

South Gloucestershire Schools Forum
Minutes of Meeting held on
Thursday 7 July 2022
Microsoft Teams

PRESENT:

Sarah Lovell (Chair)	Chief Operating Officer, Cabot Learning Federation
Dave Baker (Vice Chair)	CEO, Olympus Academy Trust
Julia Anwar	Head of Business Operations, Olympus Academy Trust
Jo Dent	Maintained Primary Governor Representative
Kim Garland	Headteacher, Brimsham Green School
Clare Haughton	Page Park Preschool
David Jenkins	Governor, Crossways Schools
Nicola Jones	Representative Special Academies
Louise Leader	Headteacher, Pathways Learning Centre
Pippa Osborne	Headteacher Christ Church Junior School
Terry Redfern (rep Kim Garland)	Brimsham Green School
Will Roberts	CEO, Castle School Education Trust (CSET)
Susie Weaver	Executive Headteacher, Cabot Learning Federation
Bernice Webber	Headteacher, Old Sodbury CE Primary School
David Williams	Diocese of Gloucester

Executive Members:

Erica Williams, Cabinet Member - Schools, Skills & Employment

Officers:

Mustafa Salih, Head of Financial Management and Business Support

Hilary Smith, Head of Education, Learning and Skills

Caroline Warren, Finance Business Partner

Deb Luter, Schools Finance Officer

Others:

Justine Poulton, Audit Manager, Internal Audit

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Attendees were welcomed by the Chair.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Trevor Jones, Erica Williams, Chris Sivers, Mustafa Salih, Kirby Littlewood, Stuart Evans, Diane Owen, Lisa Parker, Katherine Marks, Claire Hill, Fr. Malcolm Strange, Steve Moir, Louisa Wilson, Caroline Warren, Ross Newman

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – Dave Baker and Julia Anwar declared an interest re Item 9

4. SCHOOLS FORUM MEMBERSHIP (Ali Davies)

4A – Election of a New Chair

Sarah Lovell is resigning as Chair of the Schools Forum from the end of this academic year. There were no nominations received in advance or at the meeting.

Dave Baker, Vice Chair, is prepared to stand in until we can find a permanent Chair and happy to cover in the interim. Sarah will continue to chair this meeting and Dave will be the interim Chair from the next meeting.

Terms of office for the Chair is 4 years.

4B – Membership Update

The 2 governor vacancies have now been filled and they will start from the September meeting. Substitute governor to be recruited.

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

None

6. MINUTES FROM LAST MEETING – 12th May 2022

Special schools letter

The Special Schools letter has been sent to schools by Mustafa Salih. Special schools were happy with the response.

Outstanding item was in relation to the Minimum Funding Guarantee.

Action: Hilary to ask Mustafa if a letter has been sent to schools.

Remainder of the Minutes recorded as accurate.

7. Financial Regulations for Schools (Justine Poulton)

This report is for information.

By way of introduction, Justine is the Audit Manager in the Internal Audit team within the Council. This paper is aimed specifically at maintained schools as academies have their own financial regulations.

The Financial regulations for schools were last updated in 2019. This document is the refresh as there have been quite a significant number of additions. The schools financial value standard (SFVS) is a mandatory self-assessment return produced by Government each year. It must be completed by all LA maintained schools and there is a requirement for the Chief Financial Officer to sign a declaration to confirm that every school has completed the exercise.

We are liaising with a small group of business managers, and we have compiled a consultation document for them and are happy to share that.

Internal audit services will collate any feedback over the summer, and it will be circulated to all maintained schools for September 2022.

If schools have any concerns, we can talk and support with that. Justine's contact email is Justine.poulton@southglos.gov.uk if there are any questions.

Action:

Members of the Schools Forum are invited to consider the contents of the Financial Regulations for Schools and provide any feedback on their content and layout to internalauditmail@southglos.gov.uk. (Please clearly mark your response so that it is clear it is financial regulations for schools feedback. Please forward all responses by 30th July 2022.)

8. Dedicated Schools Grant 2020-21 Outturn (Hilary Smith)

This paper provides Schools Forum with the 2020/21 DSG Outturn. We are in a better position than we were forecasting at the last Schools Forum. There is still an overspend but it is an improving picture at the start of the in-year by £1,267k and some of this success has been achieved by the work we have been doing on the debt recovery and we must make sure we stay on track especially when we submit our safety valve.

The report goes through all the elements of the DSG, including Pathways and we will be looking at each of those in detail to see if there is any more we can do to stay on track in relation to the Deficit Recovery Plan.

There is an underspend of £361,000 and that relates to recruitment of staffing and, consequently, a high level of vacancies. For example, in EHC teams and this is an

issue because it impacts on our ability to improve and presents a risk to delivery of the safety valve deficit recovery plan. So we are investing in creating a 7th EHC team of a Senior EHC coordinator and two EHC coordinators. As a new approach to creating more efficient additional capacity, we are creating a new Assistant EHC Coordinator post to be first point of contact for families and schools, cover the duty contact line, support preparedness for needs assessments and for tribunals. There will be one assistant per team, and we believe this will make a significant difference.

Good news on the Early Years block where there is an underspend of £123,000 and, based on the outturn position for 2022/23, the deficit has been fully recovered.

JA – Any progress in the overspend due to the reliance on out of area LA placements?

HS – There is satisfactory progress in reducing our out of area placements.

9. Growth Funding – Additional requirement to support bulge classes (Hilary Smith)

To make Schools Forum members aware of a developing position of the report we brought to the last Schools Forum on growth funding and some areas getting quite tough, in respect of specific pressures with high yields to housing and young people from overseas. We have no places in Yrs 7 and 8 in Patchway and Filton; we have approached Olympus, who have agreed they will support bulge classes of Yrs 8 and 9 at Patchway and we will be providing growth funding to Patchway to support those bulge classes.

Thornbury housing development and Ukraine families being supported and sponsored by people has resulted in no places available in Yrs 1 and 2 so we are in discussion about bulge classes in Yrs 2 and 3. No implications on the funding as it can be accommodated within the growth funding.

We had on the agenda, now deferred to the October meeting, a report on the commissioning of school places. Shane Billingham is covering the work and is doing quite a detailed analysis of where we are on housing yield, compared to where we thought we would be with those housing developments. Also impact of children coming in from overseas from Hong Kong, refugees, and Ukraine. Because of what is happening in relation to fuel prices, contractors are pulling transport services. Historically some families in South Glos expressed a preference to send their children to secondary schools in BANES but, with some of those routes withdrawn, those parents are choosing to stay in South Glos and this is also having a small impact.

SL – Are we confident the schools selected for growth are appropriate considering there are other schools under capacity?

HS – Yes, the location of the families is in an area of saturation. Transportation to other schools is not an option.

SL – Question from a forum member in advance of the meeting – One third of the Ukraine pupil funding is being retained by the council. What is this being spent on?

HS – There is funding for Ukraine children with 2/3rds passed over to the schools and 1/3 retained centrally to cover the cost of services where it makes most sense to coordinate/commission centrally.

Anything we do not use, we will distribute across schools and have a contingency. We are still awaiting information from the Department for Education.

We have commissioned English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes and are holding them in certain venues, and we are looking to take some of the provision out on an outreach basis to our communities to ensure access.

10. High Needs Working Group (HNWG) Update

DB – There has been a massive amount of progress in all the areas. There is engagement with parent groups and there was an update on the Early Years (EY) work streams, all of them see us in a better position than at the start of the year. There remains work to do.

HS – We are improving our in-year overspend but we are still overspending.

In terms of Early Years, which has got off to a good start, panels are up and running from 12th April – transitional funding from EY to reception is proving cost effective. Quite a few children in EY with complex needs.

The work to support families, childminders and training for childminders is really moving at a pace.

Risk areas – SGC Lead in Early Years is remains absent due to illness so we have had to put an interim arrangement in place to manage those risks. EHC team is a significant risk with a number of unfilled vacancies. We are responding and dealing, as appropriate.

The safety valve – positive impact on themes 5 and 6. Theme 5 reliance on independent placements and we have a plan and are taking it forward.

We are listening to schools about the banding changes. High levels of commitment and good dialogue.

DB – There is more demand for special school placements and the communication from the special schools is pertinent.

LL – Risk Register – how we can pull those elements to reassure Schools Forum to communicate those things?

HS – Feedback from schools on communications – the letter for parents was not accessible, so we have now distributed an easy read version. Also, schools raised concerns that we were not consulting parents on the changes to our financial arrangements. This is because the financial arrangements are for the LA and schools, but we need to ensure that we demonstrate that the changes will allow us to sustain services and improvement. Therefore, the approach with parents has been to also focus on the bigger picture and that the new arrangements are needed and that is the right approach for children and young people.

With increasing demand, we also need to make sure that we use our specialist provision for the most complex children and therefore continue to develop our capacity to support more children in mainstream and continue to shift the balance to earlier intervention and support through the SEN clusters. We have been experiencing challenges with sustaining leadership of the clusters; Headteachers are busy people and there is a time commitment to lead a cluster board, with complicated financial and commissioning arrangements so we need to consider how we make sure it is not too burdensome and that succession planning is easier.

Key risk across the system of staff in EY and EHC team and responding to the implementation changes – key staffing and support, school leader level and LA level too.

LL – Can the Schools Forum help and support the central team to drive this forward?

SL – Capacity to deliver it but if there is anything we can support with the cluster leads, please let us know.

11. Schools Forum Forward Plan

Constitution for the Autumn meeting.

Forward Plan to be circulated before the next meeting.

Proposed dates for the next academic year were agreed as:

Thursday 22 September

Thursday 3 November

Thursday 1 December

Thursday 19 January

Thursday 2 March

Thursday 11 May

Thursday 6 July

12. Any Other Business

DB – –I want to say on behalf of the Schools Forum what a brilliant Chair you have been. Your knowledge, attention to detail, willingness to hold to account and to challenge have been phenomenal and we are all really grateful for that. You will be a significant loss to the Forum. I was hoping the meeting would be in person so that I could present flowers but will make sure you get them tomorrow!

HS – Thank you Sarah on behalf of the LA officer team, with no disrespect to previous post holders, for raising the bar in terms of professionalism, support, and challenge and therefore for doing such a wonderful job.

SL – I have been part of the Forum since 2016 and Chair for 3 years. It has certainly been a great experience with some interesting times. The role of the Forum is important. What we do, and how we work together, LA and schools, to make sure funding is beneficial to all pupils. It has been an absolute pleasure and I wish everybody lots of luck. Thank you.

Finish