

Minutes of the Schools Forum

4 May 2023

-: Present :-

Stewart Biddles (Chair) Primary Academy Rep; **Tim Stephens**, Primary Academy Governor; **Alex Newton**, Secondary Maintained Head; **Stephen Hulme**, PRU; **Mike Lock**, Special Schools Head; **Sarah Tomkinson**, Primary Maintained Head; **Clive Star**, Secondary Academy Governor

Also in attendance:

Rachael Williams, Assistant Director for Education, Learning and Skills; **Dan Hamer**, Head of Vulnerable Pupils; **Hannah Spencer**, Head of SEN and Inclusion; **Michael Freeman**, Clerk

1. Apologies/Changes to Membership

Apologies were received from Stuart Bellworthy, Jim Pipier, Jayne Jones, Steve Margetts, Kelly Sooben and Lisa Finn.

Officers Nancy Meehan, Malcolm Coe and Rob Parr also sent apologies.

2. Minutes of the last meeting

Minutes of the meeting held 20th April 2023 were approved as a true and accurate record.

3. Torbay Mediation Service

The Forum heard from Dan Hamer, Head of Vulnerable Pupils, on the future of the Torbay Mediation Service. Whilst the service was initially started to help where communication between parents of children at risk of exclusions and schools has broken down, it is increasingly being used as an attendance response. This has meant that the current provider of the service doesn't feel they want to continue with the role.

Dan felt that by stepping up at the school attendance support service and the conversations we've had around the definition of education, neglect and the early help response to that, that we're in a better place to provide services through existing schemes and therefore there is no longer a need to have a bespoke mediation service.

Conversations have been held with Jo Curtis, and there is some money available through her charitable work to consider stepping up a very similar service, but through the Voluntary and Community Sector that would be funded through the 3rd sector, not through Schools Forum, potentially leading to a saving to the LA of £30,000.

After discussion, a vote was held on whether to cease the service in its current guise, with results as follows:

To cease the Torbay Mediation Service:

For: 7

Against: 0

Abstain: 0

After this decision, discussion then moved on to what to do with the funding. Stewart asked if the savings would go straight into the DSG management plan. Rachael explained that it would take away potentially some of the pressures we may experience coming through our budget savings. It was then asked if the savings could be used to support the attendance work, Rachael said that the family hubs does come with some funding, however if the family hubs wasn't able to deliver an attendance service, it could be a decision we could revisit in-year.

4. Element 3 Funding Pilot

Rachael informed members that a funding pilot has been commenced looking at how element 3 has been allocated, after exploring different models that exist in other local authority areas. The decision was made to pilot what Islington, our sector led improvement partner, uses. It is felt that this method aligns with our vision of SEND around meeting children's needs rather than placing children into bands or categories, and that actually this is about individual children's needs and assigning funding in that mechanism. Rachael stressed that no decisions on whether it's implemented have been taken. Those decisions sit with School Forum and the SEND board.

Hannah Spencer, SEN Lead, explained to Forum the reasons for the pilot. It is recognised that the current ALF funding model is out of date and is inconsistent across schools. A lot of schools have fed back that for the same level of need, they get different amounts of funding for some children, feeling that they're overfunded for some children and underfunded for others. The LA wants to be more equitable with decision making on the EHCP's that are issued, but also be more dynamic changing from full time one to one support back to the child's needs and their presentation.

Hannah said that the pilot has been trialled in many different schools, and has now been extended to include two more schools, making sure that we've got a fair distribution across the local authority. Three primary schools, one in an area of deprivation, one in an area of influence and one with a middle ground, but a high level of EHCP's, were part of the pilot. The aim was to finish the pilot by the end of April, but this has been extended to make sure that this is as robust as possible, whilst also looking to see whether the funding model can be extended to post 16 as well as pre 16. The overarching themes that have come out of the pilot is that the EHCP process is out of date, and that the annual review process wasn't specific enough to be able to review the funding each year. The Higher Needs block is also funding a lot of health provision and provision that does not educate or train.

Hannah shared with members a matrix based on the four areas of the Code of practice, designed to be used to talk through children with SENCOs with head teachers and coming to a co-produced funding element, where the evidence behind the needs that was being described is clear. As one of the schools on the pilot, Sarah thought the grid was easy to use and accessible and brings much more clarity around the children's individual needs rather than putting them in a band. She also thought it provided fair funding for all children, all the way through the process year on year rather than getting a sum of money at the beginning that stayed with the child regardless of whether their needs had lessened.

Rachael then informed members that the local authority has agreed for a temporary team of amendment officers to work through the backlog of plans as well, being paid for by the local authority not by DSG funding.

Tim asked if in school nursery or out of school provisions feed into this model. Hannah explained that the LA is looking at the ALFEY funding with our Early Years head of service as well. In Islington its year one upwards, although that doesn't mean that Torbay would needs to do the same.

Mike then asked whether any schools would lose out significantly by adopting this model. Hannah recognised that it would not be possible to change all EHCPs by September, so the plan is to start rolling that out with the newer plans and then look at a phased transfer. This would be brought back to Schools Forum to consider how that moves forward and at which times.

Sarah asked whether there will be some training provided for SENCOs and teachers, and is there a program to make sure they're tighter so that it does fit along the funding model?

Hannah explained that the plan is to concentrate on the pilot for the funding and then tie both of those into the launch. Training will be offered on both the funding but also on the annual reviews, and how those things tie up together so that people don't miss out on funding by not filling in the paperwork in the right way. It was felt that this combines our written statement of action task of improving the quality of

our annual reviews and our amended plans with the funding formula, and bringing those both together to make a better quality plan with the right level of funding.

Stewart gave thanks to everyone involved for the work that's been done and looked forward to hearing more about it at the next meeting. Members were in agreement that it sounds like it's going to be a much better deal for our children and also help our schools to understand how better to support their children as well as in terms of funding.

5. School Forum Briefing

Rachael provided an update on the proposed briefing to schools by Forum. The briefing has been set for the 12th July, as this is also the date for TAPS Rachael asked secondary colleagues if they are able to host. Alex Newton agreed to host the briefing at The Spires.

Rachael proposed that the briefing be centred around the Safety Valve agreement as a whole and share some of the work forum members have done to be able to get our DSG management plan, so that schools understand what is in that agreement. The briefing will then move on to the outcomes of the funding pilot, with the aim of giving schools the opportunity to provide feedback as well. The final part of the briefing will be on the Graduated Response, which is due to be launched in June.

Rachael also felt that the meeting could be used to promote the events and support that's going to exist for practitioners, for parents and for colleagues, as well as the NCPD offer, acknowledging that people are keen to have CPD that sits behind the graduated response and the processes around annual reviews and paperwork as well.

Members agreed with the proposals, Rachael and Stewart then said that they would approach individual schools that have been part of the pilot schemes for their input into the event.

6. Any Other Business

Rachael wanted members to know that officers are currently reviewing Section 19 medical referrals and the direction of travel for the Medical Tuition Service. A report on the findings of the review can be expected in early September.

7. Items for next meeting

- Financial report
- Safety Valve update

8. Future meeting dates

- Thursday 22nd June, 09:00, via Microsoft Teams
(Please note this meeting has been rescheduled due to the SWIFT annual conference taking place on the 15th June).