

GLOUCESTERSHIRE SCHOOLS FORUM

Minutes of a meeting held on Thursday 16 March 2017
in the Cabinet Suite - Shire Hall, Gloucester.

Present:

Colin Belford	-	Secondary School Headteachers
Melissa Bradshaw	-	Special School Headteacher
John Coles	-	Primary Head Teachers
Graham Doswell	-	Primary School Governors
Andrew Harris	-	Secondary Head Teachers
Gillian Hayward	-	Secondary School Governors
Amanda Horniman	-	Early Years Providers
Emma Jarman	-	14-19 Provision
Gwyneth Keen	-	Early Years Providers
Elizabeth Knox	-	Secondary School Governors
Ian Marshall	-	Primary School Governors
Marie Owen	-	Special School Governors
Brian Robinson	-	Alternative Provision Schools
Rosy Savory	-	Clifton Diocese
Steve Savory	-	Primary Head Teachers
Jim Stenson	-	Secondary School Governors
Andrew Steward	-	Trade Unions

Observers: Cllr Paul McLain, Cabinet Member – Children and Young People & Strategic Commissioning

Officers: Stewart King, Lead Commissioner: Education and Skills
Tim Browne, Head of Education
Neil Egles, Finance Manager: Schools, Strategy and Capital
Suzanne Hall, Finance Business Partner
Joanne Bolton, Democratic Services Adviser

Apologies: Keely Folker, Primary Head Teachers
Karen Lewis, Primary Head Teachers
Will Morgan, Secondary School Headteachers
Sara Morris, Primary School Governors
Stuart Wilson, Secondary Head Teachers
Linda Uren, Commissioning Director: Children and Families

15. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

- 15.1 Stewart King, Lead Commissioner for Education and Skills, declared an interest in relation to Item 5 on the agenda, (High Needs), specifically the Coln House School update, in respect of his position as a Coln House Interim Executive Board member.
- 15.2 Elizabeth Knox, (Secondary School Governor representative) declared an interest in relation to Item 5 on the agenda, (High Needs), specifically the Coln House School update, in respect of her position as the Former Chair of Governors at Coln House School.

16. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No public questions were received.

17. MINUTES

- 17.1 The minutes of the previous meeting of 12 January 2017 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair, subject to the following amendments:
- The second sentence in paragraph 6.4 be amended to read: *'The school was currently showing a budget deficit of £800,000.'*
 - The second sentence in paragraph 5.8 be amended to read, *'It was reported that Cheltenham All Saints Academy....'*
- 17.2 The minutes of the previous meeting of 9 February 2017 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

18. HIGH NEEDS

- 18.1 Stewart King, Lead Commissioner for Education and Skills, presented a detailed report on High Needs. The following High Needs issues were considered:

18.2 Current Trends

- 18.2.1 He reported that there were some clear trends evident that were of a major concern in managing High needs over the longer term, including the significant increase in requests for statutory assessments and the increasing number of children with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP).
- 18.2.2 The Forum noted that whilst the proportion of children identified on the January 2016 school census as being on Special Educational Needs support had declined from 12.7% in 2015 to 11.8%, the number of children with an EHCP in January 2017 (a total of 3,044), had increased by 25.5% (a total of 619) from the numbers at 1 April 2015 (a total of 2,425). The Lead Commissioner for Education and Skills explained that the majority of the increase was accounted for by young people aged 16-19.

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18.2.3 The Forum noted that the number of permanent exclusions in Gloucestershire remained much higher than in comparator authorities. The number of children on the Elective Home Education Register had increased by over 50% since 2011/12.

18.3 The High Needs Budget

18.3.1 The Lead Commissioner for Education and Skills reported that the High Needs budget for the current year was projected to overspend by £2.1M. A key area of overspending related to independent special schools (partly due to the closure of Coln House), which accounted for £1.55M of the overspend. Dedicated Schools Grant balances held for the purposes of supporting High Needs (with the exception of the specific reserves for Early Years and balances on funds de-delegated from maintained schools), would be used to meet the projected 2016/17 overspend.

18.3.2 The Lead Commissioner for Education and Skills, reported that an increase of £3.2M to Gloucestershire's High Needs allocation over 2016/17 meant that the impact of the trends would be covered in budget for 2017/18, but with no allocation for inflation. The Forum acknowledged that the major concern was for the longer term, with no prospect of any cash increase in the High Needs block for four years. Reference was made to new approaches being needed such as more focus on early intervention and understanding the root cause of the developing trends, if spending was to be contained within budget.

18.3.3 Melissa Bradshaw, Special School Headteacher representative, explained that there were a number of major concerns around special school funding including provision for early intervention. The Lead Commissioner for Education and Skills explained that he was due to meet with GAPH and GASH and would welcome the opportunity to discuss the issues further with headteachers of special schools.

18.3.4 The Forum agreed the proposed High Needs budget for 2017/18.

18.4 Coln House

18.4.1 The Forum was updated on the latest position regarding the closure of Coln House, including the associated key costs. Elizabeth Knox, Secondary School Governor representative, and former Chair of Governors at Coln House, contended that safeguarding issues identified through the combined OFSTED of residential and education provision which placed Coln House in Special Measures, centred mainly on the poor state of the school building.

18.4.2 The Forum noted that with falling pupil numbers and the premises and staff costs, had the school not closed it was estimated that the deficit by 31 March 2019 would have been in excess of £2.5M. Tim Browne, Head of Education, emphasised however, that the overriding factor in the decision to close the school was to ensure the safety of the pupils.

18.4.3 In response to a question, the Lead Commissioner for Education and Skills explained that the place allocation funding for the 40 places at Coln House, was

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being held separately within the High Needs block. A member of the Forum suggested that the funding should be redistributed to facilitate 40 new places in special schools as special school places were set to be full for September 2017.

18.4.4 Officers emphasised that careful consideration had to be given to prioritising spend for specialist provision; ensuring that it was located appropriately and that children were being supported across the provision, not just at the high end.

18.5 Alternative Provision

18.5.1 The Lead Commissioner for Education and Skills explained that Alternative Provision schools in the county were either full or over their place numbers. The expectation was that the Government would proceed with the proposal outlined in the White Paper *Educational Excellence Everywhere* (Published March 2016), to transfer to mainstream schools the financial responsibility for excluded pupils. This would mean that the excluded pupils would stay on the roll of their mainstream schools. The mainstream schools were therefore responsible for commissioning and funding Alternative Provision. He confirmed that the DfE did not approve either of the two Wave 12 free school proposals for new Alternative Provision in Gloucestershire.

18.5.2 It was reported that the Cheltenham Association of Secondary Heads was looking into options (most notably the Area Behaviour Partnerships in Warwickshire) for an alternative model for meeting the needs of permanently excluded pupils.

18.6 National Funding Formula for High Needs

18.6.1 The Forum considered the DfE's presentation on its consultation on the National Funding Formula for High Needs, which set out the detail behind the proposed formula. The Lead Commissioner for Education and Skills explained that the proposed formula would not favour Gloucestershire, but that the formula factors appeared reasonable. The Forum therefore accepted the basis of the proposed formula subject to the pushing for a higher population formula factor, which local analysis had found to be the greatest determinant of costs.

18.6.2 The Forum agreed its response to the consultation.

18.7 High Needs costs benchmarking

18.7.1 The Forum considered the data extracted from the DfE High Needs benchmarking tool, which was tabled at the meeting. It was noted that the costs showing for Wiltshire (as a similar sized authority) were lower than Gloucestershire's across a number of different factors. Notably, Wiltshire did not have any Pupil Referral Units or Alternative Provision places and therefore no associated costs. However, this was due to it being part of the government's 'Exclusions Pilot', which transferred responsibility for excluded pupils to secondary schools rather than councils.

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18.7.2 With regard to the national picture it was reported that Gloucestershire's High Needs figures were in the most part close to the average figures for England. It was reported that in the London boroughs there was a high level of inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools. Again, in the South-West of England, there was a relatively high level of inclusion of pupils with SEND in mainstream schools, but in contrast to London boroughs, the South-West was overall a low-funded area. In the North-East area there was a higher number of special school places, rather than mainstream school inclusion.

18.8 Strategic Plan for High Needs

The Forum noted that the development of a Strategic Plan for High Needs would be a major priority for the Forum. The County Council had been allocated £247,000 from central government to assist the Plan's development. Gloucestershire's Joint Implementation Strategy for Children and Young People with Additional Needs, including Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, would be the major building block for the Strategic Plan.

19. EARLY YEARS

19.1 The Forum received an update on the Early Years Funding Formula for 2017/18.

19.2 The Lead Commissioner for Education and Skills reported that Gloucestershire's overall funding for three and four year olds from central government would be at the 'floor level' of £4.30 per hour. The average rate to providers including the deprivation and quality supplement was £4.08. The base rate would be £3.90 per hour.

19.3 A member of the Forum pointed out the variance between Gloucestershire's funding figure from central government for three and four year olds, and the figure for an area such as Bristol, which was much higher in comparison. Suzanne Hall, Finance Business Partner, explained however that in an area such as Bristol, the higher living and land costs, even the deprivation factor, once factored into the formula would push the figure up.

19.4 As agreed at the January meeting of the Forum, providers were consulted on whether to introduce a quality supplement and how it might be funded. The Forum noted the document outlining the results of the survey for Early Years Providers (January 2017). The document summarised that the majority of responders favoured the option of allocating the funding designated for the supplementary quality payment to support work undertaken by Gloucestershire County Council to support the Early Years Sector.

19.5 The Forum discussed the proposed Early Years Single Funding Formula. The Forum's members representing Early Years' providers informed the Forum that in the main providers were happy with the proposed single funding formula. However, the concern remained that it would not be financially viable for some providers to provide the additional 15 hours of childcare for parents from September 2017 with a

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base rate of just £3.90 per hour; however, there was recognition that some smaller businesses may benefit with more children coming in. There were also concerns around the precarious financial situation of the Early Years sector overall, given the rising business rates, the living wage rising to £9 per hour over time, and increased pension costs.

- 19.6 The Forum agreed the Early Years Single Funding Formula for 2017/18 to be set at:
- Base rate £3.90 per hour.
 - Deprivation supplement – based on IDACI as currently but average 16p per hour overall.
 - Quality supplement – 2p per hour to be deducted to support the Early Years Team.

20. NATIONAL FUNDING FORMULA (MAINSTREAM) - UPDATE

- 20.1 The Forum discussed the latest developments on the National Funding Formula Stage 2 consultation. Members acknowledged that as the consultation deadline approached, indications on whether the proposed formula in its current form, would indeed be implemented were not clear. A number of MPs were publicly expressing their reservations around the proposals. Members of the Forum acknowledged that it was a very fluid situation.
- 20.2 The Forum agreed its final response to the National Funding Formula Consultation Stage 2, which was tabled at the meeting. The response set out the major concerns around the proposed formula, with a particular reference made throughout to the existence of the 3% funding floor which locked in advantage for some schools at the expense of pupils, including those with additional needs in other schools; and the perverse consequences for children with additional needs due to the depressing core funding.
- 20.3 In response to a question, the Lead Commissioner for Education and Skills confirmed that the Council's response to the consultation reflected the F40 position, and for the most part outlined the same issues as the Forum's response.
- 20.4 The Chair concluded the discussion by emphasising that the outcome of the implementation of the National Funding Formula had to be about achieving fairer funding.

21. CAPITAL

- 21.1 The Forum received a report which set out the position of the Education Capital Programme. Stewart King, the Lead Commissioner Education and Skills, reported that the total value of the FY 2016/17 capital programme was £23.189M. Spend up to the end of February 2017 was £21.506M, which was marginally higher than the expected level for this point in the year. The Forum noted the graph of spend against profile, set out in Annex 1 of the report.

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- 21.2 The Forum was pleased to note that the DfE had recently confirmed that the bid for The Rissington School's new build permanent pre-school provision, had been successful. It was noted that Gloucestershire had submitted the permitted six bids for funding, as part of the £40M of capital funding nationally from central government to support the introduction of 30 hours free child care for working parents from September 2017. Whilst previously the DfE had announced that none of the bids were successful, following additional funding being identified this one bid was subsequently approved.
- 21.3 It was reported that the Education Funding Agency would now manage the build of the new free school on Clearwater Drive in Quedgeley. Completion of the feasibility work by GCC indicated there was a gap of around £3M between the anticipated cost of GCC managing the build and the formulaic funding on offer from the Education Funding Agency. The Lead Commissioner for Education and Skills stressed that it would not be prudent for the Council to take on that level of financial risk.
- 21.4 The Forum noted the report.

22. SCHOOLS FORUM CONSTITUTION

- 22.1 The Forum noted the Constitution complied with the Schools Forum 2012 regulations, and the make-up of the Forum's membership complied with the Schools Forum Operation Guide, therefore no changes were proposed for either.
- 22.2 The Forum noted the updated table summarising the Forum's Powers and Responsibilities, published by the Education Funding Agency.
- 22.3 It was reported that the biennial Schools Forum Elections which were due to take place in March of this year, had been postponed until 2018. This was due to there being no reference made in the National Funding Formula consultation paper on the future of Schools Forums. It was felt that a significant change in Forum membership at the current stage in the consultation on the NFF would not be helpful. The Forum noted that the term of office for all non-school members and half of the membership of the schools members was due to end on 31 March 2017 had therefore been extended to 31 March 2018.
- 22.4 However, the Forum noted that the following seats were vacant or were about to become vacant and a nomination process (ending 5pm 31 March 2017), for new representatives for those seats was currently underway:
- Primary Headteacher (Maintained) (2 seats)
 - Primary (Maintained) Governor
 - Secondary (Maintained) Governor
- 22.5 In addition, the Chair informed the Forum that Jim Stenson, Secondary (Academy) Governor, would be leaving the Forum, his last meeting would be 21 June 2017. A nomination process would begin in due course for a new representative.

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23. F40

23.1 The Chair provided the following F40 update:

- A briefing for MPs took place in Westminster on 20 February 2017.
- A letter, signed by 38 out of 41 F40 member authorities, was sent to the Prime Minister setting out the adverse consequences of the proposed formula.
- Gloucestershire's MPs continue to be kept up to date on F40 developments.
- On 13 March 2017, a small group of Forum members met with David Owen, Chief Executive of the GFirst LEP, Gloucestershire's Local Enterprise Partnership, to consider different ways of going forward.

24. UPDATE FROM THE OFFICE OF THE REGIONAL SCHOOLS COMMISSIONER SOUTH-WEST ENGLAND

Steve Savory, as Deputy Director supporting the Regional Schools Commissioner's office, updated the Forum on recent developments.

25. DISCUSSION ITEM - LOCAL AND REGIONAL STRATEGIC PLANNING AND THE ROLE OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY

- 25.1 The Forum noted the discussion paper 'Shaping the role of the County Council in Education' which had been produced to set the future direction for the Council's role in education and to consider collaborative working arrangements.
- 25.2 The Forum also noted the Regional Schools Commissioner Strategy Paper for the South West 2016/17.

Chairman

Meeting concluded at 4.05 pm