

Cheshire West & Chester Council

## **Cheshire West and Chester Schools Forum**

Monday 10 February 2025  
4.30pm – 6.30 pm

Virtual Meeting

Schools Forum Clerk  
Children and Families  
Cheshire West and Chester Council  
Telephone 07584 206913



## **Notes for members of the public**

### **Cheshire West and Chester Schools Forum**

The Council welcomes and encourages you to be at its meetings and Committees.

You are requested to remain quiet whilst the meeting is taking place.

The agenda is sometimes divided into two parts. You are allowed to stay for the first part. When the Forum is ready to deal with the second part you will need to leave the meeting because the business will be of a confidential nature, for example, dealing with individual people, contracts and financial affairs of other parties.

Members of the public wishing to attend Schools Forum meetings should contact the Schools Forum Clerk:

Email: [school.relationshipteam@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk](mailto:school.relationshipteam@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk)

Telephone: 07584 206913

## Agenda for Cheshire West and Chester Schools Forum 10 February 2025

1.	4.30	Introductions and apologies		
2.	4.35	Minutes and matters arising of last meeting 2.1 To agree the minutes held 3 December 2024 2.2 Matters arising		Page 4-12
3.	4.45	Education – SEND Capital Programme 2024-2025 and beyond	Janine Smart	To follow
4.	5.00	Early Years Funding for 2025-2026	Verity Dixon	Page 13-18
5.	5.20	Arrangements for funding from the High Needs Block 2025-2026	Lynsey Taylor	Page 19-22
6.	5.40	Schools Financial Value Standard 2025-2026	Lynsey Taylor	Page 23-26
7.	6.00	SEND High Needs programme update	Debbie Edwards	Presentation
8.	6.20	Any Other Business		
9.	6.30	Next meeting: Monday 1 July 2025		Page 27
	Finish	Meeting dates schedule		

**Cheshire West and Chester  
Schools Forum  
10 February 2025**

**Agenda Item 2**

**Minutes of Cheshire West and Chester Schools' Forum on 14 January 2025**

<b>Members</b>	<b>Representing</b>	<b>Attendance</b>
<b>Schools and Academies</b>		
Jan Diamond	Primary headteachers	Attended
Nicky Dowling	Primary headteachers	Attended
Kate Docherty	Primary headteachers	Attended
Vacancy	Primary headteachers	Vacancy
Michelle Ashfield	Primary headteachers	Attended
Claire Hughes	Primary governors	Attended
Lisa Rigby	Primary governors	Absent
Hannah Mather	Primary governors	Attended
James Bancroft	Primary governors	Attended
David Curry	Secondary headteachers	Attended
David Rowlands (Vice Chair)	Secondary governors	Attended
Vacancy	Secondary governors	Vacancy
Neil Oxley	Special headteachers	Attended
Philip Hopwood	Special governors	Apologies
Andy Stewart	PRU	Attended
Deborah Beaumont	Academies - mainstream	Apologies
Simon Faircloth	Academies - mainstream	Apologies
Duncan Haworth (Chair)	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Cathryn McKeagney	Academies - mainstream	Absent
Kevin Simpson	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Jonathan Deakin	Academies - mainstream	Absent
Louise Smith	Academies - mainstream	Attended
Vacancy	Academies - mainstream	Vacancy
Michelle Duval	Academies - special	Attended
<b>Non Schools</b>		
Paula Adolph	PVI early years providers	Attended
Vacancy	PVI early years providers	Vacancy
Kathryn Magiera	Diocese	Absent
Caroline Vile	Diocese	Absent
Greg Foster	Unions	Absent
Geoff Wright	Unions	Absent
Ian Devereux Roberts	CWAPH	Attended
Vacancy	16-19 providers	Vacancy
<b>Official Observers</b>		
Councillor Adam Langan	Cabinet Member Children & Young People	Attended
	Education Skills & Funding Agency	Absent

<b>Invited Observers</b>		
Councillor Adrian Waddelove	Shadow Cabinet Member Children & Young People	Absent
<b>Officers in attendance</b>		
Nicholas Ajaegbu	Senior Finance Manager - Children & Families	
Verity Dixon	Senior Manager - Children's Finance	
Debbie Edwards	Head of Education and Inclusion	
Charlotte Fenn	Clerk	
Amanda Perraton	Executive Director of Children and Families	
Lynsey Taylor	Finance Manager - Children & Families	

## 1. Introductions and apologies

Apologies were noted.

Duncan Haworth reported the following updates to Schools Forum membership:

### **Re-elected member:**

Greg Foster – re-elected for another term of office as Union representative.

### **Resignations:**

Natasha Kirkwood PVI representative had resigned.

Debbie Beaumont Academies representative resigning at end of February.

Duncan reported that Simone White - Interim Director of Children's Services had now left and welcomed Amanda Perraton - Executive Director of Children and Families as of 6 January 2025 to the meeting. Amanda introduced herself, her role included, under the Children's Act, responsibility for all children in CW&C and looked forward to getting to know school colleagues.

Verity Dixon - Senior Manager - Children's Finance, who had recently joined CW&C was welcomed to the meeting and introduced herself to the group.

## 2. Minutes and matters arising of last meeting

### 2.1 To agree the minutes from the meeting held 3 December 2024

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 December 2024 were agreed as a correct record.

### 2.2 Matters arising

#### 2.2.1 Arrangements for funding from the High Needs Block 2024-2025

Duncan reported that a response had still not been received from the DfE to the additional letter send by Schools Forum and this would be chased up.

### **3. Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) 2024-25 Forecast Outturn at Third Review**

Lynsey Taylor took Forum through the key points in the report which provided an update on the financial forecast outturn position for 2024-2025 for centrally held DSG as reported at the Third Review of Financial Performance.

Forum's attention was drawn to paragraph 3 and the forecast of an overspend of £10.751m on DSG budgets which was a worsened position compared to the previous forecast overspend of £9.619m. Lynsey referred to the key variances summarised under paragraph 4 and the overall forecast overspend, including DSG reserve deficit brought forward, of £18,233m summarised under paragraph 6. The service continued to monitor the position and seek mitigations in particular under High Needs.

David Rowlands sought clarification as to how the deficit was financed. Lynsey responded that the Council were carrying the deficit forward and covering it at the moment, but this was unsustainable in the long term.

**Resolved that Schools' Forum note the Third Review position on the DSG and next steps.**

### **4. Central School Services Block (CSSB) 2025-26**

Lynsey Taylor introduced the report which provided Schools' Forum with a breakdown of the CSSB for 2025-26 and what the funds could be spent on and sought Forums approval for the amounts on each line.

Forum was reminded that the funding for historic commitments was reduced by 20% each year by the DfE. Forum members' attention was drawn to table 1 which provided a line-by-line breakdown of the local authority CSSB for 2025-26 and how the funds were to be allocated.

David Rowlands made an observation that it was not designed to make us happy but didn't have much choice other than to accept it. Lynsey responded that the amounts were for the areas stated and represented how much they cost the Council.

David Rowlands sought clarification regarding the two items shown in red. Lynsey explained that the DfE bulk buy central licences on behalf of all schools across the Country and were still in negotiation and unable to confirm the charge for 2025-26. The report quoted the figure for 2024-25, once the 2025-26 figure had been confirmed, any adjustments needed would be made to the contribution line for responsibilities held for all schools.

David Curry sought clarification as to what bench marking had been done to ensure getting value for money; what were our statistical neighbours spending? Forum seemed to be accepting these figures blindly.

Lynsey responded that there were no bench marking figures available, though she had contacted some authorities, and their figures seemed to be similar. All

Council departments must look at best value, the Council had specific tendering processes and rules about staffing, so best value was looked at all the time.

Duncan acknowledged that David had made a valid point and referenced a comment made on chat:

'Is this information published on each LAs School Forum page on their websites? Could this be collated and then shared'?

Michelle Duval asked if this information was published in the section 251 statement. Lynsey responded that it was not a good measure as each authority published and categorised their data slightly differently.

Lynsey agreed to ask, through a Council Forum, for authorities to share how they spend their CSSB and the detail behind the spend as things were set up differently in different Council; what we need might not be needed in a different Council.

### **Resolved that Schools' Forum**

- i. approve the amounts on each line within the CSSB for 2025-26 as stated in the report (vote: unanimous);
- ii. note the responsibilities of the local authority for all schools in the Cheshire West and Chester area; and
- iii. request Finance Officers to put in place a process to look at bench marking CSSB and best value for future years and provide data, for the February meeting, from comparable authorities for information.

## **5. De-delegation proposals for 2025-26**

Lynsey introduced the report which outlined the services available for de-delegated by maintained schools for 2025-26 and the response to the consultation to schools.

Lynsey drawn Forum members' attention to the results of the consultation outlined in paragraphs 5-8.

Jan Diamond commented on the low number of responses to the consultation and raised concerns that this might not be a representative response, making it difficult for Forum to make a decision and asked if there was any way to encourage a better response from schools. David Curry responded that he canvassed all 8 of the maintained secondary schools and commented that the short window and time of the consultation was not ideal as it missed all CWASH dates and requested that the consultation next year be put out in October half term. This request was acknowledged by Lynsey Taylor.

David Rowlands commented that as so many had not replied, even if they were not happy with the proposals, they were not overly upset by them, silence could be deemed as consent.

**Resolves that** Schools' Forum (maintained school representatives) agreed the services to be de-delegated to the Local Authority for 2025-2026 as detailed for:

- a) Contingencies to cover the cost of staff on suspension (primary and secondary representatives separately)  
Primary Vote: Yes - unanimous  
Secondary Vote: Yes – unanimous
- b) Free school meals eligibility assessments (primary and secondary representatives separately)  
Primary Vote: Yes - unanimous  
Secondary Vote: Yes – unanimous
- c) Covering the cost of staff on for maternity/paternity/adoption leave (primary representatives only)  
Primary Vote: Yes - unanimous
- d) Pooling of funding to cover the costs of trade union facilities time (primary and secondary representatives separately)  
Primary Vote: Yes - unanimous  
Secondary Vote: Yes - Yes 1 / No 1 – casting vote by Chair Yes
- e) School improvement team delegation in line with the option chosen in 2024-25 (primary, secondary and special/alternative provision representatives separately)  
Primary Vote: Yes - unanimous  
Secondary Vote: No – unanimous  
Special/alternative provision Vote: Yes – unanimous

Duncan Haworth drew Forums attention to the proposal for schools to purchase the School Leasing Scheme provided by Link as outline in paragraphs 11 -13 and whether schools would like to buy into the scheme. Forums views were sought on the proposal.

David Rowlands took the view that the bigger schools would prefer to do things in their own way, and it would be difficult for them to be bound by a group tender as not every school worked the same system.

Kate Docherty sought clarification regarding the £2,500 costs quoted for Link. Lynsey confirmed that the £2,500 would be the annual cost to the Council, and not individual schools, for the Link service which would cover all maintained primary, secondary and special schools; currently schools did not pay into any type of scheme.



Jan Diamond sought clarification regarding how the scheme worked and asked if schools would get a breakdown of what leases were available to know what to buy into or not. Lynsey confirmed that Link would provide leasing advice to schools, they had tendered frameworks. The service listed in the report was just a brief overview. Link currently provided the Council with treasury management advice and were offering this as an add on to assist schools with leasing.

James Bancroft made the point via chat as to whether there were enough maintained schools have leasing arrangements to make it worthwhile. David Rowlands felt it would be more sensible to spell out the basis of the offer and let each school decide. It was felt that it was not something Forum members could decide for schools.

David Curry asked why it was not offered as part of the School Level Agreement (SLA).

Lynsey explained that corporate finance had asked for it to be brought to Forum to get their opinion as to whether schools would like it as an option or not.

David Curry confirmed that he could take it to CWASH on Thursday, as a high school they looked to lease a lot on photocopying and minibuses, and it might be somewhere they could go for bench marking to endure best value. He also added that it would be useful to know what the per pupil costs were per school for the service.

Hannah Mather asked if there were any case studies or feedback where Link had provided this service to other Councils that showed it was worthwhile. Lynsey agreed to look into this request.

Duncan asked Lynsey to take back the comment that there were mixed views from the Schools Forum, and they would need more detail as to what was included or not included before any decision could be made either by Forum or elsewhere as it was felt it was not necessarily a decision for Forum.

## **6. Growth Funding 2025-26**

Lynsey Taylor introduced the report and drew Forum members' attention to the proposal to set a growth fund of £256k for 2025-26. It was noted that the growth fund allocated by the government was £675k, the remaining funds would go back into the school allocation pot and be allocated out to all the primary and secondary schools.

David Rowlands thought that the schools who didn't get the growth funding would approve of the action.

### **Resolved that the Schools' Forum**

- i. note the content of the report; and

- ii. approve the amount and proposals relating to the operation of the growth fund for 2025-26 onwards.

## **7. Schools Funding Update**

Lynsey Taylor introduced the report which detailed the draft School Allocation and Funding Formula for 2025-26. Forums attention was drawn to Table 1 and the summary of the final DSG 2024-25 and indicative 2025-26 allocation.

Lynsey highlighted paragraph 4.4 regarding the proposal to continue to transfer up to the existing 0.5% of funding from the schools block to the high needs block for a further year, which would be £1.4m. Lynsey drew Forum's attention to the consultation responses, the majority of which were in agreement to this transfer.

David Rowlands raised a concern, it seemed to be an exercise in 'robbing Peter to under pay Paul', many schools budgets were under sufficient pressure that the 0.5% that has been levied each year for some time was having a much more damaging effect on most schools than was acceptable.

Lynsey responded that all of the 0.5% was going back into mainstream schools with resource provision and satellites to develop the provision for children with high needs, reducing the cost of placing children in independent schools.

David Rowlands acknowledged there was a huge problem with funding youngsters with special needs, a lot of the overspend on matters educational was down to that, the more pressure we could put on government, to put that situation right, the better.

Amanda Perraton agreed with David's comments and stated that it was a piece of work that the association of the Directors of Childrens Services had picked up; the recently appointed Secretary of State seemed to be making the right noises in this area but hadn't come up with the right resources to back that up, such is the scale of the problem.

Lynsey shared on screen Appendix A and the 2025-26 indicative proposed formula values, which has been circulated separately prior to the meeting.

It was noted that Appendix B, circulated at the same time, had the draft school allocations for 2025-26. Lynsey added that the secondary schools figure would change as the de-delegation for school improvement hadn't been agreed and the school allocations needed revising.

### **Resolved that Schools' Forum**

- i. agreed the proposed allocations and proposals to form the opening budget for 2025-2026 for approval by Council on 20 February 2025;
- ii. approve the continuation of the existing 0.5% transfer from schools block to high needs block for 2025-26; and

- iii. endorse the draft funding formula submission to the ESFA (Appendix A)

## 8. SEND High Needs programme

Debbie Edwards was only able to provide a brief update for Forum as a number of approvals had been made just prior to Christmas; a full presentation would be provided at the February meeting on what those recommendations were and next steps.

Debbie informed Forum they'd had the final recommendations from the FWL review towards the end of the Autumn term, which has been approved by Corporate Management Board. Some of those recommendations would lead to additional staff to support schools in terms of the early intervention programme and identification; that would be in addition to the 14 posts approved in the summer term, which had now all been recruited to and schools should see improvements in communication, timeliness and areas the service was struggling with due to the lack of resources in terms of the ongoing demand.

Debbie also reported that this was the second round of expression of interest in terms of meeting demand and growing our sufficiency around resource provision and special school places, focusing on secondary provision. Significant growth had already been put into primary and early years in the previous two years and now need to ensure they had the capacity for those young people as they move through the age groups.

Debbie reported that the I&I team had worked alongside finance to develop a more robust and reliable forecasting system, in terms of being able to predict future capacity and potential costs going forward.

They also had a Members SEND scrutiny task and finish group and were going through and finalising those recommendations.

Duncan provided an update on the High Needs Finance subgroup membership and sought more volunteers. The group was to meet a couple of times a year.

Member agreed:

- Duncan Haworth
- Andy Stewart
- David Rowlands
- Kate Docherty
- Neil Oxley
- Hannah Mathers

Debbie reported that an advert was going out to recruit a Director of Education, SEND and Inclusion to provide additional strategic support and expertise around the SEND agenda.

Amanda confirmed that this post would work alongside and with herself as her expertise were in Social Care and help drive strategically the Council's approach to SEND. The service would be doing a stakeholder panel, and colleagues may be drawn upon to help in that process. The advert was on the Council's website and was going in TES and going in the Management Journal.

## **9. Council Financial Position**

Lynsey Taylor provided a brief update on the Council's financial position as at Third Review.

The Council was facing significant financial challenges with a forecast pressure of £18.5m, services have had to identify mitigating actions totalling £9m leave a forecast overspend for 2024-25 of £9.5m. A large proportion of that pressure was from Adult and Childrens Social Care with smaller pressures from other areas. Council officers were working hard to alleviate and reduce the forecast overspend.

## **10. Any Other Business**

None to report.

## **11. Next meeting**

Next meeting was confirmed as Monday 10 February 2025 and not 12 February as quoted on the agenda in error.

## **Agenda item 4**

### **Early Years Funding for 2025-2026**

#### **Purpose of the report**

1. This report provides Schools' Forum with a summary of the changes to the local early years' funding formulae for 3- and 4-year-olds, 2-year-olds and 9 month to 2-year-old funding rates.
2. Seek approval from Schools' Forum for a central early years block provision of £1.225 million.

#### **Recommendations**

3. That Schools' Forum reviews the proposed changes to the local early years' funding formulae and endorse the base rate funding for 2025-26.
4. That Schools' Forum approves the central early years block provision of £1.225 million, which gives a 0.25% higher pass-through rate on average this year.

#### **Background**

5. The Department for Education's "*Local authority funding rates under the 3 and 4-year-old funding formula, 2-year-old and under 2s funding formula and maintained nursery school (MNS) funding formula*" sets the hourly funding rates that each local authority is paid to deliver the universal and additional entitlement. There are separate formulae for each age bracket.
6. On 10<sup>th</sup> December 2024 the '*Early years entitlements: local authority funding operational guide 2025 to 2026*' published which outlined the main changes as follows:
  - an increased minimum pass-through requirement for local authorities in 2025 to 2026 – the pass-through rate will increase from 95% to 96%.
  - an expectation that local authorities will announce their funding rates to childcare providers by 28 February 2025 - we intend to mandate this as a requirement in the regulations from the financial year 2026 to 2027.
  - changes to the special educational needs inclusion fund (SENIF) (section 6) and disability access fund (DAF) (section 8) sections of the guidance following a review of the department's early years SEND funding arrangements, including an expanded section on expectations around SENIF arrangements, and greater detail on how DAF should be allocated and distributed.

7. The early years entitlements for 2025-26 are:
- the 15 hours entitlement for eligible working parents of children from 9 months up to 2 years old (due to be extended to 30 hours from 1 September 2025)
  - the 15 hours entitlement for eligible working parents of 2-year-old children (due to be extended to 30 hours from 1 September 2025)
  - the 15 hours entitlement for families of 2-year-olds receiving additional support (formerly known as the 2-year-old Additional Support entitlement)
  - the universal 15 hours entitlement for all 3 and 4-year-olds
  - the additional 15 hours entitlement for eligible working parents of 3 and 4-year-olds
8. From September 2025, eligible working parents of children aged 9 months and above will be able to access 30 hours (over 38 weeks a year) from the term following their child turning 9 months to when they start school.
9. The early years' supplementary grant (EYSG) was rolled into early years block DSG grant funding last year 2024-25.
10. In line with previous years, the teachers' pay notional rates is rolled into the 3 and 4-year-old entitlement only, rather than separating out an element for the 2-year-old or under 2s entitlements.
11. All 2-year-olds and Under 2s meeting the existing criteria for early years' pupil premium (EYPP) and Disability Access Fund (DAF) for 3–4-year-olds will be eligible for this additional funding. This funding will be paid to providers at the same funding rates received by the local authority, which remain the same in 2025-26 at £1.00 per hour for EYPP and £938 per eligible pupil for DAF.

### **Early Years Dedicated Schools Block (DSG) Allocation 2025-26**

12. On 10 December 2024 the Department for Education confirmed early years' revenue funding for 2025-26 and published the individual DSG allocations for each local authority based on the spending review settlement and agreed early years budget for 2025 to 2026. The DfE's hourly funding rates for Cheshire West and Chester Council are:

<b>Department for Education Early Years Funding Cheshire West and Chester</b>	<b>Funding 2024/25 at Dec 23 £/hour</b>	<b>Funding 2025/26 at Dec 24 £/hour</b>	<b>Change £/hour</b>	<b>Change %</b>
3- and 4-year-olds	5.47	5.71	0.24	4.39%
2-year-old entitlement	7.64	7.97	0.33	4.32%
Under 2's (15 hour entitlement from Sept 2024, 30 hours from Sept 2025)	10.38	10.81	0.43	4.14%

13. Based on the above, the total DSG 2025-26 initial allocation for the early years block is £55.02m. This an indicative allocation based on January 2024 Census and will be updated in July 2025.
14. The breakdown of the initial allocation for 2025-26 is shown below, the previous year's funding announcement is shown for comparison purposes:

<b>Early Years Block</b>	<b>Funding 2024/25 at Dec 23 £m</b>	<b>Funding 2025/26 at Dec 24 £m</b>
3- and 4-year-olds	22.72	22.69
2-year-old entitlement - Additional Support	3.07	2.96
2-year-old entitlement – Working Parents	6.79	11.61
Under 2's (15 hour entitlement from Sept 2024, 30 hours from Sept 2025)	4.67	17.15
<b>Subtotal</b> (96% min. pass through)	<b>37.25</b>	<b>54.41</b>
Early Years pupil premium	0.28	0.34
Disability access fund	0.23	0.27
<b>Subtotal</b> (100% pass through)	<b>0.51</b>	<b>0.61</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>37.76</b>	<b>55.02</b>

### Early Years Budget Proposals and Formulae 2025-26

15. As in previous years the local authority is required to consult with providers on an annual basis. Schools' Forum must also be consulted on changes to early years local authority funding formulae, including agreeing any central spend by 29<sup>th</sup> February 2024, although the final decision on the formulae rests with the local authority.
16. The proposed changes to the local early years' funding formulae for 2025-26 are detailed in Appendix A.
17. In relation to the early years base rates the proposals are to increase the base rate for each age range as shown in the "Proposed 202526" column:

<b>CW&amp;C Early Years Base Rate</b>	Approved 2024/25 £/hour	<b>Proposed 2025/26 £/hour</b>	Change £/hour	Change %
3- and 4-year-olds	5.10	<b>5.45</b>	0.35	6.86%
2-year-old entitlement – Working parents and additional support	7.10	<b>7.65</b>	0.55	7.75%

Under 2's (15 hour entitlement from Sept 2024, 30 hours from Sept 2025)	9.70	<b>10.33</b>	0.63	6.49%
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18. Local authorities are required to plan to pass-through 96% of their funding from the government to early years providers in 2025-26.

19. The 96% includes the following budget lines:

- base rate funding for all providers
- supplements for all providers
- lump sum funding for MNS
- the funding paid directly to providers from the SENIF (this includes funding drawn from both the early years block and the high needs block)
- contingency funding.

20. Appendix B provides a calculation of the local authority's compliance with the 96% pass-through requirements for all formulae for 2025-26.

21. The guidance states that the remaining 4% expenditure, could be used for the following:

- centrally retained funding (for central services or services in-kind, including special educational needs and disability (SEND) services)
- transfer of funding to any of the other early years entitlements
- any extra hours that local authorities choose to fund in addition to the government's entitlement hours
- any funding movement out of the early years block.

22. In 2024-25, the pass through rate was 97.1% with central services spend of 2.90%.

23. For 2025-26 a pass-through rate of 97.75% with central services spend of 2.25% (£1.225 million) is proposed for approval by Schools Forum. This funds local authority investments associated with the implementation and extension of the new early years' provisions, including transactions processing, existing Early Years service and making the previously grant funded wraparound service permanent.

24. This proposal is £0.951 million less than the maximum allowable 4% central spend for 2025-26.

### Next Steps

25. To implement the early years funding rates for 2025-26 and notify providers on or before 28<sup>th</sup> February 2025.



## Appendix A - Proposed Cheshire West and Chester Council Early Years Funding Formulae 2025-26

Description	Funding method	2024-25	2025/26	% Increase
<b>3- to 4-year-olds</b>				
<b>Base Rate</b>	per funded hour	£5.10	£5.45	6.86%
<b>Supplements:</b>				
<b>Deprivation</b> - Additional payment based on the hours claimed for individual children who reside in the 30% most disadvantaged areas in England on the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI).	per funded hour	£0.50	£0.50	
<b>Quality</b> - Additional payment for eligible providers for the distribution of the Teachers Pay and Pensions Grant (TPPG) that was previously received directly by schools however is now included within the Early Years Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).	per funded hour	£0.07	£0.07	
<b>Rural</b> - Additional payment for settings defined as being in a Pre-dominantly Rural Census Output Area under the Rural / Urban Classification, has few competitors within 2 miles (sparsity) and occupancy below 77%.	annual lump sum	£2,000	£2,000	

<b>2-Year-olds (additional support and working parents)</b>				
<b>Base Rate</b>	per funded hour	£7.10	£7.65	7.75%
<b>Supplements:</b>				
<b>Deprivation</b> – See above.	per funded hour	£0.50	£0.50	
<b>Quality</b> – See above.		£0.00	£0.00	
<b>Rural</b> – See above.	annual lump sum	£2,000	£2,000	

<b>9 months to 2-year-olds</b>				
<b>Base Rate</b>	per funded hour	£9.70	£10.33	6.49%
<b>Supplements:</b>				
<b>Deprivation</b> – See above.	per funded hour	£0.50	£0.50	
<b>Quality</b> – See above.		£0.00	£0.00	
<b>Rural</b> – See above.	annual lump sum	£2,000	£2,000	

<b>Anticipated Budget for SEN Inclusion Fund</b> Funding for children with EHCPs will come from the High Needs DSG Block.		£551,628	£440,005	
<b>Anticipated Budget for Contingency</b> – for 2-year-old working parents and under 2s.		£115,000	£218,000	

## Appendix B – Early Years’ Formulae 96% Compliance Calculation 2025-26

The requirement will be met for 2025-26 if ‘(A – B) ÷ C’ is equal to or greater than 96% of D.

Calc	Line	Description	3- and 4-Year Olds	2 Year Olds (Additional Support)	2 Year Olds (Working Parents)	Under 2s
A	1	Anticipated budget for base rate (including funding to MNS)	£21,663,146.69	£2,836,679.67	£11,140,118.19	£16,385,286.92
	2	Anticipated budget for lump sums (including funding to MNS)	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
	3	Anticipated budget for supplements: Deprivation (including funding to MNS)	£439,821.50	£94,555.99	£120,138.53	£118,963.85
	4	Anticipated budget for supplements: Quality (including funding to MNS)	£80,745.90	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
	5	Anticipated budget for supplements: Flexibility (including funding to MNS)	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
	6	Anticipated budget for supplements: Rurality (including funding to MNS)	£28,000.00	£0.00	£30,000.00	£20,000.00
	7	Anticipated budget for supplements: EAL (including funding to MNS)	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
	8	Anticipated budget for SEN inclusion fund	£356,547.57	£24,324.99	£30,580.72	£28,551.32
	9	Anticipated budget for contingency	£0.00	£0.00	-£150,000.00	-£68,000.00
A		<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>£22,568,261.66</b>	<b>£2,955,560.65</b>	<b>£11,170,837.44</b>	<b>£16,484,802.09</b>
B	10	DfE quantum allocation to local authority of MNS supplementary funding	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
C	11	Planned total base rate hours for core 15 and additional 15 hours	£3,974,889.30	370,807.80	1,456,224.60	1,586,184.60
D	12	Equivalent average rate to providers for entitlement hours = (A-B) / C = (lines 1+2+3+4+5+6+7+8 - 9) / (line 10)	5.68	7.97	7.67	10.39
	13	LA hourly rate (published in DSG tables in future)	5.71	7.97	7.97	10.81
E	14	<b>Test of meeting requirement</b> E = (D / E) * 100% = ((line 11) / (line 12)) *100%	<b>99.4%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>96.2%</b>	<b>96.1%</b>

## **Agenda Item 5**

### **Arrangements for funding from the High Needs Block 2025-2026**

#### **Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to update Schools Forum on proposed arrangements for allocations from the High Needs Block for 2025-2026 for commissioned services, places and top up funding.

#### **Recommendations**

2. Schools Forum is asked to provide a view on the proposals within the report on financial arrangements for high needs pupils in 2025-2026

#### **Background**

3. Further to the budget setting proposals set out in the January 2025 report to Schools Forum, this report provides further detail on the proposed funding arrangements for high needs in 2025-2026. These proposals are made in the context of the continuing pressures on the high needs block and the planned increase on the DSG deficit reserve to meet demand for mainstream support and specialist provision.

#### **High Needs Budget 2025-2026**

4. At the January meeting of Schools Forum, additional Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) funding of £1.427m was allocated for High Needs expenditure to increase budgets to £64.083m (before deductions and recoupment).

#### **High Needs Funding arrangements for schools in 2025-2026**

5. The following paragraphs outline the proposed arrangements for funding schools in 2025-2026.

#### **Commissioned places in special schools and resourced provisions**

6. The following table details the commissioned places currently agreed for special and alternative provision schools. For maintained schools, discussions about future commissioned places will be held on an individual school basis in view of SEND Review recommendations for the academic year 2025-2026.

Special/ Alternative provision schools	Academic Year 2024/25	Academic Year 2025/26	Resourced Provision	Academic Year 2024/25	Academic Year 2025/26
Archers Brook	103	103	Upton Westlea Primary School	10	15
Cloughwood Academy	120	120	Frodsham Primary Academy	11	16
Dee Banks	143	143	Darnhall Primary School	10	10
Dorin Park	151	151	Acresfield Primary School	9	9
Greenbank	119	133	Dee Point Primary School	32	32
Hebden Green	133	141	Lache Primary School	9	9
Hindertont	52	50	Barnton Primary School	15	32
Oaklands	160	160	Willow Wood Community Primary School	7	7
Rosebank School	49	49	St Nicholas Catholic High School	12	12
The Russett School	141	143	The Catholic High School, Chester	15	15
The Bridge	50	50	St Josephs Catholic Primary	10	10
			Woodlands	20	20
			The Grange Primary		10
			Witton Church Walk		7
			The Rudheath Senior		16
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,221</b>	<b>1,243</b>		<b>160</b>	<b>220</b>

### Special school top up funding

7. The special school top up funding rates remain the same as 2024/25 for 2025/26 and should also be applied to other local authority pupils placed in those schools.

School	Top up rate Band 1 £	Top up rate Band 2 £	Top up rate Band 3 £
Archers Brook	4,175	12,854	16,982
Cloughwood	4,141	12,821	16,949
Dee Banks	4,456	12,935	16,965
Dorin Park	4,304	12,762	16,781
Greenbank	4,070	10,761	16,759
Hebden Green	4,225	12,686	16,707
Hindertont	5,746	14,461	18,604
Oaklands	4,047	12,462	16,464
Rosebank School	5,457	14,181	18,328
The Russett School	4,080	12,550	16,580
The Bridge			17,514

## **Mainstream top up rates**

8. There are no proposals to amend current mainstream and resource provision top up rates which are as follows.

<b>Band</b>	<b>Funding rate £</b>
A	4,500
B	7,125
C	11,062

## **Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG)**

9. Special schools minimum funding guarantee (MFG) – for 2025 to 2026, the MFG is 0% as set by the Government.

## **Core School Budget Grant (CSBG)**

10. A separate Core School Budget Grant, will be received in 2025 to 2026, comprising of the 3 separate grants Special Schools and alternative provisions received in 2024 to 2025:

- the teachers' pay additional grant (TPAG)
- the 2024 teachers' pension employer contribution grant (TPECG 2024)
- a full year allocation of the CSBG which is allocated for the period September 2024 to March 2025, to help with schools' overall costs, including the 2024 teachers' pay award and support staff costs

Further information about the distribution of additional funding to compensate employers for the planned increase in their National Insurance contributions from April 2025 will be published by the DfE in early 2025.

## **Legacy Funding Stream for 2025-2026**

11. Legacy funding, including for historic teachers' pay and pensions cost increases covers the following: -

- The teachers' pay awards in September 2018 and 2019.
- The increase in employer contributions for teachers pensions from September 2019.
- Additional cost pressures in 2023 to 2024, for which a 3.4% funding increase was made available, equivalent to the mainstream schools additional grant (MSAG).

## **Next steps**

12. Proposed funding allocations will be included in High Needs budget allocation notifications to schools and academies to be distributed by the end of March 2025. Any further changes to high needs funding arrangements arising from the implementation of the SEND Review recommendations will be brought to Schools Forum in year.

## **Agenda Item 6**

### **Schools Financial Value Standard 2025-2026**

#### **Purpose of the report**

1. This report is to update Schools Forum on the requirements of the Schools Financial Value Standard (SFVS) submission for maintained schools for 2024-2025 which is due to be submitted to the Local Authority by 31 March 2025.

#### **Recommendations**

2. This report is for information and representatives of Local Authority maintained schools and Governing Bodies are asked to share this update with their representative bodies.

#### **Background**

3. Current government guidance requires Governing Bodies to complete their SFVS self-assessment for 2024-2025 and return it to the Local Authority by 31 March 2025. A reminder letter was sent to Local Authority maintained school headteachers on 1st February 2025, detailing the requirements for the assessment and process for submitting returns for the statutory deadline.

#### **Changes to the SFVS self-assessment checklist**

4. Schools should access the latest documents and guidance notes which are available from the Department for Education (DfE) website at the following link.

[Schools financial value standard - GOV.UK](#)

#### **Key audit findings from 2023-2024 assessments**

5. The information provided by schools is reviewed by the Schools Finance Team and by Internal Audit in assessing the level of assurance that could be placed on the financial management in operation in the Authority's schools. The Local Authority are not able to confirm that each school are operating the level of controls in the framework as this would involve individual school audits. Instead a number of schools are visited in the autumn term and key themes from the assessment reviewed across all schools. General feedback is provided by Internal Audit to schools on the key findings, areas of best practice and opportunities for improving financial controls when this work is completed. Key findings from the 2023-2024 audit review are included in **Appendix A** and will be circulated to schools in the School Bulletin. Officers are aware that similar findings are being reported each year and are developing an action plan to improve the quality of submissions and controls to be shared with schools and Schools Forum.

## **Next Steps**

6. Governing Bodies should approve the SFVS submission for return to the Local authority by 31 March 2025. The Local Authority will progress with an action plan to improve the quality of submissions, review the 2024-25 returns to complete the annual assurance statement to the DfE and to determine the internal audit plan for 2024-2025.



### Key Themes from Internal Audit Review of SFVS Returns

Internal Audit has recently undertaken a review of the School Financial Value Standard (SFVS) to obtain assurance over the accuracy of these returns. The review identified the following key issues which will be shared with all schools. Schools are recommended to review these findings and areas for improvement and ensure that these are considered when undertaking the SFVS return for 2024/25.

	Finding	Recommended Best Practice
1.	<p>Completion of SFVS Assessment In some instances key elements of the SFVS were not referred to in the response to each question.</p> <p>For example, Question 21) Is the governing body given the opportunity to challenge the school's plans for replacing contracts for goods and services that are due to expire shortly? Some schools did not refer to a contract register within the response to the question. This is a key element of this question.</p> <p>The majority of schools do not refer to all elements of the Council checklist when responding to each question, for example, Question 30 (School Fund). The responses to this question rarely refer to the Terms of Reference / Statement of Intent.</p> <p>Where elements of the DfE guidance and checklist are not referred to in the response there is not enough detail for audit to verify the level of control within the school and verify that a 'Yes' response is appropriate.</p>	<p>Schools should consider all elements of the DfE Schools Financial Value Standard (SFVS) Checklist Guidance and the Council guidance (Guidance for Local Authority Maintained schools on the completion of the Schools Financial Value Standard returns) when considering the response to each question. Each element should be referred to within the response to evidence that a 'Yes' answer is appropriate</p>
2.	<p><b>Completion of Related Party Transaction (RPT) Spreadsheet (within the SFVS return)</b></p> <p>A few schools had not completed the RPT template and returned this with the SFVS for 2023/24.</p>	<p>A related party transaction is a contract or other agreement between the school and a person or entity that has close links with the persons awarding the contract. The SFVS guidance states that 'Contracts and agreements that are live in the year</p>

	<b>Finding</b>	<b>Recommended Best Practice</b>
		<p>that the SFVS is being completed for need to be reported. These should continue to be reported until the year in which the contract ceases, at which point they can be removed from the list.'</p> <p>Schools should ensure that they record all expenditure incurred during the year which involve an RPT.</p> <p>The RPT template should be returned with the SFVS. If there are no RPTs then a nil return should be recorded.</p>

**Cheshire West and Chester  
Schools Forum  
10 February 2025**

**Agenda item 9**

**Schedule of meetings 2024-2025**

**Schools Forum – all meetings 4.30pm – 6.30pm**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Venue</b>	<b>Proposed agenda</b>
Tuesday 1 July 2025	MS Teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• DSG 2024-2025 outturn</li><li>• School balances at the end of 2024-2025 (with appendices for schools and academies)</li><li>• Directed revisions to schemes for financing schools</li><li>• Annual review of Schools Forum membership, constitution, and terms of reference</li></ul>

**Schools Forum Finance Subgroup**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Venue</b>
Tuesday 10 June 2025	2.00 – 4.00 pm	MS Teams

**Schools Forum High Needs Finance Subgroup – To be reinstated from the beginning of the new financial year - dates to be confirmed.**