

## DEVON EDUCATION FORUM

24 January 2024

### Present:-

#### Schools Members

##### Primary Headteachers

Mrs R Saim	Cedar Tree Federation
Mr C Tribble	Honiton Primary
Mr G Chown	Ventrus MAT (Academy)
Mr P Walker	First Federation Trust (Academy)

##### Primary Governors

Ms K Brimacombe	Whitchurch Primary, First Fed'n (Academy)
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##### Secondary Headteachers

Ms F Bowler	Exeter St Peter's CE Aided, Substitute
Mr G Hill	West Exe School, Ted Wragg MAT (Academy)

##### Secondary Governors

Mr A Hines	Education SW Trust (Academy)
Mrs J Larcombe	Uffculme Academy Trust (Academy) Substitute
Mr A Walmsley	The Ted Wragg Multi Academy Trust (Academy)

##### Nursery School

Mrs S Baker	Westexe
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##### Special Governor

Mrs F Butler	Marland School (Chair)
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##### Alternative Provision

Ms G Boyden	Wave MAT
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##### Non-Schools Members

Mrs B Alderson	Teachers Consultative Committee (TCC)
Ms G Rolstone	Early Years, Private & Voluntary Independent
Ms S Lockwood	RC Diocesan Schools, Plymouth (Faith)

##### Observers

Councillor A Leadbetter	Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Schools
Councillor L Samuel	Cabinet Member – SEND Improvement

Apologies:-

Mrs S Crook, Ms N Warner, Mr R Gasson

**112**      **Minutes**

**DECISION:**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 22 November 2023 be signed as a correct record.

**113**      **Items Requiring Urgent Attention**

There was no item requiring urgent attention.

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

There was no item raised from the last meeting.

**115**      **Membership**

**DISCUSSION:**

The following membership change was noted:-

Ms N Warner (Newton Abbot, Decoy): Primary Maintained Governor

**ACTION:**

Director of Legal and Democratic Services (Fiona Rutley)

**116**      **Deputy Director and Head of Education Update**

**DISCUSSION:**

The Chair welcomed Mr Ceri Morgan, newly appointed, Deputy Director Education and Learning.

The Deputy Director introduced himself to the group and he welcomed his new role. He invited the Forum to give their views on what they wished for him to include in future reports.

**117      Special Education Needs & Disabilities (SEND) Transformation Programme Update**

**DISCUSSION:**

The Forum considered the report of the Director of Children & Young People's Futures (DEF/24/04) on a new approach agreed in September 2023 to deliver improvements through the SEND Transformation Programme, bringing together post Ofsted/CQC improvement work and Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit management actions.

Work on re-establishing governance, accountability and laying foundations during the Autumn term 2023 now enabled the local area partnership to move implementation forward at pace. Progress since the last update included a range of measures and update on reaching a Safety Valve agreement with the Department for Education.

Some of challenges that schools and the Council needed to focus on, by working in partnership, to deliver these plans included:-

-Inconsistent approach to inclusive provision in schools which meets the needs of children and young people with SEND;

-Poor early support/intervention offer, forcing families and professionals down the route of an Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA) and

-A focus on more funding rather than meeting needs and improving outcomes for children and young people.

Members' discussion and comments included:-

- Positive to see actions taking place and it looked like this would meet it objectives
- Concern was expressed that the budget would not meet the expectation of needs.
- Members' welcomed the news of the Safety Valve programme
- Assurance was sought on steps in place if the situation worsens – governance measures were in place
- Money was made available where savings targets were reached and then could be drawn down
- Information about what early years settings were involved and it was agreed this would be looked into and reported back.

**DECISION:**

that the update on Devon's SEND Transformation Programme be noted.

**ACTION:**

SEND Improvement Director (Kellie Knott)

**118**      **Finance**

a            **Schools Finance Group (SFG) Minutes**

The Forum considered the above minutes (also considered in relation to other finance reports within the agenda) .

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

**DECISION:**

that the minutes of the Schools Finance Group (SFG), 12 January 2024 be received.

b            **High Needs Group Minutes**

**DECISION:**

The Forum received and noted the High Needs Sub Group minutes, 8 January 2024.

c            **Finance Update**

**DISCUSSION:**

The Forum considered the report of the Director of Children and Young People's Futures and Director of Finance and Public Value (DEF/24/03).

The report (DEF/24/03) and presentation included:-

Budget Monitoring Month 8 (2023/24)  
Schools  
Dedicated Schools Grant Management Plan and Safety Valve  
High Needs  
Investment  
Risks

The summary showed:

- The Month 8 outturn forecast for 2023/24 sees a significant overspend in the overall Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) of £40.6 million which is associated with the continued demand on High Needs of £39.6 million after taking into account management actions and £1 million overspend to the Growth Fund.
- The DSG Adjustment Account, which shows the cumulative DSG Deficit as per government guidance, is projected to rise to £165.1 million by the end of 2023/24.
- £9.6 million has been achieved of the expected £20.2 million management actions to be delivered from the current DSG Deficit Management Plan/
- An additional £2 million savings within the independent sector have been identified from 3-5 year placements ending and Adult Social Care contribution.
- The SEN team are continuing to see a high level of requests for EHCP referrals, 2,055 requests have been received for the period January 2023 to November 2023 compared to 1,865 for the same period in 2022, however the number of requests being refused at 6 weeks and 16 weeks has increased since 2022 for the same period. Support from schools is required to take action to mitigate the growing demand.
- The increasing DSG deficit could have a considerable impact on future education budgets within the DSG as well as impacting on the financial sustainability for Devon County Council.

Members' discussion included:-

- A timeline for a decision on the Safety Valve bid – it was hoped this would be by the end of February
- If there should be more caution around the projection for the DSG deficit
- Management actions were built in and some of these were in place although changes had not happened as quickly as wanted but there was now rigor and more realism in place about when these could be achieved.
- Risks associated with the Safety Valve to schools budgets – Statutory Instrument was in place until 2026
- More stability in leadership which should reduce risk with a clear consistent direction
- Communication to schools needs to be clear and inform on actions taken or required
- SEND schools falling into disrepair – there was capital funding for maintenance. Agreed to find out more about this aspect and report back.

**DECISION:**

- (a) that month 8 DSG monitoring position be noted; and

(b) that the current Safety Valve / DSG management plan position be noted.

**ACTION:**

Director of Finance and Public Value (Adrian Fox)

d **2024/25 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Settlement**

**DISCUSSION:**

The Forum considered the report of the Director of Children and Young People's Futures and Director of Finance and Public Value (DEF/24/04).

The report (DEF/24/04) included:-

DSG Settlement 2024/25  
Schools Block  
Central School Services Block  
High Needs Block  
Early Years Block  
Other Schools Grants  
DSG Deficit & Management Plan

Members' discussion included:-

The meeting was informed the schools funding for next financial year 2024-25 for the schools block allocation was going to be £525 million which includes a £2.6 million for the Growth Fund this year.

The National Non-Domestic Rates (NNDR) continues to be paid by Schools rather than direct arrangement with the DfE as a couple of the District Councils do not want to put procedures in place for April 2024. Guidance states that in 2 tier local authorities all billing authorities need to agree to implement the changes. If mutual consent is not reached it will not be possible for any billing authority to adopt the revised payment process.

The NNDR funding received is equivalent to the previous year's actual NNDR payments (along with adjustments relating to the year before that). Because the funding is lagged, any increases in NNDR costs compared to the previous year has to be managed within the overall allocation and less funding is available to distribute to individual schools. In 2023/24 the shortfall was £511,000.

Members' discussion included:-

- Recognised that the authority starts from a low baseline and had been poorly funded for so long. Lobbying had taken place on this and would continue to do so.
- Highlighted the rates for 2 years olds had dropped and the increases in minimum wages which had a big impact on small independent settings.

**DECISION:**

(a) that the amendment to Basic Entitlement in line with the principles agreed at Schools Forum (22 November 2023) be approved; and

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

(b) that changes to the Dedicated Schools Grant funding 2024/25 be noted.

**ACTION:**

Director of Finance and Public Value (Adrian Fox)

- e        **Schools Funding Consultation Proposal 4 (Transfer of 0.5% Schools Block to High Needs Block)**

**DISCUSSION:**

The Forum considered the joint report of the Director of Children and Young People's Futures and Director of Finance and Public Value (DEF/24/05), together with the report of Devon School Leadership Services (DSL)C/O, (DEF/24/06), on school consultation responses in respect of this matter.

Devon Education Forum discussed proposal 4 of the schools funding consultation at its meeting on 22 November 2023. Further information was required on what the funding would be used for, therefore the decision was deferred until the January 2024 meeting. Members agreed that a further consultation with schools would be conducted.

The Council has revised its initial proposal to transfer 0.5% (£2.6 million) and is now requesting a 0.25% (£1.3 million) transfer, which will pump prime this early help work. Schools can be assured that the impact of this funding will be managed as part of safety valve monitoring via the DfE.

The Council is clear that unlike other authorities, it will not seek to apply the funds transferred in 2024/25 to the 'bottom line' to address the deficit but will reinvest in support for schools to improve the system. It will also not be seeking a significant schools block transfer which may be proposed in other areas

Members' discussion included:-

- Grateful to have extra time to discuss the proposal with school colleagues.
- Very hard decision to make as schools feel they are unable to afford this, and it will affect the service they offer
- Risks associated with the decision and possible unintended consequences.
- Supportive of the transformation programme and committed to partnership working
- Schools were facing an increasing demand on services for SEND and higher wages
- Key message to the DfE is that there isn't enough money in the system
- Following consultation, it had been proposed to change the transfer figure from 0.5% to 0.25%
- Felt it was important to communicate to the DfE about the pressure on schools as they did respond to concerns

**DECISION:**

(a) that the consultation responses set out in DSLS report (DEF/24/06) be noted; and

(b) that the transfer of 0.25% (£1.3 million) between blocks for 2024-25, to support the Safety Valve plans to manage the high needs funding sustainably and meet the needs of children and young people earlier be approved.

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

**ACTION:**

Director of Finance and Public Value (Adrian Fox)

**119 Standing (and other) Groups**

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

(a) Standing Groups

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

Minutes of the meeting held on 5 December 2023.

Also available at

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



120 **Correspondence**

None received

121 **Dates of Future Meetings**

Meetings at 10am. Please check venue/arrangements

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

Wednesday 20 March 2024

Wednesday 19 June 2024

Wednesday 20 Nov 2024

Wednesday 22 Jan 2025

Wednesday 19 March 2025.

**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 10.00 am and finished at 11.40 am