

Minutes of the Schools Forum

23rd November 2023

-: Present :-

Stewart Biddles (Chair) Primary Academy Rep; **Tamsin Summers**, Secondary Academy Rep; **Tim Stephens**, Primary Academy Governor; **Steven Hulme**, PRU (substitute for Steven Hulme); **Mike Lock**, Special Schools Head; **Sarah Tomkinson**, Primary Maintained Head; **Stewart Bellworthy**, Primary Academy Rep; **Clive Star**, Secondary Academy Rep; **Alex Newton**, Secondary Maintained Head; **Steve Margetts**, Secondary Academy Head

-: Also in attendance :-

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

1. Welcome

Apologies were received from Nancy Meehan, Jayne Jones and Jim Piper. Due to Jim having difficulties in attending meetings he has decided to step down from Forum with immediate effect. Members thanked Jim for his contributions over the years and will now look to source a new Primary Academy Rep.

Action – Rachael/Clerk to write to Primary Academy colleagues to recruit a new rep for the next meeting.

2. Voting of new Chair and Vice-Chair

At October's meeting, Stewart gave notice that he will be stepping down as Chair of Schools Forum. With this in mind, nominations have been sought from members before today's meeting. We have had one interested candidate, Sarah Tomkinson. Members voted unanimously in favour of Sarah becoming the new chair of Schools Forum, whilst giving thanks to Stewart for his work as chair over the years. Stewart will remain as member of the Forum moving forward.

The position of Vice-Chair is still vacant, a vote on this will be held at January's meeting.

Action – Any parties interested in the role of Vice-Chair to contact Rachael/Clerk before the next meeting.

3. Minutes of the last meeting

Minutes of the last meeting held on Thursday 12th October were agreed as a true and accurate record.

Rachael explained that one action from the meeting, to invite health colleagues to future forums, is still going ahead and we will be inviting them to January's meeting. Rachael also shared with colleagues' details of an Overview and Scrutiny Board taking place on the 7th December, focussing on mental health services for young people in our area. Rachael will send the link round to members for those interested in attending.

Action – Rachael to share link to Overview and Scrutiny Board.

4. Financial Report

Members were shown the latest Finance Report. It was pleasing to note that since we met on October the 28th, there has been an increase in our deficit position by £109k, and we are now at a forecast overspend of £1.038 million.

Rachael explained that in our Dedicated Schools Grant management plan, we were anticipating being in the region of 1.25 million overspent at this point in our safety valve programme, so we are currently ahead of schedule. However, Rachael did stress that the volatility of that budget remains of concern. What we know is that the additional placements in independent schools and the RE engagement work leads to increased cost across our system as well. So we currently are reporting that figure it is that increase when I look at the detail behind that, we've had three additional children going into independent provision since the October date and we've also had a large number of young people now re engaging at the college, taking us over our planned numbers, but really good outcomes in the fact that they are no longer NEAT and they are coming back into provision at our Post 16 provider. Members noted that we are still trying to make savings against other aspects within that budget. The true cost of those provisions at Post 16 and the independent placements have been offset against some of the reductions that have been made in other areas as well.

Members agreed to the recommendations to note the financial position of the Local Area DSG budget, and to review the Safety Valve update report and make recommendations to ensure future progress enables the budget position to be held and improved during the financial year.

5. De-Delegation Decisions

Members were then shown the De-Delegations and Centrally Retained Decisions for 2024/25. It was noted that the delegations that are proposed in these papers are the consistent with what has been de delegated previously. There are no new items

listed within those delegation schemes. Forum members need to vote separately on these items.

Tim queried whether it was viable to calculate the Early Years figures at 3% now, given that it is moving to that figure in the near future, in order to reduce the impact on the service it will have? Rachael explained that there are some vacancies in the early years team at the moment which we are recruiting for, so that spend will be aligned back to where we had anticipated it being. So that was the Speech and Language Therapist post in particular. Rachael felt that as the 3% figure was part of a consultation document only, it would be better to take a vote on what's in the legislation at this time.

Maintained members were then asked to vote on De delegation as follows:

For funding to be de delegated for Primary Maintained Schools:

For: 2
Against: 0 Motion Carried
Abstain: 0

For funding to be de delegated for Secondary Maintained Schools:

For: 2
Against: 0 Motion Carried
Abstain: 0

A series of votes was then held on each of the individual budget areas discussed, open to all members:

	<i>For:</i>	<i>Against:</i>	<i>Abstain:</i>
<i>Planned pupil growth</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>School Admissions Services</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Servicing the Schools Forum</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Central Early Years Block provision (5% retained)</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Funding moved from the Schools Block to the Higher Needs Block</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>

All items approved unanimously.

6. Safety Valve - Data update, Health

Members were next provided with an update on the Safety Valve, detailing the latest position that we are seeing regarding requests for statutory assessments and all of the information that we are receiving as a local authority regarding plans at this time, before having to submit our next safety valve progress report to the Department for Education and Education Skills and Funding Agency on the 15th of

December. It was explained that this report is an interim statement before the full overarching report in January's Forum.

Although our financial position is improving, there are significant risks that are being seen in the emerging data and statistics across the Local Area. We are still seeing an increase in the Request for Statutory Assessments across the local area which is then leading to plans being issued. Rachael wanted members to be clear that plans are still being issued as they were previously. Actually what we are seeing is a higher rate of refusal now. We continue to issue the plans in line with the code, but however a significant number of referrals that are coming into us that actually children require an education, health and care plan to have their needs met and that's really coming out of the fact there is some RSAs demonstrating that needs could be met through a graduated response and at SENK support, and that process of reviewing and applying strategies haven't been consistently applied across schools as well so.

Rachael explained that there's a huge amount of work that is coming in, in SEND, but actually that's work that is not leading to an outcome that actually either a school or a parent may have wanted, and actually it's work that actually could be into that SENK aspect as well. Our current refusal rate is 38% at the moment.

Stewart noted the differences in refusal rates between individual schools, and asked whether there could be an opportunity for schools to pair up, allowing SENCOs to work together? Rachael said that good quality referrals are being shared with Schools at our SENCO Forums, also noting that School colleagues being able to observe the SEND Panel process has been really helpful for schools to understand how the decisions are being formed.

Rachael then shared analysis of the next steps meetings, put in place when an RSA is refused. The majority of outcomes from these meetings, parents have been reassured through that process that actually their child's needs can be met at SEMK and we are not seeing that referral into a Request for Statutory Assessment.

Stewart then asked whether there was potential for parents to meet with the LA prior to an RSA being submitted, rather than the current process of a next steps meeting if the RSA is turned down. It was felt that this could mean parents felt more reassured, and also could potentially lead to a reduction in the number of refusals. Whilst Officers were open to the idea it was acknowledged that this would require a huge amount of work and may not be viable at present. With that in mind, Tamsin asked whether this approach could be trialled in a couple of schools, Officers agreed to look into this.

Members were also shown the tribunal outcomes that we've had in the last six months as well. Stewart noted that it is really positive in terms of tribunals are going our way. Parents are feeling reassured and RSAs aren't having to be resubmitted.

7. SEND Improvement - New governance and overview, including school representation

Rachael fed back from yesterday's briefing on SEND improvement and how the SEND governance framework in the local area is now evolving into the next phase of improvement we have secured. The focus is on how we ensure that school system leadership is embedded within that change programme moving forward and that culture shift that is required across our local area.

The latest SEND inspection reports have been really explicit about where accountability lies for those actions and areas for improvement. We've done a huge amount of improvements around working practises, but our parents and carers are telling us that that isn't yet embedded and may not have changed the lived experience.

Rachael was keen for this to be seen as an opportunity for us to really make sure system leadership is joined up and connected. Members agreed and appreciated the opportunity to engage with senior health colleagues about some of those senior issues that actually really are impacting on children.

Rachael explained that Stuart Herron would coordinate trying to work with TAPS, we've put in a conversation how TASH would look at that as well. There weren't any Secondary colleagues available yesterday for the briefing. But it was important that Secondaries are not missed out on that development piece as well.

Both Steve and Alex wanted it noted that the briefing was held at short notice and due to other commitments they were unable to attend. It was felt difficult to determine which meetings should take priority, and felt that TASH could be used as the mechanism in which to get the viewpoint of secondary heads moving forward.

Rachael accepted this point, clarifying that the presentation yesterday was a start of a conversation about how people become part of those reform programmes as well, and the multi-agency nature of those working parties will mean that heads or people from schools will have the opportunity to be alongside health colleagues to be able to actually take forward some of those actions. A lot of the actual tangible changes and work that will need to take place in partnership with other senior colleagues could not be done through TASH and TAPS Due to them not being multi-agency meetings.

8. Primary Sixth Day Provision

Following on from June's Meeting, Rachael presented to members all of the data and the information regarding our primary six day provision, currently being provided by Mayfield School at their Chestnut site.

At June's Forum it was agreed as a group to put in additional funding to the Mayfield provision to be able to offer some of the outreach work that was required for reintegration or integration into the centre as well. As part of also taking that decision, we said we would then take stock of where those referrals are coming from, what's the data and what provision might be needed in the future. Members were shown how many children were admitted, a breakdown of the children's year

groups as well as an overview of the reasons for children needing the 6th day provision.

The cost of the provision that has been provided has remained fairly static with the exception of the increase agreed at Schools Forum in June last year for an additional staff member. The average cost of a placement for 6th day provision is £13,395. When the provision started it was around £19,000 and we've reduced that over a period of time because more children are going there and those numbers are filled as well. The LA also spend more money on alternative provision at present, where alternative packages are put in place where children may not be able to be admitted into the six day provision straight away.

Looking at the schools with the most referrals, Tim asked whether many of those children actually originated in that school from reception or were placed there under managed move to prevent exclusion from another school? Dan clarified that there has not been any children on managed moves in Primaries that have gone on to be excluded.

Outlining the statutory duties that we have around the 6th day provision, Rachael asked members to consider what we want the provision to look like moving forward. Some options included looking at commissioning a new provider for the provision, to enhance resource provision within mainstream to ensure that children remain within their communities, expansion of an already registered pupil referral unit or to look at permanent exclusion back into alternative mainstream and then look for that delegation of funding to provide an outreach model as well.

Whilst acknowledging that Schools Forum is not the right mechanism to make these decisions, Rachael pointed to the work of Laura Greenland and the AP strategy paper, highlighting a need to get the Alternative Provision Strategy group up and running. Some members already attending the group raised concerns about the focus of the initial meetings, Rachael agreed to look into this with officers.

Members thanked Rachael for the report and agreed for this to become a regular update on future Forum agendas.

9. Items for next meeting

- **Election of Vice-Chair**
- **Schools Forum Terms of Reference**
- **Alternative Provision strategy update**
- **MTS update**

10. Future meeting dates

- Thursday 25th January 2024, 09:00
- Thursday 21st March 2024, 09:00
- Thursday 2nd May 2024, 09:00
- Thursday 20th June 2024, 09:00

