

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL DERBYSHIRE SCHOOLS' FORUM

Minutes of the Meeting Held on 2nd July 2025

At County Hall, Matlock at 4.45pm

Present

Members

- x John Payne - Edale Primary School
- x Richard Bull – Dronfield Junior School
- x Matt Stretton – Coton in the Elms Primary School
- x Peter Johnston - The Village Federation
- x Michelle Jenkins – Etwall Primary School
- x Chris Greenhough – Swanwick School and Sports College
- x Leah Slack representing Nadeem Shah (apologies) – Park Federation
- x Karen Hayes – Esteem MAT
- x Grant Worthington – Flying High Trust
- x Nicola Cook - Team Education
- x Keith Hirst - Redhill Academy Trust
- x Liz Seymour representing Canon Carolyn Shover (apologies) – Church of England Diocese - Derby
- x Peter Monk - ASCL

Substitutes

- x Andy Kelly – Embark Trust

Observers

- x Cllr Alex Dale – DCC
- x Cllr Jack Bradley – DCC
- x Cllr Sam Redfern - DCC
- x Cllr Lewis Whitbread - DCC

DCC Officers/others

- x Alison Noble – Temporary Executive Director/DCS
- x Joe Wilson – DCC – Director of Education

- x Rachel Moore – DCC – Interim Assistant Director Inclusion
 - x Eddie Grant – DCC Senior Finance Business Partner
 - x Phil Burrows – DCC – Finance CST
 - x Elena Beard - DCC – Finance CST
 - x Ruth Lane – DCC – School Support Finance
 - x Sarah Wainwright – DCC Finance CST
- Peter Johnston chaired the meeting.

25/09 – Welcome and Apologies for Absence

- x Nadeem Shah – Park Schools Federation
 - x Cassie Hurt – Eureka Primary
 - x Heather Watts - New Mills Secondary School
 - x Gary Mizler - Learners Trust
 - x Donna Hain – Redhill Academy Trust
 - x Julian Schofield – Esteem MAT
 - x Adele France - Minerva Learning Trust
 - x Paul Scaife – Embark MAT
 - x Canon Carolyn Shoyer - Church of England Diocese - Derby
 - x Simon Redfern - Catholic Diocese Academy Trust
 - x Deborah Turner – NEU
 - x Sarah Bryan – DCC - Senior Advisor
- The meeting was confirmed as quorate.

25/10- Minutes of The Schools Forum 29th January 2025 and actions arising

The minutes were agreed for accuracy.

Action points from the last meeting on 29th January 2025:

Action Point: Rachel Moore (Virtual School Head) to be included in future invites.

Confirmed as actioned.

Action Point: Constitution to be redrafted with regard to voting membership for union representation.

Paper to be presented during the meeting.

Action point: To provide an up to date list of Childrens Services Leadership Team with contact details and roles and responsibilities.

Joe Wilson confirmed this has been delayed due to staff changes but he would take responsibility for this.

Action point: Reply to Chris Greenhough regarding the question he raised.

Confirmed as actioned.

25/11 Revised constitution and elected member changes

Peter Johnstone and Elena Beard presented a paper regarding the revised constitution. The changes since the constitution was last presented to the Forum included an update to union members having voting rights where applicable.

Elena Beard requested agreement from the Forum to confirm that she would re-visit the ratios within the constitution between LA maintained and Academy representatives and try to fill any appropriate vacancies which currently stand at one LA maintained school secondary governor and one Academy representative.

She also highlighted the failure to attend forum meetings section and requested confirmation from the Forum that she should look at registers for the past academic year and e-mail members who had failed to attend two or more consecutive meetings without sending apologies to check whether they still wished to be members of the Forum.

Forum members approved these requests.

Action point: Forum vacancies to be filled and an e-mail sent to any members not attending Forum for two or more consecutive meetings to be contacted by e-mail to see whether they wish to remain members of the Forum.

Responsibility: Elena Beard

Timeline: next meeting

25/12 DSG 2024-25 Outturn report

Eddie Grant presented a paper to provide the Schools Forum with the final position of the revenue budget out turn position of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for 2024-25.

He started by explaining the four components of the DSG for new Forum members. He highlighted that the DSG had a deficit of £16.945m at the 31st of March 2024 and this had increased by £27.792m in 2024-25 to £44.847m by 31st of March 2025, projected to increase to around £70m by the end of March 2026. This was almost exclusively due to an over spend of £27.792m on the High Needs Block (HNB). Eddie confirmed that there was an error on the paper and that around £5m of Special School Top Ups had been included as Secondary School EHCP's, although this made no difference to the overall figures reported.

A discussion took place regarding the accumulated deficit during which Cllr Alex Dale said he had attended a national meeting and the government has agreed the statutory override be extended to March 2028 to exclude the DSG from local authority accounts as this would bankrupt the local authority immediately along with numerous other local authorities across the country. Eddie Grant confirmed that the deficit was having a serious impact on local authority cash flow and finances resulting in an estimated loss of interest of between £1m - £2m annually.

The biggest individual area of over spend is in Independent School top ups of £19.064m and Eddie confirmed that placements cost an average of £75,000 per pupil per year and 538 children across the county have been placed, including following tribunals where parents have a 95% chance of winning.

Forum members discussed the many reasons behind the increases in SEND support required and concluded that the current system is broken.

25/13 School balances as at 31.3.2025

Eddie Grant presented a paper to provide the Schools Forum with information on school balances as at the end of the 2024-25 financial year.

He confirmed that balances in LA maintained schools only have remained stable at around £29 million with 202 schools in surplus and 45 schools in deficit at the end of

the 2024-25 financial year. He confirmed that the local authority has a Team Around The School (TATS) process to support schools with deficits and Ruth Lane confirmed there are six schools in 2/3 year plans and 4 schools who have no plan to set a balanced budget in a paper that will shortly be presented to the council member for approval. (Numbers updated after the meeting)

25/14 DSG management plan update

Eddie Grant and Joe Wilson presented the attached slideshow regarding the DSG management plan.

Any local authority with a DSG deficit is required to have a DSG Management Plan under its grant conditions and as set out in the Schools Operational Guide.

The DfE has suggested a template which is a detailed spreadsheet containing details of income/expenditure and EHCP numbers including forecasts for the years 2021-22 to 2031-32. The figures indicate a potential accumulated deficit in excess of £406m by the end of 2031-32, although Eddie suggested these figures should be treated with caution as they include a number of assumptions and the main focus is around High Needs Block.

The national picture is one of a DSG deficit of £6bn by the end of 2025-26 and Derbyshire projected deficit of £70m at that stage is about in line with the national average based on funding received.

A long discussion amongst members then took place including the following points; Although Health is working with the LA to support the needs of children it is Education that is standing the financial cost in the increased financial support for pupils.

LA staff are looking to increase local support and understand what type of support will be required in future by revisiting data held.

It is felt that some pupils in Special schools should be in mainstream and visa versa and there should be more flexibility to swap.

The number of EHCP's rocketed after legislative change in 2014 and they now last until age 25.

We should find bold and creative solutions.

Joint Strategic Needs Assessment has been published to help going forwards.

Joe Wilson concluded that progress in addressing SEND is going as fast as it can and further reports would be presented to Forum in the future.

Peter Johnson summed up by saying he hoped the long discussion had benefited members understanding of the problem.

25/15 What have we achieved at this meeting for the children in Derbyshire?

The emergence of a vision to rebuild the SEND system.

Understanding more as individuals of the wider position.

Future 'in person' meeting dates confirmed as

Wednesday 15th October 2025 - County Hall @ 4.45pm

Wednesday 10th December 2025 - County Hall @ 4.45pm

Wednesday 28th January 2026 - County Hall @ 4.45pm

Wednesday 1st July 2026 - County Hall @ 4.45pm

The meeting closed at 6.30pm.

Summary of action points:

Action point: Forum vacancies to be filled and an e-mail sent to any members not attending Forum for two or more consecutive meetings to be contacted by e-mail to see whether they wish to remain members of the Forum.

Responsibility: Elena Beard

Timeline: next meeting