

GLoucestershire Schools Forum

Minutes of a meeting held on Thursday 13 January 2022

The meeting was held remotely.

Present:

David Alexander	- Secondary Headteacher (Maintained)
Alison Berry	- Secondary School Governors (Academy)
Lyn Dance	- Special School Head Teacher
Anne-Marie Delrosa	- Secondary School Governors (Maintained)
Elisa Entwistle	- Alternative Provision Schools
Rhian Evans	- Primary School Governors (Maintained)
Mikey Ezewudo	- Primary School Governors (Maintained)
Peter Hales	- Primary School Governors (Academy)
Andrew Harris	- Community Representative
Amanda Horniman	- Primary School Headteachers (Maintained)
Rachel Howie	- Gloucester Diocese
Lisa Jones	- Primary School Headteachers (Maintained)
Becky Martin	- Special School Governors (Maintained)
Julia Maunder	- Secondary School Headteachers (Academy)
Dermot McNiffe	- Secondary School Headteachers (Academy)
Will Morgan	- Secondary School Headteachers (Academy)
Sarah Murphy	- Unions
Alexander Norman	- Secondary School Governors (Academy)
Poppy Scott Plummer	- Secondary School Governors (Academy)
Clare Steel	- Special School Headteachers (Maintained)

Substitutes:

Isobel Griffey, Gloucestershire Parent Carer Forum

Officers:

Kirsten Harrison, Director of Education

Philip Haslett, Head of Education Strategy and Development

Neil Egles, Finance Manager, Schools Strategy and Capital

Suzanne Hall, Finance Business Partner, Strategic Finance

Joanne Bolton, Democratic Services Adviser and Clerk to the Schools Forum

Apologies:

Matthew Bishop, Primary School Governors (Maintained)

Helen Bond, Gloucestershire Parent Carer Forum

Penny Chislett, Post-16 Education

Stephen Dean, Primary School Headteachers (Academy)

Elaine Le Gros, Primary School Headteachers (Maintained)

Kate Hawkins, Special School Governors (Academy)

Gwyneth Keen, Early Years Providers

Chris Spencer, Director of Children's Services

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

1. ELECTION OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM VICE CHAIR

Rachel Howie, Gloucester Diocese representative, was duly elected Vice Chair of the Schools Forum (until June 2023).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No public questions had been received.

4. MINUTES

- 4.1 The minutes of the previous meeting held on 11 November 2022, were approved as a correct record.
- 4.2 The Head of Education Strategy and Development gave an update on the School Improvement Grant changes. He reported that the DfE had now published the consultation [response](#). This confirmed that the grant would reduce by 50% for the financial year 2022/23 and that the grant would end in 2023/24. The local authority held a consultation meeting with a group of stakeholders in December 2021, to discuss the impact of the loss of this grant and to explore the potential solutions to mitigate the loss. He informed members that the notes of the meeting were attached to the Action Sheet. He explained that now the outcome of the consultation had been published, the local authority would be consulting with the group of stakeholders again to work on formulating a proposal for the future funding of school improvement activities. The local authority's final proposals would be considered at the next Forum meeting on 30 March 2022.
- 4.3 Following a request at the November Forum meeting, members were provided with a detailed briefing on the pressures and challenges being experienced by the Council's Home to School Transport Service, and the resulting impact on the budget. Members were advised that whilst decisions on the funding of Home to School Transport were not within the Forum's areas of responsibility, it was linked to certain areas that were. For example, the rising cost of SEND transport which was in part due to the continuing growth in Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP) (30% rise over the last 3 years).
- 4.4 The Forum noted that many SEN transport routes were being retendered by the Integrated Transport Unit (ITU) through the framework. In light of the current lack of competition (due to economic and pandemic related reasons), this was resulting in significantly higher contract costs (in some cases 2-3 times higher). A member referred to the example outlined in the report which detailed a quote for a 6-mile journey costing £365 a day (£71,000 per academic year), and commented that this did not represent the best use of public funds. A question was asked on whether this was reasonable grounds to decline a specifically named place (rather than local provision),

on the basis that it would impact on the provision of the efficient education of others. The Head of Education Strategy and Development acknowledged that due to the current lack of competition, the Council was in effect being forced into a situation where it had to spend a significant amount of public money to cover some of the home to school journeys. He explained that he would need to check the statutory guidance and provide an answer in due course.

ACTION: The Head of Education Strategy and Development

- 4.5 A member representing Special School Headteachers on the Forum emphasised how difficult it was for the officers in the School Transport Team to manage the logistical challenge of not having enough drivers and escorts to cover the journeys for children attending special schools. In an aim to try and reduce costs, more children were being accommodated in the same vehicle, meaning much earlier pick-up times for some children which was having an impact on the way in which children at special schools were coming into school. She acknowledged that there was no easy solution to the current situation, and explained that special schools were working closely with the Home to School Transport Team, to help and provide support in finding a suitable way forward. In response, the Head of Education Strategy and Development confirmed that an external consultant had been commissioned to carry out a full review of the Home to School Transport Service. The consultant had experience of undertaking reviews in other local authority areas, and the Council was looking to learn from best practice. In addition, the ITU in conjunction with Procurement were investigating options for improving the situation in the medium to longer term including the possibility of a pilot in-house mini fleet of accessible vehicles.

5. GLOUCESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL BUDGET CONSULTATION 2022/23

- 5.1 The Finance Business Partner gave an overview of the County Council budget proposals and provided details on the specific budget information relating to Children and Families. (For information: a copy of the presentation slides covering each agenda item has been uploaded to the Council's website.)
- 5.2 Forum members were reminded that the budget consultation was open until 12:00pm on 21 January 2022 and they could respond individually if they so wished. It was noted that final approval of the budget would be considered at the Cabinet meeting on 26 January 2022 and at the Full Council meeting on 16 February 2022.
- 5.3 The Forum noted the report.

6. DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT 2022/23

- 6.1 The Head of Education Strategy and Development presented the report on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for 2022/23.
- 6.2 The Forum was informed that the 2022/23 DSG announced on 16th December 2021 totalled £547.222M. An additional Supplementary Grant of £15.284M had also been announced giving total funding of £562.506M. The Supplementary Grant was in addition to the Schools and High Needs block DSG funding calculated under the National Funding

Formula (NFF). The increase in funding was to recognise the additional costs that local authorities and schools would face in the coming year, which were not foreseen when the original allocations were calculated. This included the Health and Social Care Levy, that would be applied initially through increased national insurance contributions from employers.

- 6.3 The Head of Education Strategy and Development confirmed that this represented an overall increase in funding of £38.662M (7.4%) from the 2021/22 DSG. After taking into account the previously agreed growth fund of £1.3M, the funds allocated in the DSG Schools block settlement were enough to allow each formula factor rate and the minimum funding levels to be implemented 100% at the NFF level and for the Minimum Funding Guarantee to be set at the same +2% level as the funding floor within the NFF.
- 6.4 It was reported that the Schools Supplementary Grant funding for Early Years and Post-16 provision in schools was provided in respect of the Health and Social Care Levy and would be allocated on a simple per-pupil basis. The additional funding for mainstream school provision for pupils aged 5 to 16 was provided in respect of both the Health and Social Care Levy and wider cost pressures. The Forum noted the details on the amount each school would receive as outlined in the report.
- 6.5 Members welcomed the news on the announcement of the Supplementary Grant, particularly as it was thought that schools would have to bear the additional costs in respect of the Health and Social Care Levy. In response to a question, it was clarified that the DfE had not provided any further information on what other cost pressures schools should use the funding for. However, officers suggested that it may be the DfE's intention for schools to cover the increase in teacher starting salaries to £30k per year through this additional funding, although no announcements had been made on this as yet. In response to a question, it was clarified that the Supplementary Grant would be rolled into the NFF in future years, so the relevant formula factors would all see an increase.
- 6.6 It was acknowledged that increases to the salaries of newly qualified teachers would have an impact on the salaries of the other teaching staff in schools. The Head of Education Strategy and Development commented that the Government had made the pledge to increase teacher starting salaries to £30k per year in 2019, but there had been no clear and definitive timeline on when this would be implemented. The Forum's Union representative informed members that the teachers' unions were lobbying the Pay Review Body for the pay rises of newly qualified teachers to be government funded. The unions were working on the basis that the pay rise would be implemented in two years' time.
- 6.7 The Forum noted that the local authority has been able to deliver the NFF in full, this would leave a balance of £0.307M in the 2022/23 Schools block. The Head of Education Strategy and Development explained that the LA was proposing that the balance of the Schools block be used as a on-off contribution to support the 1 in 40 High Needs Model. The 1 in 40 rule was a local funding decision - some but not all LAs had the provision, or had variations to it, to support schools which attracted a high number of children with additional needs. Members were informed of how the 1

in 40 rule was calculated. It was explained that the number of pupils on roll was divided by 40, that figure was then the maximum number of pupils with high needs that a school would pay the sum of £6,000 for. For each High Needs pupil over that number, a school would receive the top-up funding and the sum of £6,000.

- 6.8 It was reported that Pupil Premium grants for 2022/23 had also been announced and had been increased in-line with inflation.
- 6.9 The Finance Business Partner reported that for Early Years, the funding announcements on 16 December 2021 included an increase in the hourly funding rates by 17p for three and four year olds and 21p for two-year-olds. In addition to this increase there was an increase of £27,205 to the Disability Access Fund and an increase of £60,544 for Pupil Premium, giving an overall decrease to the Early Years block of £440,268 for 2022/23. In response to a question, it was clarified that the decrease to the Early Years Block was due to the fact that the formula for the distribution of funding was based on the number of pupils in Early Years as informed by the Census data. Consequently, the funding fluctuated in accordance with pupil numbers and the cost of the available funding levels. The current figures were based on the January 2021 census. There would be further updates in the summer 2022 and summer 2023 for the January pupil counts which would reflect more accurately the picture than the January 2021 census, as the pupil numbers in the January Census would have been lower due to the impact of Covid-19.
- 6.10 The Forum was informed that the final Early Years balance was £1.464M. The 2022/23 budget would be based on the May 2021, October 2021 and January 2022 census and the summer and autumn terms budget would be notified by the DFE in January 2022. This information was currently being analysed and a decision on the use of the balances for last year would be taken at the next Schools Forum meeting on 30 March 2022.
- 6.11 The Forum considered the Central School Services block allocation information. This block included funding for the on-going responsibilities of local authorities for the statutory duties that they held for both maintained schools and academies. The allocation was based on a formula using pupil numbers (90%), free school meals (Ever 6, 10%) with an area cost adjustment applied. It was noted that the rate per pupil for 2022/23 had increased by £1.90 to £36.09 and there had been an increase of 713 pupils resulting in a £0.180M (6.5%) increase and a total allocation of £2.964M.
- 6.12 The Forum was informed that the High Needs block had been allocated an additional £6.968M. On top of this a further £2.989M had been allocated through the Supplementary Grant, bringing the total High Needs funding for 2022/23 up to £84.310M, an increase of 13.4%. The local authority was working with the ESFA, and other local authorities via the southwest regional network, to explore the potential options around how the Supplementary Grant could best be allocated in the Special School and Alternative Provision sector. Officers were planning to meet with the Gloucestershire Association of Special School Headteachers (GASSH) (including Alternative Provision headteachers) to put forward the proposals on the way forward. A firm proposal on how the Supplementary Grant for High Needs would be allocated would then be brought to a future Forum meeting for approval.

Having considered all of the information presented:

- The Forum noted the DSG settlement for 2022/23.
- The Forum recommended that Council agree the school funding formula for 2022/23, as set out in Annex A to the report.
- The Forum agreed that the balance on the Schools block could be used at year end as a one-off contribution to support the continuation of the 1 in 40 High Needs model.
- The Forum noted the information on the additional funding that would be received through the separate Schools Supplementary Grant.
- The Forum agreed to
 - a. apply the 0.17p increase to the hourly rate for 3 and 4 year olds and to consult with the Early Years Forum on the formula distribution
 - b. apply the 0.21p to the base rate for 2 year olds as set out in section 4.
- The Forum agreed the allocation of the Central School Services block as set out in the report.

7. HIGH NEEDS

- 7.1 The Head of Education Strategy and Development presented the report on the 2021/22 High Needs forecast and the current growth trends in Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP).
- 7.2 He reported that since the Schools Forum meeting in September 2021 there had been a further £613,000 increase in forecast expenditure, resulting in a forecast in-year deficit of just over £5.7M. The increased forecast expenditure was being driven by higher than forecast EHCP costs. The growth trend for EHCPs requests had continued to rise throughout the autumn terms. January 2021 to December 2021 saw an increase of 425 plans. The assumption was that that there would be an increase of 450 plans in the full 12-month period – 100 more plans than budgeted for. This had resulted in forecast expenditure for Primary EHCP costs increasing by £230k, Secondary EHCP costs by £120k and the cost of specialist placements by £250k.
- 7.3 The Forum was informed that the forecast deficit position for 2021/22 of £5.7M was greater than the previous year (£5.4M). The local authority had set out with the aim to see an improved position this year, but the 2% increase in top-up rates, significant increases in support for EHCPs in Post-16 and further education and the increase in initial requests for EHCPs had meant that the LA has been unable to reduce the in-year deficit position.
- 7.4 A table showing Gloucestershire's position in comparison to the national picture and that of Gloucestershire's statistical neighbours was presented. The Head of Education Strategy and Development explained that despite the growth Gloucestershire was experiencing, the percentage of the population supported by an EHCP in Gloucestershire was lower in both instances. It was therefore evident that

Gloucestershire was not an outlier in terms of the pressures that the SEND service was facing. The local authority therefore wanted to avoid making reactionary local decisions that would negatively affect the quality of provision for children with additional needs, when this was clearly a national issue requiring national reform.

- 7.5 The Forum noted the draft 5-year plan. The Head of Education Strategy and Development emphasised that refining and being clear on the assumptions regarding EHCP growth would be critical for the local authority to lay out an effective 5-year plan that could bring the High Needs budget back into a balanced in-year position. The Forum agreed that the development of the forecast and the underlying assumptions would be a priority for the High Needs Budget Working Group in the spring term. The local authority planned to test the assumptions contained within the draft 5-year plan with the Group, looking at the impact of the adjustments, before the plan was brought to the Forum meeting in June 2022 for approval.
- 7.6 The Head of Education Strategy and Development explained that the local authority had based its forecasting on the premise that the additional funding coming into the High Needs Block over the past three financial years would continue going forward. The DfE had very recently announced that it was considering a 5% increase for High Needs funding in 2023/24 and a 3% increase in 2024/25, therefore resulting in a tailing off of this additional funding. He emphasised that this would result in at least an additional £20M of cumulative deficit in Gloucestershire. He informed members that he had raised this issue with the F40 Group and had suggested that the F40 advocate for the current funding levels to be maintained, at least until the SEND Review was published and the reform commenced so that there was no destabilisation of the current funding levels.
- 7.7 The Head of Education Strategy and Development reported that the DfE and ESFA were in discussions with some of the local authorities with the largest High Needs deficits. Gloucestershire's position was as good as could reasonably be expected given the pressures and challenges. Some local authorities had in-year deficits greater than Gloucestershire's overall cumulative deficit figure. The local authority had developed its 5-year plan in accordance with the DfE's guidance and deficit management template.
- 7.8 The Forum noted that there were two key priority areas that the Joint Additional Needs and High Needs Transformation Programme was focussed on in the new year: testing and implementation of the new SEND banded funding model; and implementation of additional specialist places across the county. The local authority was also looking at potential ways of offering non-statutory funding to address short-term need, to avoid locking into long-term expensive statutory plans.
- 7.9 The Forum received the finalised descriptors and example provision maps. Members were informed that throughout the spring term, the local authority would be working with a number of individual schools to test the descriptors and develop provision maps for existing pupils/students with EHCPs. Assuming that testing and implementation worked well, the local authority was aiming for a wider roll out of the new system from September 2022.

- 7.10 The Head of Education Strategy and Development explained that the rising levels of need were placing significant pressure on the availability of specialist places. The local authority was looking at how the number of specialist places could be significantly increased in the coming years. Current data indicated that, should the trends continue as they were, at least an extra 100 places a year would need to be commissioned. The Forum noted the local authority's plans to address the increasing levels of need as outlined in the report. The Forum was informed that officers would be working closely with the GASSH to move this forward. The expansion of specialist provision was supported by government policy and the recent announcement to invest £2.6b into specialist capital funding.
- 7.11 The Forum was looking to gain a greater understanding of whether there was scope for more of Gloucestershire's High Needs pupils to have their needs met by Gloucestershire's maintained specialist provision, rather than independent specialist provision both within and outside of the county, which was much more expensive. It was subsequently agreed that at the next meeting, the Forum would receive a detailed breakdown of the relevant data, including an update on the import/export data on the number of Gloucestershire High Needs pupils that other areas take, in comparison to the number of High Needs pupils Gloucestershire takes in from another area. The Head of Education Strategy and Development explained that the number of Gloucestershire's High Need pupils in independent specialist provision was not out of balance with other local authorities. However, without increasing specialist provision in the county over the coming years, there was potential for this to become a significant issue.

8. SCHOOLS FORUM WORKPLAN 2022

- 8.1 The Forum received the Workplan for 2022.
- 8.2 It was noted that the key priorities for the Schools Forum in 2022 were: mainstream funding; Early Years funding; High Needs funding; and a reassessment of the role and impact of the Forum in light of its statutory responsibilities, current priorities in school funding and developments in government guidance.
- 8.3 The High Needs Budget Working Group which had been established to support the design and implementation of a new approach to funding SEND, would be meeting throughout 2022. The next meeting of the Group was on 7 February 2022.
- 8.4 The Forum noted the Workplan for 2022.

9. F40 AND COVID-19 UPDATE

- 9.1 The Head of Education Strategy and Development updated the Forum on the work of the F40 Group. He reported that the key priority areas for the F40 Group were: fair funding for all; sufficiency of school funding; SEND funding and the publication of the SEND review; sufficiency of Early Years funding; and accessibility of capital funding.

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There were a number of upcoming briefing sessions involving the F40 Group, the DfE funding policy team and ministers to talk through those core issues.

9.2 He emphasised the significance of the F40 group in influencing high level decision making; he agreed to keep the Forum up to date on developments and ensure that the views of Gloucestershire Schools Forum were represented at the meetings of the F40.

9.3 The Head of Education and Strategy agreed to circulate the F40's latest campaign document once it became available.

ACTION: Head of Education Strategy and Development.

10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Forum noted the date of the next meeting – 2:00 pm on Wednesday 30 March 2022.

Chair

Meeting concluded at 3.36 pm

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