

**Report of the Cabinet Member**  
**Children's Services and Schools**

I have been asked to Report as follows for Full Council on 7 October 2021:

**1. By Councillor Hannaford as follows:**

It has been estimated that more than two-thirds of the extra costs facing schools in England as a result of the coronavirus pandemic will not be covered by the government's support funding. Most schools have had to spend more cash throughout the pandemic in order to operate a "Covid-safe" environment. The government has provided some financial relief through its exceptional costs fund, but research from the Education Policy Institute (EPI) suggests that the majority of schools' additional costs won't be met by the fund.

The analysis, based on a survey of more than 700 schools, suggests that nearly three in five (57%) are using their reserves to cover these extra costs and around half of schools do not expect to have a balanced budget by the end of the year. The EPI estimates that of the combined total of all schools' Covid-related costs in England, less than a third (31%) will be reimbursed by the government's exceptional costs fund.

The analysis found that nearly all schools reported extra spending on PPE and cleaning supplies, while the vast majority faced increased costs in signage, digital equipment and hand-washing facilities.

It also found that since the first national lockdown in March 2020, primary schools have had to meet additional non-staff costs that averaged just under £13,000, special schools just under £18,000 and secondary schools nearly £43,000. The pressure of this additional expenditure, the report suggests, will be "felt most in schools with high levels of disadvantage" and schools may be facing a shortfall in terms of funding for catch-up.

School budgets in Devon which were already "very tight because of years of government underfunding", are now in an even worse position. It will inevitably mean schools will need to make more cuts and this will impact on the academic and pastoral support they are able to provide to pupils in the wake of the pandemic.

Can the Cabinet Member please update council on the additional costs of the pandemic on Devon's schools and the overall levels of budget deficits that they are carrying.

**2. By Councillor Hannaford and Biederman as follows:**

It is understood that many coach firm operators across Devon are going into retirement or diversifying. In addition to this Stagecoach and other bus companies are experiencing a serious driver shortage that will take some time to fully resolve.

Can the Cabinet Member please report on the current situation with Bus services in Devon, particularly with regard Driver Shortages, which is resulting in many cancellations of service, causing many residents to be stranded, missing appointments, Late for work -  
What are we doing to assist operators?

Can the Cabinet Member also update council on how these factors are impacting on our school bus services, in terms of capacity, coverage and costs. Furthermore what we are doing in partnership with others to ensure that our local children can properly access their schools and colleges.

### **3. By Councillor Letch as follows:**

A report on fostering of children in families and institutions, to include the extent that they are fostered as close as possible to their community so that they do not lose links with friends and their school.

### **4. By Councillor Aves as follows:**

Please can the Cabinet member for Children's Services provide me with a report on Pupil Premium and my points raised below:

Reference: Guardian 5<sup>th</sup> Sept 2021 article on: Schools in poorest areas of England to be worst hit by pupil premium change –

Normally, the government gives the funding to each school in England based on the number of children eligible for free school meals in January of the previous year.

However, the government changed the census date for when pupil premium funding is calculated this last year, so that schools in England had to count the number of children eligible for free school meals from October (2020) and not January 2021.

Schools and children in the poorest parts of Devon will presumably be hit harder by this. These schools will lose out on the FSM provision for the pupils that would usually qualify and as FSM funding is increasing, they lose out on this too. This will hit the most disadvantaged pupils.

DCC Children services have recently provided me with the following summary when I asked about how this will impact on Devon schools:

Impact of the October Census being used to calculate the Deprivation Pupil Premium, rather than the January Census, is a reduction in funding of £1,185,315, applying the free school meal ever 6 principle.

Free School Meal ever 6 count as per the October Census is 18,226 eligible pupils and the January Census is 19,147 eligible pupils, additional 921 eligible pupils which equates to £1,185,315 reduction in funding across all settings (Hosp Ed; Wave; Primary; Secondary; All Through; Special Schools).

Primary aged pupils – 784 pupils at £1,345 = £1,054,480

Secondary aged pupils – 137 pupils at £955 = £130,835

I do appreciate that schools will make sure families are not affected because schools have a duty to provide the FSM meals regardless of how the government decide to allocate the funds.

1. Therefore, how does this impact on school budget spending when they will have to cover this without the funding from government that they would have had previously?
2. How are Devon supporting our schools with finance decisions they have to make as a result of this?
3. Has this been changed for this school year 21/22 now that the government realises the impact of such a decision?
4. I realise representations were made to the DfE about the impact of the changes. What has been their reply?

5. Knowing your budget earlier re Pupil Premium helps you plan and budget, **but** if knowing means less money it creates more financial problems for schools and increased anxiety for our school staff and governors, plus it impacts on what is provided for our children by our schools. Again, the next generation is taking a hit in their education for a poorly thought through decision by government. Do you agree?

## **Response**

### **1. School Covid Costs and Budget Deficits**

#### **Covid Costs**

Schools have identified additional expenditure due to Covid, however the majority of this for the 20/21 academic year has been offset by Covid grants (for cleaning etc) or grants for Furlough (where eligible). Additional teaching has been supported by Catch up Premium and the national tutoring programme. This means only the remaining elements feature in schools deficit budgets.

#### **The Local Authority only has access to maintained schools information. Academy finances are monitored by the ESFA.**

Of the 135 maintained schools, five have reported a deficit budget and their combined deficit at the end of 2020/21 was £432,000. Looking forward, based on their latest reports, 12 schools are projecting a deficit for 2021/22 and these have a combined total deficit of £825,000.

The remaining 130 schools had surplus balances for 2020/21 just short of £20m in total. Based on the current forecasts for 2021/22 this has reduced to 123 schools with surplus balances totalling £16.2m. It should be noted that some budgets are carried forward to cover known upcoming costs or to cover budget shortages in years where there are reduced pupil numbers prior to them rising again. School surpluses and deficits are monitored closely by the finance team.

### **2. Driver shortages and the impact on School bus services**

We are aware of driver shortages which are affecting the transport and logistics industry. This is due to several factors including the pandemic, more attractive employment opportunities elsewhere, many existing drivers reaching retirement age, and a delay in authorities processing PCV licences.

The rise in covid cases in Devon has caused a few short term issues in some areas, but these are generally being managed and contracts are being covered.

We have a legal obligation to get children to school and are fulfilling this at present. One exception in the last week of September was a school coach route to Ivybridge Community College. We worked with local operators in the area to make alternative arrangements to get students to school, and we believe this is now resolved.

Driver issues continue to be a challenge for our local bus provider, Stagecoach. We are in regular contact with the company who are, at the time of writing experiencing around 10% shortage in drivers across the region; this has recently been mitigated by some reductions in service levels. The high turnover and sickness rate is reducing, and they have many new starters in the system. They also have been recent pay offers made which will improve their ability to attract new staff.

The company fully expect the situation to ease in the coming weeks and months. Their current service performance of operating over 90% of services is nowhere near their usual performance of operating 99.5%, they are still serving the public and hope this percentage will continue to increase.

One separate issue in Exeter (public route 985 which serves St James School) has been caused due to capacity issues on vehicles, this is being addressed separately with Stagecoach and the school and we have reached a solution.

We are working closely with transport operators in Devon to make sure any issues are highlighted ahead of time, so we can work towards a solution without impacting services. Costs for school transport have increased – as yet we are unable to finalise figures, but they are currently being worked on. The change is largely due to an increase in the number of SEND children we are transporting.

Lack of supply has also pushed up some costs for taxi journeys – relating to school and patient transport routes.

### 3. Fostering of children in families and institutions

#### 1. Introduction

2. Children’s Social Care promotes children and young people in care (C&YPIC) living, wherever it is safe to do so, close to and in the communities, they were raised. C&YPIC tell us that relationships with their birth family and friends and living in their local community and attending the same education provision, is important to them. Indeed, their experience also tells us that, on leaving our care, these relationships are harder to build – and thrive – when they have not been nurtured during their childhood and adolescence.

3. This report describes how successful Devon is, in promoting the relationships C&YPIC have with their birth family and friends. The report also details our strategic priorities, to further enhance children and young people’s experiences in our care.

#### 4. What figures tell us about homes for children and young people in care

#### 5. **More children and young people living within their family and networks**

6. The number of C&YPIC in Devon has steadily fallen from a peak of 841 in December 2020, which now sits at 803 (October 2021). Accordingly, there is an increasing number of children and young people (C&YP) whose needs are met within their family and networks who do not come into our care and who maintain their friendships and attendance at their local nursery, school or college.

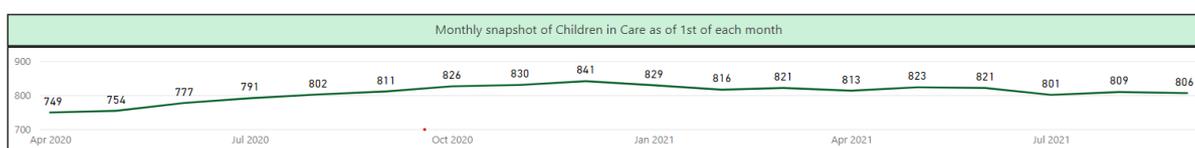
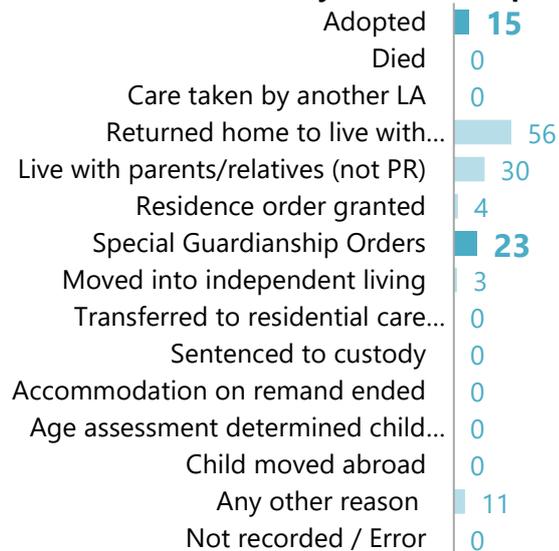


Figure One: Children in care population April 2020 to September 2021

7. **C&YPIC who ceased to be looked after who then live within their birth family or wider network**

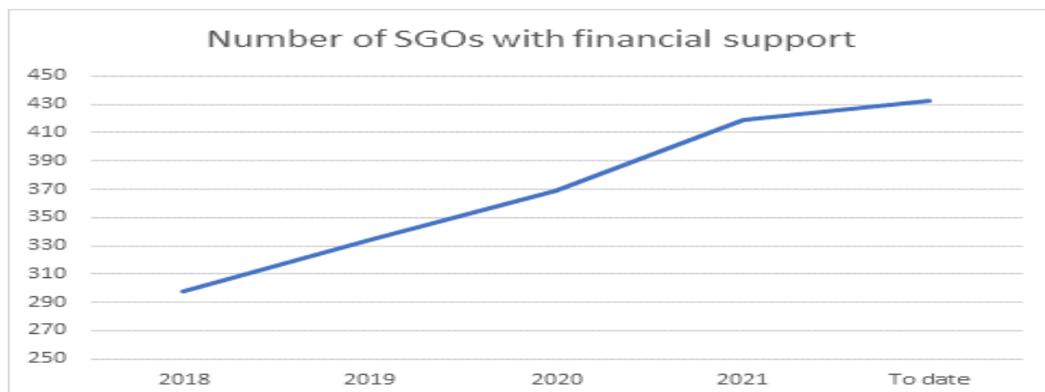
8. In the last six months, 142 C&YP have ceased to be looked after by Devon Children’s Services. Of those, 79.6% (113 C&YP), when leaving our care, returned to their parent/carer, family member or connected person. Of note, 16% who leave our care live with a special guardian, three percentage points above the England average.

**Number of CLA ceased by reason in the period**



*Figure two: Family and network destinations of C&YP who leave our care*

9. Figure three shows that, year on year, Devon County Council provides special guardianship order allowances to more special guardians, which tells us that more C&YP, who cannot live with their parent, live with a connected person known to them. For example, in March 2018, there were 298 special guardians receiving an allowance and today, this has increased by 32% to 433 (October 2021). This is a significant achievement for Devon, enabling more and more children and young people to live within their wider family.



*Figure three: Special Guardians receiving a special guardianship order allowance*

10. **Proximity of our C&YPIC to Devon and the home they lived in before coming into our care**

11. Children’s Social Care is committed to finding homes for C&YPIC close to their birth family, friends and schools. A new figure for us which we choose to care about, 71% of C&YPIC live within 30 miles of the address they lived at immediately before coming into our care. We choose to care about a proximity of 30 mile because, typically, a distance of not more than this does enable C&YPIC to continue to attend their local schools and maintain contact with their birth family without significant travelling time. This will be a key impact measure for us as we take our strategic work programme forward.

12. Of the C&YP who are cared for by Devon Children’s Social Care, 73% of them live within the Devon boundary County Council. Though we are pleased and proud of this achievement, Devon is a large rural authority and so C&YPIC can experience significant disruption and challenges in maintaining friendships, even when they are ‘in county’. Of our C&YPIC, figure four shows the number, by age group, who live in county, within a neighbouring authority and beyond (distant). This tells us that, of our 803 C&YPIC, 93% live in Devon or a neighbouring authority.

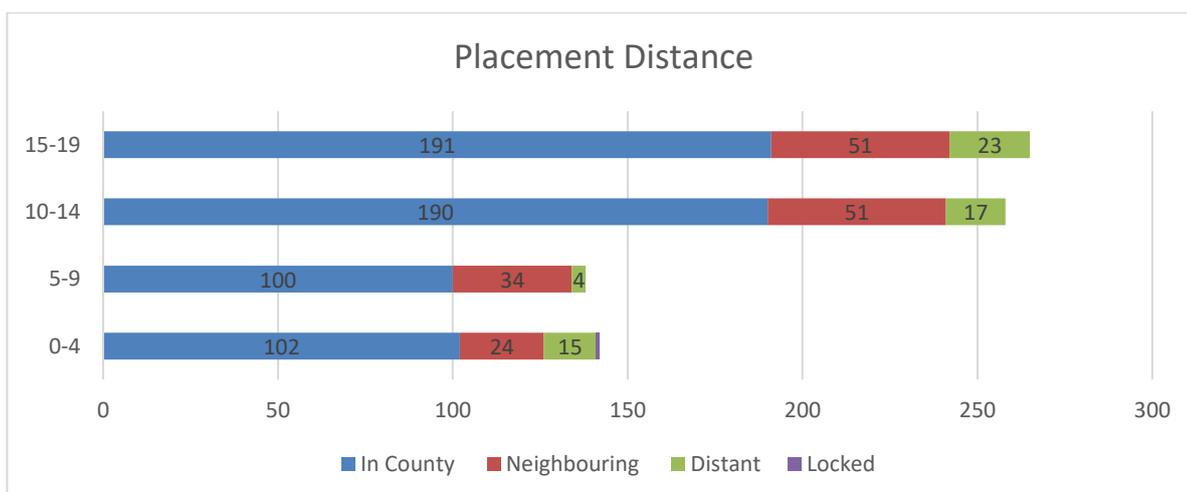


Figure five: Placement distance from the Devon boundary.

13. **How does Children’s Services promote family time?**

14. **What is the Contact Service?**

15. Children’s Services encourages, wherever it is safe to do so, foster carers or residential children’s homes, to support and supervise family time. Family time, commonly known as contact, enables C&YPIC to maintain and build relationships with important people in their lives, often parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents and siblings. Children’s Services also has a Contact Service who will support and supervise contact between children in care and their families. Their focus is to:

- build strong, meaningful, trusting and respectful relationships;
- repair relationships when difficulties or harm arises;
- enable children and young people to feel listened to; and,
- for parents to feel comfortable and respected.

#### 16. What do children and young people tell us?

17. Children's Services Participation Team currently works with, on average, 40 children and young people in care aged 11-15 and a similar number of children in care over 16 years, and care leavers. The Participation Team tells us that very few of them have raised that the distance they live from family and friends causes them issue. Two of our care leavers who have experienced multiple changes in homes when in our care have shared their stories with fostering managers to contribute to the 'strengthening stability' discussions and guidance. Detailed below are experiences shared by our C&YPIC and care leavers; they describe the importance of matching C&YPIC to their homes, recognising the challenges of living away from their local communities, but the safety, for some, that this can also help create.

#### 4. Pupil premium change

Pupil premium funding has historically been calculated using the January census information for the same year. This means that for 2020/21 the January 2020 census was used. However, for 2021/22 the DfE made the decision to change the date when the pupils eligible for Pupil Premium data was collected to the October census date. This means that for the 2021/22 year the October 2020 census date was used. As the number of eligible pupils rose by 921 between the Oct 2020 census and the Jan 2021 this meant schools received of £1,185,315 less funding than they would have under the previous system.

The Councillor is correct in saying that this does not affect families as all eligible pupils receive a free school meal from the time they qualify.

Representations around the impact of this change on school budgets have been made to the DfE but we have received no further information re the data collection date for 2022/23 to date.

Devon has a system to support maintained schools who are facing budget challenges and school who are struggling due to the pupil premium change can apply to the Financial intervention Panel for financial support. Academies have other access to support either through their trust or sometimes with the ESFA.

**Andrew Leadbetter**

Cabinet Member

Children's Services and Schools