

High Needs Action Group Minutes

Thursday 23rd February 2023

In Attendance:-

Yvonne Ely (YE) - Assistant Director for SEND – **Chair**
Tim Gibson (TG) - Interim Schools Finance Manager
Donna Munday (SM) - Divisional Accountant – Education Services
Sarah Redman (SB)- Advisor for SEND for Southwark
Pippa Baker (PB) - Head of School and SENCo Nell Gwynn
Stephanie Lea (SL) - Executive Head Teacher, The Spa Trust
Kelly Hawker (KH) - Head Teacher, Cherry Garden School
Victoria Agnew (VA) - Head of Family Early Help Services
Kate Bingham (KB) - Programme Manager for Safety Valve Programme
Kate Wooder (KW) - Executive Head Teacher, The Bridges Federation
Jenny Brennan (JB) - Assistant Director for Family Early Help and Youth Justice
Yomi Adewoye (YA) - Head Teacher for Sils
Ellie Prestage (EP) - Head of Alfred Salter Primary

Apologies:- Catherine May, Lydia Frankenburg, N Tildesley, Genette Laws, Nina Dohel,

Minutes taken by:- Sharon Wilson – PA to Yvonne Ely

1. Welcome and Introductions

Yvonne welcomed the group and introductions were made.

2. Minutes of the July meeting

Minutes of meeting dated 15th September recorded as accurate and approved by the group.

3. Actions from the meeting

Outstanding actions

Short breaks – The number of children benefiting from short breaks were still outstanding. The suggestion was to obtain the data from the Bid that was submitted.

Action: SW to speak to Chloe Harvey for data from the bid around short breaks or speak to Rachel Horner, who is the commission.

Action: Ellie Prestage to forward list of schools to SW that access the Hub to see progress.

Action: Data to be broken down by ethnicity – SW/JB to review the minutes to find context.**4. Discussion about the role of the task group moving forward (Terms of Reference)**

TG said this group should be a consultative group to represent school forums, adding value and acting as a conduit to providing suggestions. The group should be a working group, discussing more of the details of the HN challenges, rather than having that discussion in the school forums, and feeding back comments and recommendations. Specific pieces of work can also be discussed as and when necessary.

5. Safety Valve Programme – Kate Bingham

Many local authorities have a High Needs Block deficit as a consequence of expanded age range from the 2014 Children Act Responsibilities and the prevalence of high needs around ASD, the more complex needs and the difference demographics and local capacity within London and other Boroughs. The Safety Valve Intervention Programme, run by the DfE for authorities, is available to those LAs who have the highest levels of deficits.

Southwark has been in negotiations with the DfE for 12 months since the invitation to participate in the programme with discussions taking place on how Southwark propose to get their High Needs Block to balance in year. Southwark will receive an amount to write-off the high needs deficit budget currently at £23 million and is based on the achievement of what Southwark has proposed to do to bring the high needs block into balance.

The final submission was in October and following additional funding received of £3 million in November, Southwark submitted a revised DSG management plan, as requested by the DfE, to say how they intend to use the extra money. The amount that Southwark is seeking as financial support from the DfE, to eliminate the deficit over the period of the Safety Valve agreement, remains at £23m.

In terms of the programme to deliver the DSG management plan, it is linked to the SEND Strategy and service improvement and governance is attached to ensure things are progressing and reporting to league members within Southwark to show improvements are being made and achieving what was agreed as well as being monitored by the DfE.

Within the Governance Structure, this subgroup is very important when it comes to discussing the mechanics and funding allocation, and how it impacts the group. As an example, the monitoring conducted with DfE will be shared with the HN group for transparency. This group is part of the “*enablers and intelligence operational group*” and requires commitment from all to understanding how high needs block works and how funding is obtained and allocated. The draft terms of reference is reflecting the importance of this sub group and the links to the Safety Value delivery.

However, irrespective of whether £23 million is received from the DfE for the safety valve programme, the council is still obliged to ensure that the High Needs Block is in budget so improvement and saving is still to be made over the course of five years.

JB - Summerhouse is one of the services that is currently being reviewed as part of the inclusion and exclusion work stream suggested in the High Needs Sub Group report. It is right that all SEND services are reviewed as part of the high needs deficit recovery plan. This is in context of the behavioural support element of funding from schools and decision re FEH and Summerhouse funding reductions

YE- All SEND services will not be reviewed as part of the high needs deficit recover plan and Summerhouse sits outside of the terms of reference being discussed today.

Draft proposed Terms of Reference

The terms of reference was presented for all to agree and ensure the right people were listed and in agreement to attend. YE highlighted key point and members commented on each section.

Objectives of task group

Members were happy with the objective

Membership

Members were happy to continue representation

Two secondary schools heads is suggested to attend this group, but there had only been one – Catherine May, who has missed a number of meetings

Action: YE to write to Catherine May to ascertain whether she wanted to still be a part of the group.

Action: YE to speak to David Bromfield about securing secondary heads to attend the meeting.

YA suggested an email is sent to Matt Jones as the Chair of SASH who can delegate someone from SASH to represent secondary heads.

Action: YE to email Matt Jones as the Chair of SASH to request that he delegates someone to represent secondary heads at the high needs group.

Action: YE/SR/David Bromfield/SASH about representatives at high needs group. "Representative to be from a school with a resource base" to be removed from the terms of reference.

Chairing Meeting

Stephanie Lea to co-chair the High needs meeting with YE.

Frequency of meetings

Frequency of meetings to be agreed and circulated

Action: May meeting to be moved to first week of June. SW to have further discussion with TG.

Expected Outputs

From a governance point of view, there is an expectation that any discussion in this group should be fed back to the school forums.

Action: Minutes of the high needs meeting to be presented to the School Forums along with any reports discussed.

The draft Terms of Reference were agreed by the group subject to minor changes.

6. High Needs Block Position and Latest DSG Management Plan – TG/DM

There is a £2.6 million over spend on the High Needs Block DSG. There has been some improvement compared to what was reported previously which was £3.4 million. However there are 2 caveats to that forecast.

1. Still a back-log of children to be assessed for EHCPs, with 130 still to be processed and not included in the forecast.
2. Since the start of the new academic year, September, the non-mainstream providers have asked for increases and still in negotiations as more increase is being asked for than willing to be paid.

There is still a back log of EHCPs which is currently being reduced. However, the cost of the back-long will not be in this financial year but will be in next financial years, and the years cost will be a bigger pressure on EHCPs.

7. Forward Planning for Future meetings

Currently there are two forward planning items:-

1. Bench marking exercise of special schools in particular top-up rates
2. Capital Strategy

KB- With regards to the monitoring of the Safety Valve Agreement there is high detail around the finances and within all the actions there are key performance indicators that the DfE and Southwark governance will be looking at including the number of EHCPs, unit cost against cohorts, percentage of SEND support in schools and monitored monthly. There will also be a deep dive within the council governance within each of the priorities. One of the governance principles is to have one report which can be used for each of the various audiences.

8. Any Other Business

Performance Monitoring Data – TG/DM

The performance monitoring information was circulated for information. This information is for the group to get a flavour of what Southwark would be measured against going forward. The information is based on what other people within the sector have been tasked to provide and for the group to agree the information should be presented here.

DM gave the group a brief explanation of the information presented in the paper.

The data in the spreadsheet is what Southwark should be expecting and what the monitoring will look like based on what other local authorities have been asked to do.

The data included the actual numbers of EHCPs, the increase over the life of the five year Plan, new EHCPs, or whether they had ceased, if moved out of Borough, what percentage of the population have EHCPs or SEND support, the level of spend and level of surplus, the averaging cost, and the average placement cost for under 16s and over 16s, those in the independent sector, those in maintain school in and out of Borough, the average cost of further education colleges and independent special placement with post 16s.

The information also includes savings made, targets, regular reporting, expenditure before savings and increase, places in special resource provisions and spend after increase capacity, reduced cost and figures balance.

High Needs in person meeting

YE suggested that this meeting should be face to face in-person meeting. Members were asked to give some thought to this.

Action: SW to meeting with TG to agree future meeting dates

9. Date and time of next meeting

The date and time of next meeting to be agreed