

Schools Forum

Minutes

Tuesday 11 November 2025

PRESENT

Voting members	Non-voting members
School Members Anne-Marie Strachan (Thames Federation) Dave Colins (Brackenbury School) Michele Barrett (Randolph Beresford / Vanessa Nursery) Kathleen Williams (Holy Cross Primary)	Observers Aiden Smith (Governor, Jack Tizard School) Alex Parker Jacqueline Munro
Academies and Free Schools Gary Kynaston, Hammersmith Academy (Chair) Daniel Cundy & Sophia Martin (Senior Principal, AP Academies)	
Non-Schools Members Jane Gleasure (Little People, Early Years PVI)	

Officers

Jacqui McShannon (Director of Children's Services)
Tony Burton (Head of Finance for Children's Services and Education)
Peter Haylock (Director of Education and SEND)
Satwinder Saraon (Head of SEND Services and Early Years)
Irolla Valerie (Principe Accountant)
Amrita White (Committee Coordinator)

Union Representative

Eleanor Charman-Blower (NEU Secretary)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence received.

2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as an accurate record.

3. SCHOOLS BLOCK TO HIGH NEEDS BLOCK BUDGET TRANSFER 2026/27 DISAPPLICATION

Peter Haylock (Director of Education and SEND) presented the report on the disapplication request for 2026/27 to support mitigating the High Needs Block (HNB) budget pressures over the medium term. He highlighted the following key points:

- The number of plans had increased to 1840.
- Last SEN2 was a 5% increase compared to a 11% increase nationally.
- 79% of new plans were for children aged up to 10.
- The grant allocation did not fully account for the inflationary pressures across the SEND sector, mainstream, special and independent.
- Lower than originally forecasted forecast HNB funding than originally modelled per DfE advice up to approx. £1.5mil
- Overall structural deficit of £2.6 mil at 2024/25 closing balance.
- Outlined the actions to mitigate this and support the delivery as the area was facing budget challenges.

Michele Barrett (Randolph Beresford / Vanessa Nursery) asked whether a cost analysis of the early year's intervention programme was available. Peter Haylock explained that, while a formal cost analysis had not yet been produced, current indicators suggested that the programme was having a positive impact. For example, our applications for renewing EHC Plans were 5–6% lower than the national average, which indicated the effectiveness of early intervention work.

He noted that the Council remained committed to delivering these interventions but faced challenges in quantifying their full impact due to other mitigating factors. What was clear, however, was that additional investment in early intervention would be critical to achieving even greater outcomes.

Satwinder Saraon (Head of SEND Services and Early Years) added that programme data showed clear impact when children received specialist intervention within an early year setting for two terms, most no longer required this support afterward. This demonstrated the effectiveness of targeted early intervention.

Alex Parker (Observer) asked about the HNB budget and whether the budget could be reviewed as a whole, assess sector performance against it, and understand how income and expenditure were being balanced.

The Chair noted that this remained a national challenge due to the nature of the SEND provision and the increasing number of EHCPs that must be funded by Local Authorities.

Jacqui McShannon (Director of Children's Services) highlighted that, since joining the Council, had been mitigated around £5m through the Safety Valve programme. She stressed that the Council received significantly less funding compared to other Local Authorities, which continued to be a major challenge.

However, substantial work had been undertaken to prevent the gap from widening while still meeting the needs of children.

Tony Burton (Head of Finance for Children's Services and Education) added that the Council was awaiting the Government's Schools White Paper on SEND reform, originally expected in Autumn 2025 but now delayed until Spring 2026. This would provide clarity on the national direction of travel. He also noted that the Council currently had no indication of funding levels for the Dedicated Schools Grant for High Needs, mainstream and early years settings from April 2026. This information was expected in late December 2025.

Members discussed the disapplication proposal and unanimously agreed the recommendation in the report

RESOLVED:

The Schools Forum approved the Schools Block to High Needs Block Transfer Disapplication Request.

4. HIGH NEEDS BLOCK 2025/26 Q2 UPDATE

Peter Haylock (Director of Education and SEND) noted that the paper was presented for information purposes only.

The report provided an update on the High Needs Block programmes of work and outlined performance against the Department for Education's Safety Valve Agreement at Quarter 2.

RESOLVED:

The schools Forum noted the report

5. DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT Q1 2025/26 MONITORING REPORT

Tony Burton (Head of Finance for Children's Services and Education) presented the report the 2025/26 Quarter 1 monitoring position on the Dedicated Schools Grant following the retrospective Early Years Dedicated Schools Grant Funding adjustment for 2024/25.

The High Needs Block was forecast to overspend by £3.9m versus the funding allocation in 2025/26 at Quarter 1 after the budgeted application of £0.243m transfer from Central Services Schools Block and £1.23m transfer from the Schools Block. This represented an adverse position versus funding on High Needs.

On the Early Years Block budget 2025/26, a technical adjustment to the budget was explained. The Summer 2025 S251 budget return identified that the total supplements as a percentage of funding paid to providers over the 12% limit on 3- and 4-year-old entitlements per grant conditions. The supplement element of the budget had been reduced and the Special

Educational Needs Inclusion Fund (SENIF) increased to ensure the budget was compliant with grant conditions. Greater inclusion support funding was available to all Early Years providers as a result and the SENIF would provide additional funding to meet SEN needs below the statutory threshold.

The Chair asked about the Government's general priorities. Jacqui McShannon (Director of Children's Services) acknowledged this was a challenging question to answer. She explained that across the sector there was increased regulation, rising demand, and higher expectations to deliver better outcomes for residents, all against the backdrop of significant funding gaps. From a local perspective, the Council's two main priority areas remained Children's SEND (where there was a substantial structural overspend) and Adult Social Care.

RESOLVED:

The Schools Forum noted the report

6. 2026/27 NATIONAL FUNDING FORMULA UPDATE - VERBAL UPDATE

Tony Burton (Head of Finance for Children's Services and Education) provided a verbal update on 2026/27 National Funding formula and highlighted the following key points:

- Due to the timing of the Government's spending review and Autumn 2025 budget, the provisional funding and operational guides for 2026/27 financial year have not been issued to date.
- The provisional funding, modelling tools and Dedicated Schools Grant Operational Guidance for Schools and High Needs was usually received before the summer break in July.
- Final information was expected from The Department of Education by 19th December 2025 at the latest. The delay to the release of 2026/27 budget information presented a challenging timetable for 2026/27 Schools Budget process.
- The Early Years budget 2026/27 and Early Years operation guidance were expected in early December which was broadly in line with the expected timescale of late November.
- An update on the 2026/27 budget would be brought to Schools Forum scheduled for 16th December. This would include an update on known funding proposed for 2026/27 at that time, in addition to the broad principles proposed for setting the 2026/27 budget in line with the expected parameters of the National Funding Formula, if the full detail is not known at that time.
- Final 2026/27 financial year school and early years budget papers would be circulated in early January 2026. With workshops for Schools Forum members, mainstream school leaders, Early Years providers and finance professionals in week commencing the 12th January 2026. This would be ahead of the Schools Forum budget decisions at the meeting on 20th January.

RESOLVED:

That the Schools Forum noted the update.

Meeting started: 2:00pm
Meeting ended: 2:52pm

Chair

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