

Minutes of a meeting of the EAP Education, Skills and Employment

At 5.00 pm on Wednesday 2nd March, 2022 in the
Held as Remote meeting, via Zoom

Present:-

Members

Councillor Scott Edwards (Chair)

Councillor Wendy Brackenbury
Councillor Leanne Buckingham
Councillor Philip Irwin

Councillor Ian Jelley
Councillor Dorothy Maxwell
Councillor Lee Wilkes

Officers

Tony Challinor (Children's Services)
Neil Goddard (Children's Services)
Nichola Jones (Children's Services)
Tania Sowerby (Children's Services)

Ben Smith (Democratic Services)
Jenny Daniels (Democratic Services)

61 Apologies for absence

There were none.

62 Minutes of the meeting held on 26 January 2022.

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 January 2022 were approved as correct record and signed by the Chair.

63 Declarations of Interest

The Chair invited those members who wished to do so to declare any interests in respect of items on the agenda.

No interests were declared.

64 Holiday Activity Fund

At the Chair's invitation the Assistant Director, Commissioning and Partnerships (West and North Northamptonshire Councils) provided the following update with regards to the Holiday Activity Fund:

- i) It had been administered by Public Health in the North and West Councils with the aim of to provide food for breakfast and lunch periods.
- ii) It engaged families wherever possible in preparation of the food.
- iii) There were 46 providers in 103 locations;

- iv) Those on free school meals were eligible. They also catered for approximately 15% of non-free school meals children;
- v) There were 5,134 people signed up in the current year and Central Government had announced a further 3 years funding which equated to £1,000,066 per year;
- vi) The programme was initially set up quite quickly and a contract awarded to N-Sport. This was due to end but they had agreed a year's extension after which there would be a commissioning process to award a new contract;
- vii) Advertising through schools would continue and further avenues of advertising would be explored.

In answer to queries on the update the following was confirmed:

- viii) Communication to schools was an area that would be improved as officers explored other avenues for advertising the Fund. Public Health would be responsible for advertising for Easter;
- ix) It was suggested that the activity places provided by the Fund could be extended to those who could afford to pay for it if there was sufficient space, enabling friends across entitlements to be able to attend events together. In such circumstances the principle aim would always be to ensure availability for those who were eligible first and foremost but enabling friendship groups to participate was acknowledged as also being important;
- x) It was available for 4 days a week, 4 hours per day that covered the breakfast and lunchtime periods;
- xi) There were standards that set the provision offered. Some locations could also provide play areas and they would work with local groups to source the best location that could be offered;
- xii) It would not be optimal to pay rent for somewhere as that would diminish the money available for the activities.
- xiii) Children should not feel they could not take part in something because they didn't have the right equipment. It was hoped this sort of thing would be addressed by the steering group;

It was also noted that Councillor Philip Irwin was happy to be part of the steering group that needed to be set up to progress the Fund going forward. Officers would contact Councillor Irwin in due course.

RESOLVED that:

- a) The Executive Advisory Panel notes the update with regards to the Holiday Activity Fund;
- b) That additional background details, including weblinks, of the Holiday Activity Fund be emailed to members after the meeting.

65 SEND Progress and Next Steps

At the Chair's invitation the Head of Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) introduced a presentation on SEND progress:

- i) There had been a move to get help at an earlier stage for young people. This was being done by working with schools;
- ii) There were 3 key priorities: to support schools to develop provision, building on what had already been achieved, and how they allocated resources and ensured that children, young people and their families were part of that process;
- iii) The department was considering how best to form teams and how best to integrate to ensure they worked together optimally. They were working closely with Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCo's) and were developing professional development to ensure it retained the inclusive ethos;
- iv) There was a 3 tiered approach, the first being where schools provided support within their setting. Tier 2 was working in local clusters where specialists went in to a school to provide support. The third tier was where specialist provision such as a school with a unit or a special school was used;
- v) Funding was offered for each child but there was a need to fund professional development as well;
- vi) Peer support whereby schools supported each other was encouraged. There were also outreach teams and Education and Early Help and Advisory Teams;
- vii) Networks of SENCos were being established and a review of existing centres of excellence was also being undertaken. The department was also reviewing how specialist services such as sensory cognition and learning, Social Emotion and Mental Health (SEMH) teams, Occupational Therapists and Educational Psychologist Services were being used;
- viii) A sufficiency report was currently being undertaken on the current specialist provision that was offered and decisions on what provision was offered were made as locally as possible;
- ix) Governance was also being reviewed as there was a need to be efficient on how specialist services were allocated. A performance process was also being developed;
- x) There were insufficient specialist services to meet the demand . The aim was to develop a co-production with families;
- xi) The largest piece of work was assessments. There was a backlog of 58 that was currently being worked on. There was a 20-week process for each assessment but the majority of those in the system were quite close to being resolved.

The Assistant Director for Education stated that this was a complex area and they were making progress. Capacity had increased and there were also expectations of how the schools managed special needs. There was a route for addressing efficiency and meeting the needs of the children in the best way possible.

In answer to queries on the presentation the following was confirmed:

- xii) In North Northamptonshire there were children with varying needs and these were met in various ways. There were 8 schools that offered specialist provision. Some children had their needs met through outreach work undertaken in mainstream schools;
- xiii) The Special Schools Grant provided a finite sum and there was the need to spend this funding more effectively. Providing a child's needs in mainstream school was the most cost effective way to help but for some this was not possible and it was better for them to be in a special school;
- xiv) The department wished to be transparent with schools to be able to say how much was spent in their area and how much specialist provision they could access. Schools did not always fully understand the costs. The department was working with Headteachers so that could understand better whether a person needed an assessment or just some top-up funding to provide more support in the school;
- xv) Families were involved through the co-production route. They were at the heart of what the Department wished to achieve. They were reviewing drop-ins and training for families. Regular meetings were held with the parent/carer forum and this provided families to help shape what was undertaken in the future. They were also a place where specialists could come and speak with families;
- xvi) The department worked with practitioners on the ground so that they could learn where the best place was for a child;
- xvii) The county's special schools had very good Ofsted Ratings. There was a wish to build on teachers and practitioners to go out and review good practice and for practitioners to go out and support people in schools;
- xviii) A number of the outstanding assessments had plans written so it was hoped the majority of them could be completed within the next two months. A report was being written on them to go to the Director of Education and this could be made available for the Advisory Panel as well.
- xix) There were just over 120 children in receipt of specialist education. Some of these were placed out of county because that was where the school that provided the support they required was;
- xx) The aim was to provide as much assistance as possible locally so they would look to be able to develop the offer they could make. Many out of county providers gave really good care and they needed to be able to ensure that any new county providers were just as good;
- xxi) The site at Tennyson Road School was built to provide for 80 pupils. It had 130. They provided outstanding provision so they would like to keep it. The future of the site was not yet decided;

- xxii) All special schools were approaching, or at, capacity;
- xxiii) There were some children who were currently going through the assessment process to ascertain what they required, who could provide it and whether they had current provision.

RESOLVED that:

The progress and next steps in relation to Special Educational Needs and Disability provision be noted.

66 Admissions Update

At the Chairman's invitation the Assistant Director for Education provided an update on the offer day for secondary school places, as at 1 March 2022. The number of applications received at that time was 4,186. Of those 81.7% had been offered their first placed. 13.5% had received their second or third preference. 95% had received 1 of their 3 choices. These figures compared well with the previous year.

In answer to queries the following was confirmed:

- i) Every child had been offered a place at a school, even it was not one of their three preferred choices. A list was maintained of children who didn't have a place which was married up with a list of school places available. The child was then offered a place at their nearest school with an available space;
- ii) Those who did not get their preferred school could appeal if they felt their circumstances had not been adequately considered. An Appeals Panel then heard all of the appeals;
- iii) The Appeals Panel would be required to take account of the school's capacity. If the Admissions Policy wasn't applied properly the Panel could then say they had to take the child. Schools would take individual views on how they responded to an appeal;
- iv) The Appeals Panel was final. The Local Authority had a responsibility to offer places, not specific spaces where parents wished their children to go.

RESOLVED that:

The Executive Advisory Panel notes the admissions update.

67 Free School Meals Update

At the Chairman's invitation the Assistant Director for Education introduced this item (a copy of the recent report to the Executive having been previously circulated) stating this was a continuation of the scheme whereby those eligible for free school meals were offered vouchers to buy food during the school holidays. It joined up with the holiday activity fund. It was coming to the end of the scheme which was offered through a company named Huggg. Funding was given a rate of £15 per child per week. It was agreed that this would be provided in the Easter and Summer holidays.

RESOLVED that:

The Executive decision of 22 February 2022 be noted, as follows:-

- a) Approval of the funding of school holiday food vouchers for the 2022 Easter school holiday period at a cost of £306,000, from the 'Household Support Grant' received from central government for the purpose of providing financial support to vulnerable families during the pandemic. and
- b) Approval of the provision and funding of school holiday food vouchers for the 2022 May half-term period, at a cost of £153,000 from the 'Household Support Grant' received from central government for the purpose of providing financial support to vulnerable families during the pandemic.

68 Forward Plan of Executive Items

RESOLVED that:

The Forward Plan of Executive Items be noted.

69 Forward List of Items for Education, Skills and Employment EAP

At the Chairman's invitation the Democratic and Electoral Services Manager introduced this report (copies of which had been previously circulated) stating that there were 3 items for the next meeting (23 March 2022). There were also 3 items that had been scheduled on the report and there was a need to add a further update on SEND progress on a quarterly basis, as agreed earlier in the meeting.

Meetings for the following municipal year were currently being collated.

RESOLVED that:-

The following be added to the forward list of items for presentation at future meetings by officers:

- a) Update on SEND progress (every four months).

70 Close of Meeting

There being no further business the Chair thanked members and officers for their attendance and closed the meeting.

Chair

Date

The meeting closed at 18.26