

Schools Finance Group: Notes of meeting on Wednesday 6 March 2024

Key Points for DEF to Note:

Item 2 – Safety Valve Update

- Further discussions have taken place with DfE and DLUHC; awaiting confirmation of a Safety Valve agreement.

Item 4 – Falling Rolls Fund

- Officers to review DCC guidance following an update on the current funding methodology issued by the DfE.

ATTENDANCE

DCC

Mat Thorpe (Apologies)	Deputy Director of Finance and Public Value
Adrian Fox (Chair)	Head Accountant (Education & Learning)
Kellie Knott (part)	SEND Improvement Director
Heidi Watson-Jones	Safety Valve Project Officer

Devon Schools Leadership Services

Primary:

Jamie Stone	Denbury Primary
Paul Walker (Apologies)	First Federation Trust
Penny Hammett	FORT Federation

Secondary:

Sammy Crook	Tiverton Federation
Alan Blackburn	Uffculme School
Rob Gammon	The King's School
Fay Bowler – (Apologies)	Braunton Academy

Alternative Provision:

Rob Gasson	Wave Multi Academy Trust
------------	--------------------------

Special Schools

Keith Bennett	Marland School
Sarah Pickering (Apologies)	Mill Water School

DAG

Faith Butler (Apologies)	Special School Governors
Alex Walmsley (part)	Secondary Governors
Adrian Hines (Apologies)	Primary Governors

Early Years Providers

Gemma Rolstone (Apologies)	Puffins Childcare
-----------------------------------	-------------------

Other DCC Officers

Karlien Bond	Senior Accountant (Schools)
Katrina Harverson	Principal Accountant – Education & Learning

SCHOOLS FINANCE GROUP

1. Minutes and matters arising from meeting on 12 January 2024

Schools Finance Group: Notes of meeting on Wednesday 6 March 2024

- KK confirmed that Resource Base outreach funding will be removed from April 24 but that a wider approach to outreach provision will be reconsidered. **AF** to discuss with Sammy Crook.
- **KH** confirmed that schools running SEMH Partnership projects have received a letter clearly confirming funding timeframes.
- All other actions completed. Minutes agreed as an accurate record.

- **AF** to discuss resource base outreach issues with Sammy Crook.

2. Safety Valve Intervention Programme - Update

- Further discussions have taken place with DfE and DLUHC; awaiting confirmation of a Safety Valve agreement.
- Finance colleagues confirmed that the budget has been set, and savings identified within the Safety Valve submission will still need to be achieved regardless of any amount that DCC might receive if successful in the programme.
- SFG requested an explanation at the next meeting of how any Safety Valve funding, and LA contribution funding will sit within the authority and be deployed.
- SFG to consider Safety Valve monitoring expectations at the June meeting, assuming a successful outcome.

ACTION:

- **AF** to provide an overview of how Safety Valve funding will sit within the local authority budget and be deployed.
- **Finance Colleagues** to share information around Safety Valve monitoring expectations at the June SFG meeting.

3. DSG Monitoring – month 10

- DSG deficit reserve is projected to rise to £167m by year end.
- £14.6m management action savings identified as at risk of not being achieved.
- Noted an ongoing increase in the level of EHC needs assessment requests, the number of requests being refused at 6 and 16 weeks is not impacting on the overall volume of EHCPs.
- SFG to further consider data around EHC assessment requests and reasons for ongoing increases in EHC assessment requests, and rising proportion of requests from parents and carers (**KK**).
- Considered the impact of LA funding levels on schools' ability to appropriately support children with SEN needs without additional funding and support through an EHCP.
- Discussed increasing overspend in the AP Other budget. Noted that some excluded learners are not immediately placed in Wave provision, and access independent AP provision which can be of varying quality. Re-integration into a more formal learning environment can then be challenging. **KK and R Gasson** to discuss issues further.
- SFG noted the current budget position and the planned management action savings. Remaining management action savings are expected to be achieved by financial year end as projected. Services continue to explore management actions to further increase savings.

ACTION:

- **KK** to present further data around EHC assessment requests at next meeting

Schools Finance Group: Notes of meeting on Wednesday 6 March 2024

- **KK and R Gasson** to discuss issues around successful use of commissioned Alternative Provision.

4. Growth Fund monitoring and Falling Rolls – month 10

Growth Fund

- Noted end of year forecast carry forward of £399k.

Falling Rolls Fund

- DfE have issued an update on the current funding methodology outlining that funding will in future be based on medium super output areas (MSOA) within each LA. Noted these do not neatly fit with school catchments.
- Officers will review the guidance and consider any requests in line with the new guidance.
- **SN** to provide update at the June meeting.

ACTION:

- **SN** to provide update on Falling Rolls guidance at the June SFG meeting.

5. Carry Forwards from 2023-24

- Net de-delegated carry forward of £856k projected.
- Maintained schools will be asked to explain surplus and deficit balances on year-end forecasts. SFG discussed the recommended threshold for surplus of 5%, and checking of significant in-year shifts. **Finance colleagues** to check Year End guidance for maintained schools.
- SFG noted the variable funding methodology for special schools based on actual numbers of children placed and the difficulties this put on longer-term budget planning.
- Mindful of drive to expand the special schools sector, but noted this comes with very low levels of set-up funding. **AF** to feed concerns back to the service.
- Noted previous Head of Education had planned to review the remit of the Schools contingency (FIPS) Panel. KB confirmed that during the funding consultation a 'Schools in Financial Difficulty' process was outlined which aims to adopt a more proactive, cross-service approach to working with schools earlier to protect them from reaching a crisis financial position.
- Noted demographic change will have a significant impact on school funding levels.
- SFG welcomed a renewed approach, however were mindful of sensitivities of carrying forward a balance of £900k at a time when schools are struggling to balance budgets.
- SFG requested a future discussion focused on the Schools' Contingency fund.

ACTION:

- **Finance colleagues** to check Year End guidance for maintained schools on levels of surplus and in-year shifts.
- **AF** to feed concerns around levels of set up funding for new and expanded specialist provision back to the service.
- **KB** to provide paper for discussion on schools contingency fund at June SFG

6. Any Other Business

Automatic Presumption of Pupil Premium Entitlement

Schools Finance Group: Notes of meeting on Wednesday 6 March 2024

- It was felt that this approach, as adopted in some other LAs, would significantly increase Pupil Premium funding into Devon schools. This had been raised verbally at November and January DEF meetings.
- Noted the complexities around DCC not being a single tier LA, and issues around access to benefit details to obtain information needed to process eligibility checks.
- Noted that Ceri Morgan had undertaken to follow this up.

Items for DEF on 20 March

- Verbal update on Safety Valve
- Month 10 Finance update

7. Mutual Fund Board

- Month 10 position currently forecasting a £50k overspend, however mindful of varying month by month position during the year.
- Considered schools' feedback following discussion at recent Bursar briefings around proposed closing of the Mutual Fund.
- Agreed that the 2024 Autumn Funding Consultation will include a question, for MF member schools, around closure of the Mutual Fund from Autumn term 2025. This would provide a period of review for the LA to consider the impact.
- Mindful of the reducing number of schools paying into the Mutual Fund as a result of schools joining MATs which impacts on the viability of the fund.
- A decision can be announced before the end of the Autumn term 25 to enable schools to seek alternative provision if required.
- **KB** to respond to school emails and update the Finance Blog to outline the proposal to include in the Autumn funding consultation.
- Will need to clarify the approach to ceasing payment of any new claims at end of Spring term 25 during year of closure. Ongoing legacy long term sickness claim payments could be held over to end of Summer term 25 before payments agreed.

ACTION:

- **KB** to respond to school emails and update the Finance Blog to outline the proposal to include in the Autumn funding consultation.

Future meeting dates:

- **Wednesday 5 June 2024** (09.15 – 12.30 – Teams)
- **Monday 8 July 2024** (14.00 – 17.00 face to face – venue TBC)
- **Monday 9 September 2024** (all day – face to face – venue TBC)
- **Wednesday 6 November 2024** (09.15 – 12.30 – Teams)
- **Friday 10 January 2025** (09.15 – 12.30 – Teams)
- **Wednesday 5 March 2025** (09.15 – 12.30 – Teams)