

Minutes of the Schools Forum

6th May 2021

-: Present :-

Stewart Biddles (Chairman), Primary Academy Head; **Lisa Finn (Vice-Chair)** Secondary Academy Rep; **Adam Morris**, Primary Maintained Head; **Ken Kies**, Primary Academy Head; **Jim Piper**, Primary Academy Deputy Head; **Tim Stephens**, Primary Academy Governor; **Alex Newton**, Secondary Maintained Head; **Steve Margetts**, Secondary Academy Head; **Clive Star**; Secondary Academy Rep; **Sally Timmins**, Secondary Academy Governor; **Dan Hallam**, Post 16; **Mike Lock**, Special Schools Head; **Steven Hulme**, PRU Head; and **Jayne Jones**, Early Years Rep

-: Also in attendance :-

Rachael Williams, Assistant Director for Education, Learning and Skills; **Rob Parr**, Principal Accountant; **Dan Hamer**, Head of Vulnerable Pupils; **Martin Phillips**, Head of Finance; **Michael Freeman**, Clerk

1. Apologies/Changes to Membership

No apologies were received for this meeting.

2. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the previous Schools Forum, held 11th March 2021, were agreed as a true record.

3. Election of Vice-Chair

In line with the Forums Terms of Reference, Lisa's term of office as Vice-Chair has expired. There were no nominations received prior to this meeting, therefore it was proposed by Stewart and seconded by the rest of the Forum that Lisa be re-elected to Vice-Chair.

4. Financial Report

Rachael presented to members the latest financial report, containing a detailed breakdown of the outturn position for 2020/21. Whilst broadly in line with the previous financial report, members noted that the LA COVID grant has been used to offset salaries of employees funded by the DSG by approx. £195k.

In-year DSG funded activities are now overspent by £2.048m, leading to a cumulative overspend of £5.826m, with the main areas of significant pressure being the Higher Needs and Early Years blocks. Rachael explained that reductions in EHCP spend can be attributed to COVID, and that demand for EHCPs continues to grow. The SEN team are now holding additional EHCP panels to cope with this demand.

With this in mind, concerns were raised that the projections for 2021/22 may be understated, and members asked how we are justifying Torbay having the highest number of EHCPs in the country. It was explained that comparisons with other LAs is not possible yet, however SEN2 data is due to be published in mid-May. Rachael assured members that officers are continuing to work with SENCOs and that the LA is satisfied that Schools are doing all they can to manage need in school before requesting EHCPs.

Members noted the findings of the report.

5. School Allocations 2021-22

Members were shown three spreadsheets detailing the school allocations for 2021/22.

6. ESFA Visit and Safety Valve request

Rachael shared news of an ESFA safety valve agreement, whereby some LAs have been given monetary help to reduce their deficits. Members were shown details of the five LAs currently in receipt of this. Whilst it is uncertain how the ESFA has awarded this funding, it was noted that the LAs in receipt all have a deficit of 10-15%. Whilst Torbay's deficit currently stands at approx. 5%, the Forum discussed whether Torbay should apply for this funding.

The ESFA has asked for a balanced recovery plan first, but members felt that lobbying for this help when the deficit is relatively low (when compared to the LAs already in receipt of funding) would give Torbay more chance of achieving a balanced budget. The LA has been in touch with Kevin Foster MP, who advised waiting for the SEND reforms consultation to be published as a mechanism for lobbying. Rachael has also met with the Municipal Journal and has raised the issue with them.

Members were asked to vote on the proposed approach of lobbying for additional funds and submitting a non-compliant recovery plan that is both realistic and achievable:

For: 12 **Unanimous**
Against: 0
Abstain: 0

7. Update report from Higher Needs Recovery Group

Members were shown an overview of the work of the Higher Needs Recovery Group, the progress made and their next steps. It was pleasing to note that the HNRG has used COVID intervention funding to benefit 115 children in Torbay.

A review of the banding system has not yet taken place, but is anticipated that this could lead to savings of £200k. Whilst acknowledging that this is a relatively small figure, members were satisfied that the review was held for reasons of fairness, not financial, and will lead to greater equity.

Dan Hamer assured the Forum that the name of the Zero Exclusion project was in the process of being changed, after concerns from some schools that the name of the project was too emotive.

Members asked whether Governor training has taken place yet, it was explained that this has happened as part of the SEN review.

Members gave thanks for the update and expressed their wishes for the HNRG to continue their good work.

8. Update on Early Years budget

As requested at the March Forum, members were updated on Early Years funding now that national policy has been published. It was noted that 3 and 4 year old universal and extended entitlements are above 85% of the January 2020 census numbers, so no adjustment will be made to these. The 2 year old numbers are below 85%, so Torbay's numbers will be adjusted. The adjustment will not be known until the LA's headcount is submitted to the ESFA in the summer term; this will be submitted in June/July.

9. Elective Home Education proposals and decisions

Following discussions held at the last Forum, Dan Hamer has met with Alex Newton to discuss new proposals for monitoring and supporting schools and families around Elective Home Education. Members had previously enquired as to the legality of the recharging method, however officers explained that whilst there is no statutory guidance, recharging was agreed by Schools Forum.

Four recommendations were put to members, with discussion revolving around recommendation three, that Schools Forum agree a maximum liability for any one case. Members requested a change to the wording of this recommendation, and a vote was held as follows:

For Schools Forum to agree to a maximum liability for any one case, in line with the Minimum Funding Guarantee for the child, pro-rated across the year:

For: 13

Motion Carried

Against: 0

Abstain: 1

Members asked if the proposals will be shared with primary colleagues as well. Officers agreed to share with all schools if adopted.

It was asked when this new approach would start. Officers agreed that this would be backdated to the 1st April.

10. AOB

None.

11. Items for next meeting

- EHE spending review

12. Future meeting dates

- Thursday 17th June, 09:00
- Thursday 14th October, 09:00
- Thursday 25th November, 09:00