

MINUTES OF MEETING

Meeting title: Nottinghamshire Early Years and Schools Forum
Date and time: 27th February 2025, 2pm to 4pm
Location: Microsoft Teams – Online

Membership

'A' denotes absence

A	Steve Border	Maintained Primary Head Teacher
	Helen Roberts	Maintained Primary Head Teacher – (Vice Chair)
	Kirsty Lowde	Maintained Secondary Head Teacher
	Anne Hall	Academy Representative
	Neil Holmes	Academy Representative
	James Macdonald	Academy Representative - (Chair)
A	Neil Robinson	Academy Representative
	Daniel Moore	Academy Representative
	Ella Tuxford	Academy Representative
	Katie Thackery	Academy Representative
	Matt Rooney	Maintained Special School Head Teacher
A	Jamie Hutchinson	Academy Special School Head Teacher
	Colin Barnard	Governor Maintained School Representative
A	Andy Palmer	Governor Maintained School Representative
	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 and Inclusion, Children and Families
Steve Hawkins	Senior Finance Business Partner, Children and Families
Karen Hughman	Group Manager, Education Access, Standards and Safeguarding
Irene Kakoullis	Head of Service Early Years and Family Hubs
Claire Sykes	Team Manager Education and Short Breaks Placements
Mandy Stratford	Early Years Strategic Manager
Rachel Livesey	Finance Business Partner, Children and Families Finance
Sarju Sheta	Finance Business Partner, Children and Families Finance
Jason Gooch	Finance Business Partner, Children and Families Finance
Toni Gardner	Assistant Accountant, Children and Families Finance (Clerk)

	<p>1. Notes the content of the report; - report noted.</p> <p>2. Approves the amount of growth funding centrally retained for 2025-26, £0.923m – No objections all members approved unanimous.</p>	
	<p>3b Central Services Block</p> <p>Steve Hawkins presented the paper and talked through appendix A in detail.</p> <p>Peter McConnochie – Appendix A monetary columns headings to be changed from millions to thousands.</p> <p>RECOMMENDATION/S</p> <p>That the Forum:</p> <p>1. Approve the Local Authority’s application to centrally retain funding within the Central School Services Block for the services set out at Appendix A - No objections all members approved unanimous.</p>	<p>SH</p>
	<p>3c Early Years Rate_DSG Funding Central Expenditure 2025-26</p> <p>Mandy Stratford presented the paper.</p> <p>Karen Richards – FSM (Free School Meals), the eligibility of free school meals and DAF (Disability Access Fund) not aware this is available to PVI settings, as never been able to claim.</p> <p>Some clarity required and to discuss at consultation group tomorrow, now that PVI’s are not able to charge following the government's announcements on Friday. PVI’s struggling - national minimum wage has increased by 58% funding rates have gone up by less than 30%.</p> <p>Mandy Stratford - Agreed to discussing this in more detail at the consultation group, unfortunate timing due to deadline for publishing EY rates otherwise would have been discussed at the consultation group before presenting this to forum. Confirmed all payments are available to PVI providers and schools if they have children who are eligible.</p> <p>To clarify guidance that came out on Friday, meals and snacks for pupil’s who are staying over lunch time can still be charged for, there are certain consumables that can't be charged but that has always been Nottinghamshire’s view.</p> <p>A discussion was had about charging for staff who make the meals and admin required within PVI’s, it was confirmed they are unable to charge for these.</p> <p>Irene Kakoullis – reiterate what was confirmed by Mandy Stratford, understand it is difficult, guidance was only released on Friday, officers to digest further to aid discussions at the consultation group.</p> <p>RECOMMENDATION/S</p> <p>That the Forum:</p>	

	<p>1. Approves the Authority's proposal to retain £2,011,685 of early years funding to be used for sufficiency and assessment functions within the Early Years Service and SEND Inclusion Service - No objections all members approved unanimous.</p> <p>2. Approves the publication of the hourly rates to be payable to Early Years Providers as detailed above - No objections all members approved unanimous.</p>	
	<p>3d 2024-25 DSG Budget Monitoring Report</p> <p>Sarju Sheta presented paper, and Jason Gooch presented the early years section.</p> <p>James Macdonald – from December 2024, cost of an INM (Independent Non Maintained) place has gone up by 20%</p> <p>Jason Gooch –what is not caught in this report as details are still being worked on, is uptake estimates for two year olds receiving additional support. Expecting these to be lower than forecast. Current forecast for January census is as appendix B 1,192 part time equivalent places, actual uptake could be as low as 941 part time equipment.</p> <p>Could be in a situation where summer and autumn terms are higher than the funded spring term so LA will be underfunded but will still need to allocate the funding. Final figures will not be confirmed until end of March.</p> <p>RECOMMENDATION/S</p> <p>That the Forum:</p> <p>1. Note the contents of the report – report noted.</p> <p>Agenda item rearranged item 3f to be presented before 3e</p>	
	<p>3f High Needs Block 2025/26</p> <p>Steven Hawkins presented the paper.</p> <p>In the past this agenda item has been presented to forum as a presentation, decision made to convert back to a report in order to detail information more effectively.</p> <p>Nottinghamshire County Council (NCC) officers have undertaken a full review of the services and provision that's funded from the High Needs Block with a view as to whether each of these service provisions need to continue and whether they need to continue with the same rate of funding.</p> <p>Education Health Care Plans (EHCP) continue to increase, currently over 5,000 with an expected trajectory to continue to increase.</p> <p>To stop the flow of children into higher cost Independent Non Maintained (INM) schools, using the extra funding received in the High Needs Block for 2025-26. The LA has three additional enhanced provision units across the county, continue to increase places in our existing special schools, and will funding the new special school which is planned to open January 2026.</p>	

<p>Appendix useful in terms of conveying what the LA have done with the additional funding.</p> <p>Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) for special schools is currently set at 0%. Clarification was sort about two statements made, 0% MFG for special schools versus all specials school banding to be increased bringing them closer to Fountaindale's banding rates – it was agreed that the 0% MFG would be re-visited with special school members on the Forum with members updated in June. The LA has increased special school banding rates over the last few years to try to get all special schools to the same banding levels as Fountaindale, but it's becoming increasingly more difficult with the current monetary constraints.</p> <p>Funding will continue for the historic teachers' pay and pension increases, and the additional cost pressures based on 2023-24, have been built into the formula.</p> <p>There is a contribution and a new commitment to the early years inclusion fund, in previous years there was none from the High Needs Block however, Department of Education (DfE) guidance does state inclusion fund should be funded by the Early Years Block and or the High Needs Block. Therefore, as demands on the inclusion fund increases, it's been decided that it would be equitable for the High Needs Block to contribute towards some of that increased demand.</p> <p>INM placements is overspending by £11.9 million this year, an extra £2.1 million to be added to this budget but even with the increase this budget line is likely to overspend again in 2025-26, but hopefully less than 2024-25 after increase the budget line and the mitigating action mentioned earlier.</p> <p>The High Needs Block is also highly likely to overspend again in 2025-26 despite the £10.8 million additional funding received this year. The LA is forecasting to finish this year with a non ISB reserve of £5.3 million, which hopefully would be enough to cover the overspend. However, if demand continues to increase at the same level, and the overspend is in excess of the non ISB reserve it would take the blocks into a deficit for the first time.</p> <p>It's recognised by many bodies that the funding system for High Needs is not working and there's not enough money in there.</p> <p>High Level Needs working group is now established, the work carried out will hopefully help identify further options to bring costs down and embed further good practises across Nottinghamshire, unfortunately the problem will remain for the short term.</p> <p>Matt Rooney – need to understand why some budget lines are being increased yet predicting an underspend for example (EPS) Education Psychology Service is exceptional and worth every penny, but used as an example, this budget line is expecting an underspend of £300K yet we are looking to increase budget by £500K could someone talk through the rational of £800K.</p> <p>Peter McConnochie - increase is connected specifically with the expansion of that service, it is being expanded by nine additional educational psychologists. Proposal is to continue to grow the service which brings additional costs but also additional opportunity for inclusive support, not just statutory assessment.</p>	<p>PMc/MR/ JH/SS</p>
---	---------------------------------

	<p>The Council itself has also put in a substantial amount of additional funding and additional investment into the EPS, which far outweighs anything that we're looking at here.</p> <p>That service needs to grow, it needs to expand and it's a significant percentage increase, 55% increase in terms of the size of the EPS service. There has been a significant rise in the critical incident response work, the service has undertaken this year.</p> <p>Members made aware that there's been a lag between the budget being agreed and recruitment actually happening, for various reasons i.e. national shortage. Turning to Plan B recruiting training educational psychologists, hopefully been retained as qualified educational psychologists.</p> <p>Matt Rooney - could colleagues look to increase the High Level Needs (HLN) pot? By moving some money from other budgets or what's the rationale for not increasing the HLN £8.6M pot?</p> <p>Peter McConnochie - there isn't sufficient funding to cover all pressures on budget lines. HLN is one of the areas that has been increased significantly over the last five years, an increase of around 70% this being the rationale for focusing on Additional Family Needs (AFN) which also supports inclusivity in mainstream settings.</p> <p>Matt Rooney – suggested a possible reduction on the special schools equipment budget currently at £850K, to increase the HLN pot or increase special school banding rates to close the gap with banding rates at Fountainsdale?</p> <p>A conversation was had around having to change, the high cost of places in INM's and how to better place pupils.</p> <p>RECOMMENDATION/S</p> <p>That the Forum:</p> <p>1. Note the contents of the report and gives its views on the proposed budget allocations for 2025-26– report noted.</p>	
	<p>3e Early Years Inclusion Fund</p> <p>Mandy Stratford presented the paper</p> <p>RECOMMENDATION/S</p> <p>That the Forum:</p> <p>1. Note the contents of the report – report noted.</p>	
4.	<p>Any Other Business</p> <p>There was no other business raised.</p>	

5.	Confidentiality Budget approval, cabinet members decision - papers brought to Forum will reflect a draught paper that will go to cabinet members 3rd of March to be signed and approved 17th of March. Agreement not to publish budget papers until 1 st April				
6.	Date and time of next meeting. <table border="1" data-bbox="148 465 1337 506"> <tr> <td data-bbox="148 465 683 506">Thursday 12 June 2025</td><td data-bbox="683 465 842 506">2-4pm</td><td data-bbox="842 465 1337 506">In person – NCC West Bridgford</td></tr> </table> June meeting discussed and agreed to be held at County Hall West Bridgford	Thursday 12 June 2025	2-4pm	In person – NCC West Bridgford	
Thursday 12 June 2025	2-4pm	In person – NCC West Bridgford			