Gloucestershire Schools Forum
Outcome Report from the meeting of 11 January 2018

1. Gloucestershire County Council Budget Consultation
The Forum received a presentation which provided a summary of the draft budget for 2018/19. Full details of the draft budget for 2018/19, and the Medium Term Financial Strategy for the period covering 2018/19 to 2020/21, were presented to Cabinet on 13 December 2017.

It is proposed that Children and Families achieve cost reductions of £0.89M and receive cost increases of £11.36M, a net increase in budget of £10.47M. The investment being proposed is in recognition of the pressures on the Vulnerable Children and Young People element of the budget during 2017/18, which is forecast an overspend of £9.38M before the application of reserves. The majority of the investment, (a figure of £7.69M) is for the Extra Placements Budget to meet the cost and demand pressures for ensuring the most appropriate placements for the increasing numbers of children in care.

Details on the proposed changes to the budget, the cost pressures, and the risks and challenges, are outlined in the presentation (a copy of the presentation slides has been uploaded to the Council’s website and can be viewed via the link at the end of this report).

The Forum acknowledge that the Council is setting a budget within a challenging funding environment and is overall supportive of the budget proposal.

The Council’s budget consultation survey runs until 17 January 2018. Final approval of the budget will be considered at the Cabinet meeting on 31 January 2018 and at the Full Council meeting on 14 February 2018.

2. Dedicated Schools Grant
The Forum received a report on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for 2018/19.

At the Forum’s last meeting on 20 October 2017, the Forum agreed a recommended approach to the local schools formula for 2018/19. However, since that meeting, the DfE has issued a revised dataset based on the October 2017 school census, and the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) announced some rule changes to allow different methods of calculation to be used in the Authority Proforma Tool.

The DfE also announced the DSG for each authority for 2018/19. Gloucestershire’s position is that there will be an increase of £14.8M (3.5%) from the current 2017/18 DSG, amounting to £441.7M.

The formula was subsequently revised, to take account of those changes, but it remains within the spirit of the Forum’s previously recommended formula. Gloucestershire’s proposed formula now uses the revised dataset, factor rates 100% equivalent to those stated for the NFF and delivers the minimum pupil allocations of £3,300 for primary and £4,600 for secondary.

Officers have emphasised however that the final totals used in the formula still differ from those in the illustrative NFF issued by the DfE. Local Authorities are not able to fully replicate the NFF. The reasons behind this were outlined in the recent consultation paper to schools.

The announced Schools Block funding has been adjusted for the previously agreed de-delegation amounts, set out in the report, and the retention of £0.966M for the Schools Growth Fund, to arrive at a total for inclusion in the Authority Proforma Tool for delegation to schools in 2018/19 of £347.459M.

The Forum recommended Council agree the revised 2018/19 formula as set out at Annex B to the report for submission to the ESFA.

The total for the Early Years Block for 2018/19 is £33.186M (the figure will be updated following the 2018 and 2019 census). This represents an increase in funding of £3.126M relating to the full year effect of the additional 15 hours entitlement for eligible working parents, which commenced September 2017.

The Forum recommended Council agree:
- To set the target for Early Years central costs at the maximum level (5% in 2018/19).
- To the hourly rates for 2, 3, and 4-year olds to remain at the same level as 2017/18.
Following an update in the ESFA Operational Guide on redetermination of budgets where pupils have been excluded, there will be a change in the way Gloucestershire deals with changes and transfers of funds relating to permanently excluded pupils. Taking effect from 1 April 2018, the change means that any calculations relating to the funding transfers for permanently excluded pupils will only relate to the financial year in which the pupil is excluded. Members of the Forum are concerned that funding transfers to schools taking in excluded pupils will only relate to the proportion of the financial year remaining, so from the official date of exclusion to the 31 March. The Lead Commissioner for Education Strategy and Development will convey the Forum’s concerns.

3. High Needs
The Forum received a report which outlined the block funding for 2018/19 and provided an update on the High Needs Programme.

The High Needs block total for 2018/19 is £57.567M. The forecast for 2017/18 shows a projected overspend of £1.2M. DSG balances to support High Needs at 31 March 2018 stand at around £2.1M. Officers informed the Forum that it is inevitable that there will need to be a future draw on balances to support the 2018/19 budget.

The new approach to High Needs is being developed in the context of increasing demand and to meet needs more effectively with less money in real terms. The plan is for the changes arising from the High Needs programme to have an impact from the Autumn term resulting in a balanced budget being set for 2019/20. The Forum considered the latest update of the High Needs Programme which indicated where attention is currently being focused.

A Briefing and Engagement Survey, for parents, schools and other stakeholders, has been sent to relevant parties, to gather views on the ideas being put forward on the future of High Needs. The deadline for responses is 28 February 2018. Consultation on the Strategic Plan will take place from May 2018, with changes phased in from September 2018.

The High Needs budget is set to undergo a major review at the end of January. The Forum will consider the budget for High Needs 2018/19 and the medium term financial plan at its meeting on 15 March 2018.

4. Elections 2018
The Forum received a report which outlined the plans for the Schools Forum elections 2018. Information on the seats up for election and the nomination/election process can be found on the Schools Forum webpage: LINK

The Forum noted the report.

5. Schools Forum Workplan 2018
The Forum noted the proposed Workplan for 2018.

6. F40
The results of the F40 questionnaire on Fair Funding for schools determined that F40 members felt that a fairer funding allocation to schools had not been achieved, and that the Group should continue on campaigning for a fair funding deal. A series of F40 Executive Committee meeting dates have been scheduled to take place over the next year, however there is some uncertainty about how the Group will go forward given that the chair is planning to retire and the secretary is stepping down, both by the end of 2018.

The F40 Group is staging a conference on the NFF, its implications for f40 members and how f40’s fair funding campaign should develop in the future. The conference will be held on Monday 26 March 2018 between 11am and 4pm, in Westminster London.

The reports of the Forum are available here: LINK

Gillian Hayward - Chair