

## DEVON EDUCATION FORUM

22 January 2025

### Present:-

#### Schools Members

#### Primary Headteachers

Mr N Alford	Shebbear Primary
Mr G Chown	Ventrus MAT (Academy)
Mr C Tribble	Honiton Primary
Mr P Walker	First Federation Trust (Academy)

#### Primary Governors

Dr N Frost	Hayward's, Crediton
Mrs N Glew	Newton Abbot, Decoy

#### Secondary Headteachers

Mr J Buchanan	Tavistock College Dartmoor MAT (Academy)
Ms J Fossey	West Exe School, Ted Wragg MAT (Academy)
Ms R Harper	South Molton Community College
Mr G Hill	Pilton Community College, Ventrus MAT (Academy)

#### Secondary Governors

Mrs J Larcombe	Blackdown Education Partnership
Mr A Hines	Education SW Trust (Academy)
Mr A Walmsley	Ted Wragg Multi Academy Trust (Academy)

#### Nursery School

Mrs S Baker	Westexe
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#### Special Headteacher

Ms S Pickering	Mill Water School
Ms N Burroughs	Learn to Live Federation, Substitute (Observing)

Special Governor

Mrs F Butler

Marland School (**Chair**)

Alternative Provision

Mr R Gasson

WAVE Multi Academy Trust

Non-Schools Members

Mrs B Alderson

Teachers Consultative Committee (TCC)

Ms H Brown

RC Diocesan Board of Education (Faith)

Ms G Rolstone

Substitute

Ms M White

Early Years, Private & Voluntary  
Independent PETROC, 16-19

Observers:

Councillor A Leadbetter Cabinet Member – Children’s Services and Skills

Councillor L Samuel, Cabinet Member – SEND Improvement Services

Mr I Thomas – TEAM Multi Academy Trust

**152** **Declarations of Interest**

Mrs J Larcombe declared an interest in item 9c) f) regarding the vote on phase association funding on the basis of undertaking paid work for the Devon Association of Governors, and did not vote on this item.

No other declarations of interest were received, over and above any general interest arising from being a teacher or governor of a school.

**153** **Minutes**

**DECISION:**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2024 be signed as a correct record.

**154** **Items Requiring Urgent Attention**

There was no item raised as a matter of urgency.

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

**DISCUSSION:**

(a) Free School Meals Auto-Enrolment

Members queried progress on developing Free School Meal auto-enrolment for eligible pupils and expressed disappointment at the lack of progress made given that it was a longstanding issue. Officers highlighted that this was discussed at the recent Schools Finance Group, and that the issue was referred to in item 7 (minute 157, below) with an implementation plan having already been developed. It was noted that the link to the implementation plan as published did not work, but that this would be made available to the Forum members as soon as possible after the meeting.

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Schools confirmed that, when such a programme was ready to be deployed, it would receive the full support of the County Council.

**156**      **Membership**

**DISCUSSION:**

The Forum noted there have been 3 resignations since the last meeting:- Fay Bowler, secondary academy (Headteacher); Sammy Crook, secondary maintained (Headteacher); and Peter Elliott, primary academy (governor).

Rachel Harper had been elected as the secondary maintained member, who was welcomed to the meeting by the Chair.

Elections were being held to fill outstanding governor vacancies.

**ACTION:**

Head of Legal and Democratic Services (Fiona Rutley)

**157**      **Inclusion and Learning Update**

**DISCUSSION:**

The Forum considered the Report of the Director of Children and Young People's Futures (DEF/25/01), which provided an update on the activities and progress of the Inclusion and Learning Team from November 2024 to January 2025. Key developments included the initiation of the team redesign and the proposed Inclusion and Learning (Education) Strategy for Devon prior to its consultation.

The Forum heard from the Deputy Director and Head of Inclusion and Learning who spoke to the principles laid out in the report, with a full policy to follow, which would be shared with the Forum when completed. Specific reference was also made to plans moving towards Free School Meal auto-enrolment, including that an implementation plan had been completed and linked to in the report (notwithstanding that the link, as above, was faulty).

Challenges around information between the various tiers of local authorities were also referred to as a barrier that needed addressing. Officers expressed that, moving forward, they were aiming to secure backing for the plan both politically and from other relevant partners.

Members' discussion and comments included:

- That the Forum was broadly in support of the principles;
- That, despite the above, there would need to be significant focus on how progress against a developed strategy would be measured through appropriate and effective intelligence gathering;
- That the above would feed into developing a system of accountability against the developed strategy;
- The importance of viewing and developing the strategy as a joint one, not one developed by the Council and imposed upon schools;
- What form an oversight body might take (such as a strategic board). The Deputy Director and Head of Inclusion and Learning expressed that this would not be for Council officers to dictate, but that the intent would be the development of a strategic board to oversee the strategy and feed into the system of accountability;
- The importance of Early Years;
- A desire from members of the Forum for good practice to be shared;
- Comments by Forum members that ensuring all officers (namely, senior and other) were united in their advice and support given to schools, in line with the strategy, where previous redesigns did not seem to be adequately disseminated down across the entire directorate; and
- The information-sharing barrier between tiers of local authorities. A Forum member expressed that this was discussed at the last Forum, but their understanding was that districts had not been contacted to share information and the extent to which this was a barrier. The Deputy Director and Head of Inclusion and Learning responded that, were this not in fact as big a barrier as previously believed, that this would mean better opportunities to move forward.

**DECISION:**

(a) that the direction of travel indicated within the draft strategy be noted;

(b) that the Inclusion and Learning service redesign commencement be noted;

(c) that the implementation plan for Free School Meals auto enrolment be supported; and

(d) that the above 3 items be added as standard agenda items for future DEF meetings.

**ACTION:**

Deputy Director and Head of Inclusion and Learning (Jack Newton)

**158**      **Special Education Needs & Disabilities (SEND) Transformation Programme Update**

**DISCUSSION:**

The Forum considered the Report of the Director of Children and Young People's Futures (DEF/25/02), updating on steady progress since the last Forum meeting in November 2024.

As well as the Local Area launching its updated SEND Strategy, November 2024, a range of transformation projects continued to support the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), High Needs Block challenges and Safety Valve Programme work and discussions with the DfE, as detailed in the Report.

The Forum heard from the SEND Strategic Director who outlined the contents of the report. She referred in particular to ongoing work regarding the Council's financial management and governance (including a presentation given to the Council's Audit Committee). Also referred to was the average EHCP waiting times of 41 weeks, which represented steady progress in one for the Programme. However, it was made clear to the Forum that further improvement was still required.

Members' comments and discussions included:

- The issue of improper EHCP referrals impacting on capacity. It was advised that consideration of this aspect was included in the redesign;
- The lack of training for teachers on managing SEN, which impacted on the above. An example given was where SENCOs, due to their workloads (including EHCP referral paperwork) were unable to focus on ensuring that school staff were properly equipped to meet the needs of pupils;
- That there was a clear synergy between the SEND Transformation Programme and the strategy outlined in the previous item; and
- The availability of EHCP data, including in Early Years.

**DECISION:**

That the SEND Transformation Programme update set out in Report (DEF/25/02) be noted.

**159**      **Finance**

a      **Schools Finance Group (SFG) Minutes**

**DISCUSSION:**

The Forum considered the minutes of the meeting held on 10 January 2025, including the respective minutes relating to the other Finance matters for decision at this meeting (items (b) -(d)).

Also available at  
[Schools Finance Group \(SFG\) – Education and Families \(devon.gov.uk\)](https://www.devon.gov.uk/schools-finance-group-sfg-education-and-families)

Comment was made on the discussion by SFG on the Access Budgeting Software issue (page 43) and an initial statement by DCC which a Forum representative recalled placed blame on schools and was to the detriment of professional relationships and trust. The Deputy Director and Head of Inclusion and Learning took responsibility on behalf of the officers of the Council for the initial statement.

**DECISION:**

that the minutes of the Schools Finance Group (SFG), be received.

b      **Finance Update**

The Forum considered the report of the Director of Children and Young People's Futures and Director of Finance and Public Value (DEF/25/03).

The report (DEF/25/03) covered:-

The Executive Summary

Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Schools Funding

DSG central budgets

High Needs

0.25% Block Transfer to the High Needs Block (for Early Help and Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)

Workstream savings

Mitigations In-year

DSG Deficit Management Plan

Data Dashboards

Capital Investment

Risks.

Members' discussion and comments included:

- Concern around the growing deficit;
- Forecast placement numbers being lower than actual and the reasons why, including the new intake, where there were more places needed than predicted;
- Whether there was an update on if the SEND deficit override would be extended. It was explained that the override was currently in place until 31 March 2026, with no further update. An announcement from Government was hoped for around November 2025 / the Autumn Budget statement;
- The impact of demands by the Department for Education on processing EHCPs at a greater number, at greater speed, on numbers of EHCPs being beyond that included in the Safety Valve submission;
- Spend on specialist provision by the Authority being approximately fifty percent higher than what is suggested to be a good amount by benchmarking previously done by officers;
- Risks around specialist provision including the timescale of delivery of planned sites;
- A Forum member comment that, although (as below) they were noting the current positions, that there was broad concern around the financial position.

**DECISION:**

(a) that the Month 8 DSG monitoring position as set out in the Report be noted; and

(b) that the current Safety Valve / DSG management plan position as set out in the report be noted.

**ACTION:**

Director of Finance and Public Value (Adrian Fox)

c **2025-26 Schools Funding Arrangements Consultation Responses**

**DISCUSSION:**

The Forum considered the Report of the Director of Finance & Public Value and Interim Director of Children and Young Peoples Futures(DEF/25/04), following Devon's consultation with schools (ending December 2024). The Report recommendations strived to deliver the fairest distribution for the

majority of schools whilst keeping within the funding frame and National Funding Formula guidance.

There was discussion regarding recommendation (a) regarding school funding proposals necessitated by a funding gap. It was clarified that this means that the Authority was not receiving sufficient funding at the first instance and therefore the proposals were necessary to maximise delivery. It was commented by Forum members and officers that there was scope to develop the financial understanding of schools, to ensure that votes taken on financial matters were done from a basis of being better informed. This was also mentioned during discussion on recommendation (b).

There was also clarity sought regarding the 0.5% transfer proposal (decision (b)), and it was explained that, if the proposal was not agreed by the Forum, the Council would be applying to the Department for Education for permission to transfer the funding regardless of the Forum's vote.

Regarding SFG proposal in Section 8.3 (decision (f)), there were comments that it was unclear from the SFG minutes why people voted how they did.

#### **DECISION:**

(a) that the proposals for schools funding (in line with the results of the consultation) be approved:-

(i) to set the Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) to at 0%

(ii) to bridge any funding gap in the following order:

a. Reduced AWPU by up the allowed maximum of 2.5%

b. Reduced all other factors by up the allowed maximum of 2.5%;

**(Vote: Schools, Academies and PVI)**

(b) that the proposals to transfer 0.5% between blocks for 2025-26, to secure the Safety Valve agreement and implement plans to manage the high needs funding sustainably and meet the needs of children and young people earlier and in the right place, is not approved, on the basis of:

- 82% of schools not agreeing to the proposal (SFG minutes, p40), with the Forum wishing to act as a body representative of schools and leadership.
- Additionally, as in the SFG minutes, "school leaders had not felt that previous investment of the block transfer had impacted on their school directly."
- There was also concern raised that the proposals would mean that some schools were being punished for the actions of others, with 0.5% representing a significant degree of funding to be taken away from schools, many of which have good practices regarding inclusion and SEND. It was felt that taking away that funding would be to the detriment of schools' abilities to make a difference on the ground;

**(Vote: Schools, Academies and PVI)**



(c) That Schools Forum note that the partnership, including the Authority and Devon Schools, now has to decide how we address the levels of exclusion in Devon going forward. The Forum voted that the Inclusion proposal to levy £21,000 per exclusion is not approved, on the basis of 97% of schools not agreeing to this (SFG minutes), but with support indicated for the proposal in the SFG minutes for a “collaborative process involving the Authority, Devon Schools, and key stakeholders to develop a clear and actionable framework for what inclusion should look like in Devon, addressing the ongoing issue of exclusion”;

**(Vote: Schools, Academies and PVI)**

(d) that the de-delegation of the services listed in Section 6.1 of the report in line with the results of the consultation be approved (there was unanimous agreement from all representatives to vote on the services together);

**(Vote 1: Maintained primary representatives)**

**(Vote 2: Maintained secondary representatives)**

(e) that the funding of the following central services (in line with the consultation) be approved;-

(i) Emotional, Psychological & Social Wellbeing Services

(ii) School Admissions;

**(Vote: Schools, Academies and PVI)**

(f) that the SFG proposal in Section 8.3, namely that “no change is made in 2025-26, and further consideration of this issue be invited during the 2026 consultation,” be approved;

**(Vote: Schools, Academies and PVI)**

(g) that the proposal to submit a disapplication request for exceptional circumstances relating to school premises for 2025-26 be approved.

**(Vote: Schools, Academies and PVI)**

**ACTION:** Director of Finance & Public Value (Adrian Fox).

**d Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) 2025-26: Budget Planning**

**DISCUSSION:**

Report of the Director of Finance & Public Value and Interim Director of Children and Young Peoples Futures (DEF/25/05) regarding the:-

Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Settlement 2025/26

Schools Block

Central School Services Block

High Needs Block

Early Years Block

Other Schools Grants

DSG Deficit & Management Plan.

Members' comments and discussion included:

- Clarity needed at 5.1 of the report regarding the 30 hours early years working entitlement referring to that amount *in term time*, not all year round;
- That 4.6 referred only to investment in maintained special schools, and should refer also to academies;
- Challenges with the Department for Education blocking progress on efforts to ensure appropriate local specialist provision. The SEND Strategic Director ensured the Forum that they were regularly pushing back on the Department for Education;
- Continued concern that Devon does not receive enough funding for schools, including receiving significantly less per pupil than many other authorities.

**DECISION:**

(a) that the Early Years funding rates proposed and shared with providers be approved; and

**(Vote: Schools, Academies and PVI).**

(b) that the changes to Dedicated Schools Grant funding for 2025/26 be noted.

**ACTION:** Director of Finance & Public Value (Adrian Fox)

**160**     **Trade Union Facilities/Support - Agenda Item from TCC**

**DISCUSSION:**

The Teachers Consultative Committee representative provided context on the matter. They explained that they were seeking an amendment to the Trade Union Recognition Agreement to allow the usage of Facilities funds to support members who hold a national position within their union, rather than expecting individual schools (where the representatives are employed) to do so. It was explained that there was unanimous union support for this and that many other local authorities have such an arrangement, whereas Devon does not.

The Deputy Director and Head of Inclusion and Learning agreed to work with colleagues to develop a way forward and bring that to a future meeting of the Forum.

**ACTION:**

Interim Deputy Director and Head of Inclusion and Learning (Jack Newton)

**161**      **Standing (and other) Groups**

The Forum received the following from its standing and other groups (excepting Schools' Finance Group (SFG) minutes, (considered under Finance Update minute above):-

(a) Standing Groups

(i) School Organisation, Capital and Admissions (SOCA)

The Minutes\* of the meeting held on 3 December 2024 were received.

**DECISION:**

That the Forum endorse the following:-

Item 2: Children Missing Education Policy (as recommended by SOCA); and

Item 3: Elective Home Education Policy (as recommended by SOCA);

\*Also available at

[School Organisation, Capital and Admissions Group \(SOCA\) – Education and Families \(devon.gov.uk\)](https://www.devon.gov.uk/education-and-families/soca)

**162**      **Correspondence**

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**163**      **Dates of Future Meetings**

Meetings at 10am. Please check venue/arrangements

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

Wednesday 19 March 2025

Wednesday 18 June 2025

Wednesday 19 Nov 2025

Wednesday 21 Jan 2026

Wednesday 18 March 2026.

**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**

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DEVON EDUCATION FORUM  
22/01/25

The Meeting started at 10.01 am and finished at 12.36 pm.