

SCHOOLS FORUM

TUESDAY, 28 MARCH 2017

PRESENT: Head Teacher Representatives: Richard Pilgrim (Chairman), Nick Stevens (Vice-Chairman), Alison Penny, Stuart Muir, Mike Wallace, Chris Tomes and Martin Tinsley.

Governor Representatives: Jo Haswell.

Non- School Representatives: None.

Also in attendance: Councillor Natasha Airey

Officers: Kevin McDaniel and James Norris and David Cook

APOLOGIES

Apologies for the inability to attend the meeting were received from Isabel Cooke, Heidi Swidenbank, Joolz Scarlett, Amanda Hough, Hugh Boulter, Gina Kendall, Anne Entwistle and Helen McHale.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 31st January 2017 were approved as a true and correct record subject to Alison Penny being in attendance and that on page 8 Forest Green School be amended to Forest Bridge School.

Matters arising. The Forum were informed that the timescale for children's services joining Achieving for Children had changed to 1st August 2017 due to the democratic process of the two existing authorities. RBWM were still committed to becoming a partner.

With regards to the New Assessment Criteria the Chairman asked if the new criteria had been signed off as at the last meeting concern had been raised about behaviour not being included. The Head of Education and Schools informed the Forum that the matrix had been approved. There had been a focus on cases rather than behaviour; there were behaviour services in place. When behaviour needs were not addressed managed behaviour would be used.

In response to a question about existing funding the Forum were informed that the matrix would be used for new arrangements and reviews, the aim of the change was to make the process more transparent and fair. It was noted that parents and professionals had been included in the consultation process.

HIGH NEEDS BLOCK MONITORING

The Forum were informed that at their meeting on the 31st January 2017 they considered the need to make savings to the High Needs Block (HNB) and requested that a working party be established to look at potential ways of delivering the required savings.

At the working group meeting on 9th March 2017 group members looked at saving options and a breakdown of all services and budgets included in the HNB. There was a vacant post that it was proposed not to fill. When reviewing the initial implementation plan it was agreed that the

reduction in Mainstream, Special School and PR School top ups was not supported. The table on agenda page 16 showed the current HNB Implementation Plan.

The Forum were informed that there would be a conversation with the two borough special schools during the summer term to analyse costs. Part of the review would also look if a child would be better served in a special school or a mainstream setting.

As part of the in year savings it was also proposed that there be a reorganisation of alternative provision and that the Council takes a more challenging stance on permanent exclusions.

In response to questions it was noted that since September 2016 there had been 16 RBWM pupils excluded from schools, that there had been an increase in exclusions from the previous year due to the change in legislation regarding persistence and disruptive behaviour and that this year had seen an increase in exclusions due to one off events. There were reasons when it was appropriate to exclude a pupil and when excluded the LEA had a duty to provide an education setting after 6 days which was paid for from the HNB.

There were lessons to be learnt from behaviour patterns from all schools with some schools having a more challenging setting where exclusion may be more appropriate.

The Forum felt that consistency in funding from the HNB was required and this again raised the question about behaviour and the newly introduced funding matrix.

It was noted that it was expected that exclusions would increase as there were already pupils within the system without exclusion plans that were being funded and schools have also indicated that without additional support more pupils would be at risk of exclusion. The LEA wanted to be open and clear with schools; it was about being transparent and clear that there was no wish to see children out of mainstream education.

The LEA had a statutory duty to provide a PRU and therefore there was a demand lead budget. It was noted that the Fair Access Protocol was binding on all where a child could not find a placement and it was felt that there could be better use of managed moves.

The Forum were informed that whilst attending a meeting the previous week the Head of Education had been surprised to find out that RBWM was one of a few smaller councils that did take funds from the school block to support high needs pressures.

With regards to proposed implementation plan the Forum were informed that there was about £100k of savings from SEN support services and that there was expected savings from improved commissioning. Over the last few years the CYPDS team had focused on finding placements more than the costs. Following the model used by Adult Services officers would be looking at existing placements to see if they could be commissioned better, they would look at economy of scale and the quality of service provision.

Officers were asked if the value for money exercise was being applied to other areas and the Forum were informed that it was with end user surveys also being used. The outreach service would also be reviewed by the task group to assess if it is making a difference.

The Forum were informed that if the short term cash savings were successful then this would allow time to review service delivery. The task group gave the message that that they wanted provision to be provided locally as much as possible.

The Chairman mentioned that the long term view was to support the HNB and asked if we knew the timeframe for the National Funding Formula. The Forum were informed that it may be delayed for a further 12 months but if it was not we would need to be informed by the end of the summer term.

Resolved unanimously: that the Forum noted the report and endorsed:

- **The required HNB implementation plan in principle as set out in appendix A.**
- **Further exploration of the initial areas of investigation identified by the HNB Working Party.**

SCHOOLS BUDGET 2017-18

The Forum were informed that at its January 2017 meeting concern was raised regarding Early Help Advisors working in the MASH rather than providing support to schools. Service leads had been contacted and the service was now fully staffed and the support could be booked as usual. Officers were working with schools on a case by case basis and could still make referrals. There had been a short gap when they had been placed in the MASH but this had been corrected.

The Chairman mentioned that the Forum had supported the advisors so they could give advice and not undertake case work. It was agreed that a further update would be brought back to the Forum in October 2017.

WORKING GROUP TO REVIEW FORUM PROCESSES AND PROCEDURES.

The Forum considered the findings of the Forum Processes and Procedures Working Group which was introduced by Nick Stevens.

The Forum were informed that the working group had been established to examine ways that the Forum could be more open and inclusive of the sectors they represented and thus they looked at governance, process and procedures. The recommendations were contained within the report and the following areas were highlighted; distributing Forum paperwork earlier in conjunction with cluster meetings being a week before Forum meetings, that Forum reports are explicit on what decisions are being made and by which sectors and that decisions are clear with a better process being introduced if decisions are changed. It was proposed that if approved a target date of September 2017 was introduced.

The Chairman agreed that it was important that different sector views were heard and that for future meeting there would be a standing item on the High Needs Block. The Chairman suggested re-arranging Forum meetings and the possibility of having 2 fewer meetings as the December meeting was often cancelled; it was noted that it was easier to cancel a meeting them to add an additional one into the diary.

Cllr Airey, Lead Member for Children Services, mentioned that when looking at meeting dates and agenda management consideration should be given to adding appropriate Cabinet reports to the Forum agenda so schools were aware of any implications. Cllr Airey also mentioned that there was a vacancy for a primary co-opted member of the Children’s O&S Panel and asked if volunteers could be forwarded to the Kevin McDaniel.

Resolved unanimously that: officers considered the recommendations of the Task Group, that meeting dates be reviewed and that the Forum was the responsible body for distributing reports and decisions to the sectors they represent.

The meeting, which began at 1.00 pm, finished at 2.25 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....