

Gloucestershire Schools Forum Outcome Report from the meeting of 20 October 2017

1. School Funding 2018/19

The Forum considered the implications for Gloucestershire schools and academies following the recent government announcements on the National Funding Formula (NFF). The key announcements are outlined in the report.

The resulting consequence of the announcements is that the Schools Block for Gloucestershire increases by 1.94% for 2018/19 and a further 1.08% for 2019/20. The introduction of a minimum per pupil element has had a major impact on the outcome of the NFF for Gloucestershire secondary schools, particularly those with low levels of additional needs. All schools will gain from the 0.5% uplift in the baseline. Members of the Forum do feel strongly however that whilst schools will see an increase to their budgets, in real terms, this would not cover the increasing costs for schools.

Annex A to the report shows the comparison between the 2017/18 baseline funding and the NFF for each school in Gloucestershire. Annex B to the report shows a comparison between the revised NFF and the 2017/18 Gloucestershire unit values. There are still significant differences between the two formulas; a key one being that the basic amount per pupil is still lower in the NFF despite the uplift in the revised NFF.

For 2018/19 and 2019/20 the funding allocation for Gloucestershire will comprise the NFF allocation for each school aggregated to local authority level.

Whilst the Forum acknowledge that the proposed NFF does not represent what was campaigned for, its view is that as full implementation of the NFF is forthcoming, it would be prudent to commence the adjustment towards it as rapidly as possible. The Forum therefore agreed that the local formula for 2018/19 and 2019/20 be set in line with the NFF factors and in proportion to the values quoted including the 0.5% uplift to the per pupil element of the baseline for each school. And that the methodology in the report at paragraph 4.3 be applied, with the relevant permissions being sought from the DfE

The Forum has been informed that officers across the local authorities have concerns about the Authority Proforma Tool which must be used to submit the formula to the DfE. Currently the tool does not include the capping and floor mechanisms used by the DfE to calculate the NFF. Consequently, officers cannot deliver a formula for Gloucestershire schools that, as proposed by the Schools Forum, closely replicates the NFF.

The High Needs budget is under huge pressure. The latest forecast is for an overspend of around £800,000 in 2017/18. Whilst previously Schools Forums have been able to agree a transfer from the Schools Block to off-set an overspend, the ability to do this under the NFF will cease from 2020/21. Members acknowledged that it could only be a one-off transfer and that school budgets were under great pressure too. The Forum was therefore in support of no transfer being made for 2018/19. Members agreed that the focus should continue to be on working with schools on new approaches to identifying and meeting additional needs.

The Forum considered the proposals for de-delegations. The Forum's maintained schools representatives (by sector) agreed de-delegation at the per pupil rates shown in the report for:

- In-year increases in pupil numbers – primary.
- Targeted intervention – primary.
- Union facilities – primary.
- Local authorities' statutory duties for maintained schools.

The Forum agreed that the policy for primary pupil number increases between October Census dates above thresholds, should remain unchanged.

The Central Schools Services Block comprises funding for ongoing responsibilities to fund local authorities for the statutory duties that they hold for both maintained school and academies. It is

comprised of four budgets: Copyright License charge; co-ordination of admissions; Schools Forum costs, and centrally retained duties. This was previously covered in the Schools Block and the Forum would agree to top-slice the Dedicated Schools Grant at appropriate levels to fund those budgets. For 2018/19 onwards, the central funding will be allocated to local authorities based on a national average rate. Gloucestershire will lose approximately £100,000 (4%) by the end of 2019/20 as a result.

Please note that consultation with schools on the funding formula for 2018/19 will take place in November, and this will include evening briefing meetings on dates to be arranged. The Forum will make its final recommendations on the formula at its meeting on 11 January 2018, ahead of submission of the final formula to the DfE on 19 January 2018.

2. High Needs

The Forum received an update on the High Needs programme and the implications of the proposed National Funding Formula for High Needs.

The Government has announced that there will be no changes to the proposed NFF for High Needs. However, in line with the NFF for schools, every local authority will receive a 0.5% increase per head in 2018/19 and a further 0.5% per head in the 2019/20 over the 2017/18 baseline.

As a result, Gloucestershire's High Needs Block will increase by 0.91% in 2018/19 and a further 0.47% in 2019/20. Whilst the Forum welcomes the additional funding for the two years, it still represents a real term reduction of around 2.5% before allowing for population increases. In addition, as outlined above, the High Needs Block is forecast to be overspent by £800,000 in 2017/18.

In accordance with the expectation that local authorities are to develop a strategic plan for High Needs, a new approach to High Needs is being developed. The Forum received an update on the High Needs project plan, and the initial priorities have been Alternative Provision and exclusions, and engaging with schools on the inclusion issues.

The Forum was pleased to hear that the roll-out of the Restorative Practice approach at Tewkesbury School had progressed well and had good prospects of a positive impact on attendance and exclusions. The Forum agreed the investment proposal for Restorative Practice, which will enable the programme to be expanded to other schools.

The Forum considered a detailed report on exclusions which provided an analysis of the findings of the permanent and fixed period exclusions in Gloucestershire schools during the 2016/17 academic year. Gloucestershire is the highest permanent excluding local authority when compared with its statistical neighbours, and one of the highest nationally. The number of permanent exclusions is continuing to rise (there was a 2% increase in 2016/17 compared to 2015/16). The Forum was pleased to note that the County Council has set up a Scrutiny Task Group on exclusions which will begin its deliberations in November.

3. F40

The f40 group has met following the government announcements. The mood during the f40 meeting was one of disappointment. Members of the group do not feel that a fairer funding allocation to schools has been achieved, and consideration is now being given as to whether the f40 should continue to campaign for a fairer funding deal, and if so, how. A questionnaire has been circulated to all local authority members of the f40 group, to seek their views, with a deadline for responses of Friday 10 November 2017. Members of the Forum considered the questionnaire at its meeting, and the overwhelming consensus was that the campaign should continue.

4. The Next Meeting

The November meeting of the Forum has been cancelled, and the next meeting of the Forum will now take place on Thursday 11 January 2018 at 2pm, in Shire Hall.

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

Gillian Hayward - Chair