

Minutes of the Schools Forum

Thursday 8th March 2018
Mezzanine 3, Tor Hill House 09:00-11:30

-: Present :-

Roger Hughes (Chair), **Mike Lock** (Vice-Chair), **Steven Hulme** (PRU), **Jayne Jones** (Early Years Rep), **Adam Morris** (Primary Maintained Head), **Jane Young** (Primary Academy Head - replacement for Jim Piper), **Tim Stephens** (Primary Academy Governor), **Lisa Finn** (Secondary Academy Rep), **Lindsey Kings** (Secondary Academy Deputy Head), **Daneian Rees** (Secondary Maintained Rep), **Jan Chopping** (Secondary Academy Governor)

Andy Dempsey (Director of Children's Services), **Rachael Williams** (Head of Education, Learning and Skills), **Dan Hamer** (Head of Vulnerable Pupils), **Martin Phillips** (Head of Finance), **Dorothy Hadleigh** (Head of SEN).

1. Apologies/Changes to Membership

Apologies were received from Stuart Biddles, Clive Star and Maurice Codd. Jane Young attended in place of Jim Piper. The Forum welcomed Jayne Jones to her first meeting as Early Years representative, and welcomed Tim Stephens in his new role as Primary School Governor.

2. Minutes of the last meeting

Minutes of the last meeting were agreed as a true record.

3. Matters arising

Rachael Williams informed members that talk with the DfE around Early Years Census plans (Item 4 of January meeting) is still ongoing, although written confirmation has not yet been received. An update on this will be provided at the June Forum.

Members expressed concerns that the Schools Forum webpage is out of date, and is not easy to find on the Authority's Website. Mike Freeman is working with the Governance Support team to update this.

For further information on Schools Forum, please contact:
Roger Hughes, Chair, ecotaps@hotmail.com
Rachael Williams, Head of Education, Learning & Skills, Rachael.williams@torbay.gov.uk
Mike Freeman, clerk, Michael.freeman@torbay.gov.uk

4. Financial Report

Rachael Williams, Head of Education, presented members with an update on the current financial situation. The current outturn position of £947,000 overspend, whilst still significant, has improved considerably from the 1.217m predicted in January.

The Early Years census from January has now been collated, leading to more accurate data and a revised position of £180k underspend. Surplus funds can now be used to offset the Early Years block overspend from last year.

Cost in the Higher Needs block continue to rise as more children are going through the Request for Statutory Assessment (RSA) process.

There is no change to the DSG reserve position, this remains the same as January 2018.

Members then raised a question around schools allocations, and if they can see other schools allocations. It was confirmed by Martin Phillips that this will be a public document, and will bring to June Schools Forum for discussion. A link to the document will be circulated to members before this.

Discussion then moved onto Special School Funding Allocations, with members being shown a table modelling different funding top ups and the impact these would have on each Special School.

Members felt that an increase in top up in line with what mainstream schools receive would be fair, and after discussion a decision to top up the allocations by 2%, creating an additional £204k to Special Schools Budgets was put to vote. Officers advised caution, highlighting it would be creating an extra overspend by doing this, and reiterated the Local Authorities current position of virement, (with the potential for disapplication), and raised the point that a Higher Needs Recovery Group is already looking at Overspends.

To top up Special Schools allocations by an additional 2% (please note vote was open to schools members only, not Local Authority officers):

Yes: 7

No: 2

Abstain: 2

The motion was passed, and it was agreed that Special Schools would model the implications of the top up and present to members at June Forum.

Action – Martin Phillips to provide a link to all members when Schools Allocations figures are available.

Action – Mike Lock to set up working party with Special School colleagues to model percentage increase agreed in today's vote.

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5. Higher Needs Recovery Group

Rachael Williams fed back to members details of the 1st Higher Needs Recovery Group meeting, established at the request of Schools Forum in January 2018. Terms of Reference for the Group was discussed, and it was agreed that the Group will not make decisions themselves, but make recommendations that can be brought to Schools Forum for decision. Members were in agreement that schools will be required to sign up to the Recovery Plan.

Discussion revolved around the current demands on the system, detailing the numbers of pupils requiring both EHCP and SEN support. An overview of the Higher Needs budget, with a breakdown of spend against each area of activity was then discussed, to look at what is driving the demand on the funding block.

The next meeting will look into a deeper comparison of Torquay with its statistical neighbours, and also look at permanent and fixed term exclusions.

It was recognised that a chair is yet to be appointed for this meeting, this will be resolved at the next meeting on 19th April. Members were in agreement that the Chair should come from a Secondary Mainstream school, as it was felt that savings should start to be made from this sector.

6. Update on ALFEY funds

A report from the Early Years Team was shared with members, detailing ALFEY (Activity led Funding in Early Years) spending and the changes made to the ALFEY process. A new panel is now in place, which meets half termly, consisting of representatives from the Early Years' Service and from PVI settings. It was felt that the panel process offered greater scrutiny of applications, and this has led to both a reduction in the total number of children in receipt of ALFEY and the number of children who place in the higher score brackets. Although the LA is still anticipating an overspend this has now been greatly reduced.

Schools Forum recognises the success of this new process, and acknowledges the work of the panel in reducing costs when the introduction of 30 hours funding could have increased spending. Members agree that introducing a peer challenge element to the Panel is something that could be replicated in other working parties.

7. Report on High Cost pupils

Dorothy Hadleigh, Head of SEN, shared with members an analysis of High Cost Placements. There continues to be a significant increase in the number of Requests for Statutory Assessments (RSAs), and it is recognised that Torbay has a high rate of Statements/Education Health and Care Plans when compared both nationally and to our statistical neighbours. Pressure remains on Specialist Provisions, with

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Special Schools in Torbay now at capacity, and also on bespoke packages, due to the closure of one independent school in Torbay.

There has, however, been some success in the Joint Funded Placements block, where the work of Education and Social Care colleagues led to 2 students being placed in out of area mainstream special schools, rather than in independent schools, leading to a saving of approximately £150,000. It is also noted that work is ongoing around Post 16 provisions, with a peer panel now in place to discuss cases.

The Forum notes the contents of this report, and requests that updates continue on a six monthly basis.

8. Permanent Exclusion Data

A report was shown to Forum members by Dan Hamer, Head of Vulnerable Pupils. Both fixed term and permanent exclusions are high, and the rate is increasing when compared to our statistical neighbours. There is particular concern around the high proportion of SEN children/ children open to Social Care that are being excluded.

It is recognised that the hard work of the Challenging Behaviour Group has led to some pressure being relieved on the Burton Provision, with 19 students being identified as being ready to leave, creating capacity to take in excluded students.

The Forum notes the contents of this report, and requests that the Higher Needs Recovery Group considers these findings in greater depth.

9. Recoupment Presentation

Following a number of requests from Schools asking for the Local Authority to explain the recoupment methodology, it was felt that Schools Forum should revisit how recoupment is currently worked out. A presentation by Dan Hamer was shown to members detailing the current formula and alternative options, by looking at a model being used by Portsmouth.

A proposal put to members that Recoupment should reflect the minimum funding schools receive for a child, not by AWPU (Age Weighted Pupil Unit). The maximum amounts received would not rise, as we are already over the Minimum Funding Guarantee, but it is felt that this would lead to a fairer amount being recouped at the lower end for children without significant extra funding.

Although it was felt that a decision should not be made at present, members note the findings of the presentation, and note the assurances from officers that due process is in place when recouping from all schools. Members were in agreement that solutions should be sought at the Higher Needs Recovery Group, and be brought back to Forum for discussion at a later date.

Action – Dan Hamer to send copies of the presentation to members.

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10. Verbal update on Plymouth Partnership

Andy Dempsey, Director of Children's Services, updated the forum on the future partnership with Plymouth Council. A joint Director has been appointed and is expected to be in post from 1st April. Andy will remain in post for the transition period, and will lead the Local Authority through the upcoming Ofsted inspection.

It is expected that Andy will be leaving the Council towards the end of May, and as such this will be his last meeting. Alison Botham, the new joint DCS for Plymouth/Torbay will attend in his place in future. The Forum would like to express their Gratitude towards Andy, and thank him for his hard work over the last two years.

Please note – at the conclusion of this agenda item Mike Lock and Adam Morris left the meeting.

11. Post Audit Action Plan

An Action Plan was shown to members, detailing actions to be taken as a response to the audit of Schools Forum undertaken last year. Tasks were given a Red, Amber or Green rating depending on their status, and members agreed that this action plan should be updated and brought to future forums until all tasks have been completed.

12. Items for next meeting

- Financial Report
- High Needs Recovery Group
- Annual Review of School Representation
- IOSS Monitoring report
- Audit Action Plan update

13. Future meeting dates

- 14th June 2018, 09:00, Mezzanine Room 4, Tor Hill House
- 11th October 2018, 09:00, Mezzanine Room 4, Tor Hill House
- 29th November 2018, Venue TBA
- 17th January 2019, Venue TBA
- 7th March 2019, Venue TBA