

DEVON EDUCATION FORUM

19 January 2022

Present:-

Schools Members

Primary Headteachers

Mr A Dobson	Marwood Primary
Mr J Stone	Denbury Primary
Ms R Shaw	Exeter Learning Academy Trust (Academy)
Mr P Walker	First Federation Trust (Academy)

Primary Governors

Ms E Stubbs	Budleigh Salterton, St Peter's CE Primary
Mr A Hines	Rydon Primary (Education SW Trust)(Academy)
Mr I Rogers	Exminster Primary

Secondary Headteachers

Mrs S Crook	Federation of Tiverton Schools
Mr A Davis	Exmouth CC (Academy)
Ms L Heath	Uffculme Academy Trust (Academy)
Mr G Hill	Ventrus Multi Academy Trust (Academy)

Secondary Governors

Ms J Elson	Exmouth CC (Academy)
Mrs J Larcombe	Uffculme Academy Trust (Academy)
Mr A Walmsley	The Ted Wragg Multi Academy Trust (Academy)

Nursery School

Mrs S Baker	Westexe
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Special Headteacher

Mr K Bennett	Marland School
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Special Governor

Mrs F Butler	Marland School (Chair)
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Alternative Provision

Mr R Gasson	WAVE Multi Academy Trust
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Non-Schools Members

Mr B Blythe	PETROC
Ms G Rolstone	Early Years, Private & Voluntary Independent

Observer

Councillor A Leadbetter	Cabinet Member – Children's Services and Skills
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Apologies

Ms K Brimacombe
Mr J Clements
Ms S Lockwood

Whitchurch Primary
Cranbrook, St Martin's CE Primary
Exeter Diocesan Board of Education

22 Minutes

DECISION:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 17 November 2021 be signed as a correct record.

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

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24 Membership

DISCUSSION:

The Chair welcomed Mr Rogers and Ms Rolstone (as below), together with Ms Angie Sinclair, recently appointed Director of Finance.

The following membership changes noted:-

(a) Election of the following to fill vacancies:-

Mr I Rogers – maintained primary governor (substitute member)
Mr J Clements - maintained primary governor; and

(b) Ms S Barreto, faith schools (substitute member) resignation.

25 Head of Education & Learning Update

DISCUSSION:

The Head of Education & Learning reported on the secondary school exclusions data analysis and details of LA support (as set out within the Education Termly Report included on the agenda).

Exclusions data monitoring did not indicate a significant increase in permanent exclusion (PEX) amongst pupils with an Education Health & Care Plan (EHCP). There had been a slight increase in pupils with SEN support but

not out of line with the national comparison. Suspensions (previously known as Fixed Term Exclusions) had increased but were better than nationally, whilst PEX remained high overall.

Devon's Inclusion Team had had positive meetings with individual schools where exclusion was higher, discussing alternatives to exclusion and support. Exclusion levels were being closely monitored over the Spring term 2022 to try to prevent an increase following pupils return to school.

School attendance across schools this term started at 94% but there was now a significant rise in Covid related absences amongst pupils.

26 **Finance Update**

DISCUSSION:

(a) The Forum received the minutes of the Schools Finance Group (SFG), 5 January 2022, noting the respective minutes in relation to report (DEF/22/01);

(b) The Forum considered the report of the Chief Officer for Children's Services and County Treasurer (DEF/22/01).

The Report (DEF/22/01) covered:-

- The month 8 outturn forecast for 2021/22 saw a significant overspend in the overall Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) of £39.1 million associated with the continued demand on High Needs and the growing demand on Special Educational Needs (SEN) placements within the Independent Sector despite creating more places within Devon's Special Schools.
- The cumulative DSG deficit projected to March 2022 had therefore increased to £88.1 million.
- The High Needs Block saw a further increase of £3.1 million since month 6 due to increased EHCP demand identified in SEN Mainstream, top-up funding uplift for Mainstream Special Schools and increased costs in Independent settings.
- The Management Action had reduced by £700,000 to £2 million due to recognising 50% of the Social Care and Health contributions for Independent placements. The remaining actions were expected to be delivered in 2021/22.
- The increasing DSG deficit in-year could have a considerable impact on future education budgets within the DSG as well as impacting on the financial sustainability for Devon County Council. An urgent action was still required to reduce the demand on Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs) and Independent placements.

A Member asked about the EHCP cost and volume analysis within maintained schools (Appendix A to the Report (DEF/22/01)). Whilst recognising the benefits of individual plus packages, these were a growing area costing £10k

each and Members sought assurance these were applied for and allocated in a consistent manner.

The Head of Education & Learning advised that plus packages were for pupils with a higher level of need, overseen by a moderator and in cases of disagreement by a panel. Sometimes packages were in direct response to pupils awaiting the availability of a maintained special school place.

DECISION:

(a) that month 8 DSG monitoring position as set out in report (DEF/22/01) sections 1 to 4 be noted; and

(b) that an update on the monitoring of EHCP plus packages be made to the Schools Finance Group.

ACTION:

Head of Education & Learning (Julia Foster and Heidi Watson Jones) - (b).

27

DSG 2022-2023 Budget Planning

DISCUSSION:

The Forum considered the joint Report of the Chief Officer for Children's Services and Director of Finance (DEF/22/02) on the current position of the:-

DSG Deficit & Management Plan
DSG Settlement 2022/23
Schools Block
Central School Services Block
High Needs Block
Early Years Block
Other Schools Grants
Carry Forward Decisions.

The Director of Finance advised that in relation to the Schools Block and sparsity values (section 3 of Report (DEF/22/02)) and Devon's October 2021 consultation with schools based on July 2021 pupil census data and sparsity values then considered (and at the Forum's meeting 17 November 2021), the DfE's recently received latest Authority Proforma Tool included the updated 2021 October pupil census. This had occurred since SFG met on 5 January 2022 and so had not yet been considered in detail by its members. The revision now made it clear the LA was unable to assign all the factors within the sparsity allocations as there were additional schools eligible for sparsity that were not identified using the July 2021 data, resulting in an overall shortfall in the funding envelope of £1.1m. Officers therefore recommended a change in the sparsity rates to that used in 2021/22, calculated to ensure that Devon schools saw the best funding position with the funding available.

Appendix A to Report (DEF/22/02)) gave a breakdown of impact on individual schools.

The Director of Finance further advised that information had been received from the DfE last week, seeing a removal of 50% in 2022/23 of the maintained schools School Improvement Grant and removal in full from 2023/24. It was therefore recommended that £317,500 (50%) be funded from the Financial Intervention Panel Schools (FIPS), £2.5m surplus as a one off in 2022/23 only, whilst more detailed consideration be given to funding for 2023/24.

Members' discussion included:-

-a wish to more fully understand the DfE's revised Tool and sparsity criteria, modelling options, equitability and impact on individual schools, before a decision was made, bearing in mind a change was proposed from the schools consultation;

-that the potential budgetary difficulties, particularly for small rural schools, of a revised sparsity allocation at this stage when setting budgets;

-clarification was sought on whether the DfE revision and timing had affected other LAs adversely;

-that the DfE deadline requiring Devon to submit a decision was this Friday, 21 January 2022; and

-that in respect of the School Improvement Grant DfE reduction, members would consider supporting funding from the FIPS surplus as a one off in 2022/23 only.

(There was a short adjournment pending further advice on potentially not reaching a decision today on sparsity rates given the imminent DfE deadline of 21 January 2021).

DECISION:

(a) that the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Deficit as set out in section 1 of Report (DEF/22/02) be noted;

(b) that the DSG 2022/23 announcement on 17 December 2021 as set out in section 2 of Report (DEF/22/02) be noted;

(c) that further data and model options on Schools Block sparsity rates be sent to members for consideration, inviting them to submit their response via email by noon, Friday 21 January 2022, so that Devon may respond to the DfE deadline of the same date (**see Notes 1* and 2** below**);

(Vote: Schools, Academies and PVI members)

(d) that the Central School Services Block, High Needs Block and Early Years Block as set out in section 4 to 9 of Report (DEF/22/02) be noted; and

(e) that as a one off 2022/23 only, £317,500 (50%) School Improvement Grant be funded from the Financial Intervention Panel Schools (FIPS) surplus, whilst more detailed consideration be given to funding for 2023/24, following DfE notification of reduced grant.

***Note 1:** outcome of DEF member Sparsity rates responses in (c) above was:-

that Cabinet be recommended:-

that Option D (as set out in paragraph 3.8 of the Sparsity additional supporting document) to reinstate the sparsity rates to that used in 2021/22 and use the National Funding Formula (NFF) calculation to ensure that Devon schools move as close to the National Funding Formula as possible, whilst remaining in the funding envelope available be approved.**

(Vote: Schools, Academies and PVI members)

****Note 2:** (Forum Members wished to place on record that in reaching their decision they acknowledged that the funding model proposed in consultation was unable to be implemented following the release of the latest Authority Proforma Tool from the DfE. When presented with the two affordable funding formulas (Option D and E) Members supported the LA's recommendation to apply option D. This was because this provided the most favourable opportunity for school finance in future years to eventually meet the requirements of the National Funding Formula.

Forum Members would like the further data and model options now circulated to be further considered at the next Schools Finance Group meeting. It was critical that the Local Authority communicate this information to schools in a timely and sensitive manner).

ACTION:

Director of Finance (Adrian Fox) (c), (d); County Solicitor (Fiona Rutley) (c).

28

DSG Management Plan

DISCUSSION:

The Forum considered the joint Report of the Chief Officer for Children's Services and Director of Finance (DEF/22/03) including overview, management actions and risks.

In responding to a member's question regarding the Devon now being part of the 2nd tranche of the Safety Valve Intervention Programme (section 4 of Report (DEF/22/03)), the Director of Finance reported on meetings with the

DfE, welcoming the experience and best practice of other LAs, to support a service improvement plan to bring about the best outcomes for children within resources. Whilst Devon was at an early stage of the process this was a positive step towards managing the High Needs Block deficit.

DECISION:

that month 8 of the DSG Deficit Management Plan be noted.

29 DSG Management Plan Governance (minute 16(b))

This matter was discussed under the preceding item (minute no 28).

30 SEND 100 Project Progress (minute 14(b))

DISCUSSION:

The Forum received a presentation regarding the project's progress to date, to build long term SEND sustainability and confidence, working together alongside mainstream schools and families. Members noted some recruitment challenges and staffing capacity and its impact on the timetable.

In relation to outreach it was noted that some specialist maintained settings were doing their own outreach work on a non charged basis due to some current arrangements which meant they did not have the capacity to support the project. Whether this would continue on an individual settings or a Devon approach would be kept under review.

ACTION:

Head of Education & Learning (Dawn Stabb)

31 Standing (and other) Groups

The Forum received the following from standing group:-

School Organisation, Capital and Admissions (SOCA)

Minutes of the meeting held on 7 December 2021.

32 Correspondence

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33 **Dates of Future Meetings**

Please check venue/arrangements (see Calendar link) as these are subject to change:

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

Meetings held at 10am:

Wednesday 16 March 2022
Wednesday 22 June 2022
Wednesday 23 November 2022
Wednesday 18 January 2023
Wednesday 22 March 2023.

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 12.50 pm