

Minutes of the Schools Forum

11th October 2018

-: Present :-

Roger Hughes (Chair), **Steven Hulme** (PRU), **Adam Morris** (Primary Maintained Head), **Jim Piper** (Primary Academy Deputy Head), **Tim Stephens** (Primary Academy Governor), **Maurice Codd** (Primary Maintained Governor), **Daneian Rees** (Secondary Maintained Rep), **Lindsey Kings** (Secondary Academy Deputy Head), **Dan Hallam** (Post 16)

Alison Botham (Director of Children's Services), **Rachael Williams** (Head of Education, Learning & Skills), **Dorothy Hadleigh** (Head of SEN), **Dan Hamer** (Head of Vulnerable Pupils), **Rob Parr** (Principal Accountant), **Mike Freeman** (Clerk)

1. Apologies/Changes to Membership

Apologies were received from Mike Lock, Stewart Biddles and Clive Star. Lisa Finn and Jayne Jones were absent from the meeting.

Jan Chopping has resigned from the Forum. Debbie Horn of the LA will be sourcing a new representative from the Secondary Governor sector.

A decision was then held on the Chair and Vice Chair of Schools Forum. Members agreed to re-elect Mike Lock to position of Vice-Chair.

Roger Hughes was elected to continue as Chair. It was noted that Roger will be leaving the Forum next year, a new chair will need to be in place for the June 2019 meeting.

2. Minutes of the last meeting

Minutes of the last meeting, held Thursday 14th June, were agreed to be a true record. Minutes of the exceptional Schools Forum held Monday 1st October will be included in the November meeting's agenda pack.

3. Matters arising

From item 6 of June's meeting, minutes of the Higher Needs Recovery Group will now be circulated to Forum members after each meeting.

From item 8, Dan Hamer, Head of Vulnerable Pupils, informed members that the current Elective Home Education post has been increased into a full time position. The additional 0.6 post agreed by Forum is now being advertised, with interviews due to take place in the 2nd week of November.

From item 9, Post Audit Action Plan, Terms of Reference for the Higher Needs Recovery Group have now been updated. Schools Forum webpage is in the process of being updated. Members agreed that the current process, of emailing a link to all agendas and minutes when available, should continue.

Action – Dan Hamer to provide recruitment update at November meeting.

4. Financial Report

Rachael Williams, Head of Education Learning and Skills, shared with members an updated Financial Report. The forecast current overspend position has now increased from £2.4m to £2.66m. A more detailed table with projections for each budget area, as requested by members, was then explained. Volatility remains in pupil-led and demand-led issues, with significant pressure in both EHCP packages and Special Schools.

There is expected to be a underspend in the retained element of the Early Years Block, should this position remain the same at the end of year a decision on how the money will go back into the sector will need to be made. There continues to be a strong take up in the 2 year old and 3-4 year old offers, however it is noted that the average take up by parents in the 30 hour funding offer is 23 hours, helping to ease pressure on the budget. ALFEY funding continues to be monitored, and remains in line with the budget at the moment.

Joint Funded Placements continue to be signed off at Assistant Director level, and Education continues to contribute the right proportion of funds for placements.

The Higher Needs Block has seen both an increase in the number of EHCPs and the spend on each one. Following recommendations from Forum a full review of EHCP banding is imminent.

Commissioned Placements at Special Schools remains broadly in-line with previous years, however there has been a slight increase in the number of placements at Mayfield, with a view to ensuring that children's needs can be met locally.

There currently is an underspend in the Schools Intervention/Commissioning budget. A proposal was brought to members to allocate some of this underspend for Governors Training, instead of it coming out of the 19/20 budget as previously agreed.

Vote: To allocate £30k from the Commissioning underspend and use it to bring forward the planned Governors Training:

For: 7

Against: 0

Abstain: 2

Motion Carried

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

Michael Freeman, Clerk, Michael.freeman@torbay.gov.uk

Members recognise that this training needs to take place, with an aim of bringing down costs in the future.

5. Analysis of High Cost Placements

Dorothy Hadleigh, Head of Special Educational Needs, presented to Forum her report on High Cost Placements. There has continued to be an increase in Requests for Statutory Assessments (RSAs). The SEN team has conducted analysis which shows that school requests have begun to slow, but there has been a large increase in parental requests, meaning the LA remains well above the national average.

It was acknowledged that the SEN Panel has become a lot more robust in its decision making year on year, and currently has a refusal rate of around 20%. There is now a Graduated Response document out in schools, which outlines what is expected of schools at SEN support level, and the need for more evidence when submitting RSAs. Members agree that schools may need further training on this.

Following up on the issues highlighted by the SEN audit of 2016, Schools are being challenged by SEN on whether parents are being advised to submit RSAs instead of their child's school. There is also a vast difference between schools in the amount of time they employ a Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo), again this is being challenged.

It is noted that some schools are providing resistance when EHCPs are being issued, with them not accepting the initial top-up element of the plan. There are also some issues with children moving into the area with EHCPs being found a school place, Dan Hamer has been communicating with schools on this.

There continues to be pressure on the LAs Special Schools and Enhanced Resource Provisions, however a new provision has been set up in Paignton, called STEPS, for children with high anxiety. This has led to some savings for the LA by not having to place these children in high cost out of area placements.

There has been a slight growth in the number of bespoke packages being issued, however these continued to be monitored by SEN caseworkers on a 6 weekly basis. Independent Placements have seen a slight reduction in costs, as a result of greater scrutiny on the value for money that these placements provide, and the outcomes these placements provide for students.

Post 16 pressures are continuing to rise, the success of the Post 16 offer has resulted in young people wanting to maintain their education for longer. Members noted that there is some money that has been ring-fenced in order to work with Careers South West, helping parents and children in their Post 16 choices.

There is a larger number of Early Years children on EHCPs, however it was felt that this early intervention leads to greater outcomes for the children, easing the pressure on our special schools by allowing these children to access mainstream schools.

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Rachael Williams, Head of Education, Learning & Skills, Rachael.williams@torbay.gov.uk

Michael Freeman, Clerk, Michael.freeman@torbay.gov.uk

Members noted the findings of this reports, and requested an update at the March 2019 Forum.

6. **Audit Action Plan Update**

An update on the action plan, produced on the recommendations of the Devon Audit Partnership, was shared with members. As agreed at the June Forum, items 1.6.1 and 1.7.1 should revert back to an amber status, as work on these is ongoing.

With regards to item 1.9.1, members requested that the comments box be updated, with the following points:

- Minutes should be sent to all Headteachers, *and* Early Years providers.
- Headteachers are requested to cascade all minutes to Governors.
- The website should be more accessible to members of the public. Schools could help with this by providing a link to Schools Forum on their own websites.

Action - MF to update action plan, including the points raised above.
- MF to write a paragraph explaining what Schools Forum does, and send this to schools to use on their own websites.

7. **Discussion on the possibility of special schools' allocations being reduced to 17/18 levels**

Members felt that this item was adequately discussed at last week's Exceptional Schools Forum, no further discussion was needed.

8. **Items for next meeting**

- Report from Dan Hamer, Head of Vulnerable Pupils
- Verbal update on Virement consultation
- Financial Report
- Delegated Services
- IOSS
- Review of Standing Orders

9. **Future meeting dates**

- Thursday 29th November 2018, 09:00, 4th Floor Meeting Room, Tor Hill House
- Thursday 17th January 2019, 09:00, 4th Floor Meeting Room, Tor Hill House
- Thursday 7th March 2019, 09:00, Mezzanine Room 3, Tor Hill House