

Minutes of the Schools Forum

23rd January 2020

-: Present :-

Stewart Biddles (Chairman), Primary Academy Head; **Lisa Finn (Vice-Chair)** Secondary Academy Rep; **Adam Morris**, Primary Maintained Head; **Tim Stephens**, Primary Academy Governor; **Lindsey Kings**, Secondary Academy Deputy Head; **Daneian Rees**, Secondary Academy Rep; **Sally Timmins**, Secondary Academy Rep; **Clive Star**, Secondary Academy Governor; **Jim Piper**, Primary Academy Deputy Head; **Dan Hallam**, Post 16; **Mike Lock**, Special Schools Head; and **Jayne Jones**, Early Years Rep

Also in attendance:

Rachael Williams, Assistant Director for Education, Learning and Skills; **Rob Parr**, Principal Accountant; **Dan Hamer**, Head of Vulnerable Pupils; **Michael Freeman**, Clerk

1. Apologies/Changes to Membership

Apologies were received from Maurice Codd, Ken Kies, Dorothy Hadleigh and Martin Phillips.

2. Minutes of the last meeting

From item 7 of the minutes from 28th November Schools Forum, Rachael explained that she has emailed Primary Maintained members with clarification on the insurance element of Centrally retained items, and as such those members opted to delegate these back to the Local Authority. Daneian Rees, representing the Secondary Maintained sector, queried why he had not been included in this conversation. Rachael apologised for the oversight and will update Daneian via email.

Minutes of the last meeting were then agreed as a true record.

Action – Rachael to update Daneian via email.

3. Future Meeting Dates

Proposed meeting dates for 2020/21 were shown to members. It was queried whether the 12th March meeting be postponed until after the budget has been

announced, however after discussion it was not anticipated that this would affect Schools Forum. Dates for the future meetings were approved.

Action – Clerk to book meeting rooms.

4. Financial Report

Rachael presented the latest Financial Report, detailing the current financial position of the local area. The Outturn remains as overspend, however this has reduced since the previous Forum, thanks in part to spending of the Intervention and Commissioning Grant being lower than anticipated.

Pressures still remain in both the Early Years and the Higher Needs Blocks, a detailed breakdown of these was then discussed. Uptake of Early Years offers continue to be in line with the national average. ALFEY funding is forecast to be overspent by £20k, however it was noted that whilst this remains a pressure, it is not as great as has been reported in previous years. Census returns are being collated at present, officers will be able to make projections at then next Forum in March.

The Higher Needs block continues to be the main area of focus, Spend has risen by £31k since November's meeting, largely due to schools requesting additional support and the high number of children being assessed for EHCPs (Education, Health and Care Plans). Whilst still an area of significant concern it was noted that the overspend in previous reports have been much higher.

Since the last Forum work has been ongoing on the DSG allocations, members were told that School Allocations will be available on the 6th of February. Early Years funding rates have also been announced, it was pleasing to note that there has been an increase in both two year old funding (up 5p) and 3 and 4 year old funding (up 14p).

Members noted the findings of this report, and agreed to continue working with the Local Authority through the Higher Needs Recovery Group to tackle the deficit, which is anticipated to be £3.625m at the end of this financial year.

5. EFSA / School Minister Visit

The Forum heard from Lindsey Kings, Secondary Academy Rep, who gave feedback from a meeting between Torbay Secondary Heads and Nick Gibb, Schools Minister. Main points from the meeting were as follows:

- Minimum per pupil funding will remain at £5k. The Minister did acknowledge that 6th form funding does need addressing, and will be looking at that in the near future.
- The Minister is not expecting to be looking at Virement, and notes that Torbay has received additional special schools funding.

- 2% pay award will not be funded. Pension contributions will continue to be funded (teachers only, not support staff).
- Heads were keen to point out that the Higher Needs Block should not be dealt with only by education, but did however welcome the new Ofsted framework, acknowledging that the previous one did not reflect student's best interests.

Members were disappointed to note that the Virement decision was announced during the meeting, but were pleased with the opportunity to lobby the Minister and felt that he understood the current issues. It was noted that Kevin Foster MP has been very supportive, Rachael reported that the LA is now meeting with him every month on whole council issues.

Rachael then announced that colleagues from the EFSA will be visiting Torbay Council on 2nd March to offer support. These colleagues are Ann Porter, Keith Hawkins, Head of Funding Policy Unit and Hannah Bottomley, Funding Stakeholder Engagement Lead. As agreed at the last Schools Forum, Forum representatives will be Mike Lock, Adam Morris, Stewart Biddles, Jayne Jones and Sally Timmins. Rachael Williams, Dorothy Hadleigh (Head of SEN), Rob Parr and Martin Phillips (Chief Finance Officer) will attend from the Local Authority. The agenda will compose of the following items:

- Demand and trajectory of need
- Actions taken by Schools Forum in addressing historic issues
- Ideas/Proposals moving forward.

Members were in agreement with the proposed agenda, and asked for further clarification on how the Historic debt be dealt with if schools funding is not to be used to pay off the historic deficit. Rachael will ensure that minutes of this meeting are circulated to members once available.

Action –Rachael and Forum reps to finalise proposals/questions prior to visit of EFSA.

Action – Sue Moses, PA to Rachael Williams, to circulate minutes of EFSA visit

6. Exclusions report and verbal progress on managing exclusions

Dan Hamer, Head of Vulnerable Pupils, presented an updated report on Exclusions data. It was noted that the rate of Fixed Term Exclusions (FTE) compared to Permanent Exclusions (PEX) remains lower than our statistical neighbours, however the rate of PEX's is now rising faster than our National, Regional and Statistical Neighbours. Concerns remain around the high number of both Drug and Alcohol and peer on peer assault exclusions, and particularly why there are no exclusions for Bullying given the high percentage of peer on peer assault.

There has been a drop in the number of Secondary PEXs and a large reduction in the number of Special School PEXs. However, Primary numbers continue to rise,

where it is recognised there are challenges around Early Identification of children's need.

Dan explained that he is working with the Secondary Peer Group, looking at the rising number of assaults on staff. The Secondary Peer Group has led to the creation of an 'at risk of PEX' list that is reviewed fortnightly, along with conversations with partner agencies that has led to a greater understanding of Social Care needs.

Persistent Disruption continues to be the main reason for PEXs in Primary Schools, there also remains frustrations around Schools not writing RSAs (Request for Statutory Assessment) until the day of Exclusion. PEXs this year remain at the same level as last year.

Dan then reported on Fixed Term Exclusions. Numbers in the secondary sector was worrying, but we are beginning to see an impact and FTEs are reducing.

There remains some disparity between Primary School FTEs, but work is being done on changing the way that Schools use FTEs. Overall number of FTEs are reducing this year, however it was concerning to note that in the Primary Sector in particular, half of the FTEs are for children with EHCPs (Education, Health and Care Plans).

Rachael acknowledged the work of Tracey Powell and the CLA team on attachment needs, which has been well received by Secondary Schools. It was positive to note that officers are working more closely with Social Care colleagues and partner agencies and a complex strategy is now in place.

A banded review system has also been set up, with a panel now looking at funding, starting with each new EHCP. Officers will be visiting Leeds Council on the 25th - 26th February to look at the model that they have been successfully trialling, with the aim of establishing an external panel with partner agencies to look at funding moving forward.

Members noted the findings, thanking Dan for the clarity of this report and requested future reports be presented with this level of detail.

Rachael has had an approach from the Bay Education Trust and COAST academies, on how we manage exclusions. It is proposed that money used on a 6 day provision could be used instead on managing children in school, without the need for a 6 day offer. It was felt that this approach could make it easier to identify our most vulnerable children and could provide further links to Social Care and Early Help. Recognising that there would be a degree of trial and error, officers proposed that we model this approach in Paignton schools initially, with a view to extending this to the wider area if successful. It was noted that Cambridge are already using a similar model, and Exeter have also begun to trial this approach in their Secondary Schools.

Members were asked to vote on the principle of this, with the following results:

For: 12
Against: 0
Abstain: 0

Members were unanimous that this approach could be seen as an investment to save money in the long-term. A verbal update will be presented to members at the next Forum in March, with a full business case and figures ready for the June meeting.

Action - Rachael to present a verbal update on project in March.

AOB:

Rachael asked that the Post 16 value for money report, that was to be presented at March Forum, be postponed until later in the year. This is due to staff sickness in the Post 16 team. Members were pleased to note the hard work being done by the team, evidenced by a reduction in the number of NEET (Not in Education, employment, or Training) young people from 54 last year, down to 14 this year.

7. Items for next meeting

- Audit Action Plan update
- Verbal update on work of Post 16 team
- Verbal update on managing exclusions trial