

# **DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL SCHOOLS' FORUM**

## **Minutes of the Meeting Held on 28 January 2026**

### **At County Hall, Matlock at 4.45pm**

#### **Present**

##### **Members**

- Richard Bull - Dronfield Junior School
- Nadeem Shah - Park Schools Federation
- Cassie Hurt - Eureka Primary School
- Peter Johnston - The Village Federation
- Heather Watts - New Mills Secondary School
- Paul Scaife - Embark Trust
- Liz Seymour - Church of England Diocese - Derby
- Peter Monk - ASCL
- Trish Turner – Brackenfield Special School
- Sue Parkes – Staveley Junior School
- Emma Howard – Two Counties Trust

##### **Substitutes**

- Cilla Hollman – Hadfield Infant School
- David Smith – Esteem MAT
- Matilde Warden – Belper School
- Andy Kelly – Embark Trust
- Claire Hobson – UNISON
- Matt Robinson – Redhill Academy Trust

Meeting was quorate

##### **Observers**

- Cllr Sam Redfern - DCC
- Cllr Lewis Whitbread - DCC
- Cllr Alex Dale - DCC

##### **DCC Officers**

- Alison Noble – Temporary Executive Director/DCS
- Joe Wilson – Director of Education and Inclusion
- Kevin Smith – Finance CST
- Phil Burrows – Finance CST

- Elena Beard - Finance CST
- Samantha Cardwell – EYSEN Lead Officer
- Andy Walker – Head of School Support Finance

Peter Johnston chaired the meeting.

## **26/01 – Welcome and Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were noted and accepted from

- Emma Haywood - Alfreton Nursery School
- Karen Hayes - Esteem MAT
- Melanie Lawson - Embark Trust
- John Payne - Edale Primary School
- Matt Stretton - Coton in the Elms Primary School
- Grant Worthington – Flying High Trust
- Ann Donaghy – Archway Learning Trust
- Matt Morris – Team Education
- Alex Breedon – St Mary's Chesterfield
- Melanie Lawson – Embark Trust
- Liz Seymour – Church of England Diocese – Derby
- Deborah Turner – NEU
- Corinne Coward - UNISON

The chair apologised for any uncertainty regarding the meeting being in person only, and reiterated that if weather conditions (e.g. snow) required a change, the meeting would move fully online rather than hybrid.

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## **26/02 Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved as a true and accurate record.

Action points from the last meeting

- Slough case study shared with Forum
- Special representative contacted regarding Top Slicing of funds
- Education Sufficiency report will be moved forward again
- Additional columns will be added as requested to future DSG monitoring reports

No other matters arising were raised.

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## **26/03 Membership Updates**

Verbal update from Elena Beard

New members welcomed:

Sue Parkes – Maintained Primary Headteacher Representative

Trish Turner – Maintained Special School Headteacher Representative

Noted resignation:

Emma Hayward – Maintained Nursery Headteacher Representative

Action agreed to begin the process to fill the vacant nursery representative position.

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## **26/04 Early Years Inclusion Fund (EYIF) and Development Hub**

Samantha Cardwell updated Forum on the review of the Early Years Inclusion Fund, and to pilot an Early Years Development Hub

Main points are:

- Introduction of a banded funding model based on level of need (low, moderate, high) and hours attended
- Increase in PVI hourly rates (from an equivalent £8.50 to £11.00)
- Retention of existing maintained school rates
- High needs- band to be funded via the High Needs Block and aligned with EHCP pathways
- Early identification and intervention
- Invest to save approach
- Initial pilot location identified
- Service level agreements
- Governance and accountability
- Multi agency panel arrangements
- Evaluation and transition into primary provision

Members raised concerns regarding the continued differential between PVI and maintained sector funding. It was noted that:

- The gap has been partially reduced but not eliminated but movement towards closing the gap is supported
- Full equalisation is not affordable within current budgets

- Other local authorities do not operate this differential

A discussion took place on the possibilities of using funding from the High Needs Block or making the rate an average which would mean reducing the school rate. The original methodology behind the lower PVI rate is unclear, but the school rate will have been aligned to the original mainstream level which would have included additional costs such as qualified teachers and pension.

The Forum requested clarification on the differential rates. Members requested that a specific note was added to the Cabinet report highlighting Forum concerns about the equity between PVI and maintained settings

**Action Points: Review the differential funding and ensure that the Cabinet report highlights Forum's concern.**

Responsibility: Sam Cardwell, Kevin Smith

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## **26/05 Early Years Block Funding**

Kevin Smith presented the Early Years Block funding paper, including:

- Requirement to pass through at least 97% of funding to providers which has been achieved with the rates proposed
- The LA is passing on DfE increases (~5%, including legacy grants) as far as possible
- Movement towards a more universal funding rate throughout the sector without reducing funding to schools

Forum approved the Early Years Central budgets as set out in the paper

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## **26/06 High Needs Block Budget 2026/27**

Kevin Smith presented the High Needs Block budget report. The main points:

- No real terms increase in DfE funding as the legacy grants received in 2025-26 are being rolled into the DSG for 2026-27
- Projected in-year overspend in excess of £60m

- The HNB national formula has been suspended for 2026-27 so there is no addition for movement in places or pupils
- Continued reliance on statutory override and associated financial risk to the authority

A discussion took place covering the significant uncertainty pending the forthcoming white paper that is hopefully now due soon after February half term. Overspend is unavoidable under the current funding arrangements. The Authority is under constant financial pressure due to interest charges on borrowing. Officers clarified that the £3bn announcement by the chancellor in the Autumn was capital related. There is still uncertainty pending the potential post 2028 government intervention on Authority overspends.

Forum accepted the High needs position noting the financial risks and constraints.

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## **26/07 Central School Services Block (CSSB)**

Kevin Smith presented the CSSB paper highlighting that the increases reflect rolled in legacy grants (NIC and School Budget Support) and is not new funding. There is no increase in service provision. The historic commitments contribution is reduced by 20% by the DfE each year.

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## **26/08 Pupil Growth Fund and New Free School Policy**

Kevin Smith presented the paper highlighting the proposed changes to the Pupil Growth Fund policy for new Free Schools, namely:

- £150,000 pre-opening support for new schools
- Guaranteed pupil numbers (1FE) for the first four years
- Alignment with DfE guidance and increased funding certainty

A discussion took place around what the definition was of a Free School, (the DfE guidance is that all new schools established following the process in section 6A of the Education and Inspections Act 2006<sup>1</sup>, which is known as the 'free school presumption' route, are called free schools) and the reasoning behind the guarantee of pupil numbers for four years when an expanding primary school didn't have this guarantee. Clarity provided on how capital funding and revenue growth funding interact, especially for maintained schools

Forum approved the revised Pupil Growth Fund policy, including the new school arrangements and the use of the 2026-27 growth funding as set out in the recommendations.

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## **26/09 Schools Block Funding**

Kevin Smith presented the summary highlighting that there is a 2.1% increase in National Funding Formula values. The affordability of the national multipliers was again unachievable due to the changes in FSM eligibility resulting in a 0.7% pare back in all multipliers as approved at the Autumn Forum. As the pare back was very similar to the 2025-26 level, then schools should experience a ~2.1% increase in multipliers year on year. To clarify, if the NFF multipliers had been affordable, then a ~2.8% increase would have resulted. It was discussed that if future years pare backs were significantly higher, could a different approach be taken regarding reducing all multipliers or targeted to specific schools.

For those schools trading with the LAs finance service, it was indicated that an estimated 2% teacher pay award would be assumed within the updated spreadsheets for budgeting purposes.

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## **26/10 What have we achieved for our children**

Raising strategic concerns even where immediate change is not possible regarding the EYIF allocations and ensuring Cabinet is sighted on issues

Clarification of a Free School

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Date of Next Meeting is 1<sup>st</sup> July 4.45pm at County Hall, Matlock