
Schools Forum – Formal Minutes

11th June 2026

1. Welcome, Apologies and Governance

The meeting commenced with a formal welcome and confirmation of apologies, which were recorded in advance.

Attendees

Alex Newton
Maria Beer
Sarah Tomkinson
Matt Burrell
Tim Stephens
Sam Poston
Hannah Baker
Rob Parr
Nik Salter
Steve Hulme
Gina Powell
Stuart Heron
Nikki O'Dwyer
Tamisin Summers

Apologies

Katy Burns
Sally Banfield
Laurence Frewin
Stuart Bellworthy
Clare Talbot
Steve Margetts

In line with the statutory remit of the Schools Forum, members fulfilled their responsibility to review financial matters relating to the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), provide scrutiny and advice to the Local Authority, and ensure transparency in decision-making affecting education funding across all sectors.

2. The minutes of the previous meeting were reviewed and approved as an accurate record, with no amendments required.

3. Review of Previous Actions

Members reviewed progress against previous actions. It was confirmed that the Schools Forum membership list has been updated and published in accordance with governance requirements.

The Local Authority confirmed that work had been undertaken to improve the presentation of place planning data, with a revised approach that reflects pupil numbers at class level to support clearer interpretation and more informed decision-making. Hannah Baker confirmed that, following Schools Forum feedback, a revised methodology for presenting place planning data has been developed. This approach will provide more granular information and will be brought back to the Schools Forum in September to support planning discussions, including the consideration of published admission numbers (PANs). [\[Schools Fo...Recording | Video\]](#)

In relation to grammar school admissions, Hannah Baker reported an increase in out-of-area pupils accessing places. She confirmed that further analytical work is underway to understand the drivers of this trend, including geographical patterns and parental preferences. A detailed update, including trend analysis, will be presented to Schools Forum in September to inform future planning and funding considerations. [\[Schools Fo...Recording | Video\]](#)

4. DSG Outturn and High Needs Pressures – Hannah Baker

Hannah Baker provided a detailed update on high needs pressures within the DSG, including Education Otherwise Than at School (EOTAS) and Alternative Provision (AP).

She confirmed that a comprehensive review of the EOTAS offer had been completed and a revised, fully compliant model has been implemented. As a result, the number of pupils accessing EOTAS provision has reduced from 74 to 55. [\[Schools Fo...Recording | Video\]](#)

She explained that the revised model provides a more structured and robust offer, including improved safeguarding oversight, regular contract management, and a stronger focus on academic outcomes. The increase in associated costs reflects the improved quality and compliance of provision rather than an increase in pupil numbers. [\[Schools Fo...Recording | Video\]](#)

In relation to Alternative Provision, Hannah Baker reported a sustained and increasing pressure across the system, with notable growth in demand from primary-aged pupils. She confirmed that this demand is linked to rising complexity of need, particularly in relation to social, emotional and mental health (SEMH).

Hannah Baker advised that, in line with Department for Education (DFE) expectations within SEND reform guidance, demand pressures are likely to continue over the short to medium term. The Local Authority is therefore planning on the basis

of a three-year trajectory, consistent with national assumptions that improvements in demand will not be realised until later phases of reform.

She confirmed that the strategic intention remains to reduce reliance on EOTAS through improved sufficiency of specialist placements and reintegration into mainstream settings, particularly for younger cohorts.

5. In-year budget monitoring

Rob Parr presented the budget for the 26-27 financial year. Forum noted that a £4.4 million deficit is set for the DSG and a discussion was held regarding the causes of this and possible mitigations.

6. SEND Reform Plan – Hannah Baker

Hannah Baker provided an update on the development of the SEND Reform Plan and associated DFE requirements.

She confirmed that the Local Authority is required to submit its SEND Reform Plan to the DFE by 19 June, with an outcome expected by 1 September. Approval of the plan is a necessary condition for accessing associated grant funding and financial support arrangements.

She highlighted that the SEND Reform Plan must align with national DFE guidance, including financial trajectories, data reporting requirements and workforce development expectations. Quarterly reporting to the DFE on both financial performance and outcomes will be mandatory under the new arrangements.

SEND Reform Plan attached.

Experts at Hand

Hannah Baker confirmed that funding has been allocated through the “Experts at Hand” programme, with approximately £971,000 available for the initial period from September to March.

She explained that the use of this funding is tightly prescribed by the DFE and must be used to deploy qualified professionals, including educational psychologists, speech and language therapists and occupational therapists, into educational settings.

In line with DFE expectations, the purpose of this programme is to build workforce capacity, improve early intervention and reduce reliance on statutory plans over time.

Hannah stressed the requirement for this to be an expansion of the offer: existing provision cannot be included. The local authority intend to co-produce a plan for what is needed alongside mainstream providers.

Specialist and Support Bases

Hannah Baker noted that national guidance relating to specialist and support base provision remains unclear, with only limited information available. She confirmed that local planning is therefore ongoing but subject to further DFE clarification before implementation decisions can be finalised. Planning is based on an assumption that 'support base' relates to a school's in-house provision and 'specialist base' can be interpreted as the new term for an ERP.

Governance and Schools Forum Role

Hannah Baker confirmed that new DFE guidance requires Schools Forum representation within the SEND governance structure (SEND Local Area Partnership Board).

She advised that Schools Forum members are required to determine the most appropriate representation model before the summer, ensuring that the Forum continues to fulfil its advisory role in relation to DSG governance and SEND reform oversight.

Action: Hannah Baker to share the paper containing the options for the representation model with the Chair, who will share with SF members. SF to hold an extraordinary meeting in July to agree the most appropriate model. The Chair will relay the decision to Hannah Baker in due course.

7. .

7. MACPT Funding Discussion – Stuart Heron

Stuart Heron presented a discussion on the introduction of the Multi-Agency Child Protection Team (MACPT), a national DfE-led initiative under the Family First programme.

He explained that the new model requires a multi-agency approach to child protection, involving police, health, social care, and education. For the first time, education is expected to contribute financially to a strategic post responsible for coordinating child protection processes, including case conferences and strategy meetings.

The estimated cost of the education contribution was outlined as approximately £90,000 per annum, based on equivalent roles in partner agencies.

Members discussed the challenges associated with funding this role, including:

- The absence of an existing funding mechanism spanning all education providers

- The administrative burden of collecting contributions across a large number of settings
- The need to ensure equity across all education sectors, including early years and post-16

Hannah Baker clarified that, in line with DfE expectations, this cost cannot be funded through the DSG or High Needs Block, as it is considered a mainstream, non-SEND responsibility.

The Schools Forum recognised that its role is advisory and not decision-making in this context but agreed to provide strategic input to inform discussions at the Transformation Board, where final decisions will be made.

There was agreement that any proposed funding mechanism must minimise administrative burden and ensure proportionality across providers.

8. Early Years sufficiency trends

No update on this area yet available.

9. Element 3 Funding Review – Hannah Baker

Hannah Baker presented an update on the review of Element 3 (top-up) funding arrangements.

She confirmed that the needs-led matrix approach, introduced in 2023, has now been fully implemented and evaluated through audit and feedback from Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs).

The review has identified areas for improvement to ensure greater equity across need types. In particular:

- Speech and language needs are currently underweighted and will be adjusted to reflect local demand.
- Restrictions on funding for certain needs (including cognition and SEMH) will be reviewed to ensure fairness.
- Greater flexibility will be introduced to reflect age-related differences and levels of required support.

Forum asked several questions about this paper. SF queried whether they were being asked to make a decision or if this was for information only. Hannah Baker confirmed it was for information only; SFG are not being asked to agree to this policy change.

Concerns were raised about the consultation process: the absence of a working funding matrix means members and education leaders cannot assess the impact of the proposed changes. Hannah Baker explained that this was not yet written as the local authority wanted to propose the changes first. It will be shared once complete.

Hannah Baker confirmed that these adjustments will apply to new Education, Health and Care Plans from September and to future phase transfers, while existing plans will remain unchanged.

She further confirmed that this approach aligns with current DFE expectations, while recognising that national reforms may introduce a standardised funding model in future years.

In response to a question about the potential risks of making the proposed age-related changes, Hannah confirmed that the change was to allow the flexibility for this to happen as *necessary*, rather than as standard. She explained that the plan writer would judge needs against the banding and a senior manager would moderate.

Forum raised concerns about the impact of these changes being made after providers have set budgets. It was agreed that any future changes would be considered earlier in the year to prevent reoccurrence.

10. Agreement of Priorities

As per annual work plan.

Actions Completed

- The Schools Forum membership list has been updated and published in accordance with governance requirements.
- The Local Authority has implemented improvements to place planning data reporting.
- The EOTAS review has been completed and a revised, compliant model implemented.
- The SEND Reform Plan has been developed and presented to Cabinet.

Actions to Do

- The Local Authority (Hannah Baker) will present **detailed place planning data** at the September meeting.

- The Local Authority (Hannah Baker) will provide a **full analysis of grammar school admission trends**.
- The Local Authority will provide **trend data on EOTAS and Alternative Provision** for Schools Forum oversight.
- Schools Forum members will determine and agree **representation on the SEND governance board** prior to the summer.
- The Local Authority will continue to provide **regular SEND reform updates**, including financial monitoring in line with DFE requirements.
- Rob Parr will explore and report back on a **proportionate funding mechanism for MACPT**, recognising the need to minimise administrative burden.
- The Element 3 funding review will be scheduled as a **standing annual item** on the Schools Forum work plan.