

GLOUCESTERSHIRE SCHOOLS FORUM

Minutes of a meeting held on Monday 18 March 2024
The meeting was held remotely.

Present:

Matthew Bishop	- Primary School Governors (Maintained)
Rachel Bradley-McKay	- Primary School Headteachers (Maintained)
Dominic Burke	- Secondary School Headteachers (Academy)
Mikey Ezewudo	- Primary School Governors (Maintained)
Justin Godding	- Primary School Headteachers (Maintained)
Emma Gundry	- Alternative Provision
Andrew Harris	- Community Representative
Kate Hawkins	- Special School Governors (Academy)
Becky Martin	- Special School Governors (Maintained)
Jon Millin	- Primary School Headteachers (Maintained)
Will Morgan	- Secondary School Headteachers (Academy)
Roz Nelson	- Early Years
Wendy Newby	- Special School Headteachers (Maintained)
Alexander Norman	- Secondary School Governors (Academy)
Liz Oakey	- Special School Headteachers (Academy)
David Williams	- Diocese of Gloucester

Observers: Cllr Stephen Davies - Cabinet Member for Children's Safeguarding and Early Years
Cllr Philip Robinson - Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Bus Transport

Apologies: Helen Bond, Gloucestershire Parent Carer Forum
Karen Clinton, Secondary School Headteachers (Maintained)
David Kettleby, Post 16
Stephen Dean, Primary School Headteachers (Academy)
Rhian Evans, Primary School Governors (Maintained)
Chiquita Henson, Secondary School Headteachers (Academy)
Amanda Horniman, Early Years
Sarah Murphy, Unions

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

2. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No public questions had been received.

3. MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting held on the 11 January 2024, were approved as a correct record.

4. EARLY YEARS

- 4.1 The Head of Early Years presented a report which set out the proposed use of the Early Years Teachers Pay Award Grant, and the use of the carried forward Early Years balances (2022/23). The report also confirmed the hourly rates distributed to Early Years providers, following consultation on options agreed at the January Forum.
- 4.2 It was reported that Gloucestershire County Council had received £124K for 2023/24 for Early Years Teachers Pay Award Grant. The funding had been provided to local authorities to address increases in teacher pay from 1 September 2023; however, as there was no maintained Early Years provision in Gloucestershire, the local authority had been advised to consider how the funding was targeted to take account of the additional pressures that Early Years providers faced.
- 4.3 Members were informed that the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Early Years block funding was calculated using the numbers from the claims submitted in the January census multiplied by a nationally set hourly rate. Funding was not used equally across the academic year, partly due to variation in the length of academic terms and partly due to variations in take-up of the Early Years entitlement. This could lead to a surplus when the lagged effect was adjusted in June/July of the following year. The reconciliation for the academic year 2022/23, identified a balance of £612K.
- 4.4 The Forum agreed that the surplus Teachers Pay Award Grant of £124K (2023/24) be added to the Early Years balance of £612k (2022/23), and the total amount of £736k be used as follows:
- Retain 200K (27%) for contingency.
 - Allocate £536K (73%) to providers proportionately, based on the full academic year hours 2022/23.
- 4.5 The Early Years block for 2024/25 provided an hourly rate of £10.33 for under two-year-olds, £7.60 for two-year-olds, £5.47 per hour for three- and four-year-olds. The local authority consulted with the Early Years sector on the two options set out in the report for devolvement of the hourly rate to providers. The Forum noted that option 1 was selected by the majority of providers and had subsequently been agreed. Further consultation with the Early Years sector was now taking place to agree the payment schedule, including consideration of moving from termly to monthly payments.

- 4.6 In response to a question on how the Forum could get involved in the Early Years funding campaign, officers explained that many local authorities had been providing robust feedback to the DfE on the challenges being faced by the sector, particularly around the need to ensure that the funding rate was sufficient to enable implementation of government's childcare reforms. Early Years was a core focus of the f40 Group's campaign work, and a member of the Early Years Alliance was involved in the f40 Group representing Early Years providers. The f40 Group's key message to government was that if there was future investment in Early Years, then the focus should be on investing in the sustainability and quality of Early Years education. There had been record levels of investment in Early Years over the last few years, but this had predominantly been focused on the expansion of the offer.
- 4.7 A question was raised on whether there would be a sufficiency of Early Years provision in areas of deprivation within the county. In response, the Head of Early Years explained that sufficiency was difficult to predict, the local authority was continuing to work with providers to identify areas where more places were needed. In areas which had been identified as requiring more places, the local authority was working with the existing providers to increase the number of places being offered. If the local authority was aware that a setting was at risk of closure then the setting would be offered assistance in the form of a business support plan, to try and keep the setting open. The Head of Early Years emphasised to members that the local authority would continue to assess the supply and demand of Early Years places to ensure there was a sufficiency of childcare provision in the county.
- 4.8 The Head of Early Years reported that currently most of the new claims that were coming through as part of the extended childcare offer for eligible two-year-olds from April 2024, were for children already in a setting but would now have that place funded instead of being paid for by parents. However, if the funding rate was lower than the figure that parents had been paying, this would place financial pressure on the setting.
- 4.9 Roz Nelson, Forum member representing Early Years, reported that the sector was currently under significant pressure, and any additional funding would be welcomed by providers, alongside any additional lobbying that could be done. A number of settings were reporting that they were at risk of closure in Gloucestershire. Work was on-going with the local authority to get provision up and running where there was a shortfall; however, there were significant challenges around recruitment and retention of staff. It was hoped that there would be announcements on investment in Early Years in the lead up to the general election.

5. HIGH NEEDS

- 5.1 The Head of Education Strategy and Development presented a report on High Needs which provided the draft High Needs Budget for the financial year 2024/25; information on the impact of a 3% inflationary uplift to the SEND banding; and the proposal for the delivery of a SEND targeted support funding model for mainstream schools.

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- 5.2 He informed members that in the draft High Needs budget 2024/25 there was a gap of £23.583M between the expected levels of expenditure and the High Needs funding allocation.
- 5.3 The key assumptions were as follows:
- The mainstream and Early Years top-up budgets were modelled, assuming a similar growth in the number of funded Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP) that was experienced in 2023/24. In addition, it included an assumption, subject to approval by the Cabinet, of a 3% increase in the banding levels. This resulted in an expected increase in spend of around £2M across the four budget lines.
 - Increase of 38 special school places and the full year impact of 50 places at Sladewood School. It also included capacity to extend Early Years specialist provision for 2024/25. This resulted in an expected increase in spend in special school place funding of £1.235M.
 - As a consequence of the additional places and the proposed increase in banding rates by 3%, the cost of EHCP top-ups for maintained schools was expected to rise by around £750k.
 - Net increase of 71 placements into independent special schools. This was forecast to increase the independent schools' budget, including post-16 placements, by £1.7M.
 - Pressures on Hospital Education services were also high. Adjustments to the service offer were being made to strengthen support. As a consequence, the forecast expenditure had been increased by £500k.
 - Continued rise in demand for Education Other Than At School, Personal Budgets, and Special School Bespoke packages. This accounted for an expected increase in spend of £1.45M.
 - Local authority staffing budgets have had a 3% inflationary increase applied to ensure that pay awards can be made without a reduction in the service offer.
- 5.4 The Head of Education Strategy and Development explained that the draft High Needs budget 2024/25 was broadly in-line with the Dedicated Schools Grant management plan forecast for 2024/25. Forecast expenditure was £119.5M and income £95.8M, which showed a forecast deficit of £23.7M. The final High Needs budget for 2024/25 which was subject to approval by the local authority (including the proposed 3% inflationary uplift), would be presented at the June Forum meeting.
- 5.5 Two Forum members representing secondary school headteachers, strongly emphasised that schools were at crisis point as there was simply not enough funding for schools to adequately support children with SEND. One member reported that the budget for his school would be in a significant deficit position this year, and this was directly related to an overspend on support for pupils with SEND. Both members stressed that at some stage there would come a point when schools would not be able to deliver on their commitments. There was recognition that it would not be possible given the current funding constraints for the local authority to deliver an increase to the SEND banding rates above 3%; however, it was

suggested that if any additional funding was received from government, that it be allocated to schools to support children with SEND.

- 5.6 One Forum member representing special school governors strongly emphasised that special schools were not receiving sufficient funding, and that the proposed 3% increase to special school banding was not high enough.
- 5.7 In response to a question, the Head of Education Strategy and Development reported that the average cost of a placement at an independent special school was circa £20-25k higher, compared to the average cost of a placement in one of the county's maintained special schools. He acknowledged there was too much reliance on independent special schools as currently, despite all of the progress being made to increase sufficiency, there was still not enough special school places in the county. It was agreed that a breakdown on the cost of placements at independent special schools would be brought to the June Forum meeting.
ACTION: Head of Education Strategy and Development.
- 5.8 In response to a question from a member representing special school governors on the increasing need for more Post-16 and 19 provision in the county, the Head of Education Strategy and Development reported that one of the core activities in the DfE's Delivering Better Value in SEND Programme was to look at Post-16 commissioning. There was recognition that the increase in the number of EHCPs in the system would, in next few years, start to impact Post-16 provision. There was a need to ensure that there was appropriate and sufficient Post-16 provision, and the local authority was working with the Further Education and colleges in the county to look at developing the right Post-16 offer in the local area. He commented that there was an opportunity for the member to become involved in this work, which would be a key priority over the next couple of months.
- 5.9 One member pointed out that the more schools did not receive sufficient funding to support children with SEND within the mainstream, the more the permanent exclusion rate would increase, meaning increased pressure on specific elements of the High Needs budget, and more children going into independent special schools; thereby creating a false economy.
- 5.10 The Head of Education Strategy and Development provided an overview of why the SEND Targeted Support Funding Model was being reviewed. He explained that the threshold of the model had risen repeatedly. This was because the growth in the number of EHCPs had significantly increased the cost of the model. There was no mechanism within the current model to control spend throughout the year, and the continued adjustments to the threshold to make the model work within a broad budget of £3-3.5M was not sustainable.
- 5.11 There was currently no oversight of the impact of the funding, which made it harder for the local authority to sustain the model, or commit more funding. He pointed out that if the impact of the funding could be assessed, a case could be made for further investment in the model to reduce the use of high-cost specialist placements.

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- 5.12 The current model exclusively used EHCP numbers to distribute funding. Using the EHCP as the only identifier or proxy factor to recognise the complexity of needs for a school cohort was a significant limitation in the existing model.
- 5.13 He reported that the modelling work and the working group session had been helpful in exploring the benefits and potential challenges in making changes to the existing SEND Targeted Support Funding Model. He reported that the key points of the feedback and learning were:
- The proposed model provided much greater control of expenditure.
 - Assessing the impact of funding was important for future investment. Schools that had received the targeted support funding would be asked to report back on how the funding had been used. The local authority would then be able to assess the impact, creating an impact report, from which a case could be made for further investment in the model to reduce the use of high-cost specialist placements.
 - Longer-term investment and allocations was positively received but reduced the responsiveness of the model.
 - Broadening proxy factors significantly changed distribution of funding and that SEND factors (EHCP, SEND Support and Low Prior Attainment), remained critical for distribution.
- 5.14 The Head of Education Strategy and Development reported that officers had taken account of the feedback and views, including how the funding should be distributed. He explained that the new model would be implemented in two phases, as detailed below:
- Phase 1:
- Funding to be agreed as a fixed sum for 2024/25, to mirror expenditure on the 1 in 30 model in 2023/24.
 - Funding to be allocated to schools as a lump sum, to replicate the exact amount received in 2023/24. Schools would be asked to confirm how the money would be spent and the impact the funding has had for children and young people with SEND in their school.
- Phase 2:
- Further refinement of the funding model and the proxy factors to address feedback from schools, specifically the inclusion of MyPlan+ data and EHCP banding data.
 - Further modelling to take place across the summer, with a Schools Forum working group session to review distribution options, ahead of a Schools Forum decision in the Autumn term for 2025/26 allocation of funding.
- 5.15 One member questioned whether consideration had been given to implementing a degree of monitoring and control over the proxy factors. He suggested that some schools may increase the number of children moving from a MyPlan to a MyPlan+ so as to receive more of a share of the funding. In response, the Head of

Education Strategy and Development reported that the variation in practice around SEND support was an issue that needed to be looked at in greater detail, and the unintended consequences of using certain proxy factors would need to be considered. He added that a MyPlan+ identified that a child had a level of need requiring multi-agency support, meaning there was a strong degree of control and rigour around using this as a proxy factor. As there was a variation in practice in terms of the broader SEND support, the general view was that they would not be the strongest proxy factors to use in determining the distribution of funding. He reported that officers were working on refining the proxy factors that would be used, including the specific weightings to be applied.

- 5.16 One member commented that he felt the direction of travel was wrong. In his view the funding for children with EHCPs should be ring-fenced and should follow the child and not be conflated with other budgets. He indicated that the notion to invest funding into schools to reduce the need for EHCPs, was not realistic. It would place intolerable pressure on schools that were trying to do their best and may lead to schools not being able to meet the legal requirements of the EHCPs in terms of the support that should be provided.
- 5.17 The Head of Education Strategy and Development explained that the provision of targeted support funding had not been about reducing the number of the EHCPs in the system. He explained that the model was set-up by the local authority in an attempt to address flaws in the Schools National Funding Formula, that prevented those schools with more complex cohorts receiving the additional funding that was intended. He pointed out that parental preference meant that we would continue to see, schools that were perceived to have better SEND support, attracting higher proportions of children with SEND.

6. F40 UPDATE

- 6.1 The Head of Education Strategy and Development gave an update on recent f40 Group activities. A series of meetings had taken place over the past few weeks to explore the work being undertaken by the f40 Group ahead of the forthcoming general election, in an aim to ensure that education was a key priority in political manifestos.
- 6.2 He reminded members that the f40 Group believed that based on demand and inflation from 2015 - 2023, £4.6bn was needed for SEND funding over that period. As a consequence of the funding not keeping pace with the level of demand, it was expected that the national High Needs deficit would be at £3.6bn by March 2025.
- 6.3 He explained that if the full level of funding needed could not be provided by government, then the next consideration would need to be around policy reforms. The f40 Group had now commenced with developing a model for policy reforms, and the key areas of focus were as follows:
- Investment into Early Years and mainstream education. As part of this work the f40 Group was making it clear that changes were needed to the NFF, as

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there were a number of proxy factors in the NFF which were used to identify the complexity of a school's cohort. However, the way in which the Minimum Per Pupil Funding Level (MPPFL) was applied mitigated the benefit of these factors. Under the NFF, schools with less complex cohorts initially received less funding, but once the MPPFL was applied, they would be brought up to the same funding level as other schools. The widely held view was that the additional needs proxy factors needed to be applied after the MPPFL, to ensure that funding was properly responding to the needs of the school's cohort.

- The need for clarity around the national notional SEND funding formula, to ensure consistency in approach in terms of how it was funded and used, and also the need for a reporting mechanism around the formula.
- The need to ensure that nationally there was the required level of specialist places in the system to reduce the reliance on independent special schools, and that this should be funded through a one-off significant investment of capital funding.
- The need for visibility and oversight around the role of the independent special school sector within the education landscape.

6.4 The Head of Education Strategy and Development reported that Jon Millin, Forum member representing Primary School Headteachers had recently joined the f40 Group.

7. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The Forum noted that the next meeting would take place on Thursday 13th June 2024 at 2:00pm. The meeting would be held remotely.

Chair

Meeting concluded at 3.13 pm