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Dear Colleague,

This year, again, schools and council leaders are confronted with very difficult choices about how best to allocate the education funding from government.

Following consultation with all schools, the outcome of which was finely balanced, the council asked the Devon Education Forum (DEF) to agree to transfer 0.5% of the Dedicated Schools Grant, from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block. DEF did not agree, on the basis that funding into schools is already very stretched and any further reduction is unacceptable. They also wanted to make visible the plight of school leaders, managing in a context where the quantum allocation is insufficient.

The DEF decision left the council with a dilemma. We have to ensure sufficient funding into the High Needs Block to meet the needs of the pupils identified by schools as having needs that require additional resource. At the same time, we are very mindful of the pressures on schools and the risk that schools' capacity to meet need will be further eroded by any further reductions. A rock and a hard place.

The council has and will continue to campaign hard, at the highest levels and alongside other stakeholders, for increased education funding for schools including for pupils with SEND. The council appreciates the risks of further depletion of core funding to schools. Like schools, the council intends to make visible to national government the reality of the funding gap.

The DSG has to cover the costs of education spending. This was the decision of national government when it removed local discretion and created the DSG.

The council's responsibility is to demonstrate that it is taking all reasonable steps to contain the spend on High Needs and transferring resource between blocks constitutes reasonable steps. The council will apply to the Secretary of State for permission to transfer 0.5% of the DSG (£1.9m) from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block.

We know that many lower funded Local Authorities are doing the same, some seeking 1% and more; those with higher funding levels are not yet in a similarly parlous condition.

Two years ago, against very considerable opposition, the council made a transfer of resource from the Schools Block to the HNB. School leaders and members of the council sought assurances that such a transfer would never happen again. The council could not give such a guarantee and made this clear at the time. The council committed to doing everything in its power to avoid this. In spite of the council's best endeavours, the Free School Programme, over which the council has no

control and little influence, has delayed essential, additional special school places coming on stream as anticipated. The children who need the places therefore have to be placed in the independent sector at much higher cost. The planned reduction in HNB overspend cannot, in these circumstances, be achieved.

It is with a very keen appreciation of the potential impact of the changes in schools, with a reaffirmed commitment to continue the fight for resourcing that children in Devon have a right to expect, and with a somewhat heavy heart that I write to you, so that you can understand why I have made the decision I have made

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James McInnes', written in a cursive style.

James McInnes