

South Gloucestershire Schools Forum

Minutes of Meeting held on Thursday 9th July 2020 Microsoft Teams

PRESENT:

Sarah Lovell (Chair)	Finance Director, Cabot Learning Federation
Nicky Edwards	Natural Choice Nurseries
Kim Garland	Headteacher, Brimsham Green
Clare Haughton	Paige Park Pre-School
Pippa Osborne	Headteacher Christ Church Junior School
Diane Owen	Chair, King's Oak Academy
Stuart Evans	South Gloucestershire and Stroud College
Richard Aquilina	Governor, Bailey's Court
Malcolm Strange	Diocese Rep
Will Roberts	CEO, Castle School Education Trust (CSET)
Steve Moir	Headteacher Bradley Stoke
David Jenkins	Governor, Crossways Schools
Susie Weaver	Executive Headteacher, Cabot Learning Federation
Bernice Webber	Headteacher, Old Sodbury CE Primary
Carl Lander	Hanham Primary Federation (HPF)
Mark Freeman	St Michael's CE VC Primary
Louise Leader	Headteacher, Pathways Learning Centre
Linda Porter	Governor, Watermore School
Keith Lawrence	Chair of Enable Trust.

Officers:

Mustafa Salih, Head of Financial Management and Business Support
Stuart Thomas, SEND Financial Planning Lead
Hilary Smith, Head of Education, Learning and Skills
Caroline Warren –Finance Business Partner
Erica Williams - South Gloucestershire Councillor (Education Lead)

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Attendees were welcomed by the Chair.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Carl Lander, Lisa Parker, Kim Garland, Keith Lawrence, Dave Baker

3. EVACUATION PROCESS

n/a

4. ANY OTHER ITEMS THE CHAIR DECIDES ARE URGENT

None

5. MINUTES FROM LAST MEETING

Confirmed were an accurate reflection of the previous meeting.

6. REVIEW OF ACTIONS

All actions points were reviewed by Sarah Lovell (SL)

Action – Internal audit feedback from Academies will be carried forward to the Autumn term.

7. OUTTURN REPORT – CAROLINE WARREN (CW)

CW talked briefly through the report:

- Paragraph 4 – confirmed the final position for 2019/20 of the dedicated schools grant (DSG) is a £16.3m cumulative overspend.
- Confirmed that work is now being done with an updated deficit recovery/sustainability plan (*see below*).
- Successful visit from DfE regarding DSG recovery plan.
- Claims for schools in financial difficulty fund (SIFD) have been less than anticipated.
- Early Years income shortfall identified for the academic year 2019/2020 of £575k. The Local Authority has contacted the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) who are currently looking into a supplementary claim for the shortfall in funding – a future update will be provided on this.

SL highlighted this is a risk if funding is not provided as it impacts the 2020/21 DSG.

Mustafa Salih – ESFA colleagues were given an updated Recovery plan. Propose to bring an updated paper to the September 2020 Schools Forum.

Action:

- Early Years discrepancy of £575k will be looked into; an update will be given at the next Forum meeting.
- Updated deficit recovery plan.

8. CONTINGENCY FUND UPDATE (School in Financial Difficulty) – MUSTAFA SALIH (MS)

MS – The Forum were asked for an update on the allocation made from the contingency fund. A template was sent to all schools that had received contingency funding since the fund began.

Reference was made to the attached reports.

Each school has a template which has a summary of what the money was spent on, what the impact has been and the current impact on schools' budget.

Diane Owen (DO) – Pleased with the reports and shows that we have a robust procedure that schools will be required to give a report back. Lots of positive news in reports, we can see that the money is being put to good use. The £300k is making a difference, Will the fund be split between the two cut off points?

Louise Leader (LL) – Who is feeding back to those who have written these reports?

MS – Schools did recognise the importance of feeding back, and it's provided more assurance over money allocated in future.

On the allocation, this is more difficult. There are two windows during the year, we don't really have any thoughts about how we allocate all the money or how we should promote it. Happy to take views.

SL – Splitting the fund is not needed this year with the lack of applications. We could suggest reminding schools of this fund in September through a written communication previously provided.

MS – We do a lot of work with maintained schools through our Schools in Financial Difficulty Group (SIFD), adding this as a strand to the SIFD group would be a good approach.

SL – Highlighted the need to contact academies too.

Nicky Edwards (NE) – Documents were useful, we should have better moderation over reporting.

Pippa Osbourne (PO) – Referred to schools that requested contingency funding at the start of the year and were rejected. Should we contact them?

MS – Agreed that these schools could be revisited.

Will Roberts (WR) – I did the report for Marlwood – it was not onerous given that significant funding had been allocated to us.

Do we want to carry over the contingency as it's likely schools will find it easier this year due to higher funding, but the benefit of this will wear off as costs rise into year 2020/21?

MS – The contingency fund has been successful, we want to keep it going forward. Even if it isn't all used, it's worth keeping it going forward. There is £300k less to

allocate to all schools, the effect to one school is minor but benefit to a school in difficulty is huge.

Erica Williams (EW) – Great to see positive feedback, good monitoring and transparency. New challenges post COVID in September and how we meet the needs of pupils. Perhaps there may be another way of using this funding post-lockdown.

SL – Noted Chipping Sodbury’s financial position has improved significantly which is a particular success story.

9. CONTINGENCY FUND APPLICATION – REPORT WITHDRAWN

MS responding – Staple Hill: we discussed with the school and we both agreed there was more work needed to review the school’s position in detail and if there were any other options/solutions. After that more detailed work it could still be that a request comes forward, but we won't know that until that work is done.

10. HIGH NEEDS WORKING GROUP (HNWG) TERMS OF REFERENCE (TOR) – SUSIE WEAVER

SW – The revised TOR are included, they have been in place and have been revised a couple of times. We want to make clear the role of the HNWG going forward. We haven’t changed the overall aim of the group. We will continue all the way through to next academic year.

Some changes have been made to the statements around what we want to achieve, we need to strike a balance between just watching and getting involved. The wording has been chosen carefully. Some important points:

- Four times a year we will report to the Schools Forum.
- We have scheduled the meetings for the year 2020/21.
- Re-established who should be in the group.
- Reinforced the parent/carer representative part of the HNWG.

Mark Freeman (MF) – Questioned the Focus and the purpose of the HNWG with the existence of so many other SEN groups – SEN partnership board, Cluster group etc. “The HNWG should principally be around the financial impact. There is quite a lot of overlap, could this be slimmed down with the amount of time we are spending in these groups?”

SW – Acknowledges that there is overlap.

Hilary Smith (HS) – There is a risk of duplication, there are many interdependencies. Until we get things right at SEN support, EHCPs and then exclusions, it is right that the HNWG IS a sub-group of the forum with appropriate challenge.

MS – The HNWG is a sub-group of the Schools Forum, we spend money for a reason so we must look at these initiatives, it helps challenge the LA, but it also helps us to challenge the system and the schools. The HNWG looks at the whole picture.

HS – The SEND partnership specifically looks over the governance structure and the arrangements we have in place for improving SEN.

SW – Should we look at things 2 reports on and maybe look at the question of overlap then?

DO – Referred to Page 8 of the TOR, wording needed looking at.

NE – With Rachel absent in Early Years is there a substitute member covering this role within the group?

HS – There is early indication that Early Years (EY) is an important group and that we have a consistent approach in how we use the early years current fund. Will make sure that there is representation from EY.

Richard Aquilina (RA) – If the HNWG is a sub-group of the Schools Forum should the membership be representative of all forum membership areas? e.g. there is not a governor representative.

SW – Happy to take advice.

HS – Would be a good idea.

DO – Did question Governor Representation when the group was formed. However, is conscious of MF's comment on over-duplication of groups.

HS – Having spoken to Parent Carer Forum they feel that they don't really want to be part of a group overseeing the spend of money, they just want good quality SEND provision.

Action – Re-visit Governor representation on the HNWG and the wording on page 8 of TOR.

TOR were approved by Forum with the caveat regarding the review of the wording on page 8.

11. REPORT ON CLUSTER FUND – HILARY SMITH

HS – Update report. A key part is improving SEN support but also financing and reducing demand on the Pathways Learning Centre, exclusions and the number of EHCPs. Detailed plans are now in place showing how each cluster will be targeting its funding.

You would like to see the impact, but it's still too early, lots of these plans will not be ready until September, I will be looking at some key indicators so that we can measure the impact of the clusters. Next report will have detail of what difference it is making in reducing EHCPs and exclusions.

DO – Thank you for the report, next query on measuring impact which has been covered by **HS** in briefing around the report.

Action: Future report on impact in Autumn term

12. VERBAL UPDATE ON EARLY YEARS – NICKY EDWARDS

HS – The early years working group has been looking at the funding over the COVID period, this a sector that has been specifically hit by the pandemic. We would like the Schools Forum to support the sector in a report to the DfE. Would like to circulate report and would like approval before September's forum in taking this forward.

SL – Conscious of people taking a break over the holidays. When would the report be ready for review?

HS – 31st July for paper to be ready. Aim to send to DfE following week.

SL – Any concerns over timescales? Does not want to put pressure on Forum members reading emails over school holidays.

NE – Will try to get it ready by the end of next week.

SW – How large is the report?

NE – 20 minutes read, with executive summary at the start as a 3-minute read.

PO – Early years are having a raw deal, would trust and would give full support to the report before seeing it.

SL – Agree that the sector needs support. Approved the letter being sent via e-mail to forum for approval in July.

Action: Letter to be circulated to forum members by 31st July for approval outside of the meeting cycle.

13. AMENDMENTS TO SCHEME FOR FINANCING SCHOOLS – CAROLINE WARREN

Mostly slight changes of wording to scheme
Reference made to the following paragraphs:

10.1 – Risk protection (insurance) 1st April 2020 schools can join. This does not apply until 31st March 2021 – 6-month notice period is required from schools.

11.3 – change of wording

13.9 – refers to insurance

13.11 – section has been deleted

No comments made – approved by the Schools Forum members representing LA maintained schools.

14. FORWARD PLAN

Financial implications of COVID – request from today’s meeting

Deficit Recovery Plan – request from today’s meeting

Internal Audit from Academies – carry over request from previous Forum meeting

Impact of Clusters – request from today’s meeting

Sept	24th	1	Schools Budget Consultation	MS
		2	Q1/Quarter update	Caroline W
		3	Integra update - schools/SIFD	Sue Morgan
		4	HNWG verbal update	Susie Weaver
		5	COVID - Financial implications	MS
		6	Deficit recovery plan	
Nov	5th	1	Schools Budget Consultation - options	MS
		2	HNWG - Progress update - written quarter update	Susie Weaver
		3	Q2 update	Caroline W
		4	Internal Audit feedback from Academies	DB
		5	Impact of Cluster groups	HS

15. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

None