

Minutes of the Schools Forum

20 January 2022
Held via Microsoft Teams

-: Present :-

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

-: Also in attendance :-

Rachael Williams, Assistant Director for Education, Learning and Skills; **Rob Parr**, Principal Accountant; **Dan Hamer**, Head of Vulnerable Pupils; **Dorothy Hadleigh**, Head of SEN; **Sarah White**, Early Years Finance Officer; **Michael Freeman**, Clerk

1. Apologies/Changes to Membership

Apologies were received from Martin Phillips and Nancy Meehan. Kelly Sooben of South Devon College has now been appointed as our Post 16 representative, Kelly will be joining the forum in place of Dan Hallam at our next meeting.

Stewart shared that unfortunately Adam Morris has had to take early retirement on medical grounds, a new Primary Maintained Governor is being sought. The forum thanked Adam for his time and commitment to School Forum and wished him well for the future.

2. Minutes of the last meeting

The Minutes of the last meeting held 25th November 2021 were agreed as a true record.

3. Financial Report

The Forum heard from Rachael, who presented an updated projected position of the local area for 2020/21. DSG (Dedicated Schools Grant) funded activities are now forecast to be overspent by £3.325m, an additional pressure of £123k since the November's Forum. The most significant area of increase is in the Other

packages including SEND budget line, Rachael explained that this is due to the volume of new requests being received.

The Early years autumn headcount is currently being processed; this block is discussed in further detail in item 5 of this meeting.

The Higher Needs block remains the area of most concern, there has been an increase of £68k in Independent Special School Fees and £146k in the Other packages including SEND block. Members noted the findings of the report and agreed to continue to work with the Local Authority through the Higher Needs Recovery Block to enact the financial recovery plan.

4. Special School Allocation 2022/23

Rachael and Rob Parr, Principal Accountant, informed members that a supplementary grant will be available in 22/23 (provisionally £2.7m for Torbay) for maintained schools and academies, allocations at school level will be released in spring 2022. Special schools do not receive the supplementary grant mentioned above, but instead an additional Higher Needs Block allocation of £830k has been allocated for 22/23.

As School Forum has previously agreed that Special Schools should benefit to the same level as the increases given to Primary and Secondary schools, a model for allocating funding was proposed to ensure Special Schools receive an equivalent amount to the supplementary Grant allocated to Primary and Secondary in 22/23. The methodology was using the 21/22 Primary & Secondary data to calculate an allocation for each school if the Supplementary Grant had been allocated in 21/22. This allocation was then taken as a percentage of the overall school funding across Primary & Secondary, this created an overall percentage increase of 2.88% which has then been applied to Special School Funding through increased top-up values.

After discussion, members felt that the proposal was in the interest of fairness towards Special Schools, and a vote was held as follows:

To allocate £334,226 (40.27% of the additional Higher Needs Block) to Special Schools using the funding methodology described:

For: 12 Unanimous
Against: 0
Abstain: 0

Whilst agreeing to the proposals outlined, members were asked to note that there could be some challenge from the ESFA, who may query why the LA is allocating 40% of its growth when we are not yet at a balanced budget.

5. Early Years Funding Rates for 2022-2025

Members heard from Sarah White, Early Years Finance Officer, who presented an update on Early Years funding.

Whilst there is no change to the National Funding Formula, The budget has provided the Local Area with increased rates, as per the Government's Autumn Budget announcement and Spending Review. Torbay has been allocated the minimum increase with an additional 21 pence per hour for 2 year olds and 17 pence per hour for 3 and 4 year olds.

Using the methodology outlined by Sarah in her report, Hourly rates for Torbay children will now be set at:

3&4YOs = £4.15 per hour

An increase of 14 pence per hour compared to the current rate of £4.01

2YOs = £5.17 per hour

An increase of 13 pence per hour compared to the current rate of £5.04

The forum noted the findings of Sarah's report, and thanked her for her time.

6. Schools Forum and HNRG Workshop next steps

Rachael gave some feedback from the joint School Forum/Higher Needs Recovery Group workshops that have taken place since the last Forum. It was discussed whether the HNRG's remit was too wide reaching, and Rachael proposed to members that the group be split up into smaller groups tasked with looking at each individual budget line.

Members were unanimous in agreement to this proposal, but felt that the groups needed to be a mechanism to affect changes and not just a place to share ideas. It was felt important that there should be no disconnect between the Forum and the working groups, therefore each working group should have one member of Forum on it.

Action – Rachael to write to HNRG members explain the changes agreed today.

Action – Rachael to seek volunteers for the new groups.

7. Local Area SEND Inspection

Members were shown a joint letter from the CQC (Care Quality Commission) and Ofsted detailing their findings from the recent SEND inspection. Whilst the report notes good practice in Early Years and Special Schools, it was felt that some schools did not understand the graduated response approach. Rachael clarified to members that feedback was largely based on responses from parents that are significantly challenging and really give a call to action for change that is needed across the system. The inspectors did not report back on individual school visits but used the information from visits to inform the recommendations overall.

Rachael explained that a written statement of action is now being drafted by officers, the deadline for this to be submitted to CQC/Ofsted is 28th April. This will be a multi-agency response, and Rachael informed members engagement with the Regional Schools Commission has started in preparing this and ensuring we are aligned in priorities. Members requested that the work of School Forum be embedded into the statement and asked whether there are any examples from other local authorities. Dorothy explained that she is already talking to colleagues in Swindon regarding ideas. The written statement of action will include input from both parent and children and young people, as well as input from the Chief Executive and multi-agency partners from Health and Social Care.

Members acknowledged that the report is challenging, and recognised the need for change. Joint working at all levels will be the main challenge, and members requested some input from Senior LA officers at a future Forum to discuss any proposed changes.

8. Items for next meeting

9. Future meeting dates

- Thursday 10th March, 09:00
- Thursday 5th May, 09:00
- Thursday 16th June, 09:00