

Cheshire West & Chester Council

Cheshire West and Chester Schools Forum

Monday 13 February 2023
4.30pm – 6.30 pm

Virtual Meeting

Schools Forum Clerk
Children and Families
Cheshire West and Chester Council
Telephone 07584 206913



Notes for members of the public

Cheshire West and Chester Schools Forum

The Council welcomes and encourages you to be at its meetings and Committees.

You are requested to remain quiet whilst the meeting is taking place.

The agenda is sometimes divided into two parts. You are allowed to stay for the first part. When the Forum is ready to deal with the second part you will need to leave the meeting because the business will be of a confidential nature, for example, dealing with individual people, contracts and financial affairs of other parties.

Members of the public wishing to attend Schools Forum meetings should contact the Schools Forum Clerk:

Email: school.relationshipteam@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk

Telephone: 07584 206913

Agenda for Cheshire West and Chester Schools Forum 13 February 2023

1.	4.30	Introductions and apologies		
2.	4.35	Minutes and matters arising of last meeting 2.1 To agree the minutes held 17 January 2023 2.2 Matters arising 2.2.1 Item 8 Any Other Business - Fischer Family Trust	Christine Ridley Thomas	Page 4-12
3.	4.50	Council Financial Position update	Anna Jones	Verbal
4.	5.10	Early Years Funding for 2023-2024	Natalie Cole	Page 13-19
5.	5.35	Arrangements for funding from the High Needs Block 2023-2024	Natalie Cole	Page 20-24
6.	6.00	Schools Financial Value Standard 2022-2023	Natalie Cole	Page 25-30
7.	6.20	Any Other Business		
8.	6.30	Next meeting: Tuesday 4 July 2023		
	Finish	Schedule of meetings 2022-2023		Page 31

**Cheshire West and Chester
Schools Forum
13 February 2023**

Agenda item 2

Minutes of Cheshire West and Chester Schools Forum, virtual meeting, on 17 January 2023

Members	Representing	Attendance
Schools and Academies		
Jan Diamond	Primary headteachers	Attended
Nicky Dowling	Primary headteachers	Attended
Ian Devereux-Roberts	Primary headteachers	Attended
Kate Docherty	Primary headteachers	Attended
Beth Hacking	Primary headteachers	Attended
Sharon Broughton	Primary governors	Absent
Duncan Haworth (Chair)	Primary governors	Attended
Lisa Rigby	Primary governors	Absent
David Nield	Primary governors	Attended
Nick Lacey	Primary governors	Absent
David Curry	Secondary headteachers	Attended
Martin Hill	Secondary headteachers	Apologies
David Rowlands	Secondary governors	Attended
Rob Williams	Secondary governors	Apologies
Neil Oxley	Special headteachers	Attended
Philip Hopwood	Special governors	Attended
Andy Stewart	PRU	Attended
Deborah Beaumont	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Simon Faircloth	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Darran Jones	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Luci Jones	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Helen Studley	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Cathryn McKeagney	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Emma Leach	Academies - special	Attended
Non Schools		
Cat Hirst	PVI early years providers	Absent
Vacancy	PVI early years providers	Vacancy
Kathryn Magiera	Diocese	Absent
Caroline Vile	Diocese	Apologies
Greg Foster	Unions	Attended
Geoff Wright	Unions	Absent
Rob Pullen	CWAPH	Attended
Vacancy	16-19 providers	Vacancy
Official Observers		
Councillor Robert Cernik	Cabinet Member for Children and Families	Attended

Officers in attendance

Helen Brackenbury	Director Children and Families
Natalie Cole	Finance Manager
Charlotte Fenn	Clerk
Debbie Edwards	Head of Education and Inclusion
Christine Ridley Thomas	Senior Manager School Intervention Co-ordination & Schools Causing Concern

Observers

Councillor Razia Daniels	Shadow Cabinet Member for Children and Families
Mitchel Hatton	Schools Finance

1. Introductions and apologies

Apologies were noted.

Duncan Haworth reported the following membership changes:

Resignations:

Sarah Connolly Concordia MAT

New representatives:

Simon Faircloth	Concordia MAT	Academies
Cathryn McKeagney	The Catholic High School, Chester	Academies
Nicky Dowling	Highfield Community Primary School	Primary Heads
Jan Diamond	Hartford Manor Primary School & Nursery	Primary Heads

Duncan welcomed new members to their first meeting and explained the protocol for virtual meetings.

2. Minutes and matters arising of last meeting

2.1 To agree the minutes from the meeting held 11 October 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on the 11 October 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

2.2 Matters arising

2.2.1 Item 4 - Update on Council Financial Position

Natalie Cole reported that as the December Schools Forum meeting had been cancelled and the consultation period had now concluded it would not be possible to provide an update at this stage. The budget proposals were currently going through Scrutiny prior to Full Council in February; a further update on the Council's financial position would be brought to February Schools Forum.

2.2.2 Item 9 - Brief Update – SEND Review Final Report

Debbie Edwards briefly outlined the 10 recommendations which had been shared at the last Schools Forum Finance subgroup. The recommendations had been split under four themes:

Theme 1: Service Restructure and Redesign

Theme 2: Sufficiency and Commissioning

Theme 3: Targeting support for the most vulnerable learners

Theme 4: Communicating the Vision and Building the Strategic Alliance of Support for Inclusion.

It was noted that the final structure under theme 1 had not been shared with the affected team and therefore was confidential until the staff consultation started on the 30 January.

Implementation of the recommendations was proposed to start in the summer term supported by Jonathan Wilding for approximately 12 months, subject to approval at full Council in February 2023 of any additional resource requirements.

Natalie Cole provided a brief outline on the financial impact. The benefit and financial implications of the recommendations were modelled against an 'as-is' projection, which assumed a continuation of increasing demand and costs. The target operating model was based on the reduction of demand for Education Health Care Plans and associated commissioned places, placement costs and top up funding and was projected to balance the in-year budget in 2026-2027. It was noted that the recommendations and investment could not immediately address this position and there was likely to be a three-year period where annual overspends of between £1m-£2m are unavoidable; costly placements in independent placement provision could not be reduced until there was internal capacity to move pupils into by increasing inclusion and support in mainstream.

David Rowlands' commented that the schemes made sense but communication between all those working with the pupils was crucial so not to work in a silo.

Debbie Edwards acknowledged David Neild's comment that the recommendations were effectively saying that more pupils needed to be educated in mainstream or we would be in more of a financial 'mess'.

Philp Hopwood sought clarification on several points in particular what the evidence was for moving pupils into mainstream, was it demand led, was the needs profile changing or was it financial?

Debbie Edwards responded that it was not just financial, numbers were raising nationally, where the needs of children and families could be met it was appropriate for them to be educated in borough. Comorbidity had increased and pupils had more complex needs. One of the questions that

needed addressing was, are we providing the right training for our staff to support pupils to be educated along with other pupils in mainstream schools.

It was noted that if all the external schools funding was redistributed amongst CW&C schools it would support more pupils, the cost of an external school could be significantly high. Debbie acknowledged that more work needed doing to build parents confidence that their child's needs could be met in mainstream schools.

Philip acknowledged Debbie's response but felt that having not seen the review he did not feel reassured by what he had heard presented at Forum and felt the comments were contradictory especially as the data reflected an increase in child with more complex needs.

Further to David Rowlands' comment, regarding communication, Helen Brackenbury acknowledged that this area was challenging with the level of Education Health Care Plans increasing exponentially and parents and colleague's frustrations at not knowing their child's progress through the system. Communication was key to ensuring parents felt informed and reassured.

David Neild asked how CW&C compared to the national benchmark in relation to pupils going into external provision.

Debbie responded that CW&C were well supported by Special schools and had higher special provision than other Local Authorities and most schools wished to be inclusive. All our special schools were good or outstanding and were in demand, but we needed to convey to parents that our maintained schools were equally suitable compared to independent schools.

Nicky Dowling asked what the key drivers were for the independent sector.

Debbie responded that there were several factors including aggressive marketing tactics, word of mouth by parents and friends, evidence of heads suggesting schools and schools having the opportunity of saying they couldn't meet a pupil's needs.

It was also noted that a big pull was that some independent schools were paying legal fees for the tribunal process.

3. Indicative Dedicated Schools Grant Allocations for 2023-2024

Natalie Cole introduced the report which detailed the provisional allocation figures for the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for 2023-2024.

Natalie drew Forum members' attention to paragraph 5 which outlined the changes to the allocation which had led to an increase in available funding of £20.802m.

There were no comments from Forum to report.

Resolved that Schools Forum note the indicative allocations which would inform the schools block funding formula and DSG budget proposals for 2023-2024 in further agenda items.

4. Dedicated Schools Grant Budget Setting Proposals 2023-2024

Natalie Cole introduced the report which presents the DSG budget proposals for the next financial year based on the allocations outlined in item 3 and included details of central expenditure budgets.

Forum's attention was drawn to paragraph 5 and the table which showed that the responses received to the consultation were largely in support of maintaining the 0.5% transfer from schools block to high needs block for 2023-2024.

Natalie went through the budget proposals, for approval by Schools Forum, for the schools block, high needs, early years and central services spend as outlined in Appendix B page 20.

Natalie drew Forum's attention to the four changes in the Central spend budgets outlined in Appendix B table1.

It was noted that this was the first time the budget had been set higher than the funds available.

There were no comments from Forum to report.

Resolved that Schools Forum

- i. Approve the continuation of the existing 0.5% transfer from schools block to high needs block for 2023-2024 (vote: unanimous);
- ii. Endorse the draft DSG budget proposals in Appendix B for approval by Council (vote: unanimous); and
- iii. Approve the central spend budgets in Appendix B (vote: unanimous)

5. Draft of 2023-2024 School Funding Formula for January Submission

Natalie Cole introduced the report which detailed the draft School Funding Formula for 2023-2024 taking into account the decisions taken previously on the principles of the local funding formula and the October 2022 census data provided by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA).

Natalie went through the paper by exception as most of the decisions had been agreed or endorsed previously.

It was noted that the formula would be based on pupil numbers and demographics taken from the October 2022 census and the formula factors as listed in appendix A. There needed to be a slight reduction to the national funding formulae (NFF) rates of £6 to meet the overall affordability of the schools block allocation. The Notional SEN guidance was reviewed by the Schools Forum

Finance Sub Group at the December 2022 meeting and it was concluded that, as calculations complied with the guidance and were in line with other local authority allocations, there was no need to change the current calculation.

Forum members also noted that the 2023-2024 school funding figures in Appendix D were draft and subject to ESFA and Council approvals.

Rob Pullen sought clarification regarding why there was a significant change in funding for Alvanley and Manley Primary. Natalie confirmed that this was due mainly to the amalgamation of the school and reduction in the lump sum, the school had been aware of the impact on funding prior to the amalgamation.

Resolved that Schools Forum (School, Academy and PVI representatives) endorse the draft funding formula submission to the ESFA (vote: unanimous).

6. De-delegation proposals for 2023-2024

Natalie Cole introduced the report which outlined the services to be considered for de-delegated by maintained schools for 2023-2024.

Natalie referred Forum members to the recommendations which listed the services currently under consideration for de-delegated. It was noted that decisions to de-delegate A-D had been taken since 2013, whereas School improvement was de-delegated for the first-time last year.

Forum members were referred to the consultation outcomes for A-D in paragraph 5. It was noted that maintained schools had been consulted on 4 options, outlined in Appendix B, for de-delegating School improvement, following the DfE decision to remove the School Improvement Monitoring and Brokering (SIMB) grant funding from April 2023. The weighted scores and ranking of options, in paragraph 10, were noted.

Christine Ridley Thomas was invited to talk through the options. It was noted that, as part of the consultation, the additional information on the impact of school improvement de-delegation options and reduced funding, as seen in Appendix B, had been shared with schools. As well as ASIA (Associate School Improvement Adviser) and SSL (Specialist Subject Leaders) support, schools currently also had access to enhanced leadership support, governance reviews as well as funding for additional support for schools who entered the Schools Causing Concern process.

Rob Pullen reported that a meeting had been held, last week, for primary schools to discuss the options. Primary colleagues had been concerned that, due to the timing of the consultation, not all schools had fully understood what the de-delegated options provided and felt that the consultation responses may not be reflective of schools' actual feelings. Rob had conducted a poll at the meeting with the following results – 9 voted for option 1 and 6 voted for option 2; the poll had been first preference only and not ranked.

Nicky Dowling reported that she had responded to the consultation and attended the meeting. Nicky also declared an interest as she worked as an ASIA. She commented that a targeted school would only receive one ASIA visit per year under option 3; as a Head she felt one visit was not enough and as an ASIA had concerns as to how affective this could be and wasn't value for money. Option 2 was better value for money. She was also disappointed at the low response to the consultation.

Kate Docherty shared Nicky's concerns, having the support of the local authority was reassuring and felt that culling the service was extreme, option 2 was preferable to option 3.

Ian Devereux-Roberts agreed with Kate's comments, all schools were in financial difficulties but in the interest of fairness option 2 was preferable.

There were no comments to report from secondary or special representatives.

Resolved that Schools Forum (maintained school representatives) agreed the services to be de-delegated to the Local Authority for 2023-2024 as detailed for:

- a) Contingencies to cover the cost of staff on suspension (primary and secondary separately)
Primary Vote: Yes - unanimous
Secondary Vote: Yes – unanimous
- b) Free school meals eligibility assessments (primary and secondary separately)
Primary Vote: Yes - unanimous
Secondary Vote: Yes – unanimous
- c) Covering the cost of staff on for maternity/paternity/adoption leave (primary only)
Primary Vote: Yes - unanimous
- d) Pooling of funding to cover the costs of trade union facilities time (primary and secondary separately)
Primary Vote: Yes – unanimous
Secondary Vote: Yes – unanimous
- e) School improvement team (primary, secondary and special/ alternative provision separately)
Primary Vote:
 - Option 1 -1
 - Option 2 -5 – option agreed**
 - Option 3 -0
 - Option 4 -0Secondary Vote:
 - Option 1 -0
 - Option 2 -0

Option 3 -2 – option agreed

Option 4 -0

Special/alternative provision Vote:

Option 1 -0

Option 2 -0

Option 3 -3 – option agreed

Option 4 -0

7. Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) 2022-2023 Forecast Outturn at Third Review

Natalie Cole went through the report which provided an update on the financial forecast outturn position for 2022-2023 for centrally held DSG as reported at the Third Review of Financial Performance.

There were no comments from Forum to report.

Resolved that Schools Forum note the Third Review position on the DSG and next steps.

8. Any Other Business

Fischer Family Trust (FFT)

Christine Ridley Thomas provided a brief update regarding the funding of FFT for 2023-2024 onwards. It was noted that, as referenced under item 4, the funding stream which the LA had historically used to fund the subscription for all schools to access FFT would cease from the end of March 2023.

FFT have offered the LA 3 options; buy a subscription on behalf of all primary and secondary schools; buy a subscription solely on behalf of all primary schools or buy a subscription solely on behalf of all secondary schools.

If schools wished to continue to pay for FFT, buying it through the local authority could reduce the rate as opposed to the individual cost per school, however the current usage data for primary schools indicated that there were not enough schools to make it value for money. It was noted that if bought through the LA access could be switched off to schools not wishing to use it.

Christine was taking the proposal through the heads associations, that week, to see if interested in buying through the LA. It was noted that if the LA was to purchase, on behalf of schools, Schools Forum approval would need to be sought at the February meeting.

David Curry confirmed that he could take FFT to CWASH this Thursday and asked what the subscription rates might be.

Christine replied that secondary was around £1,000 – £2,000 and primary £200 - £800.

9. Next meeting

Next Schools Forum meeting Monday 13 February 2023 – virtual.

Agenda item 4

Early Years Funding for 2023-2024

Purpose of the report

1. This report details the proposed budget allocation for the early years block and funding of the two, three and four year old entitlements for 2023-2024 through the Early Years Funding Formula (EYFF) and Early Years Inclusion Support Fund (EYISF).

Recommendations

2. That Schools Forum review the proposed allocation of the early years block allocation and endorse the increase in base rate funding for 2023-2024.

Background

3. This report follows the principles agreed in the January 2023 report to Schools Forum on the local authority's early years block allocation for 2023-2024. Schools Forum agreed budget proposals to allocate the early years block allocation in full to early years budgets with no changes to central spend. Changes to the local Early Years Single Funding Formula had also been previously agreed by Cabinet in December 2022 when the decisions were taken to:
 - Continue to remove the existing quality supplement and to redistribute the funding to all providers through the universal base rate.
 - Put in place a new quality supplement being to target the Teachers Pay and Pension Grant (TPPG) funding to eligible providers.

Early Years Block allocation

4. In the Autumn Statement, the Chancellor announced a further £20m investment in early years funding in 2023-2024 to increase the hourly rates for early years entitlements in respect of national living wage increases. The investment is in addition to the £180m increased level of funding confirmed in the earlier spending review and also the impact of the updated datasets from the Early Years National Funding Formula (EYNFF) consultation. The funding rates for 2023-24 have been confirmed as follows:
 - a 6p per child hour (1%) increase to the 2 year old funding rate
 - an increase to 3 and 4 year old funding rates of 26p per child hour to £4.87 (19p in funding uplifts and 7p from the mainstreaming of the

Teachers Pay and Pension Grants into the EYNFF). A minimum funding floor for local authorities of £4.87 per child hour (CW&C funding remains at this minimum level).

- An increase of 2p (3%) to 62p per child hour to Early Years Pupil Premium funding rates and
- Disability Access funding to increase by 3% from £800 to £828 per eligible child.

5. For CW&C, the initial Early Years Block allocation for 2023-2024 is an increase of £1.104m from 2022-2023. This allocation reflects the increases in per child hour funding rates and is shown in the table below. Allocations will be updated in July 2023 from the headcounts taken at the January 2023 census.

Early Years Block	Pupil Numbers	Amount per pupil £	Allocation £000
3 and 4 year old universal entitlement	4,723	2,776	13,110
3 and 4 year old extended entitlement	2,458	2,776	6,823
2 Year Olds	801	3,255	2,607
Early Years Pupil Premium	437	353	154
Disability Access Funding	140	828	116
Total Early Years Block			22,811

Budget proposals for 2023-2024

6. The proposed EYFF for three and four year old entitlements is detailed in Appendix A. It is proposed to increase the base rate to all providers from £4.05 to £4.34 for 2023-2024 which includes the national increase of £0.19 plus the redistribution of quality supplements through the universal base rate.
7. The government's consultation response on the Early Years Funding Formula published in December 2022 confirmed the mainstreaming of the TPPG into the local authorities Early Years Block funding allocations. As agreed by Cabinet in December 2022, subject to this outcome a new Quality supplement will be implemented to administer the TPPG of £0.07 per child hour to settings employing qualified teachers on teachers terms and conditions and contributing to the Teacher's Pension Scheme. This supplement will be allocated to schools with maintained nursery units and academies. In the absence of an existing data collection that would enable the Local Authority to determine which other providers would be eligible for the supplement, an application process will be utilised to enable the supplement to be administered and provider funding rates agreed by the statutory deadline of 28 February 2023. Appendix B.
8. The following sources of funding will continue to be made available for providers in line with funding allocations and eligibility criteria. The budget for

Early Years Inclusion Support Funding was increased in 2022-2023 to £719k (£519k from Early Years Block and £200k from the high needs block to recognise proportion of children with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) in mainstream settings). There is significant pressure on this funding in 2022-2023 with forecast spend at £1m. The local authority propose to manage this risk in 2023-2024 through the following measures:

- Reviewing the proportion of children with EHCPs and the contribution from the high needs block
- Review the scope to meet the demand through funded hours following the January census and final allocation.
- Retaining the small 1% increase in 2 year old funding allocation of £27k in view of increasing number of 2 year olds accessing EYISF. Current allocations for 2 year olds are in the region of £120k against the current contribution of £40k from 2 year old funding allocation. The universal funding rate for 2 year olds for 2023-2024 would therefore remain at £5.51 per child hour.
- Further review the demand and process for EYISF. Funding will continue to be made to providers in accordance with the existing assessment framework which is included in Appendix C.

Budget heading – other funding to providers	Budget £000
2 year old funding (£5.51 per child hour)	2,515
Early Years Pupil Premium (62p per eligible 3 and 4 year old child hour)	154
Disability Access Funding (£828 lump sum per eligible child)	116
Early Years Inclusion Support Funding	746

9. Further detail on the budgets held as central spend are shown in the table below. The central spend budget is at the same level as in 2022-2023 with the proposal to mitigate the local government pay awards through vacancy management savings across the Service budgets. Central spend accounts for 4% of the total early years block allocation which complies with the central spend cap of 5% of three and four year old funding (and the requirement to passport 95% of the allocation to providers).

Budgeted central spend	Budget £000
Commissioning Team	131
Early Years Consultants and Early Years Childcare Advisors	484
Early Years Workers	269
Vacancy management savings target	-41
Total	843

Next Steps

10. To implement the EYFF funding rates for 2023-2024 and notify providers in accordance with the statutory timeframe of 31 March 2023.

Appendix A Proposed Cheshire West and Chester 2023-2024 Early Years Single Funding Formula

Current CW&C EYSFF 2022-2023	Proposed CW&C EYSFF 2023-2024
Universal base rate	
£4.05 per child hour	£4.34 per child hour
Deprivation Supplement	
Additional payment based on the hours claimed for individual children who reside in the 30% most disadvantaged areas in England on the IDACI or in the 30% most disadvantaged WIMD. Payment of £0.50 per child per hour	Additional payment based on the hours claimed for individual children who reside in the 30% most disadvantaged areas in England on the IDACI or in the 30% most disadvantaged WIMD. Payment of £0.50 per child per hour
Quality Supplement	
<p>Additional payment based on the highest qualified staff member at the setting.</p> <p>If the highest qualified staff member holds an appropriate Qualified Teacher Status - the Provider will receive £0.13 per child per hour.</p> <p>If the highest qualified staff member holds Early Years Professional Status the Provider will receive £0.06 per child per hour.</p>	<p>Existing quality supplements to be removed with funding allocated through the universal base rate.</p> <p>New Quality supplement to be implemented to administer the Teachers Pay and Pension Grant of £0.07 per child hour to settings employing qualified teachers on teachers terms and conditions and contributing to the Teacher's Pension Scheme.</p>
Rurality supplement	
£2,000 if the Setting is defined as being in a Pre-dominantly Rural Census Output Area under the Council's Rural / Urban Classification, has few competitors within 2 miles (sparsity) and occupancy below 77%.	£2,000 if the Setting is defined as being in a Pre-dominantly Rural Census Output Area under the Council's Rural / Urban Classification, has few competitors within 2 miles (sparsity) and occupancy below 77%.

Appendix B: Quality Supplement Application for Private, Voluntary and Independent providers

Setting name	
Ofsted registration number	
Name of member of staff with QTS	
Evidence provided of QTS qualification	Yes/No DfE registration number:
Does salary paid by setting meets the minimum threshold School Teachers' Review Body 32nd report: 2022 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)	Yes/No
Evidence provided of salary threshold e.g. contract	Yes/No Evidence provided:
Does the setting pay into the Teacher's Pension Scheme for this employee/annual pension contribution meet the minimum threshold	Yes/No
Evidence provided of Teachers Pension Scheme membership e.g. Pension reference number	Yes/No Evidence provided:
Declaration I confirm that the above staff member spends a minimum of 15 hours leading practice for children in receipt to 3 and 4 year old funding entitlement	Name: Role: Signature: Date:

Appendix C Early Years Inclusion Support Funding

The Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Inclusion Support Funding Descriptors are used to decide on the level of funding required to match need.

Banding levels of funding are set out in the table below and are based on the following key principles:

- Needs identified as universal and SEN support are to be met from funding delegated to providers through early years funding, Disability Access Funding and Early Years Pupil Premium. This is in line with the principles of elements 1 and 2 in mainstream and specialist provision where lower level needs are met from delegated funding. Core funding for early years providers also reflects lower staffing ratios than those in mainstream to be met from the hourly rate.
- Band A descriptors are likely to require an additional targeted intervention over a limited period of time which does not increase with the extended entitlement. Therefore one lump sum payment would be made for children regardless of 15 hours or 30 hours entitlement.
- Bands B and C lump sums provide additional funding to individual children with high level and complex needs and reflect an increasing level of support which would reasonably be expected to double, dependent on access to the extended hours. Typically, Band B children would present with communication, ASD and social/emotional difficulties and would not require dedicated 1 to 1 support. A higher complexity of need is presented in Band C which requires a higher level of ongoing support.
- Children with EHCPs would be assessed through the statutory process and would generally be funded at Band C with some at Band B.
- Allocations will be made for 1 year and then reviewed. Children in receipt of funding at the end of the academic year would continue to be funded into Reception for the first 2 terms whilst reviews are undertaken by the school.
- Allocations would be split across providers where a child is accessing more than one provider and would be made on a termly basis subject to the continuation of the child's entitlement.

	Universal and SEN Support	Allocation per annum		
		Band A	Band B	Band C
15 hours entitlement	Delegated funding through EYFF, DAF, EYPP	£1,710	£3,420	£5,130
30 hours entitlement			£6,840	£10,260

Agenda item 5

**Arrangements for funding from the High Needs Block 2023-2024
Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to update Schools Forum on proposed arrangements for allocations from the High Needs Block for 2023-2024 for commissioned services, places and top up funding.

Recommendations

2. Schools Forum is asked to provide a view on the proposals within the report on financial arrangements for high needs pupils in 2023-2024.

Background

3. Further to the budget setting proposals set out in the January 2023 report to Schools Forum, this report provides further detail on the proposed funding arrangements for high needs in 2023-2024. These proposals are made in the context of the continuing pressures on the high needs block and the planned increase on the DSG deficit reserve to meet demand for mainstream support and specialist provision.

High Needs Budget 2023-2024

4. At the January meeting of Schools Forum, additional Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) funding of £6.827m was allocated for High Needs expenditure to increase budgets to £59.372m. In summary, this was allocated to budgets to fund current expenditure and further growth and investment.

Budget proposal	£000
Growth in high needs budgets to meet current level of expenditure based on the forecast spend in 2022-2023 (as at Third Review).	1,183
Full year effect of current academic year placements in independent and non maintained special schools	1,017
Full year effect of current commissioned places in special schools, resourced provisions and alternative provision	1,295
Growth in SEND provision and support in mainstream and specialist placements to meet anticipated demand for SEND	2,378
Additional funding to in borough special schools and alternative provision	909
Pay award inflation for Local Authority teams	198
Vacancy management and non pay budget review savings	-154
Total	6,827

High Needs Funding arrangements for schools in 2023-2024

5. Further to the budget proposals above, the following paragraphs outline the proposed arrangements for funding schools in 2023-2024

Commissioned places in special schools and resourced provisions

6. The following table details the commissioned places currently agreed for special and alternative provision schools. For maintained schools, discussions about future commissioned places will be held on an individual school basis in view of SEND Review recommendations for the academic year 2023-24.

Special/ Alternative provision schools	Academic Year 2022-23	Academic Year 2023-24	Resourced Provision	Academic Year 2022-23	Academic Year 2023-24
Archers Brook	85	85	Upton Westlea Primary School	10	10
Cloughwood Academy	90	110	Frodsham Weaver Vale Primary School	7	7
Dee Banks	118	118	Darnhall Primary School	7	7
Dorin Park	143	143	Acresfield Primary School	9	9
Greenbank	119	119	Dee Point Primary School	16	16
Hebden Green	133	133	Lache Primary School	9	9
Hinderton	45	45	Barnton Primary School	15	15
Oaklands	155	155	Willow Wood Community Primary School	7	7
Rosebank School	49	49	St Nicholas Catholic High School	12	12
The Russett School	113	120	The Catholic High School, Chester	15	15
The Bridge	40	40			
Total	1,090	1,117		107	107

Special school top up funding

7. For 2023-2024, a minimum funding guarantee of 3% has been set by the DfE as part of the conditions of grant. There is a requirement on local authorities to uplift special school 2021-2022 place and top up funding by 3% through an increase to top up funding. The table below shows revised top up rates that

will apply from April 2023 and should also be applied to other local authority pupils placed in those schools.

School	Top up rate Band 1 £	Top up rate Band 2 £	Top up rate Band 3 £
Archers Brook	4,175	12,854	16,982
Cloughwood	4,141	12,821	16,949
Dee Banks	4,456	12,935	16,965
Dorin Park	4,304	12,762	16,781
Greenbank	4,070	10,761	16,759
Hebden Green	4,225	12,686	16,707
Hinderton	5,746	14,461	18,604
Oaklands	4,047	12,462	16,464
Rosebank School	5,457	14,181	18,328
The Russet School	4,080	12,550	16,580
The Bridge			17,514

Mainstream top up rates

8. There are no proposals to amend current mainstream and resource provision top up rates which are as follows.

Band	Funding rate £
A	4,500
B	7,125
C	11,062

Additional funding allocation for 2023-2024

9. In the financial year 2023-2024, maintained special schools and pupil referral units, special academies and hospital schools will receive a separate allocation amounting to 3.4% of their total place and top-up funding income, similar to the mainstream schools additional grant. This will be paid directly by the local authority which maintains the school or (in the case of academies) previously maintained the school. Local authorities must allocate 3.4% per place, based on the place funding of £10,000 per place plus the average top-up funding they pay for a pupil placement in financial year 2022-2023, using the total number of places being funded in academic year 2022-2023. Indicative allocations have been shared with the schools and will be finalised at the end of 2022-2023 for any further changes in top up funding.

Exceptional funding

10. Schools taking pupils over their commissioned numbers will continue to receive top up funding for additional pupils. Schools will continue to be

supported with exceptional funding where it can be demonstrated that the additional top up funding is not sufficient to cover the additional costs as detailed in **Appendix A**.

11. With effect from January 2023, all decisions that are not otherwise covered by agreed banding and funding allocations, will need to be approved by the SEN Finance Panel which will be attended by the Head of Service, Senior Manager for SEND and Senior Finance Manager with representation from SEN Team Managers. Responsibilities and decisions taken by the SEN Panel and SEN Inclusion Funding Panel will also be realigned to ensure decisions with financial implications are approved and administered promptly. New arrangements will be shared with schools when finalised.

Next steps

12. Proposed funding allocations will be included in High Needs budget allocation notifications to schools and academies to be distributed by the end of March 2023. Any further changes to high needs funding arrangements arising from the implementation of the SEND Review recommendations will be brought to Schools Forum in year.

Appendix A Existing exceptional funding arrangements

Mainstream - Notional SEN and arrangements for additional funding

Local authorities identify within each school's budget share a notional SEN budget from which schools and academies can provide a level of support for all their pupils with SEN. This is a notional amount of funding and should not be regarded by schools and academies as a substitute for their own budget planning and decisions about how much they need to spend on SEN support, or as a fixed budget sum for spending by schools.

However, local authorities need to take a view on the level of additional support costs that can be met from each school's notional SEN budget in order to make sure that schools have sufficient resources to meet those costs up to the £6,000 threshold, and to determine which schools might need additional funds from the high needs budget which must be agreed on a formulaic basis. Additional funding from the High Needs block will continue to be distributed under the following criteria.

Notional SEN must be sufficient to meet the first £6,000 of each high needs pupil on roll recognising any part year effect of starters and leavers. For schools up to and including 150 pupils, the notional SEN must also be sufficient to cover £6,000 for every 1:50 pupils. Therefore, additional funding will be made available from the high needs block if $\text{Notional SEN} < (\text{number of high needs pupils} * £6,000) + (£6,000 \text{ for every } 1:50 \text{ pupils for schools with } 150 \text{ or fewer pupils})$. Reviews will be carried out on a termly basis.

Resource Provision

Schools that have one or more pupils in Reception will also be allocated funding equivalent to 3B in order to support access to the foundation curriculum. This funding will only be in place whilst there is one or more pupils in Reception year.

Schools funded through commissioned places

Schools will not receive additional place funding where they take pupils over their commissioned place number, only the top up funding element. Exceptions will be considered where over numbers require a change to the structure of the provision and increase the core costs to the school as funded by place funding. These situations will be considered as they arise on a case by case basis. Schools should not request additional place funding for pupils from other local authorities and should contact the CW&C SEN Team.

Agenda item 6

Schools Financial Value Standard 2022-2023

Purpose of the report

1. This report is to update Schools Forum on the requirements of the Schools Financial Value Standard (SFVS) submission for maintained schools for 2022-2023 which is due to be submitted to the Local Authority by 31 March 2023.

Recommendations

2. This report is for information and representatives of Local Authority maintained schools and Governing Bodies are asked to share this update with their representative bodies.

Background

3. Current government guidance requires Governing Bodies to complete their SFVS self assessment for 2022-2023 and return it to the Local Authority by 31 March 2023. A reminder letter was sent to Local Authority maintained school headteachers on 2 February 2023, detailing the requirements for the assessment and process for submitting returns for the statutory deadline.

Changes to the SFVS self assessment checklist

4. There have not been any changes to the self assessment checklist questions for 2022-2023 and schools should access the latest documents and guidance notes which are available from the Department for Education (DfE) website at the following link.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/schools-financial-value-standard-sfvs>

The website notes the following updates to the guidance for 2022-2023

21 September 2022

Updated the page, including the documents 'Schools financial value standard checklist' and 'Checklist guidance', to reflect expectations for the 2022 to 2023 academic year. Changes to the guidance include, in section E on value for money, updates on threshold values for public procurement, good estate management and the get help buying for schools service.

1 April 2022

Added information on related party transactions and a link to the specimen signature template.

Key audit findings from 2021-2022 assessments

5. The information provided by schools is reviewed by the Schools Finance Team and by Internal Audit in assessing the level of assurance that could be placed on the financial management in operation in the Authority's schools. The Local Authority are not able to confirm that each school are operating the level of controls in the framework as this would involve individual school audits. Instead a number of schools are visited in the autumn term and key themes from the assessment reviewed across all schools. General feedback is provided by Internal Audit to schools on the key findings, areas of best practice and opportunities for improving financial controls when this work is completed. Key findings from the 2021-2022 audit review are included in **Appendix A** and will be circulated to schools in the School Bulletin. Officers are aware that similar findings are being reported each year and are developing an action plan to improve the quality of submissions and controls to be shared with schools and Schools Forum.

Next Steps

6. Governing Bodies should approve the SFVS submission for return to the Local authority by 31 March 2023. The Local Authority will progress with action plan to improve the quality of submissions, review the 2022-23 returns to complete the annual assurance statement to the DfE and to determine the internal audit plan for 2023-2024.

Summary of Key Themes identified from an Internal Audit Review on SFVS

Internal Audit has recently undertaken a review of the School Financial Value Standard (SFVS) to obtain assurance over the accuracy of these returns. The review identified the following key issues which will be shared with all schools. Schools are recommended to review these findings and areas for improvement and ensure that these are considered when undertaking the SFVS return for 2022-23.

	Finding	Recommended Best Practice
1	<p>SFVS Assessment In some instances key elements of the SFVS were not referred to in the response to each question.</p> <p>For example, Question 21) Is the governing body given the opportunity to challenge the school's plans for replacing contracts for goods and services that are due to expire shortly? Some schools did not refer to a contract register within the response to the question. This is a key element of this question.</p> <p>The majority of schools do not refer to all elements of the Council checklist when responding to each question, for example, Question 30 (School Fund). The responses to this question rarely refer to the Terms of Reference / Statement of Intent.</p> <p>Where elements of the DfE guidance and checklist are not referred to in the response there is not enough detail for audit to verify the level of control within the school and verify that a Yes response is appropriate.</p> <p>Generally actions were in place to address any In Part or No answers within the SFVS, however on some occasions actions were identified within the individual SFVS question and not summarised in the Action Plan. The majority of schools had not indicated target dates for the completion of each action or a responsible officer.</p>	<p>Schools should access the latest DfE guidance available for the completion of the 22-23 assessment. Please see the link below.</p> <p>Schools financial value standard (SFVS) and assurance statement - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)</p> <p>Schools should consider all elements of the DfE and Council guidance when considering the response to each question.</p> <p>Each element should be referred to within the response to evidence that a 'Yes' answer is appropriate.</p> <p>All actions should be recorded within the SFVS within the 'Summary of agreed action and timetable for reporting back' box. This should contain the agreed action, responsible officer and target date for completion.</p>

	Finding	Recommended Best Practice
2	<p><u>Review of Key Documents</u> There was not always evidence within Governing Body minutes that key documents, for example, Manual of Internal Financial Procedures (MIFP) had been formally reviewed and approved.</p> <p>There was not always evidence that the Governing Body had received and reviewed the finance reports six times in accordance with the SFVS requirements.</p> <p>Internal Audit was informed that the documents had often been presented however there was no formal approval evidenced within the minutes.</p>	<p>Schools should ensure that sufficient evidence is retained of the approval of all key documents.</p> <p>Where documents are presented for review this should be documented within the minutes of the meeting stating the report presented and any discussion / challenge of the information presented.</p> <p>Governing Body minutes should be reviewed in detail and any errors / omissions should be highlighted, and the minutes amended prior to approval.</p>
3	<p><u>School Fund</u> Testing identified a number of issues relating to the School Fund including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was not always evidence of approval for purchases in accordance with the Scheme of Delegation. • The audit identified instances where there was a 'mixing of funds' ie money is being moved between the School Fund and the official budget. • There was not always evidence that the auditor had been approved by the Governing Body. 	<p>Segregation of duties should be achieved within the administration of the School Fund and appropriate approval should be obtained for purchases in accordance with the Scheme of Delegation.</p> <p>The independent auditor should be selected via a formal procurement process and this should be ratified by the Governing Body. The appointment of the auditor should be reviewed on an annual basis by the Governing Body and this should be reflected within the minutes of the meeting.</p> <p>In accordance with the Scheme for Financing Schools the following should be in place:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The School Fund Terms of Reference / Statement of Intent should be reviewed and approved by the Governing Body on an annual basis. • The unofficial fund monies shall at all times be kept completely separate from Council monies. Council payment or income transactions shall not be made via unofficial funds, and vice versa. <p>Sufficient information should be provided to the Governing Body to ensure that they are able to challenge expenditure and ensure that it is in accordance with the Terms of Reference of the School Fund.</p>

	Finding	Recommended Best Practice
Related Party Transactions (RPTs)		
4	<p><u>Declaration of Interest Forms</u> Testing identified the following issues relating to declaration of interest forms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some declaration of interest forms were out of date (these related to 2020/21) and therefore require updating. • Some schools have not published governor declaration of interests on the school website or where this is published no date is recorded. 	<p>Governor declaration of interests should be accessible to parents and the public and should therefore be published on the school website. The website should indicate the date of the declarations and whether there is a nil return.</p> <p>Declaration of interest forms should be completed on an annual basis for all governors / staff and when a new declaration arises.</p>
5	<p><u>Procurement Process</u> Testing on a sample of RPTs identified the following issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RPTs were not always reviewed and formally approved by the Governing Body prior to the purchase. • Minutes of Governing Body meetings do not evidence that the officer / governor with the RPT has been excluded from any discussions related to the RPT. Officers / Governors appear to be present whilst the RPT is being discussed and on occasion the officers with the RPT received the quotes and presented update reports to Governors. 	<p>Even if low value, it is prudent for all RPTs to be reviewed and approved by Governors to ensure that they are appropriate and that the procurement process is open and transparent. Governors should consider how long the supplier has been used, the total value of the expenditure with the supplier ie cumulative spend and whether any market testing has been undertaken. These discussions should be documented within the minutes of the meeting. This ensures that the process is open, transparent and the Governor / staff member does not benefit from their position within the school.</p> <p>It is recommended that the relevant officer / Governor has no involvement in the procurement process where there is a personal interest. In addition, this individual should leave the meeting when the RPT is discussed and / or approved to ensure that any decisions are independent and not influenced by the individual concerned.</p>
6	<p><u>Completion of RPT Spreadsheet (within SFVS)</u> Testing of the RPT spreadsheet identified the following issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The RPT template within the SFVS guidance only refers to contracts. Testing identified that some schools have found this misleading and have therefore only recorded contracts within the spreadsheet (not any purchases with an RPT). 	<p>A related party transaction is a contract or other agreement between the school and a person or entity that has close links with the persons awarding the contract. The SFVS guidance states that 'Contracts and agreements that are live in the year that the SFVS is being completed for need to be reported. These should continue to be reported until the year in which the contract ceases, at which point they can be removed from the list.'</p>

	Finding	Recommended Best Practice
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A number of schools are not recording the total value of the procurement / contract when they complete the RPT only the expenditure within the current year. <p>Further testing identified that some schools appear to have annual contracts which are 'rolled over' for several years without market testing / undertaking a further procurement process to ensure that value for money is achieved.</p>	<p>Therefore schools should ensure that they record all expenditure incurred during the year which involve an RPT not just those where a contract is in place.</p> <p>The total value of the contract should be highlighted on the RPT as well as the current expenditure within the year.</p> <p>Contracts should not be 'rolled over' on an ongoing basis. It is important to ensure that the full length of the contract / supply of service should be determined at the outset and the estimated value of the contract / purchase should then determine the procurement process ie whether tenders or quotations are required.</p>

**Cheshire West and Chester
Schools Forum
13 February 2023**

Agenda item 8

Schedule of meetings 2022-2023

Schools Forum – all meetings 4.30pm – 6.30pm

Date	Venue	Proposed agenda
Tuesday 4 July 2023	tbc	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• School funding arrangements for 2024-2025• DSG 2022-2023 outturn including schools' balances• Directed revisions to schemes for financing schools• Education – Basic Need Capital Programme 2021-2025• Annual review of Schools Forum membership, constitution, and terms of reference

Schools Forum Finance sub-group

Date	Time	Venue
Tuesday 13 June 2023	2.00 – 4.00 pm	MS Teams

Schools Forum High Needs sub-group - dates to be confirmed