

Minutes of the Schools Forum – 10th December 2025

Microsoft Teams Meeting.

Status: Agreed

Name	Establishment	Representing
Claire Whiting (CW) Chair	Redhill Primary Academy	Academies – North Cluster
Liz Smith-Keitley (LS)	Newport Childrensworld	PVI sector
Penny Hustwick (PH)	Hollinswood Primary School	Maintained – Governors
Joseph Piatczany (JP)	Meadows Primary Academy	Academies – North Cluster
Christobel Cousins (CC)	Lilleshall Primary School	Maintained Primaries – Newport Cluster
Darren Lennon (DL)	Linden Centre PRU	Maintained PRUs
Joe Edgar (JE)	Haberdashers' Abraham Darby Academy	Academies – South Cluster
Adam Jones (AJ)	Newport Girls High School	Academies – Newport Cluster
Nicola Davis (ND)	The Bridge Special School	Maintained Special Schools
Laura Armato (LA)	Amethyst Academies Trust	Academies – Central Cluster
James Youngman (JY)	Learning Community Trust	Academies - Special Schools
Rachel Cook (RC)	Newdale Primary School	Maintained Primaries – Central Cluster
Simon Wellman (SW)	Director of Education & Skills	Director of Education & Skills
Tim Davis (TD)	Finance Manager	Representative of the Director of Finance
Andy Wood (AW)	Senior Accountant - Schools	Representative of the Director of Finance

1. Apologies - AW.

1.1 The apologies given for this meeting were as follows:

- Sarah Roberts – High Ercall Primary School – Maintained – Wellington Cluster.
- Alison Ashley – Kickstart PRU - Academy PRUs.

2. Minutes of the 16th May 2025 meeting and matters arising - CW.

- 2.1 The minutes of the 16th May 2025 were accepted as a true and accurate record. Copies of the minutes can be found here:

[Minutes of 16th May 2025.](#)

- 2.2 There were no matters arising that would not be covered at this meeting.

3. Membership Structure of the School Forum - TD

- 3.1 TD reminded the Forum of the reasoning behind the review of the membership of the Forum, i.e. the need to have membership in line with the numbers of pupils on roll in maintained / academy schools.
- 3.2 TD stated that the aim was also to maintain the longstanding cluster model which provides a structure for mainstream school forum members to consult with colleagues. However at the time of requesting volunteers there were no primary academies within the south cluster so we were unable to both align academy/maintained members and have a south cluster representative.
- 3.3 CW welcomed the new members and thanked them for volunteering and was pleased to see such a good turnout for the first meeting of the academic year.

4. Schools Funding 2026/27. - TD.

- 4.1 The paper presented to support this agenda item can be found at the link below.

[School Funding 2026/27.](#)

Schools Block.

- 4.2 As has been the trend over recent years the DfE have merged previous years grants (for the elements of payroll costs deemed to be in excess of the funding settlement) into the schools block. The paper has tables to compare 2025/26 funding levels, adjusted to include the additional grants, to 2026/27 funding. Generally, the increases in formula factors are around 2%.
- 4.3 TD pointed out that the Minimum amount per pupil had been frozen at the previous year's level after adjusting for the subsumed grants. The minimum funding guarantee (MFG), which is the other protection for schools, can be set between the range of minus 0.5% to 0%. We intend to continue to apply the maximum protection for 2026-27 so the MFG will be set at 0%. The low level of the MFG demonstrates that this is not a generous settlement for schools.
- 4.4 The schools block operational guidance stipulates that local authority formulae must move 10% closer to the NFF each year but as we have been mirroring the formulae for some years this stipulation is a moot point for us.

- 4.5 The schools block formulae is a consultation agenda item for the Forum. The Forum were asked for any comments to be taken into consideration by the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People, Learning, Employment & Skills for consideration prior to her sign off. Forum members were happy to endorse the continuation of the approach (mirroring the national funding formula and aiming for maximum MFG protection) that has been followed for several years.

Central Schools Service Block (CSSB).

- 4.6 The 2026/27 allocation for the CSSB has increased substantially. This is the funding that covers statutory local authority services, and is covered in detail in the next agenda item.

High Needs block.

- 4.7 Historically the LA would have received an estimated allocation for the High Needs block in July from the DfE, however this year we do not yet have a draft allocation.
- 4.8 Central Government have once again extended the period during which local authorities can ring-fence the deficit for DSG (now up to March 2028). It appears possible that the repayment of accumulated deficits may be shared between local authorities and the DfE.

Early Years block.

- 4.9 To date there has been no information on the funding levels for the FY2026/2027 allocations, but this is not unusual and the Early Years formula is usually an agenda item on the January Forum.

5. Arrangements for funding statutory services provided by the Local Authority – Central Schools Service Block and De-Delegation - TD.

- 5.1 The Forum were presented with a paper which was in two parts and can be found at the following links:

[Central Schools Services Block Statutory Services 2026/27.](#)

[2026-2027 Funding for Statutory Schools Services.](#)

- 5.2 This paper provides the background for the requests for funding for the statutory services that the LA must provide for schools. The first part is the funding that comes from the CSSB and is for all schools, including academies, so is a vote for the whole schools Forum. The second part of the paper is for those statutory services applying to maintained schools only and that are funded through de-delegation.

- 5.3 TD explained the increase in funding within the CSSB which funds those statutory services which the LA must provide to all schools. He then went on to explain how the figures for each service area had been adjusted for inflation/actual costs where known.
- 5.4 CW stated that when the annual agenda item first came to the Forum, each service area charge was scrutinised. Several service areas have both a statutory element which is within the scope of this agenda item and a traded element provided through Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with schools.
- 5.5 TD pointed out that less visible elements tend to be the statutory elements with the traded elements being customer facing and used the finance service as an example, describing some of the statutory elements.
- 5.6 RC stated that members and schools need to be able to see what is being included within the statutory side of these services to be able to see where the funding is being spent. RC then asked if the LA could make saving in these services and reduce the costs. TD & SW responded that over recent years, given the pressures on LA finances and no increases in funding to cover inflation, finding savings has been a priority and have been made where at all possible.
- 5.7 RC asked about the future of de-delegated services, in the context of the reduction in school numbers due to conversions of maintained schools to academies. TD & SW responded by saying that already the LA has already subsidised statutory services to schools when funding has been inadequate and if necessary would have to do so in the future, the Schools Quality Assurance service (covered in a separate paper) being an example.
- 5.8 The Forum then voted on the proposal for funding of services from the CSSB and all were in favour.
- 5.9 The local authority-maintained schools felt that they could not vote at this meeting on the de-delegation as they had not had time to consult with their colleagues. The vote on this part of the agenda was therefore deferred until the January 2026 meeting. TD agreed to circulate a bullet point summary of the key issues to assist in consultation.

6. De-delegation for Statutory School Quality Assurance Services - TD.

- 6.1 The paper presented to support this agenda item can be found at the link below.

[De-delegation for Statutory School Quality Assurance Services](#)

- 6.2 SW stated that the service is a statutory one, therefore cannot be a traded service.
- 6.3 It is accepted that funding the service is a challenge with the reducing number of schools, but the LA is already subsidising this service and is only asking for a modest 2% per pupil increase in the funding. Due to the decrease in maintained school pupil numbers, this will deliver less funding to the LA which means the LA subsidy will again increase.

6.4 RC asked if relevant staff work in other areas as well as QA? SW outlined the difficulties in this, including the need to maintain an independent position given the assurance purpose of the role.

6.5 As the LA maintained schools felt they could not vote on this until they had consulted with their colleagues the vote on this agenda item was deferred until the January 2026 meeting.

7. De-delegation for Free School Meal Assessment - TD.

7.1 The paper presented to support this agenda item can be found at the link below.

[De-delegation for Free School Meal Assessment](#)

7.2 There was little discussion on this agenda item as it was accepted that this de-delegation saved a lot of time and effort in schools and schools would not want to have the burden of completing these checks.

7.3 The LA maintained primary schools voted in favour of de-delegation. The one secondary school, as the representative was not present, was emailed and asked if they would like to de-delegate and replied in the affirmative.

8. AOB - CW.

8.1 There being no further business the meeting was ended at 11.15.

9. Next Meetings

The dates of the forthcoming meetings for the academic year 2025/26, are as follows:

[Planned Forum Meetings](#)

- Thursday 15th January 2026
- Thursday 19th March 2026
- Thursday 14th May 2026