

## Schools Forum

### High Needs Working Group Minutes

**Date Tuesday 2 March 2022**

**Time: 10am – 12pm**

**Venue: MS Teams**

Attended:

Charles Quaye	<b>(CQ)</b>	Principal Accountant
Alison Milne	<b>(AM)</b>	Principal Accountant
Jenny Adamson	<b>(JA)</b>	Head Teacher, Saffron Valley Collegiate
Clare Cranham	<b>(CC)</b>	Head Teacher, Kensington Avenue
Roger Capham	<b>(RC)</b>	PACE Academy Trust
Helene Greenidge	<b>(HG)</b>	John Ruskin College
Theresa Staunton	<b>(TS)</b>	Early Years
Keran Currie	<b>(KC)</b>	Area SEND Lead
Jonathan Driscoll	<b>(JD)</b>	SEN Data Manager
Sonal Desai	<b>(SDe)</b>	Area SEND Lead
Mark Southworth	<b>(MS)</b>	Locality SEND Support, Consultant Lead
Claire Farmer	<b>(CF)</b>	SEN Advisor
Saskia Van Vliet	<b>(SVV)</b>	12-25 SEN Team Leader

Rob Veale **(RV)** Head Teacher, Atwood Primary Academy

CHAIR

H Beck: Note taker

Agenda Item	Title	Lead
1:	Welcome, Introductions and apologies	Chair
	RV welcomed everyone to the meeting.  Apologies from Kathy Roberts, Richard Charles and Pam Sokhi.	
2:	Minutes of the last meeting held on 12 January 2022	Chair
	<p><b>Amendments to the minutes:</b></p> <p>Page 3, para 3 – amend storages to shortages.</p> <p>Page 6, para 9 – “CQ said the strategy....this would cause conflict between the Children and Family Act...” amend to “...this would cause conflict between finance and the service...”</p> <p>Page 8, ACTION 2 –“circulate audit queries to MS/SD for information - CQ” amend to “ Liaise with MS regarding audit queries – CQ”</p> <p>All other actions have been completed and minutes agreed.</p>	

**ACTION updates :**

- **Page 3, Action 1** – due to the impact of Covid, staffing structures will be shared in September 2022
- **Page 4, Action 1** – KR informed RV that £100k is given to Beckmead to run the PRU which is a separate contract with SEND department and Beckmead. Chaffinch Brook is being chased up on the impact report and the value of the contract of £40k.

CQ is concerned about the £100k as finance have not had sight of this as everything that is paid to Beckmead is on the contract value. He questioned whether Beckmead were sending a separate invoice to the service for payment and it has been authorised by the service, he will need to send an email out ASAP to clarify the £100k.

RV said he will be disappointed, having raised this issue many times, if history repeats itself, like it did last year with Beckmead submitting an invoice of £120k which pushed out the outturn figure negatively. There needs to be clarity behind this £100k.

MS said Beckmead cannot send an invoice without a purchase order being raised first. We need to know who raises these purchase orders for Beckmead.

CC picked up at previous meetings that at the locality forum there is a level of scrutiny that the LA puts in place around the commissioning process and the spending of this. She asked if the same level of scrutiny went into Chaffinch Brook as she is not aware that they offer the outreach element. As a HT she does not understand what is being offered or how you draw up on it?

RV said it is incredibly difficult to answer any of these questions without the LA officer present. It seems there is a relationship between Beckmead and the LA, i.e. being an academy, impact on contracts, the Chaffinch Brook element etc. No impact report has been received by Chaffinch Brook regarding the £40k charged for their service. He is asking CQ more questions now regarding the top 25 providers drawing down funds from the High Needs block i.e. where are the contracts, what are the KPIs, are the contracts having any impact etc.

CQ said that Schools Block had challenged Oasis Academy regarding their contract, so he would suggest the Chair invite Beckmead to the next meeting to justify what children have benefited from the £40k.

RV asked if Chaffinch Brook would be receiving another £40k as of the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 and who signs this off. His view would be to not renew the contract with Chaffinch Brook and put this money into locality SEND support.

CQ said there is a legal obligation once a contract has been signed. From finance perspective once the LA has gone into a contract and they do not want to pay it, finance would need to escalate this to legal.

RV asked what the relationship between the LA and the academy was, as it seemed this is a rolling contract.

CQ said the LA has had disputes with Beckmead to the point where the DfE got involved. He had 4 meetings with the Head of the DfE in charge and it was agreed that the LA meet Beckmead half way.

MS asked if anyone has seen sight of the contract that is held between Chaffinch Brook or the PRU or Beckmead.

CQ said he has seen a copy of the £40k contract and could let RV have sight of this.

RV asked when the end point of the £40k contract is as it would be interesting if it was 31 March 2022.

CQ said when the invoice was presented to him to pay Beckmead for the outreach services, he had challenged this and this resulted in it being escalated to the DfE. The contract was ratified backwards so Beckmead were paid £120k for the past 3 years.

RV asked if CQ knew when the outreach contract for Chaffinch Brook ends.

CQ said he is not aware of when the contract ends but he will send an email to Beckmead and tell them he is giving a copy of the contract to RV.

**Page 8, Action 1** – The working group need to be aware that the plan should be to roll out Locality SEND support across all areas of Croydon for September 2022. There has been lots of discussions and work carried out by KR/CQ/MS/SD. A paper produced by MS for the Schools Forum pre-meet was pulled as it needs additional work done to it. It will be presented at the Schools Forum in June for a vote in agreeing the roll out to all localities with a budget to support this. This delay therefore puts the full roll out of the Locality SEND support in a vulnerable position at the moment.

RV asked MS/CQ if we were any closer to sign off. His understanding was that 3 options were to be presented with finance underpinning this.

MS said his paper presented to the Schools Forum pre-meet did show the budget discussed with CQ and that he was clear this was not the final budget. At last year's Schools Forum it was agreed to roll out the Locality SEND support this year with the final roll out in September 2022.

MS said it has been agreed to put forward 3 options:

- 1) roll out LSS from September 2022 using budgets that were predicted and signed off at last year's Schools Forum – the funding gap will be approximately £1.5m;
- 2) remove the High Needs funding and put it into the existing line for EHCPs – funding gap will be approximately £800k;
- 3) continue with the schools already in the Locality SEND support – funding gap will be approximately £700k. This option has been crossed off as there will be inequities in the system.

MS said as of last Friday a 4<sup>th</sup> option has been put forward and the budget has been sent to CQ/SD. He is awaiting contact.

- 4) the budget has been cut down by removing the inclusion development funding - funding gap will be approximately £600k.

MS said as there is still a funding gap, a decision needs to be made to either bridge the funding gap or rethink LSS.

CQ agreed with MS and said SD would like him to get to the bottom of the funding for the locality model. He shared the High Needs Strategy workings spreadsheet to show the different models used.

RV asked the working group for their views in rolling out LSS across all areas as of September 2022. The recommendations can then be presented to Schools Forum.

The working group were unanimous in their recommendation to roll out LSS across all areas.

RV said the money needs to be found and asked CQ if a decision was near.

CQ informed the group that one of the recommendations was to approach cabinet for funding. Cabinet did not have any money offer due to the LA's situation. Where can the money come from for the roll out? His recommendation at this point is to share the pot of money with every locality.

TS asked where the additional £5m put aside to set up the programme was. Is the £1.5m being used over the 3 years from the £5m? Are we in the same position that we were in when we looked at setting up the new school, having spent way over our budget, to bring down the money going into the private sector? There will always be overspend with EHCPs. We have to accept that it will take time and that we will go over budget until the system is in place. What has happened to the extra £7.4m allocated for the High Needs?

JD said EHCPs are going up and asked MS how he modelled the impact of LSS and what changed MS expectation to reduce

EHCPs. How was this working in terms of finance and pupil spending as he does not have the details. He offered help with the modelling.

SDe said there is a need to meet with JD to look at how this will look within the data spreadsheet. This project is focusing on early intervention and the long term is around EHCPs. At the moment there are 2 systems running, where some schools are applying for EHCPs and other schools applied for EHCPs before they joined. It is going to look inflated at the moment but 5 years down the line it will be streamlined. We have to invest in to get the outcome that we want.

MS said it is important to remember that this is about the need for Croydon to demonstrate to the ESFA, that it has a recovery plan which is part of the formal recovery plan signed off by the ESFA. There was transformation funding put into this that would help to eventually decrease the amount of EHCPs. There is some indication that EHCPs have not gone down but in the pilot area EHCPs are rising at a much slower rate. The ELPs seem to be skewing the figures. If the figures JD supplied could be analysed accurately, we should be able to see the impact on the EHCPs. We need to continue with LSS, if this is what is supported, which will cost money in the short term but it will reap benefits in 3/4/5 years' time.

RV asked if JD could do modelling at the end of year 1 and year 2 on what the take up of EHCPs is, on what we are doing well etc. There is willingness from the director and the working group to roll this out.

CQ said SD is 100% committed to going ahead with the locality roll out. He would like the working group to note that the LA is bankrupt and because of this everything the LA does comes under scrutiny. The LA have to work in a way to recover. The DfE will bail out the LA by clearing the £24m deficit but need to see how the money is being spent. The financial statutory instrument regulates how the money and the DSG are spent. The only time you can work outside of the instrument is to run a pilot programme.

RV said from what he understands, this can be a transformation project. Why can we not use some of the £7.4m extra to get this transformation project over the line and asked how long can the project last for?

CQ said there are statutory instruments governing how the money is used. He explained that the extra £7.4m given to the LA is to pay part of the deficit off.

RV said the £7.4m will not automatically service the £24m deficit. His understanding is that the £7.4m would be used on other things, therefore can we not use some of this to get the project over the line?

CQ said the £7.4m has been split into 3 parts as follows:-  
a) £500k into the locality model;  
b) £3.5m into special schools as they have not had any top up funding for nearly 7 years;  
c) £3m has been distributed to other streams noted in Line 1 – Line 16. FE colleges are overspent by £1.5m.

AM added that the budget for FE colleges is £2.7m and so it has commitments of £5.5m. There is a current overspend of £2.7m on the FE budget alone.

RV asked what further education were doing to negate that overspend as it having a negative impact on what else the High Needs wishes to achieve i.e. SALT, EP, locality SEND support etc.

SVV said we need to be mindful in terms of FE colleges as the children have long term needs as they leave school to go onto to further education. This might cause a reduction in EHCPs over the next 5 years but you could see a massive increase in EHCPs as they leave locality schools and go into further education. This reduction will not be long term so we need to be prepared for this. Special schools funding is not being reviewed, so schools are putting requests through the ERP panel to get one to one support for children, as the money they receive is insufficient.

TS said though it is interesting to hear about the £7.4m she is surprised that this has not come as “this is our plan in our budget, this is what we want to do”. The Early Years group look to see what and where the best place is to put the money. She pointed out that Early Years is not mentioned at all regarding any money or any increases. She is disappointed that the decision to distribute the money has not come through with papers or an explanation of where the money is going. This seems to have been done outside of the Work group and outside of what is going to Schools Forum.

CQ said finance always report the budget figures and are in the process of finalising the budgets. He can present the figures at the May meeting. Everyone needs money and it is very difficult to spread the money.

TS agrees it is difficult but a project was invested in with a plan. All the projects need to be voiced before decisions are made to move money around or pull money from investments. Though we set a balanced budget, we know we cannot regulate EHCPs.

CQ said there is a letter from the DfE saying that if we cannot manage our deficit they will come and manage the High Needs budget. There is no project in the DfE remit.

HG referred to the over spend in the FE sector. What would be helpful for Croydon and John Ruskin and Orbital colleges is to see where all the spending has gone. If we need to work on reducing

	<p>the over spend, we can work with Croydon college to see what is happening. She is interested to know where the big spenders are.</p> <p>AM said she is working on a piece of work identifying what the forecast spend will be. The big spend is in Croydon college, Carshalton college, the whole of the South Thames group and East Surrey. The figures may be going up because students are not naturally finishing at 21 years old but are carrying on until 25.</p> <p><b>ACTIONS:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Hold a discussion regarding LSS – RV/MS</b></li> <li>• <b>Contact Beckmead today (cc RV) to provide contract evidence of £40k invoice being submitted – CQ</b></li> <li>• <b>Invite Beckmead to the 13 May 2022 to provide impact of the £40k outreach programme</b></li> <li>• <b>Email Beckmead to say he is providing a copy of the contract to RV – CQ</b></li> <li>• <b>Provide the breakdown of the spending per college to HG - AM</b></li> </ul>	
3:	Verbal update on Beckmead – a) Chaffinch Brook outreach impact	KR
	Addressed above.	
4:	SEN Data Dashboard	JD
	<p>JD gave an overview of his performance report which highlights what is going well, areas to watch out for and points out things that could be done better. He met with KR/CQ to discuss the finance figures and together they will develop a set of indicators to go into the dashboard going forward and this should be presented at the May 2022 meeting. EHCPs are increasing each month and there are 3629 children and young people with an EHCP. He will work with MS/SD/KC to look at this in more detail and understand the impact of LSS. The average case load per SEN worker is still high.</p> <p>AM asked where JD was pulling his figures from as she knows that on the CAPITA system there are fields that she uses for estimated costs and actual costs. She is aware that SEN finance use the CAPITA system to record the financial costs and forecast them.</p> <p>JD said the figures will come from finance and will be led by CQ as to what he would like included.</p> <p>JD said recruitment is underway for a business finance manager in SEND.</p> <p><b>ACTION:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Present paper with headline figures to the High Needs meeting in May 2022 – JD</b></li> </ul>	

5:	16 – 25 Pathways	KR
	Nothing to report.	
6:	Verbal update on Special Need School Funding arrangements	KR
	Nothing to report.	
7:	Verbal updates on Croydon SEND Department – plans for reconfiguration	KR
	Nothing to report	
8:	AOB	
	None.	

Meeting Finished at: 11.35am

**NEXT MEETING WEDNESDAY 13 May 2022, 12.30am – via MS Teams**