

Minutes of the Schools Forum

11th March 2021

-: 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; **Alex Newton**, Secondary Maintained Head; **Steve Margetts**, Secondary Academy Head; **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; **Rob Parr**, Principal Accountant; **Dan Hamer**, Head of Vulnerable Pupils; **Sarah White**, Early Years Finance and Business Manager; **Sheena Wright**, Senior Early Years Advisor; **Michael Freeman**, Clerk

1. **Apologies/Changes to Membership**

Apologies were received from Steven Hulme. Rachael explained that Martin Phillips and Nancy Meehan could not attend due to an upcoming Ofsted quality assurance visit.

After many years of service, Maurice Codd has made the decision to step down from Schools Forum due to other commitments. Members wished Maurice well for the future and gave thanks for his dedication to Schools Forum over the years.

In line with the Terms of Reference, a replacement for Maurice will now be sought from the Maintained Primary Governor sector. Officers will begin the process of seeking nominations for this position shortly.

Action – Clerk to write to Maurice on behalf of the Forum.

2. **Minutes of the last meeting**

Members looked at the minutes from January's meeting, these were agreed as a true and accurate reflection of the meeting.

3. Election of Chair of Schools Forum

As per the Forum Terms of reference (discussed in further detail in Item 5) Stewart's term of office as Chair of Forum has expired, and whilst happy to continue in this role, nominations for Chair were sought by the clerk outside of this meeting.

No nominations were received, therefore it was proposed by Lisa Finn and seconded by the rest of Forum that Stewart be re-elected to Chair.

Election of Vice-Chair will take place at the next meeting, members were invited to submit nominations to the Clerk prior to this.

4. Primary representation

As members' terms of office have recently expired, officers have written to Primary colleagues seeking representations from their sector. No nominations have been received, therefore all current Primary members have been re-elected to Schools Forum.

5. Term of Reference

Following discussion at January's meeting, members were presented with an updated Terms of Reference. Members made the following points:

It was felt that item 6, *No Academy shall be represented by more than one person.....* should be changed to *No Academy Trust shall be represented by more than one person.*

It was mentioned that other Forums have had issues with disruptive members and the question was asked whether the Local Authority has the power to end an individual's membership. Whilst not a problem in Torbay, Stewart felt that item 40 of the ToR covers this scenario adequately.

Action – Clerk to update terms of Reference.

6. Financial Report

Rachael presented to members an updated financial report. It was pleasing to note that the deficit has reduced by approx. £560k, thanks in part to the COVID prevention fund being received into the Dedicated Schools Grant. This has been used to offset some salaries for officers involved with ongoing COVID work. There has also been a reduction in commissioned services coming out of the Higher Needs block. Rachael gave thanks to the hard work of Play Torbay, who have recently secured £90k of lottery funding.

The expected demand on the system has not yet been seen, members noted that there have been less families moving into area than anticipated, and some bespoke packages have now been ceased due to the current situation.

Rachael explained that whilst any reduction in the current deficit can be seen as positive news, it was important to note that savings made this year are an anomaly and this is not expected to be a long term position, demand on the Higher Needs block will continue as we are beginning to see the expected increase in RSAs (Requests for Statutory Assessment).

Members noted the findings of the report.

7. Early Years Funding

The Forum heard from Sarah White, Early Years Business and Finance Manager, on the Early Years census and how current funding is calculated. Sarah explained that up until autumn 2020, the budget was set using a formula of 5/12 of 2019 census numbers and 7/12 of 2020 census numbers. This was in line with DfE guidance to continue to fund EY providers as if the pandemic was not happening. However, since January 2021, the budget is now calculated on a ratio of 9/12 of 2020 census numbers and 3/12 2021 census numbers.

This had led to an approximate £100k of negative adjustment in the budget, although this is subject to change based on duplicate cross checking with neighbouring LAs. It is anticipated that this negative adjustment will lead to an estimated £83k overspend in the EY budget. This is an area of concern as lower attendance figures throughout the pandemic could lead to significant underfunding in next year's budget, as there will potentially be more children requiring funding that was have been budgeted for. Sarah assured members that the DfE are aware of this issue, and after meeting with regional colleagues this is a problem for all LAs nationwide.

Sarah then presented some principles for future spend management, and asked members to discuss the following:

The hourly rate for 2, 3 and 4 year olds is calculated and paid to providers based on termly headcount submissions, officers will then calculate a final budget position for the EY block partway through the year. Any surplus in the budget will be used to enhance the next deprivation budget allowing for an increased per-child rate. Any deficit will be deducted from the deprivation budget, leading to providers being paid only the guaranteed minimum per-child rate. These principles were put to vote as follows:

To accept the principles of future spend management outlined above:

For: 12

Against: 0 **Unanimous**

Abstain: 0

Despite concerns, Members were in agreement that these proposals would go some way to mitigating impact on the budget moving forward. It was requested that regular updates on the situation be shared with members at every Schools Forum.

8. COVID Prevention funding

Rachael was pleased to announce that the LA has now agreed to an extra £250k of additional funding to mitigate against COVID. Members welcomed this news, and asked how this funding is intended to be spent. It was proposed by Rachael that this is discussed at the Higher Needs Recovery Group.

Rachael clarified that as this is a limited amount of money it will be used only in the Primary and Secondary sectors, bespoke packages will continue to be used for Post 16 children.

Members were asked to vote on the following:

To accept the additional £250k funding:

For: 12
Against: 0 **Unanimous**
Abstain: 0

To delegate the allocation of funding to the Higher Needs Recovery Group:

For: 12
Against: 0 **Unanimous**
Abstain: 0

Members expressed a wish to act quickly on this, Rachael explained that the next HNRG meeting is on the 22nd March, and it's anticipated that money will be allocated to schools in May & June.

9. Elective Home Education

Rachael gave some context to the current high number of EHE children, and the current measures in place around recalling funds. This was following concerns raised by Alex outside of the Forum. Rachael explained that the process of recalling funding for EHE children was within the Higher Needs recovery plan agreed by Schools Forum. This recovery plan has been approved by both the DfE and the ESFA, and the LA is confident that due process is being followed.

Colleagues agreed with the points raised by Alex, namely that schools felt the current system of recalling funding for places where children have opted to be EHE is unfair, as these places are taken up by other children with no additional funding in place. Whilst accepting that the consequences of the current system are unintentional, members felt that the impact it is having on Schools is unsustainable and requested that alternative proposals be discussed, such as invoicing schools for work undertaken by the EHE team on a per case basis.

Rachael thanked members for their comments. She felt it important to note that the current system was put in place with the genuine intent of improving outcomes for

children, but acknowledged that now was the right time to review the procedures in place. Alex and Dan Hamer agreed to meet outside of Schools Forum to discuss possible solutions, and share these with colleagues at the next meeting.

10. Torbay Promise Update

The Forum heard from Steve Margetts on the Torbay Promise initiative. Steve explained the concept of supporting families throughout their education (a 'conception to college' approach) based on data produced by the Local Education Board on two areas of Torbay with higher numbers of children going into care. The initiative will offer a wider array of support to children and families covering both Health and Education needs, with the aim of preventing future problems before they happen. Steve has been liaising with colleagues from the Early Help team and a task group has now been established, whose first task is to set up a pilot scheme involving a small number of families.

Members were excited at the prospect of being able to tackle problems earlier in a child's education. They gave their thanks to Steve for his hard work on this and offered their support where needed.

11. Any Other Business

Rachael has been approached by the Municipal Journal to contribute to an article on Higher Needs Funding.

Stewart proposed that June's School Forum be postponed one week with a view to potentially holding the meeting in person. However, Rachael explained that it was unlikely that the LA will be holding face to face meetings by this point, and so the meeting will go ahead on the original date (17th June) as arranged.

12. Items for next meeting

- Election of Vice-Chair
- Update on Early Years budget
- Schools allocations 2021-22

13. Future meeting dates

- Thursday 6th May, 09:00
- Thursday 17th June, 09:00

- Thursday 14th October, 09:00
- Thursday 25th November, 09:00