

Minutes of the Schools Forum

19 November 2020

-: Present :-

Stewart Biddles (Chairman), Primary Academy Head; **Lisa Finn (Vice-Chair)** Secondary Academy Rep; **Adam Morris**, Primary Maintained Head; **Ken Kies**, Primary Academy Head; **Tim Stephens**, Primary Academy Governor; **Lindsey Kings**, Secondary Academy Deputy Head; **Daneian Rees**, Secondary Academy Rep; **Clive Star**; Secondary Academy Rep; **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; **Martin Phillips**, Head of Finance; **Rob Parr**, Principal Accountant; **Dan Hamer**, Head of Vulnerable Pupils; **Michael Freeman**, Clerk

1. Apologies/Changes to Membership

Apologies were received from Maurice Codd and Sally Timmins. Colin Horrocks, Assistant Headteacher at St. Cuthbert Mayne, attended the meeting as substitute for Daneian Rees.

2. Minutes of the last meeting

Rachael informed the meeting that as per item 5 of the minutes the Deficit Position Statement has now been sent to all Torbay Headteachers. Minutes were approved as a true record.

3. Financial Report

Rachael presented an updated financial report to the Forum. Since Octobers meeting there has been an upshift, creating an additional £386k of pressure. Officers warned that this could have been more for some underspends for planned contingency work that will no longer be needed.

The Early Years autumn headcount is currently being processed. The DfE announcements on funding post January 2021 have not been finalised, but a figure of 80% of the previous settlement has been proposed. Members felt that this offer is not appropriate, echoing the feelings of the national working group attended by Rachael, and agreed for the LA to write on behalf of Schools Forum to local MPs explaining their position.

Pressure remains in the Higher Needs Block. Torbay continues to see large numbers of students moving back in to the area, as well as more bespoke packages being offered as a result of children being unable to return to mainstream education. There has also been some additional funding for Brunel Academy to meet the increasing demand of a challenging SEMH cohort placed there.

The COVID pandemic has seen large numbers of Post 16 children lose their employment pathway, leading to 22 SEN students opting to stay on at college. There has also been students who have not been able to complete their exams during the pandemic, the LA has agreed to additional time within these placements. This has created an additional pressure of £212k on Post 16 budgets. Added to this, a Tribunal leading to high cost out of area placement has seen an extra £65k cost.

Members asked whether there is anything that we can do as a Forum to lobby the Government for additional schools funding. It was felt reasonable to write to Council leaders outlining the pressures experienced due to COVID, noting that regional colleagues have also done this.

Members noted the findings of the financial report, and requested that future reports include further detail around children moving out of Torbay as well.

Action – Rachael to write letter to local MPs detailing Forum’s Concerns on the proposed Early Years Offer.

Action – Officers to meet with Chair and write letter to the Chief Executive of Torbay Council, explaining members concerns.

4. De-Delegation and Centrally Retained Items

Rachael explained to members that each year a decision needs to be taken on money that is de-delegated back to the local authority to conduct activities for our maintained schools. Three separate votes are required, firstly for maintained Primary schools only, then maintained secondary schools, with the final vote open to all members.

De-delegations are the same as previous years, for Free Schools Meals, Insurance, ELA children and Travellers Education and Rates. The Chair agreed that the de-delegations be voted on individually. Votes were as follows:

For Maintained Primary schools to de-delegate services for 2020/21 to the LA:

	<i>Rates</i>	<i>EAL and Traveller Education</i>	<i>Insurance</i>	<i>Free School Meals</i>
<i>For:</i>	1	1	1	1
<i>Against:</i>	0	0	0	0
<i>Abstain:</i>	0	0	0	0

For Maintained Secondary schools to de-delegate services for 2020/21 to the LA:

	<i>Rates</i>	<i>EAL and Traveller Education</i>	<i>Insurance</i>	<i>Free School Meals</i>
<i>For:</i>	1	1	1	1
<i>Against:</i>	0	0	0	0
<i>Abstain:</i>	0	0	0	0

The next part of the vote was on Centrally Retained Items, and budget areas that can be retained with the agreement of the Schools Forum.

For Torbay this is Planned Pupil Growth, School Admissions Service, Servicing the Schools Forum, Centrally retained element of the Early Years Block (5%) and request to transfer funds from the School Block to High Needs. This vote was open to all Forum members:

	<i>Planned Pupil Growth</i>	<i>School Admissions</i>	<i>Schools Forum</i>	<i>Early Years Block</i>	<i>Virement</i>
<i>For:</i>	12	12	12	12	11
<i>Against:</i>	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Abstain:</i>	0	0	0	0	1

5. Special School Funding

A decision on the future funding of special schools was then discussed by Forum. Members were shown a paper modelling various options as a result of a working party between Officers and Mike Lock, Special Schools representative, as agreed at October's meeting.

Following decisions taken by members in Item Four of this meeting (De-delegation of funds and Centrally Retained items), members were asked to consider two options on funding for 2021:

Option 1 - a 3.09% increase to Special School funding in line with schools.

Option 3 - a 5.03% increase in line with schools, taking into account the historic allocation position (a deficit of 1.94%) as well.

After discussion, members were asked to vote on the above options. Results were as follows:

Option 1: 5
Option 3: 7

Members felt that it was time to readdress the balance in funding between mainstream and Special Schools, and felt that opting to make inroads into the

previous three years deficit, as well as addressing future funding, was the right thing to do.

Concerns were raised as to how we maintain parity moving forward. It was acknowledged that the upshift agreed upon today will add to pressures on the overall budget, but members felt that the debt belongs to all schools and therefore the increase agreed was fair for everyone.

An additional paper was then shared by Rachael, giving a breakdown of Early Years SEND Inclusion funding (ALFEY). It was noted that we are seeing increasingly complex needs, leading to an increase in both the amount of children in receipt of funding and the average rate of funding per child. This in turn has led to the ALFEY budget being an area of significant pressure.

Members noted the findings of the report, accepting that the pressure will need to be addressed before creating additional pressures further down the line. Members asked whether the Torbay Promise project could be of help, but it was thought that this has been delayed due to the ongoing COVID pandemic. Rachael will seek clarity on this and feedback at January's meeting.

Action – Rachael to gather information on Torbay Promise initiative.

6. Management Plan Update

Rachael gave an update on the management plan. Whilst the document is not robust yet, historic data has now been populated and officers are working on the future projections. It was felt that presenting the management plan to the Higher Needs Recovery Group would offer a greater level of scrutiny in understanding how to populate the plan, and Rachael asked for the permission of members to do this. Votes were as follows:

To present the Management Plan to Higher Needs Recovery Group:

For: 11

Against: 0

Abstain: 0

Unanimous

Action – Send updated Management plan to Forum members once the HNRG has met.

7. Audit Action Plan Update

As agreed at Schools Forum last year, members were presented with an updated Action Plan as a result of the audit of Schools Forum. Rachael updated members on two issues currently flagged as amber (ongoing):

Item 1.7.1, solutions on how to deal with the deficit – Work on this continues through the mechanism of the Higher Needs Recovery Group. As this work has not

yet had an impact on budget positions it was agreed to leave this item as amber, with a view to revisiting next year.

1.9.1, Website accessibility – Members were in agreement that previous issues in finding links to the Schools Forum meeting have been addressed. It was felt that minutes and the terms of reference for the meeting were easy to find on the council website, and this item could now be rated as green.

8. Membership and length of office

Following enquiries from secondary schools colleagues, Membership of the Forum was discussed. With the exception of both Ken Kies and Sally Timmins, all members have exceeded their three year period of membership as outlined in the Terms of Reference. Whilst memberships have rolled over (as per Terms of Reference item 11) schools colleagues have raised concerns that some groups may be under represented on the Forum, and as such have asked the Forum to address this.

Whilst acknowledging the need for fairer representation, Members pointed to the good work being done by the current membership, and were keen not to destabilise the meeting by making lots of changes all at once.

Rachael agreed to seek representatives from Schools, members agreed that Secondary schools be contacted first, with a view to contacting the Primary and Early Years sectors in January. Any declarations of interest will be brought to January's meeting. Current members expressing an interest in remaining on the Forum were asked to write to Rachael directly.

Action – Rachael to seek Forum representatives from Secondary Schools Colleagues.

Action – Mike to update the Forum Terms of Reference to reflect agreed changes.

9. Any Other Business

Rachael informed members of a COVID winter fund, a £500k grant awarded to the LA to tackle food and fuel poverty. This is a catch all fund but after meeting with Adult colleagues Rachael explained that the majority of this money is expected to go to Children's services. This will include 2 year old children where eligible, Children on Early Years Pupil Premium and those in receipt of Free School Meals, and will be in the form of vouchers given to schools to hand out to eligible families.

Rachael is meeting with LA colleagues tomorrow to discuss the conditions of the grant, and invited representative of the forum to attend on behalf of schools. Lisa Finn, Tim Stephens and Jayne Jones accepted and will feed back details of the meeting at January's Forum.

10. Items for next meeting

- Updated to the Schools Forum Terms of Reference
- Management Plan Update
- Meeting Dates for 2021

11. Future meeting dates

- Thursday 14th January 2021