

Minutes of the Higher Needs Recovery Group

26 April 2021

Present

Mark Eager, Matt Gifford, Siobhan Grady, Dorothy Hadleigh
Daniel Hamer, Steven Hulme, Ken Kies, Stephen Kings, Mike Lock, Patrick McCann,
Samantha Meyer, Adam Morris, Liz Lawrence (For Alex Howarth) Rob Parr, Sue
Kemp and Rachael Williams

Not present

Julie Chubb, Brian Chapman

1. Welcome and Introductions

Stephen welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Last minutes and action update

The HNRG minutes of 22/3/21 were agreed to be an accurate account of meeting.
The Chair agreed that the actions were either completed or an agenda item today.

3. Update on ESFA visit and Safety Valve Agreement

Rachael shared the ESFA Safety Valve Agreement and gave an overview on the current budget position presented to School Forum. She said the predicted overall budget was a deficit of £2.04m which is lower than the anticipated outturn of a deficit of £2.6m. This is attributed to additional Covid Prevention funding into the DSG and SEN service delays for statutory assessments.

Rachael reported that she has sought further information about those local authorities who have been offered a safety valve agreement. The mechanism for being awarded a safety valve agreement is not well understood or available. The work conducted indicates that authorities awarded an agreement had a deficit within the region of 10 – 15% of the DSG budget, Torbay's position is 5.6%.

An ESFA informal meeting is being held on 18th May when a plan will highlight the increase in demand which cannot be managed locally. It will be the request of the Local Authority that the ESFA work alongside Torbay to help achieve a balanced

budget and support us to achieve a safety valve agreement. It is the expectation of the EFSA that following the informal meeting the local area will need to submit their recovery plan within four weeks of the meeting.

Members supported the plans for the ESFA meeting.

Members noted that the SEN Review will be released in 2 to 3 weeks. Rachael raised the importance of this consultation and ensuring that we made good use of providing significant local evidence into the review.

4. Current situation with Requests for Statutory Assessments

Dorothy gave some contextual content on the current referrals for statutory assessment. Comparative data for new referrals show an increase in demand during January 32, February 38 and March 54 which has necessitated an increase in SEN Panel meetings to weekly instead of fortnightly.

The SEN team are proactively working with schools to ensure young people's needs are identified before their transitions in September and enabling appropriate staff to be recruited to support level of need.

Members noted the increased demand for all partner agencies to submit their reports back within the statutory timescales.

It was suggested that a piece of work is conducted to understand the likely trajectory of referrals from SENDCO's. This will be actioned at the SENDCO network.

The group also noted the impact on post 16 pupils unable to move into apprenticeships/employment and opting to stay in further education.

5. Update on Covid Prevention Funding and allocation of money

Dan reported that School Forum have delegated the responsibility to roll out £250k Covid Funding to the HNRG. 25 schools have responded within the deadline to access funding for those pupils who fall within the criteria, however, some schools have not responded. These schools will be chased for a response.

He asked that the HNRG consider which option should be adopted when distributing the funding.

- Option 1 – Funding is allocated equally for each child and passed to schools
- Option 2 – Funding is weighted so that children who meet more than one criteria receive funding for each criteria met
- Option 3 – Funding is weighted but a child must be identified as meeting 2 or more criteria

Members discussed each option and unanimously agreed that option 2 was the preferred option.

All schools will be given the opportunity to apply by tomorrow. The funding window will then be closed and the funds will be immediately allocated to those schools that have responded.

6. Improvements in commissioning with the Alternative Provider sector

Donna Frost joined the meeting and introduced herself as the Education Safeguarding Officer.

She outlined the Quality Assurance Framework for Alternative Provision which have been designed to provide additional safeguarding and quality markers for providers that are used. These are being completed by providers. She said this was necessary to provide a tool to enable Torbay Council Education Services to monitor the quality, leadership and delivery of alternative provision for school age pupils. The QA process will include visiting each provider in April 21 – August 21 where the audit will be discussed and advice, guidance updates provided. Providers that have completed the audit will be the only providers used by the local authority. Review mechanisms are built into the process and this will happen on a yearly basis.

Members thanked Donna for her very helpful work.

Rachael outlined the importance of this work in enabling us to move forward with block commissioning of placements.

7. Update on Primary Zero Exclusions work

Dan reported that this work has now been reconvened post the pandemic. Work has started with Paignton and Brixham Headteachers. There has also been a group started in Torquay. The TDA are working with us to consider the viability of using the Polsham site as a primary hub. Next steps include – establishing the model of support, planning the interventions and associated budget and creating a referral board and mechanism.

Rachael explained that this will not cause a budget pressure but will use existing resources differently.

8. Mediation extension of contract

Dan reported that the service had been commissioned and operational prior to Covid, however their support was diverted to support children and families struggling with Covid related anxiety. Service resumed in March 2021 and will be

monitoring against normal KPIs this year. 57 families have been supported with advice about potential exclusions since the service has returned to its original role.

9. Proposals regarding EHE re-charge prior to School Forum

Dan explained that the EHE recharge was discussed at School Forum following a concern that was raised. School Forum tasked Dan Hamer and Alex Newton to work on a proposed new model. This was presented to the group for consideration.

This was discussed the HNRG were in agreement with the proposal.

The HNRG endorsed the charging of schools for historic alternative provision.

10. Autism Champions Work

Dorothy updated everyone on the current staff who have autism experience. Of the 24 staff trained in 2017 only six remain in post locally. Staff have either left or have promoted to another job.

Members recognised that the initial investment by schools to purchase autism expertise was considerable and that a more sustainable solution should be explored. This could involve the teaching schools CPD offer of free bi- annual training.

Rachael asked Siobhan if there was any health funding available as part of the autism work streams being developed. Siobhan will confirm and feedback to the group.

Dorothy will take forward a conversation to see if the work of the teaching schools can be linked to the autism training being proposed.

11. Any Other Business

Dorothy asked members to be mindful of the changes to funding for post 18 students with EHCP who were previously a care experienced. This will include students who have been placed in Torbay from other authorities.

Rachael thanked Patrick McCann for his contribution to this group. Becky Thompson will be his replacement and will be attending the meetings in the future.

Siobhan will share the team changes when they are known and highlighted the work progressing to monitor each health waiting list through a national integrated care system.

ESFA and Safety Value Agreement	Rachael to feedback outcome of the meeting with ESFA at the next meeting
Covid Prevention Funding	Dan to give update on funding allocation to schools at next meeting
EHE recharge	Dan to give update on those schools who have been charged for provision for alternative provision
Autism Champions Work	Siobhan to feedback on funding opportunities through Health. Dorothy to explore CPD through the teaching schools for autism training
Any Other Business	Becky Thompson to be invited to future meetings