

GLOUCESTERSHIRE SCHOOLS FORUM

Minutes of a meeting held on Thursday 20 June 2019
in the Cabinet Suite - Shire Hall, Gloucester.

Present:

Brian Bartlett	- Primary School Governors (Maintained)
Colin Belford	- Secondary School Headteachers (Maintained)
Elisa Entwistle	- Alternative Provision Schools
Andrew Harris	- Community Representative
Kirsten Harrison	- Secondary School Headteachers (Academy)
Amanda Horniman	- Early Years Providers
Lisa Jones	- Primary School Headteachers (Maintained)
David Metcalf	- Primary School Headteachers (Maintained)
Will Morgan	- Secondary School Headteachers (Academy)
Alexander Norman	- Secondary School Governors (Academy)
Jacqui Phillips	- Secondary School Governors (Academy)
Steve Savory	- Primary School Headteachers (Academy)
Clare Steel	- Special School Headteachers
Adam White	- Secondary School Governors (Maintained)

Observers:

Cllr Richard Boyles, Cabinet Member for Children's Safeguarding and Early Years
Cllr Patrick Molyneux, Cabinet Member: Economy, Education and Skills

Officers:

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

Apologies:

Matthew Bishop, Primary School Governors (Maintained)
Sara Byrne, Primary School Governors (Maintained)
Penny Chislett, Post-16 Education
Peter Hales, Primary School Governors (Academy)
Kate Hawkins, Special School Governors
Rachel Howie, Gloucester Diocese
Dan Johnson, Primary School Headteachers (Maintained)
Liam Jordan, Clifton Diocese
Gwyneth Keen, Early Years Providers
Sarah Murphy, Trade Unions

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Rob Wilcock, Secondary School Headteachers (Academy)
Stuart Wilson, Secondary Head Teachers (Academy)

10. ELECTION OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM CHAIR

- 10.1 Philip Haslett, Head of Education Strategy and Development, explained that Forum members had received correspondence from the clerk outlining the proposal for Andrew Harris, the recently retired headteacher, and former member of the Schools Forum, to return as a member of the Forum and be elected as the Forum's Chair.
- 10.2 The Forum considered the proposal and members expressed their support for Andrew Harris becoming the Schools Forum Chair. There were no other nominations. Andrew Harris was therefore duly elected as the Schools Forum Chair for a two year term of office.

(At this juncture there was a brief adjournment whilst Andrew Harris was informed of the Forum's decision; he then subsequently joined the meeting.)

11. ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE CONSTITUTION

- 11.1 Joanne Bolton, Clerk to the Schools Forum, outlined the amendment that would need to be made to the Constitution to reflect the appointment of Andrew Harris as a community representative. The Forum agreed to amend its membership structure (paragraph 1 of the Constitution), to include one additional non-schools member 'a community representative'.

ACTION: Joanne Bolton

- 11.2 No other changes were proposed as part of the Annual Review.
- 11.3 A member questioned whether an addition should be made to paragraph 1 in the Constitution, to outline that there should be at least one member on the Forum who was a representative of the headteachers of academies, as well as maintained schools. It was agreed that the clerk would look into this and report back.

ACTION: Joanne Bolton

12. ELECTION OF THE VICE CHAIR

Steve Savory, Primary Headteacher (Academy) representative, was duly elected as the Schools Forum Vice Chair for a two year term of office.

13. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

14. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No public questions had been received.

15. MINUTES

- 15.1 The minutes of the previous meeting held on 10 January 2019, were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.
- 15.2 Clare Steel, Special School Headteacher representative, referred to an action from the previous meeting and explained that clarification was needed on the number of children who had been allocated a special school place in the next academic year. It was agreed that the Head of SEND would make contact with Clare Steel to discuss this.
ACTION: Philip Haslett
- 15.3 Elisa Entwistle, Alternative Provision Schools representative, asked officers to provide further clarification on the plans for the pupils, whose named special school in their Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) was oversubscribed.
ACTION: Philip Haslett

16. OUTTURN AND MAINTAINED SCHOOL BALANCES 2018/19

- 16.1 Neil Egles, Finance Manager – Schools Strategy and Capital, introduced the report which outlined the 2018/19 in-year outturn position for the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and non-DSG, and the maintained school balances at the end of 2018/19.
- 16.2 He explained that the overall 2018/19 DSG outturn position was a net in-year overspend of £2.810M representing 0.6% of the 2018/19 DSG budget. A further £1.993M of balances were remaining from 2017/18 resulting in an overall DSG deficit balance at the end of 2018/19 being £0.817M, equivalent to 0.2% of the £451.072M 2018/19 DSG.
- 16.3 The Forum agreed that the DSG deficit be earmarked at the end of 2018/19, as outlined in the report, and carried forward to 2019/20.
- 16.4 It was also reported that in Gloucestershire 185 maintained schools were in surplus and 22 in deficit of which 123 (61%) held revenue balances at the end of 2018/19 above the claw back thresholds (5% of ISB Secondary/8% of ISB Primary). The excess amount above the thresholds represented £6.4M (42%) of the total £15.0M mainstream revenue balances held. This was a £1.9M increase in the amount of excess balances that were held at the end of 2017/18.
- 16.5 The Forum acknowledged that excess funds could be retained above the thresholds when they had been committed in accordance with any of the permitted reasons as outlined in the report. Members recognised that it would be a complex and substantial piece of work to challenge every commitment identified by the 123 schools and they were therefore satisfied that challenge of schools with the biggest surpluses by the Deficit Officer Group continued to be the most effective approach.

- 16.6 It was reported that the Council's Deficit Officer Group was in the process of reviewing the plans of maintained schools holding surplus balances relating to the financial year 2018/19. Schools with the largest balances had been asked to provide the reasons for their surplus and their plans for future expenditure. The Deficit Officer Group would then work with the headteachers and school business managers to advise each school on the appropriate action to use their surplus where appropriate. A member emphasised the importance of involving the school governors in those discussions. It was therefore agreed that officers would ensure that the Deficit Officer Group undertook to involve the governors in their discussions with the schools.
- ACTION: Philip Haslett**
- 16.7 Cllr Patrick Molyneux, Cabinet Member: Economy, Education and Skills; and Cllr Richard Boyles, Cabinet Member – Children's Safeguarding and Early Years, made reference to the overall surplus amount above claw back thresholds of £6.4M, and the high amount of surplus being held by some individual schools. The point was made that the overall amount of surplus could be perceived as undermining the argument that education was underfunded. Cllr Molyneux stressed that ultimately the revenue funding should be spent on educating the children. Schools should be cautious about holding onto a high surplus, and be able to demonstrate valid reasons as to why the funds were being held back; budgets may need to be organised more effectively.
- 16.8 A member made reference to the local authority's proposal, considered by the Forum at its meeting in November last year, which was to make a percentage funding transfer from the Schools block to the High Needs block, to address the 2019/20 shortfall. He then challenged the proposal to not implement claw back, given that there was such huge pressure on the High Needs block. He emphasised that the overall budget needed to be considered. He suggested that clawed back surplus funds would be better used to support the High Needs block of the DSG.
- 16.9 After debating the claw back option, the Forum agreed that no claw back should be applied to maintained school balances at the end of the 2018/19 financial year. The Forum recognised that the best method of reviewing excess surplus, continued to be through the work of the Council's Deficit Officer Group.
- 16.10 The Forum agreed however, that if funds were ever clawed back in the future a better use would be to support the High Needs block of the DSG. The Finance Manager explained that the DfE had previously indicated that if any funds were clawed back from mainstream schools the funds could only be used by adding them to the following years Schools block for allocating through the formula to all schools and academies. The local authority and the Forum had previously indicated that they would not want to do that as it could result in some funds being allocated back to those it was clawed back from and would also risk one off funding being locked in permanently due to the Minimum Funding Guarantee. The Finance Manager explained that it was a number of years ago that the DfE advised that so it might be worth asking the question again to see if the ESFA would now allow any clawed back funds to be used for High Needs with the Forum's approval.

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16.11 Officers were therefore asked to seek clarification from the ESFA, on how any clawed back surplus funds were allowed to be used and to ascertain if it was permissible (in future budget setting rounds) for any schools balances clawed back from mainstream schools, to be used in the High Needs block.

ACTION: Neil Egles

16.12 The Forum heard that a total of 14 out of the 25 schools which were projecting a deficit had actually ended the year in a deficit position. However, an additional 7 schools which were not projecting a deficit at the beginning of the year ended the year in a deficit position. Lisa Jones, Primary (Maintained) Headteacher representative, indicated that some primary schools were already looking at deficit budgets for the first time. It was agreed that further information on the budget deficits in maintained schools would be shared with the Forum once the data analysis had been completed.

ACTION: Philip Haslett

16.13 The Forum noted the summary from the Deficit Officer Group as outlined in the report. It was explained that the Deficit Officer Group was anticipating an increase in deficit budget submissions in 2019/20, as added pressure on school budgets continued to grow.

16.14 The Forum noted that the outturn position for non-DSG funded services was an over-spend position of £8.67M (8.29% of the budget). Over the last few years there had been a sustained increase in demand for social care including children coming into care, causing significant pressures and over-spends within children's services.

17. HIGH NEEDS

17.1 Philip Haslett, Head of Education Strategy and Development, introduced the report which outlined the High Needs outturn for 2018/19 and the 2019/20 budget; and provided an update on the High Needs Strategy and associated activities.

17.2 The Head of Education Strategy and Development gave a presentation on High Needs. *(For information: a copy of the presentation has been uploaded to the Council's website and is included in the signed copy of the minute book.)* He explained that the High Needs budget deficit at the end of 2018/19 was £2.884M. The Chair pointed out that this was significantly worse than the forecast overspend of £0.516M which was made at the beginning of 2018; the reasons why there had been a marked increase needed to be addressed.

17.3 The Forum was informed that the significant overspend in 2018/19 was driven by increased demand for places in Alternative Provision, out of county spend (Independent special schools), special school provision, and also EHCP costs in primary. It was explained that there was huge pressure on the Alternative Provision Service, pupil numbers were 140% over its capacity. The costs associated with maintaining EHCPs had risen significantly. The number of children with an EHCP

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was 368 more than the number at this time last year (an increase of 11.2%), at an estimated cost of £3.68M.

- 17.4 The 2019/20 High Needs budget had been set at an in-year deficit of £1.192M. There was concern that when this deficit was combined with the deficit total at the end of 2018/19, it totalled a High Needs overspend at the end of 2019/20 estimated at £4.076M.
- 17.5 The Head of Education Strategy and Development explained that the local authority was developing a 5-year recovery plan to bring High Needs to an in-year surplus so that the deficit could be recovered. The Forum reviewed the High Needs Strategy. There were concerns expressed by some members of the Forum that the specialist commissioning strategy, a key area of planning for High Needs, was based on data which did not reflect the current pupil population in special schools. This was due to some significant changes in identification of primary need in the most recent school census. Members of the Forum emphasised the point that it was critical that the data underpinning the strategy was correct, to ensure that the right solutions were identified. Officers agreed to work with the Association of Special School Headteachers to examine the data and ensure its accuracy.
ACTION: Philip Haslett.
- 17.6 The Forum noted that the consultation period on the draft specialist commissioning strategy would close on 30 June 2019.
- 17.7 Officers explained that the core message from the Strategy was that the available funding would be utilised to support early identification of need and inclusion. In order to deliver this the Strategy outlined 8 areas of activity that would form the action plan for High Needs. The Forum noted the progress update on each of the 8 activities, as outlined in the report.
- 17.8 The Head of Education Strategy and Development explained that all of the 8 activities were critical in using the funding available to support early identification of need and inclusion. However, there were two core drivers: the development of new approaches to managing exclusions; and improvement of the graduated pathway and EHCP process. Whilst a sustainable budget needed to be achieved, the key focus would be on offering a better service for children with additional needs. The Forum agreed that the two core areas would be the priorities for the Schools Forum Working Group.
ACTION: Philip Haslett.
- 17.9 The Head of Education Strategy and Development emphasised that developing solutions successfully relied on effective partnership and collaboration between schools and the local authority. He commented that officers would work closely with the Schools Forum Working Group in co-designing the solutions.
- 17.10 The Forum was informed that the Timpson Review into exclusions and the government response had now been published. A project team with schools and Alternative Provision would be established to design and develop new models for

supporting early intervention to prevent permanent exclusions and to respond to the recommendation of the Timpson review. The Forum noted that the Project Team would report on its recommendations, plans and financial modelling to the Schools Forum Working Group, for review and testing, prior to a formal submission and recommendation to the Forum.

- 17.11 A member raised the point that a percentage of the number of the pupils who had been permanently excluded in Gloucestershire, would have been excluded due to a serious on-off incident, which was much more challenging to tackle through early intervention, than persistent disruptive behaviour. Elisa Entwistle, Alternative Provision representative, added that for many children difficult home lives meant support mechanisms were needed in their wider lives not just in education; this was key to reducing permanent exclusions. Further consideration was needed on how to involve other sectors.
- 17.12 Chris Spencer, Director of Children's Services, commented there was now a thousand children being home educated in the county. The authority did not receive any funding for those children. He stressed that there needed to be greater challenge to reduce number of those electing to home educate, with a particular emphasis on promoting the benefits of school education. All potential funding needed to be gained.
- 17.13 The Forum was informed that strategies were being reviewed to enable better use of the EHCP funding pathway to support earlier intervention and effective use of the graduated pathway. Local Inclusion Clusters would be engaged with to consider different funding models. This would be developed with the Schools Forum Working Group, before a recommendation to the Forum.
- 17.14 The Forum noted the High Needs Strategy document. Amanda Horniman, Early Years representative, referred to the development and implementation of the Restorative Practice programme as outlined in Strategy, and asked whether the programme would include Early Years. It was agreed that officers would consider how to engage Early Years in the programme.
ACTION: Philip Haslett.
- 17.15 The Forum was informed that a key focus of the High Needs Action Plan would be on the transition from Early Years to primary school, (e.g. understanding what was needed in terms of 'school readiness', and the collection of SEND data for use by primary schools). The Head of Education Strategy and Development explained that the funding model for Early Years did not currently cater for children with SEND; he signalled that SEND support for Early Years would be included in the discussion. A member of the Forum stressed that more structured formal partnerships needed to be forged between Early Years and Primary.
- 17.16 The Forum noted that progress on the High Needs Strategy would be reported to schools through 'Heads Up', 'What's up Gov', the headteacher associations and local school partnerships, and through the schools' bulletin board.

18. GLOUCESTERSHIRE SCHOOLS FORUM WORKING GROUP

- 18.1 The Forum noted the Schools Forum Working Group's One Page Strategy which set out the Group's ambitions and how it would operate. The Forum noted that the Group would play an active role in informing, guiding and implementing the strategic aims identified in the High Needs Strategy, and it would also explore the wider school funding, and Early Years issues and plans.
- 18.2 The Forum noted the draft notes of the Working Group's meeting held on 9 May 2019. At the meeting held on 9 May, members of the Working Group considered in detail the High Needs Strategy and provided feedback to officers ahead of the Schools Forum meeting.

19. LOBBYING AND MEDIA - CONTINUING TO RAISE THE PROFILE OF SCHOOL FUNDING AND HIGH NEEDS

- 19.1 The Forum considered the proposal as outlined in the Lobbying for Funding Change report. The Forum recognised that the planned spending review in 2019 would be a critical moment for school funding. It was emphasised that a collective effort was needed now to make the case for additional funding for schools and High Needs.
- 19.2 In addition to the work already being undertaken through national campaigns (F40 and WorthLess?), the Forum recognised the importance of ensuring that everything was being done locally to mobilise support, and to gain a clear picture in Gloucestershire of the detrimental impact on pupils of the savings schools were having to make.
- 19.3 The Forum supported the proposal to run a funding event, in each of the 6 constituencies in Gloucestershire. The purpose of the event was to bring together headteachers, MPs and the Local Authority to discuss and tackle school funding issues to ensure there was a common understanding of the issues. MPs would be asked to use the report captured at the event to intensify the discussion in Parliament for fairer/better funding for schools.
- 19.4 It was agreed that the events would be arranged to take place in the Autumn term 2019.
ACTION: Philip Haslett/Joanne Bolton.

20. SCHOOLS FORUM MEETING DATES

The Forum noted the future meeting dates as outlined below:

2019

Thursday 19 September

Thursday 14 November

2020

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Thursday 9 January
Thursday 18 June
Thursday 17 September
Thursday 12 November

Meetings will be held in the Cabinet Suite of Shire Hall and will commence at 2pm.

Chairman

Meeting concluded at 4.00 pm