

GLOUCESTERSHIRE SCHOOLS FORUM

Minutes of a meeting held on Thursday 14 November 2019
in the Cabinet Suite - Shire Hall, Gloucester.

Present:

Brian Bartlett	- Primary School Governors (Academy)
Colin Belford	- Secondary School Headteachers (Maintained)
Sara Byrne	- Primary School Governors (Maintained)
Elisa Entwistle	- Alternative Provision Schools
Andrew Harris (Chair)	- Community Representative
Kirsten Harrison	- Secondary School Headteachers (Academy)
Dan Johnson	- Primary School Headteachers (Maintained)
Lisa Jones	- Primary School Headteachers (Maintained)
David Metcalf	- Primary School Headteachers (Maintained)
Sarah Murphy	- Unions
Alexander Norman	- Secondary School Governors (Academy)
Stuart Wilson	- Secondary School Headteachers (Academy)

Substitutes:

Observers:

Cllr Richard Boyles, Cabinet Member: Cabinet Member for
Children's Safeguarding and Early Years

Cllr Patrick Molyneux, Cabinet Member for 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)
Penny Chislett, Post-16 Education
Peter Hales, Primary School Governors (Academy)
Kate Hawkins, Special School Governors
Amanda Horniman, Early Years Providers
Rachel Howie, Gloucester Diocese
Liam Jordan, Clifton Diocese
Gwyneth Keen, Early Years Providers
Will Morgan, Secondary School Headteachers (Academy)

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Jacqui Phillips, Secondary School Governors (Academy)
Steve Savory, Primary School Headteachers (Academy)
Clare Steel, Special School Headteachers
Adam White, Secondary School Governors (Maintained)
Rob Wilcock, Secondary School Governors (Academy)

28. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

29. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No public questions had been received.

30. MINUTES

30.1 The minutes of the previous meeting held on 19 September 2019, were approved as a correct record and signed by the chair.

30.2 Sarah Murphy, Trade Union representative, read out a statement made by Luke Sibieta, Research Fellow, at the Institute of Fiscal Studies. She reported that he had stated since 2009-10 school funding per pupil had fallen by 8% in real terms in England. The government's new spending plans for education should be near enough sufficient to reverse cuts by 2022-23; in addition, the government was continuing to provide compensation to schools for higher pension contributions on top of this. In his statement he had outlined that the package represented a large increase in spending per pupil, taking it back to about the same level it was in 2009-10. However, a 13-year period of no net growth in school spending per pupil, after inflation, still represented a significant squeeze on school budgets when considered in historical terms. The Trade Union representative emphasised that school staff and governors should be made aware of this.

31. AMENDMENT TO THE MEMBERSHIP STRUCTURE OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM (SPECIAL SCHOOL REPRESENTATION)

31.1 The Forum considered a request from the Gloucestershire Association of Special School Headteachers (GASSH) to increase the special school representation on the Forum.

31.2 The Forum noted that there was currently one special school governor and one headteacher representative within its membership. A question was raised on whether the current number of special schools representatives within the Forum's membership, was already in proportion to the number of special schools in the county. It was acknowledged that this was likely the premise on which the special school representation was based on when the Forum was established. However, due to the prominent focus of the High Needs strategy and funding on the Schools Forum agenda now, and in the future, members felt that it would now be prudent to

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enhance the representation of special schools within the Schools Forum membership.

- 31.3 The Forum agreed to increase the special school representation by one additional headteacher and one additional governor, and for those sub-groups, to be represented by one academy representative and one maintained representative (aligning it with the primary and secondary school phases) as outlined below:

Special Schools Headteachers: 2 (one academy representative and one maintained representative)

Special School Governors: 2 (one academy representative and one maintained representative).

- 31.4 The Forum's membership structure outlined in its Constitution would be amended to reflect those changes. The Forum noted that an election would now be undertaken for:

1 Special School Headteacher (academy)

1 Special School Governor (maintained).

ACTION: Joanne Bolton.

32. SCHOOL FUNDING 2020/21

- 32.1 Philip Haslett, Head of Education Strategy and Development, presented the report which provided an update on:- the current forecast for the High Needs budget for 2019/20; the data and evidence to support a review of special school places in the county; the rate of permanent exclusion in the county; and on the progress in developing primary local inclusion clusters and the proposed projects.
- 32.2 He reported that the pressure on the High Needs budget was continuing due to the increasing levels of Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) that were being identified which was resulting in a continued rise in the number of Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP). In 2015 the local authority maintained 2,245 EHC Plans or Statement of Special Education Needs, in January 2019 the figure was at 3,859. If the trend of yearly increases was sustained at the current levels then the indication was that the local authority would receive an additional 350 plans a year, which would have a significant impact on the High Needs Block.
- 32.3 The current forecast showed an in-year overspend of the High Needs Block of £6,913,500. This would move the overall deficit for the DSG to £9,502,400. The Forum was informed of the main areas of overspend, and the plans for deficit recovery as outlined in the report.
- 32.4 Officers indicated that in 2020/21 Gloucestershire could expect to see an additional £6.13m allocated to High Needs funding. However, this was not sufficient to bridge the current in-year deficit. The long-term plan outlined in the High Needs strategy to provide earlier intervention and support to meet need, prevent escalation and ensure access to mainstream education was critical. However, given the continued

rise in EHCPs, there would be increased focus on how there could be a short-term impact on the overspend.

- 32.5 In response to a question on hospital education, Tim Browne, Director of Education, explained that this area, as with Alternative Provision in general, was experiencing an increase in demand. In response to this growth in demand the hospital education operating model had been reviewed and services recommissioned. The on-line learning provision was proving to be successful, and a telepresence robot – AV1 was being piloted. This robot was helping children in hospital or being cared for at home to remain part of their school community, by virtually taking the child's place in the classroom, enabling the child to participate in class. If the two-year pilot project was successful then the scheme may be expanded.
- 32.6 The Forum was informed of the outcome of an analysis of the current trends in both independent special school placements and referrals to special schools. From the analysis the local authority had ascertained that additional special school places would need to be commissioned for 2020/21; and the focus on prevention through early intervention and support was critical to reduce the rising level of need in the system. A new model was being developed to help fund and support this.
- 32.7 One key area identified in the analysis was that a significant proportion of the reason why special schools could not meet need, and an independent special school placement was needed, was due to key stage 3/4 boys with social, emotional mental health (SEMH) needs. Officers acknowledged that this would need to be addressed as part of the planning of the future provision in the county. The plans to build a new 75 place 11-16 SEMH special school, would only provide part of the provision needed. In the short-term discussions were taking place with the existing special schools to determine whether they could accommodate additional pupils. As a result of the increase in demand, the equivalent of a new special school will be needed, whether by expanding existing schools or a new build, in addition to the planned 75 place SEMH special school.
- 32.8 It was acknowledged that given the growth in children with SENDs requiring a special school place, any new special school would need to have clear admission criteria, so that allocations could be managed appropriately.
- 32.9 The Forum agreed that engagement with the Gloucestershire Association of Special School Headteachers (GASSH) should take place to explore how additional special school places could be commissioned for 2020/21; and to understand more fully why the needs of some pupils could not be met by maintained special schools and put in place support to enable them to be met in county, rather than more expensive independent special school provision. It was noted that officers would begin this process by meeting with GASSH on 22 November 2019.
ACTION: Philip Haslett

33. HIGH NEEDS

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- 33.1 The Forum received an update on the work being done to transform the way in which Gloucestershire utilised High Needs funding to support inclusion and thus reduce rates of permanent exclusion, such as through the primary Local Inclusion Clusters (LINC)s). The Schools Forum Working Group on Exclusions had considered the outline proposal, and on a whole, members of this Group were in agreement with the key objectives, but looked forward to receiving further details.
- 33.2 There was a degree of concern amongst Forum members about how the objectives would be achieved and the associated financial arrangements, and timeline of implementation. It was noted that further details would be considered by the Working Group at its next meeting on 27 November 2019, with an update to the Forum at its next meeting on 9 January 2020. A pilot project to test the new way of working would be rolled out in the spring of 2020.
- 33.3 In response to a question, Tim Browne, Director of Education, confirmed that home to school transport provision was funded by the County Council not the Dedicated Schools Grant. The Forum acknowledged that managed moves would be challenging in more rural areas due to the distances involved; officers accepted that there would need to be some flexibility within the home to school transport policy to counter this.
- 33.4 The Forum noted that there had been a significant decrease in the number of places being commissioned at Alternative Provision schools in the county. Elisa Entwistle, Alternative Provision representative, expressed strong concerns that due to the move towards no permanent primary exclusions, primary headteachers felt obliged to keep children in their schools, whom would otherwise have been allocated a place at an Alternative Provision school. She was also aware that some children were being allocated provision at a special school, whilst remaining on the roll of their home school. The Alternative Provision representative was concerned that the needs of those children were not being met appropriately, and stressed that any long-term decisions on the future of the new model for LINC)s should not be made on a short-term 'halo'. She emphasised that there would still need to be provision within the model which was sustainable and long-term and that could meet a child's needs effectively.
- 33.5 In response, the Head of Education Strategy and Development, explained that a pilot project was being carried out, whereby pupils at risk of permanent exclusion were being allocated provision within a special school. By doing this the aim was to assess and understand the child's needs within the special school setting and then for the child to transition back into a mainstream school with a plan in place for moving forward. A number of referrals for this type of provision were being received from primary headteachers. He explained that that if this pilot was successful then it would be expanded. In response to concerns over primary school headteachers holding pupils in their schools who would otherwise have been excluded, he explained that a survey would be undertaken to determine the position schools were in, he commented that he was keen to understand the data on this.

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33.6 The Forum considered the mainstream EHCP top-up rates for 2020/21. There were concerns raised that by not increasing the EHCP top-up rates, more inclusive schools would be financially penalised. However, members acknowledged that given the current High Needs deficit, an increase to the mainstream EHCP top-up rates would at this stage be untenable. The Forum subsequently agreed that the top-up rates for EHCPs for 2020/21 would be maintained at the current rates.

34. F40

34.1 Philip Haslett, Head of Education Strategy and Development, introduced a report which provided an analysis of School Funding Announcements September 2019, produced by the National Education Union. The report had formed the core part of the discussion at the last meeting of the f40.

34.2 The Chair posed the question of why the bar charts showing the shortfall of the government's core schools budget allocation to the Schools Block and the High Needs Block, over the years 2015-2023, had not shown the cumulative amounts, which would have been significantly higher.

34.3 The Head of Education Strategy and Development reported that the f40 local authorities were still being funded lower than other local authorities, mainly in more affluent parts of the country. The f40 was continuing to emphasise the importance of engaging and lobbying for a fairer school funding deal.

34.4 The Forum noted the report.

Chairman

Meeting concluded at 3.17 pm