

GLOUCESTERSHIRE SCHOOLS FORUM

Minutes of a meeting held on Thursday 14 January 2021

The meeting was held remotely.

Present:

David Alexander	- Secondary Headteacher (Maintained)
Helen Bond	- Gloucestershire Parent Carer Forum
Matthew Bishop	- Primary School Governors (Maintained)
Lyn Dance	- Special School Head Teacher
Elisa Entwistle	- Alternative Provision Schools
Andrew Harris	- Community Representative (Chair of the Schools Forum)
Kirsten Harrison	- Secondary School Headteachers (Academy)
Kate Hawkins	- Special School Governors
Amanda Horniman	- Early Years Providers
Dan Johnson	- Primary School Headteachers (Maintained)
Lisa Jones	- Primary School Headteachers (Maintained)
Gwyneth Keen	- Early Years Providers
David Metcalf	- Primary School Headteachers (Maintained)
Will Morgan	- Secondary School Headteachers (Academy)
Sarah Murphy	- Unions
Alexander Norman	- Secondary School Governors (Academy)
Jacqui Phillips	- Secondary School Governors (Academy)
Steve Savory	- Primary School Headteachers (Academy)
Clare Steel	- Special School Headteachers
Adam White	- Secondary School Governors (Maintained)
Rob Wilcock	- Secondary School Governors (Academy)
Stuart Wilson	- Secondary School Headteachers (Academy)

Observers:

Cllr Richard Boyles, Cabinet Member for Children's Safeguarding and Early Years

Cllr Patrick Molyneux, Cabinet Member for Economy, Education and Skills

Officers:

Philip Haslett, Head of Education Strategy and Development

Neil Egles, Finance Manager, Schools Strategy and Capital

Suzanne Hall, Finance Business Partner Strategic Finance

Simon Harper, Head of Democratic Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer

Joanne Bolton, Democratic Services Officer and Clerk to the Schools Forum

Minutes subject to their acceptance as a correct record at the next meeting

Apologies: Penny Chislett, Post-16 Education
Peter Hales, Primary School Governor (Academy)
Rachel Howie, Gloucester Diocese
Becky Martin, Special School Governors (Maintained)

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

2. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No public questions were received.

3. MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 12 November 2020 were approved as a correct record.

4. GLOUCESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL BUDGET CONSULTATION 2021/22

4.1 The Finance Business Partner Strategic Finance gave an overview of the County Council budget proposals and provided details on the specific budget information relating to Children and Families. *(For information: a copy of the presentation slides covering each agenda item has been uploaded to the Council's website.)*

4.2 A member of the Forum emphasised the importance of all schools, and in particular governing bodies, being made aware of when the County Council's budget consultation was taking place, so that they were provided with the opportunity to respond. In response to a question on what action had been taken by the local authority to notify schools, the Finance Business Partner confirmed that a notice on the budget consultation had been included on the Schools bulletin board. Headteachers and governors had also been notified of the consultation via the *Heads Up* and *What's Up Gov* bulletins. The budget for consultation was also published on the Council's website.

4.3 Forum members were reminded that the budget consultation was open until 5:00pm on 15 January 2021 so that they could respond individually if they so wished.

4.4 The Forum noted report.

5. DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT 2021/22

5.1 The Head of Education Strategy and Development presented the report on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for 2021/22.

5.2 The Forum was informed that the DSG for 2020/21 announced on 17 December 2020 totalled £524.114M, it represented an increase in funding of £22.898M (4.8%)

from the current 2020/21 DSG. A further £20.648M (4.3%) had also been included for the movement of the teachers' pay and pension funding from separate grants into the DSG, bringing the total change up to £43.546M (9.1%). This allowed for the national funding formula factor rates for schools to be applied in full at their 100% level. The Forum noted the DSG total for each of the four allocation blocks (Schools, Central School Services, High Needs, and Early Years) as set out in the report.

- 5.3 The Forum was informed of the key changes between 2020/21 and 2021/22. It was reported that whilst sparsity funding continued to be based on the same distance thresholds of 2020/21, funding had increased significantly for 2021/22 with an increase of 73% in the maximum primary sparsity factor from £26,000 to £45,000 and an increase of 11% in the maximum secondary factor from £67,600 to £75,000. This had resulted in an overall increase in the sparsity funding allocated of £0.419M (53%). A total of 33 schools (28 primary and 5 secondary) qualified for the funding.
- 5.4 It was reported that the Minimum Per Pupil Funding (MPPF) rates had increased by £250 in primary and £150 in secondary. The MPPF rates including the teachers' pay and pension grants was now: £4,180 for primary schools and £5,415 for secondary schools. A total of 78 schools (64 primary and 14 secondary) would be funded on the MPPF. The Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) rate had increased from £1.84% in 2020/21 to 2% in 2021/22. A total of 78 schools (74 primary and 4 secondary) would receive the MFG uplift.
- 5.5 The Forum noted the information outlined in the report on how the 2021/22 figures compared to those in 2020/21 and how schools in each sector were now being funded. The Head of Education Strategy and Development explained that the local authority had been able to deliver the National Funding Formula in full leaving a Schools block surplus of £0.643M in 2021/22.
- 5.6 It was reported that for Early Years, the funding announcements on 17 December 2020 included an increase in the hourly funding rates by 6 pence for three and four year olds and 8 pence for two year olds resulting in an increase in the Early Years block of £476,895. In addition to that increase there was a reduction of £7,995 to the disability access fund, giving an overall increase to the Early Years block of £468,900 for 2021/22. The Forum noted that there would be further updates in the summer 2021 and summer 2022 for the January pupil counts.
- 5.7 The Forum considered the urgent report on Early Years funding, which had been published on the Council's website and circulated to Forum members on 13 January 2021. The decision had been taken to circulate the urgent report the day before the Forum meeting, due to urgent funding issues emerging within the Early Years sector. The emerging issues were being driven by low attendance numbers in settings due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the change in DfE guidance to only fund places based on attendance from 1 January 2021. The Head of Education Strategy and Development explained that the local authority was concerned that the funding approach outlined by the DfE did not go far enough to ensure the sustainability of providers - in many cases attendance would not have been high

enough to reflect a normal year, resulting in a significant reduction in funding. He emphasised that this message was being made very clearly to the local authority by the Early Years sector.

- 5.8 The Head of Education Strategy and Development explained that in order to take steps to mitigate the impact on providers and to ensure sufficiency of Early Years provision in the county, the local authority had been looking to seek approval from the Forum to fund Early Years providers, for the spring term, on the basis of eligible places and hours rather than attendance, taking account of the DfE measures to offset the financial shortfall set out in the report. He added that the local authority was also proposing that the current surplus of £1.3M be used to offset the costs of continuing to fully fund eligible places. He explained however, that just before the Forum meeting commenced, the DfE had announced that local authorities could complete the census based on what would be the normal expected pupil attendance instead of actual pupil attendance from 1 January 2021. Consequently, the Head of Education Strategy and Development was able to confirm at the Forum meeting that this would ensure the normal level of income into the Early Years block to support places, and therefore the issues raised in the urgent report had been resolved by the DfE's announcement. The Early Years representatives on the Forum welcomed the news, and commented that they felt reassured that the local authority was proposing to fund on the basis of eligible places even if the DfE had not made the announcement. They emphasised however just how much extra pressure the Early Years sector was under in ensuring that settings could stay open during the current national lockdown.
- 5.9 The Forum considered the Central School Services block allocation information. It was reported that this block included funding for the on-going responsibilities of local authorities for the statutory duties that they held for both maintained schools and academies. The allocation was based on a formula using pupil numbers (90%), free school meals (Ever 6, 10%) with an area cost adjustment applied. The indicative rate per pupil for 2021/22 was £31.94 and there had been an increase of £0.205M related to the net increase in pupil numbers and for teachers' pension employer contributions funding for centrally employed teachers.
- 5.10 The Forum noted that the High Needs block had been allocated an additional £8.246M, bringing the total funding for 2021/22 to £74.622M. Included within that figure was £2.255M of funding for teachers' pay and pension costs that were previously funded through separate grants.
- 5.11 A member questioned whether the local authority held central data on how many schools had implemented the 1 September 2020 pay award as set out in the DfE's School teachers' pay and conditions document 2020. The Head of Education and Strategy confirmed that whilst the local authority did not collect this data, he would request the information from the maintained schools and academies, including information on the total amount of any pay rise awarded to teachers. The information would be brought to a future meeting of the Forum.
- ACTION: The Head of Education Strategy and Development.**

5.12 Having considered all of the information presented:

- The Forum noted the Dedicated Schools Grant settlement for 2021/22.
- The Forum recommended that Council agree the school funding formula for 2021/22, as set out in Annex A to the report.
- The Forum agreed that the balance on the Schools block could be used at year end as a one off contribution to support the continuation of the 1 in 40 High Needs model.
- The Forum agreed to apply the 0.06p increase to the hourly rate for 3 and 4 years olds and the 0.08p to the formula for 2 year olds.
- The Forum agreed the allocation of the Central School Services block as set out in section 4 of the report.

6. HIGH NEEDS

6.1 The Head of Education Strategy and Development gave a presentation on the 2020/21 High Needs forecast, the key funding drivers for High Needs, and an update on the national picture.

6.2 He reported that there had been a number of movements in the reporting period, which were outlined in the report. One of the key movements was the use of independent school places from September 2020 onwards, it included 2 highly complex residential placements starting in September and the need for 10 additional independent school placements between September and the new year. Consequently, there was now a forecast overspend of £204,000 on the independent school budget.

6.3 Overall the December financial forecast for the 2020/21 High Needs budget was broadly in-line with the planned year end deficit budget. The Head of Education and Strategy explained that this demonstrated that there was now a greater understanding of the level of need coming into the system and the growth trends, enabling more control of the budget and accurate forecasting.

6.4 The Forum was informed that the key drivers of the overspend continued to be the number of Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP) in the system, and the rate of permanent exclusions. As at 1 December 2020 there were 4,284 active EHCPs, which was a rise of 202 since August 2020. The number of new requests for EHCPs continued to rise, and the local authority was reviewing the data to determine whether the rise was a consequence of the impact of Covid-19. Once the analysis was complete it would be shared with the Forum.

ACTION: The Head of Education Strategy and Development.

6.5 The Head of Education Strategy and Development reported that a further spike in the number of new requests for ECHPs was anticipated over the next 12 months, due to the rising level of need in the system resulting from a further national lockdown. The rates of permanent exclusion had remained broadly in-line with the previous year - a total of 23 children and young people had been permanently

excluded from schools this academic year, compared to 21 in the same period in 2019/20.

- 6.6 The Head of Education Strategy and Development explained that the pressure on High Needs budgets continued to cause concern in local authorities across the country. The Society of County Treasurers (SCT) and the F40 group had recently surveyed members to get an up to date picture. The Forum considered a summary report from the SCT, which outlined that in terms of the cumulative High Needs deficits; by the end of 2020-21 forecasts from the 32 that responded showed: 13 members with deficits between £0M and £10M; 9 members with deficits between £10M and £20M; 1 with a deficit in the £20millions and another just over £30M; and 3 with deficits between £40M and £50M. Gloucestershire was positioned in the second group of 9 members with a deficit of between £10M and £20M. The local authority had reached out to find out which local authorities had no deficit or a very low position to understand the context and how they had maintained that position. Officers hoped to be able to provide more information on this at the next Schools Forum meeting in June 2021.

ACTION: The Head of Education Strategy and Development.

- 6.7 The Head of Education Strategy and Development shared with the Forum emerging data on the national picture of High Needs deficit. The Forum noted the two bar charts attached at Annex A to the High Needs report, one chart showed the 2017-18 to 2020-21 estimated year end balance of the High Needs block across a number of local authorities. The second chart showed the 2020-21 estimated deficit as a proportion of the High Needs block funding, which provided a clearer picture of how the local authorities were managing their High Needs budget. The Head of Education Strategy and Development explained that this information showed that Gloucestershire's High Needs deficit as a proportion of the budget overall was not as significant as many of the other local authorities - there were some local authorities that had a deficit in excess of their overall High Needs budget.
- 6.8 The Head of Education Strategy and Development explained that the inequity of High Needs funding was a concern. He presented an example of a comparison of between Gloucestershire and Buckinghamshire, despite both local authorities having a similar pupil and school population, there was a significant disparity between how much High Needs funding each local authority received - Buckinghamshire received a total of £25M more High Needs block funding than Gloucestershire.
- 6.9 A member commented that she was aware that there was a different structure of high needs provision within Buckinghamshire compared to Gloucestershire, and added that it would be valuable to see comparisons of High Needs block funding between Gloucestershire and other local authorities, particularly those that did not have a historical track record of developing the infrastructure for High Needs provision. The Head of Education Strategy and Development explained that a significant proportion of High Needs block funding was based on historic spend at a moment in time, the High Needs formula had then locked in the inequity in how

local authorities were funded. This would explain why Buckinghamshire which had a similar pupil and school population to Gloucestershire, received significantly more per pupil funding. It was therefore recognised that whilst high needs recovery for many local authorities was underpinned by a need for central government to provide sufficient funding, the issue of how it was apportioned to local authorities also needed to be addressed, particularly the heavy dependence on historic funding. It was noted that the F40 group would be undertaking a more detailed analysis of High Needs funding, and the group aimed to involve a larger percentage of the local authorities, to gain clearer picture. The analysis would help to inform the debate with central government around how High Needs funding should move forward nationally. The analysis would be shared with the Forum once complete.

ACTION: The Head of Education Strategy and Development.

- 6.10 The Forum was informed that an update would be provided at the June Forum meeting, once the consultation exercise with schools was complete, on the plans for moving forward with the three areas that had been previously identified for further potential savings to be made. The three areas were: an adjustment to the diseconomy of scale model of funding available to special schools; a reduction in High Needs expenditure on the '1 in 40' model to support schools with high numbers of EHCPs; and a reduction in direct expenditure on the Advisory Teacher Service.
- 6.11 In response to a question, the Head of Education Strategy and Development explained that the authority had a 5-year recovery plan focussed on transformation work, particularly earlier intervention. However, he emphasised that whilst the local authority now had a better understanding of the budget, and despite the activities under the Joint Additional Needs and High Needs Transformation Programme moving forward, the authority was not at a point of being able to recover the High Needs block deficit position of £14.5M, particularly when taking into account the financial impact of Covid-19. It was also likely that a similar budget deficit would be set for 2022/23. It was recognised that the position would remain in future years unless there was a significant change to the funding system so that government funding matched the increased levels of need in the system.
- 6.12 The Forum was informed of the developments taking place nationally - the report on the outcome of the DfE's SEND review was due to be published in the Spring Term 2021, and the report on the DfE's review of the High Needs Formula and notional SEN Funding was due to be published in 2021. The outcome of the reviews were eagerly awaited as they should set out how the government planned to fund High Needs moving into the future. The Forum would be informed of any government announcements.
- 6.13 In response to a question, the Head of Education Strategy explained that whilst the 1 in 40 model would need to continue in 2021/22, he hoped that in future years through the implementation of national changes, resulting from DfE's reviews of SEND and High Needs funding, that the local authority would be in the position whereby funding for high needs would no longer need to be subsidised in that way.

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7. GLOUCESTERSHIRE SCHOOLS FORUM ELECTIONS 2021

- 7.1 The Clerk to the Forum presented a report which outlined the plans for the Schools Forum Elections 2021.
- 7.2 The Forum noted the report.

8. GLOUCESTERSHIRE SCHOOLS FORUM WORKPLAN 2021

- 8.1 The Forum received the Workplan for 2021. It was noted that the key priorities for the Schools Forum in 2021 were Mainstream, Early Years, and High Needs funding; the financial impact of Covid-19; and a reassessment of the role and impact of the Forum in light of its statutory responsibilities, current priorities in school funding and developments in government guidance.
- 8.2 The Head of Education Strategy and Development explained that schools were being asked to continue monitoring the impact of Covid-19 on their budgets. Analysis of the exceptional costs incurred by schools in Gloucestershire could then be used by the local authority to help inform DfE and ESFA policy. The analysis would be shared with the Forum once complete.
ACTION: The Head of Education Strategy and Development.
- 8.3 The Head of Education Strategy and Development informed members that the plan was for a Schools Forum working group on High Needs to be established within the next few months.
- 8.4 The Forum noted the Workplan for 2021.

9. F40

- 9.1 The Head of Education Strategy and Development reported that there were three key areas of focus for the F40 group in 2021:
- The continuing campaign for a fairer school funding deal through the core national funding formula.
 - The financial impact of Covid-19 on schools, and making the case for additional support and funding for schools from central government to cover the additional, unexpected costs as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.
 - High Needs funding - not just the overall quantum of funding but reviewing and understanding the way in which High Needs funding was allocated across the country.

Chair

Meeting concluded at 3.35 pm