

## Schools Finance Group: Notes of meeting on Wednesday 26 May 2021

### Items for DEF to note:

#### Item 2 – SEND / High Needs

- DEF to note the increase in the volume of placements in the independent special school sector over the past 12 months, and the planned increase in special school place capacity through new special school developments, and expansion of existing schools.
- HNB management action plan to be discussed with DfE. Governance arrangements now in place. Additional clarity on role of SFG and DEF in monitoring outcomes.
- SEND 100 Project Steering Group has appointed a Project Lead to drive forward progress in the individual projects and report on progress against identified targets.

#### Item 3 - DSG Outturn

- DEF to note the DSG year-end overspend position of £22.5millions, made up of Individual school balances of £21.1millions, ringfenced balances of £5.4millions and the cumulative DSG Deficit of just under £49millions.

#### Item 5 – FIPS Annual Report

- DEF to note ongoing commitment to provide holistic, proactive and supportive intervention package for schools predicting and experiencing financial difficulties.
- Proposed reduction in the schools' contribution to contingency budget for the next financial year due to the current surplus balance position.

### Attendance

#### DCC

Mat Thorpe ( <i>Chair</i> )	Assistant County Treasurer (Children's Services)
Adrian Fox ( <b>apologies</b> )	Head Accountant (Education & Learning)
Richard Curtis	Senior Accountant (Schools)
Dawn Stabb	Head of Education & Learning
Heidi Watson-Jones ( <i>notes</i> )	Service Support Officer (E&L)

#### Devon Schools Leadership Services

##### Primary:

Alun Dobson	Marwood Primary
Jamie Stone	Denbury Primary
Paul Walker	First Federation MAT

##### Secondary:

Sammy Crook	Tiverton Federation
Andrew Davis ( <b>apologies</b> )	Exmouth Community College
Lorraine Heath ( <b>apologies</b> )	Uffculme Academy
Moira Marder ( <i>sub</i> )	Ted Wragg Trust
Phil Randall ( <i>sub</i> )	St Peters CofE Aided School

##### Alternative Provision:

Rob Gasson ( <b>apologies</b> )	Wave Multi Academy Trust
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#### SENTient Heads

Keith Bennett	Marland School
Sarah Pickering ( <b>apologies</b> )	Mill Water School

#### DAG

Faith Butler ( <b>apologies</b> )	Special School Governors
Malcolm Dobbins	Primary Governors
Alex Walmsley	Secondary Governors

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### Early Years Providers

Dianne Roberts (**apologies**)

Early Years / PVI providers

### Other DCC Officers

Julia Foster (*part*)

Senior Manager SEND

Katrina Harverson

Senior Accountant (Education)

## 1. Minutes of Previous Meeting – 3 March 2020

- **KH** to follow up on mutual fund claims specifically lined to Covid
- Minutes agreed as an accurate record.

## 2. SEND/ High Needs

### Independent placements monitoring

- Heads welcomed the year end position report. The group noted the ongoing increase in the volume of placements in the independent special school sector, and the planned increase in special school place capacity through new special school developments, and expansion of existing schools.
- Noted that changes in education placements can often follow a change of care placement. Closer working with Adult services will enable improved transition planning for post-19 learners out of education and better prepared for adulthood. Mindful that there is a lack of appropriate care provision for the young adults with most complex disabilities.
- New starters are generally beginning new placements in September, significantly from mainstream secondary schools into the independent mainstream sector. SEMH and ASD remain the predominant needs, with children struggling with larger mainstream secondary environments, and parents seeking smaller class sizes. Need more open discussion with mainstream schools to determine how they can be better supported to meet this need without the child moving to the independent sector.
- Noted Magdalen Court has now been designated a special school.
- Noted that a very small number of children's placements have been extended as a result of the pandemic, many linked to achievement of outcomes at transition points, and with specific and targeted timeframes and outcomes attached to any agreed ongoing provision.
- The group discussed placements into schools with RI Ofsted judgements. Noted that Ofsted category holds no legal status in SEND considerations; parental preference will outweigh this and the LA can struggle to identify a robust alternative provider able to meet specific need. It was felt that this position could be strengthened by schools providing more detailed consult responses identifying how needs could be met with additional support in place.
- SFG discussed the increasing demand for small secondary classes and whether this situation could be improved in mainstream schools. The development of further resource bases is expected to provide smaller learning environments in larger schools. Revising the language and structure of advice may help to place children in these types of environments.
- Conversations have taken place with other LAs where there is increased confidence in parents and schools and this has informed the Devon SEND Transformation planning which aims to secure additional support quickly to support families and schools when they first ask for help, avoiding the need for escalated situations and higher level provision being required when a family situation reaches crisis.

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- The group considered how 'triage type pre-discussions' with SEN team could help a school determine how best it might be able communicate local pressures and concerns prior to returning a formal EHCP consultation response. that may be negative. The discussion could reduce barriers
- It was also felt that parental perception can be that small rural primary schools are best placed to meet their child's needs due to the small environment but should be mindful that there can be local pressures with limitations of staff capacity and space.

### **DSG deficit management plan - Governance**

- Heads welcomed the clarification of the governance arrangements as outlined in the DfE management plan template. The Head of Education and Head Accountant will be responsible for monitoring.
- Considered the role of SFG in the monitoring and challenge process. Regular high-level updates to be provided to SFG across the workstreams, with options for deep-dive investigations and ability to provide assurance to DEF. Schools' monitoring of the SEND100 projects (via the Project Steering Group) will also feed into this monitoring and challenge.
- Considered that a named accountable person for SEND 100 outcomes would be helpful, and it was suggested that this is discussed further at DEF to provide clarity. Special, AP, primary and secondary heads sit on the SEND 100 steering group.
- SFG requested detail be added to the plan around the planned expansions of maintained special schools – JF to be the accountable officer.

### **SEND 100 Project update**

- Steering group has appointed a project lead – secondment to begin in June 0.4fte for 2 years. Tracey Jones is currently a SENDCo in a maintained primary school.
- Project coordinators are working together to develop the programmes.
- The Project Lead will provide reports to SFG and DEF and will also be responsible for unblocking any issues encountered identified during individual project work in schools.
- Robust monitoring of the project delivery and the financial savings will be important to identify where changed practice is happening and where it is needed to move further.
- SFG remains mindful of disconnect between the steering group and finance in the development of the financial targets.
- SFG requested a report outlining the delivery plans of the individual project workstreams.
- Clarity of the financial impact of all interventions will be crucial for effective monitoring of the overall deficit position by DCC and DEF. The long term plan is to bring overall spend in line with the funding allocated on a year on year basis.
- Mindful that the children remain at the heart of the work, and successfully and appropriately meeting their needs will take priority over the focus on financial savings.

### **ACTION:**

- **SFG** to consider further their role the monitoring and reporting of the management plan progress
- **KH** to capture all of planned savings through programmes, including the planned increase special school places to the HNB management action plan.
- **DEF** to consider need for a named accountable person for the SEND 100 project outcomes.

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- **SEND 100 Project Lead / Coordinators** to provide an update outlining the delivery plans of the individual projects at next meeting.

### 3. DSG Outturn 2020-21

- SFG noted the powerpoint summary presented, with a draft outturn position for the DSG of an overspend of £22.5m.
- Carry forward to 2021-22 includes £21.1m individual schools balances, £5.4m of ringfenced carry forwards and a cumulative DSG deficit of just under £49m.
- Continued demand on high needs and increase in SEN placements noted; the group was reminded that £1.5m of surplus growth fund identified for SEND100 project activity.
- SFG requested clarity around the SEN mainstream and special school funding positions, in particular the funding gap attributed to these areas. The High Needs summary table will be amended for future reports to clearly identify the net position and management action targets.
- HNB management plan to be discussed with the DfE on 9 June. Assurance will be sought on the delivery plans and how the targets will be achieved. Mindful that the success will largely depend on the involvement and buy-in of schools to change practice. The LA will need to ensure that the savings targets are met alongside ongoing requirement to meet the needs of children with SEN.
- Clarification was requested on the oversight by DEF of the management plan.
- Heads felt that the DEF role will be to provide challenge to the LA but also acknowledged a need to challenge to schools to engage in the SEND 100 programme, changing culture and securing a resolution to meet children's SEN needs in maintained settings. Schools will need to have an embedded understanding of the goals and challenges and work alongside, and not against the LA.
- SFG members flagged concern that the targets will not be achievable but agreed that clarity around the role, accountability and responsibility of DEF and LA officers in the process must be agreed to ensure that all parties understand what is being asked of them.
- The group considered how the management plan and the financial context will be clearly communicated to schools to ensure they understand the impact of the proposed measures and projects. A joint accountability and ownership of the plan and targets will be valuable to help to change culture and embed new ways of working. Joint communications will be important, with support from DEF for the messages being delivered. **DS** presentation to next Heads' briefing event will further explain SEND Transformation. Clarity will be helpful around what specific action and culture needs to change in schools and what the leaders can address individually within their schools and trusts to contribute to the wider programme.

#### **Action:**

- **AF/DS** to consider the schools forum guidance to establish the roles and responsibility of the Schools Forum in the monitoring of and accountability for the HNB management plan.

### 4. DSG Monitoring – month 1

- Powerpoint slides and verbal update shared due to Local authority elections and time constraints on the team to report month 1 in the usual way.

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- Continued focus on additional pressure to the High Needs Block as this remains the most volatile are of the budget, with in-year pressures already identified in the independent sector and management action yet to be achieved.
- SFG requested some further detail in future reports on the success of HNB management action measures. It was felt that it will also be helpful to provide positive messages in communications to schools on the savings achieved through management action and changed behaviours and strategies leading to an improved position.

### 5. FIPS Annual Report

- SFG welcomed the widening role of FIPS which includes earlier identification of maintained schools experiencing financial difficulties, to enable timely and proactive budget management and support to be put in place.
- Impact of Covid has resulted in an increase in the number of schools, particularly primary, being discussed at FIPS.
- Support provided by the Panel can include leadership and governance support, place planning informing class structures and school improvement.
- Due to the level of surplus currently in the budget, a reduced rate of contingency funding has been requested for 2021-22 financial year from schools.
- SFG considered the demographic shift moving from primary to secondary, and discussed primary school issues due to maintaining structures that can no longer be sustained with falling rolls. This situation is being monitored by FIPS, and officers are working with schools on curriculum and pupil number predictions.
- Noted that there were a range of individual school circumstances, aside from small schools with low numbers on roll, which can lead to financial concerns.
- Heads appreciated the update and welcomed the early intervention and support to schools.
- Mindful that the number of claims continues to increase.

### 6. Growth Fund

- SFG noted the summary breakdown of predicted Growth need over the next 5 years, including new schools and those expanding provision.
- Reiterated that £1.5m of the surplus has been transferred to fund initial SEND 100 project activity.

#### **ACTION:**

- **RC/KH** to update the report to reflect planned places linked to the expansion of Marland School sites.

### 7. Mutual Fund Board- month 12

- SFG noted the month 12 summary report.
- Heads queried whether the mutual fund claims are reflecting any particular issues of staff absence due to long Covid cases.
- Clear criteria for eligibility around mutual fund claims to be recirculated to schools. Mindful of turnover of administrative staff who may no longer be familiar with the criteria and timeframes for submitting claims.

#### **ACTION:**

- **RC** to look into any pattern of longer-term Covid related absence claims.

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- **RC** to provide a general update communication to all schools who are members of the mutual fund outlining an overview of the fund, and details of criteria and timeframes for submitting claims.

**8. Any Other Business**

- Malcolm Dobbins shared with the group that he would be standing down as a governor, and consequently a SFG and DEF member. Thanks were expressed to Malcolm for his commitment to the groups and schools across Devon over many years.

**Items for 16 June DEF:**

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**Next meetings:**

Wednesday 14 July 2021 (09.15 – 12.00 – venue TBC)

Wednesday 8 September 2021 (09.15 – 16.00 – venue TBC)

Wednesday 3 November 2021 (09.15 – 12.00 – venue TBC)

Wednesday 5 January 2022 (09.15 – 12.00 – venue TBC)

Wednesday 2 March 2022 (09.15 – 12.00 – venue TBC)