

MINUTES OF MEETING



**Nottinghamshire
County Council**

Meeting title: Nottinghamshire Early Years and Schools Forum
Date and time: 13th November 2025, 2pm to 4pm
Location: Microsoft Teams

Membership

'A' denotes absence

	Alison Prodger	Maintained Primary Head Teacher
	Steve Border	Maintained Primary Head Teacher
A	Ben Trenowden	Maintained Primary Head Teacher
	Karl Hopkinson	Maintained Primary Head Teacher
	Kirsty Lowde	Maintained Secondary Head Teacher
A	Anne Hall	Academy Representative – (Vice Chair)
	Neil Holmes	Academy Representative
	James Macdonald	Academy Representative - (Chair)
A	Neil Robinson	Academy Representative
	Daniel Moore	Academy Representative
	Ella Tuxford	Academy Representative
A	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
	Penny Richardson	Governor Academy 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:

Anne Coyle	Executive Director for Children's Services
Gareth Moss	Group Manager, Financial Services
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

1.	Welcome and introductions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> James Macdonald welcomed all members 	
	Apologies for Absence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apologies received from Ben Trenowden, Anne Hall, Neil Robinson, Katie Thackery, Jamie Hutchinson and Louise Knott. Apologies accepted. 	
2.	Minutes of previous meeting (17th September 2025) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paper outlining, the projected funding requirements and the future structure of the growth fund will be presented at the December meeting. Minutes approved as accurate. 	ACTION KH
3.	3a DSG Budget Monitoring <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Steve Hawkins presented the report. Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for 2025–26 received by Nottinghamshire County Council totals £969 million. Current forecast for 2025/26 indicates an overspend of £35.6 million, entirely attributable to the High Needs Block. EHCP lines for independent specialist provision (under 16s and over 16s) account for approximately £32.5 million of the overspend. Overspend increased by £3 million since September, primarily due to new starters in independent settings for the academic year 2025/26. Nottinghamshire County Council is implementing mitigative actions to address overspend information to be shared at the next High Level Needs working group, then with the Forum. Matthew Rooney requested more detail on highest-cost placements for the next High-Level Needs Working Group meeting. Steve Hawkins confirmed additional detail will be provided. Council officers aim to provide graphs and trend analysis in future reports for better visibility. Jason Gooch presented the Early Years section of the report. Early Years Block reporting an underspend of £301,000, consistent with the previous forum update in September. Main driver of underspend: funding for three- and four-year-old entitlements and two-year-old entitlements is based on January census counts, while payments to the sector are based on actual uptake. Higher January census averages compared to actual full year uptake creates a surplus. Current figures, funding for 30,444 places vs. estimated uptake of 30,058 places. Additional underspend expected on Disability Access Fund due to funding for all eligible pupils, but payments only made when entitlement is taken up. From next financial year, DfE will move from January census-based funding to a termly headcount funding mechanism. Anticipated impact, funding will be based on actual numbers therefore less likely to see any surpluses. High Needs Block National Context: Nottinghamshire’s forecast overspend mirrors the national picture, with many local authorities facing similar deficits. 	SH

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chair's Comment (James Macdonald): Acknowledged the severity of the situation and emphasized the importance of ongoing work by the High-Level Needs Working Group to mitigate the impact. • Matthew Rooney: Requested clarity on options available to address the forecast £34 million negative non-ISB reserve and whether actions can be taken immediately or only after year-end. • Steven Hawkins: Confirmed the authority is already moving into deficit and actions are underway now. Current measures include, reviewing packages and reducing costs where possible. Exploring a transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block as a mitigation strategy, emphasized that action does not need to wait until year-end. • Peter McConnochie highlighted changes in budget monitoring approach, moving from siloed monitoring to integrated scrutiny across all blocks for greater rigour. • Outlined additional strategies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improving practice and decision-making processes to slow financial pressure. - Targeted work on high-cost placements and sufficiency planning. - Growth in internal estate (e.g., St. Giles) to reduce reliance on external provision. - Ensuring appropriate placement of children in mainstream provision where possible. - Tightening sign-off levels for high-cost placements to ensure senior oversight. - Considering invest-to-save initiatives, including commissioning additional consultancy capacity to accelerate improvements. • Daniel Moore: Asked whether surpluses within individual DSG lines (e.g., Early Years Block) are ring-fenced or can be used to offset the overall deficit in the non-ISB reserve. In previous years, early years underspends were redistributed to providers by increasing rates, but this option is not available now due to the overall deficit position? • Peter McConnochie: Explained that all underspends from previous years are sit within the non-ISB reserve as a whole, not ring-fenced to individual blocks. If historical underspends had been retained, they would have provided a cushion against the current deficit. Redistribution of early years underspends to providers is not feasible under current financial circumstances. Steven Hawkins confirmed the interpretation within the DSG is correct. <p>RECOMMENDATION</p> <p>That the Forum:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Notes the content of the report - report noted. 	
	<p>3b 2026-27 School Funding Formula Consultation</p> <p>Steve Hawkins presented the paper:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DfE Update: National Funding Formula (NFF) will continue with existing factors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pupil-led funding - Additional needs - School-led funding 	

- Geographic funding
- Protection factors
- Allocations for 2026–27 not yet received; expected autumn 2025.
- School Budget Support Grant and National Insurance Grant will be rolled into DSG.
- Free School Meal expansion (Sept 2026) funded via separate grant outside DSG.
- Local Authority Position: Nottinghamshire will mirror NFF as closely as possible.
- Affordability issues persist due to rising deprivation factors; approx. £2M gap in previous years.
- Consultation Approach: Need to agree principles and figures supplied are only illustrative using 2025-26 data.
- Three scenarios modelled for affordability:
 - Reduce factors within formula with a 0% MFG (Minimum Funding Guarantee)
 - Reduce factors within formula and apply a negative MFG
 - Apply a gains cap
- Dis-application request for Minster School MPP (Minimum Per Pupil). The Secondary school has a unique year group structure (small junior cohorts per year).
- Current minimum per-pupil funding calculation uses weighted average across all year groups, disadvantaging Minster and allocating a lower MPP.
- Require School's Forum approval to apply to the DfE to adjust MPP accordingly this has been an annual request since 2021.
- Dis-application request for exceptional premises for additional funding for rental agreements at four schools:
 - Bagthorpe Primary School
 - Willoughby Primary School
 - Holy Trinity C of E Infant School
 - All Saints Infant School
- Exceptional premises permitted under operational guidance; requires yearly schools forum approval.
- De-delegation of funding for maintained schools, is consulted on annually with maintained school representatives to approve.
- Services proposed for 2026–27: Five continuing services from previous years and a new service: Outdoor Education.
- DfE Guidance: Local authorities may transfer up to 0.5% of the Schools Block to another block with Schools Forum approval. Transfers above 0.5% require Secretary of State approval.
- Current Position: Forecast overspend of £35 million on High Needs Block (discussed under Item 3A). With anticipated further overspends in 2026–27. A proposal in the consultation on transferring 0.5% of Schools Block to High Needs Block for 2026–27.

- Based on 2025–26 Schools Block size (£705M), 0.5% would be around £3.5M. Actual figures for next year unknown until allocations confirmed.
- James Macdonald: Confirmed impact on all schools and asked if higher transfer is possible. Steven Hawkins outlined that while a higher percentage transfer was considered, uncertainty around future funding and ongoing mitigation work led to proposing 0.5% transfer for this year as an equitable starting point.
- Peter McConnochie this proposal for a transfer of 0.5% falls under the remit of Schools Forum. The local authority faces significant pressure on the High Needs Block, and national trends suggest overspend issues could worsen. This proposal is seen as a first step while awaiting further guidance from central government, including the forthcoming White Paper.
- Anne Coyle stressed the importance of demonstrating pro-active measures to address the £35 million overspend. National directors are continuing to present this case to the DfE and central government.
- James Macdonald queried whether neighbouring authorities are taking similar steps. Steven Hawkins responded that most authorities are at the consultation stage, and specific plans for next year are not yet known.
- Daniel Moore added that Lincolnshire is consulting on the same 0.5% transfer, confirming alignment with Nottinghamshire's approach, and queried whether the £3.5 million generated by the transfer would be used entirely to support mainstream schools (Additional Family Needs (AFN), High Level Needs (HLN), Family Network Funding (FNF) or only a proportion.
- Peter McConnochie allocation will be determined through the budget-setting process. Historically, Nottinghamshire has invested heavily in mainstream inclusion, particularly AFN funding, to ensure timely support and reduce reliance on costly independent placements. The collective view is that strengthening mainstream provision is the right approach. Consultants in the High Needs Block Review also noted the importance of mainstream inclusion.
- Derby City consulted last year for 2025/26 on a 0.5% transfer, confirming similar approaches regionally.
- Steve Border raised concerns about the financial impact on schools,, which could result in staff redundancies. He questioned where this process will end and reiterated the need for stronger lobbying to government about systemic underfunding, including pay rises and other pressures. Schools are at breaking point, and this is a shared concern among Rushcliffe heads.
- Peter McConnochie acknowledged these concerns, noting: Schools Forum can and should lobby central government. The system must share responsibility for meeting children's needs, despite rising costs.
- Nottinghamshire has an approved SEND free school, but progress is stalled pending central government decisions tied to the spending review and White Paper.
- Anne Coyle reinforced the importance of a strong, united voice from Schools Forum and noted that consultants have highlighted opportunities to reduce reliance on costly placements by improving mainstream provision.
- Anne also acknowledged the challenges posed by tribunals and systemic constraints and emphasized that while the discussion is difficult, it is necessary.

- James Macdonald emphasized that the outcome of the forum's decision will inform the final approach. Members need to step away from individual school or trust roles and consider what is best for all young people. He cautioned against making predictions but noted that if lobbying central government becomes necessary, the argument should focus on the forum making decisions in the best interests of all young people. The adverse impact on every child in a school due to funding constraints could serve as a powerful case to present to central government about the lack of funding in the education sector and the difficult choices members are being forced to make.
- Karen Richard emphasized the need to avoid removing money from early years to benefit schools, calling it counterproductive and highlighted a significant increase in parents pursuing EHCPs, which will impact schools. Karen advocated for more investment in early years. Stressed the importance of prevention rather than reactive measures and encouraged forum members to consider this approach. Laura Gapski supported this.
- Karl Hopkinson asked whether any analysis or modelling has been done to assess how the proposed 0.5% transfer would affect schools.
- Steve Hawkins confirmed that consultation documents will include three affordability models and an illustrative model showing the impact of the 0.5% transfer.
- Alison Prodger queried whether the group will review decisions to transfer funds into the High Needs Block and ensure allocations are strategic rather than gap-filling. James Macdonald confirmed this is part of the group's remit.
- Current deficit requires creative strategies to manage resources effectively. Highlighted this as an opportunity for innovative approaches to reduce the deficit while maintaining support for schools.
- Peter McConnochie explained the group was established a year ago to:
 - Address anticipated pressures on the High Needs Block.
 - Ensure openness and transparency in budget planning and spending.
 - Facilitate collaborative consultation rather than unilateral decisions by the local authority.
- Steve Hawkins set out the consultation timeline:
 Opens: 19 November
 Closes: 3 December.
 Results will be presented at Schools Forum 10 December for formula recommendation to Nottinghamshire County Council and it's for the LA to approve.
- Funding formula will be submitted to the DfE in January.

RECOMMENDATION/S

That the Forum:

1. Gives its views on the proposed consultation questions listed in section 8 – noted and views given
2. Approves the LA submitting a disapplication request for Minster School's MPP calculation as per section 4.

	<table border="1" data-bbox="148 143 1240 215"> <tr> <th>Votes for</th><th>Votes against</th><th>Abstentions</th></tr> <tr> <td>12</td><td>0</td><td>0</td></tr> </table> <p>3. Approves the LA submitting disapplication requests for the exceptional premises factors detailed in section 5.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="148 313 1240 385"> <tr> <th>Votes for</th><th>Votes against</th><th>Abstentions</th></tr> <tr> <td>12</td><td>0</td><td>0</td></tr> </table> <p>4. As representatives of the Early Years and School Forum actively encourage colleagues in the sector / other schools to engage in the consultation – noted and agreed</p>	Votes for	Votes against	Abstentions	12	0	0	Votes for	Votes against	Abstentions	12	0	0	
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	<p>3c Early Years Funding 2026-27 Consultation.</p> <p>Mandy Stratford presented the paper:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confirmed no intention to change how the hourly rate is passed on to early years providers; the same formula will apply once the base rate is known. Budget allocation within the Deprivation Fund. Current uplift: 5p per hour on EYPP (Early Years Pupil Premium). Proposal: Remove the 5p uplift as EYPP nationally increased from 68p to £1 and redirect funds to three alternative options as outlined in report. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retain current support + create an additional supported 2-Year-Old Premium Retain current support for social care children + increase communication and language supplement from £50 to £80 per term. Retain current £50 payment but extend communication and language support to include 2-year-olds. Options B & C depend on tracking returns from providers. Consultation Timeline: Opens: 17 November Closes: 1 December. Responses to be presented at Forum 10th December. Penny Richardson: Requested clarity on the definition of “children known to social care.” Raised concern that some children with significant disabilities may not be identified early due to lack of referrals, absence of local settings, or missed health visitor assessments. Emphasized the importance of ensuring these children are not overlooked. Mandy Stratford: Explained that deprivation funding applies specifically to children with social care involvement. Other funding streams (Inclusion Fund and DAF payments) remain available for children with SEND. Early health notifications and referrals from health visitors are addressed through these additional funding streams and clarified that the proposed changes only affect targeting of funding for children with social care involvement, not SEND funding. Karen Richards: Expressed concern that some providers are not claiming DAF (Disability Access Fund) despite eligibility, impacting available support. Highlighted a serious issue: providers refusing to accommodate children with high-level needs due to lack of funding and financial constraints. Previously, private hours could be used to assist these children, but current rules require free provision at the point of delivery, limiting flexibility. Warned 													

	<p>that turning children away results in lack of early support before transition to primary school, creating long-term challenges.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Laura Gapski: Added that supporting children with high-level needs requires skilled practitioners who can identify needs and engage wider agencies. Workforce reductions and funding cuts hinder this capability. • Raised the absence of a specific Level 3 SEND qualification for early years practitioners. Suggested introducing such a qualification to ensure every setting has staff with specialist skills, enabling effective early intervention and strong parent partnerships before school entry. • Anne Coyle emphasized the importance of Family Hubs in engaging families at the earliest point of need. • Encouraged sector to ensure they are connected to the Families First programme; offered support if not currently involved. • Highlighted that checks and engagement cannot effectively be done via Teams or Zoom, stressing the need for in-person interaction. • Explained that the 18 Family Hubs aim to create local communities of practice, removing barriers for families and enabling easy access to services (e.g., baby weighing) to foster early connections. <p>RECOMMENDATION/S</p> <p>That the Forum:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consider and agree the proposed question to be included in the consultation for early years funding for 2026-2027. <table border="1"> <tr> <th>Votes for</th><th>Votes against</th><th>Abstentions</th></tr> <tr> <td>12</td><td>0</td><td>0</td></tr> </table>	Votes for	Votes against	Abstentions	12	0	0	
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4.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Toni Gardner confirmed the next Forum meeting 10th December will now be held at County Hall in the Rufford Suite instead of Oak House as previously advised. Time remains unchanged 2pm-4pm. • Anne Coyle expressed appreciation for the group's leadership and teamwork, acknowledging that tough decisions lie ahead. Emphasized the importance of staying united and the group is stronger together while maintaining a positive atmosphere. 							
5.	<p>Any Other Business</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No other business was raised. 							
6.	<p>Confidentiality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No confidential items. 							
	<p>Date and time of next meeting</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Wednesday 10 December 2025</td><td>2-4pm</td><td>In person – County Hall Rufford Suite</td></tr> <tr> <td>Thursday 12 February 2026</td><td>2-4pm</td><td>Microsoft Teams</td></tr> </table>	Wednesday 10 December 2025	2-4pm	In person – County Hall Rufford Suite	Thursday 12 February 2026	2-4pm	Microsoft Teams	
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