

**DEVON EDUCATION FORUM**

18 January 2023

Present:-

Schools Members

Primary Headteachers

Mr C Tribble

Mr G Chown

Mr P Walker

Ms R Miller

Honiton Primary

Ventrus MAT (Academy)

First Federation Trust (Academy)

Kingskerswell CE Primary, Substitute

Primary Governors

Mr J Clements

Ms K Brimacombe

Cranbrook, St Martin's CE Primary

Whitchurch Primary, First Fed'n (Academy)

Secondary Headteachers

Mrs S Crook

Ms F Bowler

Ms J Fossey

Ms Mr G Hill

Federation of Tiverton Schools

Braunton Academy

West Exe School, Ted Wragg MAT (Academy)

Academy Trust (Academy)

Secondary Governors

Mr A Hines

Ms G Sanders

Mr A Walmsley

(Education SW Trust) (Academy)

Athena Learning Trust (Academy)

The Ted Wragg Multi Academy Trust (Academy)

Nursery School

Mrs S Baker

Westexe

Special Headteacher

Mr K Bennett

Marland School

Special Governor

Mrs F Butler

Marland School (**Chair**)

Alternative Provision

Mr R Gasson

WAVE Multi Academy Trust

Non-Schools Members

Mr B Blythe

Mrs B Alderson

Ms G Rolstone

Exeter Diocesan Board of Education (Faith) Sub  
PETROC

Teachers Consultative Committee (TCC)

Early Years, Private & Voluntary Independent

Observer

Councillor A Leadbetter

Cabinet Member – Children's Services and  
Schools

Apologies  
Ms R Saim

Cedar Tree Federation

**72**      **Minutes**

**DECISION:**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 23 November 2022 be signed as a correct record.

**73**      **Matters Arising from the Last Meeting and Report back on Issues Raised with Cabinet/f40**

**DISCUSSION:**

The Cabinet Member - Children's Services & Schools advised that Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) and the substantial High Needs Block deficit was a top priority for Cabinet and the County Council. He was always willing to be available to discuss such matters with the Forum and school leadership, as well as f40 issues, as a representative on f40's Executive.

The Cabinet Member also introduced Mr Julian Wooster, recently appointed Interim Director of Children and Young People's Futures (see also minute 74 below for further joint issues debated).

**74**      **Children and Young People's Futures Update**

**DISCUSSION:**

The Chair welcomed Mr Julian Wooster, Interim Director of Children and Young People's Futures who outlined his proposals for developing the service, working alongside the Cabinet Member (Children's Services & Schools).

The Interim Director indicated that the SEND improvement programme was the pressing priority, including controlling spend on independent special school placements. He welcomed working alongside the Interim SEND Strategic Director. Devon had to perform better, within a national system that was not working well and leading to a complex and very difficult environment to manage school and family expectations. This was to be seen as a whole Council issue, not a service issue.

A Forum Member's questions concerned senior leadership around SEND and communication with the Forum over the Cabinet and the County Council's position on SEND. Whilst recognising recent SEND progress, there was concern that as a number of key leadership posts were currently interim,

vision could further change when permanent appointments were made. The Forum and Phase Associations remained committed to working alongside the Council.

Regular senior leadership reports to Forum meetings were also requested.

**75**      **Membership**

**DISCUSSION:**

The Chair welcomed Ms Rachel Miller, substitute member (Kingskerswell CE Primary) to the meeting.

**76**      **Education & Learning Update**

**DISCUSSION:**

The Forum considered the Report of the Interim Director of Children and Young People's Futures, noting further developments since the publishing of the Report i.e.:-

(a) School Effectiveness Service

A revised Report recommendation in relation to school improvement (section 4 of the Report), proposed the use of Financial Intervention Panel, Schools (FIPS)' surplus funding for 2023/24 only. Some funding would also remain within FIPS in line with its prudent approach in supporting schools facing additional challenges; and

(b) Education Psychology Service (EPS)

The Interim SEND Director reported on the difficult decision to pause trading at least to the end of the summer term, with currently an 8 month wait for a pupil to receive an Education Psychologist assessment. The Department for Education (DfE) had acknowledged the difficult position (in Devon) and the need to address the backlog of cases.

There were plans to develop a sustainable service as part of the wider strategic plan, including:-

- recruitment process for four specialist senior staff working with schools;
- the SEND improvement plan was nearly ready for sign off;
- working together to ascertain what support schools needed;
- review of the funded structure and being creative with High Needs funding;
- Education Health & Care Plan (EHCP) good practice in-house/outside.

The Interim SEND Director would be sending a letter to schools and parents advising of the pause in the Education Psychology Service and offering apology for this.

The Report also considered school attendance and communications with schools.

**DECISION:**

(a) that surplus funding from within the Financial Intervention Panel, Schools (FIPS) budget for 2022/23 be carried forward and used for school improvement (school effectiveness service) for 2023/24 i.e. for one year only, at an estimated cost of £640,000, be approved;

**(Vote: Maintained Primary)**  
**(Vote: Maintained Secondary)**

(b) that the draft letter to schools and parents regarding the pause in the Education Psychology Service be sent to the Chair of the High Needs Funding Sub-Group for comment prior to despatch.

**ACTION:**

Director of Finance and Public Value (Adrian Fox) – (a);  
Interim SEND Director (Jackie Ross) – (b).

**77**      **Finance Update**

**DISCUSSION:**

**(a) Schools Finance Group Minutes - 6 January 2023**

The Forum considered the above minutes, including the respective minutes relating to the Finance Update Report at (b) and other DEF agenda items where appropriate.

Also available at  
[Schools Finance Group \(SFG\) – Education and Families \(devon.gov.uk\)](https://www.devon.gov.uk/schools-finance-group-sfg)

**DECISION:**

that the minutes of the Schools Finance Group (SFG), 6 January 2023 be received.

**(b) Finance Update Report**

The Forum considered the Report of the Interim Director of Children & Young People's Futures and Director of Finance and Public Value (DEF/23/02).

Month 8 outturn forecast 2022/23 saw an overall DSG overspend spend of £40.6m due to the continued demand on High Needs and the growing demand on SEN placements within the Independent Sector despite creating

more Devon special school places. This was an adverse change of £458,000 since month 7.

Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) management action was anticipated to deliver £6.3m savings in this financial year (£3.9m to date).

The Report highlighted reasons for a projected cumulative DSG deficit to March 2023 of £127.2m, increasing to £144m by 2024/25, i.e. £4.9m over that included in the DfE Safety Valve. Solutions to mitigate the in-year overspend were being reviewed.

The increasing DSG deficit could have considerable impact on future DSG education budgets as well as Devon County Council. Action was required now by all stakeholders, working in partnership to reduce the demand on EHCPs and independent placements.

Member's discussion included:-

-concern that with the projected cumulative DSG deficit to March 2023 of £127.2m increasing to £144m by 2024/25, the management actions resulting in savings may not be sufficient to rectify the deficit position (whilst noting some savings were longer term); and

--whether the DfE had yet confirmed that Devon had been accepted onto the DSG Safety Valve Programme, recognising the serious risks should this not be the outcome.

In response:-

-the Interim SEND Strategic Director advised of a number of projects (including Team Around the School) and the work of a senior group with experience and expertise, which was for example preventing independent special school placements (wherever Devon provision was appropriate); and

-the Director of Finance and Public Value advised that a DfE response on the Safety Valve position was still awaited, although there had been a further formal senior leadership approach to the DfE in December 2022. A further follow up would now be made.

**DECISION:**

(a) that month 8 DSG monitoring position be noted along with the Forum's ongoing concerns at the DSG deficit, recognising there was much work required to reach a sustainable solution; and

(b) that the current Safety Valve/DSG manage plan position and further formal senior leadership approach to the DfE be noted.

**ACTION:**

Director of Finance and Public Value (Adrian Fox) – (b)

**78 Dedicated Schools Grant 2023-24: Budget Planning**

**DISCUSSION:**

The Forum considered the Report of the Director of Finance & Public Value and Interim Director of Children and Young People's Futures (DEF/23/03) regarding the:-

DSG Settlement 2023-24  
Schools Block  
Central School Services Block  
High Needs Block  
Early Years Block  
Other Schools Grants  
DSG Deficit & Management Plan.

In relation to the Schools Block, the government funding settlement was £2m below a fully funded National Funding Formula, therefore to ensure the block remained within its funding requirements actions were required as set out in section 2 of the Report.

**DISCISON:**

(a) that the reduction of the size of the growth fund from £2.8 million for 2023-24 to £1.8 million be approved, in line with the 2023-24 spending forecast.

**(Vote: Schools, Academies and PVI)**

(b) that the use of the balance from the reduction of size the growth fund for 2023-24 against the shortfall of £970,000 in Schools Funding that remained after reducing the Sparsity Factor to £47,300 for Primary and £72,900 for Secondary be approved.

**(Vote: Schools, Academies and PVI)**

**ACTION:**

Director of Finance & Public Value (Adrian Fox)

79      **2023-24 Schools Funding Arrangements - Transfer to the High Needs Block**

**DISCUSSION:**

The Forum considered the Report of the Director of Finance & Public Value and Interim Director of Children and Young People's Futures (DEF/23/04) regarding the reconsideration of the transfer 0.5% between blocks for 2023-24 through a one-off transfer of the growth fund surplus, to support the demands of the High Needs Block and in particular the work on cost prevention and reduction, as set out in the Report.

This followed the Forum's refusal of this transfer at its last meeting and subsequent disapplication by the County Council to the Secretary of State for Education to overrule this decision. The DfE subsequently had requested the forum to reconsider their decision following the announcement of the Mainstream Schools Additional Grant (MSAG) funding for schools (indicative Devon allocation of an additional £17m (3.4%)), which placed schools in a much better financial position than at the time of Devon's school funding consultations in October 2022. The DfE did not expect the Forum to rely upon the outcomes of that consultation.

A Forum representative commented that although this proposal had been discussed at the Schools Finance Group on 6 January 2023, there had been further developments, he also expressed concern at the DfE's comments in relation to consideration of the October 2022 Devon consultation response. However there was now an opportunity to demonstrate and evidence the impact on schools of the proposal for the one-off Growth Fund surplus transfer for 2023-24 only, without individual school budgets being impacted. This should then form an early basis for the next year's consultation round when money would be required from individual school budgets.

**DISCISON:**

that Cabinet be recommended:-

that the transfer of 0.5% between blocks for 2023-24 through a one-off transfer of the growth fund surplus be supported (following its reconsideration as requested by the DfE).

**(Vote: Schools, Academies and PVI)**

**ACTION:**

Director of Finance & Public Value (Adrian Fox)

**80        Standing (and other) Groups**

**DISCUSSION:**

The Forum received the following from its standing and other groups (excepting Schools' Finance Group (SFG) minutes, (considered under Finance Update minute above):-

(a) School Organisation, Capital and Admissions (SOCA)

Minutes of the meeting held on 6 December 2022.

Also available at

[School Organisation, Capital and Admissions Group \(SOCA\) – Education and Families \(devon.gov.uk\)](https://www.devon.gov.uk/education-and-families/soca)

(b) High Needs Funding Sub Group

The Chair's verbal update of the meeting held on 16 January 2022 was noted. In summary the group had considered communications to schools and key messages of keeping more children in mainstream school. The ambition for a mindset change was important to slow the level of EHCPs and SEN placements.

The next work area for the group was to look at the funding framework in the round assisted by a task & finish group, reporting back to the Forum in due course.

**81        Review of standard agenda items**

Members identified standard matters they would like to be included within future Forum agendas (predominantly to be included with the Head of Education Update standard agenda item):-

Education/School Key Performance Indicators

Education/School Performance Data

Key Priorities

SEND outcomes

Ofsted outcomes reported on a termly basis (including % schools according to Ofsted rating and any shift in patterns)

Reports from Devon regarding SEND (including risks) and schools' feedback reports.

**82        Correspondence**

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**83**      **Dates of Future Meetings**

Meetings at 10am. Please check venue/arrangements

<https://democracy.devon.gov.uk/mgCalendarMonthView.aspx?GL=1&bcr=1>

Wednesday 22 March 2023

Wednesday 21 June 2023

Wednesday 22 November 2023

Wednesday 17 January 2024

Wednesday 20 March 2024.

**NOTES:**

1. *Minutes should always be read in association with any Reports for a complete record.*
2. *If the meeting has been webcast, it will be available to view on the [webcasting site](#) for up to 12 months from the date of the meeting*

\* **DENOTES DELEGATED MATTER WITH POWER TO ACT**

The Meeting started at 10.10 am and finished at 11.52 am