

County Hall
Taunton
Somerset
TA1 4DY

All Headteachers
All Chair of Governors
MAT Chief Execs

Please ask for
Julian Wooster

E-Mail
jwooster@somerset.gov.uk

Direct Dial
01823 359024

Date
4 September 2018

Dear Colleague

As you may be aware, there has been considerable media speculation about Somerset County Council's financial circumstances.

The pressures on local government finances are well-documented, as funding from central government continues to fall while demand and costs increase. The challenge is particularly difficult for councils which have the responsibility for services that support vulnerable children and adults, and even more serious for those providing their services in rural areas.

Somerset County Council has made around £130m of savings and efficiencies in the last eight years. Local authorities must return a balanced budget and, as the trend of reduced funding and increasing costs continues, the County Council is considering a significant number of additional savings. No decisions have been made at this stage, but proposals will be considered for decision by the Council's Cabinet Committee when it meets on 12 September. In some cases, these will be decisions to take forward proposals, in other cases it will be to start consultations that could see proposals taken forward.

Proposals in relation to children's services include:

- Significant service reductions in council funded Early Help services.
- A reduction in support to Early Years Providers.
- Increase call on the High Needs element of the Dedicated School Grant – details will be presented to the Schools Forum in October.
- Further efficiencies in Home to School Transport.

Further details and a full list of the proposals being considered is published on the County Council website:

(<http://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=134&MId=663&Ver=4>)

Our priorities for education remain those that are set out in the Education Vision and Strategy which were set collectively with schools and other partners back in 2015 and run through to the end of 2019. Over this academic year we will work with education partners to review and agree revised priorities for the next Children's and Young People's plan.

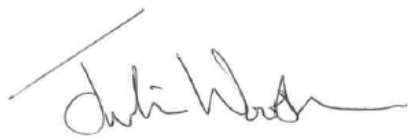
In relation to school improvement the Council's statutory responsibility is to monitor performance of all schools and education providers; to identify support for maintained schools and education providers at risk of being judged to have serious weaknesses or being placed in special measures by OFSTED; as well as other associated specific duties in relation to Maintained Schools which the Council will continue to meet.

The Council is committed to addressing the challenge of the evolving education landscape with the appointment of Councillor Faye Purbrick as Cabinet Member for Education, alongside Councillor Frances Nicholson and Annette Perrington, Assistant Director for Inclusion. In addition, Support Services for Education is now directly accountable to the Director of Children Services and the Cabinet Member for Education. The Assistant Director for Education role will for this financial year not be filled, and following the departure of Neal, Dave Farrow, Head of Outcomes and Sufficiency will support the strategy and system development work outlined above. Dave will be also support David Theobald and the Primary Improvement Team.

In recent meetings we have agreed that, given the national and local context, all stakeholders need to come together to shape the future of school improvement in Somerset. Possible proposals include reviewing the role and membership of the Somerset Education Partnership Board to better reflect the Regional Schools Commissioner Office work around local Schools Standards Boards. Establishing and embedding Phase Strategy Groups as a more effective 'system led', approach to addressing school standards. Together we are also exploring the most effective scale for developing an area-based approach to improving education outcomes, alongside strengthening the Team Around the School model to support vulnerable pupils and students.

Finally, I can assure you that Somerset County Council remains fully committed to working with our partners in schools and other sectors to ensure that all Somerset children, have access to high quality education.

Yours sincerely



Julian Wooster
Director of Children's Services



Frances Nicholson
Cabinet Member
Children and Families



Faye Purbrick
Cabinet Member
Education and Council Transformation