

Cheshire West & Chester Council

Cheshire West and Chester Schools Forum

Tuesday 8 October 2024
4.30pm – 6.00 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 8 October 2024

1.	4.30	Introductions and apologies		
2.	4.35	Minutes and matters arising of last meeting 2.1 To agree the minutes held 16 July 2024 2.2 Matters arising		Page 4-9
3.	4.50	Early Years Funding Formula Consultation and proposal for 2025-2026	Bo White	Paper to follow
4.	5.10	Final Allocation of the Dedicated Schools Grant for 2024-2025	Lynsey Taylor	Page 10-11
5.	5.30	Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) 2024-2025 Forecast Outturn at First Review	Lynsey Taylor	Page 12-13
6.	5.50	Any Other Business		
7.	6.00	Next meeting: Tuesday 12 November 2024		
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**Cheshire West and Chester Schools Forum
8 October 2024**

Agenda item 2

Minutes of Cheshire West and Chester Schools' Forum 16 July 2024

Members	Representing	Attendance
Schools and Academies		
Jan Diamond	Primary headteachers	Apologies
Nicky Dowling	Primary headteachers	Attended
Kate Docherty	Primary headteachers	Attended
Beth Hacking	Primary headteachers	Absent
Michelle Ashfield	Primary headteachers	Attended
Sharon Broughton	Primary governors	Absent
Lisa Rigby	Primary governors	Absent
Vacancy	Primary governors	Vacancy
Vacancy	Primary governors	Vacancy
David Curry	Secondary headteachers	Attended
David Rowlands (Vice Chair)	Secondary governors	Attended
Vacancy	Secondary governors	Absent
Neil Oxley	Special headteachers	Attended
Philip Hopwood	Special governors	Apologies
Andy Stewart	PRU	Attended
Deborah Beaumont	Academies - mainstream	Apologies
Simon Faircloth	Academies - mainstream	Apologies
Duncan Haworth (Chair)	Academies - mainstream	Apologies
Cathryn McKeagney	Academies - mainstream	Absent
Karen Vitalis	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Vacancy	Academies - mainstream	Vacancy
Vacancy	Academies - mainstream	Vacancy
Vacancy	Academies - mainstream	Vacancy
Michelle Duval	Academies - special	Attended
Non Schools		
Natasha Kirkwood	PVI early years providers	Attended
Paula Adolph	PVI early years providers	Attended
Kathryn Magiera	Diocese	Absent
Caroline Vile	Diocese	Absent
Greg Foster	Unions	Apologies
Anita Barnes	Unions	Substitute
Geoff Wright	Unions	Absent
Ian Devereux Roberts	CWAPH	Attended
Vacancy	16-19 providers	Vacancy
Official Observers		
Councillor Adam Langan	Cabinet Member Children & Families	Absent
Olivia Shaw	Education Skills & Funding Agency	Attended
Officers in attendance		
Charlotte Fenn	Clerk	
Carolyn Davis	Senior Manager Education and Inclusion	
Rachel Ridgeway	Finance Manager	
Lynsey Taylor	Finance Manager	

Apologies (Officers)

Debbie Edwards

Head of Education and Inclusion

Helen Brackenbury

Executive Director of Children & Families

1. Introductions and apologies

David Rowlands was acting as chair as Duncan Haworth was not available.

The Clerk informed Forum that the meeting was being recorded.

Apologies were noted.

The Clerk reported the following update to Forum membership: -

New representatives:

Michelle Ashfield The Arches Community Primary School - Primary Heads rep
Paula Adolph S4YC - PVI rep – previous PVI rep left in 2020, welcomed back to the group.

Resignations/term of office ending:

Darran Jones Academies rep - term of office ended April

Nick Lacey Primary Governor rep – resigned April

It was noted that the Clerk was seeking nominations to fill the vacancies.

David Rowlands asked colleagues wishing to speak to announce themselves and who they represented for the benefit of the new members.

2. Minutes and matters arising of last meeting

2.1 To agree the minutes from the meeting held 12 February 2024

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 February 2024 were agreed as a correct record.

2.2 Matters arising

2.2.1 Item 4 Arrangements for funding from the High Needs Block 2024-2025

Neil Oxley provided an update to the current state of affairs in special schools and the demands on places. Neil acknowledged that the funding pressures faced by the special school sector were the same for the maintained sector. Neil reminded Forum that about a year ago there was a moratorium on no more children to attend special schools, that had significantly changed, and all special schools were being instructed to take over their pupil admission number (PAN) which was putting significant stress on the sector. Neil referred to a document which showed the additional numbers, over PAN, special schools were expecting to take for 2024-2025; this document would be circulated with the minutes. These additional places impacted on cost and were putting pressure on schools where they had stated they could not meet pupil

needs, including going through parental tribunals and being instructed to take the pupil even though had given reasons why they couldn't. A number of special schools had stated they had safety concerns because of the increase in pupils on a site designed to cater for significantly less pupils, and three out of the eight LA special schools (38%) were facing a deficit budget.

David Rowlands commented that this was a very serious situation where special schools were having to take more pupils than their PAN suggests at a rate which was underfunded and suggested that Schools Forum write to CW&C MPs drawing attention to the problem, urging them to do what they could to encourage the new government to take appropriate action.

Neil added that the new Secretary of State for Education, in a presentation today, had acknowledged the situation regarding SEN and high needs by using the phrase 'I know the situation is broken', and would be interested to see what attempts were looked at to address it.

David Rowlands felt it made sense, as a Schools Forum, to remind all of those who could have some influence that they need to use it.

Resolved that Schools Forum write to:

- i. CW&C MPs drawing attention to their concerns and urging them to do what they can to encourage the new government to take appropriate action; and
- ii. Secretary of State for Education drawing attention to their concerns

3. Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) 2023-2024 Final Outturn

Lynsey Taylor introduced the report on the 2023-2024 final outturn position for the centrally held DSG budget and reserve.

Lynsey drew Forums attention to the DSG deficit reserve brought forward from 2022-2023 and the in-year overspend for 2023-2024 amounting to 7.482 million deficit for 2024-2025. It was noted that the deficit was mainly due to pressure around high needs as outlined in paragraph 4.

Lynsey referred to the next steps and the SEND Implementation Board working with a consultant to implement the recommendations from the High Needs Strategic Review to help reduce the deficit.

David Rowlands commented that Forum should be pleased that the Implementation Board was looking at how the service could spend money more effectively.

Ian Devereux Roberts commented, in light of the report and Neil's update on the challenges for the special schools' sector, these challenges were replicated within mainstream primary and raised concerns that primary colleagues were dealing with the here and now with the significant challenges of pupils with complex needs within their settings as no places were available in special schools. Ian stated that time seemed to be running away and we were not moving forward and implored the Implementation Board to be mindful of the significant challenges schools were facing currently. Ian was aware that needed

to clawback the significant deficit but that was not helping colleagues and children currently in settings.

Nicky Dowling asked for assurances, from the SEND Implementation Board, that the two points just raised were part of the strategic review, as felt that although the challenges special schools were facing has been raised no solutions had been offered locally, and special schools should be consulted around what solutions they felt would be acceptable.

Resolved that Schools Forum note the final outturn on the 2023-2024 centrally held DSG and reserve and next steps.

4. Maintained School Balances Financial Year 2023-2024 and Academy Balances 2022-2023

Lynsey Taylor introduced the report which informed Schools Forum of the final outturn position of maintained schools in the Borough for the 2023-2024 financial year. Lynsey drew Forums attention to the School Balances draft outturn position 2023-2024 of a net surplus, as outlined in paragraph 4. It was noted that this surplus had reduced from the previous year.

Lynsey also drew Forums attention to the breakdown by sector and the number of schools with surplus and deficit balances as shown under paragraph 5. Lynsey referred Forum members to appendix A and the Academy balances for 2022-2023. It was noted that Academies finances ran on an academic year, whereas maintained schools' finances ran on a financial year, the balances were not comparing like for like.

Lynsey drew Forum members' attention to the increase in the number of schools ending the year with deficit balances, from 19 in 2022-2023 to 29, of which 20 were unable to set a balanced budget for 2024-2025.

David Rowlands commented that it was a matter for concern that more schools were struggling with deficits.

David Curry wanted it noted that some of the school surpluses were due to prudent budget setting by putting in a 3 percent pay award for teachers and support staff to support potentially unfunded or part funded pay awards, as was the case last year. It didn't help when government could see that schools look like they have surplus funds with which they can fund a pay award.

In light of Neil's comments David supported a more general letter on funding, per say, as there was a clear issue with the funding formula. David sited his school, as an example, as it got funding support from the Authority as the formula did not allow his school to be funded appropriately, and schools like his, as they did not meet the £5,995 dimensions. Also of concern was the issue, going forward, if schools do get pay awards it is per pupil and put into the main formula and lots of schools were disadvantaged as a result. The formula needed looking at to make it more equitable to ensure schools weren't disadvantaged one year or the following year from to a pay award.

Neil added to David's comments regarding pay awards in relation to support staff which were unfunded, as this was an area of concern particularly for special schools who had a high number of support staff in their structure.

Resolved that Schools Forum note the outturn position and movement in balances for both schools and academies.

5. Updated guidance on the Scheme for Financing Schools for 2024-2025

Lynsey Taylor introduced the report which updated the Schools Forum on the changes in the latest guidance on Schemes for Financing Schools issued by the Department for Education (DfE) and the amendments to be incorporated in the Cheshire West and Chester Scheme.

It was noted that a draft copy of the Scheme for Financing Schools should have been received by all schools and Forum members to review.

Lynsey drew Forum members' attention to the changes, outlined in paragraph 4, relating to borrowing by schools and the introduction of International Financial Reporting Standard 16 (IFRS16) regarding finance leases and requested Forum's approval for the revisions to the scheme.

There were no comments to report.

Resolved that Schools Forum (maintained schools only) approve the revisions to the scheme which would be reflected in the updated Scheme to be published July 2024 (vote: unanimous).

6. Annual review of the Cheshire West and Chester Schools Forum's membership, constitution and terms of reference

The Clerk introduced the report to review the Schools Forum's membership, constitution and terms of reference and ensure that the composition of the Schools Forum was compliant with the regulations.

The Clerk reported that officers had reviewed the pupil numbers based on the current make up of schools and academies and had determined that there was no need for a revision of membership. It was also noted that no formal revisions to the Schools' Forum regulations have been issued by the DfE.

The Clerk drew Forum members' attention to a number of vacancies, nominations had been sought but not all vacancies had been filled and the deadline for nominations had been extended to 13 September. Forum members were asked if they were aware of anyone who might be interested in serving on the Schools Forum to contact the clerk for more information.

David Rowlands endorsed the Clerk's plea for more people to fill the vacancies and commented that it was a group that could have some influence and was much more effective at influencing if it had full membership.

Resolved that Schools Forum note that

- i. Officers had determined that the pupil ration does not warrant a revision of the Schools Forum membership at this time; and
- ii. there were no changes to the constitution and terms of reference.

7. Any Other Business

None to report.

8. Next meeting

Next Schools Forum meeting Tuesday 8 October 2024.

Agenda Item 4

Final Allocation of the Dedicated Schools Grant for 2024-2025

Purpose of the report

1. To report to the Forum the final allocation of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for 2024-2025 as published by the Education and Skills Funding Agency in July 2024, highlighting the differences from the indicative allocation used in budget setting for this financial year.

Recommendations

2. The Schools Forum is asked to note the amendments to the DSG allocation for the schools block, high needs and early years funding blocks for 2024-2025.

Background

3. In December 2023, the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) announced the details of the indicative DSG funding settlement for the 2024-2025 financial year. This was the basis for setting the schools budget share and centrally held budgets for 2024-2025 and were agreed at the January 2024 Forum.
4. In July 2024, the ESFA published revised DSG allocations for all local authorities to reflect changes in high needs commissioned places, early years census data and academy recouplement. It is a requirement for local authorities to discuss the published DSG allocation with the Schools Forum in confirming that the grant has been used in support of schools.

Changes to the Allocation

5. The indicative DSG allocation available in December 2023 for the local authority area was £363.6m.
6. Table 1 below shows in summary the changes to the Local Authority's indicative allocation given in December 2023 to the final allocation in July 2024.

Table 1 - Summary of change to the final DSG allocation

2024/25 DSG Allocation	Schools Block £	Central School Services Block £	High Needs Block £	Early Years Block £	Total DSG £
Indicative Total Allocation Announced (December 2023)	265,285,141	2,190,981	58,352,098	37,759,545	363,587,765
Final Total Allocation (Announced July 2024)	265,285,141	2,190,981	58,352,098	37,392,845	363,221,065
Change	0	0	0	-366,700	-366,700

7. The final DSG 2024-2025 net allocation (published in July 2024) after deductions is shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2 - Final 2024-25 Allocations

2024/25 DSG Allocation	Schools Block £	Central School Services Block £	High Needs Block £	Early Years Block £	Total DSG £
Gross Allocation	265,285,141	2,190,981	58,352,098	37,392,845	363,221,065
Deductions	-120,154,828	0	-2,916,002	0	-123,070,830
Net Allocation	145,130,313	2,190,981	55,436,096	37,392,845	240,150,235

8. Deductions on the school block relate to academy recoupment in relation to de delegation and rates liability.

Next Steps

9. The revised allocations shown in Table 2 above will form the basis of reporting for the remainder of 2024-2025.

Agenda Item 5

Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) 2024-2025 Forecast Outturn at First Review

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of the report is to provide an update on the financial forecast outturn position for 2024-2025 for centrally held DSG as reported at the First Review. This is based on the position as at end of July 2024.

Recommendations

2. The Forum is asked to note the First Review position on the DSG.

Forecast Outturn

3. The forecast outturn position for the centrally held DSG is a pressure of £9.619m as at the end of July 2024.

Within this overall position, there are a number of forecast overspends. Specifically, £3.482m on high needs mainstream top up funding, £3.480m on independent non maintained school fees, £0.261m on alternative provision, £0.476 on Targeted Education Access, £0.151m Resource Provision growth, £1.010m Personal budgets, additional SEN costs £0.196m, staffing costs £0.52m and other SEN costs £0.898m.

These pressures are currently being partially offset by forecast underspends on independent school fees for non-SEN pupils £0.120m and slippage in service investment £0.267m in contracts.

DSG Reserve

4. The table below summarises the position on the DSG reserve as at First Review.

	£000
DSG reserve brought forward (deficit) 2023-2024	-2,713
Addition to reserve at the end of 2023-2024	-4,769
Current reserve held (deficit) 2024-2025	-7,482

5. Local authorities will need to demonstrate their ability to cover DSG deficits from their available reserves from 2023-2024 onwards. The Council is working towards a solution to recover the current deficit as failure to address this will have an impact on the Council's budgetary pressures going forward.

Next Steps

6. All areas of DSG will be reviewed as commitments for the new academic year are confirmed in the autumn term. Officers will continue to monitor the financial position and seek ways to mitigate the impact across all areas of the DSG. The forecast DSG outturn position will next be reviewed and reported as part of the Second Review of Financial Performance (end of September).

**Cheshire West and Chester Schools Forum
8 October 2024**

Agenda item 7

Schedule of meetings 2024-2025

Schools Forum – all meetings 4.30pm – 6.30pm

Date	Venue	Proposed agenda
Tuesday 12 November 2024 tbc	MS Teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School Funding Arrangements 2025-2026
Tuesday 3 December 2024	MS Teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DSG 2023-2024 Forecast Outturn at Mid-Year Review • Initial Planning for DSG Allocations for 2025-2026 and Budget Setting • Education – Basic Need Capital Programme 2024-2027
Tuesday 14 January 2025	MS Teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicative Dedicated Schools Grant Allocations for 2025-2026 • Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) budget setting 2025-2026 • Draft of 2025-2026 School Funding Formula for January Submission • De-delegation – Proposals for 2025-2026 • DSG 2024-2025 Forecast Outturn at Third Review • Update - SEND HN programme
Monday 10 February 2025	MS Teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early Years Funding for 2025-2026 • Arrangements for funding from the High Needs Block 2025-2026
Tuesday 1 July 2025	MS Teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DSG 2024-2025 outturn • School balances at the end of 2024-2025 (with appendices for schools and academies) • Directed revisions to schemes for financing schools • Annual review of Schools Forum membership, constitution, and terms of reference

Schools Forum Finance sub-group

Date	Time	Venue
Tuesday 12 November 2024 tbc	2.00 – 4.00 pm	MS Teams
Tuesday 21 January 2025	2.00 – 4.00 pm	MS Teams
Tuesday 10 June 2025	2.00 – 4.00 pm	MS Teams

Schools Forum High Needs sub-group – being reviewed