

Minutes of Schools Forum

20 June 2024

-: Present :-

Stewart Biddles, Steven Hulme, Mike Lock and Tim Stephens

(Also in attendance:)

1. Apologies/Changes to Membership

Apologies/Membership
Malcom Coe
Stewart Bellworthy
Hannah Baker
Tamsin Summers will be late
Clive Star
Jayne Jones
Nancy Meehan

Minutes and Actions

Sarah Tomkinson

Agreed

Alex Newton and Steve Hulme did not attend previous meeting.

2. Minutes of the last meeting

3. Financial report - Rob Parr

We are currently forecasting an overspend of 848k when we initially did our safety valve plan for this year, we said that we would have a deficit budget of 481,000. In effect we're 367,000 over where we said we would be a couple of years ago, but we have carried forward from the previous year 207,000 in a better position of where we said we would be so we have got a net position of an estimated 160K over where we said we would be at the end of this financial year, it is over where we said we were in the scheme of the safety valve and compared to lots of other authorities we are in a we're in a relatively good position.
The main area of concern is independent special school placements offset by various other little under spends in certain areas.

4. Schools Capital Funding - Rob Parr/Claire Talbot

5. Safety Valve Update - Nancy Meehan

Safety Valve Update Update on SV is

Rachel Setter

1. The Department for Education (DfE) brought forward submission dates by 2–3 weeks without prior notice. It is believed this change followed the suspension of payments to several local authorities to increase scrutiny. This adjustment has impacted forecast predictions that were expected to be achievable as part of the submissions.
2. Fortunately, the recent submission was accepted without challenge, and the first payment for this year has been received.
3. It is anticipated that the next submission will include confirmation of secured health funding from the Integrated Care Board (ICB). A written commitment to some funding has been received, though the actual payment is still pending. On this basis, there is confidence that the next tranche of funding for this year will be approved. While there is still some risk, the agreed ICB contribution provides reassurance.

There was discussion around the increase in Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), which is attributed to rising need locally, and concerns about the impact of the Safety Valve programme on children's futures. Current refusal rates are approximately 45%. Requests for statutory assessments continue, but many are deemed inappropriate and do not progress further.

Commissioned placement numbers remain high, but capacity cannot be increased further due to physical space limitations. Feedback from a recent national peer group meeting indicated surprise that any ICB funding was secured, as other authorities have not received similar support. The current amount is £119k, which is not included in the Safety Valve submission.

Half of the requested funding from the previous financial year has been paid, with an agreement to resolve contributions toward EHCP costs within six months. If this deadline is not met, the remaining 50% will be paid.

Questions were raised about changes in demand for EHCPs and statutory assessments and how this will be managed going forward. It was noted that accountability is based on figures from two years ago, which cannot be challenged. Nationally, the level of need is increasing, and all authorities are facing similar pressures. Comparatively, local challenges are minor against the scale of issues elsewhere.

Discussion included lobbying efforts with the DfE and potential engagement with new MPs. National media recently reported a 26% year-on-year increase in EHCP requests across England, highlighting that this is a widespread issue rather than a local one. Concerns were also raised about perceptions of how schools use funding and the limited focus on education in political manifestos, with media influence seen as a key factor.

6. Schools reducing PAN - Claire Talbot

TS asked is there a way of identifying surplus accommodation.

Not sensible to do in isolation. Can we get a strategic overview? Where is the need and how can we best use it.

CT The landscape changes every year it is very challenging. We have estate that needs improving but not removing.

AN asked how do we make flexibility work when we already have a waiting list.

CT asked to consider class allocation to go over PAN for those on the waiting list.
DH Deep dive into fair access protocol that can be used for children coming into area. Conversation to be had with TASH.

7. Drop in Birthrate - Rachel Setter

- **Drop in Birthrate**
 - Birth rate is reducing, but there's also significant **move into area**, which brings challenges.
 - Rachel confirmed data is being reviewed council-wide via the **Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA)**.
- **Current Service Arrangement**
 - Funding provided to Devon for an **ethnically diverse advisory teacher** who supports:
 - Education for unauthorised encampments.
 - EAL (English as an Additional Language) support.
 - Equality, diversity, inclusion, and bullying consultations.
 - **Encampments have reduced**, so purchased hours are underutilized.
- **Planned Actions**
 - Reallocate unused hours to **update the website** with:
 - Resources for education providers and early years settings.
 - Information for parents.
 - Tools for maintained schools.
 - Consultation opportunities.
 - Multi-Academy Trusts can purchase services at **reduced cost**.
- **Engagement**
 - The advisory teacher Rachel met is keen to **speak with the team**.
 - Suggestion: Invite her to **TAPS and TASH** for a service update.

Discussion Points

- **TS Question:** Parenting and cultural differences—how do we address/support?
- **RS Response:** Needs a separate conversation to **break down barriers and reduce stigma**.
- **LF Question:** Will the drop in birthrate be exacerbated by fewer people? Any forward-looking data?
- **RS Response:** Yes, JSNA covers this; Rachel can provide more info.
- **LF Concern:** Family Hubs funding may not continue post-election.
- **RS Response:** Funding secured until **March 2025**; biggest risk is **perinatal mental health**, lobbying ongoing.

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8. Nursery and pre school sufficiency in light of new funding - Emma Kerridge

Nursery and pre-school sufficiency in light of new funding

Emma

Kerridge

See item attached

New entitlements from April this year.

460 children taken up places. We are above average on the 15-hour offer

9. Dashboard breakdown of Ofsted and CQC - Dan Hamer

DH Over the last 2 years the government has removed the funding from the LA for school improvement work.

10. S19 in connection with the high needs block spend - Dan Hamer

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

Key Issues

- **Section 19:** Applies to children unable to attend school (e.g., due to medical needs). Feels "hidden" from schools and creates funding imbalance concerns.
- **Section 100:** Schools' statutory duty to make reasonable adjustments and provision for children with medical needs. Implementation varies widely across schools.
- **Current Challenge:**
 - Some schools do this well; others less so.
 - Section 19 provision is costly and not fully offset by recoupment from schools.
 - Even full recoupment wouldn't cover current spend.

Dan Hamer's Proposal

- **Audit:**
 - Zero-cost audit to review reasonable adjustments and provision schools make for children with medical needs.
 - Suggested auditor: Jess Hunter.
 - Schools Forum support requested for this audit.
- **Recoupment Extension:**
 - Apply the same principle used for MTS (Medical Tuition Service) to all Section 19 provisions.
 - Example: If a child attends NTS for 2 days, recoup 2 days; same for supervised education provided by the LA.
- **Goal:** Not about equivalence or full cost recovery, but consistency in applying recoupment.

Concerns Raised

- **SM:** Worried focus is too much on costs.
- **AN:**
 - Section 19 feels hidden from schools.
 - Needs a robust cost model for Section 19 children before agreeing.
- **ST:** Audit may be difficult because schools have different contexts; hard to set a baseline.
- **RS:** Governance process for MTS ongoing; will go to Schools Forum later.
- **SM:** Questions Schools Forum's decision-making responsibility.

Actions & Next Steps

- **DH:**
 - Bring back a proposal after working with TASH.
 - Requested primary exercise; Jake Grinsill offered support.

- **AN:**
 - Will provide cost-per-child data if given more detail.
- **RS:**
 - Update on MTS after governance process.
- **Audit:**
 - To be developed with exemplar for schools to agree.

11. AOB and Items for next meeting

Update from health paying towards the EHCP's

Nancy Meehan

See above

Next meeting

Rearranged to Monday 2nd December 2024 at 09.30