

**SCHOOLS FINANCE GROUP**  
**Notes of meeting**  
**4 March 2020**

**ISSUES FOR DEF ON 18 MARCH 2020**

<b>Item 4</b>	<b>SEND Recovery Plan</b> Noted work currently ongoing to address the effectiveness of SEND processes and address the identified SEND funding shortfall. These measures include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• looking at provision of specialist SEN support for mainstream schools.</li><li>• capital funding to create additional special school places.</li><li>• SEND transformation project</li><li>• Review of SEND strategy alongside parents.</li></ul>
<b>Item 4</b>	<b>'SEND 100' Project</b> Following DEF agreement to transfer £100k from Schools' Block to HNB, SFG agreed to engage a consultant to work up a proposal to look at specialist SEND support in mainstream settings with a view to reducing the call on the High Needs Block for costly intervention from independent providers. A task group is to be convened to agree the remit for the project.
<b>Item 6</b>	<b>Mutual Fund</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mutual Fund Board agreed that no action would be take at present to deploy predicted surplus until the current Coronavirus situation has passed.</li><li>• Mutual Fund will cover school claims for staff absence due to self-isolation due to COVID-19 Coronavirus, as defined within Public Health England guidance.</li></ul>

**SCHOOLS FINANCE GROUP**  
**Notes of meeting**  
**on 4 March 2020 at Great Moor House**

		<b>Attendance</b>		
		<b>4/3/20</b>	<b>8/1/20</b>	<b>6/11/19</b>
<b>DCC</b>				
Adrian Fox (Chair)	Head Accountant (E&L)	✓	✓	✓
Dawn Stabb	Head of Education & Learning	✓	✓	✓
Karlien Bond	Senior Accountant (Schools)	✓	✓	<b>Apologies</b>
Heidi Watson-Jones	Service Support Officer (E&L)	✓	✓	✓
<b>DAPH</b>				
Jonathan Bishop	Cornerstone Academy	✓	✓	<b>Apologies</b>
Alun Dobson	Marwood Primary	✓	✓	✓
Jamie Stone	Denbury Primary	✓	✓	✓
Paul Walker	First Federation	✓	✓	<b>Apologies</b>
Martyn Boxall	Exeter Children's Federation			✓
<b>DASH</b>				
Daryll Chapman	Dartmoor MAT	✓	✓	✓
Lorraine Heath	Uffculme Academy	✓	✓	✓
Matthew Shanks	Education South West	✓	✓	✓
Sammy Crook	Tiverton High School	✓	✓	✓
Andrew Davies	Exmouth Community College	<b>Apologies</b>	✓	✓
<b>SHAD</b>				
Keith Bennett	Marland School	✓	✓	✓
Jacqui Warne	Learn to Live Federation	<b>Apologies</b>	✓	✓
<b>DAG</b>				
Faith Butler	Special	✓	✓	<b>Apologies</b>
Malcolm Dobbins	Primary	✓	✓	✓
Alex Walmsley	Secondary	✓	✓	✓
<b>EY Providers</b>				
Lydia Wright	Early Years – PVI providers	✓	<b>Apologies</b>	<b>Apologies</b>
<b>In Attendance</b>				
Katrina Harverson	Senior Accountant (E&L)	✓		
Julia Foster	Senior Manager SEND	<b>Apologies</b>		
Gill Loman	SEND Resource Manager	✓		

**1. Item/Focus: Minutes and Matters Arising from meeting on 8 January 2020**

**Discussion:**

- Still awaiting guidance from DfE on Recovery Plans. Expecting submission to be required by end June.
- F40 conference 10 March has been postponed due to Coronavirus..
- Teachers' recruitment – new campaign to go live 9 March. Thanks were extended to Cranbrook Education Campus and Woolacombe schools for their involvement. **KH** has arranged joint funding of the project between Education and Phase Associations. Final narrative to be agreed by Heads.

**Key Decision/** Minutes agreed as an accurate record.

<b>Issues for DEF:</b>	
<b>Action:</b>	
<b>2. Item/Focus: DSG Monitoring – month 10</b>	
<b>Discussion:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduction of almost £500k in DSG shortfall, particularly around HNB (adjustment of Alternative Provision from reduction in forecasted medical placements, Devon Inclusion Project picking up reintegration costs, and in Independent Schools as the price variance reduced based on the average cost within remaining growth).</li> <li><b>Closedown 2019/20</b> – key dates have been circulated to schools. All accruals to be processed by 27 March. Schools will be asked to provide an explanation of any surpluses / deficits projected.</li> </ul>	
<b>Key Decision/ Issues for DEF:</b>	Report noted
<b>Action:</b>	
<b>3. Item/Focus: SEND / High Needs update</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Noted savings achieved in independent provision fees.</li> <li>Increase in mainstream SEN spend seems to be having a positive impact on spend in independent sector. Noted ongoing increase in EHCP assessment requests, particularly in the primary sector.</li> <li>SFG noted that the Mainstream SEN budget has remained static over the last 4 years.</li> </ul>	
<b>SEN Top Up Allocations</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Report circulated outlining that it is expected that SEN top up will follow the child regardless of setting.</li> <li>Discussed how the information could be more widely shared with Headteachers which may increase understanding of the funding stream process and provide clarity on the impact of placement moves.</li> <li>Considered how top up funding delays can impact on a school's ability to quickly meet need and being able to put in place additional support.</li> </ul>	
<b>Month 9 – Independent Sector Report</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Report circulated.</li> <li>Requested information about the total number of independent settings are currently being used, and how many have been quality assured.</li> <li>Small QA team. Suggested that Ofsted-trained Devon Heads be approached to participate in this QA process.</li> </ul>	
<b>Key Decision/ Issues for DEF:</b>	Report noted
<b>Action:</b>	<b>Gill Loman</b> to provide information about the total number of independent settings are currently being used, and how many have been quality assured, in the next ISP update.
<b>4. Item/Focus: SEND / High Needs Recovery Plan</b>	
<b>Discussion:</b>	
Currently considering options around:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Outreach or centrally employed staff to deliver specific types of SEN work in mainstream schools.</li> <li>£19.1m capital funding for special school places (now approved).</li> <li>SEND transformation project – Helen Moltano working on investigations across all SEND partners to look at increased efficiencies in process and accountability to address HNB</li> </ul>	

shortfall.

- SEND strategy being revisited alongside parents.
- Wider projects led by the SEND board (including speech and language)
- Considered how to address the increasing parental preference for admission to special school. Mindful that children should be placed in special schools only where the school is appropriate to meet their needs.
- Seeing a particular increase in demand for specialist provision for children presenting with anxiety; there is no recognised threshold and this has become a significant SEND condition.
- Discussed the DEF agreement of £100k transfer from schools' block to HNB. SFG agreed the principle to jointly agree / appoint a post through the LA and SFG to undertake a piece of work to pull together possible SEND options. The subsequent report would therefore be jointly owned by the LA and SFG. Noted that Helen Molteno has undertaken a thorough exercise, making links with SEND partners across Devon and might be appropriate to approach for this piece of work. Noted that Helen has extensive experience of working on transforming services in other local authorities, looking at SEND, social care and disability across childrens and adults services.
- The appointed person, administrative support and other related costs would be expected to be included in the £100k. SFG/LA will need to move forward to agree the remit for the post.
- The outline remit will be to explore options and produce a detailed proposal to be put to schools as part of the Schools Funding consultation (October 2020). This proposal will be jointly owned by SFG and the LA, and will be accompanied by a request in the autumn for a further transfer from Schools' block to HNB. The principles of the above will be outlined in the recovery plan which is required in June 2020.
- Discussed increase in EHCP requests. Heads explained that in a number of cases schools feel that an EHCP is not appropriate, which can lead to submission of a parental request. Noted some particular issues around pupils at risk of exclusion where having an EHCP has been identified as a possible mitigating factor, and resulting in a school's decision to exclude being overturned.
- Heads suggested that it would be helpful to ascertain additional reasons for requests for statutory assessment being submitted (e.g. pupil moving into area/ child entering reception/secondary).

#### **0-25 SEN Task Group – Commissioning Independent Sector Placements**

- Working with procurement colleagues to develop frameworks.
- Key priorities will identify:
  - A negotiated core offer framework for each provider;
  - Fee increases and common funding approaches will be investigated;
  - Contractual funding approaches will explore models for future contracting agreements;
  - Challenge to ensure Value for Money, alongside finance colleagues.
- Mindful that the LA is open to challenge to ensure a quality provision is being delivered for the fees that are being demanded. A balanced and equitable approach to funding provision for children with SEN will be essential moving forward.
- Part of the remit of the group will be to review independent placements to ensure that they are appropriate and meeting individual need.
- Discussed how parental preference is key to any placement decision; it is unlikely that the findings of the group will result in children being moved to a different school. The task group work will inform future placement decision making.
- Discussed the appropriateness of the threshold for identification of SEN, as laid out in the SEN Code of Practice. Discussed legislation which the LA must abide by which outlines the LA statutory responsibilities to meet the needs of individual children, regardless of the financial position of the local authority.
- Block contracting is already working well with Vranck House. Independent providers will be approached in phases to review fees, funding approaches, and core offers. LA is writing to independent providers outlining that the LA is unwilling to pay any fee increases this financial year, and that a future cap of no more than 2% increase will be applied.
- Operationally, the task and finish group will report to the SEND Improvement Board, with financial impact reported to SFG through the SEND Recovery Plan.

**Key Decision/  
Issues for DEF:**

Report noted

<b>Actions:</b>	<p><b>SFG voted and unanimously agreed</b> that the LA move forward in engaging Helen Moltano to present a plan in June 2020 for the ESFA and a proposal for Autumn funding consultation vote. (AD proposed/PW seconded.) Remit of the project is to keep more children with SEN appropriately supported in mainstream settings.</p> <p><b>SFG</b> to convene a task and finish group to consider remit for the post: Alun Dobson volunteered to represent Primary. Secondary colleague to be included – <b>Alex W</b> to approach Moira Marder to nominate a Ted Wragg head which will ensure helpful learning from Bridge Project is included in discussions.</p> <p><b>Phase Associations</b> to discuss with schools what they would like to see / what they would expect to be part of the autumn in proposal.</p> <p><b>Phase Associations</b> to invite Helen Moltano to next Executives or Heads Briefings (6 May).</p> <p><b>SFG</b> endorsed the priorities outlined for the SEN task and finish group on independent sector placements.</p>
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**5. Item/Focus: Carry Forwards 2020/21**

**Discussion:**

- Provisional £3m DSG surplus carry forwards, not including school balances which won't be confirmed until financial year end.

<b>Key Decision/ Issues for DEF:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Report noted</li> </ul>
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<b>Action:</b>	
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**6. Item/Focus: Mutual Fund Board**

**Discussion:**

- £462k surplus from previous financial year. £580k surplus forecast for current financial year.
- Due to Coronavirus situation any decisions for deployment of the projected surplus will be deferred.
- Agreed that Mutual Fund will cover claims for staff absence due to self-isolation due to COVID-19 Coronavirus, as defined within Public Health England guidance.
- Premium rates for 2020/21 year have already be agreed.

<b>Key Decision/ Issues for DEF:</b>	Mutual Fund will cover claims for staff absence due to self-isolation due to COVID-19 Coronavirus, as defined within Public Health England guidance.
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<b>Action:</b>	
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**7. Item/Focus: Learner Services to Schools Re-Commissioning**

**Discussion:**

- Thanks to all who attended the Schools Engagement event on 6 February.
- The group explored some key questions around delivering services in a different way – to ensure that a fresh approach is taken to the current re-commissioning process.
- Explored clarity around definition of what Heads needed from the services, drilling down to identify specific outcomes.
- Looked at what was being valued currently, and what would make schools want to buy more.
- The event concluded that there was a desire for a different, and much more integrated way of working in the future.
- The Board has heard initial findings from Helen Moltano's conversations with SEND partners regarding SEND transformation, and has started to consider a range of options for future service groupings.

<b>The meeting moved to Part 2 to continue the discussion.</b>	
<b>Key Decision/ Issues for DEF:</b>	Update noted
<b>Action:</b>	
<b>8. Item/Focus: Data Transfer system licences (AnyComms +)</b>	
<b>Discussion:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Richard Reece had provided a briefing on the secure LA data transfer system.</li> <li>• Current 3-year licence agreement will end in August 2020.</li> <li>• A re-negotiated agreement is available, which would need to be managed centrally. Costing is based on a per school (DfE number) basis.</li> <li>• SFG considered whether this could be funded through a top-slice agreement to remove the requirement for individual school invoices.</li> <li>• Thanks to Richard for negotiating the LA held contract for 2020 onwards at a reduced rate to all schools.</li> </ul>	
<b>Key Decision/ Issues for DEF:</b>	<b>SFG agreed</b> for funding to be top-sliced to facilitate a centrally managed licensing arrangement.
<b>Action:</b>	
<b>9. Item/Focus: Items for DEF</b>	
<b>Items for DEF finance report:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Month 10 budget response</li> <li>• SEND Recovery Plan</li> <li>• Engagement of Helen Moltano to look at options for future SEND intervention in mainstream settings.</li> <li>• Mutual Fund position to be held to allow response to Coronavirus situation.</li> <li>• Top slice for centrally managed license agreement for AnyComms+.</li> </ul>	
<b>Key Decision/ Issues for DEF:</b>	
<b>Action:</b>	

**Next meetings:**

**Wednesday 3 June 2020 (9.15 – 12.45pm) – County Hall – Coaver Ansell Room**

**Wednesday 15 July 2020 (9.15 – 12.45pm) – at Larkbeare House – Knightshayes Room**

**Wednesday 9 September 2020 (9.15 – 4.30pm) – at Larkbeare House – Knightshayes Room**

**Wednesday 4 November 2020 (9.15 – 12.45pm) – at Larkbeare House – Knightshayes Room**

**Wednesday 6 January 2021 (9.15 – 12.45pm) – at Larkbeare House – Knightshayes Room**

**Wednesday 3 March 2021 (9.15 – 12.45pm) – at Larkbeare House – Knightshayes Room**