

GLOUCESTERSHIRE SCHOOLS FORUM

Minutes of a meeting held on Wednesday 30 March 2022

The meeting was held remotely.

Present:

David Alexander	- Secondary Headteacher (Maintained)
Alison Berry	- Secondary School Governors (Academy)
Penny Chislett	- Post-16 Education
Lyn Dance	- Special School Head Teacher
Stephen Dean	- Primary School Headteachers (Academy)
Anne-Marie Delrosa	- Secondary School Governors (Maintained)
Elisa Entwistle	- Alternative Provision Schools
Rhian Evans	- Primary School Governors (Maintained)
Mikey Ezewudo	- Primary School Governors (Maintained)
Andrew Harris	- Community Representative (Chair of the Forum)
Kate Hawkins	- Special School Governors (Academy)
Amanda Horniman	- Primary School Headteachers (Maintained)
Rachel Howie	- Gloucester Diocese (Vice Chair of the Forum)
Lisa Jones	- Primary School Headteachers (Maintained)
Gwyneth Keen	- Early Years Providers
Victoria Leather	- Early Years
Becky Martin	- Special School Governors (Maintained)
Julia Maunder	- Secondary School Headteachers (Academy)
Will Morgan	- Secondary School Headteachers (Academy)
Sarah Murphy	- Unions
Darren Preece	- Primary School Headteachers (Maintained)
Clare Steel	- Special School Headteachers (Maintained)

Observers:

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

Officers:

Kirsten Harrison, Director of Education
Philip Haslett, Head of Education Strategy and Development
Clare Dudman, Head of School Improvement
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:

Matthew Bishop, Primary School Governors (Maintained)
Helen Bond, Gloucestershire Parent Carer Forum
Peter Hales, Primary School Governors (Academy)
Dermot McNiffe, Secondary School Headteachers (Academy)
Alexander Norman, Secondary School Governors (Academy)

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

Poppy Scott Plummer, Secondary School Governors
(Academy)
Cllr Philip Robinson - Cabinet Member for Economy, Education
and Skills

11. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

12. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No public questions had been received.

13. MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 13 January 2022 were approved as a correct record.

14. EARLY YEARS

- 14.1 Phil Haslett, Head of Education Strategy and Development, presented a report which set out the Early Years context in Gloucestershire, the proposed use of the Early Years Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) block for 2022/23 including the retained amount and the options for how best to use the surplus.
- 14.2 He reported that the Early Years block for 2022/23 was announced by the DfE in December 2021 and totalled £34.897 million. The allocated hourly rate for 2022/23 was an increase of 21p per hour for two-year-olds to £5.65 per hour and 17p per hour for three and four-year-olds to £4.61 per hour. In January 2022 the Schools Forum approved the proposal that the increases were added to the hourly rate passed to providers for both 2-year-olds and 3 and 4-year-olds. It was also agreed at the January meeting that there would be a consultation with Early Years providers on a number of options (set out in Section 4 of the report) in respect of the Early Years' formula including deprivation payments for 3 and 4-year-olds.
- 14.3 It was confirmed that the Early Years Forum had agreed to implement Option 1 for the distribution of the additional allocated increase of 17p per hour for 3 and 4-year-olds. This had been communicated to the Early Years sector and would be applied from April 2022.
- 14.4 The Head of Education Strategy and Development reported that the fragility of the Early Years infrastructure had been further impacted by the national pandemic and this continued to present challenges in relation to the sufficiency of places and quality of early education and childcare both locally and nationally. An interim sufficiency assessment completed by the local authority in January 2022 had highlighted emerging sufficiency concerns in the Stroud and Dursley areas of the

county and also highlighted the continued risks to provider sustainability due to a combination of cost and funding pressures. He explained that the investment to support Early Years & Childcare sufficiency (£250k) would enable the local authority to continue its work with providers at risk of closure and maintain its duty to have a sufficient provision of good quality childcare available across the county.

- 14.5 The Forum received details on the proposal to commission a 12-month pilot of Early Years Specialist Assessment Provision for early years children with special educational needs. Members were informed that due to the current pressure on the specialist places in the county, access to assessment provision was challenging. The aim of the pilot was to determine whether by putting in place Early Years Specialist Assessment Provision, this would help to alleviate pressure and ensure children with special needs received support and assessment within the Early Years sector at the right time, avoiding any delays.
- 14.6 The Head of Education Strategy and Development reported that the possibility of transferring the underspend from the Early Years block to offset overspends in other parts of the DSG was considered. However, given that Early Years funding was low in Gloucestershire creating viability and sufficiency issues for parts of the sector, it was felt that utilising Early Years funding to support overspends would not be appropriate or equitable.
- 14.7 The Forum agreed that the total uncommitted Early Years carry forward balance of £1.479M be used as follows:
- Retain £250k (17.8%) of the underspend to support Early Education & childcare sufficiency (capital and revenue).
 - Retain £200K (14.3%) to commission a 12-month pilot Early Years Specialist Assessment provision for early years children with special educational needs.
 - Allocate £950k (67.9%) to providers based on the full academic year hours in 2020/21.
- 14.8 Gwyneth Keen, Early Years representative, on behalf of the Early Years sector, welcomed the decision to allocate £950k of the surplus to providers. It was recognised that this injection of funding would help to alleviate the challenges that providers faced to deliver a quality provision for children in the county.
- 14.9 The Forum considered the use of the provisional Early Years DSG block 2022/23. The Head of Education Strategy and Development reported that the proposal was for the budget for central costs to be allocated at the level circa £1.64 million. This would continue to fund an element of Children and Family Centres, Early Years quality team and supporting overheads.
- 14.10 The Head of Education Strategy and Development explained that the commissioning of Children and Family Centres was the first step in an incremental/transitional approach to an integrated Family Hub model. The proposal was for a commitment

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

for the DGS funding of £1,048,758 be made available for the period of the contracts to contribute to the development of Family Hubs across Gloucestershire. The Early Years Forum had been consulted and was in support of the proposal. The local authority would involve the Early Years sector in the commissioning process, and in the monitoring of impact and the outcomes achieved. He added that both the Early Years Forum and the Schools Forum would have oversight of how the funding was being used and the provision that was being made for Early Years through the Family Hubs. Details on the specification of the Children & Family Centres and updates on the commissioning process would be brought to future Forum meetings.

ACTION: Head of Education Strategy and Development

- 14.11 In response to a question, the Head of Education Strategy and Development clarified that the support services and overheads element of the Early Years Block primarily related to the staffing costs associated with the Early Years service within the local authority.
- 14.12 The Forum agreed the use of the Early Years DSG block as set out in Section 6 of the report, including a commitment for the DSG funding of £1,048,758 be made available for the period of the Children & Family Centre contracts to support the development of Family Hubs across Gloucestershire.

15. LOCAL AUTHORITY SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT GRANT

- 15.1 The Head of Education Strategy and Development presented the report which set out the options and a preferred solution to the funding pressures created by the removal of the School Improvement Monitoring & Brokering Grant. Members noted that on 9th December 2021 the local authority held a briefing meeting with key stakeholders, including maintained schools headteachers and chairs of the headteachers associations. The focus of the session was to explore the issues created by the DfE consultation and potential solutions to the proposed loss of funding.
- 15.2 He reported that in early January 2022, the DfE's consultation response was published, confirming that the grant would be removed over the next two financial years. A 50% reduction in 2022/23 and full removal in 2023/24. This would result in a loss of circa £360,000 in 2022/23 and £720,000 in 2023/24. A further meeting was held with the heads associations and representatives of maintained schools on 2nd March 2022, during which the local authority shared and discussed the report which set out the proposals on how, in the short-term, the loss of funding could be addressed in the most effective and equitable way.
- 15.3 The Head of Education Strategy and Development explained that the first option the local authority considered was to use de-delegation from maintained schools to recoup the lost funding. This was suggested by the DfE in the consultation. However, de-delegation has to operate on a per-pupil basis rather than a whole-school budget top-slice. The regulations also stated that it must be applied equally to all maintained schools. As a result, all maintained schools in Gloucestershire would pay the same amount at a rate of approximately £9 per pupil. It was

recognised that school improvement was a whole school activity and as such, a per-pupil funding was a difficult approach to apply equitably for all schools.

- 15.4 The second option the local authority considered was to bridge the funding gap using a combination of de-delegated balances, the Central Services block, and a reduction in intervention funding that the Local Authority could offer to schools.
- 15.5 It was reported that de-delegated balances were forecast to carry a surplus at the end of the financial year. The proposal was for £100k of the surplus to be used to support the loss of the grant. This would leave very little contingency in the budget; however, it was a budget that was consistently underspent.
- 15.6 The Head of Education Strategy and Development informed members that a reduction in the school improvement intervention budget may limit the local authority's ability to provide additional funding to maintained schools that need intervention or school improvement support. This may mean that the local authority would no longer be in a position to provide funding to schools with a budget surplus, instead the local authority would need to focus the provision of funding to support schools that had a deficit budget position or were close to a deficit position. He stressed that it would not reduce the capacity of the School Improvement Service in providing advice, guidance and support to schools, it would solely affect the provision of additional intervention funding to schools.
- 15.7 He reported that the Central Services block had seen a small increase this year and the local authority had therefore been able to provisionally ring-fence £160k to support the loss of the grant in 2022/23.
- 15.8 He explained that the timing of the consultation and response had left very little time for the authority to address the challenges the loss of grant had created for maintained schools and the local authority. Consequently, the potential solutions had been developed by the local authority at a very fast pace. He was aware that there were other local authorities that had put forward a proposal to their Schools Forum on recouping the lost funding via de-delegation from maintained schools. Their Schools Forum had voted against the proposal and the local authority had then subsequently appealed to the DfE. The DfE, having recommended de-delegation in the consultation paper, had overturned the Schools Forum decision and allowed the local authority to progress with de-delegation. He explained that in Gloucestershire the local authority had aimed to avoid that pathway by developing an alternative solution to de-delegation.
- 15.9 The Forum was advised that the second option was the preferred option on the basis that it would provide the most effective and equitable approach to bridge the funding gap for 2022/23. It would also provide time for more sustainable long-term plans to be put in place for 2023/24 and beyond.
- 15.10 In response to a question, the Head of Education Strategy and Development confirmed that the use of de-delegated balances as part of the second option, would not include any trade unions de-delegated balance.

- 15.11 The Forum agreed that the local authority bridges the funding gap for 2022/23 by reducing intervention funding and redundancy support for maintained schools.
- 15.12 Clare Dudman, Head of School Improvement, informed members that in the longer term the local authority was working with schools to develop a traded service. As part of this service the local authority was offering schools the option of two different tiers of support that could be purchased independently or as part of a group of 5 or more schools (meaning that prices can be negotiated). The aim was for the service to be as flexible as possible to meet the portfolio of needs of schools. The Forum received the draft Gloucestershire School Improvement Offer (GLOSSI) Traded Service brochure and it was confirmed that the final copy was due to be circulated to schools imminently.
- 15.13 A member commented that she would be interested to find out more information about who had been appointed to the School Improvement Service and the process involved, particularly in terms of quality assurance. In response, the Head of School Improvement explained that the Gloucestershire School Improvement Service would encompass an experienced team of School Improvement Partners comprising a range of skills including those of serving headteachers, principals, senior leaders from local authorities, experienced leaders of MATs and subject specialists. There would be a full selection process involved in the appointment of external partners; this would include making the appropriate Disclosure and Barring Service checks, and ensuring that they met the local authority's set criteria in regard to relevant qualifications and experience. All contracts with would have a break clause so that if the local authority was not satisfied with the service an adviser was providing, they could be withdrawn from the service or replaced by another adviser. She advised members that she did not envisage there being any problems, as this approach was followed in other local authorities and worked well. She emphasised the point that schools would need to provide her with direct feedback if they were unhappy with any aspect of the service being provided.
- 15.14 The Forum was informed that the aim was for schools to be provided with a document detailing the background and skills of the professionals working within team and the external partners. This would be circulated to schools in around June 2022. A Forum member stressed the importance of schools being provided with information on the team member/external partner biographies, as the feedback they had received from schools was that this information would have a direct impact on whether or not schools decided to buy-in to the traded service. Once the selection has been completed this would be actioned.
- 15.15 A Forum member representing special schools questioned whether the School Improvement Offer traded service would incorporate a specialism in regard to special schools. She felt that previously it had been ad-hoc as to whether a special school was allocated an adviser who had the required knowledge and understanding of the differences in the curriculum, funding and the relationships required with health and social care. Consequently, there was a degree of concern about paying for a traded service that was not able to provide the

specialism required. In response, the Head of School Improvement explained that once feedback had been received from the special schools and the level of interest ascertained for buy-in, the focus would be on ensuring that there were a range of advisers within the team who had the right skill set to work with special schools.

- 15.16 The Head of School Improvement reported that in order to get an indication of the number of schools requesting support, the local authority would be asking for expressions of interest from schools in the next few weeks. A commitment for purchase would need to be made in the summer term.
- 15.17 The Head of Education Strategy and Development explained that following the recent publication of the Government's Schools White Paper the local authority would be reviewing its statutory responsibilities and long-term role to ensure that the structure of school improvement alongside the traded services offer enabled the local authority to undertake its statutory functions in relation to school improvement. The local authority would also review the current de-delegation to assess the appropriate level of de-delegation from 2023/24 onwards.

16. F40 UPDATE

- 16.1 The Head of Education Strategy and Development, informed members that he had been appointed to the role of Deputy Chair of the f40 Executive Group. He explained that the priorities for the f40 Group were fair funding, sufficiency of funding, SEND and High Needs, capital funding and Early Years.
- 16.2 He presented a graph which showed the variation in funding of the gross Dedicated Schools Grant Allocation per mainstream pupil by local authority (December 2021). He pointed out that it showed a significant variation in funding between local authorities particularly to those located in London, which received a much higher allocation. The f40 Group represented a group of the lowest funded education authorities in England. The key purpose of the f40 Group was to influence change in the way the government allocated funding to local authorities and schools, with a focus on removing the current inequities.
- 16.3 He reported that in terms of recent activity, the f40 Group held its annual conference for all local authority members, to gather views on the core issues ahead of a DfE briefing meeting with the Funding Policy Team. The f40 Group held a briefing for MPs on 21 March 2022, this also focussed on those specific funding issues within the education system, highlighting the key areas of concern. A letter had been drafted to the Chancellor from f40 MPs urging him to level up education funding and to provide more funding, including for SEND. He agreed to circulate to the Forum, the letter to the Chancellor, and the documents that were used at the MP's briefing.
- ACTION: Head of Education Strategy and Development.**
- 16.4 Members were informed that the core focus of the f40 Group continued to be the campaign for equity in the National Funding Formula. In addition, following the recent publication of the Government's SEND review, the f40 Group would be

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

increasing its focus and working closely with the Government on High Needs funding.

- 16.5 The Head of Education Strategy and Development urged members to contact him direct if they felt that there was a particular funding issue that was not already being addressed.

17. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Forum noted that the next meeting of the Schools Forum would take place on 16 June 2022 at 2:00pm.

Chair

Meeting concluded at 2.55 pm