

Minutes - Sheffield Education Funding Forum

3.00-4.30pm, 17 September 2025, Learn Sheffield, Savile Street

Chair: Keith Crawshaw

Schools Forum Members:

Primary Heads Representatives

- Nigel Brooke-Smith (Greystones)
- Helen Kenyon (Pipworth)
- Chris Holder (Lowfield)

Primary Governors

- Alison Warner (multiple schools)

Secondary Head

- Linda Gooden (King Edward VII)

Non-school Members

- Stephen Betts, Learn Sheffield
- Andy Krabbendam, Faith Sector (Clifford All Saints)
- Fiona Hawksley/Lisa Smith, Trade Unions
- Karen Simpkin, Early Years providers (Sunflower Children's Centre)
- Sarah Le-Good/James Smythe, 16-19 Sector (Sheffield College)

Academies

- Ann Allen (Chorus Education Trust)
- Keith Crawshaw (Sheffield South East Trust)
- Jim Dugmore (Peak Edge Academy Trust)
- Neil Miley (Mercia Learning Trust)
- Morag Somerville (Steel City Schools Partnership)
- Nevine Towers (Diocese of Sheffield Academy Trust)

Special Academies

- Joel Hardwick (Nexus Multi-academy Trust)

Special Schools

- Vacant seat

PRU

- Rhona Dodds (Sheffield Inclusion Centre)

Apologies: Ann Allen, Rhona Dodds, Linda Gooden (Natalie Glossop attended on behalf of); Joel Hardwick, Helen Kenyon, Andy Krabbendam, James Smythe, Nevine Towers, Alison Warner

Also in attendance: Patrick Butterell, Assistant Director, School Effectiveness; Amanda Murray, Planning and Strategy Officer (notes); Mark Sheikh, Head of Service, Resourcing and Business Planning

Presenters: Jacky Beatson, Resourcing Manager; Helen Mansfield, Resourcing Manager; Jim Watkin, Programme Manager

1. Welcome, apologies and declarations of interest

- Apologies were noted as per above.
- No declarations of interest were made.
- The Chair welcomed Natalie Glossop who attended on behalf of Linda Gooden.

2. Previous meeting minutes/matters arising

The minutes were agreed as a true and accurate record and no matters arising were raised.

3. SEND Top-up and Locality Funding Update

Mark Sheikh gave an update on this standing item, as per Paper 3, and highlighted the following key points:

- The banded funded system has gone live for all pupils with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) in mainstream schools as of September 2025.
- An additional £2.5m funding is being distributed across mainstream schools to provide support with meeting the needs of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) to avoid escalation to an EHCP.
- Locality funding has increased to £1m for 2025/26.

Forum discussion can be summarised as follows:

- The Chair asked about the continuing role of localities and it was confirmed that they will be asked for an action plan, and further information will be provided at the December meeting of the Forum.

Action: Mark to request an update on the localities' action plans for the December meeting.

The Forum noted the update provided.

4. Capital Allocations

Jim Watkin summarised the update on the capital allocations for maintained schools as per Paper 4:

- **The Basic Need Allocation** is based on the projected need for places by September 2026 and peaks in 2025/26 at just over £26m.
- **The School Condition Allocation** is just over £4m for 2025/26. This allocation is welcome but is insufficient to meet the £45m requirement for priority maintenance work.
- In addition, the Department for Education (DfE) has agreed to refund the £485k cost of replacing the reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete at Abbey Lane Primary.
- **School Rebuilding Programme** – the six rebuild schools and stages of progress are listed at section 3.1. The funding replaces the buildings but not furniture and fittings, and it should be noted that any costs that are considered *abnormal* are expected to be picked up by the Council.

Forum discussion clarified the following points:

- Buildings will be of standard design.
- To paint interior breeze block would be an additional cost and the walls are likely to be panelled with a 20–25-year shelf life.

- Modern standards of accessibility will be incorporated into design but will only replace existing – they will not add capacity.

The Forum noted the updated allocations; school rebuild programme timescales and the priority areas for high needs capital as detailed in the paper.

5. High Needs Block Deficit/Statutory Override

Mark Sheikh drew attention to the key points in Paper 5:

- The DfE has confirmed the extension of the Statutory Override on Dedicated School Grant (DSG) deficit to 31 March 2028. This is to allow time for authorities to manage their growing pressures, and deficits do not need to be recorded/recognised during this time.
- Sheffield is projecting its first cumulative DSG deficit in 2025/26, estimated at £15-18m. However, this could increase to £50-60m over the next couple of years without reducing expenditure.
- The projected deficit is driven by increased EHCP demand, high cost independent and out of city placements and investment in mainstream for SEND support and EHCP top-up funding.
- Other authorities have much larger deficits and some are being given support via national programmes: Safety Valve and Delivering Better Value. However, Sheffield is not currently part of these.
- We are in the process of producing a recovery plan, but it will require system-wide collaboration.

Forum discussion raised the following points:

- We are not sure if the Government will write-off any of the debt.
- Policy change will take time so it is likely that we will also need to find a financial solution.
- Historically, the High Needs Block is/has been underfunded.
- Funding cuts are likely to impact on non-statutory services.
- It would be valuable to see the data that sits behind this in order to consider how we can mitigate/minimise expenditure (including sharing data between trusts); as well as learn from other authorities who have recovered from similar deficits.
- The recovery plan will take into consideration existing DSG expenditure, sufficiency planning e.g. integrated resources, and expansion of *local* special provision. More information will be brought back to the December Forum.
- Members of the Forum queried the Government's understanding of the reality of the situation.
- Also, it was felt that there is still too much emphasis on attainment versus inclusive outcomes in determining results in Ofsted assessments which could inhibit achieving some of the cost reductions required.

The Forum:

- **Noted** the projected DSG deficit and that this is the first cumulative deficit for Sheffield.
- **Noted** the extension of the Statutory Override to March 2028 and the temporary relief it provides.

- **Noted** the emerging Deficit Recovery Plan, the guiding principles informing decisions, and the key actions underway to manage the High Needs Block deficit.
- **Acknowledged** the importance of collaboration across the Sheffield school system and support initiatives that promote early intervention, local placement, and effective use of SEND resources.
- **Acknowledged** the need for active engagement by all schools and providers to work together with the Council to ensure sustainable solutions to the DSG deficit while maintaining high-quality outcomes for children with SEND.

6. Special Schools Needs-led Budget

Mark Sheikh and Helen Mansfield presented Paper 6:

- The existing funding structure for pupils with special educational needs is detailed in section 2.2 of the paper.
- Historically, Level 3 has been delivered through a guaranteed funding model which, whilst providing stability, does not fully reflect the variation in needs across schools. Schools are increasingly seeking a more equitable and needs-led approach.
- It should be noted that in any new model there would be winners and losers. We would need to create a profile/banding system and then attach the funding.
- We are currently undertaking benchmarking to look at the models used by other local authorities.
- We have previously reviewed the model with special schools and are proposing an opportunity to revisit this by establishing a working group to progress the review.
- It is suggested that the working group include special school representatives (and other representatives) from the Education Funding Forum, members of the existing Funding Working Group and/or other members from the special school sector.
- The proposed timeline is to establish and gather evidence between September and December 2025, and to explore and co-produce a model during 2026. Any proposals would need to be taken into account when producing budgets which need to be agreed by February 2026.
- A progress report will be provided at the December Forum.

Forum members raised the following additional points:

- Any benchmarking would need to be in the context of how services are commissioned in different areas.
- Sarah Le-Good and Keith Crawshaw volunteered to join the working group.

The Forum noted the planned review and **agreed** to support the development of the working group.

7. Early Years Block Funding

Jacky Beatson updated the Forum on the key headlines of the 2026/27 early years budget as per Paper 7:

- As of 2026/27 local authorities must pass-through 97% of early years funding to providers.

- **Best Start in Life**
 - The DfE will review the early years national funding formula, in consultation with the sector, by summer 2026.
 - Further details are to follow in autumn regarding proposed investments in support available for children with SEND in early years.
- As of the financial year 2026/27, the census will be termly, not annual with the aim of better aligning funding allocations.

Additional Forum discussion included the following points:

- Nurseries are struggling and some are closing. The 30-hour funded childcare only covers certain costs and providers need to be able charge to make it viable.
- Jacky confirmed that providers can charge but it cannot be a condition of accessing a free place, and provision needs to be in line with the Code of Practice.
- It was acknowledged that there are issues with staffing retention and recruitment. A grant is now available to help with retention of new staff and we will share information about this.

Action: Jacky Beatson to look into the terms of the staff retention grant and share with Karen Simpkin/the Early Years Working Group.

The Forum noted the update.

8. SEN Home to School Travel and Transport Update

Mark Sheikh summarised Paper 8:

- We have a statutory duty to provide transport up to the age of 16 and a discretionary duty for post-16.
- The 2025/26 budget is £20.5m and the projected spend is £27.5m.
- Approximately 2,500 children and young people access our transport provision, and this number is set to increase.
- Work is being carried out to understand need and reduce reliance on high-cost transport – as set out at section 3 of the paper and including, for example personal travel budgets and independent travel training (we are in the process of increasing the team from 5 to 12 travel trainers).
- One of the significant findings from our analysis is that approximately 400 children are on part-time timetables, and this group represents a high number of all the taxi journeys. LAs are not expected to provide separate travel for such arrangements except in exceptional circumstances – schools are expected to pay. We have therefore written to schools requesting information regarding pupils on part-time timetables with a view to implementing change by Christmas 2025.
- For post-16 (discretionary) transport, we are consulting on a proposal to increase parental contribution from £540 to £1,000 per year.

Forum discussion included the following:

- There was concern around the impact of the proposed increase of parental contributions on low-income families and members asked that their concern be noted. It was acknowledged that the parental contribution had remained the same for some time but at the low-income end families were still struggling to meet the increased cost of living and a modest increase to them would still make a significant impact.
- The Chair requested that an update be brought back to the Forum.
- The risk of unintended consequences was raised for example if a parent decides to home educate because they cannot afford the transport contribution – it was confirmed that this is why we must first collect data around attendance and part-time timetables.
- It was suggested that taxi provision does not have to be provided if attendance drops below a certain level.

Action: Helen Mansfield to provide more information on the bursary funding.

The Forum noted the scale of the challenge and the initiatives being implemented, in particular around part-time timetables.

9. AOB

None raised.

Date of next meeting: 17 December 2025, 3.00-5.00pm, Learn Sheffield