**South Gloucestershire Schools Forum**

**Minutes of Meeting held on**

**Thursday 25 March 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

Nicky Edwards Natural Choice Nurseries

Stuart Evans South Gloucestershire and Stroud College

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)

Kirby Littlewood Headteacher, Stanbridge Primary School

Pippa Osborne Headteacher Christ Church Junior School

Diane Owen Chair, King’s Oak Academy

Lisa Parker Headteacher, Warmley Park School

Linda Porter Governor, Watermore School

Terry Redfern (rep Kim Garland) Brimsham Green School

Fr. Malcolm Strange Diocese Representative

Susie Weaver **Executive Principal | Cabot Learning Federation**

Bernice Webber Headteacher, Old Sodbury CE Primary

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

Caroline Warren, Finance Business Partner

Alison Davies, Business Support Manager

Michelle Palmer, Senior Finance Officer (Observer)

Maxine Winter, Governor Development Consultant (Observer)

**Others:**

Tamsin Moreton, Enable Trust Representative

1. **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

Attendees were welcomed by the Chair.

1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Trevor Jones, Chris Sivers, Kim Garland, Louise Leader, Steve Moir, Bernice Webber

**DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST - None**

1. **ANY OTHER ITEMS THE CHAIR DECIDES ARE URGENT**

None

1. **MINUTES FROM LAST MEETING – 21 JANUARY 2021**

**Schools Budget Consultation – Options**

MS has drafted a joint letter from Mustafa and Sarah Lovell as Chair of the Schools Forum and will forward tomorrow after getting final agreement.

One correction: Page 6 1st sentence should read: The consultation could not be issued to the Early Years Working Group ahead of the launch due to time constraints.

Remainder of the Minutes recorded as accurate.

Action carried forward – Letter to schools to be issued before next forum meeting

1. **HIGH NEEDS WORKING GROUP (HNWG) UPDATE**

Susie Weaver gave an update on the HNWG regarding the purpose of the group, how impact will be measured

Update for this forum includes:

* the transfer of £2.2 million of funding
* the Deficit Recovery Programme
* additional documents including the Recovery Plan.

**Governance structure and communication**

Need to be very clear about governance and getting the role of the HNWG as part of the broader strategy in terms of inclusion across the LA to come together after a period of 12 months. We are trying to communicate to all Headteachers that we have a clear vision of the governance and decision making to be understood by all.

We have also spent time on the Deficit Recovery Plan and Mustafa Salih is leading on that. The HNWG will challenge and give a critical eye. Detailed overview in terms of the different themes about building capacity, top-ups, improved identification, commissioning independent placements and effective planning of special schools and resource bases. To prepare a draft programme to get all those themes together.

SL – Good to see those different themes to focus on as a Forum.

MF – Given that the HNWG has been in existence for a number of years, at what point are we going to see an impact on the deficit and to see effective challenge on the workings of SGlos as whole to address the deficit?

SW – It has taken a little longer to work through the staffing structure at the LA end, co-ordination of the different parts of how the LA work together and the staffing to get on with the work. The group is working with LA officers and things are in place and improving in terms of co-ordination around the broader strategy.. We will work on the SEND clusters to bring the deficit down and create clarity of the financial sub-group who will focus on the Ready Reckoner and other key expenditure items.

MS – I think although we haven’t made an impact on the numbers yet, we have done a lot of foundation work to make that happen a lot quicker than in the past.It is fair to recognise that part of the capacity challenge was due to vacancies. These positions have now been filed.

We have looked at how we might see the actual numbers changing through the Recovery Plan tool and it will take a number of years as it will get worse before it gets better. We had worked with the DfE on that Recovery Plan but have not heard from them because of COVID. Before that they were content with the Plan and we have recently strengthened the Plan to show how all the pieces of work across the council, schools and various sectors fits together and really capture all those activities taking place.

DO – Welcome the greater clarity the report has given us which is helpful and a positive step. The challenge is how we measure the impact as there is a lot of reference to governance which makes me feel maybe there should be governance representation as part of the working group and that may be a benefit suggestion to consider.

SW – Happy to consider governance and have a follow up discussion. .

EW –Funding. We have always been at the lowest point with regards to our High Needs Block and SEND and I had a discussion with Luke Hall about the SEND review being delayed. Why the funding is so low is based on deprivation so he has asked me to build a good case to give to him and take this forward. The areas of deprivation are masked by our overall figures and need to pull those figures out and make a good case to obtain more funding.

Working on the Food Cell Board with other Cabinet Members, there is a link between food nutrition within our schools that we could combine with deprivation figures within public health as well as educational settings and how they portray themselves and get a better picture to carry forward to Luke Hall. Does Forum agree with that approach?

SL – We are happy to support applications for funding where appropriate..

NE – Emphasised the importance of theme 3 in the HNWG cohort. COVID has severely impacted on young children with some unable to speak and lack of professional support. 2 years from now when they start to go into schools these children will require additional support..

SW – Agreed, longer strategy is required.

CL – How much have we spent out of school budgets, where are the barriers and why are we not saving money today?

MS – We have done lots of work over the last 2-3 years but since then it has been a high priority. The deficit is a lot smaller than otherwise would have been and we will see that a number of LAs have had large parts of their deficits wiped out. We weren’t on the list as we think our deficit wasn’t high enough. We have increased local places for SEND, cluster funds into those areas, changed the top-up system etc. and it has had a big impact. The funding didn’t follow that and every LA has struggled with this position and it is inevitable every LA has a deficit because of the SEND situation. We have done a lot and need to do a lot more lobbying of the DfE and central Government.

SW – We recognise some work has been completed YTD.

SL – Recognise some steps have been taken and not to detract from the group by looking backwards but look to the future. Forum to support the work of the group to push forward this message.

MS – The proportion of Education and Health Care Plans (EHCPs) still cause significant problems and we will be targeting that latest data of 2019/20 which showed the proportion for SG grew at a larger rate than other LAs but because of some of the work through the clusters, it is again an improvement.

SL – Going forward, Forum request progress against the themes on how they are progressing, what the impact is and what are the outcomes of the group.

Action – SW to consider governance as part of HNWG.

Action – Futue HNWG reports to include progess on the themes.

1. **SCHOOLS BUDGET AND EARLY YEARS FUNDING FORMULA (EYSFF)**

MS **–** Schools Budget**.** The proposal to transfer £2.2m supported by the Schools Forum was approved by the Secretary of State for Education which allows us to continue to invest in the cluster funds. This is a positive outcome. Every school should be aware of their budgets for the following year.

Notification of the Early Years Funding Formula rates have gone out to colleagues about underfunding because of the date of the census. The Forum had agreed an application to the council’s COVID grant to cover the shortfall. This was approved by Cabinet.

NE – Questioned the notification sent out as nothing has been received by the sector.

**Action:**

**MS - To ensure a communication has gone out to the Early Years settings confirming the shortfall in places would be funded.**

1. **DfE’s HIGH NEEDS BLOCK CONSULTATION**

MS – Shared slides on the Consultation which has just closed. This consultation was to do with the High Needs National Funding Formula and to make the Forum aware of this consultation.

SL – Helpful presentation and what are the timeframes?

MS – Unfortunately closed on 24th March but it did go out to all schools.

SL – Is there a timeframe to hear anything back on the implementation in 2022-23?

It is important to share with the Forum and across all schools and is specifically a challenge around the DSG.

MS – If those changes happen and it resulted in more funding, we would look to gain an extra £1m to £2m so it was worth responding. Timescales are unknown.

1. **DEFICIT RECOVERY PLAN**

MS – We received information through the media, that discussions were taking place between the DfE and 5 Local Authorities providing financial supporting for their DSG deficit. 5 LAs have signed agreements to have significant deficits written off by the DfE.

The council is trying to get information from the 5 LAs. SGC quickly got something out to the Deputy Director of Finance at the DfE to make sure SGC is on that list and included a sample agreement signed with Hammersmith and Fulham.

It’s a shame we were not aware but they are saying it was the size of the deficit. Will keep the Forum updated and if we get to meet with the DfE it might be helpful if we had a representative from the Schools Forum and would ask the Chair to join us.

The rest of the paper details aspect of the Recovery Plan just to make the Forum aware that below that level we have used the DfE template in more detail capturing the structure and contents to make sure that high level working starts to drive out the numbers that we need to start seeing.

There is continued growth in SEND spend/demand. Tried to work out if we start moving these factors from where we are now rather than at the national level of top-ups and to be more like the national average and start to reduce that spend. We will start to see the deficit reducing in 2023-24 and we would need to demonstrate to the DfE to balancing in year. Happy to share a detailed template with anyone that wants to see it. The template is 90% complete with some numbers around pupil data still required.

SL – Helpful to see the forecast and recognition that numbers are increasing.

**HS, DB, SL, MS and AD reviewed the detailed papers in the planning meeting and recognised the main figure which shows the deficit getting worse before better.Chair and Vice Chair agreed a summarised version of the spreadsheet should be shared with Forum based on the level of content and role of the Forum.**

MS –Apologies were given that the spreadsheet had only gone out today.

Regular updates and actions welcomed by the Schools Forum.

MS – DfE has started looking at the formula and the major SEND review happening as well which should have another positive impact on funding. Still need to continue with the work we are doing as there is going to be ongoing pressure in the system for change and improvement. We need to carry on the path we are on to improve our value for money.

NE – Theme 3 – more of our effort on the positive and not the negative and the £2.2m from Schools Block to the High Needs Block could that go back to schools?

SL – Government will publish responses.

DB – Shared a link to the article regarding the funding bailouts

<https://schoolsweek.co.uk/councils-receive-conditional-send-special-needs-school-funding-bailouts/>

DB – Signpost to the documents – are we are on the list?

MS – I don’t know – we didn’t know the list existed until the list came out but we may be on the list for the 2nd tranche.

HS – Still continue to invest and focus on those key areas for improvement, e.g. around early years and building capacity through the SEN clusters.

SL – With the size of the deficit growing, what is SGlos Cabinet’s position in relation to carrying that level of deficit?

MS – Cabinet recognises that deficit and the impact it has on the council’s balance sheet and that level of deficit can be held by the council over that time period.

Action – To bring to the next meeting a bit more information on the deficit recovery plan and what the impact of the HNWG will have on that deficit.

1. **FORWARD PLAN**

Proposed dates for 2020/2021 shared, as below.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Academic Year 2021-22 (All Thursday) |  |
| Sept | 23rd |
| Oct | 21st |
| Nov | 18th |
| Jan | 20th |
| March | 24th |
| May | 12th |
| July | 7th |

1. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

RA – Due to the impact of COVID and children’s development delays, is there an impact on available school places in 2022?

HS – We are seeing a small increase in requests for a delayed start to formal schooling which has not been a problem but will be kept under review. If it became an issue then there would be conversations with the Headteachers and it would be flagged to the Schools Forum.

**Meeting closed**