

Minutes of the Higher Needs Recovery Group

22 March 2021

-: Present :-

Brian Chapman, Mark Eager, Matt Gifford, Dorothy Hadleigh, Daniel Hamer, Ken Kies, Stephen Kings, Mike Lock, Samantha Meyer, Adam Morris, Rob Parr, Rachael Williams and Sandra Wright

(Also in attendance: Alex Howarth, Stuart Heron)

1. Welcome and Introductions

Stephen welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Siobhan Grady.

2. Minutes of last meeting

The Higher Needs Recovery Group minutes 27/9/20 were agreed to be a true record of the meeting.

3. Budget Position DSG

Rachael introduced two School Forum reports which show a breakdown of the projected position of the Local Area for 2020/21 and anticipated outturn for 2021/22. She said that the cumulative overspend of the DSG is now £3.778m. The ESFA attended a School Forum (SF) meeting to re-debate the deficit position for Torbay and clearly stated that the priority for SF and HNRG should be to work towards a balanced budget.

Members further discussed

- the possibility of the DfE writing off authorities, which despite their best efforts, will still not be able to pay off their historic deficit from the DSG over the next few years.
- Outcome of SEND review – savings still unknown
- AP providers out of area – reductions in out of area placement - some savings have been made but due to the complexities of the young people's needs a substantial bespoke package has been necessary

No objections were raised at Rachael's suggestion to discuss item 5 revisit actions in HNRG plan next in order to focus on what we are going to do and when.

Rachael introduced the initial consultation document which outlined where budget reductions could be made.

Rachael summarised what has taken place and what has not:-

- Cultural Peer to Peer Challenge - well established in secondary schools and has an impact in keeping children in mainstream school
- Fair Access Protocol – updated version has been agreed
- Providing independent advice to parents – service set up but progress has been hampered by the pandemic
- Providing training and information to governors – a challenge to governors has taken place around SEN audits
- Access recovery funds for pupils who are permanently excluded or moving to bespoke alternative provision – SF have found this a challenge to implement so recoup of funds has been less than anticipated
- Joint health and social care funding – process in place to ensure that education now only pay the education element of a package.
- Post 16 – outcomes for Post 16 students have been improved and processes are in place to ensure that 19 year old students transfer to adult services.
- SEMH Primary Provision – additional SEMH provision created at Mayfield's STEPS and Spires for children who are struggling to re-integrate into mainstream school
- Medical Tuition Service – progress hampered by covid, and income target not as predicted

What has not taken place:-

- Reduction in requests for Statutory Assessments and issuing of EHCPs and Element 3 top up funding – there has been a recent reduction in requests for Statutory Assessment during the lockdown period, however, numbers have been rapidly rising since the start of the year. Stringent measures are in place to ensure that only pupils who truly warrant an EHCP are progressed. Identified historic legacy issues are ongoing

What we said we were going to do:-

- Deficit outturn position now worse than anticipated by £350k – recognised by members that if previous actions had not been taken the position would have been much worse.
- ESFA will required evidence of what savings have been progressed
- Banding review – review has not taken place

Dedicated Schools Grant Safety Valve Agreement

Members noted the contents of the report which highlighted other local authority's large deficit action plans to achieve a positive in year balance and take control of reducing their deficit. Torbay School Forum will be using the examples to progress it's own action plan and identify where additional savings can be made.

Rachael confirmed that she would find out about the EFSA safety value programme and how Torbay could be included in it.

4. Covid Prevention Funding

Rachael announced that Torbay Council have allocated £250k of the Covid fund to support the reintegration of children into their school on a short term basis. School Forum have agreed to delegate the responsibility to roll out of the funding to schools through the Higher Needs Recovery Group. The HNRG provide a progress/outcome report to School Forum in June 2021.

Members debated and discussed how best to manage the roll out of funds which would target the most vulnerable pupils.

Members considered the proposed principles of providing support and management of the process and were keen to effectively provide targeted support to children and young people quickly.

Members agreed that the targeted support should apply for pupils in Torbay who are:-

- on part time tables
- Displaying covid/return related anxiety not previously of concern
- Have not returned to school

Rachael agreed to identify the number of pupils who fall into this category and liaise with schools/academies to gain information on their particular need. Progress of roll out of funding will be reported at next meeting.

5. Revisit actions in Higher Needs Recovery Plan

Covered in item 3

6. Autism Education Trust

Stuart H and Dorothy asked for members views about headteacher's supporting further autism champion work following the successful roll out which benefitted all education settings. Staff previously trained as champions have moved on leaving a gap in this specialist skill. The number of pupils awaiting autism assessment continues to grow which is putting pressure on specialist placements.

Members noted that the current waiting time for autism assessment is over 2.5 years and asked for more information about developing a bespoke package of autism champion work through CPD.

It was agreed that Dorothy would find the original list of autism champions previously trained and share with headteachers the possibility of sharing expertise. Rachael will flag this with both TAPS and TASH.

7. Any Other Business

Next meeting agenda items: SEND Review and EFSA Safety Value programme

Stephen thanked everyone for their time in attending the meeting

Summary of actions

Budget position DSG	Rachael to confirm how Torbay could be included in the EFSA safety value programme and feedback progress
Covid Prevention Funding	Rachael will identify the number of pupils who fall into the targeted support category and liaise with schools to gain information about their particular needs. Progress report on roll out of funding at next meeting
Autism	Dorothy to find the original list of autism champions and share with headteachers the possibility of sharing expertise. Rachael will flag this with both TAPS and TASH
Next meeting agenda items	SEND Review ESFSA Safety Value Programme Covid Prevention Funding progress report