

Minutes of Schools Forum

9 May 2024

-: Present :-

Stewart Biddles, Steven Hulme, Stuart Bellworthy, Mike Lock, Jim Piper, Tim Stephens, Jayne Jones, Steve Margetts, Alex Newton, Laurence Frewin and Sarah Tomkinson (Chairwoman)

(Also in attendance:)

1. Apologies/Changes to Membership

2. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes for the Schools Forum were deferred and will be re published in due course.

3. Matters arising

Points that RW agreed to bring to future meetings will be addressed at our agenda setting meeting.

Allocation to next meeting

Send statistics and transition budgets to future meetings.

4. Financial Report

The final position for last financial year is £1.024 million, slightly better than the deficit budget that we set on our safety valve plan of £1.263 million. We have been in the safety valve for 18 months, at the end of 23/24 we are £207,000 better off than we thought we would be.

The pressure area is independent special school placements.

The cumulative position it is just under £12.8 million overspend. Overall, we have received just short of £7.3 million from the ESFA, which leaves a net deficit of £5 - £5.5 million, if the safety valve continues, we can wipe that out over the next few years.

On page 13 is the EHCP adjustments to schools in year and although that is over budget, it is less than we spent in 22/23. We have started to see an impact on ceasing some of the EHCPS. This has had an impact on the finances. On the following page is the high needs contingency, which is the special school places and various ad hoc adjustments from the high needs block where we are closer to budget.

Tim Stephens asked if we have checked the 95% funding received has flowed through to the settings and Rob Parr said we need to wait for the adjustment to be made in July.

5. Safety Valve Update

Safety Valve Report – High-Level Overview

1. EHCP Numbers and Trends

- **Current Position:** As of the latest update, there are 1,576 EHCPs in the system, with 34 more to be issued (from February to April) and only 10 to be ceased. This will bring the total to 1,600, which is a return to the high numbers seen at the end of 2022—a concerning trend for reporting to the DfE.
- **Statutory Assessment Requests:** The DSG management plan aimed for 15 new requests per month, but the actual average is 27. About 60% of these requests result in new plans. The rate of requests is not decreasing, and the number of plans being ceased is not keeping pace.
- **Early Intervention:** An “early next step” meeting has been introduced before statutory assessment requests, but this has not yet reversed the trend.

2. Financial and Compliance Risks

- **DSG Management Plan Submission:** The next submission is due on 29 May. There is heightened scrutiny from the DfE, and five local authorities have already had payments suspended for not meeting their plans.
- **Enhanced Management:** Some LAs placed on enhanced management (with monthly meetings) still failed to meet requirements and had payments stopped.
- **Wider Context:** All local authorities are facing similar challenges, especially regarding the lack of financial support from health partners for EHCPs.

3. Health Funding and ICB Involvement

- **ICB Funding Issues:** There has been no funding from ICB colleagues for the past two years, despite pre-proceedings letters and ongoing discussions. A meeting with ICB is scheduled, and a clear position is being presented to secure funding for children with complex needs.
- **Regional Approach:** The aim is to establish a consistent pathway across Devon, Plymouth, and Torbay, matching the ICB footprint, to avoid further financial deficits while this is being developed.

4. Cessation Work and Parental Confidence

- **Annual Reviews and Ceasing Plans:** The local authority is scrutinising annual reviews to identify plans that can be ceased. However, due to deadline changes and legal requirements, reporting on ceased plans is delayed.
- **Parental Confidence:** Feedback from SENCOs highlights that parental confidence in the system is low, which drives up requests for statutory assessment. Communication efforts are being planned to address this.

5. Rising Needs and Systemic Pressures

- **Speech and Language Needs:** Forecasts suggest 40% of 0–9-year-olds will have speech and language needs, but there are not enough therapists to

meet demand. Schools are under financial pressure and have fewer staff to support children, increasing reliance on statutory assessments.

- **Funding Per Pupil:** Local funding is lower than in some other areas, compounding the challenge.

6. Data and Monitoring

- **Dashboard Development:** A robust dashboard has been developed to track needs by area, age group, and other factors. This has been useful in Ofsted and CQC engagement and will be brought to future meetings for more detailed analysis.



Key Insights and Implications

- The system is under significant strain, with EHCP numbers rising and insufficient cessation of plans.
- Financial risk is increasing due to potential loss of DfE payments if targets are not met.
- There is a critical need for health partners (ICB) to contribute funding.
- Parental confidence and systemic pressures (staffing, funding, rising needs) are major factors.
- Improved data tracking is helping, but more action and partnership working are needed.

6. Exclusions and Suspensions EHE

Exclusions and Suspensions EHE

Dan Hamer

See report attached from agenda.

A team approach was suggested by Stuart Bellworthy for all principles to come together to share the information and discuss the issues that are currently putting us under pressure with the numbers of Exclusions and Suspensions and EHE.

Rachel Setter/Nancy Meehan have picked up with Ofsted and ICB to work as a partnership with Headteachers.

Nancy to co-ordinate

7. S19 Funding

- **S19 Funding:** There is a pressing need to address the funding shortfall and clarify the MTS plan. The lack of quorum delayed decisions, but this will be revisited at the next meeting.
- **Systemic SEND Pressures:** The forum recognises the need for a coordinated, multi-agency response involving education, health, and regulatory bodies. The willingness to bring together headteachers and external partners signals a proactive approach.
- **Next Steps:** Look out for further updates after the 20 June meeting, when more information on S19 and MTS should be available, and after Nancy Meehan coordinates the proposed partnership meeting.

8. Items for next meeting

Update from health paying towards the EHCP's.

Summary of school allocations

S19 in connection with Hannah's high needs block spend – Dan Hamer

Early years funding update – Rob Parr - September

Vacancy for a primary Academy Governor – check membership

9. Future meeting dates