

# GLOUCESTERSHIRE SCHOOLS FORUM

Minutes of a meeting held on Thursday 11 November 2021

The meeting was held remotely.

## Present:

|                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| Alison Berry        | - Secondary School Governors (Academy)          |
| Lyn Dance           | - Special School Head Teacher                   |
| Stephen Dean        | - Primary School Headteachers (Academy)         |
| Anne-Marie Delrosa  | - Secondary School Governors (Maintained)       |
| Elisa Entwistle     | - Alternative Provision Schools                 |
| Andrew Harris       | - Community Representative (Chair of the Forum) |
| Kate Hawkins        | - Special School Governors (Academy)            |
| Amanda Horniman     | - Primary School Headteachers (Maintained)      |
| Rachel Howie        | - Gloucester Diocese                            |
| Lisa Jones          | - Primary School Headteachers (Maintained)      |
| Becky Martin        | - Special School Governors (Maintained)         |
| Julia Maunder       | - Secondary School Headteachers (Academy)       |
| Dermot McNiffe      | - Secondary School Headteachers (Academy)       |
| Sarah Murphy        | - Unions  |
| Alexander Norman    | - Secondary School Governors (Academy)          |
| Poppy Scott Plummer | - Secondary School Governors (Academy)          |
| Clare Steel         | - Special School Headteachers (Maintained)      |

## Substitutes:

|                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| Andrew Stafford | - Primary School Governors (Maintained) |
| Laine Lewis     | - Gloucestershire Parent Carer Forum    |

## Observers:

Cllr Philip Robinson - Cabinet Member for Economy, Education and Skills

Cllr Stephen Davies - Cabinet Member for Children's Safeguarding and Early Years.

## Officers:

Kirsten Harrison, Director of Education  
Chris Spencer, Director of Children's Services  
Philip Haslett, Head of Education Strategy and Development  
Neil Egles, Finance Manager, Schools Strategy and Capital  
Suzanne Hall, Finance Business Partner, Strategic Finance  
Joanne Bolton, Democratic Services Adviser and Clerk to the Schools Forum

## Apologies:

David Alexander, Secondary Headteacher (Maintained)  
Matthew Bishop, Primary School Governors (Maintained)  
Helen Bond, Gloucestershire Parent Carer Forum

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Penny Chislett, Post-16 Education  
Rhian Evans, Primary School Governors (Maintained)  
Elaine Le Gros, Primary School Headteachers (Maintained)  
Peter Hales, Primary School Governors (Academy)  
Becky Poulter Jewson, Early Years  
Gwyneth Keen, Early Years Providers  
Will Morgan, Secondary School Headteachers (Academy)

## **28. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest were made.

## **29. PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

No public questions had been received.

## **30. MINUTES**

- 30.1 The minutes of the previous meeting held on 16 September 2021, were approved as a correct record subject to the membership details for Dermot McNiffe in the attendance list being corrected to read: 'Secondary (Academy) Headteachers'.
- 30.2 The Forum noted the progress against the actions from the previous meeting as outlined in the Action Sheet.
- 30.3 At the September Forum meeting it was noted that schools were losing out on income due to changes in the way Pupil Premium was being calculated. The concern was that the additional Covid-19 recovery funding being allocated to schools was not covering this loss to their budgets. The Head of Education Strategy and Development explained that analysis on the impact showed lost income from changes to the Pupil Premium census date totalled £1,400,370. This was a £1,213,190 loss for primary schools and £187,190 for secondary schools. Covid recovery premium funding in 2020/21 for secondary schools totalled £931,047 and £1,313,045 for primary schools. Therefore primary schools were disproportionately impacted by the change in the Pupil Premium funding which was offsetting the additional funding received for recovery.
- 30.4 The Head of Education Strategy and Development explained that the Home to School Transport budget was increasingly under significant pressure. He would provide details on the costs for children travelling to special schools in the county and independent special schools out of county, at the 13 January 2022 Forum meeting.
- ACTION: Head of Education Strategy and Development.**

## **31. COMPREHENSIVE SPENDING REVIEW**

- 31.1 The Forum received an update on the key messages coming out of the government's Comprehensive Spending Review 2021 in relation to Education.
- 31.2 For Early Years and Family Support, there would be additional funding for the early years entitlements worth £160M in 2022-23, £180M in 2023-24 and £170M in 2024-25. A total of £302M to fund new programmes to support parents, provide bespoke breast-feeding services and parent-infant mental support, and funding to rollout Family Hubs across England.
- 31.3 It was reported that for the core schools' budget there would be an additional £4.7 billion by 2024-25. In response to a question, the Head of Education Strategy and Development explained that this closely aligned with the 2019 spending review figure of £7.1 billion over three years, and should therefore result in a similar percentage increase to the Per Pupil funding levels continuing for schools, like those seen over the last 3 years. However, schools would need to consider the cost of the National Insurance Levy from April 2022, and the commitment to increase teacher starting salaries to £30k (announced in 2016).
- 31.4 In response to a further question, he clarified that there were no further details on whether the Per Pupil funding, by remaining at a similar level, would mean a redirection of funding into the additional needs aspects. He added that any action to direct funding to support children with additional needs would be linked to the outcomes of the government's SEND review, which was due to be published imminently.
- 31.5 For Post-16 and Youth Services there would be an additional £1.6 billion by 2024-25 for 16-19 year-olds. Current funding rates would be maintained as student numbers grew. An additional 110,000 students were anticipated by 2024/25. The capital settlement for SR 21 included £2.8 billion for colleges condition funding and funding for improved facilities (including continued roll out of T-Levels) and to establish 20 new Institutes of Technology. A total of £560M new funding had been announced for youth services in England over the next three years, enough to fund 300 youth clubs.
- 31.6 The Forum noted that a total of £2.6 billion had been allocated to fund places for children and young people with SEND. The Head of Education Strategy and Development reported that initial indications from the ESFA were that this funding would be allocated to the new free school and academies programme. The Education Building and Development Officers Group (a national group made up of local authority officers and property professionals who are responsible for effective asset manager of school premises within their own LA), was engaging with the ESFA's policy team, and requesting greater flexibility to enable the funding to be used to enhance existing specialist provision in local areas. This was on the basis that the process for free school bids could take up to 3 years to complete, and there was a risk that the bids may not even be successful.
- 31.7 In education recovery there would be a £1 billion extension to the Recovery Premium for the next two academic years to help schools to deliver evidence-based

approaches to support the most disadvantaged pupils. The Head of Education Strategy and Development reported that schools in Gloucestershire could expect that the recovery funding levels they were currently receiving would continue for at least the next two years. However, if there were any significant changes to Pupil Premium numbers this would have an affect on the level of recovery funding being received as the funding was calculated on Pupil Premium census data. A total of £800 million had been announced for 16-19 year-olds, with the expectation that this would fund 40 additional hours per student per week.

- 31.8 The Director of Children's Services reported that Gloucestershire represented 1% of the national population of children; consequently this could be interpreted locally as Gloucestershire broadly receiving 1% of those headline figures. Initial indications were that this would be a good settlement for Gloucestershire. He referred to the national £1.7 billion levelling up fund, and commented that he hoped that Gloucestershire would receive a share of the funding which could then be directed at enhancing schools serving the more deprived areas in the county, in recognition that education was an effective way out of poverty.
- 31.9 In response to a question, it was explained that further details on the funding for Gloucestershire's schools core budgets in the financial year 2023/24, would be reported at the September 2022 Forum meeting.
- 31.10 The Head of Education Strategy and Development agreed to circulate to Forum members, further details on the funding announcements, once they became available.
- ACTION: Head of Education Strategy and Development.**

## **32. CONSULTATION ON SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT GRANT FUNDING**

- 32.1 The Head of Education Strategy and Development explained that the government was consulting local authorities on proposed changes to how LA's school improvement actives were funded. The government was proposing to remove the grant and enable all improvement activity, including that provided in connection with core improvement activities, to be funded in the same way via de-delegation from schools' budget shares. The rationale behind the proposal was that local authorities rarely needed to utilise intervention powers, many historically poorer performing schools were now academies, and core improvement activities were part of a continuum of wider activity.
- 32.2 He reported that the impact of the removal of this grant in Gloucestershire would be a loss of income totalling circa £720k by 2023/24. A reduction of 50% would be seen in 2022/23. The government was proposing to change the regulations to allow all LA School Improvement activities to be funded through de-delegation, with the agreement of the local schools forum or the Secretary of State.
- 32.3 The Head of Education Strategy and Development explained that in terms of next steps, the LA would assess the impact of the proposed changes and work with Forum members representing maintained schools to model potential options for

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School Improvement funding. Consultation/engagement would take place with all maintained schools, (Primary, Secondary, Alternative Provision and Special) to consider options, and to also produce a response to the government's consultation. He stressed that the consultation was focused on the pace of the removal of the grant, rather than whether the grant should or should not be removed.

- 32.4 The Head of Education Development and Strategy emphasised that decisions on de-delegations for School Improvement funding would involve the Forum members representing maintained schools across the school sector (i.e. Special, Alternative Provision, Primary, and Secondary).
- 32.5 In response to a question, the Head of Education Strategy and Development confirmed that Gloucestershire rarely needed to utilise the intervention powers. LAs were working hard not to get into the position of having to use the intervention powers with schools that were causing concern. The Director of Children's Services added that using this statutory power of direction was always an intervention of last resort. The LA aimed to work with governing bodies to build consensus to avoid having to use it; however, it was a useful power to call upon when needed.
- 32.6 The Director of Children's Services explained that ultimately the consultation was sending the message that it remained the government's intention to move to full academisation, and for all stand alone academies to join Multi Academy Trusts by 2025. It could be implied that the removal of this grant was removing a barrier to academisation. He added that following the loss of the grant income it would be incredibly difficult to maintain a school improvement service at local authority level to support schools, consequently this would be a loss of service to maintained schools. Senior officers were concerned about the impact this would have on the school improvement service, including a lack of intelligence in schools meaning less opportunity for LAs to act before performance deteriorated significantly and formal intervention became inevitable. A member commented that it would be hugely disappointing to lose the support and advice the LA provided for maintained schools, which was greatly appreciated.
- 32.7 A member expressed concern that this was not a consultation but more of a nudge towards full academisation; the worry was how this may directly negatively impact on non academy schools in Gloucestershire.
- 32.8 The Director of Education reported that she had attended a South West regional consultation meeting with representatives of the DfE, who were running this consultation process. The meeting was attended by Directors of Education in the south west region, who put forward concerns about the proposed change to the School Improvement funding. This was the first meeting whereby Directors of Education could respond verbally, enabling those concerns to be registered as part of the consultation process.
- 32.9 The Director of Children's Services informed members that at those consultation meetings, the views of LAs were also being sought on the appetite for moving to full

academisation 'on block' - meaning that all maintained schools would become academies at once. It was becoming increasingly clear that the LA may, moving forward, need to commence with the development of a roadmap to full academisation for Gloucestershire schools. This would be based on the realisation that it was the government's directive and it would need to happen at some point. By taking this proactive approach it would enable discussions about how full academisation could be undertaken in the most constructive and beneficial way for the children in the county, to provide them with the best education experience. It was recognised that a collaborative approach was needed and the Education Reference Group and the headteacher associations were viewed as useful forums to have the debate around moving towards full academisation. Members expressed support for this approach, and it was suggested that governors should also be included in those conversations not just headteachers.

32.10 The Head of Education Strategy and Development referred to the following statement in the consultation document:

'The local authority role in school improvement has changed significantly in recent years, with the growth of school-led approaches, such as Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs), putting school improvement in the hands of the strongest schools and school leaders'.

He contended that there were also many outstanding leaders within maintained schools.

32.11 The Head of Education Strategy and Development pointed out that it was a challenge for small rural schools to convert to academies because of issues around funding and viability. He explained however, that it could be implied that the significant increase seen in sparsity funding was targeted at addressing those barriers to academisation. Therefore, the proposed change to School Improvement funding was not an isolated example of the government working towards bringing about that change.

32.12 The Head of Education and Strategy agreed that he would share the LA's draft response to the consultation on how LAs' School Improvement activities were funded, with the representatives of maintained schools on the Schools Forum for comment. He also encouraged maintained schools to respond to the consultation on an individual basis by the deadline date of 26 November 2021.

32.13 It was noted that at the 13 January 2022 meeting, the Forum would receive a report and recommendation from the LA, for a decision to be made on the future funding arrangements for School Improvement.

### **33. HIGH NEEDS**

33.1 The Head of Education Strategy and Development provided an update on the High Needs forecast for 2021/22 and the current growth trends in Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs).

- 33.2 As reported at the last School's Forum meeting in September there had been a further £660,000 increase in costs which has resulted in a forecast in-year deficit of just over £5M. The forecast now included a 2% increase to top-ups as agreed at the previous Schools Forum meeting. To offset this cost, the LA had made an adjustment in the forecast expenditure on external Alternative Provision, this had been possible due to the reduced pressure the Alternative Provision service.
- 33.3 He reported that the most significant movement was in the College and FE budget, where there had been a sharp increase in the number of places. An overview of the current mainstream EHCP profile was presented to the Forum which showed the allocation of funding into the different year groups. It was noted that there had been a rise in primary, which may then flow through into secondary. The spike in years 10 and 11 was starting to flow through into Post-16. Small changes in trends and average costs in other budget areas, in this case the year 11 cohort, could have a significant impact. To address those issues, the LA had developed a more detailed activity led financial model incorporating the various component budgets supporting High Needs. The model would look back over the last three years to assess trends, and then forecast a 5 year forward plan. Officers were confident that the model would significantly improve the LA's ability to accurately forecast and plan the budget for the next financial year. The model had been developed in line with the DfE Dedicated Schools Grant Management Plan, to aid future discussions with the DfE. It was noted that the Forum would receive further information on the model at the 13 January 2022 Schools Forum meeting.
- 33.4 The Forum noted that EHCP numbers were continuing to rise – the requests to assess in the June-September period were significantly up on last year. The LA was planning to use a net increase of 400 new plans to forecast budget. As part of the modelling work, there would be close look at the financial impact of that assumption over a 5 year period.
- 33.5 The forecast High Needs in-year deficit of just over £5M was broadly in line with previous year's budget position. The Head of Education Strategy and Development explained that the position was as good as could be reasonably expected, given the changes in the trends and pressures on the system. Some LAs were reporting significant in-year High Needs deficit budgets – in one case £22M.
- 33.6 The Head of Education Strategy and Development explained that there was now an increased focus on the Post-16 transition process, making sure that the review process was effective, and that plans were ceased or reduced, as required. The SEND Casework Team was under such pressure due to the volume of EHCPs in the system, that currently the annual reviews did not always take place on time.
- 33.7 Members were informed that it would take around 2/3 years for the benefits of the earlier intervention work being undertaken to start having an impact on the budget position - this was being built into the modelling work. In addition, the impact of the investment in special school places and therefore a reduction on the reliance on out of county placements would also need to be factored into the modelling work. Initial

indications were that there was potential for an in-year High Needs balance by 2024/25; however, there was likely to be a £18m deficit by that time.

- 33.8 Members were informed that the pressure on the High Needs budget was predominantly created by the rising level of need - this was a national issue. The LA wanted to avoid making reactionary local decisions that would negatively affect the quality of provision for children with additional needs, when this was clearly a national crisis affected by national policy. Therefore the publication of the government's SEND review, which should give a clear steer nationally, was eagerly awaited. It was also anticipated that the government would undertake a High Needs consultation at some point in the near future.
- 33.9 The Head of Education Strategy and Development reported that the government would soon provide clarity on how Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficits would be treated. There was currently a protection in place so that LAs did not have to include the DSG deficit in the overall LA deficit reporting; however, this protection would run out at some point in the near future. He explained that the DfE and ESFA were currently working with some LAs, and taking an individualised approach to dealing with DSG deficits. However, as this was a national problem, a number of organisations were pushing the government to take a national approach.
- 33.10 The Forum noted the breakdown of the costs and trends for specialist and independent specialist provision.
- 33.11 The Director of Children's Services emphasised that it was important to think about using the funding coming into Gloucestershire more effectively, to invest more in local special school places, which would mean fewer children needing to be placed out of the county in expensive residential and independent special schools. He recognised that Gloucestershire, in comparison to other LAs, was currently disproportionately placing children in out of county specialist provision.
- 33.12 In response to a question, the Head of Education Strategy and Development explained there was scope for some of the additional funding for places for children and young people with SEND, to be used for Alternative Provision. There was an opportunity to look at improving some of the infrastructure for Alternative Provision schools in the county and the way in which they were used. He stressed however, that until there was further guidance from the DfE on how the funding could be accessed, it was difficult to comment on exactly how the funding could be utilised. If the DfE did insist that it could only go through the free school programme, then discussions would take place locally about what applications could be submitted through the free school programme, in partnership with the Mainstream, Special, and the Alternative Provision sectors.
- 33.13 The Head of Education Strategy and Development explained that the High Needs Budget workshop meeting had taken place on 20 October 2021. The focus of this meeting was on understanding the strategy and context of the High Needs budget. Moving forward the plan was for a High Needs Budget Working Group to take an in-

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depth look at specifically targeted areas and plans, to assess the impact and to ensure that the LA was actively taking the right approach.

33.14 In response to a question, the Head of Education Strategy and Development explained that the SEND team was looking at the EHCP trends around year 6 and year 7, in an aim to understand the reason behind the significant variation in the number of EHCPs in the system in those two year groups. There was currently a dip in number of EHCP requests in year 6 and then a marked increase in the number of requests in year 7. He recognised that further analysis was needed on the data. If this was a transitional issue then that would be where changes to the funding system would be important so that support could be provided outside of a statutory EHCP process in a more effective and timely manner to support the children during that time of need. The Forum identified this as an area for the working group to take an in-depth look at.

#### **34. F40 UPDATE**

The Head of Education Strategy and Development reported that he had attended the recent meeting of the f40 Executive Group. The core focus of the F40 Group for this year and the next 3 years was to continue the campaign for equity in the National Funding Formula. The f40 Group would also increase its focus on High Needs funding following publication of the government's SEND review.

#### **35. NEXT MEETING**

The Forum noted the next meeting would take place at 2:00pm on Thursday 13 January 2022.

**Chair**

Meeting concluded at 3.40 pm