

GLOUCESTERSHIRE SCHOOLS FORUM

Minutes of a meeting held on Thursday 10 November 2022

The meeting was held remotely

Present:

Lyn Dance	- Special School Headteachers (Academy)
Stephen Dean	- Primary School Headteachers (Academy)
Anne-Marie Delrosa	- Secondary School Governors (Maintained)
Elisa Entwistle	- Alternative Provision Schools
Rhian Evans	- Primary School Governors (Maintained)
Mikey Ezewudo	- Primary School Governors (Maintained)
Andrew Harris	- Community Representative (Chair)
Kate Hawkins	- Special School Governors (Academy)
Chiquita Henson	- Secondary School Headteachers (Academy)
Victoria Leather	- Early Years
Karen Lewis	- Primary School Headteachers (Maintained)
Becky Martin	- Special School Governors (Maintained) (Vice Chair)
Dermot McNiffe	- Secondary School Headteachers (Academy)
Will Morgan	- Secondary School Headteachers (Academy)
Alexander Norman	- Secondary School Governors (Academy)
Poppy Scott Plummer	- Secondary School Governors (Academy)
David Williams	- Diocese of Gloucester

Observers:

Cllr Stephen Davies - Cabinet Member for Children's Safeguarding and Early Years

Cllr Philip Robinson - Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Bus Transport

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

Chris Hemingway, Finance Manager (Projects)

Clare Dudman, Head of School Improvement

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

Apologies:

David Alexander, Secondary School Headteachers (Maintained)

Alison Berry, Secondary School Governors (Academy)

Matthew Bishop, Primary School Governors (Maintained)

Helen Bond, Gloucestershire Parent Carer Forum

David Kettleby, Post 16

Amanda Horniman, Early Years

Lisa Jones, Primary School Headteachers (Maintained)

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Sarah Murphy, Unions
Darren Preece, Primary School Headteachers (Maintained)
Clare Steel, Special School Headteachers (Maintained)

35. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

36. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No public questions had been received.

37. MINUTES

37.1 The minutes of the previous meeting held on 15 September 2022 were approved as a correct record.

37.2 Members noted progress against the actions, as detailed in the Action Sheet.

38. SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT FUNDING - 2023/24

38.1 The Head of School Improvement presented a report which detailed the local authority's plans to support school improvement following the removal of the Local Authority Monitoring and Brokering (LAMB) Grant.

38.2 The Forum was informed that on 11 January 2022, the local authority was notified that the DfE would be going ahead with the removal of the grant. Gloucestershire had been significantly impacted by the removal of the grant which was allocated according to the number of maintained schools in each area. The impact of the DfE's removal of the grant was a £720,000 reduction in the Schools Improvement budget phased over a two-year period (50% removed in April 2022 and the remainder in April 2023).

38.3 The Head of School Improvement explained that in order to adapt to the reduction in funding a range of changes had been made to the way in which the Education Intervention and Outcomes Team (EO&I) operated. The work around income generation to support the universal school improvement offer had been particularly positive. As a result, 'Gloucestershire School Improvement' known as 'GLOSSI' had generated £255,000 (as of 14.10.22) with further income expected from training courses.

38.4 The Head of School Improvement informed members that de-delegated funding for targeted intervention remained a key element of the funding to support the EO&I team. The activities undertaken to address the reduction in funding for universal school improvement support had enabled the local authority to retain the de-delegation funding rates at the same level as previous years. De-delegation enables the authority to provide good quality support to maintained schools that are in challenging

circumstances, usually when they met or are likely to meet the criteria under 'Schools Causing Concern' and in line with the local authority's School Improvement Strategy.

- 38.5 Members were informed of how the de-delegated funds were allocated, and the particular activities that the funding was used for as part of the prevention and targeted intervention work that took place.
- 38.6 The Head of School Improvement outlined that school performance across the county, in both LA maintained schools and academies remains very positive, with 86.9% of primary schools and 90.2% of secondary schools currently holding a good or outstanding Ofsted grades. The Head of School Improvement explained that there was some variation between the performance of LA maintained schools and academies, but that this was to be expected, as the poorest performing schools were sponsored to become academies.
- 38.7 In response to question, the Head of School Improvement confirmed that from 2023/24 whilst there would be a full removal of the grant, the current level of provision could be retained with the same de-delegation per pupil rate as in 2022/23. It would, however, be a more of a challenge; as a consequence, the local authority was looking to increase the level of income generated through GLOSSI.
- 38.8 A Forum member representing primary headteachers explained that she had received an email from the Chair of Gloucestershire Association of Primary Headteachers (GAPH) ahead of the Forum meeting, expressing concern that there had not been sufficient consultation, particularly in regard to the proposed per pupil rate for de-delegation. The Forum member felt that this could, in part, be due to the proposal not being fully explained and suggested that further information may need to be circulated. In response, the Head of Education Strategy and Development explained that a series of consultation sessions had been held previously, to inform the primary headteachers of maintained schools of the changes to the LAMB grant and the potential options the local authority was considering to address the loss of the grant. As the local authority was not proposing to change the per pupil rate in 2023/24 from the current level in 2022/23, no consultation was undertaken on the de-delegation of funding. The current per pupil rate of de-delegated funding had been in place since 2015/16.
- 38.9 In order that the local authority could continue to provide the current level of support and further enhance the school improvement offer to schools, Forum members were asked to consider and approve de-delegation at the per pupil rate of £9.27 for targeted intervention for primary maintained schools. However, at this point in the meeting, two out of the six Forum members representing primary maintained schools (and therefore eligible to vote), were in attendance, and one member indicated that they would abstain from a vote. As a result, and taking into account the issue raised around schools needed to receive additional clarification on the de-delegation proposal, it was agreed that the decision on whether to approve de-delegation at the proposed per pupil rate would be deferred until the January 2023 Forum meeting at the latest. The Clerk would also look into whether arrangements could be made for an urgent decision to be made by those members eligible to vote, outside of a Forum meeting.
- ACTION: Head of Education Strategy and Development/Clerk.**

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38.10 The Head of Education Strategy and Development agreed to contact the Chair of GAPH, in order to provide additional clarification around the de-delegation aspect of the funding for 2023/24.

ACTION: Head of Education Strategy and Development.

39. HIGH NEEDS

39.1 The Head of Education Strategy and Development presented a report which provided an update on the High Needs financial forecast for 2022/23, the current numbers of Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) plus the forecast growth trends, and the key activities taking place to address the overspend.

39.2 He explained that at the Schools Forum meeting in September 2022, a planned total spend of £90.895M was reported. This had risen by £574k to £91.469M. The Forum was informed of the key variations. The High Needs overspend for 2022/23 was now forecast to be £6.9M, which would result in a cumulative £27.1M overspend by the end of the year.

39.3 The Head of Education Strategy and Development emphasised that the pressure around the EHCP system was still high. The number of supported EHCPs had continued to rise (5,323 funded plans were in place at the start of October 2022). He added that the number of requests for assessments being refused and decisions by the local authority not to progress with an EHCP, had increased; however, a consequence of this was a rise in the number appeals and SEND Tribunals.

39.4 He reported that the rate of EHCPs per 1000 pupils in Gloucestershire had historically been lower than comparator groups. It was unclear, until a new national dataset was developed, as to whether the increases Gloucestershire was seeing had worsened Gloucestershire's position compared to the picture nationally and for statistical neighbours. He emphasised however that this was a national issue and therefore it was likely that other local authority areas were experiencing similar increases.

39.5 The Forum was informed that both Autism and Speech Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) were increasingly being identified as primary areas of need in new plans. This was being monitored to assess whether some targeted earlier intervention outside of the statutory EHCP process could have an impact on the rises particularly for SLCN.

39.6 The Forum received the draft implementation plan for the SEND and Inclusion Strategies. The Head of Education Strategy and Development gave an update on two key areas of the development work. The first being that the new EHCP pathway and the digital platform had been agreed and would be implemented from January 2023. The new pathway was a much more streamlined and efficient process for caseworkers to manage, and would enable improved engagement between caseworker and family. The digital platform would enable greater visibility of progress of the EHCP process for families through the portal, and would facilitate clearer engagement for all involved across the EHCP process.

- 39.7 The second key area was the work taking place to increase the sufficiency of special school places in the county. The Brook Academy 11-16 SEMH special school opened in September and now had 35 children on roll. The competition to appoint a provider for a new special school on the site of the closed Severn View primary school was completed and the school had been awarded to the SAND multi-academy trust. The school is due to open in September 2023 and add a further 80 places. A bid had been submitted to the wave 15 free school programme for 2 new special schools, offering a total of 400 places (200 each). The 2 new schools are critical in terms of reducing the use of independent specialist provision. He stressed the importance of the local authority being successful in both applications as this would then provide flexibility for the capital funding available in Gloucestershire (approx. £14M) to be used to support other key development activities within High Needs. The outcome of the applications would be known in early 2023.
- 39.8 A Forum member representing Early Years reported that the Early Years Provider Forum had concerns that the local authority was not sufficiently involving providers in the discussions taking place around developing SEND strategy. There was also uncertainty around how the strategy for Early Years and the SEND and Inclusion Strategies, aligned. The Early Years Forum was of the view that there lacked a joined up approach. She stressed the need for the local authority to involve the Early Years sector in future discussions around SEND Strategy and strongly emphasised that funding and resources directed at birth to age 5 years had the most significant impact in improving outcomes and the lives of children and young people. In response, the Head of Education Strategy and Development indicated that he would be happy to attend a future meeting of the Early Years Provider Forum to discuss the strategic elements of the implementation of the SEND Strategy, and how links with the Early Years Provider Forum could be enhanced moving forward.
- 39.9 The Head of Education Strategy and Development presented information on the new mainstream banded funding model. He reported that it had been a challenge to address how to migrate the existing mainstream funding system on to a new banded system. This was due to the existing cohort of EHCPs in mainstream consisting of individually costed plans, building up over many years, which had resulted in a variation of funding levels associated to the plans. To improve the reliability of the financial modelling, following a number of earlier attempts, which did not provide a reliable outcome, the outliers (the top and bottom 5%) of plans had been removed from the modelling, this had helped to reduce the variation. From initial calculations it had been determined that if the banding was applied to the existing cohort, this would result in an approx. £57k reduction in current spend; given the size of the budget this was a marginal reduction.
- 39.10 The Head of Education Strategy and Development explained that Gloucestershire's funding levels had been benchmarked with other authorities. South Gloucestershire and BANEs were particularly helpful as their banded funding levels had recently been agreed with the DfE as part of the DBV programme. There was close alignment between Gloucestershire's 'band rate value' and the South Gloucestershire and BANES funding levels.

- 39.11 The Head of Education Strategy and Development presented information on the financial impact of each of the three funding options for the new banding system. He explained that having discussed the modelling with the mainstream schools, the plan was for the local authority to move forward with option 2 (Gloucestershire's model with an uplift to the top band). The local authority had also modelled what the anticipated financial impact of inflationary uplifts would be, based on option 2. A table was presented which showed the increased costs to the High Needs block associated with a 1-5% inflationary uplift.
- 39.12 In response to a question, the Head of Education Strategy and Development explained that the intention of the local authority, by implementing a new mainstream banded funded system, was neither to increase nor reduce spend in High Needs. The aim was to develop a better structured and consistent system across the county, replicating existing funding levels through a common banded funding model.
- 39.13 A Forum member emphasised that the local authority had to avoid a scenario of schools receiving less funding to support children with additional needs. The funding allocation for each child needed to be adjusted to take into account cost pressures and inflation. She acknowledged that whilst the level of High Needs deficit had to be considered, the danger was that it could become the most pressing concern when first and foremost the focus should be on responsibility to meet the needs of children with SEND.
- 39.14 The Head of Education Strategy and Development explained that government spending plans for future years were likely to be insufficient to meet the cost pressures facing mainstream schools and therefore the expectation was that schools would experience real-term cuts to funding. An inflationary uplift to mainstream schools would help support those schools to be inclusive and help maintain financial stability.
- 39.15 There was a degree of uncertainty amongst members around the type and level of support that would be provided in accordance with each level of banding. The Head of Education Strategy and Development agreed to re-circulate information on the banding descriptors before the next meeting.
- ACTION: Head of Education Strategy and Development**
- 39.16 The Forum was informed that the plan was for the funding options for the new banding system to be shared with all mainstream schools. The Forum would make a decision on which option the local authority should implement in regard to the banded funding model and level of inflationary uplift, at its meeting on 12 January 2023.
- 39.17 The Head of Education Strategy and Development presented information on the new special school banded funding model. He explained that the modelling of special school banding was more straightforward as special schools already operated on a banding system. There were currently 5 levels of banding for special schools. The new model effectively conflated band C and D from the current system into one band. This had been undertaken due to there being limited progression between band C and

D within the current model. Officers had worked with all special schools in the county, to test the new model and as part of the process provided costed provision maps. He presented information on the financial impact of applying the three funding options to the existing cohort, and explained that following a meeting with special school headteachers there was a collective agreement that the local authority would need to use the current funding levels as the basis for the new funding model. Implementation of current funding levels would mean a small increase in cost, circa. £46k.

- 39.18 A member representing special school governors questioned whether consideration could be given to the implementation of a buffer system or an additional band, instead of the highest band for special schools remaining at the lower limit funding level. This would then avoid special schools having to seek exceptional funding through what was currently a complicated process, when the cost of meeting the needs of a child exceeded that figure. She pointed out that the upper limit funding level figure, for the highest band, had been determined by special schools following a considerable amount of work. In response, the Head of Education Strategy and Development acknowledged that the process for requesting exceptional funding could be quite convoluted. One of the aims was to make the process much more straight forward for special schools. He agreed that he would discuss this issue with the Gloucestershire Association of Special School Headteachers (GASSH).

ACTION: Head of Education Strategy and Development

- 39.19 The Head of Education Strategy and Development presented information on the financial impact of potential inflationary increases for 2023/24 on each of the three funding level options.
- 39.20 The Forum noted that officers would consult with special schools on the three banded funding options alongside an inflationary uplift for 2023/24 and the impact of the minimum funding guarantee. The Forum would make a decision on which funding level option and level of inflationary uplift the local authority should implement, at its meeting on 12 January 2023.
- 39.21 The Head of Education Strategy and Development pointed out that special schools did not receive any funding increases from other avenues, the only way they would receive an increase including inflationary would be through applying these to the banded funded model. Due to the rise in costs, particularly in regard to the support staff pay award, careful consideration would need to be given as to the level of increase special schools should receive. In response to a question, he reported that mainstream schools received funding increases through the National Funding Formula - in 2023/24 factor rates would rise between 2% and 4%.
- 39.22 Forum members representing special schools strongly emphasised the need for special schools to receive additional funding. Special schools were increasingly having to meet the needs of children with the most complex of needs. The consequence of no additional funding may mean that special schools could no longer afford the cost of meeting the needs of those children. This would then lead to further pressure on the independent and out of county special school budget. The work of the

f40 Group was recognised as being crucial in campaigning and lobbying central government for increased SEND funding.

39.23 In response to a question, the Head of Education Strategy and Development agreed that at the next meeting he would provide figures on what percentage of a special school's overall budget the different levels of inflationary increases represented.

ACTION: Head of Education Strategy and Development.

39.24 In response to a question, the Head of Education Strategy and Development clarified that if the local authority increased the level of funding going into special schools through an inflationary uplift, this would result in a further increase to the High Needs deficit, and not cuts to other services. Whilst he was conscious of the overall deficit position, the reason the deficit continued to rise was because the local authority had a statutory responsibility to meet the needs of children with SEND.

39.25 The Head of Education Strategy and Development reported that the Schools Forum working group met on the 31st October 2022 to consider the impact of the 1 in 40 model and to look at options for addressing the rising costs. Following a suggestion made at the working group the local authority would be working with a cohort of the 25 schools with the highest levels of funding to review how SEND provision was currently delivered and how the additional funding was being used. The intention was to gain assurance that the funding was having an impact, and also to review how effectively provision was being made for such a large cohort of children with SEND. There was recognition that there could be opportunities to improve the quality of provision and effective use of funding. He indicated that this was a good pathway to make longer-term decisions about the use of a targeted support model for mainstream schools. He agreed to share the scope of the review with the Forum.

ACTION: Head of Education Strategy and Development

39.26 In regard to the short-term, he stressed that officers would need to consider a reduction or capping of the 1 in 40 model for 2023/24 to prevent costs escalating whilst the review work took place. The current thinking was that the 1 in 40 model would be reduced to 1 in 30 or 1 in 35 for 2023/24. The rising level of EHCPs meant that the reduction to 1 in 35 would likely see the overall costs remain at current levels, as it only reduced spend based on current EHCP numbers by £653k, whereas a move to 1 in 30 would provide a saving of £1.6M compared to 2022/23. A decision would need to be made at the Schools Forum meeting in January 2023.

39.27 A member made the point that if the number of children with EHCPs was distributed more evenly across all schools in the local community, instead of just a few schools being perceived to be inclusive and able to offer the right support, then spend would reduce as fewer schools would need the additional funding. The current situation was that some mainstream schools did not have enough experience of supporting children with additional needs. She emphasised that if the funding through the model was to be phased out, then the local authority would need to introduce a way of ensuring that mainstream schools could effectively meet the needs of all children in the local area, otherwise the current position would just continue.

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- 39.28 The Chair pointed out that the number of children with EHCPs in mainstream schools was not distributed in a way in which reflected the proxy factors for SEND funding within the National Funding Formula. As a result, the model was needed to support schools which had a disproportionately high number of children with additional needs.
- 39.29 The Head of Education Strategy and Development reported that as part of the EHCP casework, the local authority was now taking a more directive approach in making sure that children attended their local school unless there was a strong reason as to why the school could not meet their needs. The local authority was in the process of mapping the movement and distribution of children with EHCPs across the county; he expected to be in a position to bring back information to the Forum on the results of this exercise at the June 2023 meeting.
- 39.30 The Head of Education Strategy and Development explained that work was ongoing to bring forward proposals on the future of mainstream school banding, special school banding and the 1 in 40 model, to the January 2023 Schools Forum meeting. He explained that as these were all High Needs funding decisions, whilst the Schools Forum in January 2023 would provide a view on the way forward for each of those key areas, the final decision would rest with the local authority.

40. F40 UPDATE

- 40.1 The Head of Education Strategy and Development gave an update on the recent activities of the f40 group. Whilst the core focus of the f40 group remained on influencing change in the way central government allocated education funding to local authorities, there was now increased focus on the quantum of funding and SEND funding.
- 40.2 Members were informed that the f40 group was undertaking a range of different activities in order to gain momentum in communicating the core messages around education funding. This included recent coverage in national media. The Chair of the f40 had also written to the new Prime Minister, the DfE's SEND Review Team, and the Secretary of State for Education.
- 40.3 The Head of Education Strategy and Development explained that the f40 would be working on undertaking a survey and developing case studies to present information to the DfE of the impact on schools of the real-term cuts.
- 40.4 He explained that there was an opportunity for a Forum member representing headteachers or governors to become involved in future meetings of the f40 Group. He emphasised that it would be of value to have additional Gloucestershire representation at the meetings particularly in regard to providing a school's perspective on the key issues.

41. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Forum noted that the next meeting would take place on 12 January 2023, in person at Shire Hall.

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Chair

Meeting concluded at 4.01 pm