

Children and Families Scrutiny Committee

Report Title	Update on the Permanent Exclusions Task Group report
Purpose of Report	To provide an update on progress on responding to the recommendations
Is this for information or decision?	For information
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Organisation	Gloucestershire County Council
Key Issues:	
Permanent exclusions remain very high in Gloucestershire and above the level in comparator authority areas. Government policy announcements are awaited.	
Recommendations to the Committee:	
That the report be noted	
Financial/Resource Implications:	
The cost of Alternative Provision for excluded pupils, funded from Dedicated Schools Grant, is around £5.7m	

1. Background

- 1.1.** Following concerns raised at the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee (CFOSC) in January 2017 the formation of a 'permanent exclusions task group' was commissioned.

- 1.2. Between December and March 2018 the task group considered all the available data and met with a range of stakeholders including, headteachers, parents, students and governors, as well as the appropriate council staff.
- 1.3. Following this work the task group reported its findings and recommendations to the CFOSC in May 2018.
- 1.4. The task group referenced the announcement by the government on the 16th March 2018, that they would be undertaking a review of school exclusions led by Edward Timpson CBE. We are still awaiting the publication of the findings of the review. Terms of reference for the review can be found on the Department for Education's (DFE) website - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-exclusions-review-terms-of-reference>
- 1.5. It is also worth noting that education select committee undertook an inquiry into the rising number of permanent exclusions. The inquiry and the government and Ofsted responses are here - <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/education-committee/inquiries/parliament-2017/inquiry/>.
- 1.6. Many of the issues identified by the education select committee inquiry are in alignment with the findings from Gloucestershire's task group report.
- 1.7. We have continued to develop our plans and strategies for tackling the increasing rate of exclusions, but we are also mindful of the need to consider and reflect the recommendations that will come from the Timpson review, which is expected imminently.

2. Data for Academic year 2018/19 (as at 31st December 2018)

During the autumn term 2018 exclusion rates have continued to remain high. However, there has been a significant change in the trend of these exclusions, with a decline in primary exclusions and a continued rise in secondary.

Table 1: Permanent exclusions during the Autumn terms 2018 (terms 1 and 2).

	2017/18	2018/19
Primary permanent exclusions	18	5
Secondary permanent exclusions	36	50
APS permanent exclusions	0	1
Total permanent exclusions	54	56

For further detail please see the report on off-rolling data.

3. What has been achieved so far?
 - 3.1. As outlined in para 1.7 we are awaiting the publication of the Timpson review from government. We expect the review to provide a clear steer from government on the escalating issue of permanent exclusions. We have therefore been cautious not to over-reach in our planning, so as to avoid having to unpick them to align with the recommendations from Government.
 - 3.2. However, since the publication of the task group report there has been a significant amount of work completed to refine and develop strategies to address the continued rise in permanent exclusions.
 - 3.3. Our strategic planning has been informed by consultation with key stakeholders, including children and young people with additional needs, parents and carers mainstream schools, special schools and specialist providers, the Gloucestershire schools forum and health care professionals.

It was also informed by the published inquiry from the education select committee and the responses from Government and Ofsted.

- 3.4.** As the task group identified in its finding it is hard 'to identify a definitive answer to the question of why there are such a high number of exclusions in Gloucestershire schools' (para, 3.2.1 – Permanent Exclusions Task Group report).
- 3.5.** The underlying issues are complex and as such are woven into a number of elements of the Councils work. We are therefore tackling them as part of our broader strategies to address the pressures on the high needs budget and the joint strategy to support children and young people with additional needs.
- 3.6.** These strategies (the High Needs Cabinet report; and Gloucestershire's Joint Strategy for Children and Young People with Additional Needs, including Special Educational Needs & Disabilities, see annex 1.) have been finalised and approved by Cabinet in January 19.
- 3.7.** Our approach is underpinned by three core objectives:
 - The development of a collaborative culture of inclusivity that is owned and operated by school leaders;
 - That we take a preventative approach by ensuring support and intervention is provided at the earliest possible opportunity; and
 - We aspire to a fully inclusive education system with Zero exclusions.
- 3.8.** Whilst conscious of the need to align with the recommendations that will come from Government, through the Timpson review, we are also conscious of the need to implement change across Gloucestershire. So, there are a number of areas which we have started to make progress. These are:
 - The work of the inclusion team
 - Implementation of a new Fair Access Protocol (FAP)
 - The development of primary inclusion hubs
 - The implementation of restorative practice approaches
- 3.9.** The work of the inclusion team and the implementation of the FAP, are the areas in which we are able to have more immediate impact. The impact of the primary inclusion hubs and restorative practice programme are longer term strategies focussed on changing the underlying culture of permanent exclusion.

4. The work of the inclusion team

- 4.1.** Staff within the Education Inclusion Service have worked with schools to avoid children being excluded from school. Working with other services and agencies, the team has focused on improving inclusion across the school system through:
 - Redesigning training packages for Governor's and Head Teachers to provide an explicit focus on inclusive practice (training to include rather than exclude).
 - Targeting challenge at leaders within individual schools with significantly high levels exclusions and children leaving to become home educated (especially in KS4).
 - Developing a 'Team Around the School' approach for 6 targeted secondary schools alongside partner services and agencies. Looking holistically at groups or individual children needing support and understand how best the school can respond and wider multi-agency support be galvanised (in one school alone this approach has avoided 4 exclusions).

- Improving school leadership understanding of whole school approaches to respond to more shared needs of groups of children; i.e. through a more nurturing or structured environment.
- Attendance at all exclusion Governor Disciplinary Meetings to influence Governor's questioning on events leading up to an exclusion and whether the school had done all it could to mitigate this – also sharing good practice across schools.
- Encouraging Headteachers to seek support from the council prior to determining whether it is necessary to exclude a child and to consider more personalised, child-centred options as alternatives; such as:
 - Facilitating managed moves between schools
 - Accessing alternative sanctions to exclusions for schools (i.e. programmes related to drug use)
 - Enhancing multi-agency work to improve identification of a child's needs and appropriate support for the child and/or family
 - Facilitating timely support and advice for schools and families across agencies to prevent issues from escalating

4.2. Much of this work is to facilitate an inclusive culture change within schools (which is challenging given the performance and funding pressures they have) and therefore results are not expected to be immediate; although it is hoped that the new Ofsted framework will help drive the inclusion agenda. However, during September – December 2018 alone, the collaboration between the service and schools has had the following positive impact for children:

- 4 children were put on alternative pathways prior to school determining exclusion was necessary
- 4 exclusions were withdrawn by the school following agreement on an alternative solution.
- 2 exclusions were overturned at the Governor's Disciplinary Meeting (meeting held to determine final exclusion decision)
- 1 exclusion decision was overturned by an Independent Review Panel (parental appeal mechanism against final exclusion decision)
- 3 exclusion decisions considered by an Independent Review Panel were returned to the school Governing Body on evidential grounds, requesting reconsideration of their final decision to exclude

5. Primary Hubs

5.1. As outlined in section 4.1 of the high needs cabinet report we have started to develop the vision and strategy for the creation of the 7 primary inclusion hubs across the county.

5.2. A key objective of the hub model is for schools to develop and guide local strategies to improve inclusion and ultimately provide them with more autonomy and delegated financial responsibilities.

5.3. The quality of engagement from schools is a critical element of achieving this objective. As such we are delighted that the schools have responded and engaged very positively.

5.4. Each of the 7 hubs has been formed and initial discussions have taken place to explore their objectives and to consider potential operating models. These discussions are informing our thinking about how we structure the implementation of the hub model to ensure success. In particular how we ensure a smooth transition to a 'school led' model that provides greater local autonomy and decision making.

5.5. Initial planning has taken place to develop a three phase model that includes a central hub which will hold and manage funding and draw together the work of the local hubs. This model is being finalised ready for implementation from September 2019.

6. Restorative Practice

6.1. The High Needs paper that was approved by the cabinet in January 2019 outlines a committed of 200k a year for the next 5 years to support the implementation of the restorative practice programme across Gloucestershire schools.

6.2. The funding we have set aside will enable us to start scaling up the programme, with a view to creating a self-sustaining programme with through the traded service or accessing funding through alternative routes.

6.3. A five year plan has been developed, which outlines the key milestones and objectives for the programme, both for Gloucestershire CC and the schools that we work with. During which time we will apply for and achieve the Restorative Service Quality Mark (RSQM), to validate the work that we are doing. We will also set the expectation that the schools achieve the quality mark.

6.4. The response from schools has been exceptional, with demand already outstripping our capacity to deliver. We are looking at ways to try and meet the demand, but also with a clear view that we need to prioritise the engagement of schools that need the support the most.

7. Fair Access Protocol (FAP)

7.1. The FAP has been reviewed and agreed with the Gloucestershire Association of Primary Headteachers (GAPH) and the Gloucestershire Association of Secondary Headteachers (GASH).

7.2. The new protocol:

- Places more emphasis on the child by including pupil voice in the referral process, ensuring the child has the opportunity to put forward their point of view at the point of referral.
- Provides a clearer and more structured timeline for transition into and out of alternative provision.
- Clearer guidance and expectations on the assessment and support required through the transition points into and out of alternative provision.
- A clearer mandate for the panel to ensure that a place back into mainstream education is identified.

7.3. The finalised protocol will be published on the Gloucestershire County Council website shortly and the first panel will take place in early March.

7.4. We will continue to monitor and refine the process and protocols over the coming months to ensure effective implementation.