

Minutes of the Schools Forum

7 March 2019

Mezzanine Room 3, Tor Hill House

-: Present :-

Roger Hughes (Chairman/Primary Maintained Head), **Mike Lock** (Vice-Chair/Special Schools), **Stewart Biddles** (Primary Academy Head), **Adam Morris** (Primary Maintained Head), **Tim Stephens** (Primary Academy Governor), **Maurice Codd** (Primary Maintained Governor), **Lindsey Kings** (Secondary Academy Deputy Head), **Daniean Rees** (Secondary Academy Rep), **Jason Trevarthen** (Secondary Academy Rep – Substitute for Lisa Finn) **Clive Star** (Secondary Academy Governor), **Dan Hallam** (Post 16) **Jayne Jones** (Early Years)

Rachael Williams (Assistant Director of Education, Learning & Skills), **Dan Hamer** (Head of Vulnerable Pupils), **Alison Eden** (Senior Accountant) and **Mike Freeman** (Clerk)

1. Apologies/Changes to Membership

Apologies were received from Sally Timmins, Jim Piper, Steven Hulme and Lisa Finn. Jason Trevarthen attended as Lisa's substitute.

Alison Botham and Rob Parr sent apologies, Alison Eden attended from the Finance team.

2. Minutes of the last meeting

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

3. Matters arising

None.

4. Election of Chair and Vice Chair

Given Rogers decision to stand down as Chair of Schools Forum, members were sent an email asking for nominations for a new Chair. Two nominations were received, both in favour of Stewart Biddles. No further nominations were brought to the meeting, therefore Stewart has been elected Chair, and will succeed Roger.

Mike Lock will also be standing down from his role as Vice-Chair. At present, there has been no nominations for this position, therefore this will be deferred until the

next meeting in June. Members were asked to speak to colleagues, with any interested parties being nominated via email to the Clerk.

Action – MF to source Vice-Chair nominations

5. Virement Decision

Rachael was pleased to announce that the LA has received notification that the Virement application of 1.79% of the overall DSG budget, as agreed at Schools Forum, was successful and is now being enacted. Budgets have now been sent out to schools, but the LA has not had any responses from schools following this announcement.

6. Financial Report

Rachael Williams shared with the Forum a financial report detailing the current outturn position, which has reduced from £2.716m in January to £2.620m. Taking onto account the additional Higher Needs allocation of £268k that was agreed by members at January Forum, the final outturn position at the end of the year is expected to be £2.35m.

After calculations based on the Spring census data, there is a predicted underspend in the Early Years Block of £282k. However, early calculations indicate that may be a negative adjustment in the Summer, predicted to be approximately £216k. Members agreed that the underspend should be kept in contingency because of this, and voted as follows:

Vote – to hold the £282k as a contingency to cover the expected negative adjustment in Summer 2019:

For: 12

Against: 0

Abstain: 0

Given this underspend, The adjustment received from last year's Early Years funding, initially being held to mitigate any overspend in this year's budget, was then discussed, with members debating how best to allocate these funds. Two options were considered on how to use this funding, with a third option proposed by members at the meeting. Votes were as follows:

Option A - Allocate the funding to providers in a lump sum based on the hours claimed over the last three headcounts.

For: 1

Against: 10

Abstain: 1

As this option was rejected by members, voting then moved on to option B.

Option B – Re-allocate the funding to repay the Higher Needs block contribution to the Early Years SEN Inclusion Fund (ALFEY Funding), bringing the overall deficit position to a lower level:

For 6

Against: 6

Abstain: 0

In the event of a tie, the Chair has casting vote, therefore the motion carried. Because of this, Option C, which proposed a 50/50 split between the first two options, was not voted on.

It was felt that this was a good opportunity to alleviate some of the pressure and reduce the Higher Needs debt.

There is an overspend in the SEN Inclusion budget of £16k, however there is an underspend of £15k in the DAF (Disability Access Fund) which was felt could be used to offset this. Members voted as follows:

To use the £15k underspend in the DAF to offset the ALFEY overspend:

For: 12

Against: 0

Abstain: 0

The Higher Needs Block remains of significant concern, with an overspend of £160k projected, due in part to an increase in the number of requests for additional funding above the £6k allocated to schools. However, it was noted that the work of the HNRG (Higher Needs Recovery Group) is beginning to have some effect. The work of the Peer Challenge Group is ongoing, Secondary Heads will be meeting shortly to discuss the managing of children at risk of exclusion, with any proposals being brought to Schools Forum in the future.

Members noted the findings of this report, and thought that it would be beneficial to have an agreed set of principles in place, in the event of further new money becoming available. A discussion on this will be held at the next Forum in June.

Action – MF to add to June agenda.

7. Report on High Cost Pupils

Rachael presented a report from Dorothy Hadleigh, head of SEN on High cost placements. The number of RSAs (Requests for Statutory Assessments) has continued to increase. As part of the ongoing partnership, colleagues from Plymouth are now attending Torbay SEN panel, Schools Forum will receive a report from Plymouth on the threshold decisions being made in due course.

It was recognised that the use of bespoke packages are becoming more significant, due in part to our special schools being at capacity, as well as trying to reduce the

number more costly out of area placements. Two students currently on such placements will be moving back to Torbay specialist provisions in 2019, generating a saving of £60k. The number of placements at independent provisions has remained the same since September.

The SEN casework team are looking at value for money. Bespoke packages, being used to maintain a child on a mainstream role, is the area of most concern at present. Rachael has asked independent consultants from the Local Government Association to look at these, and is working with Dorothy on what is driving the current overspend.

Rachael was pleased to announce that funding has been secured to increase the capacity of the SEN team from April 2019, and will be looking to appoint one additional SEN caseworker, 2 x SEN monitoring officers and one EHCP writer.

Post 16 placements continue to rise, a transition board has now been set up with Adult Social Care, and a Post commissioning officer, funded by Adult Social Care has been appointed. Joint funded placements are being looked at by consultants, their recommendations will be reported on at a future forum when available.

The Forum thanked Dorothy and the SEN team for the detailed report and their ongoing hard work. It was requested that future reports could include a breakdown of Primary/Mainstream/ post 16 children, rather than Pre and Post 16.

ACTION – RW to speak with Dorothy re further breakdown of figures.

8. Higher Needs Recovery Group

Dan Hamer, Head of Vulnerable Pupils, presented analysis on permanent and fixed term exclusions. There is a significant number of permanent exclusions when compared to our statistical neighbours in Devon and Plymouth, however we have seen a reduction in exclusions from Special Schools, with work being done to arrange packages that meet children's need before the point of exclusion is reached. There continues to be an increase in fixed term exclusions across the sector, with persistent disruptive behaviour the main reason. Dan is continuing to work with the Troubled Families team, Social Care colleagues and the Turning Corners Project on this.

Some recoupmnt has taken place, assessment places at Burton Academy are now charged for, which has seen places reduce. However, there remains some problems with reintegration.

Transitionary events between Early Years settings and Primary Schools are being trialled locally this year, with a view to providing a more co-ordinated approach to transitions.

Members noted the findings of the report, and thanked Dan for his ongoing work.

Please note that at the conclusion of this item Lindsey Kings left the meeting.

9. Activity Led Funding in Early Years Report

An update on the current position of ALFEY (Activity Led Funding in Early Years) funding, as well as a detailed explanation of the current banding system, was shared with members. It is recognised that the number of children in receipt of ALFEY funding continues to rise, but also that the complexity of need for the children is growing as well. If this trend continues it is felt that the £250k allocated by Schools Forum for ALFEY will not be sufficient, so the ALFEY panel has proposed ceasing level 1 funding, instead offering alternative support to settings to support children that would previously meet level 1 criteria. This support would help to ease the additional pressure on placed on settings by ceasing the funding. Members note the actions agreed by panel.

10. Post 16 update

Rachael presented to members a progress update on the Post 16 progress – As agreed by the Post 16 task and finish group, set up in December 2016, Data is now being monitored on a termly basis, with Pathway Plans in place for each young person that enables caseworkers to assess the value for money of each placement.

Providers have been sent a data collection exercise, with a number of key indicators measured. Rachael was pleased to announce that of the completed returns, 88.2% of students have completed their course, of these 67% are remaining in education and 5.8% have moved in employment. It was however concerning to note that 6.7% of young people were reported as NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training).

Moving forward, it was agreed that Forum should write a letter to providers to chase outstanding data collection forms. It was felt that any future contracts with providers should now include the forms as standard. The next Post 16 working party is in April, the group will look at writing measurable targets for providers, to enable a fair comparison between provisions.

Action – RW to write letter to providers on behalf of Forum requesting the completion of data collection forms.

11. IOSS funding report

Please note, due to earlier items overrunning, and the need for members to vote, this item was discussed earlier than shown in the agenda.

It was reported that funding for the IOSS (Intensive Outreach Support Service) has ceased, due to national changes in the funding received by Local Authorities. Members were asked to consider the delivery of the service in the future, and how this can be funded.

Rachael presented three options for consideration, with members asked to vote on each one:

Option A: School Forum ask officers to conduct an evaluation of all outreach services currently commissioned by the Higher Needs Budget and bring a proposal to the Higher Needs Recovery Group for consideration and a final decision by School Forum.

For: 12

Against: 0

Abstain: 0

With members in unanimous agreement, Option B, *School Forum works to find an alternative solution to funding the IOSS service, through direct payment from schools or other mechanisms*, was not voted on.

It was agreed that looking at all of the outreach services currently commissioned through the Higher Needs Block would enable the Forum to see what investments give the biggest returns. The findings of this work will be reported on at October's Forum.

Please note that at the conclusion of this item Maurice Codd left the meeting.

12. Items for next meeting

- Election of Vice Chair
- Financial Report
- High Needs Recovery Group – Verbal update
- Annual review of school representation
- Post audit action plan

13. Future meeting dates

- Thursday 27th June 2019, 09:00, Venue TBC
- Thursday 10th October 2019, 09:00, Mezzanine Room 4, Tor Hill House
- Thursday 28th November 2019, 09:00, 4th Floor South, Tor Hill House
- Thursday 23rd January 2020, 09:00, 4th Floor South, Tor Hill House
- Thursday 12th March 2020, 09:00, Venue TBC