

Gloucestershire Schools Forum

Outcome Report from the meeting of 16 March 2017

1. High Needs

The Forum received a detailed report on High Needs. The Forum noted the clear trends evident, including the increase in requests for statutory assessments and the increasing number of children with an Education Health and Care Plan, which are of a major concern in managing the High Needs budget over the longer term.

The High Needs budget for the current year is projected to overspend by £2.1M. A key area of overspending relates to Independent Special Schools (partly due to the closure of Coln House), which accounts for £1.55M of the overspend. Dedicated Schools Grant balances held for the purposes of supporting High Needs (with the exception of the specific reserves for Early Years and balances on funds de-delegated from maintained schools), will be used to meet the projected 2016/17 overspend.

An increase of £3.2M to Gloucestershire's High Needs allocation over 2016/17 means that the impact of the trends will be covered in budget for 2017/18, but with no allocation for inflation. However, the major concern is for the longer term, with no prospect of any cash increase in the High Needs block for four years. There is recognition that new approaches, such as more focus on early intervention, and understanding the root cause of the developing trends, will be needed if spending is to be contained within budget.

The Forum considered the DfE's presentation on its consultation on the National Funding Formula for High Needs, which set out the detail behind the proposed formula. Officers have ascertained that the proposed formula would not greatly disadvantage Gloucestershire. The basis of the proposed formula was therefore accepted, subject to pushing for a higher population formula factor which local analysis has found to be the greatest determinant of costs.

The Forum agreed its response to the consultation.

The Forum also noted that the development of a Strategic Plan for High Needs would be a major priority for the Forum.

2. Early Years

The Forum received an update on the Early Years Funding Formula for 2017/18.

The Forum members representing Early Years providers, indicated to the Forum that in the main providers are happy with the proposed Early Years Single Funding Formula. However, the concern remains that it will not be financially viable for some providers to provide the additional 15 hours of childcare for parents from September 2017, with a base rate of just £3.90 per hour. However, there is recognition that some smaller businesses may benefit with more children coming into settings. There are also concerns around the precarious financial situation of the Early Years sector overall, given the rising business rates, the living wage rising to £9 per hour over time, and increased pension costs.

The Forum agreed the Early Years Single Funding Formula for 2017/18 as set out in the report.

3. National Funding Formula (Mainstream) Update

The Forum agreed its final response to the National Funding Formula Consultation Stage 2.

The Forum's response sets out the major concerns around the proposed formula, with a particular reference made throughout to the existence of the 3% funding floor which locks in advantage for some schools at the expense of pupils, including those with additional needs, in other schools; and the perverse consequences for children with additional needs due to the depressed core funding.

4. Capital

The Forum was updated on the position of the Education Capital Programme 2016/17. The Forum noted the graph of spend against profile, set out in Annex 1 of the report.

The Forum was pleased to note that the DfE had recently confirmed that the bid for The Rissington School's new build permanent pre-school provision, had been successful. Gloucestershire had submitted the permitted six bids for funding, as part of the £40M of capital funding nationally from central government to support the introduction of 30 hours free child care for working parents from September 2017. Whilst previously the DfE had announced that none of the bids were successful, following additional funding being identified this one bid has now been approved.

5. Schools Forum Constitution

The Forum reviews its Constitution and membership annually at every March meeting. The Constitution complies with the Schools Forum 2012 regulations, and the make-up of the Forum's membership complies with the Schools Forum Operation Guide, so no changes were proposed.

Due to the uncertainty around school funding as a result of the National Funding Formula, the biannual Schools Forum Elections due to take place in March of this year, have been postponed until 2018. The term of office for all non-school members and half of the membership of the schools members was due to end on 31 March 2017 and has therefore been extended to 31 March 2018.

However, the following seats are vacant or are about to become vacant, and a nomination process for new representatives for those seats is currently underway:

- Primary Headteacher (Maintained) (2 seats)
- Primary (Maintained) Governor
- Secondary (Maintained) Governor

In addition, from the end of June 2017, a Secondary (Academy) School Governor Seat will become vacant, and a nomination process will begin shortly for a new representative.

Full details of the election process plus the nomination forms are available on the Schools Forum web page: <http://bit.ly/2nr8sMm>

6. F40

A briefing for MPs took place in Westminster on 20 February 2017.

A letter, signed by 38 out of 41 f40 member authorities, has been sent to the Prime Minister setting out the adverse consequences of the proposed formula.

Gloucestershire's MPs continue to be kept up to date on F40 developments.

On 13 March 2017, a small group of Forum members met with David Owen, Chief Executive of the GFirst LEP, Gloucestershire's Local Enterprise Partnership, to consider different ways of going forward.

7. Update from the office of the Regional Schools Commissioner South-West England

Steve Savory, as Deputy Director supporting the Regional Schools Commissioner's Office, updated the Forum on recent developments.

8. Local and Regional Strategic Planning and the Role of the Local Authority

The Forum noted the discussion paper 'Shaping the role of the County Council in Education'. The paper was produced to set the future direction for the Council's role in education and to consider collaborative working arrangements.

The Forum also noted the Regional Schools Commissioner Strategy Paper for the South West 2016/17.

The reports of the Forum are available here. <http://bit.ly/2nVoT0c>

Gillian Hayward - Chair