

MINUTES OF MEETING

Meeting title: Nottinghamshire Early Years and Schools Forum
Date and time: 10th December 2025, 2pm to 4pm
Location: County Hall NG2 7QP

Membership

'A' denotes absence

	Alison Prodger	Maintained Primary Head Teacher
	Steve Border	Maintained Primary Head Teacher
A	Ben Trenowden	Maintained Primary Head Teacher
A	Karl Hopkinson	Maintained Primary Head Teacher
A	Kirsty Lowde	Maintained Secondary Head Teacher
	Anne Hall	Academy Representative – (Vice Chair)
	Neil Holmes	Academy Representative
	James Macdonald	Academy Representative - (Chair)
A	Neil Robinson	Academy Representative
A	Daniel Moore	Academy Representative
A	Ella Tuxford	Academy Representative
A	Katie Thackery	Academy Representative
	Matt Rooney	Maintained Special School Head Teacher
	Jamie Hutchinson	Academy Special School Head Teacher
	Colin Barnard	Governor Maintained School Representative
A	Andy Palmer	Governor Maintained School Representative
	Penny Richardson	Governor Academy Representative
A	Laura Gapski	PVI - Early Years Group Member
	Karen Richards	PVI - Early Years Group Member
A	Nigel Frith	Church of England Diocese Representative
A	Louise Knott	14-19 Partnership Representative
	Joe Jefferies	Trade Union Representative - NASUWT
A	Jo Myers	Trade Union Representative - UNISON

In attendance:

Peter McConnochie	Director of Education, Learning and Inclusion
Karen Hughman	Head of Education Quality, Provision, Learning & Inclusion
Steve Hawkins	Senior Finance Business Partner, Children and Families Finance
Jason Gooch	Finance Business Partner, Children and Families Finance
Mandy Stratford	Early Years Strategic Manager
Toni Gardner	Assistant Accountant, Children and Families Finance-Clerk to Forum

Votes for Model 1	Votes for Model 2	Votes for Model 3
0	7	1

- Model 2 recommended
- Question 2 – De-delegated services
Only maintained sector to vote.

Primary Sector	Votes for	Votes against	Abstentions
Free School Meal Eligibility Assessment	3	0	0
Support Ethnic Minority & Bilingual Learners	3	0	0
Contingency for primary crisis communications	3	0	0
Trade Union Facilities	3	0	0
School Improvement	3	0	0
Outdoor Education	3	0	0

- There were no secondary representatives; however, Chilwell did respond to the consultation. Their response was a vote ‘for’ all the de-delegated services listed above, with the exception of the contingency for primary crisis communication, as this element requires only a primary vote.
- From paragraph 21 onwards, the report covers the proposed 0.5% transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block. This was discussed at the last meeting, and due to the significant ongoing pressures within the High Needs Block, the LA have put forward a proposal, one the LA have not made for several years, to transfer 0.5% of the Schools Block to help support the High Needs Block.
Consultation responses, were:
34 votes in favour,
26 votes against, and
26 respondents recorded as unsure.
- Question 3 - Do you agree with transferring 0.5% of the Schools Block into the High Needs Block to help mitigate against the anticipated overspend driven by the continued increase in demand for provision for children with SEND.

Votes for	Votes against	Abstentions
4	1	3

RECOMMENDATION

That the Forum:

1. Notes the content of the report - report noted.
2. Undertakes the votes required to recommend the schools local funding formula for 2026-27 – votes undertaken results above.

To increase uptake for next year’s consultation it was agreed the LA host information sessions for schools to attend. This was done for the Local Funding Formula 24-25.

3b 2026-27 Early Years Deprivation Funding Consultation

Mandy Stratford presented the paper:

- The purpose of this report is to agree the proposed changes to the use of deprivation funding for early years children in 2026/27. A consultation was carried out between 17 November and 1 December. Alongside the digital

consultation, two face-to-face sessions were had to gather views of early years providers before finalising the allocations presented in this report.

- The consultation was issued to all early years providers, including schools, and private, voluntary, and independent (PVI) settings. Unfortunately, the response rate was less than 1%, which was disappointing. In total, 93 providers submitted a response.
- Karen Richards - decisions must be made within a fixed budget and views on the issue are divided. A response rate of around 1% is not representative and is likely to fall further due to the complexity of the process and a lack of confidence or understanding among providers.
Highlighted that no funding can be used for administration, despite providers delivering funded hours without additional financial support. With around 83% of children funded and no ability to charge additional fees, settings are facing increasing pressure, particularly as private hours can no longer be used to subsidise SEND provision or administrative work.
- The Local Authority therefore proposes that from 1st April 2026 the following shall apply:

Current Deprivation Funding element 2025-2026	Per term (Su/Au/Sp)
Child in Need Plan, Child Protect Plan or Looked After	£135 / £136 / £135
3 and 4 year olds who were previously a supported 2 year old who are reported as Emerging on Communication & Language tracking returns	£50
Supported 2 year olds who are Emerging on Communication & Language tracking returns	£50
Supplementary payment of 7p per hour on the hourly rate for Supported 2 year olds (Families receiving additional support)	£0.07p per hour

RECOMMENDATION/S

That the Forum:

1. Agree the proposed changes to the use of Deprivation Funding for Early Years Children for 2026-2027.

Votes for	Votes against	Abstentions
8	0	0

3c School Growth Fund Criteria.

Karen Hughman presented the paper:

- Members will be aware the growth fund was overspent in the previous financial year and as a result, Forum requested a review to ensure:
 - Growth Fund allocations do not exceed the available budget in future years
 - No pupils are double funded
 - Whether growth fund should support schools where additional Year 7 places were created at the request of the local authority, but pupils did not materialise
 - Whether schools should be supported to manage budget pressures in Years 8 and 9 following earlier growth

- Report sets out:
 - The statutory guidance on the use of the Growth Fund, what it can and cannot be used for.
 - Proposed changes to ensure clearer application of the funding and improved budget control
- A link is included in the report to the 2026/27 Growth Fund guidance, which confirms what the Growth Fund may be used for:
 - Support growth in pre-16 pupil numbers to meet basic need
 - Support additional classes to comply with infant class size regulations
 - Meet the revenue costs of opening new schools
 - Meet revenue costs where schools remove or repurpose surplus places
- The guidance is explicit that Growth Fund cannot be used to:
 - Support schools in financial difficulty
 - Support general growth driven by school popularity, as this will be reflected through lagged funding via the National Funding Formula
- The total Growth Fund allocation has reduced significantly in recent years: From over £4 million in 2022, to approximately £2 million in the most recent year
- The exact allocation for 2026/27 is not yet known, the Department for Education is expected to apply the same calculation methodology as in previous years, with no change to the formula.
- In recent years, expenditure on infant class size breaches has been low. With falling pupil numbers in early years, this is expected to remain limited going forward.
- The primary pressure on the Growth Fund has been the secondary school bulge, which is now approximately three years into its progression through the system.

A number of secondary schools have supported the system by admitting pupils above PAN (Published Admission Number) over the last two to three years. As a result many of these schools are now receiving funding through their GAG (General Annual Grant) for those pupils and their reliance on Growth Fund is therefore reducing.

This marks a significant shift compared to earlier years, when schools were exceeding PAN for the first time and were fully reliant on the Growth Fund
- It is important that schools do not budget on the assumption that Growth Fund will be available where pupils are already funded through GAG, as this would result in double funding.
- Growth Fund will continue to support unavoidable infant class size breaches

Funding will be based on the cost of one M6 teacher, reflecting the need for an additional class

Secondary schools exceeding PAN; Growth Fund will only be available where the local authority has formally requested a school to admit above PAN to meet basic need. This excludes situations where a school or academy chooses independently to expand, Growth Fund will only be available where pupils are not already funded through GAG

To fund the pre-opening costs of new presumption free schools.

- Jamie Hutchinson - What happens if the opening of the new free school is delayed in any way. Do we have to give them additional money?
Karen Hughman – No, money is for setting up the new school
- Addressing an earlier query from previous years regarding schools seeking additional funding in Year 8 based on the higher pupil number funded in Year 7 when anticipated Year 7 numbers did not materialise.
Growth funding would only be allocated for year 7 growth and cannot be extended into year 8 and 9 etc, where actual pupil numbers are lower than originally projected.

RECOMMENDATION/S

That the Forum:

approves that the following will apply to the allocation of Nottinghamshire Growth Funding from April 2026

A) Growth Fund will be used to

- To revenue fund infant/ primary schools where exceptional or over PAN allocations have taken place, resulting in unavoidable breaches of infant class sizes.
- To fund secondary schools where the Local Authority has requested over PAN admissions in Year 7 if there is a difference between the GAG funding received by the school for year 7 and the number of places requested.
- To fund the pre-opening costs of new presumption free schools

B) Growth Funding rate

- The agreed rate for primary schools where exceptional or over PAN allocations have taken place, resulting in unavoidable breaches of infant class sizes will be the cost of one M6 teacher.
- The agreed rate for secondary schools fund secondary schools where the Local Authority has requested over PAN admissions in Year 7 if there is a difference between the GAG funding received by the school for year 7 and the number of places requested will be confirmed once the DFE confirm the funding available.
- Providing up to £200,000 to new free schools to contribute towards revenue costs incurred prior to opening.

	Votes for	Votes against	Abstentions
A	8	0	0
B	8	0	0

3d DSG Budget Monitoring Pd7

Steven Hawkins and Jason Gooch presented the paper

- Overspend areas were highlighted as set out in the report, along with any actions previously taken.
- Penny Richardson sought clarification on whether “SEND division costs” are allowable within the high needs budget and how would children without plans go into independent specialist?

	<p>A full breakdown of services will be taken to the High Needs Working Group where it can be discussed in detail.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The statutory override remains in place, allowing the local authority to ring-fence the £35m deficit until March 2028, preventing its immediate impact on the council’s wider financial position. <p>A recent announcement from the DfE confirms that from 2028 the Department will assume responsibility for the management of high needs deficits. However, no guidance has yet been issued on the period between now and 2028.</p> <p>Until the transfer of responsibility occurs, the deficit remains with the local authority, and further DfE scrutiny and pressure to reduce or contain overspend is anticipated.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peter McConnochie highlighted that last year’s £10.5m overspend on the same budget line continues to place significant pressure on the system this year. Emphasised that the core issue driving financial strain is demand, combined with insufficient national funding for SEND provision. This is a challenge affecting local authorities across the country. <p>Noted that the high needs review was clear that more must be done where possible, and the local authority is responding accordingly. The approach set out in the DSG Recovery Plan, alongside recommendations from Marion and Elizabeth’s work, will feed into the wider SEND Transformation Plan, providing a structured set of actions and priorities.</p> <p>Peter stressed the need to improve practice within parts of the local authority where necessary, recognising that tightening systems and processes may help mitigate some pressures—though demand will remain a key factor.</p> <p>Throughout this, reiterated that the needs of children and young people must remain central. Where difficult decisions are required regarding the most appropriate type or location of education, the authority must be willing to make those decisions in the interests of ensuring the right support is provided.</p> <p>RECOMMENDATION/S</p> <p>That the Forum:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Notes the content of the report - report noted. 	
<p>4. Any Other Business</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It was agreed to trial, for one year, all future in-person meetings hybrid, with County Hall confirmed as the fixed location due to the availability of the appropriate Teams setup. While some meetings do benefit from being fully in person, Forum members agreed to proceed with the hybrid trial as requested and to be review next December. 	
<p>5. Confidentiality</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No confidential items. 	

Date and time of next meeting		
Thursday 12 February 2026	2-4pm	Microsoft Teams
Thursday 11 June 2026	2-4pm	Hybrid (Microsoft Teams & County Hall)