

Notes of the LA School Improvement Monitoring and Brokering Grant consultation meeting, held on Wednesday 2 March 2022. The meeting was held remotely.

Present:

Schools Forum Members (maintained representatives):

David Alexander (Secondary School Headteacher), Elisa Entwistle, (Alternative Provision), Mikey Ezewudo (Primary School Governor).

Co-Chair of Gloucestershire Association of Special School Headteachers:

Lyn Dance (CEO SAND Academies Trust).

Co-Chair of Gloucestershire Association of Primary Headteachers:

Kerry Cunningham (Headteacher of Longlevens Infant School).

Chairs of the Local Primary Partnerships: Karen Howard: Chair of GSP (Headteacher of Harewood Infant School); Jane Farren: Co-Chair of TDP (Headteacher of Norton C of E Primary School); Liam Jordan: Co-Chair of TDP (Headteacher of St Mary's Catholic Primary School).

GCC Officers: Philip Haslett, Head of Education Strategy and Development; Clare Dudman, Head of School Improvement; Suzanne Hall, Finance Business Partner; Jo Bolton, Democratic Services Adviser and Clerk to the Schools Forum.

Apologies:

Schools Forum members (maintained representatives): Anne-Marie Delrosa (Secondary School Governor); Rhian Evans (Primary School Governor); Amanda Horniman (Primary School Headteacher); Lisa Jones (Primary School Headteacher); Becky Martin (Special School Governor); Matthew Bishop (Primary School Governor).

Secondary (maintained) Headteachers: Richard Gilpin (Headteacher of Pittville School); Kieron Smith (Headteacher of Archway School); Scott Albon (Headteacher of Barnwood Park School); Pam Wilson (Headteacher of Maidenhill School).

Chair of GASH: Julia Maunder (Headteacher of Thomas Keble School).

Co-Chair of GASSH: Clare Steel (Headteacher of Alderman Knight School).

Co-Chair of GAPH: Nikki Hill (Headteacher of Naunton Park Primary School).

Chairs of the Local Primary Partnerships: Kate Burke: Chair of WGSP (Headteacher of Yorkley Primary School); Julie Fellows: Chair of SCSP (Headteacher of Fairford C of E Primary School); Jane Farren: Co-Chair of TDP (Norton C of E Primary School); John Jones: Chair of NCSP (Headteacher of Bourton on the Water Primary Academy); Jon Millin: Chair of CLP (Headteacher of Shurdington C of E Primary School); Debbie Sleep: Chair of SAS (Headteacher of Stroud Valley Community School).

1. Local Authority School Improvement Grant

The Head of Education Strategy and Development, introduced the report and explained that the outcome of the consultation published in early January 2022 confirmed that the grant would be removed over the next 2 financial years – a 50% reduction in 2022/23 and full removal in 2023/24. The timescale of the consultation and the subsequent response had not provided much opportunity to address the challenges the removal of the grant created for maintained schools and the LA. He explained that the LA had focussed on exploring options that bridged the immediate funding issue for 2022/23. The development of a future school improvement offer based around traded options was progressing, and the proposed options on the way forward would allow time to ensure that this was undertaken effectively to achieve a more sustainable solution for the long-term.

2. The Head of Education Strategy and Development reported that the LA had explored the following two options that could in the short-term, fund school improvement services:

- **Option 1 - To use de-delegation from maintained schools to recoup the lost funding.** The use of de-delegation from maintained schools was suggested by the DfE in the consultation document. However, de-delegation had to operate on a per-pupil basis rather than a whole-school budget top-slice. The regulations also stated that it must be applied equally to all maintained

schools. As a result, all maintained schools in Gloucestershire would pay the same amount at a rate of approximately £9 per pupil. He indicated that this would require a compromise across the system in recognition that every institution was funded differently (i.e. a small primary school had access to a smaller budget and therefore its overall contribution would be less than a secondary school's contribution with a larger budget). He emphasised that school improvement was a whole school activity and as such, a per-pupil funding was a difficult approach to apply equitably for all schools. He acknowledged that there were concerns around this option.

➤ **Option 2 - To bridge the funding gap using a combination of de-delegated balances, the central services block, and a reduction in intervention funding that the Local Authority can offer to schools.** This option would involve the use of three funding elements to cover the loss of grant totalling £320k in 2022/23. De-delegated balances were forecast to carry a surplus at the end of the financial year of £447,000. Some of this funding (£250k) was ringfenced to cover any deficits that may need to be written off due to academy sponsorships. As de-delegated balances were forecast to carry a surplus, that had accumulated over a period of time, the LA was able to propose that £100k of the surplus be ringfenced to support the loss of the grant.

The second element of funding would come from the central services block. The central services block had seen a small increase this year and the LA had provisionally ringfenced £160k to support the loss of the grant in 2022/23. The third element would involve a temporary reduction in the improvement intervention budgets that the LA used to fund activities/support for schools in intervention. This would mean a £100k reduction in budget (broadly 50% of the total budget), and would therefore reduce the LA's capacity to provide those services. Consequently, the activities agreed through the project groups would need to be funded through the school budget.

3. In response to a question, the Head of School Improvement clarified that the school improvement intervention budget primarily funded the intervention project groups. The project groups undertook intervention work with maintained schools that had been rated as 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate' by Ofsted, or were at risk of falling into one of those categories.
4. She explained that there were approximately 15-20 maintained schools in the county that received support from a project group. A reduction in the school improvement intervention budget may result in the LA having to request schools to match fund the support provided, as opposed to the current approach of the LA gifting the support. A headteacher pointed out that schools requiring intervention support would most likely be in a challenging financial situation and that rapid school improvement intervention could cost a significant sum of money over a short space of time. The Head of School Improvement acknowledged there was a risk that some schools may not be able to bear the cost of intervention support; however, the risk was balanced by the LA's plans to expand the offer and deliver an increased school improvement service to schools. At present, schools were only offered one visit per year from a School Improvement Adviser. An expansion of this service would lead to greater intelligence in schools, and more opportunity for LAs to act before performance deteriorated significantly and formal intervention became inevitable.
5. The Head of Education Strategy and Development pointed out that there were only a small number of maintained schools in Gloucestershire with a deficit budget. Budget deficits were usually linked to pupil numbers, and typically it was smaller schools with less resilience to fluctuations in numbers that were affected. He added that the LA was proposing a 50% reduction in the improvement intervention budgets, consequently there would still be funding available to deliver a service, just not at the current levels. It was imperative that the service was prioritised appropriately to ensure the funding was targeted at schools that really needed the support.
6. The Head of School Improvement explained that savings could be made in delivering certain aspects of the improvement intervention service, such as training, to groups of schools rather than carrying out lots of individual sessions. She was working with her team to ensure that the service was made as cost efficient as possible. She believed that despite a 50% reduction in the budget there remained sufficient funding to provide a good level of support; however, there would be times when the LA would need to ask a school to make a contribution towards the cost of providing the service, particularly in the case of a school with a healthy budget position. She clarified that schools were not obliged to buy-in support for school improvement from the LA, schools could purchase services from external partners instead.

7. The Head of Education Strategy and Development explained one of the implications of Option 2 was that there would be very little contingency in the de-delegated budgets, and subject to de-delegated budget performance in 2022/23, this could limit the LA's ability to support maintained school redundancies. The LA provided financial support to schools that had a challenging financial position and were in the process of implementing a staffing restructure. Over the last financial year the LA had worked with a number of schools to cover the cost of staff redundancies. If the LA was to receive a similar number of requests for support from schools in 2022/23, a contribution may need to be made from school budgets. He explained that he was not expecting the level of requests to be as high as this year, as it was anticipated that the budgets of maintained schools in Gloucestershire would see an increase in 2022/23. He pointed out that the ESFA did not support academy redundancies and therefore it could be implied that there was currently an inequity in the system given that maintained schools were receiving support from LAs.
8. He explained there would still be a contribution from schools for the school improvement service, under Option 2, just not in the form of a top-slice of funding coming out of every maintained school's budget. Instead, a contribution would be made at the point in time when a school needed to access the support.
9. A headteacher suggested that there was, in effect, a third option, not included in the report, and this was for maintained schools to opt not to have the de-delegation amount deducted from their budget share, on the basis that it was not a mandatory requirement. The Head of Education Strategy and Development acknowledged that the LA could opt to do nothing to address the loss of the grant, he emphasised however that this would result in the school improvement service being stripped back significantly and ultimately the removal of the important prevention work taking place. He was therefore of the view that doing nothing to address the loss of the grant would be unpalatable. He explained that the best course of action was to use Option 2 to bridge the loss of the grant for one year, thus allowing time for the development of a future school improvement offer based around traded services. There was recognition that having oversight of school improvement activity in the whole school community, was a statutory function of the LA, and therefore this still had to be funded in some way.
10. A headteacher raised the point that the school improvement traded service needed to become more accessible, marketable, and ultimately financially independent following the loss of the grant. It was critical that schools were made aware of the support available. The Head of School Improvement confirmed that the traded offer was being developed in this way. Information on the traded service would be circulated to schools in the w/c 7 March 2022. Schools would be asked to provide feedback, including information on any other services they required, so that this could be looked at for inclusion as part of the offer too. Information on the cost of each package of support was currently being finalised and would be included in the circulation. Schools would be able to purchase services individually, or as part of a group of 5 or more schools - schools would then benefit from economies of scale.
11. David Alexander, secondary headteacher, reported that he had consulted with his secondary maintained headteacher colleagues on the proposed options and he confirmed that there was no support for Option 1. Kerry Cunningham, primary headteacher, confirmed that there was no support for Option 1 from GAPH, and Lyn Dance, special school headteacher, confirmed that GASSH was also of that view. Comments were made that whilst support was leaning towards Option 2, it was difficult to provide feedback when it was not yet clear what the traded services offer would look like moving forward.
12. It was reported that the basic traded services offer would consist of 3-4 visits from a School Improvement Adviser per year, with more enhanced packages of support also available. The service would be able to provide schools with Ofsted style reviews if needed.
13. It was acknowledged that Option 2 would mean bridging the funding gap for one year, whilst the traded services option was developed. The Head of Education and Strategy explained that at the beginning of next year the LA would need to look at what actions needed to be taken to address full removal of the grant in 2023/24. The traded services offer would be reviewed to determine whether it could provide the long-term financial solution needed to address the complete loss of grant. If the

traded offer received sufficient buy-in from schools, then it would not be necessary to make significant adjustments to the level of support the school improvement team was able to provide. It was suggested that the traded services offer be given two full years in which to become fully established, before a final review on whether it was a sustainable model of support for maintained schools.

14. The Head of Education Strategy and Development confirmed that based on the feedback he had received during this meeting, the two options would be put forward for consideration by the Schools Forum at its meeting on 30 March 2022. The Forum would be advised that Option 2 was the preferred option. Option 2 would also specify that the traded services offer would need two years in which to become fully established, before a final review was undertaken on whether it was a sustainable model of support for maintained schools.

ACTION: Head of Education Strategy and Development

15. He agreed to look into whether there was sufficient time in the budget approval process to seek the Forum's view at the March meeting, on whether a wider consultation of schools should be undertaken, before the Forum made a recommendation to the LA on which option to proceed with. He agreed to keep the group informed of progress.

ACTION: Head of Education Strategy and Development

Ends