
SCHOOLS' FORUM

Monday 8 June 2026 – 10am

**Conference Suite
Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning,
Brierton Lane**

A G E N D A

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|----|--|--------------|
| 1. | Apologies | Chair |
| 2. | Minutes from Schools' Forum meeting on 10 February 2026 and matters arising. | Chair |
| 3. | Minutes from Schools Capital Sub-Group on 6 November 2025 and matters arising. | Chair |
| 4. | Hartlepool Local Area SEND Reform Plan 2026 | Fiona Stobbs |
| 5. | Schools Forum Membership and Constitution | Fiona Stobbs |
| 6. | Updates to Scheme for Financing Schools | Fiona Stobbs |
| 7. | Dedicated Schools Grant Final Outturn 2025/26 | Fiona Stobbs |
| 8. | Early Years Block Final Outturn 2025/26 | Fiona Stobbs |
| 9. | High Needs Block Final Outturn 2025/26 | Fiona Stobbs |

Date and Time of Next Forum Meeting –
Monday 21 September, 10am at the CETL

Schools' Forum Meeting

10th February 2026

Attendees:

Members

Carole Bradley (CB) (Academy Primary) (Chair)
 Tim Blades (TB) (Maintained Governor)
 Dean Cope (DC) (Academy Secondary)
 Alison Darby (AD) (Maintained Primary)
 Gillian Hood (GH) (Academy Primary)
 John Hardy (JH) (Academy Primary)
 Lorna McLean (LM) (Academy Special)
 Marcus Newing (MN) (Academy Primary)
 Amanda Palmer (AP) (Diocese RC)
 Phil Pritchard (PP) (Academy Primary)
 Caroline Reed (CR) (Academy Primary)
 Linda Richardson (LR) (Early Years PVI)
 Andy Rogers (AR) (Academy Secondary)
 Emma Rutherford (ER) Horizon School
 Sue Sharpe (SS) (Academy Primary)
 Mark Tilling (MT) (Maintained Secondary)
 Lee Walker (LW) (Academy Primary)
 Vicki Wilson (VW) (Diocese C of E)

Local Authority Officers

Claire Mcpartlin (CM
 (Administrator)
 Sandra Shears (SSh)
 (Children's Finance)
 Fiona Stobbs (FS) (Inclusive
 Learning and SEND)
 Jane Watt (JWa) (Children's
 Finance)
 Amanda Whitehead
 (Assistant Director Education)

Agenda Item	Action
<p>1 Apologies -</p> <p>David Leane (Diocese RC) Toni Ray (PVI) Zoe Westley (Academy Special)</p>	
<p>2 Substitutes</p> <p>This item was not on the agenda but raised by the Chair following the issue being raised by a Forum member prior to the meeting.</p> <p>It had been requested that members of Forum be able to have more than one substitute. The Chair felt this would be beneficial to ensure there was representation at the meeting.</p> <p>MT expressed concern that representatives attending may not have full knowledge of discussions to ensure consistency with decision making.</p>	

	<p>It was raised that Forum had started to meet more frequently which may have an impact on the number of meetings members are able to attend. SSh advised it would be possible to review the number of meetings in place, whilst ensuring they are in line with the appropriate Children's Services Committee for decision making.</p> <p>CR queried the types and categories of representation allowed for Schools' Forum. Members asked that clarity on what was and what was not allowed be brought to the June meeting where the new membership will be discussed.</p> <p>Decision</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Agreed for the number of meetings of Schools' Forum to be reviewed. ii) A wider review to take place around substitutes and the allowable categories of representation. Forum agreed this would take place alongside the review of terms of office from September 2026 at their June meeting. 	JWa
3	<p>High Needs Block (HNB) Projected Outturn 2025/26</p> <p>The report presented the projected 2025/26 outturn for high needs services based on spending to the end of Quarter 3.</p> <p>Based on spending to the end of Quarter 3 and estimated expenditure, the projected outturn for 2025/26 ranged from £3.951m to £4.521m overspend. This was primarily based on anticipated overspend on exclusions and top-up funding and support. There was an existing negative reserve balance of £4.932m recorded against the DSG Block.</p> <p>A query was raised around the 6 ARP places at £30k. JWa confirmed this related to a proposed external ASD specialist provision so should not have been described as an ARP. The specialist unit had been assumed within the last budget however this did not go ahead. In its place, two 12 place ARPs were established which added cost. For clarity, JWa confirmed that all ARPs are payable at £10k per place (or £6k per place if on school roll) plus top-up.</p> <p>Decision</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) That the report be noted. 	
4	<p>Consolidated High Needs Block Budget Requirement 2026/27 (Including Strategic Proposals)</p> <p>Following comments from members at the last meeting, SSh had received feedback from James Magog (Director of Finance, IT and Digital, HBC) which was shared with the group. The following points were noted:</p>	

- Core spending power increase of 21% - this is received from Government on the assumption council tax is increased by 5%. It is currently proposed that there will be no increase to council tax however this may change. The Finance and Corporate Affairs Committee will give a proposal to Council regarding council tax. A balanced budget is required to be approved by Full Council by 11 March.
- The projected £10m deficit must be funded from the council's own cash balances.
- The council being viewed as an outlier should be considered a positive, however, this is not currently affordable.
- Looked After Children is the biggest financial pressure within the council.
- Although there was concern that lack of funding for ARPs may result in further exclusions, only 5% of the High Needs Block is spent on Permanent Exclusions.
- Even with provisional funding from DfE for 90% of the DSG deficit, the remaining 10% would need to come from Council reserves.

A discussion took place around the funding provided to schools. It was felt the 0.37% increase was not sufficient to fund staff and resources due to the increase in children with additional needs. Notional SEN is received; however, this is not additional funding and is part of the funding per pupil.

JH thanked James for his feedback following comments at the last meeting.

The report presented the complete draft budget requirement for the High Needs Block (HNB) spending in 2026/27.

At the January meeting members had been informed of the budget requirement for existing provision for the HNB as a two-stage process. That report did not include the cost of proposals linked to strategic changes including the plans to increase provision or improve outcomes for SEN pupils. These issues were included in this report along with planned costs to educate PEX pupils. This and the previous report brought together the full budget recommendations proposals for HNB which would go to Children's Services Committee.

After recouplement, the funding available in 2026/27 including block transfers was £18.954m. The draft proposals reviewed by Forum in their January meeting resulted in a budget requirement of £25.950m, this leaves a shortfall of £6.996m.

The report outlined the main challenges expected to affect the 2026/27 budget including increased volume of pupils with SEND and complexity of need and sufficiency of places.

A query was raised around funding of staff in the Inclusion Team, FS confirmed that there were no plans to fund these staff from the High Needs Block at this stage. The funding currently agreed is in place until 2028.

	<p>Following a lengthy discussion, it was noted that there was currently no AP for primary school aged children within the town. It was discussed that providers had approached the Local Authority around setting up a provision however this would be expensive and no funding is available.</p> <p>AD suggested that there should be a review of the efficacy of ARPs across all schools.</p> <p>MT asked whether there was a gap within the Sufficiency Strategy around Home Educated pupils (a significant number that could potentially return to school education at any point).</p> <p>Decision</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ii) That Forum reviewed the contents of the report. iii) That Forum reviewed the strategic budget proposals. iv) Forum unanimously agreed to recommend the additional budget proposals contained within the report to Children’s Services Committee for approval. 	
5	<p>Permanently Excluded Pupils (PEXs) – standing item</p> <p>There had been 13 pupils permanently excluded within this academic year. This was a reduction on the number at this point last academic year when the number was at 16.</p> <p>There were 108 children on roll at Horizon in total.</p> <p>JH passed on thanks to the work being done to reduce the numbers of PEX within the town.</p>	
6	<p>Any Other Business</p> <p>No other business.</p> <p>Meeting closed: 11:30 am.</p>	
7	<p>Date and Time of Next Forum Meeting</p> <p>Tuesday 10 March 2026, 10 am, Conference Hall, Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL).</p>	

OUTSTANDING ACTIONS LOG

Meeting	Description	Owner
10 Feb 2026	Forum to review allowable categories of representation under Schools' Forum regulations, alongside new terms of office from September 2026	Jwa / SSh

Financial Year 2025/26: Children’s Services Committee – Log of Schools’ Forum
Recommendations and Committee Decisions

Last Updated: 16 January 2026

Committee Date	Report	Recommendation and Decision Details
02/12/25	Special School Growth Proposals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Approve the growth proposals for Springwell school recommended by Schools’ Forum for AY 2025-26 of £0.179m; b) Approve the growth proposals for Catcote school recommended by Schools’ Forum for AY2025-26 of £0.453m
03/02/26	DSG Schools Budget Shares and Central Services Block 2026/27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Noted the agreement by Schools’ Forum to the budget requirement of £0.619m for the Central School Services Block and to the transfer the residual funding from Central School Services Block to the High Needs Block (£0.047m). b) Noted the agreement by Schools’ Forum to transfer 0.5% of schools block funding (£0.454m) to the High Needs Block. c) Agreed MFG to be used for 2026/27 and noted the recommendation from Schools’ Forum of applying an MFG of 0.0%, alongside an appropriate cap which has been calculated at 2.97%.

Item 2

		d) Approved the School Budget Share for 2026/27.
3/2/26	DSG Early Years Block 2026/27	<p>a) Approved the retention of £0.465m (3% of total funding) to deliver the early year's service as recommended by Schools' Forum (15 for; 0 against; 1 abstention).</p> <p>b) Approved the hourly rate for 3- to 4-year-old provision as recommended by Schools' Forum (16 for; 0 against; 0 abstention).</p> <p>c) Approved the hourly rate for 2-year-old Working Parent provision as recommended by Schools' Forum (16 for; 0 against; 0 abstention).</p> <p>d) Approved the hourly rate for 2-year-old FRAS provision as recommended by Schools' Forum (16 for; 0 against; 0 abstention).</p> <p>e) Approved the hourly rate for under 2-year-old provision as recommended by Schools' Forum (16 for; 0 against; 0 abstention).</p>



Schools Capital Sub-Group Meeting

Thursday 6th November 2025

Held remotely via Microsoft Teams



PRESENT		
Mark Tilling	Headteacher - High Tunstall College of Science (Chair)	Secondary School Rep
Jo Heaton	CEO - Northern Lights Learning Trust	C of E Diocese Rep
Louise Robson	Head of Corporate Services - Catcote Academy	Special School Rep
Carole Bradley	Executive Headteacher - Northern Lights Learning Trust	Primary Academy Rep
David Turner	Headteacher - Rift House Primary	Primary School Rep
Chris Connor	Headteacher - Fens Primary	Primary School Rep
Andy Rodgers	Executive Head Teacher - English Martyrs	Secondary Academy Rep
David Leane	Chief Finance Officer - Bishop Hogarth Trust	RC Diocese Rep
Kelly Armstrong	Strategic Children Commissioner	HBC
Claire Appleton	Group Accountant (Corporate and Schools)	HBC
Julie Reed	Pupil Place Planning, Admissions & Capital Manager	HBC
David Mitchell	Capital Projects Officer	HBC
APOLOGIES		
Kieran Bostock	Assistant Director (Place Management)	HBC
Amanda Whitehead	Assistant Director (Education)	HBC

Item		Action
1.	Review of minutes from 12th June 2025.	
	No matters arising. Minutes of previous meeting agreed.	
2.	2025/26 Schools' Capital Works Programme - Progress Update (JR)	
	The vast majority of the 2025/26 programme is now complete. There is one project on hold and the remaining two will be completed before the end of the financial year. As the DfE has formally confirmed that Golden Flatts will be rebuilt as a 1FE school the previously approved capital projects for Golden Flatts, that have been on hold, have now been cancelled with all funds returning to the unallocated pot for 2026/27 programme.	

Item		Action
3.	Finance Update (CA)	
	Although most of the projects are complete, there is a slight lag in costs coming through from the completed projects.	
4.	Net Capacity Assessment – Valuation Office/DfE Primary Pilot (JR)	
	<p>The Net Capacity Assessment (NCA) measures rooms, records room types and calculates the number of pupils a school can accommodate.</p> <p>The DfE have already completed the Net Capacity Assessment in Secondary schools and, as a continuation of this work, they have commissioned the Valuation Office Agency (VOA), who are public sector property experts, to conduct NCAs for primary schools.</p> <p>The NCAs will start nationally in Autumn 2025 and continue until 2029. The VOA will be in touch with all primaries to arrange a site visit.</p> <p>St Josephs Catholic Primary School is the only Hartlepool School to be part of the initial pilot after which schools will be allocated to tranches. There are no Hartlepool schools in the first tranche, however they will be releasing further tranches in due course.</p> <p>Once an NCA has been completed, copies will be shared with both the LA and the school.</p> <p>DL requested JR forward e-mail confirming St Josephs will be part of the pilot.</p>	JR
5.	Schools Based Nursery Capital (DM)	
	<p>Following last year's first phase of the School Based Nursey Capital Funding, the DfE opened a second phase on 22nd September with a bid deadline of 11th December.</p> <p>The aim of the funding is to increase existing nursery places, or develop a new nursery, with a maximum capital funding allocation of £150,000.</p> <p>Any successful bids would have to be up and running by Sept 2027.</p> <p>All schools were contacted regarding submitting a full application for this year or an expression of interest for next year (phase 3).</p> <p>Any applications will need to be approved by the Local Authority.</p>	
6.	School Rebuilding Programme	
	<p>St Helens (CB)</p> <p>The previous delays around archaeological finds have been resolved, A planning issue caused further delays, however this has also now been resolved allowing works to proceed.</p>	

Item		Action
	<p>Golden Flatts (DM) No further update other than outlined in item 2.</p>	
7.	High Needs Capital Allocation (KA)	
	<p>Kingsley Due to Sport England permissions expiring in June 2026, plans are in place to remove the current demountable.</p> <p>In addition, a planning application has been approved to install a separate demountable for SEND pupils, allowing yr6 pupils to return to the main school. This demountable will be on land where there will be no Sport England restrictions.</p> <p>A draft of the SEND Sufficiency and Capital Plan is now complete and will be taken to Schools' Forum before being considered for approval by Children's Services Committee.</p> <p>The SEND White Paper, which is due to outline future High Needs Capital spending, has been delayed.</p>	
8.	SEMH Funding Update (MT)	
	<p>The Schools' Forum approved using SEMH funding to allow the Local Authority to continue the work of the Hartlepool Inclusion Team following the end of the SEND AP Change Programme in March 2026. This approved funding will extend the Change Programme Hartlepool Inclusion Team model up to 31st August 2028.</p> <p>Update - information obtained after the meeting The agreement from Schools Forum commits £538k of the SEMH funding pot (£651,251). If we receive funding for the Change Programme within the upcoming SEND White Paper, all the £538k will not be required, however this won't be known until the new year. If there is no funding from the White Paper, there would be approx. £113k remaining.</p>	
9.	Any Other Business	
	None	
10.	Date and Time of Meetings for 2024/25 Academic Year	
	<p>Thursday 29th January 2026 at 10:00 – 12:00</p> <p>Thursday 11th June 2026 at 10:00 – 12:00</p> <p>These meetings are to continue as Microsoft Team meetings.</p>	

Report to Hartlepool Schools' Forum 8 June 2026
From Fiona Stobbs (Interim Assistant Director - Education)

Agenda Item 4 – Hartlepool Local Area SEND Reform Plan 2026

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide forum with an update on the how the local area plans to respond to the Schools White Paper and proposed SEND Reforms.

2 Background

- 2.1 In February 2026, the Government published both the Schools White Paper- 'Every child achieving and thriving' and the SEND Reform Consultation- 'Putting Children and Young People First', setting out a national vision to improve outcomes for children and young people, particularly those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). The proposals emphasise earlier intervention, stronger inclusion within mainstream education, improved accountability, and greater consistency across local areas. A key focus is on strengthening partnerships across education, health and care systems, alongside ensuring financial sustainability within the High Needs Block.
- 2.2 The consultation further outlined expectations for local areas to develop integrated, evidence-based reform plans that address systemic challenges in SEND and Inclusive Practice. This includes a stronger emphasis on co-production, clearer pathways of support, improved data use, and alignment between strategic commissioning and financial planning.
- 2.3 On 9th March 2026, Hartlepool Borough Council, along with all Local Authorities, received formal direction to formulate a Local Area Reform Plan. This requirement included three core components:
- The Local Area Reform Plan template
 - A Maturity Matrix
 - A Data and Finance return
- 2.4 Each local authority was allocated two advisors (one SEND Advisor and one Financial Advisor) to support development. All local authorities are required to submit a first draft to the Advisor's by 19th May 2026, with feedback to be provided to us by 2nd June 2026.
- 2.5 Following this stage, the plan must be formally approved and signed off by:
- Local Authority Chief Executive
 - Executive Director for Children's Services
 - Local Authority Chief Financial Officer
 - North East & North Cumbria Integrated Care Board Chief Executive
 - North East & North Cumbria Integrated Care Board NHS Place Director

- 2.6 Each local area is also required to appoint a Senior Responsible Officer (SRO); for Hartlepool this is Fiona Stobbs, Interim Assistant Director- Education.
- 2.7 The final plan must be submitted by 19th June 2026 which will then enter a robust quality assurance and moderation cycle on both a regional and national level.
- 2.8 The plan carries significant financial implications for the Authority. If successful, the Council will receive £7.914m in High Needs Stability Grant funding, this is 90% of the DSG Deficit as at 31 March 2026. This grant will be transferred to a usable reserve and applied to offset the DSG Deficit as at 31 March 2028. The Authority is required to earmark £0.879m to fund the remaining 10%.
- 2.9 In addition, the authority is proposing to earmark sums for 2026/27 and 2027/28 for the equivalent 10% requirement.
- 2.10 If approved, we will also gain access to Experts at Hand funding in subsequent years (with Year 1 funding expected in June 2026).
- 2.11 Each local authority will also be required to provide quarterly data and finance returns throughout the next 3 years, and the plan will be an iterative document, being continuously shaped as we move forward.
- 2.12 The purpose of this report is to share a high-level summary of Hartlepool's Local Area Reform Plan and the work carried out to date.

3 SEND and Alternative Provision (AP) Change Programme

- 3.1 Since 2023, Hartlepool Borough Council has acted as the Lead Authority for the North East Change Programme Partnership within the national SEND and AP Change Programme. This leadership role has enabled the local area to test innovative approaches and develop infrastructures which places Hartlepool in a strong position to respond to the Local Area Reform Plan requirements.
- 3.2 Through Change Programme funding, (and with the support of Schools Forum with the 'SEMH pot') Hartlepool has established an Inclusion Service, including:
 - Recruitment of Senior Specialist Teachers for Inclusion, supporting schools to develop inclusive practice
 - A team of Education Officers, supporting:
 - Parents and carers to navigate the SEND system
 - Pupil voice and advocacy
 - Reduction of in-year school admissions
- 3.3 In addition, the local area has successfully piloted several multi-agency delivery models, including:

- PINS (Partnerships for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools)
- ELSEC (Early Language Support for Every Child)
- APST (Alternative Provision Specialist Taskforce – locally known as HIST)

3.4 These initiatives have strengthened collaboration across education, health and care, and provided valuable learning to inform system-wide reform.

3.5 **Actions Undertaken to Date for the plan:**

The SEND, AP and Inclusion Operational Group had previously developed a Maturity Matrix as part of the SEND and AP Change Programme. This originally captured progress and achievements; however, it has now been refined to reflect a whole-system perspective, identifying both strengths and areas for development across the SEND and Inclusion system.

Significant progress has also been made in relation to data and financial planning. The Data and Finance teams have worked closely with SEND, Inclusion, Commissioning and ICB colleagues to:

- Model pupil projections over the next three years.
- Assess financial pressures and sustainability.
- Align this work with both the DSG Management Plan and the SEND Sufficiency Plan

A programme of co-production activity has been undertaken to inform the development of the Local Area Reform Plan and associated action plan.

3.6 **Co-production and Stakeholder Engagement**

Consistent with national expectations, the local authority has acted as a system convener, with delivery shared across partners including education settings, health services, and the Integrated Care Board (ICB).

Engagement activity has included:

- Ongoing young people's engagement, facilitated through the Education Officer for Pupil Voice and Advocacy. Young people have also developed a video to share their experiences and aspirations, please click on the following links:
 - [School-Ambitions | Videos & Movies on Vimeo](#)
 - <https://vimeo.com/1174448275/0245b2c291?share=copy&fl=sv&fe=ci>
- The Education & Inclusion Summit held on 6th March 2026, where stakeholder feedback has directly shaped the development of the plan
- Alignment with the Best Start in Life Local Plan, ensuring a coherent and joined-up approach across early years and SEND priorities
 - [hartlepool-best-start-in-life-local-plan-2026](#)

- A structured programme of 8 co-production sessions during the week commencing 20th March 2026, including:
 - Early Years
 - Schools
 - Post-16-25 provision
 - Parent and Carer groups

- Approximately 200 stakeholders participated across these sessions, contributing to the development of priorities, identifying system challenges, and shaping proposed solutions

- Please find an image in **Appendix 1** of the detail captured in the parent/ carer sessions which will be a core focus of how direction of travel.

4 Proposals

4.1 Executive Summary of the Plan

Build a 0–25 system where CYP achieve and thrive through inclusive settings and strong partnerships

Hartlepool's inclusion system has undergone significant development in recent years, shaped particularly by participation in the Change Programme. This enabled us to test and refine inclusive models, strengthen relationships and align a shared moral purpose: ensuring CYP can access the support they need to thrive. Hartlepool benefits from strong partnerships, with embedded multi agency collaboration through clusters, inclusion panels, early intervention initiatives and shared workforce development. There is evidence of strengthened early identification, collaborative problem solving and growing inclusivity, alongside investment in broader continuums of provision spanning early language, mental health support and expanded specialist and mainstream capacity.

However, inclusivity is not yet experienced consistently. Variation in confidence and capacity, alongside increasing complexity of need, continues to affect families' experiences. While ambition is shared, there is a clear need to stabilise, align and consolidate practice before scaling further system change. It is from this position of emerging strength and recognised pressure that Hartlepool's reform journey is intentionally shaped.

By 2029, the system will operate as a coherent 0–25 partnership where inclusion is everyone's responsibility, strong relationships underpin decision making, and CYP experience a genuine sense of belonging within their local community.

Improve the capacity and capability of the mainstream and specialist workforce

Workforce capacity and capability will be a defining strength of Hartlepool's future system. Professionals will be confident, skilled and well supported, with access to

strong specialist input, effective coaching and modelling. Inclusive practice will be consistent across 0-25 settings, underpinned by a clear and trusted local offer that families and professionals understand and value. Improved post 16 pathways will strengthen transitions and destinations for young people with SEND, reducing fragmentation and improving long term outcomes.

Improve confidence of children, families and stakeholders in reform and system readiness.

Confidence in the system will be reflected in improved lived experience. Families will report that engagement is constructive and no longer relies on “fighting” language to secure support. CYP will experience needs identified earlier and met accurately, reducing escalation, crisis, PEX and breakdowns in provision. A clear and shared Hartlepool Promise, subscribed to by professionals, will underpin consistent everyday practice and transparent decision making.

Stabilise finances and improve value for money

Current performance shows rising EHCP demand, pressure on timeliness and increasing financial strain, reflecting national trends. By 2029, Hartlepool expects a more stable EHCP growth rate, improved timeliness, reductions in exclusions and elective home education linked to dissatisfaction, and a gradual improvement in the HNB position as mainstream capacity and early intervention strengthen, with a financial sustainable Experts at Hand offer.

Progress will be evidenced through improved value for money, strengthened QA, increased ability of mainstream settings to meet a broader range of needs, a more even distribution of children with SEND across schools, and fewer children needing out of area provision.

By 2029, Hartlepool will have achieved a calm, equitable and sustainable inclusion system where professionals are confident, families trust the system, and CYP are supported to thrive.

4.2 Vision and Goals

Hartlepool’s local area partnership is committed to building a confident, inclusive and sustainable 0–25 system where all CYP are supported to achieve, belong and thrive in their local communities.

Over the next three years, we will focus on three clear, measurable goals:

- Improve outcomes for children and young people
- Build confidence and trust in the local system
- Secure value for money and sustainability

These goals will deliver a calmer, more equitable and resilient inclusion system, where improved experiences, stronger outcomes and sustainable finances are achieved in parallel for Hartlepool’s CYP and families.

4.3 Local Blueprint for the Next Three Years

Over the next three years, Hartlepool will deliver a coherent, inclusive and financially sustainable 0–25 system rooted in early intervention, strong partnerships and a confident workforce. Central to this transformation is the Experts at Hand model, which will become the core infrastructure underpinning system delivery.

Experts at Hand as Core Infrastructure

By 2029, the learning and capacity created through the Change Programme will be embedded as a permanent system, with a phased transition to sustainable roles. A single, integrated Experts at Hand offer will bring together education, health (including SaLT and OT), educational psychology and specialist teaching expertise. This will provide clear, accessible routes into support without reliance on diagnosis or crisis, ensuring earlier intervention and more consistent support. Practitioners will benefit from embedded coaching, supervision and outreach through clusters, while parents will access a clear and trusted front door to advice and support.

We have set out our local blueprint across the 4 core building blocks.

Strengthening inclusion across education settings – organising places and provision to meet as many needs as possible, as close to home as possible, with all settings and providers moving towards a shared understanding and consistent practices around inclusion.

System leadership, local partnership collaboration and co-production – putting in place the enabling conditions across a local area that ensures planning and provision reflects the local area & is joined up, including strategic co-production with parent carers and children and young people.

Access to specialist support and local placements – improving collaboration between settings and deploying expertise from a range of specialist and expert sources, to support schools and settings to meet the needs of children and young people earlier and locally.

Encouraging inclusive culture & behaviours – using funding and shared accountability towards a system that works for children and families while achieving value for money.

4.4 What is the Local Road Map

Our strategic intent

2026/27 represents a foundational year in which we deliberately slow down to strengthen the core of the Hartlepool inclusion system. Year 1 focuses on building a cohesive, well-understood and evidence-informed system that is trusted by families, schools, and professionals, and capable of delivering consistently high-quality inclusive practice.

This year is explicitly about creating the conditions for sustainable improvement: clarity of offer, strength of governance, alignment of services, confident inclusive leadership, and shared ownership of system change. Year 1 is successful if the system is calmer, clearer, more aligned and better prepared to improve outcomes sustainably in Years 2 and 3.

Rather than introducing multiple new initiatives, we will consolidate, align and embed what we already know works, while improving coherence and consistency across the system.

Year 1 delivery model: Engage, Unite and Reflect

4.5 What is the Local Delivery Plan (2026/2027)

The following information sets out the activities we will undertake to move towards our vision and goals across the first year:

<p>Clarifying the Local Inclusion Support Offer Outcome</p> <p>A single, Local Inclusion Support Offer that is co-produced and clearly sets out thresholds, roles, pathways and support.</p>	<p>Front Door: The Nest Outcome</p> <p>Establishing The Nest – SEND, Inclusion and Early Years Centre as a single front door for families and professionals.</p>	<p>Experts at Hand Outcome</p> <p>Transitioning the Experts at Hand offer from Change Programme delivery into a sustainable, system-wide model.</p>
<p>Inclusive Leadership Programme Outcome</p> <p>Working closely with new and established strategic leaders across the local area to ensure shared vision and ownership.</p>	<p>Consistency in Inclusion Bases Outcome</p> <p>Developing a shared ethos, practice framework and quality standards for inclusion bases. Ensuring inclusion bases are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • consistent in intent and delivery, • effective in supporting inclusion, • not operating in ways that inadvertently exclude children by default. 	<p>Culture of Emotional Safety Outcome</p> <p>A system wide culture of emotional safety is embedded across Hartlepool, inclusive practice enabling it to be sustained for children and young people with diverse and complex needs.</p>
<p>Early Years Strengthening Outcome</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhancing the inclusion team through the appointment of a Senior Specialist Teacher for Early Years Inclusion. • Supporting early years practitioners to deliver confident, inclusive teaching. • Ensuring early years intelligence meaningfully informs wider system visioning and strategic planning. 	<p>Hartlepool Promise Outcome</p> <p>To have a town-wide Hartlepool Promise to all children and young people across education that drives excellence and inclusion.</p>	<p>Governance Review Outcome</p> <p>Completed a full governance review to ensure structures are robust, transparent and responsive to recent leadership changes in Hartlepool.</p>
<p>Education, Support and Overview Panel (ESOP)</p>	<p>Data Intelligence and Baselines</p>	<p>Quality Assurance and Evaluation Processes</p>

<p>Outcome</p> <p>Further developing our ESOP process to strengthen the system's monitoring, oversight and planning for children and young people accessing alternative provision and EOTAS packages.</p>	<p>Outcome</p> <p>Developing a robust SEND and inclusion data dashboard that brings together:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demand • Access • Outcomes • workforce intelligence 	<p>Outcome</p> <p>Schools and settings consistently use high quality self-evaluation and robust assurance processes to strengthen inclusive practice and ensure High Needs Block funding is targeted effectively to improve outcomes for children and young people.</p>
<p>Specialist Provision Planning and Alignment Outcome</p> <p>Increased local capacity and reduced out-of-area reliance</p>		

4.6 What will the 'Experts at Hand' Offer Look Like in Year 1

The 'Experts at Hand' offer underpins this vision by shifting Hartlepool from a referral and diagnosis-led system to a needs-led, relational and preventative model of support, shaped directly by stakeholder feedback gathered across the local authority through co-production discussions, including specific views on how 'Experts at Hand' should operate in practice.

Our aim:

- All settings (including early years, schools, alternative provision and post-16) can access timely, practical advice without waiting for diagnosis or crisis, addressing current barriers such as long waiting times, lack of capacity and unclear follow-up.
- Experts at Hand prioritises working alongside staff in daily practice, focusing on coaching, modelling, supervision and environmental design rather than one-off training that is not embedded.
- Specialist expertise is coordinated and aligned, reducing variation in advice and strengthening multi-agency working.
- The model builds capacity and sustainability by training key staff within settings to champion inclusive practice and retain expertise within settings.

Delivery Team Structure

The Experts at Hand delivery model will be underpinned by a multi-disciplinary team bringing together education, health and family support expertise:

<p>Senior Specialist Teachers (Inclusion):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SEMH (APST Lead) • Communication & Interaction • Lead SENDCo, Transition & Inclusive Mainstream Provision • Early Years 	<p>Alternative Provision Specialist Taskforce (APST):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 x Lead SEMH Practitioners • 2 x Lead SEND Practitioners • 1 x Assistant Psychologist • 1 x Family Support Worker • 1 x Parenting Support Worker 	<p>Educational Psychology:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 x Senior Specialist Educational Psychologist • 1 x Assistant Psychologist
<p>ELSEC (Early Language Support for Every Child):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 x Speech & Language Assistants • Band 8A equivalent Speech & Language Therapist (3 days per week) • 1 x Band 6 equivalent Speech & Language Therapist (3 days per week) • 1 x Specialist Teacher (4 days per week, term time only) 	<p>Wider Inclusion Support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 x Education Officer – SEND Navigator • 1 x Education Officer – Pupil Voice & Advocacy • 1 x Education Officer – In-Year Admissions • 1 x Administrative Assistant 	

The Experts at Hand model will complement and be strengthened by existing services, including, but not exclusively, the Educational Psychology Team, Small Steps, Early Years Team, Mental Health Support Teams, STARS (HI & VI Service) and the Best Start Family Hubs.

Year 1 Implementation Approach

During the summer term, services will work collectively to streamline processes, align delivery models and evaluate existing approaches across different programmes, ensuring a clear, coherent and unified system.

The model will be structured around clusters, ensuring that all elements of the offer are accessible to early years settings, schools and post-16 providers.

Throughout 2026/27, the focus will be on embedding this integrated approach, identifying gaps in provision and strengthening the offer iteratively, ensuring it remains responsive, sustainable and aligned to the needs of children, young people and families across Hartlepool.

The funding for the majority of these posts will be allocated from the Experts at Hand funding. However this will be heavily subsidised this year through the SEND &

AP Change Programme funding. We will now be able to cover the cost of the Senior Specialist Teachers (Inclusion), meaning we will return £297,680 to the 'SEMH pot'.

4.7 Conclusion: Building a Stronger Inclusive System

In summary, Hartlepool is well-positioned to respond to the national SEND reform agenda, building on the strong foundations established through the Change Programme, existing good practice already evidenced across schools and settings, and extensive co-production with partners, families and young people. The Local Area Reform Plan sets out a clear and ambitious, yet realistic, three-year journey focused on strengthening inclusion, improving outcomes and ensuring financial sustainability. Through a deliberate focus on Year 1 as a period of alignment and consolidation, the Council and its partners will create the conditions for long-term, system-wide improvement, ensuring that children and young people with SEND and their families are supported to achieve, belong and thrive within their local community.

5 **Recommendations**

5.1 Forum are asked to:

- a) note the return of £287,680 to the SEMH Pot
- b) note the contents of the report

Appendix 1



Report to Hartlepool Schools' Forum 8 June 2026
From Fiona Stobbs (Interim Assistant Director - Education)

Agenda Item 5 – Schools' Forum Membership and Constitution

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Terms of office for membership of Schools' Forum are set for a 2-year period. The current terms of office expire at the end of academic year 2025-26.
- 1.2 Schools' Forum elects a Chair and Vice-Chair for a 2-year period. The current appointments end at the end of academic year 2025-26.
- 1.3 Alongside the refresh of terms of office, Forum can review the effectiveness of Schools' Forum and propose any changes.
- 1.4 During spring term 2026, the frequency of meetings for Hartlepool Schools' Forum in comparison with neighbouring authorities was queried. Linked to this query was a request for an additional substitute to allow for strong attendance across the year. These points will be covered in this report.

2 Background

- 2.1 DfE published an Operational and Good Practice Guide for Schools' Forums in March 2021 that is kept under regular review.
- 2.2 Hartlepool Schools' Forum has a local constitution that was last updated in June 2024. This document is attached at **Appendix 1**.
- 2.2 Associated documents including Schools' Forum Structure, Schools' Forum Powers and Responsibilities and a Schools' Forum Self-Assessment Checklist are available from DfE.
- 2.3 Relevant publications are attached as **Appendix 2** to this report. The publications include a helpful self-assessment toolkit that contains a list of questions to be considered to assess the effectiveness of Forum. Members may wish to complete the checklist and share their completed list with the local authority for review and action. This will assist the authority, new Chair and Vice Chair in improving the effectiveness of Forum moving forward.

3 Summary Requirements – Forum Membership and Structure

- 3.1 There are no size restrictions on Forum, although “care should be taken to keep the Schools' Forum to a reasonable size to ensure that it does not become too unwieldy”.
- 3.2 Members should comprise 3 groups – school members, academy members and non-school members. The school members and academy members places must equal at least two-thirds of the overall membership. The balance of membership for maintained primary, maintained secondary and academy members should be broadly proportionate to pupil numbers in each category. There is no requirement

for academy member representation to be split across phases, although this may be encouraged where appropriate to ensure a better match to pupil volumes.

- 3.3 The requirements for School Members (i.e. maintained schools) are:
- Members must include a primary and secondary representative, unless there are no primary or secondary schools maintained by the local authority;
 - A member should be in place where the authority maintains either a nursery school, special school or Pupil Referral Unit;
 - Sub-groups for headteachers, headteacher representatives and governors can be established – these sub-groups do not need to be of equal size;
 - Headteachers can be represented by other senior members of staff within their school;
 - Governors can include interim executive members of an interim executive board;
 - As a minimum, there must be at least one headteacher and one governor representative within the School Members Group.
- 3.4 Guidance on the appointment of academy members includes:
- Academy members are not restricted to principals, senior staff or governors as members are there to “represent the proprietor bodies”;
 - It is possible that an academy member is appointed to more than one schools forum – this is acceptable where appropriate.
- 3.5 The requirements for Non-School Members are:
- Non-school Members should represent no more than one-third of membership;
 - A representative for 16-19 education must be included;
 - At least one PVI representative for the early years sector must be included;
 - Diocese representation should be considered – these could be a school-based representative such as a headteacher, or a person linked more generally with the diocese such as a member of the education board;
 - Non-school membership should be used to ensure that the needs of all pupils in the local authority are properly represented.
- 3.6 The Schools’ Forum must elect a Chair from amongst its own members. The position of Vice Chair can also be appointed to provide cover. Hartlepool custom and practice has developed to alternate between a Primary Phase Chair and Secondary Phase Chair, although this is not a requirement within the regulations.

4 Frequency of Meetings – Hartlepool Schools’ Forum

- 4.1 Schools’ Forums must meet at least four times each year.
- 4.2 The frequency and timing of meetings should be agreed in advance for the year ahead. These should take local authority deadlines into account, such as disapplication requests, onward decision making by Committee, submission of the APT (authority proforma tool), etc.
- 4.3 Meetings will need to be established at appropriate points to enable consultation and decision making.

- 4.4 During financial year 2024/25 and 2025/26, Hartlepool Schools' Forum met 7 times each year. Additional meetings are occasionally called because further information is requested from Forum before a recommendation could be made. In recent years, additional meetings have been required to respond to the later timing of funding information being published by DfE.
- 4.5 The recurring items and relevant consultation month are shown in the table below. This suggests 5 meetings per year. This would be based on Forum feeling able to consistently vote on their recommendations within a single meeting.

Month	Agenda Item	Constraints
June	Dedicated Schools Grant Final Outturn	For information only
	Scheme for Financing Schools	Updated Scheme must be published on Council website in a timely manner. Published by DfE in April and then local scheme reviewed and reported to Forum.
	Forum Membership (every 2 years)	Terms of office expire every 2 years
September	Special School Cost Model Proposals	Confirmation to each school of their payments from September each year. Growth to be approved by Committee.
	High Needs Block Projected Outturn Q1	For information only
	Growth Fund Disbursement	For information only
	Statutory Services Provided by the Authority	Onward to Committee for decision making and possible disapplication request
	Indicative Schools Block and Central School Services Block Budgets	Onward to Committee for decision making and possible disapplication request
	Centrally Retained Budgets – Early Years	Onward to Committee for decision making and possible disapplication request
November	High Needs Block Projected Outturn Q2	For information only
	Statutory Services Provided by the Authority (second meeting if required)	Onward to Committee for decision making and possible disapplication request
January	School Budget Shares	Onward to Committee for decision. APT deadline circa 21 January.
	Early Years – Hourly rates to Providers	Onward to Committee for decision. Providers must be notified of new hourly rates by end Feb latest.
February	High Needs Block Budget Requirement	Onward to Committee for decision. Budget must be approved by Council end March.
	High Needs Block Projected Outturn Q3	For information only

5 Local Constitution

- 5.1 Hartlepool Schools' Forum Constitution is attached at appendix 1.
- 5.2 Section 5 of the Hartlepool Constitution covers the appointment of substitutes. At the last meeting of Schools' Forum on 10 February 2026, the Chair raised an item for discussion regarding substitutes and their appropriate attendance at Forum. Where neither a Forum Member, nor their substitute is unable to attend a meeting,

attendance by an appropriate other person is allowed by permission of the Chair. This process has worked successfully to date and is only used exceptionally.

- 5.3 There are now examples of academy members attending other Schools' Forums outside of Hartlepool. To ensure strong attendance at Hartlepool's Schools' Forum, questions have arisen about the frequency of meetings and whether a second "permanent" substitute could be appointed.
- 5.4 Information to allow the frequency of meetings to be reviewed is covered at section 4 of this report.
- 5.5 Should the frequency of meetings reduce; Forum may decide that appointment of a second substitute is unnecessary.

6 **Terms of Office Renewal**

- 6.1 Terms of Office are set for a 2-year term that ends at the start of academic year 2026.
- 6.2 The split of schools membership (maintained and academy) already represents the latest academy conversions.
- 6.3 The local authority will manage the appointment of non-school members.
- 6.4 Maintained school members are asked to agree a representative to manage their new appointments.
- 6.5 A Forum member from the academy sector is asked to manage the new academy representation from September 2026.

7 **Recommendations**

- 7.1 Forum is asked to:
 - a) Review the frequency of meetings outlined at section 4 of this report and determine whether a move to 5 planned meetings per year is adopted;
 - b) Review the proposal for a second substitute;
 - c) Propose a Chair and Vice-Chair for a 2-year term from September 2026 (custom and practice would be to appoint a Chair from secondary phase and a Vice Chair from primary phase);
 - d) Agree a maintained schools lead to appoint to new terms of office from September 2026;
 - e) Agree an academy lead to appoint to new terms of office from September 2026;
 - f) Raise any concerns arising from a review of the DfE self-assessment toolkit attached to this report;
 - g) Instruct the local authority on any changes proposed to the local Hartlepool constitution.

Hartlepool Schools Forum Constitution

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Local authorities are required to establish and maintain a Schools Forum in their area, to advise on school funding matters. This is a requirement of the 2002 Education Act. The operation of Forums must comply with the requirements of The Schools Forums (England) Regulations 2021 (the Regulations).
- 1.2. This document sets out the Constitution of the Hartlepool Schools Forum (Forum), covering the administrative area served by Hartlepool Borough Council (the local authority).
- 1.3. This Constitution supersedes any previously approved Constitution.

2. Membership of the Forum

- 2.1. Membership of the Forum shall consist of maintained school members, academy members and non-school members, with school and academy members being at least two-thirds of the total membership. The balance between maintained primary, maintained secondary and academy members should be representative of the number of pupils in each area.
- 2.2. The Hartlepool Schools Forum shall have **23 members**. The membership is consistent with the Regulations, comprising elected school members and appointed non-school members. The composition of the Forum is set out in **APPENDIX A**. The Governor representative will represent both the primary and secondary sectors.
- 2.3. The numbers of members will be reviewed annually by the local authority. The local authority shall recommend amendments to the Constitution of the Forum where appropriate, taking account of the distribution of pupils between maintained schools and academies, as recorded in the previous October's census.
- 2.4. No person who is an elected councillor of the local authority or officer of the local authority may be appointed as a non-schools member of Schools Forum. However, the elected councillor with primary responsibility for education in the local authority and the elected councillor with primary responsibility for the resources of the local authority may attend and speak at the Forum meetings. Equally the local authority's Executive Director Children's & Joint Commissioning Services and Director of Finance, IT and Digital (or their representatives) may attend and speak at the Forum meetings.

- 2.5 Any person presenting a paper or other item to Forum on the meeting's agenda may attend but will be restricted to contributing to matters related to the item they are presenting.
- 2.6 An observer appointed by the Secretary of State may attend and speak at meetings of the Schools Forum.
- 2.7 All persons present at each Forum meeting will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.
- 2.8 All new members will be required to attend an induction programme which the Chair will organise.

3. Election and Appointment of School Members

- 3.1 Schools Forum members shall be appointed for a term of up to two years or until they cease to hold the office to which they were elected or appointed, or they resign from the Forum by giving notice in writing or verbally in a Forum meeting which is recorded in the minutes of that meeting. They shall not be restricted to headteachers, principals or governors.
- 3.2 School members of the Forum who are headteachers or headteachers representatives shall be nominated by the appropriate representative body, for example primary school headteachers nominate primary school representatives.
- 3.3 The appropriate represented body should determine how their member be elected, ensuring that there is a transparent and representative process by which Schools Forum members are nominated and elected to represent their constituents.
- 3.4 Academy members shall be appointed by the proprietors of academies in the local authority's area. It is for the proprietors to determine who shall be appointed a member of Forum. The local authority shall, however, advise the proprietors of the outcome of the annual review and set out its view of what would be an appropriate representation to reflect the numbers of pupils in each phase.
- 3.5 If the appropriate representative body is unable to nominate school or academy members within three months of a vacancy arising, or the selection process results in a tie between two or more candidates, then the local authority shall appoint a member instead.

4. Election and Appointment of Non-school members

- 4.1 The local authority shall seek nominations for non-school members from relevant bodies, as identified in **APPENDIX A**.
- 4.2 The local authority shall, on receipt of a nomination under paragraph 4.1:
 - (a) make an appointment pursuant to that nomination, or
 - (b) provide the relevant body with the grounds on which they determine not to make such an appointment.
- 4.3 Where the local authority has proceeded under paragraph 4.2 (b), they shall seek a further nomination from the relevant body concerned.
- 4.4 The local authority shall inform all its school members of the name and relevant body of all non-school appointees to the Schools Forum.
- 4.5 If a non-school member of the Schools Forum resigns, or otherwise ceases to serve as a member, the local authority will commence procedures to secure a replacement.
- 4.6 Non-school members may number no more than one third of Forum's total membership.

5. Arrangements for allowing substitutes for Schools Forum members

- 5.1 A named substitute will be recorded for each member of Forum. Substitutes are able to vote at meetings of the Schools Forum on behalf of school and non-school members.
- 5.2 It is the responsibility of members of the Schools Forum unable to attend a meeting to arrange for the named substitute to attend in their place and to receive any necessary papers, and the outcomes of any consultations with the group they represent.

6. Meetings and proceeding of the Forum

- 6.1. The Forum shall meet at least four times during an academic year.
- 6.2. Dates for meetings shall be agreed, at least a term in advance, for example autumn term meeting dates agreed at summer term meeting.
- 6.3. Dates for additional meetings shall be agreed at the preceding meeting, or in exceptional circumstances by the Chair.
- 6.4. Papers shall be circulated by email at least five working days to all headteachers as well as Forum members in advance of the meeting. In exceptional circumstances this requirement may be suspended with the

agreement of both the local authority's Executive Director Children's & Joint Commissioning Services (or their representative) and the Chair. Minutes of meetings shall be published on the local authority's website as soon as they are available.

- 6.5. All meetings of the Forum shall be public meetings.
- 6.6. Meetings shall be quorate if at least 40% of the total membership is present at the meeting (excluding vacancies).
- 6.7. If a meeting is not quorate it can proceed but it cannot legally take decisions (such as election of a Chair, or a decision relating to funding conferred by the funding regulations). A meeting that is not quorate can respond to consultation by the local authority.
- 6.8. The members of the Forum shall elect a person as Chair and a Vice-chair from among their number and determine the Chair's term of office, which shall not exceed two years.
- 6.9. Unless Schools' Forum agreed to formally accept apologies because of particular circumstances, failure by a Forum member, or their representative, to attend two consecutive meetings will result in the member being asked to stand down.
- 6.10. The members of the Forum may not elect as Chair any member of the Forum who is an elected member of the Council or officer of the local authority.
- 6.11. Members of the Forum may determine their own voting procedures, excepting that all members of the Forum shall be entitled to vote on all matters put to a vote with the exception of:
 - matters relating to the formulae to be used by the local authority to determine the amounts to be allocated to schools and early years providers, where voting is restricted to school and academy members and non-school members representing early years providers
 - decisions about retaining funding for statutory duties relating to maintained schools only is limited to maintained primary, maintained secondary and PRU members.
- 6.12. Voting procedures and outcome shall be formally recorded in the minutes of the Forum.
- 6.13. The proceedings of the Forum are not invalidated by:
 - any vacancy among their number
 - any defect in the election or appointment of any member
 - any defect in the election of the Chair.

- 6.14. The Forum shall have the discretion to convene working parties of the Forum, either with a nominated membership, or open to all members of the Forum wishing to attend. Working parties shall report to the Forum on the outcome of their meetings. The Forum can invite other persons to participate in working groups but should agree this in advance and such a decision should be recorded in the minutes of the meeting at which this was decided.
- 6.15. The Forum shall have the discretion to nominate named members of the Forum to take decisions on its behalf where an item has been discussed at a meeting, but a final decision cannot be taken because information is not available at the time of the meeting. Decisions taken in this way shall be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

June 2024



Education & Skills
Funding Agency

Schools Forum

Operational and good practice guide

March 2021

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Introduction

1. This guide is designed to provide local authority officers and schools forum elected members with advice and information on good practice in relation to the operation of schools forums.
2. It is organised in two sections:
 - section 1 provides information on the constitutional and organisational requirements for schools forums
 - section 2 covers a number of key aspects of the operation of schools forums at local level, drawing on good practice from a number of schools forums
3. GOV.UK contains details of all the announcements, documents and other information relating to school funding and schools forums, including the National funding formula (NFF) The website also has a range of useful links to other sites that may be of relevance to schools forum members.
4. A short [guide to the schools forum for schools and academies](#), which may be helpful to stakeholders and the wider school family, is available on GOV.UK.
5. If you have any queries about the operation of schools forums please contact Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) using the [ESFA enquiry form](#).

Section 1 – schools forum regulations: constitution and procedural issues

Regulations

6. [National regulations](#)¹ govern the composition, constitution and procedures of schools forums. Local authorities can provide schools forum members with a copy of these regulations or alternatively they can be accessed at:

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2012/2261/contents>.

7. The School and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations 2021 amended The Schools Forums (England) (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 to make permanent provisions to enable schools forums meetings to be held remotely. This includes (but is not limited to) telephone conferencing, video conferencing, live webcast, and live interactive streaming. Where a schools forum decides to hold a public meeting by remote means only, the forum should provide support or make alternative arrangements so that any interested parties who do not have telephone or online access can attend virtual meetings.

Schools forum powers

8. Schools forums generally have a consultative role. However, there are situations in which they have decision making powers. The respective roles of schools forums, local authorities and the DfE are summarised in [schools forum powers and responsibilities](#). The overarching areas on which schools forums make decisions on local authority proposals are:

- de-delegation from mainstream maintained schools budgets (separate approval will be required by the primary and secondary phase members of schools forum), for prescribed services to be provided centrally
- to create a fund for significant pupil growth in order to support the local authority's duty for place planning (basic need), including pre-opening and diseconomy of scale costs, and agree the criteria for maintained schools and academies to access this fund
- to create a fund for falling rolls for good or outstanding schools if the schools' surplus capacity is likely to be needed within the next three years to meet rising pupil numbers and agree the criteria for maintained schools and academies to access this fund

¹ Schools Forums (England) Regulations 2012 (S.I. 2012/2261) (as amended)

- agreeing other centrally retained budgets, including for local authority statutory responsibilities (where these relate to maintained schools only, voting is by the primary, secondary, special and PRU members of schools forum)
- funding for central early years expenditure, which may include funding for checking eligibility of pupils for an early years place, the early years pupil premium and/or free school meals
- authorising a reduction in the schools budget in order to fund a deficit arising in central expenditure, or from de-delegated services, which is to be carried forward from a previous funding period in the 2018 to 2019 funding year the schools block is ring-fenced. Local authorities require schools forum approval in order to move up to 0.5% from the schools block to other blocks
- in each of these cases, the local authority can appeal to the Secretary of State if the schools forum rejects its proposal.

9. Local authorities should be aware that the provisions of the [Local Government Act 2000](#) restrict the delegation of local authority decisions to Cabinet, a member of Cabinet, a Committee of Cabinet or an officer of the Council, which would not include schools forums. As a result the local authority cannot delegate its decision making powers to schools forum, for example, decisions on the funding formula.

10. Regulations state that the local authority must consult the schools forum annually in connection with various schools budget functions, namely:

- amendments to the school funding formula, for which the voting is restricted by the exclusion of non-schools members except for PVI representatives
- arrangements for the education of pupils with special educational needs in particular the places to be commissioned by the local authority and schools and the arrangements for paying top-up funding
- arrangements for the use of pupil referral units and the education of children otherwise than at school, in particular the places to be commissioned by the local authority and schools and the arrangements for paying top-up funding
- arrangements for early years provision
- administrative arrangements for the allocation of central government grants paid to schools via the local authority
- There's no specific definition of these consultation requirements over and above the wording in the regulations. It's a matter for the local authority to decide on the appropriate level of detail it needs to generate a sufficiently informed response from schools forum.

11. Consultation must also take place when a local authority is proposing a contract for supplies and services which is to be funded from the Schools Budget and is in excess of the EU procurement thresholds. The consultation must cover the terms of the contract at least one month prior to the issue of invitations to tender.

12. The schools forum has the responsibility of informing the governing bodies of all schools maintained by the local authority of the results of any consultations carried out by the local authority relating to the issues in paragraphs 12 and 13 above.

13. Local authorities will need to discuss with the schools forum any proposals that they intend to put to the Secretary of State to:

- vary the MFG
- use exceptional factors
- vary pupil numbers (Secretary of State approval is no longer required for increases relating to changes in admission limits or reorganisations)
- allow additional categories of, or spending on, central budgets
- amend the sparsity factor
- vary the lump sum for amalgamating schools
- vary the protection for special schools and special academies
- move up to 0.5% from the schools block, where the schools forum do not agree, or move more than 0.5% from the schools block

Proposals will then need to be considered by the Secretary of State.

Membership

14. The Schools Forums Regulations provide a framework for the appointment of members, but allow a considerable degree of discretion in order to accommodate local priorities and practice. A quick guide to the [structure of the schools forums](#) is available.

15. There is no maximum or minimum size of a schools forum. Authorities will wish to take various issues into account in deciding the actual size, including the need to have full representation for various types of school, and the local authority's policy on representation of non-schools members. However, care should be taken to keep the schools forum to a reasonable size to ensure that it does not become too unwieldy.

16. Types of member: schools forums must have 'schools members', 'academies member(s)' if there is at least one academy in the local authority's area and 'non-schools members'. Schools and academies members together must number at least two-thirds of the total membership of the schools forum and the balance between maintained primary, maintained secondary and academies members must be broadly proportionate to the pupil numbers in each category, so the structure of Forum should be regularly reviewed, we would suggest good practice is to review the membership as a standing agenda item at each meeting. Academies members must represent mainstream academies and, if there are any in the local authority area, special academies and alternative provision academies. There is no requirement for academies members to represent specific primary and secondary phases, but it may be encouraged to ensure representation remains broadly proportionate to pupil numbers. Academy members must be separately elected and designated from maintained school representatives, please see paragraph 28.

17. Schools forum members will need the skills and competencies to manage Forum business (as detailed in [school forum powers and responsibilities](#)) and to take a strategic view across the whole education estate whilst acting as representative of the group that has elected them. Furthermore, they should be easily contactable and pro-active in raising the profile of issues and communicating decisions, and the reasons behind them, effectively. Good practice for schools forums would be to offer training to new or existing members who may benefit from this.

Term of office

18. The term of office for each schools member and academies member should be stipulated by the local authority at the time of appointment. Such stipulation should follow published rules and be applied in a consistent manner between members. They need not have identical terms – there may be a case for varied terms so that there is continuity of experience rather than there being a complete change in the membership at a single point. The term of office should not be of a length that would hinder the requirement for the structure of the schools forum to mirror the type of provision in light of the pace of academy conversions. Examples of how this may work include:

- holding vacancies until the schools forum structure is reviewed providing that this does not mean holding vacancies for an unreasonable length of time, for example, we would expect this vacancy to be filled for the following term
- increasing the size of the schools forum temporarily to appoint additional academy members, then deleting schools member posts at the end of a term of office or when a vacancy arises
- considering continuity of service; where an academy conversion affects the school of a current schools member, would academies consider appointing that person as an academies member

19. The length of term of office for non-schools members is at the discretion of the local authority. Schools and academies must be informed, within a month of the appointment of any non-schools member, of the name of the member and the name of the body that that member represents.

20. As well as the term of office coming to an end, a member ceases to be a member of the Schools Forum if he or she resigns from the schools forum or no longer occupies the office by which he or she became eligible for election, selection or appointment to the schools forum. For example;

- a secondary schools member must stand down if their school converts to an academy
- a schools member representing community primary school governors who is no longer a governor of a community primary school in the relevant local authority must cease to hold office on the schools forum even if they remain a governor of a school represented by another group or sub-group
- other situations in which membership of the schools forum ends are if a member gives notice in writing to the local authority and, in the case of a non-schools member, the member is replaced by the local authority, for example at the request of the body which the member represents

Schools members

21. Schools members represent specified phases or types of maintained schools within the local authority. As a minimum, schools forums must contain representatives of two groups of schools: primary and secondary schools, unless there are no primary or secondary schools maintained by the local authority. Middle schools and all through schools are treated according to their deemed status.

22. Where a local authority maintains one or more special schools the schools forum must have at least one schools member from that sector. The same applies to nursery schools and pupil referral units (PRUs).

23. The local authority then has discretion to divide the groups referred to in paragraph 16 and 17 into one or more of the following sub-groups:

- headteachers or headteachers' representatives in each group
- governors in each group
- headteachers or headteachers representatives and governors in each group
- representatives of a particular school category, for example, voluntary aided

24. Headteachers can be represented by other senior members of staff within their school. Governors can include interim executive members of an interim executive board. The sub-groups do not have to be of equal size; for example, there

may be more representatives of headteachers of primary schools than governors of such schools, or vice versa. The membership structure of the schools forum should ensure there is sufficient representation of each type of schools member in each group to ensure that debate within the schools forum is balanced and representative. As a minimum, there must be at least one representative of headteachers and one representative of governors among the schools members.

25. Whatever the membership structure of schools members on a schools forum, the important issue is that it should reflect most effectively the profile of education provision across the local authority to ensure that there is not an in-built bias towards any one phase or group.

Election and nomination of schools members

26. The relevant group or sub-group is probably best placed to determine how their schools members should be elected.

27. It's good practice for those who draw up the scheme to ensure that a vacancy amongst a represented group would be filled by a nominee elected according to a process that has been determined by all those represented in that group, for example, community primary school headteachers, or secondary school governors, ensuring that everyone represented has had the opportunity to stand for election and/or vote in such an election. The process must be restricted to the group in question; a headteachers phase group could only vote as a whole for headteacher members if the voting excluded academies, as academies members form a separate group.

28. It's not appropriate for a single person to be elected to represent more than one group or sub-group concurrently, for instance, if they were a governor at a primary and secondary school. They can stand for election from either group but can be appointed to represent only one of those groups.

29. The purpose of ensuring that each group or sub-group is responsible for their election process is to guarantee that there is a transparent and representative process by which members of schools forums are nominated to represent their constituents.

30. Appropriate support to each group or sub-group to manage their election processes should be offered by the clerk of a schools forum, or the committee/democratic services of a local authority. This may just include the provision of advice but may also consist of providing administrative support in actually running the elections themselves.

31. As a minimum, we would recommend that the clerk of a schools forum make a record of the process by which the relevant schools within each group and sub-group elect their nominees to the schools forum and be able to advise the Chair

of the schools forum and local authority on action that needs to be taken, where necessary, to seek new nominees.

32. In determining the process by which elections should be operated it is perfectly legitimate for a local authority to devise, in consultation with their schools forum, a model scheme for the relevant schools within a group or sub-group to consider and be invited to adopt. However, such a model scheme cannot be imposed on that body of schools: adaptations and/or alternative schemes may be adopted. A single scheme need not be adopted universally.

33. Care should be taken to ensure that every eligible member of a group or sub-group has an opportunity to be involved in the determination of their group's election process, is given the opportunity to stand for election if they choose to do so, and is involved in the election of their representative(s).

34. It would not be compliant with the regulations for the steering committee or Chair of a 'parent' group simply to make a nomination to represent their group or sub-group on a schools forum. Schools members must be elected, subject to paragraph 39 below.

35. The local authority may set a date by which the election should take place and must appoint the schools member if the election has not taken place by that date. The person appointed should be a member of the relevant group.

36. We would recommend that any scheme takes into account a number of factors:

- the process for collecting names of those wishing to stand for election
- the timescale for notifying all constituents of the election and those standing
- the arrangements for dispatching and receiving ballots
- the arrangements for counting and publicising the results
- any arrangements for unusual circumstances such as only one candidate standing in an election
- whether existing members can stand for re-election

37. In the event of a tie between two or more candidates, then the local authority must appoint the schools member instead. The local authority may decide to appoint someone else rather than one of the candidates and might wish to take into account the experience or expertise of the individuals, and the balance between the different types of school represented on the schools forum.

Election and nomination of academies members

38. Academies members must be elected by the proprietor bodies of the academies in the local authority's area, and they are probably best placed to determine the process. Academies members are there to represent the proprietor bodies of academies and are, therefore, not necessarily restricted to principals, senior staff or governors. The same factors should be taken into account as for the election of schools members, set out in paragraphs 28 to 39. For the avoidance of doubt, Free Schools, University Technical Colleges and Studio Schools are classed as academies for this purpose. There is no distinction between sponsored and converter academies.

39. There are three sub-groups for academy members: mainstream academies, special academies and alternative provision academies and it is for the proprietors of academies within each of these sub-groups to elect their representatives. It is not appropriate, therefore, for headteacher phase groups to determine representation unless the academy proprietors have agreed and even then the voting would need to exclude maintained school representatives. There is no requirement for academies members to be split into primary and secondary sub-groups. However, local authorities may wish to encourage academies to consider the pupil proportions across all academies when electing their representatives.

40. Where there is only one academy in a sub-group in the local authority's area, then their proprietor body must select the person who will represent them.

41. It is possible that a single person be appointed as an academies member to more than one schools forum, for example if an academy chain is located across multiple local authorities, providing they are elected on each occasion in accordance with the agreed election process for each separate schools forum.

42. As with schools members, the local authority may set a date by which the election should take place and must appoint an academies member if the election does not take place by that date, or if an election results in a tie between two or more candidates.

Non-schools members

43. Non-schools members may number no more than a third of a schools forum's total membership (excluding observers, see paragraph 58). A representative of providers of 16-19 education must be elected from those providers. This includes those in the FE sector (FE and sixth form colleges) and other post-school institutions that specialise in special education needs (SPNs), where 20% or more of their students reside in the local authority's area. As with academies the providers are probably best placed to determine the election process.

44. The local authority must appoint at least one person to represent early years providers from the private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sector. Early years

PVI settings need to be represented because funding for the free entitlement for three and four year olds and eligible two year olds comes from the Dedicated Schools Grant, and all settings are funded through the Early Years Single Funding Formula (EYSFF).

45. Before appointing additional non-schools members to the schools forum, the local authority must consider whether the Church of England and Roman Catholic dioceses situated in the local authority's area; and, where there are schools or academies in the area with a different religious character, the appropriate faith group, should be represented on the schools forum. If diocesan authorities nominate members for appointment as non-schools members they may wish to consider what type of representative would be most appropriate, schools-based such as a headteacher or governor, or someone linked more generally with the diocese, for example a member of the education board.

46. It's also good practice for local authorities to ensure that the needs and interests of all the pupils in the local authority are adequately represented by the members of a schools forum. The interests of pupils in maintained schools can be represented by schools members. Some pupils in a local authority, however, are not in maintained schools but instead are educated in hospitals, independent special schools and non-maintained special schools. Certain types of non-schools members can play an important role in representing the interests of these groups of pupils. They can also play a role in representing the interests and views of the services that support those groups of vulnerable and at risk pupils who nevertheless are on the roll of maintained schools, such as looked after children and children with special educational needs.

47. The purpose of non-schools members is also to bring greater breadth of discussion to schools forum meetings and ensure that stakeholders and partners other than schools are represented. Organisations which typically provide non-schools members are trades unions, professional associations and representatives of youth groups. Parent groups could also be considered. However, as there are clearly limited numbers of non-schools members able to be on a schools forum, care should be taken to ensure that an appropriate representation from wider stakeholders is achieved.

Other membership issues

48. There are three restrictions placed on who can be a non-schools member of a schools forum. The local authority cannot appoint:

- an elected member of the local authority who is appointed to the executive of that local authority (a lead member/portfolio holder) ('executive members')
- the Director of Children's Services or any officer employed or engaged to work under the management of the Director of Children's Services, and who does not

directly provide education to children (or manage those who do) ('relevant officer' (a) and (b))

- other officers with a specific role in management of and/or who advise on funding for schools ('relevant officer' part (c))

49. Schools forums have the power to approve a limited range of proposals from their local authority: the restrictions ensure that there is no conflict of interest between the proposing body (the local authority) and the approving body (the schools forum).

50. However, non-executive elected members and those officers who are employed in their capacity as headteachers or teachers and those who directly manage a service which provides education to individual children and/or advice to schools on, for example, learning and behavioural matters are eligible to be members of schools forums.

51. In the case of non-executive elected members, they may be a schools member (by virtue of them being a school governor), an academies member or a non-schools member. As a non-schools member they may be well placed to fulfil the broader overview and scrutiny role they have within the local authority in general.

52. However, the inclusion of non-executive elected members and certain officers is not a requirement. Many schools forums do not have such members on them and it is for each local authority and schools forum to consider how best to ensure the right balance of school and non-school representation on the schools forum, taking into account their local circumstances and preferences.

The role of executive elected members

53. A schools forum needs to ensure that there are systems in place for executive members of the Council to be aware of its views on specific issues and, in particular, any decisions it takes in relation to the Schools Budget and individual budget shares.

54. Executive members with responsibility for education/children's services or resources of the local authority are able to participate in schools forum meetings. By doing so such elected members are able to contribute to the discussion and receive first-hand the views of the schools forum: it is clearly good practice for this to be the case and the regulations provide the right for executive members to attend and speak at schools forum meetings. However, there is no requirement for this to happen so at the very least there should be clear channels of communication between the schools forum and executive members. Communication may also be assisted if schools forum members attended relevant Cabinet meetings as members of the public, for example, when the funding formula is decided.

Recording the composition of schools forums

55. Each local authority must make a written record of the composition of its schools forum detailing the numbers of schools members and by which group or sub-group they were elected, the number of academies members and the number of non-schools members, their terms of office, how they were chosen and whom they represent. This record should also indicate the term of office for schools and academies members. It would be helpful if this were published on the schools forum website so schools and wider stakeholders can easily find who their representatives are.

Observers

56. The Regulations provide that the Secretary of State can appoint an observer to attend and speak at schools forum meetings, for example a representative from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). This allows a conduit for national policy to be discussed at a local level and provide access for schools forum to an additional support mechanism, for example, where there are highly complex issues to resolve.

Participation of local authority officers at meetings

57. Only specific officers can speak at meetings of the schools forum. These officers are:

- Director of Children's Services or their representative
- Chief Financial Officer or their representative
- any person invited by the schools forum to provide financial or technical advice
- any person presenting a paper to the schools forum but their ability to speak is limited to the paper that they are presenting

58. In the majority of cases schools forums are supported by a specific officer. In the course of their work, however, schools forums will be required to consider a whole range of issues and they may consider it appropriate that other officers attend for specific items of business. Where this is the case, the local authority should meet the schools forum's requests as far as possible. It is best practice to record attendance at meetings as well as membership to ensure elected members are attending and contributing to discussions.

Procedures

59. Many procedural matters are not prescribed in the regulations and are at the discretion either of the local authority or the schools forum itself. However, there are requirements in the regulations relating to:

- **Quorum:** A meeting is only quorate if 40% of the total membership is present (this excludes any observers, and it is 40% of the current membership excluding vacancies). If a meeting is inquorate it can proceed but it cannot legally take decisions (election of a Chair, or a decision relating to funding conferred by the funding regulations). An inquorate meeting can respond to local authority consultation, and give views to the local authority. It would normally be good practice for the local authority to take account of such 'unofficial' views, but it's not legally obliged to do so. In practice, the arrangements for meetings should be made to reduce the chance of a problem with the quorum. The quorum stipulation is in the regulations to help ensure the legitimacy of decisions
- **Election of a Chair:** Under the Regulations, if the position of Chair falls vacant the schools forum must decide how long the term of office of the next Chair will be. This can be for any period, but the schools forum should consider carefully whether a period exceeding two years is sensible. A long period will also cause problems if the member elected as Chair has a term of office as a member which comes to an end before their term of office as Chair ends. The schools forum must elect a Chair from amongst its own members, so it is not possible to elect an independent Chair. In addition any elected member of the local authority or officer of the local authority who is a member of a schools forum may not hold the office of Chair. Schools forums can also appoint to a position of vice Chair to provide cover if the Chair is absent or the post vacant
- **Voting procedures:** The Regulations provide that a schools forum may determine its own voting procedures save that voting on:
 - the funding formula is limited to schools members, academies members and PVI representatives
 - de-delegation is limited to the specific primary and secondary phase of maintained schools members
 - retaining funding for statutory duties relating to maintained schools only is limited to maintained primary, secondary, special and PRU members
- **The powers which schools forums:** have to take decisions on a range of funding matters increase the importance of clear procedures, for example, decisions are made on a simple majority or the threshold to be met if higher. These procedures should take account of any use of working groups by the schools forum, for example a decision might be taken by voting to accept and adopt a report by a working group (see paragraph 65). As part of any voting

procedure there should be clarity in the procedures for recording the outcome of a vote, and any resolutions a schools forum makes in relation to any vote taken

- **Substitutes:** the local authority must make arrangements to enable substitutes to attend and vote (where appropriate) at schools forum meetings. This applies to schools members, academies members and non-schools members. The arrangements must be decided in consultation with schools forum members
- **Defects and vacancies:** The Regulations provide that proceedings of the schools forum are not invalidated by defects in the election or appointment of any member, or the appointment of the Chair. Nor does the existence of any vacancy on the schools forum invalidate proceedings (see paragraph 61 on quorum)
- **Timing:** schools forums must meet at least four times a year
- **Meeting:** schools forums can meet remotely. This includes (but is not limited to) telephone conferencing, video conferencing, live webcast, and live interactive streaming.

60. Where the regulations make no provision on a procedural matter, local discretion should be exercised. It is for the local authority to decide how far it wishes to establish rules for the schools forum to follow, in the form of standing orders. While it is entitled to do so, it is of course good practice to allow the schools forum to set its own rules so far as possible.

Public access

61. Schools forums are more than just consultative bodies. They also have an important role to play in approving certain proposals from their local authority and are therefore involved in the decision making process surrounding the use of public money at local level. As a result schools forums are required to be open to the public. Furthermore papers, agendas and minutes must be publicly available well in advance of each meeting. It's good practice that notification that the schools forum is a public meeting is included on the website and papers are published at least a week in advance. Local authorities should ensure that the websites are accessible and easy to find.

62. Some schools forums already operate very much along the lines of a local authority committee. This is perfectly legitimate and will provide a consistent framework for the running of meetings that are open to the public, and the publishing of papers and agendas well in advance of the meeting and minutes published promptly as required under Regulation 8(13) of the Schools Forum Regulations 2012.

63. Local authorities should ensure that their schools forum clerk's contact details are published on their website and that it is clear to interested parties how they can attend the meeting remotely.

Working groups

64. It's open to a schools forum to set up working groups of members to discuss specific issues, and to produce draft advice and decisions for the schools forum itself to consider. The groups can also include wider representation, for example, an early years reference group can represent all the different types of provider to consider the detail of the early years single funding formula. The reference group would then be able to give its considered view on the local authority's proposals to the schools forum. The schools forum should not delegate actual decisions or the finalisation of advice to a working group, as this may have the effect of excluding legitimate points of view. These have proved effective for larger local authorities; examples of some working groups are for high needs and early years.

Urgent business

65. It's good practice for the local authority to agree with its schools forum an urgency procedure to be followed when there is a genuine business need for a decision or formal view to be expressed by the schools forum, before the next scheduled meeting. The local authority may of course call an unscheduled meeting; but it may also wish to put in place alternative arrangements such as clearance by email correspondence or some other means. Such instances should be avoided so far as possible but are legitimate provided all members of the schools forum have an opportunity to participate, the logistics provide a reasonable opportunity for consideration and the local authority policy on data security is not compromised.

66. It's not legal for the Chair to take a decision on behalf of the schools forum, no matter how urgent the matter in question; but a schools forum may wish to put in place a procedure for the Chair to give the local authority a view on an urgent issue.

Resources of the schools forum

67. The costs of a schools forum fall in the Central School Services Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).

68. It's legitimate to charge the running costs of schools forums to this budget including any agreed and reasonable expenses for members attending meetings, the costs of producing and distributing papers and costs room hire and refreshments and for clerking of meetings. Beyond these costs some schools forums have a budget of their own to use for activities such as commissioning research or other reports.

Section 2 – effective schools forums

Introduction

69. As the previous section outlined, local authorities have responsibility for establishing schools forums. They also have an ongoing responsibility to provide them with appropriate support, information and guidance in carrying out their functions and responsibilities.

70. The following outlines some aspects of what local authorities and schools forums should consider in ensuring that their schools forums are as effective as possible. The pace of academy conversions in particular means that this significant sector must be properly represented and feel that it is able to play a meaningful part in the discussions of the schools forum.

71. Central to the effectiveness or otherwise of a schools forum will be the relationship between it and its local authority. The local authority will have a significant influence on this: the support it provides; the resources it devotes and the weight it gives to the views of schools forums all contribute to the nature of the relationship. There are therefore a number of characteristics of this relationship that are particularly important:

- partnership: having a shared understanding of the priorities, issues and concerns of schools, academies and the local authority
- effective support: the business of the schools forum is supported by the local authority in an efficient and professional manner
- openness: it's important that a schools forum feels it is receiving open, honest and objective advice from its local authority
- responsiveness: local authorities should as far as possible be responsive to requests from their schools forums and their members. Schools forums themselves should also be aware of the resource implications of their requests
- strategic view: members of schools forum should consider the needs of the whole of the educational community, rather than using their position on a schools forum to advance their own sectional or specific interests
- challenge and scrutiny: schools forums may be asked to agree to proposals from their local authority that will have an effect on all schools and academies in the local area. The extent to which schools forums can scrutinise and challenge such proposals is an important aspect of their effectiveness

72. The characteristics identified above are just some of the aspects that will contribute to an effective schools forum. The following provides more detail on some of the specific issues that local authorities and schools forums may wish to consider in thinking about their own arrangements.

Induction of new members

73. When new members join the schools forum appropriate induction materials should be provided. These might include material relating to the operation of the schools forum together with background information about the local and national school funding arrangements. Typically they might comprise:

- the constitution of the schools forum
- a list of members including contact details and their terms of office
- any locally agreed terms of reference explaining the relationship between the schools forum and the local authority
- copies of minutes of previous meetings
- the programme of schools forum meetings for the year
- the local schools forum web address

74. This Operational and Good Practice Guide, suitably supplemented by local material, should also be provided to new members on their appointment.

75. Where there is sufficient turnover of schools forum members in any particular year the local authority may wish to organise a one-off induction event to brief new members. Such an event would usefully include an outline of the role of the schools forum and the national funding arrangements for schools and local authorities. It might also include an explanation of the local funding formula and any proposals for review. The opportunity could also be taken to explain the main reporting requirements for school and local authority expenditure.

Training

76. Ideally schools forum members should be able to use some of the budget set aside for schools forum running costs for accessing relevant training activities. Some training will be provided by officers of the local authority but members may wish to attend national or regional events, the costs of which, where necessary, can be supported from the schools forum budget. Local and national bodies have a key role to play in developing the competencies of forum members.

77. Training will need to be provided in response to any changes in the role of the schools forum and national developments in respect of school funding, to ensure that members can be fully effective when detailed discussions are taking place.

Agenda setting

78. The process by which the agenda for a meeting or cycle of meetings is set is in many respects one of the key determinants of the effectiveness or otherwise of a schools forum.

79. The frequency and timing of meetings of the schools forum should be agreed in advance of each financial or academic year; these should take into consideration deadlines for the local authority such as disapplication requests and the submission of the authority proforma tool (APT). It's good practice to publish the dates of meetings on the schools forum website. In drawing up this cycle of meetings, in consultation with the schools forum, the local authority should provide a clear overview of the key consultative and decision-making points in the school funding cycle. These will be drawn from a combination of national and local information and should inform the basic agenda items that each meeting needs to cover. For instance meetings will need to be scheduled at appropriate points to enable the schools forum to consider the outcomes of local consultations and national announcements.

80. Although the business of schools forums must be open and transparent, it is recognised that from time to time items of a confidential nature will need to be discussed. It's recommended that authorities apply the same principles that they apply to Council or Cabinet meetings when judging an item to be confidential and adopt similar practices for dealing with those reports in the meeting, for example placing them together at the end of the agenda.

Preparation for a schools forum meeting

81. It's vital that the schools forum is transparent, open and has clear communication lines to all of the members that are represented. This ensures the wider school family are aware of the business discussed, the impact on their setting and the reasons for the decisions.

82. The vast majority of a schools forum's business will be transacted on the basis of prepared papers. It is therefore important that these are concise, informative and produced in a timely and consistent manner. Recommendations should be clearly set out at the beginning of each report. It's also helpful if the front of the report confirms whether the report is for information or decision and who is eligible to vote where relevant.

83. It's good practice for the schools forum and local authority to agree a standard for papers. It is usual for papers to be dispatched at least one week prior to the meeting at which they will be discussed to allow members to consider them and if necessary canvass views from the group they are representing. Papers should be published on the local authority's website at this time to enable representations to be made to schools forum members.

84. Consistency in the presentation of papers also contributes to the effectiveness of meetings: it helps set the tone of meetings, facilitate the engagement of all members and signal the importance the local authority attaches to the work of the schools forum. Ideally such a standard should be agreed between the schools forum and local authority. The publishing of papers as a single pdf file is helpful as it saves time and avoids accessing multiple documents both in advance of, and during, the meeting. An Executive Summary of the reports can provide schools forum members and members of the public with an overview of the agenda and the decisions required.

85. The publishing of papers on a publicly available website well in advance of the meeting ensures that all interested parties are able to access papers. Some schools forums ensure that each represented group meets in the days immediately prior to the schools forum meeting to ensure the agenda is discussed and schools forum members are properly briefed by the group they represent. Although on occasions it's inevitable that schools forums will receive late, or tabled reports it does create some difficulty for members as they will not have been able to seek the views of those they represent.

86. Schools forums can consider adopting a flexible arrangement for time immediately prior to the meeting. For example it could be used for training of new members, or as a drop-in session for members to ask items of clarification, or for members to meet without officers to discuss the agenda.

Chairing the schools forum

87. The Chair of a schools forum plays a key role in setting the tone, pace and overall dynamic of the schools forum. They should provide an environment within which all members are able to contribute fully to discussions and guide the schools forum to making well informed decisions.

88. The relationship between the Chair and the local authority is therefore vital. The Chair should be very clear on the substance of the agenda items, understand the issues involved and the decisions and/or actions that need to be taken in respect of School Forum business. It's good practice for there to be a pre-meeting between the senior officer of the local authority supporting the schools forum and the Chair of the schools forum to ensure that all the issues are clearly understood.

89. Equally, the Chair has the responsibility of representing the views of the schools forum back to the local authority: for instance, they should, where appropriate, take the initiative to make suggestions for improvements to the way the business is conducted, and, in exceptional cases and with support of the members of the schools forum take the view that they do not have sufficient information on which to base a decision and ask that an item is deferred until further information is available. However, in doing so, the Chair and schools forum should be fully aware of the consequences of deferral.

90. The independence of the schools forum is paramount. Enhancing the role of Chair to a paid position, rather than the reimbursement of reasonable expenses, could blur the lines of independence. Similarly, if the Chair undertakes significant work for the local authority in another capacity, for example as an external consultant, they could be viewed as equivalent to an officer of the local authority.

91. Local authorities could consider if sharing contact details of the schools forum Chair with neighbouring authorities would be helpful for peer support and improving networking opportunities.

Clerking the schools forum

92. Clerking of a schools forum should be seen as more than just writing a note of the meeting. A good clerk provides an invaluable link between the members of the schools forum, the Chair and the local authority. It's a role often undertaken by an employee of the local authority though we would recommend consideration is given to the use of an independent clerk.

93. Clerks should manage the logistics of the meeting in terms of ensuring dispatch of papers and producing a note from the meeting. In considering the style of meeting notes consideration should be given to making them intelligible enough for non-attendees to get a sense of the discussion as well as clearly indicating the conclusion and action agreed in relation to each agenda item. Verbatim reports of a schools forum's discussion, however, are unlikely to be very useful. Schools forums may consider whether a simple action log should be maintained by the clerk to ensure all action points agreed are followed up.

94. Beyond this a good clerk can:

- provide the route by which schools forum members can access further information and co-ordinate communication to schools forum members outside of the formal meeting cycle
- respond to any queries about the business of the schools forum from headteachers, governors and others who are not on the schools forum themselves
- be responsible for ensuring contact details of all members are up to date
- maintain the list of members on the schools forum and advise on membership issues in general
- assist with the co-ordination of nomination or election processes run by the constituent groups
- keep the schools forum website up to date, for example by posting latest minutes and papers

- monitor, on a regular basis, the schools forum and general schools funding pages on the GOV.UK website; and arrange for the distribution of any relevant DfE information to schools forum members
- if appropriate, provide technical advice in relation to the schools forum regulations and in relation to the operation of a schools forum's local constitution
- organise, operate and record any voting activity of the schools forum in line with the provisions of its local constitution

95. Not all of these tasks may be able to be undertaken by the schools forum clerk. However, each one is important and there should be arrangements in place to ensure they are discharged adequately.

Good practice for schools forum meetings

96. Schools forums should ensure there is a clear debate of all agenda items. Whilst sub-group meetings are valuable in working through detailed issues, schools forums should consider that the level of debate held at the schools forum meeting and recorded in the minutes will be the official reflection of the level of challenge and discussion on each issue.

97. The use of nameplates for schools forum members also showing which group they are representing can be helpful to members of the public and presenters of papers. In addition the use of coloured cards or coloured nameplates can be helpful when specific members of a schools forum are eligible to vote on specific items, for example, voting on de-delegation or changes to the funding formula.

98. Consultations with the schools forum are a key responsibility of a local authority, ranging from the funding formula to the letting of contracts. Each consultation will be different and depend on the subject being consulted on, but local authorities should consider the following factors as good practice for effective consultation:

- plan and consult early
- allow reasonable timescales for response (as Forum members may need to consult the groups they represent)
- an open and honest approach
- fully inclusive
- allow for ongoing dialogue
- provide feedback

- clear communications

Meeting notes and recording of decisions

99. A vital part of the effective operation of a schools forum is to ensure that an accurate record of the meeting is taken. This must include the clear recording of votes where there are contrary views. Recommendations to, and decisions of, schools forums must be clearly set out.

100. Notes or minutes of each schools forum meeting should be produced and published on the local authority website as soon after the meeting as possible to enable members and others to see the outcome of any discussions and decisions and/or votes. It is good practice to formally agree the accuracy of the note and minutes at a subsequent meeting but the publication of the draft minutes should not be delayed as a result. We would recommend that a log of the decisions is published within three working days of the meeting, and the draft minutes within 10 working days so that interested parties can access them and consult on them, if necessary, before the next meeting.

101. In order to provide clarity about representation at each meeting, it is good practice for the minutes to record the group and/ or subgroup that each member represents against their name.

Communication

102. Communication to the wider educational community of the discussions and debates of, and decisions made by, the schools forum is fundamental to their effective operation. The more schools and other stakeholders know about the proceedings of the schools forum, the more their work will be an important and central part of the context of local educational funding. This is particularly important given the decision making role that the schools forum has. Local authorities should consider the operational differences between the types of stakeholders and plan their communications accordingly. For example ensuring effective communications across the PVI sector may be more difficult than with schools, which are more likely to have existing channels of communication for example, headteacher meetings.

103. Each schools forum should therefore be clear what its channels of communication are. It is fundamental that each member of schools forum represents the views of the group or sub-group that they represent and that all those with an interest in funding work together to ensure that their views are taken into account. Therefore communications directly between members and those they represent is essential; professional associations and phase groups could be suitable channels. This will ensure that schools forum members have an ongoing dialogue with the constituents of their group or sub-group and are therefore well able to represent their

views at schools forum meetings. However, the schools forum should also consider additional communication processes. These could include:

- drawing schools' attention to the fact that all its agendas minutes and papers are publicly available on the local authority's website (this should include the publication of formula consultation documents)
- an annual report on the proceedings of the schools forum
- attendance by the Chair, or other schools forum member, at other relevant consultative or management groups such as any capital working group; or senior management meetings of the Children's Services Department
- a brief email to all schools, early years providers and other stakeholders after each schools forum meeting informing them of the discussions and decisions with a link to the full papers and minutes for further information
- a schools forum newsletter can be a less formal and more interesting way of communicating forum business and raising the profile of the schools forum and its members

News updates

104. Most, but not all, members of the schools forum will already be in receipt of regular information on school funding matters from the local authority and DfE. Other schools forum members should be copied into such information flows so that they can be kept abreast of developments between meetings.

105. Many local authorities have already established dedicated schools forum websites on which they post key information for schools forum members and other interested parties and updated on a regular basis.



Education & Skills
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Schools forums structure

A summary of the structure of schools forums.

Category	Schools members	Academies members	Non-school members
Represented groups	<p>Where the local authority maintains the following types of school, they must be represented on the schools forum:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Primary Schools• Secondary Schools• Special Schools• Nursery Schools• PRUs	<p>At least one academies member must be a representative of mainstream academies, which includes free schools, UTCs and Studio Schools. In addition, there must be one member for each of the following groups (if such exist in the local authority area):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Special academies, including free schools• Alternative provision academies, including free schools	<p>16 to19 providers</p> <p>Early years Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) providers</p> <p>Before considering other groups, the local authority must consider diocesan representation</p>

Category	Schools members	Academies members	Non-school members
Type of member	<p>Within each of the five groups above there could be the following types of member:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Headteachers (or their representative) • Governors • Headteachers and Governors • In overall terms there must be at least one headteacher (or their representative) and one governor 	Any	Any
Schools forum structure	<p>Schools members and academies members must comprise at least two thirds of the schools forum membership</p> <p>Primary schools, secondary schools and academies must be broadly proportionately represented on schools forum, based on the total number of pupils registered at them</p>	<p>Schools members and academies members must comprise at least two thirds of the schools forum membership</p> <p>Primary schools, secondary schools and academies must be broadly proportionately represented on schools forum, based on the total number of pupils registered at them</p>	
Voting	Only primary representatives can	No voting on de-delegation or the	No voting on de-delegation or the

Category	Schools members	Academies members	Non-school members
	<p>vote on primary school dedelegation Only secondary representatives can vote on secondary school dedelegation All schools members can vote on the scheme for financing schools All schools members can vote on any other schools forum business, including the consultation on the funding formula.</p> <p>Maintained school members can vote on items relating to general duties and retained duties.</p>	<p>scheme for financing schools All academies members can vote on any other schools forum business, including the consultation on the funding formula.</p> <p>Academy members can vote only on retained duties.</p>	<p>scheme for financing schools Only PVI representatives can vote on the consultation on the funding formula.</p> <p>All non-school members can vote on any other schools forum business</p>
Elected by	<p>The relevant sub-group of the relevant type of school e.g. primary school governor representatives are elected by the governors of primary schools, secondary school headteachers are elected by the headteachers of secondary schools.</p>	<p>The relevant proprietors of academies elect for their group, e.g. mainstream academies, special academies and alternative provision academies</p>	<p>Election only applies to the representative for the 16 to 19 providers, who is elected by all eligible 16 to 19 providers</p>

Local authority appointment of members	Only if no election takes place by the agreed date or in the event of a tie	Only if no election takes place by the agreed date or in the event of a tie	<p>Can appoint a 16 to 19 representative only if no election takes place by the agreed date or in the event of a tie.</p> <p>For all other non-schools members the local authority appoints, but it's good practice to seek nominations from the relevant bodies</p>
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Other attendees who are permitted to contribute to a schools forum meeting:

- an observer appointed by the Secretary of State
- the Chief Financial Officer
- the Director of Children's Services
- officers providing financial & technical advice to schools forum
- the Executive Member for Children's Services
- presenters (restricted to the paper they are presenting)
- the Executive Member with responsibility for resources



Schools forum self-assessment toolkit

This toolkit provides local authority officers and elected members with a framework for assessing the strengths and weaknesses of their schools forum. The toolkit is designed as a set of questions which can be considered by individuals or the forum as a whole.

Question	Yes / No	Notes
1. Are meeting dates set in well advance and details (including time and venue) published in an accessible manner to enable interested parties to plan their attendance?		
2. Are meetings timed to coincide with key dates? (for example, reporting of funding formula)		
3. Are meetings held in an accessible venue to enable observers to attend easily?		
4. Is there a dedicated website link for schools forum, is it current and regularly updated?		
5. Are the agenda and papers publicly available on the authority's website at least 6 working days in advance of the meeting?		
6. Are the papers published as a single document, so that users can download easily?		
7. If papers are tabled at the meeting, are they published on the website promptly after the meeting?		
8. Are draft minutes published a reasonable time (for example, within 2 to 3 weeks) after the meeting, rather than waiting until the following meeting?		

Question	Yes / No	Notes
9. Are the minutes clear and unambiguous, with sufficient detail to illustrate the discussions, without reporting verbatim every point made?		
10. Is the constitution clear and appropriate? Including for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a clear process for ensuring proportional representation - the process for electing members and their tenure - the timescale for review is clearly set out - the process for dealing with repetitive non attenders 		
11. Is there an induction pack or training programme available for new members?		
12. Is the election process clear and transparent? Representatives are elected only by the group they are representing, whether phase-specific for maintained schools, or by the proprietors of academies for academy members.		
13. Do the papers contain clear recommendations and indicate in a consistent manner whether the item is for information, consultation or decision?		
14. Is it clear to observers who attendees at the forum are representing? (for example, by use of name plates, indicating sector)		
15. Does the chair manage the meeting well, ensuring that all are able to contribute to the agenda items, that no bias towards any sector is evident and that no single person or organisation is able to dominate the discussion?		
16. Is there inclusive participation in discussions for all phases and types of members?		

Question	Yes / No	Notes
17. Do members actively canvass views and objectively represent their whole peer group at the forum and provide feedback after meetings?		
18. Where votes are required, is it clear who is eligible to vote for different items?		
19. Where votes are required, are the arrangements for recording the votes clear and unambiguous?		
20. Is there a system in place for a decision if votes are tied?		
21. Is the operational & good practice guide used to regularly review the forum's adherence to good practice?		

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Report to Hartlepool Schools' Forum 08 June 2026
From Fiona Stobbs (Interim Assistant Director - Education)

Agenda Item 6 – Updates to Scheme for Financing Schools

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Local authorities are required to have a Scheme for Financing Schools, setting out the relationship they have with their maintained schools.
- 1.2 DfE (Department for Education) publish annual changes required to the Scheme for Financing Schools. Local authorities are required to incorporate the changes into their Scheme and associated documentation, in consultation with schools.
- 1.3 This report outlines the outcomes of the 2026/27 review and advises Forum of any changes to the guidance.

2 Background

- 2.1 DfE published an update to the Scheme for Financing Schools statutory guidance on 26 March 2026.
- 2.2 In addition to the review of DfE changes, the overall Scheme is being assessed for required updates – particularly where the Hartlepool Scheme includes local advice in addition to the mandatory DfE content.

3 Changes to the Scheme

- 3.1 A review of the 2026/27 DfE guidance has been undertaken, which confirmed that there are no changes to the Scheme for Financing Schools requiring incorporation into the Council's existing Scheme.
- 3.2 Annex 1 of the Scheme lists the maintained schools covered by the Scheme. This has been reviewed and remains unchanged, as there have been no academy conversions since the previous update
- 3.3 Several changes are proposed arising from the more general review of the Hartlepool Scheme. Where the changes extend beyond job title or date updates, maintained schools will be provided with a schedule of changes, along with a link to the revised Scheme.

4 Recommendations

- 4.1 Forum is asked to:
 - a) note that there are no DfE changes to the Scheme for 2026/27;
 - b) note the planned "local" changes to the Hartlepool Scheme outlined at paragraph 3.3 of this report;
 - c) note that the changes will be listed and sent to maintained schools and the revised Scheme will be published on the Council website after the Forum meeting.

Please note that only Maintained School Forum Representatives are affected by these recommendations

Report to Hartlepool Schools' Forum 8 June 2026
From Fiona Stobbs (Interim Assistant Director - Education)

Agenda Item 7 – Dedicated Schools Grant Final Outturn 2025/26

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to update Schools' Forum on the outturn position for the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) budgets for the financial year 2025/26.

2 Background

- 2.1 In accordance with the 'Schools Revenue Funding 2025/26 Guide' published by Department for Education (DfE), the local authority is required to report the Dedicated Schools Grant financial outturn at the end of the financial year.
- 2.2 DSG funding is received across 4 blocks – Early Years, High Needs, Central School Services Block and Schools Block (including Growth Fund).
- 2.3 The Local Authority first reported a DSG deficit of £1.589m at the end of 2023/24. The deficit increased to £4.932m by 31 March 2025.

3 DSG Financial Position for 2025/26

- 3.1 The table below summarises the DSG actual spend against budget. There was an overall overspend across DSG budgets of £3.861m.

DSG Block	2025/26 Funding £m	2025/26 Block Transfers £m	2025/26 Budget £m	2025/26 Actual £m	2025/26 Variance +over / (-) under £m
Early Years	14.890	-	14.890	14.062	(0.828)
High Needs	17.599	0.516	18.115	22.825	4.710
Central School Services	0.688	(0.080)	0.608	0.587	(0.021)
Schools, incl Growth Fund	18.172	(0.436)	17.736	17.736	-
TOTAL DSG	51.349	-	51.349	55.210	3.861

- 3.2 The final outturn against the Early Years Block was an underspend of £0.828m. This is discussed in further detail within a separate report on this same agenda.
- 3.3 The High Needs Block overspent by £4.710m in 2025/26 – an improvement of £0.706m from the latest projection of £5.416m shared with Forum at their meeting on 10 February 2026. Schools' Forum will recall that the High Needs Block budget for 2025/26 exceeded the grant available by £4.257m. The final position is outlined in further detail within a separate report on this same agenda.
- 3.4 There was an overall underspend of £0.021m against the Central Schools Services block. This is despite the continuing financial pressure of £0.010m relating to the pension costs for historic redundancies at Brierton School. The primary reason for

the net underspend was underspending against the Admissions Service - £0.019m lower than budgeted.

3.5 The funding of Individual School Budgets was in line with budget.

4 DSG Reserves

4.1 The opening DSG deficit for 2025/26 was £4.932m. With an in-year overspend of £3.861m, the cumulative deficit at 31 March 2026 is £8.793m. In line with accounting regulations, the deficit is held as an unusable reserve. The statutory override, which was due to end in March 2026, has now been extended to March 2028.

4.2 However, following the government's announcement in February 2026, the High Needs Stability Grant will provide funding of 90% of eligible DSG deficits held at 31 March 2026, with the remaining balance to be met locally (e.g. from General Fund reserves). This funding is conditional on the submission and approval of a Local SEND reform plan and ongoing compliance with DfE requirements. Should Hartlepool meet the requirements, funding of £7.914m would be provided from government, with the authority to cover the remaining £0.879m from Council funds.

4.3 Hartlepool has provided a first draft of the SEND reform plan to our allocated DfE advisors. The final plan will be submitted formally on 19 June 2026. A summary of the Hartlepool submission is outlined in a separate report on this same agenda.

4.4 The financial position beyond March 2026 is less clear, although DfE have referred to a similar level of grant and assurance process in future years until High Needs Block funding is fully reviewed and implemented. The High Needs Block budget for 2026/27 expects an in-year deficit of £7.360m.

5 Recommendations

5.1 Forum is recommended to note the contents of this report.

Report to Hartlepool Schools' Forum 8 June 2026
From Fiona Stobbs (Interim Assistant Director - Education)

Agenda Item 8 – Early Years Block Final Outturn 2025/26

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to present further details of the Early Year Block outturn position for 2025/26. The Early Years Block forms part of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).

2 Background

- 2.1 Following the significant expansion of nursery entitlements, Hartlepool Early Years Block funding now exceeds £14m.
- 2.2 Funding and spending is captured against:
- 3-4YO Universal and Extended provision
 - 2YO Families Receiving Additional Support (FRAS)
 - 2YO Working Parents
 - Under 2YO Working Parents
- 2.3 Settings maintain their attendance data in the EYES system. Following a monthly headcount validation process, payments are made to settings each month based on EYES information.
- 2.4 In simplistic terms, Early Years Block funding is based on the formula:
- Number of pupils recorded at census point x 15-hour entitlement x 38 weeks x the funded hourly rate.
- 2.5 Monthly payments to settings are based on actual attendance hours recorded in EYES at the agreed hourly base rate, including any supplements.

3 Early Years Block Financial Position for 2025/26

- 3.1 Spending against the Early Year's Block is difficult to predict. The DSG funding provided is based on PTE's (part time equivalents) at given census points. As the attendance between census points can fluctuate, and the monthly payments to settings are based on actual attendance, a difference between census point funding and actual payments is inevitable.
- 3.2 For 2025/26, attendance at each census point was generally higher than actual attendance (and therefore payments to settings). This excess of funding resulted in a significant underspend in 2025/26. However, this position could easily change in any given year, with actual attendance being higher than at census points.
- 3.3 The overall underspend of £0.828m against the Early Years Block is outlined in the following table. Each year, DfE make a funding adjustment to align final funding to the latest January census point. DfE will not calculate the funding adjustment for

2025/26 until June 2026. Variances in the following table reflect the expected DfE adjustment.

Description	Budget £m	Actual £m	Variance +over/ (-) under £m
Under 2YO Provision	3.905	3.580	(0.325)
2YO Provision	4.016	3.931	(0.085)
3-4YO Provision	5.666	5.479	(0.187)
Pupil Premium	0.388	0.411	0.023
SEN Inclusion Fund	0.059	0.050	(0.009)
Disability Access Fund	0.109	0.084	(0.025)
Centrally Retained	0.576	0.428	(0.148)
Block Funding	(14.719)	(14.791)	(0.072)
TOTAL	0.000	(0.828)	(0.828)

- 3.4 The primary reason for the favourable outturn was owing to the number of children (Part Time Equivalents) counted at census points differed from the actual number of children attending provision outside of census dates. Funding from DfE is based on snapshots at agreed census points only and is not based on actual attendance throughout the year. Payments to providers are based on actual attendance.
- 3.5 The following table illustrates the differences between funding from DfE based on census points versus the actual payments based on attendance.

Provision	Funding Basis (PTE numbers)	Actual Payments (PTE numbers)	Difference (PTE numbers)	Comment
Under 2YO	636.59	587.60	(48.99)	Funding exceeds payments to Providers
2YO FRAS	274.20	299.16	24.96	Payments to Providers exceed funding
2YO Working Parents	615.56	580.15	(35.41)	Funding exceeds payments to Providers
3-4YO	1764.72	1713.51	(51.21)	Funding exceeds payments to Providers

- 3.6 For example, the 2025/26 cost of a single PTE for a full year's provision for under 2-year-olds was £6,093. Funding was almost 49 PTEs above actual attendance for under 2-year-old provision across the year, resulting in a saving of £0.300m.
- 3.7 Contingency funding was set aside by the local authority in 2025/26 to manage the risk of overspending. The contingency has not been used. This contributed circa £0.090m to the overall underspend in 2025/26. To help address this, contingency budgets have reduced in 2026/27 with amounts being shifted into the base rate to providers.
- 3.8 Spending against the SEN Inclusion Fund was £0.009m under budget.

- 3.9 Claims made by Providers against the Disability Access Fund do not match the funding allocated by DfE. This contributed £0.025m to the overall underspend in 2025/26.
- 3.10 Spending against the centrally retained budget that funds staffing and other costs towards management and administration of the early year's offer differs to the budgeted amount. In 2025/26, this budget underspent by £0.148m, mainly owing to staff vacancies and lower training costs.

4. Pass Through Rate Assessment

- 4.1 The regulations state that local authorities must pass through at least 96% of funding to providers (this increased to 97% from April 2026). Actual pass-through rates are shown in the following table. The table includes the final outturn position for reference as this links directly to the pass-through rate.

Provision	Actual Pass Through %	Final Overspend (+) / Underspend (-) £m
Under 2YO	87.75%	(0.325)
2YO	93.92%	(0.085)
3-4YO	92.83%	(0.187)

- 4.2 Clearly, the actual pass-through rate is of concern. The local authority does not have any control on the number of children attending early year provider settings. The reduction in the contingency amounts for 2026/27 will help the pass through rate.
- 4.3 Managing spending effectively against the early year's block continues to be a difficult balance between ensuring at least 96% of funding (97% in 2026/27) is passed directly to settings, whilst avoiding overspending should actual attendance shift to exceeding census point attendance.
- 4.4 From 2026/27, all provisions will be funded on 3 census points for the first time. This adds new uncertainty into funding levels moving forward.

5 Recommendations

- 5.1 Forum is recommended to note the contents of this report.
- 5.2 As the Hartlepool Early Year's Allocation has increased significantly in recent years and linked to concern regarding the pass through rate, the authority is proposing to align Early Years reporting with the High Needs Block in 2026/27. Forum would then receive quarterly reports on projected spending against the Early Years Block.

Report to Hartlepool Schools' Forum 8 June 2026
From Fiona Stobbs (Interim Assistant Director - Education)

Agenda Item 9 – High Needs Block Final Outturn 2025/26

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide information for Schools' Forum on the outturn position for High Needs Block (HNB) spending in 2025/26. The HNB forms part of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).

2 Background

- 2.1 The High Needs Block overspent by £4.710m in 2025/26 – an improvement of £0.706m from the latest projection of £5.416m shared with Forum at their meeting on 10 February 2026. Schools' Forum will recall that the High Needs Block budget for 2025/26 exceeded the grant available by £4.257m.

3 High Needs Block Spending 2025/26

- 3.1 The final position is outlined in the following table and discussed in the paragraphs below.

Description	Budget £m	Actual £m	Variance £m
Block Funding	(21.876)	(22.091)	(0.216)
Academy Place Funding (Recoupment)	3.976	3.976	0.000
Local Authority Place Funding	1.096	1.096	0.000
Independent School Fees	5.282	5.074	(0.208)
Out of Area Placements	0.442	0.352	(0.089)
Top-ups and Support (IPS, special schools, ARPs)	12.086	13.285	1.199
Horizon School and AP	0.990	0.768	(0.222)
Post-16 Support	1.548	1.537	(0.011)
Support Services	0.713	0.713	(0.000)
Approved Budget Shortfall			4.257
TOTAL	4.257	4.710	4.710

3.2 Block Funding and Academy Place Funding

HNB funding increased by £0.216m from the provisional allocation received in December 2024. This brought total HNB funding, before recoupment of academy place funding, to £22.091m. Academy place funding amounted to £3.976m in 2025/26 – this comprises special schools, academy ARPs and Hartlepool College of Further Education.

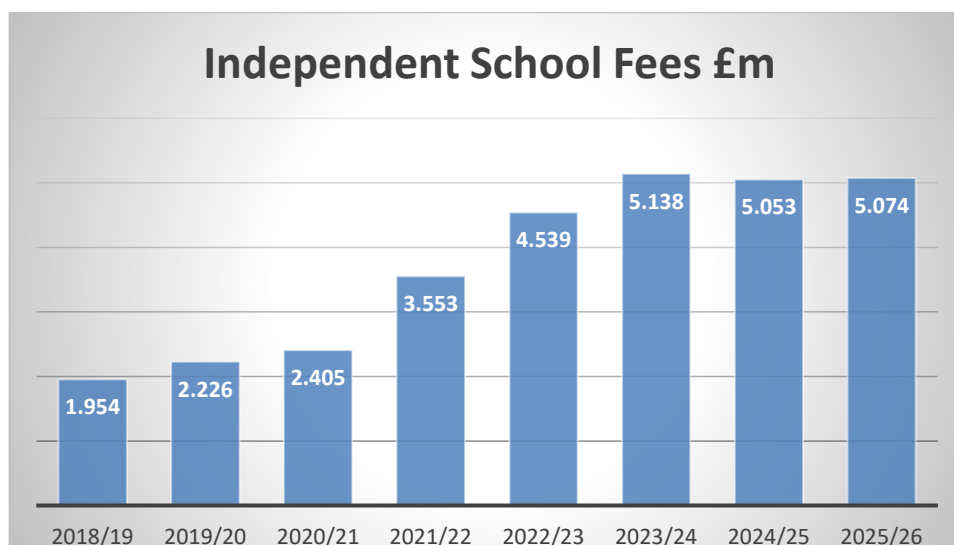
3.3 Local Authority Place Funding

Places at Horizon, Haven and maintained school ARPs were funded at a total of £1.096m in 2025/26.

3.4 Independent School Fees

The final outturn for Independent School Fees shows an underspend of £0.208m against a deliberately challenging budget for 2025/26. Despite budget pressures,

the overall cost of independent school fees has remained broadly stable in recent years, as illustrated in the chart below.



3.5 Out of Area Placements

The final outturn for Out of Area Placements underspent by £0.089m.

3.6 Top-Ups and Support

The cost of Top-Ups and Support exceeded budget by £1.199m. This budget heading includes funding for Individual Pupil Support (IPS), funding for Special Schools, the new SEMH Free School and ARP top-ups. The primary spending variances from this budget area are highlighted below.

Individual Pupil Support

The final outturn for Individual Pupil Support (IPS) was £4.420m, an overspend of £0.966m. The Seeking Support Panels continue to challenge and scrutinise all new funding requests. However, despite the increased level of challenge, underlying demand continues to rise. As a result, the revised process has not yet delivered a direct financial benefit, although it is likely that additional costs are being avoided.

ARPs

The final cost of ARPs in 2025/26 was £2.323m, an overspend of £0.302m. The primary reason for the overspend relates to the new Complex SEMH and EBSA ARPs being managed by Horizon School. The original budget assumed one new Complex need ARP of 6 places at £30,000 per place. However, following further discussion and identification of need, two new 12 place units were commissioned, increasing costs beyond initial estimates.

Special Schools

The Special School overspend of £0.137m represents a part-year impact of unbudgeted growth for Academic Year 2025-26. Children's Services Committee approved the AY2025-26 special school growth requests at their meeting on 2 December 2025.

Places at the SEMH Free School for the 2025 academic year have increased from the initial 30 to 41, in line with the approved DfE transition plan. An underspend of

£0.159m materialised owing to lower top-up funding for several pupils with more complex needs compared to estimates at Quarter 3.

Hearing Impaired / Visually Impaired SLA

The HI/VI joint agreement has generated a final underspend of £0.025m. This reflects the confirmed 4% uplift in fees from Middlesbrough Borough Council, which was lower than originally anticipated at the time of budget setting

3.7 **Horizon, Haven and Alternative Provision**

The Horizon, Haven and Alternative Provision budget shows an overall underspend of £0.222m in 2025/26. The school returned an underspend of £0.156m to the HNB. Clawback of funding for permanently excluded pupils who have not yet returned to education also contributed to the overall underspend.

3.8 **Post-16**

The cost of supporting Post-16 pupils with SEND who remain in education has resulted in an underspend of £0.011m. The Council's Commissioning Team continues to secure efficiencies where possible by agreeing group arrangements rather than individual pupil funding packages. Expenditure in this area now appears to be stabilising following significant increases in recent years.

3.9 **Support Services**

Support Services were on budget in 2025/26 with nil variance.

4 **Summary**

4.1 The in-year overspend of £4.710m has been added to the existing DSG deficit of £4.932m. After reductions for underspends on the other DSG blocks, the total in-year DSG deficit was £3.861m, resulting in a cumulative deficit of £8.793m.

4.2 The Local Authority continues to manage its DSG position in line with DfE requirements for authorities operating with a deficit.

4.3 Government have announced the High Needs Stability Grant that will fund 90% of DSG deficits as at 31 March 2026. The grant is reliant on submission of a successful Local SEND reform plan, alongside continued compliance with DfE requirements. The grant receivable will be £7,914m providing significant support towards the deficit recovery position; however, the remaining balance will need to be funded by the Council's General Fund,

4.4 The financial position beyond March 2026 is less clear, although DfE have referred to a similar level of grant and assurance process in future years until High Needs Block funding is fully reviewed and implemented. The High Needs Block budget for 2026/27 expects an in-year deficit of £7.360m.

5 **Recommendations**

5.1 Forum is recommended to note the contents of this report.