

South Gloucestershire

Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Recovery Plan follow up meeting notes

LA	South Gloucestershire
Date/time	Tuesday 11 th February 2020, 12:15pm – 3:00pm
Where held	South Gloucestershire Council offices Badminton Road Yate Bristol BS37 5AF
Attending from DfE	Keith Thompson – DfE, Special Educational Needs and Disability Adviser Keith Howkins – ESFA, Head of Funding Policy Implementation Unit – DfE/ESFA Chair John Edmunds – DfE, Early Years and Schools Group FR Unit Hanna Bottomley – ESFA, Funding Stakeholder Engagement Team
Attending from LA	Mustafa Salih – Head of Financial Management and Business Support Hilary Smith – Head of Education, Learning and Skills Caroline Warren – Finance Business Partner Stewart Thomas – SEND financial planning lead Sarah Lovell – Schools Forum Chair

INTRODUCTIONS

South Gloucestershire ran through the agenda which they had sent through in advance of the meeting. It was explained that the items would hopefully show that the plans detailed in the recovery plan are starting to have an effect and things are moving in the right direction.

DfE/ESFA chair confirmed that they should take their partial approval for a block movement disapplication as good news as the LA is one of only a few who have received any form of approval this year. Due to the additional high needs funding strong evidence was required to show how the money would be used for long term strategies rather than just paying off the deficit and South Gloucestershire made a good case for this.

The quarterly update was discussed in detail, this gave overall context and showed that the LA are not currently in a great place due to a number of issues including:

- The high number of EHCPs
- Number of exclusions
- The current use of resources is not effective (but making progress on this)

There is an ongoing change programme which is looking at the system as a whole and focusing on cultural change which should have a knock-on impact to address the issues and drive down costs. The schools, including MATs, are on board with this and there has been a lot of work on engaging with them on being more inclusive, including changing the language that is used and taking more responsibility, but the message is getting across.

There has been a lot of changes across the Local Authority within the last 2 years particularly in senior leadership positions which has put South Gloucestershire in a strong position to restructure and negotiate changes. New structures and processes are currently being put in place and should be finalised soon.

It was confirmed that most of the primary schools in South Gloucestershire are maintained schools and most of the secondary schools are multi academy trusts.

CLUSTERS

South Gloucestershire is currently implementing 'Clusters' of providers. They have split them into five different areas which will be held to account on spend, EHCPs and sharing best practice. There is also an evidence sharing process across all five for educational outcomes and exclusions.

Two of the five have already been in place for over a year and the final three are about to launch on 1st April. South Gloucestershire stated that they need funding to be able to achieve this which is what the disapplication was for and so they would need to review what was going to be possible now they had received partial approval for the block movement they had requested. Schools forum fully support this clustering approach as it has been shown to also allow better joint working with health, police, CCG and therefore enable more effective joint commissioning. It has allowed the LA to work with partner agencies in a more targeted and efficient way which will hopefully enable cost savings and better outcomes for pupils longer term. CCG have said that they see this as a good model of how they should be working together.

SPECIALIST PROVISION

The clusters have said that it would be most cost effective and create better outcomes for children and young people (CYP) if they each had centrally available resources – for example speech and language therapists. South

Gloucestershire is struggling to commit to this due to uncertainty in funding levels as LA breakdowns are only available 1 year in advance. To employ a full-time person there needs to be more security than just a 1-year position to attract the best people.

The overall aim is to keep all CYP with an EHCP within mainstream education **and** within their cluster, so they are close to home.

South Gloucestershire discussed future plans for the clusters including one school wanting to create an ASD resource base within their school so that they can be more inclusive and hopefully save money and create better outcomes long term; however, financial support is needed to test this which isn't available at this time with the pressures on funding.

DfE asked how the LA are maintaining governance with devolved responsibility.

South Gloucestershire confirmed that they are still centrally responsible however they are looking to restructure their internal resource, so they have a dedicated person to focus on each cluster and lead on EHCPs. They feel that the clusters have enabled schools to be better connected while the LA still own the process. They are wanting to give schools the tools and resources to better manage and support EHCP CYP. There is an EP on each cluster board and they are investing in training and workforce development for teachers.

GOOD PRACTICE

South Gloucestershire are currently looking to ensure inclusion throughout the LA and are developing a toolkit to provide to staff. This is a huge piece of work and has grown since it was initially started. Rather than start from scratch they have adapted a version from Cheshire East which has been working well for them and South Gloucestershire are nearly ready to launch theirs.

DfE/ESFA asked how they thought the best way to disseminate best practice was.

South Gloucestershire said they are keen to hear from other LAs and are happy to trial any initiatives or be involved in any pilot schemes.

DfE/ESFA said they are looking into peer to peer discussions and showcasing best practice and ideas centrally.

PARTNERSHIPS

It was discussed that joint commissioning with health has become increasingly difficult in the last few years and the LA need Health to pay their share. South Gloucestershire feel that messages from central government are

not clear and not joined up. They have been trying to negotiate with Health for over 3 years – including through the use of external bodies – with very limited success. They stated that they need a clear message from government that complex cases should be funded jointly and covered with partnership agreements. Putting this in place at a local level is not working and the LA need central government to fix this. It was noted that the CCG also have a large financial deficit in the area.

Note: the CCG covers Bristol and North Somerset as well.

DfE/ESFA suggested talking to Mark Tucker, who is a NHSE SEND Adviser, to try and improve relationships and make some progress. South Gloucestershire confirmed that they already have his contact details and will try this. They stated they are also interested to see what the outcome of the SEND review will be.

READY RECKONER

South Gloucestershire have now had their ready reckoner in place for about 12 months. This replaces the previous matrix, which funded generously, and top up funding and instead quantifies each element of every service that a CYP with an EHCP requires. It is being phased in with the current stage covering new EHCPs and key-stage changes. About 122 new EHCPs have already been determined this way along with about 123 who were due an annual review. There has been some analysis done on the cost savings and it is estimated that costs have reduced from an average of £9,508.56 per EHCP to £7,812.52 (this includes Pupils in South Gloucestershire and also pupils in other LA Schools).

This was developed following consultations and the heads and schools forum are on board with the costings. There have been no parental complaints so far as it is a very transparent process and should be more customised to the individual than the previous matrix system.

DfE/ESFA stated that this could be a good case example to be shared with other LAs.

STRUCTURE

South Gloucestershire are trying to ensure there is a clear internal structure in place for the future. This includes having a single strategic lead to have oversight of education. They stated that their local CCG was the only one in the country not to apply for funding for a central Mental Health lead – The LA have since challenged this decision and they have now applied.

The police are interested in how to support the LA achieve a reduction in exclusions as this is shown to have a direct impact on ASB in the area.

SUPPORT

DfE/ESFA asked if there was anything the LA needs help with.

South Gloucestershire explained that they currently only have one Pupil Referral Unit which has an 82 place provision. While this is designed to be a short-term assessment of pupils, they are struggling with pupils getting stuck there, which blocks up places and costs more. They are trying to change this and are working hard on changing the culture of the system including both teachers and parents. However, clusters need access to good quality Alternative Provision and they are looking at setting up a group to see what best practice is and what exactly is needed to best match the needs of each area. They would like to find out if any other LA is already doing this or have looked at implementing something similar.

DfE/ESFA will make some enquiries and let South Gloucestershire know.

DfE/ESFA also mentioned that they would be interested to see the Ready Reckoner and South Gloucestershire agreed to send them a copy.

DATA

South Gloucestershire went through a presentation with their local data and how they compared to national figures and their statistical neighbours.

DfE/ESFA asked about their high top up funding in mainstream education.

It was confirmed that this was linked to a historic issue with mainstream not paying the first £6k as per regulations which has now been fixed. This meant that some top ups were effectively being overfunded. The ready reckoner should also help to address this problem and there should be improvements in the data over the next few years as this is rolled out to all EHCPs.

The savings detailed on the recovery plan were discussed specifically regarding the ready reckoner and if it had made any savings so far. South Gloucestershire confirmed that the ready reckoner has not been developed specifically as a cost saver as such and is more to ensure that individual needs are met. There are no targets for cost savings related to this tool.

One of the pressures detailed were the high costs from out of LA placements and residential fees. South Gloucestershire stated that independent providers seem to be able to charge what they want and the LA feel they have to pay very high costs due to parental preference and lack of suitable alternative provision. It is not always clear what the quality of these placements are like. They would like help on this from the DfE and officials stated that the SEND review may provide some guidance and support on this.

DfE/ESFA asked why the LA are spending 6% on 'Other' provision when the national average is 1%. South Gloucestershire said they would look into this and let officials know.

South Gloucestershire stated that tribunals have increased this year. DfE/ESFA advised that other LAs have had success going to the next upper tribunal when they have lost and they feel they have a case.

RECOVERY PLAN

DfE/ESFA thanked South Gloucestershire for their recovery plan and all the additional detail that they have now provided. Officials suggested that Saving S1 is broken down into individual components so that they can be more easily tracked and monitored.

Pressure P5 was discussed which was a new pressure since the recovery plan had originally been submitted. The rising average cost of EHCPs is forecast to continue to rise which DfE/ESFA officials questioned given conversations regarding the Ready Reckoner which has been shown to lower average costs so far. South Gloucestershire stated that they could not be sure in the future what the costs will be but so far this year the number of EHCPs has increased along with the average cost. Both of these have contributed to the forecast DSG deficit at the end of 2019-20 to increase from £13.8m (As submitted in the RP in June 19) to £16.8m as per the updated Recovery Plan. DfE/ESFA officials stated that it was a concern that the deficit seems to be rising each time the costs are reassessed and they will be interested in seeing the final draft account figures for this year.

DfE/ESFA questioned what Pressure P2 “Opening of Free School and increasing Local Provision in the future will create pressure on funding” meant.

South Gloucestershire explained that in their experience they have seen a ‘build it and they will come’ mentality with special schools and if they increase provision then costs will increase as there will be more pupils to fill the places.

DfE/ESFA asked if the LA can include the clusters as part of the pressures and savings as this is a good example of invest to save and it would be useful to see the actual costs and savings broken down.

DISAPPLICATION

South Gloucestershire asked how the amount for the partial block movement which has been approved was calculated. DfE/ESFA officials explained that this figure was what had been requested minus the amount of additional funding that has been provided. It was discussed that South Gloucestershire were one of very few LAs that had received approval for any part of their block movement disapplication and this was due to the amount of evidence received regarding what they were planning on using it for. The invest to save plans that had been described along with the evidence of how the clusters were working and the need to complete this process was seen as positive.

Most disapplications which were targeted on paying off the deficit or which did not have enough supporting evidence were rejected this year due to the additional high needs funding announcement.

DfE/ESFA officials stated that they are hoping to provide the splits on future years additional funding (2021-22 and 2022-23) as soon as they realise how important it is for the LAs to be able to forecast and plan their spend. It was discussed that future years block transfer requirements will remain to be seen as progress is still being made towards a hard NFF.

South Gloucestershire asked DfE/ESFA to think about the School/High needs split and if it was working and also for more guidance and support on what to do with historic deficits. They said it would be useful to have access to a specific grant to help with resourcing EHCPs in the LA. If they could access funding which would support them with investing in the short term to enable savings long term it would help bring down the deficit faster.

SCHOOLS FORUM

Sarah Lovell joined from the schools forum (she is a FD at one of the MATs). Sarah discussed the role of the schools forum and stated that the LA has been working with them well and they are working together to identify pressures. There is a high needs working group which is chaired by the SEN lead and they are looking at how they can best meet the needs of students within mainstream education. The recent consultation with schools was discussed. It was confirmed that they have good representation from every sector.

DfE/ESFA asked what impact the recent TV series which was based in South Gloucestershire had had in the area.

South Gloucestershire confirmed that it had a big impact at the time and had made SEN an important point with local people. There was a public consultation going on at the time and engagement in this was much higher than it would have been otherwise which was good.

SUMMARY

DfE/ESFA asked about capital funding and if they were accessing it.

South Gloucestershire said they currently have plans to open another special free school. There should be enough places within the LA after this to accommodate everyone who needs them and they will then be focusing on ensuring the needs of the pupils are fully understood so that they can ensure the right type of provision is available. A review is planned this year to better understand this and work towards changing current provision to best suit need so it is suitable for the future.

A review is also being carried out to look at residential provision in the area and if this is still best value for money and meets the needs of the CYP.

Overall, all the capital funding for this year has been used.

The clusters were discussed again. It was explained that each cluster has created their own terms of reference and a lot of investment has gone into staff training to upskill staff to better meet the needs of parents and CYP.

DfE/ESFA asked what was stopping mainstream education from being more inclusive.

South Gloucestershire said they thought it was about the schools not having the confidence that they can meet the needs of the child or young person. Some analysis is needed on the current providers in mainstream and what they are able to provide. There is a real range of needs detailed on EHCPs in the LA and along with parental choice and expectations this can create challenges. DfE stated that there is scope in the High Needs block to provide funding to inclusive schools. It was discussed that resource bases need to be reviewed.

DfE/ESFA asked about S106 contributions.

South Gloucestershire confirmed they are not getting them for 19-25 provisions

DfE/ESFA asked for a full breakdown on the savings including the calculations behind them. They also confirmed that they would be sending an email soon to confirm their disapplication decision.

ACTIONS – please see page below for agreed actions for bot DfE/ESFA and South Gloucestershire

ACTIONS

Action	Who by
Find out if other LAs have set up Alternative Provision within clusters of schools, what is best practice and what exactly is needed to best match the needs of each area.	DfE Keith Thompson
Send through the Ready Reckoner	South Gloucestershire
To look into why the LA are spending 6% on 'Other' provision when the national average is 1%.	South Gloucestershire
Include the clusters as part of the pressures and savings as this is a good example of invest to save	South Gloucestershire
Fully breakdown the savings including the calculations behind them.	South Gloucestershire
Send an email to confirm disapplication decision	DfE Keith Howkins