**South Gloucestershire Schools Forum**

**Minutes of Meeting held on**

**Thursday 8 July 2021**

**Microsoft Teams**

**PRESENT:**

Sarah Lovell (Chair) Finance Director, Cabot Learning Federation

Dave Baker (Vice Chair) CEO, Olympus Academy Trust

Richard Aquilina Governor, Bailey’s Court Primary School

Mark Freeman Headteacher, St Michael’s Primary School

Clare Haughton Page Park Pre-School

David Jenkins Governor, Crossways Schools

Nicola Jones Representative Special Academies

Carl Lander Hanham Primary Federation (HPF)

Steve Moir Headteacher, Bradley Stoke School

Ross Newman Early Years Schools Forum Representative

Pippa Osborne Headteacher Christ Church Junior School

Diane Owen Chair, King’s Oak Academy

Linda Porter Governor, Watermore School

Fr. Malcolm Strange Diocese of Bristol Representative

Susie Weaver Executive Headteacher, Cabot Learning Federation

David Williams Diocese of Gloucester

Louisa Wilson Headteacher, St. Stephens C of E Junior School

**Officers:**

Mustafa Salih, Head of Financial Management and Business Support

Hilary Smith, Head of Education, Learning and Skills

Deb Luter, Schools Finance Officer

Hugh Disley, Strategic Lead for Inclusion & SEND

Alison Davies, Business Support Manager

Maxine Winter, Governor Development Consultant (Observer)

**Others:**

Tamsin Moreton, Enable Trust Representative (Observer)

1. **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

Attendees were welcomed by the Chair.

1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Erica Williams, Trevor Jones, Chris Sivers, Louise Leader, Kim Garland, Kirby Littlewood, Nicola Jones, Bernice Webber

1. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**
2. **ANY OTHER ITEMS THE CHAIR DECIDES ARE URGENT**

None.

1. **SCHOOLS FORUM MEMBERSHIP (Ali Davies)**

Item 11 to cover the Membership.

Only two changes: Richard Aquilina has resigned, and this will be his last meeting. Clare Haughton is happy to continue as the Early Years representative.

Welcome to Ross Newman now standing as the Early Years representative.

1. **ANY OTHER ITEMS THE CHAIR DECIDES ARE URGENT (Sarah Lovell)**

None.

1. **MINUTES FROM LAST MEETING – 13 MAY 2021**

**Schools Budget Consultation – Options**

Mustafa confirmed that a letter has been sent to all schools on behalf of the LA and Schools Forum – closed.

**Update in SEND Clusters**

Hugh Disley (HD) to give an update on the presentation at Item 7 on behalf of Ali Ford who was unable to attend.

Remainder of the minutes recorded as accurate.

1. **UPDATE ON SEND CLUSTERS**

HD gave a summary of the main points in the report as follows:

Evaluation highlights significant focus on building confidence of parents in the offer for SEN Support. Despite the COVID situation, Clusters have continued to focus on the project and develop further, especially through the close working of SENCOs within each area.

Data shows that there is significant increase in SEN support being considered as highly or moderately impactful for children and young people, including occupational therapy, behaviour and autism during the last year.

Overall the report shows that we have built firm foundations on which to accelerate progress through, possibly, an easier year in 2021/22.

Worth noting that recently appointed Principal Educational Psychologist, Helen Cox, took up post on Monday, bringing significant additional leadership capacity to the service.

Looking ahead, Helen will consider the role of the EPS and how they can best add value to the clusters, especially in relation to working with Parents/Carers. The Parent and Carer Forum will be involved in supporting the evaluation of anything new that is taken forward.

HD thanked the schools and Integra for their support and also noted the significant efforts and difference that Ali Ford and Claire Heron have made to the team since their arrival in April.

Recommendations:

* To note the report and to have a more robust evaluation in place for next year.
* To support the chairs of the different clusters in encouraging participation of the inclusion of all schools which will add benefit in all we do.

HS stated that there is now a level of stability across the whole team with all vacancies filled by permanent staff and much more integrated working across Education, Learning and Skills (ELS) to support improvements in SEND. Additionally, closer involvement of Integra, for example in training and support and guidance to SENCOs. Further, we are building closer relationships with Social Care and Health which will have an impact on the support we can give to the SEN Clusters. There is a real appetite across the Clusters to work together via the Cluster Boards and move forward as one.

Diane Owen (DO) – Why no feedback from Clusters?

HD – We are still trying to get that information – the day to day running since January has been difficult for some schools in particular.

Sarah Lovell (SL) – How can the Forum promote the SEN clusters’ work and support the Cluster leads? How do we encourage colleagues and try to get them on board to look at the local need; the more we get involved, the better the improvement will be.

Steve Moir (SM) – The complexities and challenges we are dealing with require time and I think the realisation for all of us to see the real impact is going to take more than a year in putting infrastructure together and encouraging colleagues.

HD – system-wide support for speech and language communication issues for example, cannot be resolved in 2 or 3 years. Although we can start to commission better which may deliver some quick wins, the majority of impact will be in medium and longer term.

**Action: To bring back a progress report on the impact of the Clusters to Schools Forum in the autumn.**

DO – Who has been the audience of the presentation? Is it just Schools Forum? Should it be seen by schools as it shows positive things?

HD – We have been sharing with SENCOs and trying to refine the presentation and share it at a broader event and the High Needs Working Group (HNWG).

1. **Update on working with Schools on Budget Planning and Schools with Financial Challenges in 2020/21 and planned activity for 2021/22**

Mustafa Salih (MS) gave a summary of the report, which is for information. We set up a process in the council amongst the key officers to try and monitor and review schools requiring more support with their financial position and management. It covers more than Schools in Financial Difficulty (SIFD) in trying to identify schools that might be having a longer-term challenge. We meet on a regular basis and agree schools needing a bit more support through Integra.

Within the report it does show that maintained schools’ balances improved year on year on average by the end of 2021. There are still a number of schools having difficulty balancing their budgets and focus.

Deb Luter (DL) went through the report and asked for any feedback.

Richard Aquilina (RA) – Is training up to speed for governors? Are governors trained for those SIFD?

DL – There were 3 sessions covering all aspects of income in schools which were very well attended and will be running again in September this year. We do encourage schools to include governors and for those who have not, we can recommend they come along. Schools find it difficult to get governors to attend but Headteachers can also attend the training.

HS – We do identify those schools which are struggling and will be encouraging associated governors to attend necessary training courses.

DL – In the letters that go out to Category 1 and 2 schools, we recommend that governors attend the training.

HS – Impact of the Small Schools Strategy. We are being more proactive looking at what opportunities exist, identifying that many struggle in terms of the leadership costs they are carrying and, therefore, what opportunities might there be to take a more collaborative approach. We are also focusing on early years and future sustainability. Additionally what other opportunities may exist to meet the wider needs of the community.

SL – We are still allocating payments to 2 schools we approved a few years ago. How is that progressing and an update on Chipping Sodbury School?

MS – That is finished, and the full amount is now available going forward.

Chipping Sodbury is now an Academy. Agreed with the ESFA their final balance would be transferred to the ESFA. That final deficit is significantly reduced from where the school started and was able to get on top of its financial situation which is a positive outcome.

DO – Are there are any plans to advertise the availability of the funding for SIFD?

MS – We do not advertise for Maintained schools but to have it as an option for those schools in financial difficulty. Slightly different for Academies as we do not work with those schools, but we could look at that.

**Action: At the next Forum give a reminder of the availability of funding for SIFD.**

1. **High Needs Working Group (HNWG) Update for Information**

Susie Weaver – Reflecting on the way the purpose of the group has changed over the last year in the Terms of Reference. Previously we didn’t have the staffing and structure in place and we were unclear about how the HNWG was providing support.

We recognised that this is a long game, that requires focus on different strands and themes. Also that next year we need to focus on better communication and ensure awareness through distribution across a wider network.

There are some strong points of progress. There is high engagement and good commitment with the LA team which will continue to next year. We have agreed to identify a special schools’ governor to join the HNWG.

In Theme 2, we are looking at the top-up funding and how that might look and will be modelling that up to review those changes.

A summary of the 5 Themes will be pulled together and will need to be shared with Mustafa and then Schools Forum to be communicated to the broader sector.

There is good involvement with parent/carers now and use that engagement to feed into the LA work of the joined-up themes across the LA.

HD – Kate East has drafted a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between schools and the Cluster Boards which will be a formal document, so they know what they are signing up to and the commitment. There will also be Terms of Reference and we are looking at Educational Psychologists and strategic approach as opposed to an individual approach.

1. Dedicated Schools Grant 2020/21 Outturn

MS – Important background is that we still have a large deficit and that cumulative deficit is continuing to grow. The outturn for 2021 is £7.5k showing an improved position compared to Q3 which is quite positive.

The other positive position is on the Early Years Block and the potential for that. Schools Forum approved the proposal on using the underspend on the schools’ block to offset those early years ones and that the early years deficit has been covered. The ongoing risk in that area has been eliminated. Still in conversation with the ESFA to fund that shortfall.

In terms of the £7.5k overspend, the HNWG is focused on changing elements to bring down all those themes and try to reduce that overspend over the next 3 to 4 years.

Each budget is ring fenced so we know if it is a budget that is insufficient and that we are going to spend more than the available budget. The pressures continue to be the same, EHCP, top-ups, out of authority placements and the numbers of exclusions continue to be high. Still a massive challenge and a large deficit.

SL – It is a better position than Q3 and we recognise, as a Schools Forum, that HNWG needs to focus on this on behalf of the Forum.

1. Schools Forum Membership, Constitution & Self-Assessment

Purpose of the report is to review the membership of the Schools Forum. The latest membership list will be updated following the meeting.

Constitution of the Schools Forum will be reviewed in the autumn 2021 together with the membership.

Ross Newman has joined Schools Forum as the representative for the Early Years Group.

We will take forward the Maintained primary vacancy and the position of academies with the relevant groups.

Review of the membership will be a standing item for each meeting.

Latest guidance from the ESFA around meetings allows for virtual meetings to take place indefinitely but we recognise the need for face to face also and so will consider which meetings that would work best for.

Dave Baker (DB) – Re point 17 of the self- assessment - Are we sharing key information with the groups we are representing?

SL – How to ensure we can access those groups we are representing?

Ross Newman (RN) – Similar difficulties with early years providers and how to create a better strategy to get more views of the early years sector to feedback to this group.

**Action: Please feedback on point 17 to AD so that we can see if there are any gaps in sharing key information.**

**Recommendations:**

1. Change from academies membership – 1 more primary and 1 less secondary.
2. Update list and vacancies following the meeting and election of new members.
3. Review the constitution.
4. See action above re point 17 of the self-assessment – all to feedback to AD
5. **Any Other Business**

**Leavers:**

On behalf of the Schools Forum, Dave Baker thanked Mark Freeman for his sterling service and commitment which dates back well over 10 years. He is absolutely all about children and ensuring effective use of the public purse. We will miss your challenge and support Mark.

Mark Freeman – Thank you to Dave. On the Forum, when it started, I would really echo that it is important to challenge, and we should be about representing our constituents. It is a great Local Authority and never wanted to go anywhere else and have valued the relationship. It has been quite hard work and interesting and hopefully I have contributed over the years.

Sarah Lovell said a big thank you to Richard Aquilina who has been an active participant in terms of challenge, really represented the governing body on the Forum and will be missed.

No further business.

Meeting closed.