

To all members of the Sunderland Schools Forum

Together for Children
Sunderland
City Hall – Level 2
Plater Way
Sunderland
SR1 3AA

Date: 11th September 2025
Our TFC-SF/ZW

Dear Colleague

SUNDERLAND SCHOOLS FORUM

You are invited to attend a meeting of the Schools Forum, scheduled for Thursday 18th September 2025 at 8.30 am. The meeting will be held virtually, and a Teams appointment has been circulated.

AGENDA

25/38	Appointment of Chair/Vice Chair <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nominations/expressions of interest will be invited at the meeting. - 	
25/39	Welcome, Introductions and Apologies SSF Vacancies/Appointment Proposals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2 x Academies Primary - 2 x Academy Secondary and All Through - 1 x Roman Catholic Diocese - 1 x Maintained Faith School Headteacher/Representative 	
25/40	<u>Review of Effectiveness of the Sunderland Schools Forum (SSF)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Membership Review (appendix 1) - Terms of Reference (appendix 2- for information) 	
25/40	Declarations of Interest	
25/41	Minutes of Previous Meeting School Forum meeting, held on 3 rd July 2025 (attached) (appendix 3)	
25/42	Matters Arising from the Minutes/Agreed Actions Action Log, from 3 rd July 2025 (attached) (appendix 4)	
25/43	Feedback from Short Life Working Groups/Sub Groups <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusion (including feedback on the Inclusion Pilot) • Quality Assurance Processes for Service Providers • DBV Funding: High Needs Block Business Plan • Audit and Assurance Sub-Group 	KR PR PR KR

25/44	Presentations:	
25/45	Reports for Discussion and Decision <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SEN Resourced Provisions Gap Funding 2025/26 (deferred from July meeting) (appendix 5) Voting: All SSF Members • Early Years Block Inclusion Underspend (carried forward from July 2025) • Dedicated Schools Grant Update and Projected Outturn 2025/26 (report to follow) • Budget Planning Framework 2026/27 – De-delegation of Trade Union Facilities Time (verbal update) <p>For information only</p>	PR PR DO/DD DO/DD
25/46	Any Other Business	
25/47	Date and Time of Next Meeting 16 th October 2025	

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any queries.

Yours faithfully



Zena Wilkinson
Team Leader
Governor Support Team
Together for Children
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E Mail: zena.wilkinson@togetherforchildren.org.uk

SCHOOLS FORUMS MEMBERSHIP – JULY 2025

				<u>VOTING RIGHTS</u>				
SCHOOL MEMBERS				1	2	3	4	5
1.	Maintained Primary School Headteacher (Mandatory)			Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
	Maintained Primary Schools South Headteacher	Catherine Jones – Headteacher	Thorney Close Primary School	<p>No voting rights: the views of the individual Primary Headteacher Clusters Groups will be put forward by the Maintained Primary Schools representative.</p> <p>In the event of the Maintained Primary School Teacher absence a Deputy will be appointed to share the views of the individual Primary Headteacher Cluster Groups.</p>				
	Maintained Primary Schools North Headteacher	Lisa Wood - Headteacher	Hylton Castle Primary School					
	Maintained Primary Schools Washington Headteacher	Sara Bainbridge - Headteacher	Barmston Village Primary School					
	Maintained Primary Schools Hetton/Houghton Headteacher	Nicola Hill - Headteacher	Hetton Primary					
2.	Maintained Special School Teacher (Mandatory)	James Waller – Headteacher: CHAIR	Sunningdale School					
3.	Maintained Nursery Headteacher (Mandatory)	Ailsa Higgins - Headteacher	Hetton Lyons/ Usworth	Y	Y		Y	Y
4.	Maintained Pupil Referral Service Headteacher (Mandatory)	Donna Walker - Headteacher	Link School	Y	Y		Y	Y
5.	Maintained Faith School Headteacher/Representative	Vacant	St Benet's RC Primary School	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
6.	Maintained Sector School Governor	Michael Hartnack - Governor	Grange Park Primary School	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
7.	Academy Primary, Infants and Junior	Emma Jarvis – Headteacher (Hetton/Houghton)	Dubmire Primary		Y		Y	Y
8	Academy Primary, Infants and Junior	Audrey Bolam – Headteacher (Washington)	Oxclose Primary		Y		Y	Y

SCHOOLS FORUMS MEMBERSHIP – JULY 2025

9.	Academy Primary, Infants and Junior	John Lines – Headteacher (Washington)	Columbia Academy		Y		Y	Y
10.	Academy Primary, Infants and Junior	Lauren Reeves – COO (South)	Vision Learning Trust (Hillview)		Y		Y	Y
11.	Academy Primary, Infants and Junior	Vacant			Y		Y	Y
12.	Academy Primary, Infants and Junior	Mandy Henderson - SBM	Ryhope Infant Academy		Y		Y	Y
13.	Academy Primary, Infants and Junior	Courtney Snowball	Diamond Hall Infant School		Y		Y	Y
14.	Academy Primary, Infants and Junior	Vacant			Y		Y	Y
15.	Academy Secondary and All Through	David Amos	Academy 360		Y			Y
16.	Academy Secondary and All Through	Madeline Hope – Director of Finance	Bishop Chadwick Education Trust		Y			Y
17.	Academy Secondary and All Through	Vacant			Y			Y
18.	Academy Secondary and All Through	Vacant			Y			Y
19.	Academy Secondary and All Through	Joanne Maw – Chief Executive officer	Aspire Learning Trust		Y			Y
20.	Academy Secondary and All Through	Phil Smith – Chief Finance Officer	Castlevew Academy		Y			Y
21.	Academy Secondary and All Through	Vicki Pinkney - Headteacher	Hetton Academy		Y			Y
22.	Academy Secondary and All Through	Colin Devlin – VICE CHAIR	Kepier Academy		Y			Y
23.	Academy Special (Mandatory)	Mick Little – Chief Operations Manager	Ascent		Y			Y

NON SCHOOL MEMBERS								
24.	Private, Voluntary & Independent Nurseries	David Martin	Chilton Moor Nursery		**		Y	Y
25.	Private, Voluntary & Independent Nurseries	Michelle Barr, Nursery owner and Manger	Buttons Nursery Washington		**		Y	y
26.	Post 16 Provision	Vikki Morton	Sunderland College					Y
27.	Teacher Associations	Andy Lewis						Y
28.	Roman Catholic Diocese	Vacant						Y
29.	Church of England Diocese	Sarah Armstrong	Benedict Biscop					Y

TOGETHER FOR CHILDREN OFFICERS & COUNCILLORS								
	Head of Accounting & Finance	Deborah Orr						
	Director of Education	Kim Richardson						
	Strategic Service Lead – Education							
	Lead Member Children’s Services	Cllr M Butler						
	Lead Member Children’s Services Deputy – No longer applicable							
	Deputy s.151 Officer	Claire Emmerson						

MEMBERSHIP VOTING RIGHTS		
1	Scheme for Financing Schools (Maintained)	
2	Schools Block Funding Formula	
3.	De-delegation maintained schools	
4.	Early Years Single Funding Formula	
5.	All other School Forum Decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Central expenditure relating to schools’ block b. Deficits on central expenditure to be funded from following year’s DSG. c. Voting procedures

- De-delegation maintained secondary removed as no longer pertinent.
- ** PVI representatives can vote on the consultation on the funding formula only.

SCHOOLS FORUMS MEMBERSHIP – MARCH 2025

		<u>VOTING RIGHTS</u>				
SCHOOL MEMBERS		1	2	3	4	5
1.	Maintained Primary School Headteacher (Mandatory)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
	Maintained Primary Schools South Headteacher	No voting rights: the views of the individual Primary Headteacher Clusters Groups will be put forward by the Maintained Primary Schools representative. In the event of the Maintained Primary School Teacher absence a Deputy will be appointed to share the views of the individual Primary Headteacher Cluster Groups.				
	Maintained Primary Schools North Headteacher					
	Maintained Primary Schools Washington Headteacher					
	Maintained Primary Schools Hetton/Houghton Headteacher					
2.	Maintained Special School Teacher (Mandatory)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
3.	Maintained Nursery Headteacher (Mandatory)	Y	Y		Y	Y
4.	Maintained Pupil Referral Service Headteacher (Mandatory)	Y	Y		Y	Y
5.	Maintained Faith School Headteacher/Representative	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
6.	Maintained Sector School Governor	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
7.	Academy Primary, Infants and Junior		Y		Y	Y
8	Academy Primary, Infants and Junior		Y		Y	Y

SCHOOLS FORUMS MEMBERSHIP – MARCH 2025

9.	Academy Primary, Infants and Junior	John Lines – Headteacher (Washington)	Columbia Academy		Y		Y	Y
10.	Academy Primary, Infants and Junior	Lauren Reeves – COO (South)	Vision Learning Trust (Hillview)		Y		Y	Y
11.	Academy Primary, Infants and Junior	Courtney Snowball – Business Manager	Diamond Hall Infant School		Y		Y	Y
12.	Academy Primary, Infants and Junior	Mandy Henderson - SBM	Ryhope Infant Academy		Y		Y	Y
13.	Academy Primary, Infants and Junior	Vacant			Y		Y	Y
14.	Academy Primary, Infants and Junior	Vacant			Y		Y	Y
15.	Academy Secondary and All Through	David Amos	Academy 360		Y			Y
16.	Academy Secondary and All Through	Madeline Hope – Director of Finance	Bishop Chadwick Education Trust		Y			Y
17.	Academy Secondary and All Through	Vacant			Y			Y
18.	Academy Secondary and All Through	Vacant			Y			Y
19.	Academy Secondary and All Through	Joanne Maw – Chief Executive officer	Aspire Learning Trust		Y			Y
20.	Academy Secondary and All Through	Phil Smith – Chief Finance Officer	Castlevew Academy		Y			Y
21.	Academy Secondary and All Through	Vicki Pinkney - Headteacher	Hetton Academy		Y			Y
22.	Academy Secondary and All Through	Colin Devlin – VICE CHAIR	Kepler Academy		Y			Y
23.	Academy Special (Mandatory)	Mick Little – Chief Operations Manager	Ascent		Y			Y

SCHOOLS FORUMS MEMBERSHIP – MARCH 2025

NON SCHOOL MEMBERS

24.	Private, Voluntary & Independent Nurseries	David Martin	Chilton Moor Nursery				Y	Y
25.	Private, Voluntary & Independent Nurseries	Michelle Barr, Nursery owner and Manger	Buttons Nursery Washington	**			Y	Y
26.	Post 16 Provision	Vikki Morton	Sunderland College				Y	
27.	Teacher Associations	Andy Lewis					Y	
28.	Roman Catholic Diocese	Vacant					Y	
29.	Church of England Diocese	Sarah Armstrong	Benedict Biscop				Y	

TOGETHER FOR CHILDREN OFFICERS & COUNCILLORS

	Head of Accounting & Finance	Deborah Orr						
	Director of Education	Kim Richardson						
	Strategic Service Lead – Education							
	Lead Member Children’s Services	Clir M Butler						
	Lead Member Children’s Services Deputy – No longer applicable							
	Deputy s.151 Officer	Claire Emmerson						

MEMBERSHIP VOTING RIGHTS

1	Scheme for Financing Schools (Maintained)	
2	Schools Block Funding Formula	
3.	De-delegation maintained schools	
4.	Early Years Single Funding Formula	
5.	All other School Forum Decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Central expenditure relating to schools block b. Deficits on central expenditure to be funded from following year’s DSG. c. Voting procedures

SCHOOLS FORUMS MEMBERSHIP – MARCH 2025

- De-delegation maintained secondary removed as no longer pertinent

** PVI representatives can vote on the consultation on the funding formula only.

SUNDERLAND SCHOOLS FORUM TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. TERMS OF REFERENCE

1.1 The Schools Forum brings together key partners in the provision of education in Sunderland and is established by the Local Authority under powers contained within the Education Act 2002.

1.2 The Terms of Reference for the Schools Forum are drawn from The Schools Forums (England) Regulations 2012.

1.3 The Schools Forum is a statutory consultative body and has the following powers and responsibilities (detailed by the Education & Skills Funding Agency):

Function	Local Authority	Schools Forum	DfE Role
Formula change (including redistributions)	Proposes and decides	Must be consulted [voting restrictions apply - see schools forum structure document] and informs the governing bodies of all consultations	Checks for compliance with regulations
Movement of up to 0.5% from the school's block to other blocks	Proposes	Decides	Adjudicates where the School Forum does not agree LA proposal.
Contracts (where the LA is entering a contract to be funded from the school's budget)	Proposes at least one month prior to invitation to tender, the terms of any proposed contract	Gives a view and informs the governing bodies of all consultations	None
Financial issues relating to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • arrangements for pupils with special educational needs, in particular the places to be commissioned by the LA and schools and the arrangements for paying top-up funding • arrangements for use of pupil referral units and the education of children otherwise than at school, in particular the places to be commissioned by the LA and schools and the arrangements for paying top-up funding • arrangements for early years provision • administration arrangements for the allocation of central government grants 	Consults annually	Gives a view and informs the governing bodies of all consultations	None

Minimum funding guarantee (MFG)	Proposes any exclusions from MFG for application to DfE	Gives a view	Approval to application for exclusions
De-delegation for mainstream maintained schools for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> contingencies administration of free school meals insurance licenses/subscriptions staff costs – supply cover support for minority ethnic pupils/underachieving groups behaviour support services library and museum services School improvement 	Proposes	Maintained primary and secondary school member representatives will decide for their phase. Middle schools are treated according to their deemed status	Adjudicates where the School Forum does not agree LA proposal
General Duties for maintained schools Contribution to responsibilities that local authorities hold for maintained schools.	Proposes	Would be decided by the relevant maintained school members (primary, secondary, special and PRU).	Adjudicates where the School Forum does not agree LA proposal
Central spend on and the criteria for allocating funding from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> funding for significant pre-16 pupil growth, including new schools set up to meet basic need, whether maintained or academy funding for good or outstanding schools with failing rolls where growth in pupil numbers is expected within three years 	Proposes	Decides	Adjudicates where the School Forum does not agree LA proposal
Central spend on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> early years block provision funding to enable all schools to meet the infant class size requirement back-pay for equal pay claims remission of boarding fees at maintained schools and academies places in independent schools for non-SEN pupils admissions servicing of the School Forum Contribution to responsibilities that local authorities hold for all schools 	Proposes	Decides	Adjudicates where the School Forum does not agree LA proposal
Central spend on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> capital expenditure funded from revenue – projects must have been planned and decided on prior to April 2013 so no new projects can be charged contribution to combined budgets – this is where the School Forum agreed prior to April 2013 a contribution from the schools' budget to services which would otherwise be funded from other sources existing termination of employment costs (costs for specific individuals must have been approved prior to April 2013 so no 	Proposes up to the value committed in the previous financial year and where expenditure has already been committed.	Decides for each line	Adjudicates where the School Forum does not agree LA proposal

new redundancy costs can be charged) • prudential borrowing costs – the commitment must have been approved prior to April 2013			
Central spend on: • high needs block provision • central licenses negotiated by the Secretary of State	Decides	None, but good practice to inform forum	None
Scheme of financial management changes	Proposes and consults the governing body and Head of every school	Approves (school members only)	Adjudicates where the School Forum does not agree LA proposal
Membership: length of office of members	Decides	None (but good practice would suggest that they gave a view)	None
Voting procedures	None	Determine voting procedures	None
Chair of the School Forum	Facilitates	Elects (may not be an elected member of the Council or officer)	None

2. CONSTITUTION

2.1 The Membership of the Schools Forum shall be as follows:

Primary Headteachers (M ¹)	1 Headteacher
Academy Primary, Infants and Junior	8
Secondary Headteachers (M)	0 Headteacher ²
Academy Secondary and All Through	8
Nursery (M)	1 Headteacher
Special (M)	1 Headteacher
Academy Special (Mandatory)	1
Pupil Referral Services (M)	1 Headteacher
Faith Representative	1 Headteacher (Primary)
Governors	1 Governor

2.2 Members representing schools may be drawn from Headteachers (or their representative), CEOs and all classes of Governor.

2.3 Academy Trusts in the local area are required to consider the type of representative and from which sectors within their group. However, at least one member must represent special academies as required by Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) regulations.

¹ M – denotes Mandatory place

² No Maintained Secondary Schools now

- 2.4 Maintained primary representatives will be elected from within their area Headteacher groups. It will be the responsibility of current Forum representative to ensure that appropriate discussion and representation takes place.
- 2.5 Maintained primary members will be required to elect from their maintained primary membership group the representative who is to hold voting rights to vote on their behalf. It is recommended that a deputy is also identified for occasions where the voting member is unable to attend Forum.
- 2.6 Faith schools will continue to have a primary place available in the school's group as well as two non-school places representing the Church of England and Roman Catholic Diocese.
- 2.7 Current members who have not attended three or more Forum meetings will be discharged from their membership duties and replaced via the Terms of Reference membership process
- 2.8 As well as the term of office coming to an end, a member ceases to be a member of the Schools Forum if he or she resigns from the schools forum or no longer occupies the office by which he or she became eligible for election, selection or appointment to the schools forum.
- 2.9 Members of Schools Forum have an obligation to inform and consult, as appropriate, with their cluster or sector group that they are responsible for representing and to bring back to Forum the collective views / voting intention of that representative group.

2.10 Substitute Members

Where a Forum member is unable to attend they are responsible for arranging an appropriate substitute to attend the meeting.

The substitute for headteachers must be from the same representative group and can be a member of the headteacher's senior management team or a headteacher from another school. Alternatively, if a substitute cannot be found the headteacher may ask their headteacher association to substitute.

Where a cluster area representative is unable to attend their nominated deputy should do so.

Governors can only be substituted by a governor. The substitute can be a governor from the same governing body or from another school within the same representative group. If no substitute can be found, the Authority will arrange a substitute from a pool of elected substitutes.

If a member knows that they need to leave the meeting early, they should arrange for a substitute to attend the whole meeting and then the substitute can take over when the member leaves.

Substitutes have the right to vote provided they are acting on behalf of a member with voting rights.

Members are required, where possible, to notify the Clerk to Schools Forum of any substitutes no less than 24 hours before the meeting at Zena.wilkinson@togetherforchildren.org.uk.

3. APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS

- 3.1 The current members of the Schools Forum are responsible for the appointment of vacancies to the membership as set out in the table in 2.1. The representation for primary and secondary schools will remain proportionate to the number of pupils within each sector. The representation in relation to maintained schools and academies will remain proportionate to the number of pupils.

- 3.2 Nominations from current members will be considered as will direct nominations from prospective members themselves.
- 3.3 Following discussion at Forum a vote will be held in respect of the appointment of a new member, with the majority vote being ratified at the same meeting. The new member will be informed by the Clerk to the Schools Forum and invited to attend the next scheduled meeting.
- 3.4 If an election is required for headteachers, or their representatives, all relevant schools will be balloted. For governors all governing bodies for the relevant section will be balloted. The candidate with the highest number of votes will be appointed. In the event of a tie, a second election will take place for those candidates who have equal votes. If there is more than one vacancy within a representative group, all groups eligible to vote will have one vote per vacancy.
- 3.5 In circumstances where a vacancy on Forum remains with no nominations the Authority will liaise with schools and academies from the relevant sector to encourage the submission of nominations.
- 3.6 Any change of the nominated officer from non-school bodies, shall be notified to the Clerk to the Forum at least 14 days before the next meeting.

4. CONDUCT AND TERMS OF OFFICE

- 4.1 In carrying out their functions, members of the Schools Forum are expected to act in accordance with the seven principles of public life set out in the first report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life: selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership. Members will need to take a strategic view across the whole education estate whilst acting as representative of the group that has elected them. Furthermore, they should be easily contactable and pro-active in raising the profile of issues and communicating decisions, and the reasons behind them, effectively.
- 4.2 The term of office for Schools Members will be a maximum of four years from the date of appointment, subject to their remaining eligible. The term of office for Non-Schools Members will be a maximum of four years from the date of appointment.
- 4.3 Schools Members may resign from membership of the Schools Forum and will also cease to be a member if he or she is no longer eligible to be a member.
- 4.4 Any member, who fails to attend three consecutive meetings of Schools Forum, even where a substitute attended on his or her behalf, may have their membership terminated on a majority vote of the other members.
- 4.5 After their term of appointment comes to an end, individuals may choose to stand down, however, there is no limit on the number of consecutive terms of office an individual may serve on Schools Forum if they are re-elected. Members who have not attended regularly are prevented from standing again for 2 years after their last term of office.

5. CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR

- 5.1 The Schools Forum shall appoint from within its membership a Chair and Vice-Chair, elected (if necessary) by a majority of votes cast. These posts may not be held by an elected member or employee of the Authority.

- 5.2 A Chair or Vice-Chair shall cease to hold office if he or she resigns by giving written notice to the Clerk to the Schools Forum, or if he or she ceases to be a member of the Schools Forum.
- 5.3 Chair and Vice-Chair shall be elected at the first meeting of the academic year. A Chair or Vice-Chair may stand for re-election in further successive years where eligibility criteria is met.
- 5.4 The Chair's responsibilities include chairing meetings and overseeing the preparation of the record of the meeting. In the absence of the Chair the Vice-Chair shall fulfill these roles.
- 5.5 If in any circumstances, it is necessary that a view be given on behalf of the Forum and it is impossible to convene an urgent meeting in accordance with 7.2, the Chair shall be entitled to express a view on behalf of the Forum. The Chair shall inform the Members of the Forum, informally as soon as possible, but shall nonetheless report that view and the circumstances behind the need to give that view to the next meeting of the Forum.
- 5.6 The Schools Forum shall select one of its members to preside over a meeting if both the Chair and Vice-Chair are unable to attend.
- 5.7 The Chair can be removed from office between annual elections only if the Schools Forum passes a resolution on a majority of votes cast to remove him or her; and
 - a) fourteen working days notice of such a meeting is given; and
 - b) removing the Chair is a specific item on the agenda for such a meeting; and
 - c) before the vote at the meeting, those proposing that the Chair be removed state reasons for the proposal, and the Chair is given an opportunity to make a statement in reply.

6. CLERK TO THE SCHOOLS FORUM

- 6.1 The Authority shall appoint a Clerk. The responsibilities of the Clerk include, but are not limited to, drafting a schedule of Forum meetings, convening meetings in line with the schedule, keeping a record of each meeting and ensuring members of the Schools Forum have all relevant information to make a reasoned decision.

7. MEETINGS OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM

- 7.1 The Clerk shall convene the meetings of the Schools Forum, giving a minimum notice of eight working days, with a full agenda.
- 7.2 In cases of urgency, the Clerk shall convene a meeting of the Schools Forum on the direction of the Chair, or in their absence, the Vice-Chair.
- 7.3 The Schools Forum shall meet at least four times a year.
- 7.4 The Schools Forum shall meet as necessary in order to be consulted on contracts for supplies and/or services or other financial issues.
- 7.5 A meeting is only quorate if 40% of the total membership is present (this excludes any observers, and it is 40% of the current membership excluding vacancies). If a meeting is inquorate it can proceed but it cannot legally take decisions (election of a Chair, or a decision relating to funding conferred by the funding regulations). An inquorate meeting can respond to Local Authority consultation, and give views to the Local Authority. It would normally be good practice for the local authority to take account of such 'unofficial' views, but it's not legally obliged to do so. In practice, the arrangements for meetings should

be made to reduce the chance of a problem with the quorum. The quorum stipulation is in the regulations to help ensure the legitimacy of decisions

7.6 Local Authority attendance is restricted to the Lead Member, Director of Education (or representative), Director of Finance (or representative), officers providing financial or technical advice and officers presenting reports.

7.7 The Secretary of State can appoint an observer to attend and speak at meetings, for example a representative from the Education and Skills Funding Agency.

7.8 Agendas, reports and minutes will be published on a website accessible to the public.

8. RECORD OF MEETINGS

8.1 The names of the members present at a Schools Forum meeting must be recorded with the minutes of the meeting. Draft minutes of the meeting shall be circulated within 7 working days of the meeting.

8.2 The Forum minutes must be agreed at the following Forum meeting.

8.3 The Authority should make available the agenda, papers and approved minutes for each meeting. The only exception will be for items that the Forum has decided should be confidential.

8.4 Confidential items shall include those which fall within Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972. The Chair or Vice-Chair when agreeing the agenda for each meeting shall determine items to be considered in private session and shall have regard to Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

8.5 The minutes of any part of a meeting that are confidential should be kept separate and not available for inspection.

8.6 Members of the Schools Forum shall respect the confidentiality of items of business which Schools Forum decides are confidential.

9. VOTING

9.1 Voting shall be by individual member votes cast, but voting is limited for:

- the funding formula - limited to schools members, academies members and PVI representatives
- de-delegation - limited to the specific primary and secondary phase of maintained schools members
- retaining funding for statutory duties relating to maintained schools only - limited to maintained primary, secondary, special and PRU members

9.2 As the role of the Schools Forum is consultative there shall be no bar upon members abstaining or any need for a Chair's casting vote except in limited situations set out in 9.3.

9.3 In the event of a tied vote the Chair shall have a casting vote.

10 PROCEEDINGS

- 10.1 The Forum may establish sub-groups to focus on specific issues. If a view of the Forum is required related to the work of a sub-group, then the sub-group shall present a report and/or recommendation to the Forum.
- 10.2 Schools Forum shall have regard to the requirements placed on the Authority and school governing bodies by all relevant equality legislation and associated regulations.
- 10.3 Schools Forum will be considered as a 'public authority' for the purpose of the Human Rights Act 1998. Schools Forum must act in a way which is compatible with the rights and freedoms in the European Convention on Human Rights.
- 10.4 Any complaints about the operation of Schools Forum shall in the first instance be addressed to the Clerk to the of Schools Forum. The Clerk and the Chair / Vice Chair of Schools Forum should seek to resolve problems quickly. The action taken to resolve a complaint must be reported to the next meeting of Schools Forum.

11.0 BUDGET

- 11.1 The Forum shall determine matters for which they may need funds. Approved expenditure may include expenses for members; costs of Clerk, training courses for Members and the hire of a meeting room, where a room is not provided by the Authority. Officers of the Authority will offer guidance on budgetary procedures.
- 11.2 The Authority shall prepare an annual statement showing total expenditure for the Forum.

12. INFORMATION TO BE PROVIDED TO NEW SCHOOLS FORUM MEMBERS

- 12.1 When a new member is appointed, he or she should receive background information from the Clerk to the Schools Forum and induction, including:
- a copy of the Terms of Reference
 - the procedures for meetings
 - recent minutes of meetings

13. CHANGES TO THIS DOCUMENT

- 13.1 Schools Forum may review the Terms of Reference as necessary and request changes to be made by the Authority. The Authority shall not unreasonably refuse to make such changes.
- 13.2 The Authority may revise these Terms of Reference as necessary to reflect either the proportions referred to in section 2.1, new guidance from the DfE or new statutory requirements.

14. APPROVAL OF TERMS OF REFERENCE

- 14.1 Approved by Schools Forum on 6 July 2023.

SUNDERLAND SCHOOLS FORUM

Minutes of the Meeting Held on Thursday 3rd July 2025 at 8.30 am

School Forum Member Attendance

Voting

James Waller (JW) - Chair	Maintained Special School
Sarah Armstrong (SA)	Church of England Diocese
Michelle Barr (MB)	Private, Voluntary & Independent Nurseries
Ann Blakey (AB)	Maintained Faith School Representative
Colin Devlin (CD)	Academy Secondary and All Through
Caroline Granton on behalf of Donna Walker (CG)	Maintained Pupil Referral Services
Michael Hartnack (MH)	Maintained Primary – Governor
Ailsa Higgins (AH)	Maintained Nursery
Madeline Hope (MHo)	Academy Secondary and All Through
Emma Jarvis (EJ)	Academy Primary, Infant and Junior
Catherine Jones (CJ)	Maintained Primary Schools Headteacher
Andy Lewis (AL)	Teacher Association
Michael Little (ML)	Academy Special
Lauren Reeves (LR)	Academy Primary, Infant and Junior
Joanne Maw (JM)	Academy Secondary and All Through
Phil Smith (PS)	Academy Secondary and All Through

Non-Voting

Sarah Bainbridge (SB)	Maintained Primary School
Lisa Wood (LW)	Maintained Primary School Headteacher

Together for Children Officers and Councillors

Cllr J Butler (JB)	Lead Member, Children's Services
Debra Dixon (DD)	TfC Team Manager, Management Accounting Team
John Hope (JH)	TfC Technical Accountant Education Funding
Ronnie Lynn (RL)	TfC Internal Strategic Lead, Education
Leigh Morris (LM)	TfC Team Manager, School Finance
Kim Richardson (KR)	TfC Director of Education
Alan Rowan (AR)	TfC Capital Sufficiency Lead
Gemma Slater (GS)	TfC Trainee Accounting Technician
Jill Wilson (JWi)	TfC Finance Business Partner
Zena Wilkinson	Schools Forum Clerk

		Agreed Action
25/27	<p><u>Welcome, Introductions and Apologies for Absence</u></p> <p>The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.</p> <p>The Clerk advised that apologies for absence had been submitted by Mr Amos, Mr Cullen, Mrs Emmerson, Mrs Hill, Mrs Orr, Mrs Robertson and Mrs Walker (Mrs Granton was in attendance as proxy for Mrs Walker).</p>	

	<p>The Clerk confirmed a quorum was present and the meeting could proceed to business.</p> <p>The Clerk reported the following vacancies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 x Academy Primary, Infants and Junior representatives • 2 x Academy Secondary and All Through • 1 x Roman Catholic Diocese <p>Members were advised that Courtney Snowball, School Business Manager, Diamond Hall Infant School, had put forward an expression of interest to join the membership and the nomination had been accepted by the South Primary Headteacher Group.</p> <p>Members RESOLVED:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To appoint Courtney Snowball as an Academy Primary, Infant and Junior School member. 	
25/28	<p><u>Declarations of Interest</u></p> <p>MH advised that as an elected Councillor he would declare declarations throughout the meeting, if appropriate.</p> <p>JB declared an interest with regard to the FSM Auto Enrolment, in line with his involvement with the project.</p> <p>SSF members NOTED:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The declarations of interest in relation to the business to be considered. - Declarations could be made throughout the meeting, if appropriate. 	
25/29	<p><u>Minutes of Previous Meeting</u></p> <p>SSF members RESOLVED:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To accept the minutes of the Sunderland Schools Forum (SSF) held on 22nd May 2025 as a true record, with the following amendment: - The omission of an identified action on the action log (PR was to provide a report detailing Early Years Block Inclusion Underspend). 	
25/30	<p><u>Matters Arising from the Minutes/Agreed Actions</u></p> <p>Matters Arising from the Minutes:</p> <p>Members confirmed they had received a copy of the Action Log prior to the meeting.</p> <p>24/37 Feedback from Short Life Working Groups JW noted this action had been recorded for a period of time and queried if it was still pertinent. KR stated that this was in relation to sensory processes, which had been embedded.</p> <p>24/65 Reports for Discussion and Decision Invitation to be extended to Mr P S Wilson, Section 151 Officer.</p>	

	<p>The Clerk advised that Mr Wilson and Mrs Claire Emmerson (Assistant Director of Finance) would receive invitations to attend all future meetings.</p> <p>25/06 Feedback from Short Life Working Groups KR advised that an Inclusion Forum had been scheduled to be held today and Mr Robert Bell, Headteacher, would be discussing a proposed EOI pilot. KR proposed providing feedback from the Inclusion Pilot at a future meeting, once the pilot was established. SSF members agreed the proposal.</p> <p>25/16 Any Other Business JH confirmed he had discussed the provider agreement content with NW.</p> <p>25/22 Feedback from Short Life Working Group JW noted that invitations to put forward proposals for the next Inclusion Forum had been extended in January 2025. RL explained that within the new academic year the Inclusion Forum may be included within BAP meetings, stating that the same representatives attended both meetings and similar topics were discussed.</p> <p>RL assured SSF members that he could be contacted directly if there were any suggestions for discussion topics within the forums scheduled.</p>	KR
25/31	<p><u>Feedback from Short Life Working Groups</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusion <p>KR advised SSF members that the current arrangements were being re-evaluated, stating that going forward work would be undertaken on identified, specific, strands.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality Assurance Processes for Service Providers <p>KR advised SSF members that the deadline to be notified that a SEND Inspection would be scheduled, during the current academic year, had passed and shared that she believed an Inspection would be scheduled in the Autumn Term 2025.</p> <p>KR highlighted that there had been a slight amendment to the SEND Framework, in relation to Annex A.</p> <p>RL advised that in terms of the quality assurance process a refined, and strengthened, quality assurance process had been implemented in respect of any provider utilised by TfC.</p> <p>RL stated that he, PR and team members had undertaken a number of quality assurance visits and further were planned for the Autumn Term 2025, explaining that priorities would be identified in line with pupil numbers.</p> <p>RL provided assurance that the quality assurance processes implemented were thorough, sharing that the procedures had been commended by external professionals.</p>	

	<p>RL explained that quality assurance visits would be scheduled annually.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DBV Funding: Probity <p>RL informed SSF members that PR had provided feedback within an Education Directorate meeting, stating that in relation to funding they were now looking at “business as usual”. KR suggested including High Needs Block Business Plan as a standing item of business going forward.</p> <p>JW noted that a SEND White Paper was due to be released in the Autumn Term 2025.</p>	Clerk
25/32	<p><u>Presentations</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deputy Section 151 Officer <p>The Clerk advised that CE had submitted her apologies for this meeting but had confirmed she would attend the next meeting.</p>	
25/33	<p><u>Reports for Discussion and Decision</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Free School Meals Auto Enrolment</u> <p>Members confirmed they had received a copy of the following report prior to the meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Free School Meals (FSM) Auto Enrolment Proposal <p>Members welcomed AR to the meeting.</p> <p>AR advised that the transition protection arrangements for children transitioning from primary to secondary school were due to end this year, explaining that a re-assessment for FSM eligibility would be required. AR stated that it had been identified the new proposals would remove 400 children from the FSM register, which would have a significant impact on families. AR explained that the House of Commons would be hearing a second reading of the proposal to implement a national FSM process across all local authorities, as all local authorities were using different processes and procedures.</p> <p>AR explained that it was not possible to auto enrol pupils/parents without their permission, therefore a process needed to be identified to provide parents with an option to “opt out” of auto enrolment.</p> <p>AR informed SSF members that the Department of Works & Pension (DWP) had confirmed permission to share information and consent was awaited from Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs (HMRC) and, if agreed, it was hoped FSM data would be available to share with schools in September.</p> <p>AR advised that there were 12,500 pupils claiming FSM and test data had identified that there were 708 pupils currently in the</p>	

school system, or were due to join Reception, that were eligible for FSM but were not registered.

AR stated that he believed it would be possible to develop a programme to negate some issues which had been identified but it would not be possible to confirm this until the May census was completed, at which time information would be requested from the DWP and HMRC.

AR provided an overview of the requirements to be eligible for FSM, sharing that there would be a need to write out to parents to advise them that they would have a 2 week period in which to "opt out" of claiming FSM (and those parents indicating that they wished to opt out would be removed from the process); further eligibility checks would be undertaken on any families who had not opted out and on completion of this exercise schools would be provided with a list of eligible pupils so they could communicate outcomes to families and pupils could be registered for FSM. AR stated that the aim was for schools to have a list of pupils eligible for FSM in September, rather than after the school census in October.

AR explained that work would be undertaken today to validate test data, advising SSF members that he believed gaps had been identified but he did not believe these were unsurmountable.

AR stated that he believed the new proposals would be beneficial for SEN and schools who had pupils outside of the Sunderland City Council borders.

AR explained that processes would still be required for those families who did not have recourse to public funding.

AR advised SSF members that one issue which may be encountered was in relation to those schools who did not share Wonde information with Sunderland City Council/TfC. AR explained that the coverage for the proposals detailed were limited by geographical and data accessibility.

AR shared that 25% of the Year 7 and Reception cohort may not be picked up within the processes proposed but consideration was being given to potentially completing a second data sweep in October.

AR reiterated that he believed an additional 700+ children would be identified but the process may also identify a significant number of families who were no longer eligible to claim FSM. AR shared that discussions were currently being held with respective SCC departments (who had previously supported families with winter fuel allowances) to identify whether there was any available funding to provide meals between September to March but reiterated that nothing was formalised.

AR stated that he believed this was a worthwhile project, but it was not cost neutral, therefore there would be an increase to the cost of the FSM Eligibility service level agreement (SLA). AR explained that the processes put forward were very capacity intensive.

PS thanked AR for the information presented, acknowledging this would be a complicated process. PS recognised that if funding occurred, and additional FSM pupils were identified, the plan was that this would be funded by LA's. PS questioned the projected level of funding. AR stated that he was unable to provide any guarantees, sharing that the initial draft indicated that this would equate to £140,000 (£500 per pupil). AR stated that he hoped to have an outcome next week, at which point there would be a need to look at allocation arrangements. PS acknowledged that not all families eligible to receive FSM used this option, therefore there may be a reduced number taking this forward. PS stated that he believed the proposals had positive potentials.

AR shared that SCC and TfC were leaning heavily on Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) but also highlighted the fact that parents were entitled to receive FSM vouchers during school holidays.

SSF Members **AGREED:**

- To note the FSM Auto Enrolment Proposals, as shared.
- Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Update

DD explained that as it was early in the financial year she would be providing a verbal update on the DSG position.

DD stated that, as reported at the last meeting, the current deficit position was approximately £16,000,000 and advised SSF members that the national statutory override had now been extended to 2028, and further information was expected to be received in the Autumn Term 2025.

SSF members were advised that DD and KR were working closely with Mr P Wilson (Section 151 Officer) with a focus on HNB expenditure, to provide strategic levels of information, for example projected costs, proposals and impacts. DD shared that TfC were trying to set an in year balanced budget, stating that this was very difficult, and confirmed work would be undertaken across the Summer term.

SSF Members **AGREED:**

- To note and accept the DSG Update, as presented.
- Audit and Assurance Sub-Group to Review the DSG High Needs Block Spending Proposal

DD advised SSF members that she and KR had discussed the option of implementing an Audit and Assurance Sub Group, to provide SSF members with an opportunity to understand, in more detail, expenditure.

KR explained that to support the strategy she believed there would be benefits from the implementation of a sub group, in terms of reporting back to the Chair and SSF Forum. KR explained that this would ensure SSF members were clearer in relation to the detail of proposal put forward. KR stated that the proposal was to identify 3 sub group members to provide feedback, from special, secondary and primary schools and

KR/DD

invited expressions of interest. CD stated that he believed this proposal would be beneficial and put forward an expression of interest to represent secondary schools; PS confirmed that he also believed this was a beneficial proposal, as it would provide detailed information, and put forward an expression of interest. ML commended the proposal put forward, acknowledging the growing deficit balance, and put forward an expression of interest, stating that he believed a forensic approach was needed; CJ put forward an expression of interest, to represent primary schools.

KR extended her thanks for the expression of interest put forward.

SSF Members **RESOLVED:**

- To accept the proposal to implement an Audit and Assurance Sub-Group: Membership CD, PS, ML and CJ.
- Early Years Block Inclusion Underspend

AH noted this agenda item was in response to her request at the previous meeting, for detailed information in relation to the EY Inclusion Funding underspend, explaining that she had requested a report in relation to the new allocation process/system.

SSF Members **AGREED:**

- This item of business would be deferred until the September 2025 meeting.
- Education Health Care Top Up Banding Rate – Proposed Increase from April 2025

SSF members confirmed they had received a copy of the following report prior to the meeting for consideration:

- EHCP Top Up Banding Rate – Proposed Increase from April 2025

DD explained that the purpose of the report was to provide SSF members with a range of proposed options in relation to EHCP Top Up banding rates, from April 2025, together with the estimated additional cost to the DSG HNB:

- Proposal 1: No increase to banding rates, resulting in no additional costs to the DSG HNB in 2025/26.
- Proposal 2: Increase all EHCP banding rates by 0.9%, in line with the average overall budget increase in mainstream schools, from April 2025, at an estimated additional cost of £158,178 to the DSH HNB for 2025/26 (assuming there were no increases in EHCP pupil numbers).
- Proposal 3: Increase all EHCP banding rates by an agreed percentage at a projected additional cost of £175,753 per 1% increase to the DSG HNB for 2025/26 (assuming there were no increases in EHCP pupil numbers).

ML thanked DD for the information presented, stating that in line with HNB deficits, and from personal experience, he believed this had been a different year, because of the additional funding

PR

being received by special schools, which went toward additional costs. ML explained that he supported equity but stated this year he felt this may not be required, taking into consideration the size of the DSG deficit and potential to make savings.

ML recognised that £158,000 equated to 1% of the deficit but acknowledged that this was single year proposal and that his perspective may not represent all views. ML stated that as this was a personal view he would abstain from voting.

PS thanked ML for his comments, stating that he believed these were beneficial, explaining that as a representative of recipients or funding it was important to understand whether this was needed. PS explained that he did not fully understand how top up worked, sharing that his organisation received top up funding for a number of children, but he believed the additional funding identified negated this need.

DD noted that PR was not at the meeting but stated that from her understanding, when a child was assessed they were placed within a specific banding and costings had been calculated for the individual bands. DD explained that if it was felt the child's needs were outside of the identified banding criteria specific funding arrangements could be made. DD acknowledged that schools also received funding as the child was on roll.

PS acknowledged that overall costs had increased and queried if the EHCP allocations were re-assessed frequently. DD stated that she believed an annual assessment was undertaken. KR confirmed that needs were reviewed annually and could be increased or decreased, sharing that if additional funding was required this was scrutinised. PS stated that in line with this information he felt if the assessed level of need did not fully meet a particular banding it would be fitted into the nearest relevant banding.

JW stated that he believed there was a need for a reality check on how the process worked, sharing that bandings were difficult to change and the funding did not account for the yearly increases in specialist equipment and provisions needed, which were all subject to increasing costs. JW stated that he believed when looking at cost savings for disabilities there was a need to consider this. JW advised SSF members that he believed if organisations were being held fiscally responsible, and meeting budgets allocated, this meant tightening belts and consistently meeting needs with less and less funding. JW highlighted that there had been significant increases within the SEN sector, so establishments were trying to meet need with funding that was not increasing at the same rate, stating that he believed there was a potential to move toward a crisis situation.

JW stated that he believed some of the best specialist provisions available were within the LA and these provisions were continuing to provide services with reducing funding allocations, and increasing costs.

JL stated that he agreed with JW's comments and shared that he believed the strategy needed to invest in specialist provisions. JL

explained that if there was an inability to meet needs within local provisions there may be a need to look outside of the City, which was incur a heavier, more significant, drain on financial resources.

ML stated that the description of the banding process detailed was correct but pressures on the system meant annual reviews were not always undertaken for every child.

JL stated that he believed there was a potential than an inappropriate decision could put a school at risk and provided an overview of his rationale.

CD recommended colleagues undertake a visit Sunningdale School, sharing that he believed this provided a reality check in terms of the diversity, and complexity, of the needs being met.

Following a vote SSF Members RESOLVED:

- To note the content of the report, as presented.
- To agree Proposal 2: To increase all EHCP banding rates by 0.9% in line with average overall budget increases in mainstream schools, from April 2025, at an estimated additional cost of £158,178 to the DSG HNB for the 2025/26 financial year (assuming there were no increases in in EHCP pupil numbers).

- Alternative Provision Commissioning Arrangements (High Needs Block (HNB)) 2025/26

SSF Members confirmed they had received a copy of the following report prior to the meeting for consideration:

- Alternative Provision Commissioning Arrangements (HNB) 2025/26

RL advised SSF members that the number of pupils permanently excluded from schools for the current academic year was 120, sharing that there had been an increase in permanent exclusions within both primary and secondary schools. RL advised that the number of permanent exclusions so far was above the overall number excluded in 2023/2024.

RL stated that the Link School had been operating at capacity, in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, since September 2024 and explained that although there was some capacity identified from phased transitions these were quickly utilised due to additional permanent exclusions implemented during the Autumn Term.

RL explained that there had been a need to use alternative provisions, highlighting that the SSF had agreed to commission additional places (exemplifying East Boldon Riding Centre (EBRC)), but these resources had reached capacity and TfC had needed to use spot purchase placements, which were more costly.

RL advised SSF members that TfC had used Springboard and Education North East for placements, stating that they provided good quality provisions. RL stated that TfC were able to get all

permanently excluded pupils into a provision, but these had incurred additional costs, exemplifying that the Future Pathways provision cost £185 per day, against the cost of placements at Education Plus and Springboard, which were £120 per day.

RL stated that he believed one of the reasons for the increased number of permanent exclusions was the lack of capacity within the Link School to provide support provisions.

RL explained that he would like to put forward a proposal to commission the following placements

- EBRC: 45 part time placements (3 days per week) at a daily rate of £95 - overall cost £500,175.
- Springboard: 20 full time placements and 20 part time placements (3 days per week) at a daily rate of £127 – overall cost £715,650.
- Education Plus: 16 part time placements (3 days per week) at a daily rate of £133.33 – overall cost £249,600

RL explained that, if agreed, the placements would be available from September 2025 and admissions would be agreed through the Vulnerable Pupil Panel.

RL informed SSF members that TfC was currently working with registered provisions to increase capacity, explaining that increasing the available capacity within the Link School would require capital expenditure.

RL acknowledged that there had been queries in relation to the use of EBRC, as they were not registered with Ofsted, sharing that EBRC were working toward this. RL explained that EBRC would need to be registered as an independent alternative provision and would be subject to the same requirements as schools, which was significant. RL reiterated that EBRC were working towards becoming Ofsted registered but stated that if additional resources were required to attain the registration, the cost of the placement provisions would increase to reflect this.

RL acknowledged mainstream schools were experiencing more challenging behaviour.

RL explained that one of the issues TfC was trying to navigate was to peer match pupils to appropriate provisions.

RL stated that he believed he would be presenting alternative proposals for September 2026.

SB withdrew from the meeting.

RL highlighted that TfC could continue to spot purchase alternative placement provisions, but this would increase costs.

RL advised that the costings detailed within the report presented were based on “worst case” scenarios.

JM stated that she would support the proposals put forward, sharing that there were concerns in relation to the reactionary costs incurred. JM acknowledged some schools had very low

<p>exclusion rates, sharing that she believed there was a potential to work with these schools to identify good practices, sharing that she believed there was a need to look at stopping issues occurring.</p> <p>KR advised SSF members that she would like to provide assurance that the proposals were put forward based on increased need. KR acknowledged that some challenges being encountered were more complex than others and also recognised that there was a perception that some schools managed these well. KR stated that she believed there was a need to acknowledge that not all incidents were “like for like”.</p> <p>KR stated that she believed there were discussions to be held within individual Inclusion Forums but stated that the proposals put forward were intermediate and TfC were looking at capital investment for 2026, in relation to the Link School triage resource.</p> <p>RL shared that during the last BAP meeting school colleagues were invited to identify whether they felt their school dealt with behaviour well and, although there were no volunteers to share this information, discussions had exemplified processes and procedures implemented, exemplifying the Thrive approach. RL advised SSF members that TfC, with Health, had commissioned services from Commando Joe’s, and an assessment would be undertaken to identify how this impacted on suspensions and exclusions.</p> <p>Following a vote SSF Members RESOLVED:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To approve the proposal to commission 101 placements from the following alternative providers: EBRC (45); Springboard (40) and Education Plus (16) for a one year period, from September 2025. • <u>SEN Resourced Provisions Gap Funding 2025/26</u> <p>SSF members confirmed they had received a copy of the following report prior to the meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Resolving SEN Unit and RP Funding Deficits – 2024/25 – 2025/26 <p>The Clerk confirmed that the above report was raised within the Secondary Headteacher Meeting forum and Headteacher’s had agreed to defer consideration of the proposal as they had insufficient time to study to report content.</p> <p>LW shared that North Primary Headteachers had asked if it would be possible to schedule a meeting with finance representatives to discuss the content of the SSF reports, prior to Primary Headteacher meetings. DD confirmed that finance personnel were happy to attend meetings.</p> <p>SSF members AGREED:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This item of business would be deferred until the next meeting, scheduled for September 2025. 	<p>DD</p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Schools Forum Provisional Future Dates and Work Plan 2025/26</u> <p>SSF members confirmed they had received a copy of the following document prior to the meeting for consideration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Schools Forum Meeting Schedule and Work Plan <p>The Clerk advised that Secondary Headteacher's had requested a change to the meeting scheduled in July 2026, as this coincided with transition dates.</p> <p>SSF members AGREED:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To accept the School Forum Meeting Schedule and Work Plan, as presented on the premise the scheduled date for July 2026 was revised. 	DO/Clerk
25/34	<p><u>Any Other Business</u></p> <p>JW advised colleagues that AB was retiring at the end of the current academic year. JW thanked AB for the support and commitment she had given the SSF during her period of membership. AB thanked colleagues and commended the work undertaken by colleagues, day in and day out.</p>	
25/35	<p><u>Date and Time of Next Meeting</u></p> <p>18th September 2025 16th October 2025* 20th November 2025 11th December 2025* 15th January 2026 19th February 2026* 12th March 2026 21st May 2026 2nd July 2026 **</p> <p>*These meetings may be cancelled dependent on business need. **To be revised</p> <p>Meeting time 8.30 am Meetings will be held virtually</p>	

Schools Forum Action Log

Date of Meeting	Agenda No	Request	Action	Responsible	Date of Completion	Remarks
22/05/2025	25/24	Reports for Discussion and Decision	PR to provide feedback on the EY Block underspend and potential options available.	PR		Placed on July agenda but in PR's absence deferred until the September agenda.
03/07/2025	25/32	Matters Arising from the Minutes/Agreed Actions	KR to provide an overview of the IEO Pilot.	KR		Pilot to be implemented in Autumn 2025 and feedback will be provided in due course.
03/07/2025	25/31	Feedback from Short Life Working Groups	KR recommended future reporting on DBV Funding focused on High Needs Block Planning.	Clerk		Standing item of business
03/07/2025	25/35	Reports for Discussion and Decision	Audit and Assurance Sub-Group to Review the DSG High Needs Block Spending Proposal: Sub Group to be implemented involving the following individuals who expressed an interest: Colin Devlin; Catherine Jones; Mike Little and P Smith.	KR/DD		
03/07/2025	25/35	Reports for Discussion and Decision	Schools Forum Meeting Schedule and Work Plan: Meeting date schedule in July 2026 to be reviewed.	DO/Clerk		

REPORT TO SUNDERLAND SCHOOLS FORUM

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

July 2025

Resolving SEN Unit and RP Funding Deficits – 2024/25 – 2025/26

The purpose of this report is to update Schools Forum on outcomes resultant from a previously agreed proposal to remove the financial implications between commissioning special educational needs places at a special school and commissioning special educational needs places at a resourced unit. Schools Forum is asked to:

- a) Approve the proposed funding model.
- b) approve the funding allocations for 2025/26.
- c) consider information on future requirements and
- d) delegate approval for payments to settings where an initial allocation has been agreed by Forum but where recruitment covers multiple census periods to the Director of Education.

1.0 Background

- 1.1 Together for Children, in partnership with Sunderland based schools and academies, recognises the value a diverse Special Educational Needs infrastructure offers to the city and its residents.
- 1.2 SEN units offer young people the opportunity to access bespoke SEN support within their localities, provides access to both a mainstream and special curriculum and resource and ensure a more appropriate placement of children within the special school sector.
- 1.3 SEN units also offer potential savings in transport costs, placement costs and increase specialism within educational providers. Therefore, Together for Children's long term strategic aim is to continue to develop further units across the city.
- 1.4 However, there is currently a discrepancy between the funding received by a school/ academy with a SEN unit and a with Special Schools. Within a mainstream setting a proportion of the funding provided to deliver an SEN placement is paid on school census. This results in a gap between the point a pupil is taken on roll and the point funding is received for that pupil. Examples are included below.

Example One

A Local Authority Maintained school opens a 16-place unit in September 2023. All places at the unit were full by October Census 2023. The setting would therefore receive.

- Agreed top up funding for each child from the point of admission.
- A balancing value of £6,000 (Commission place funding) reflecting £10,000 minus AWPU from the point of admissions and
- AWPU for sixteen pupils from April 2024

In the above situation the school would not receive the financial equivalent of AWPU for sixteen pupils between September 2023 and March 2024

Example Two

A Local Authority Maintained school opens a 16-place unit in September 2023. Five places at the unit were filled by October Census 2023 the remaining 11 were filled over the 2023/24 academic year. The setting would therefore receive.

- Agreed top up funding for each child from the point of admission.
- A pro-rata balancing Commission place funding reflecting £10,000 minus AWPU from the point of admissions and
- AWPU for five pupils from April 2024
- AWPU for eleven pupils from April 2025

In the above situation the school would not receive the financial equivalent of AWPU for 5 pupils between September 2023 and March 2024 and would not receive AWPU for 11 pupils between the point of enrolment and March 2025

Example Three

A Local Authority Maintained school currently operates a 16-place SEN Unit. That unit is at capacity and the school is receiving a full financial allocation for places that have previously been commissioned. Following dialogue with Together for Children an additional eight places are added to the unit in September 2023. Those places are not filled until after October Census 2023. The setting would therefore receive.

- Agreed top up funding for each child from the point of admission.
- A pro-rata balancing Commission place funding of £6,000 reflecting £10,000 minus AWPU from the point of admissions and
- AWPU for 16 pupils already on roll
- AWPU for 8 additional pupils from April 2025

Example Four

A mainstream academy opens a 16-place unit in September 2024. No places at the unit were filled by October Census 2023 the remaining 16 were filled over the 2024/25 academic year. The setting would therefore receive.

- Agreed top up funding for each child from the point of admission.
- A pro-rata balancing Commission place funding reflecting £10,000 minus AWPU from the point of admissions and
- AWPU for 0 pupils in September 2024 and September 2025
- AWPU for 16 pupils from September 2026

In the above situation the school would not receive the financial equivalent of AWPU for 16 pupils between September 2024 and September 2026

2.0 Process

2.1 In February 2024 Schools Forum agreed a process to remove the disparity between places commissioned at a Special School and places commissioned at a SEN Units within maintained schools. The agreed process is as follows;

- When a place is commissioned at a SEN unit at a mainstream school (Local Authority maintained school, Voluntary Aided School, Foundation School or academy) additional funding (in addition to the current balancing value and tiered 'Top Up' value) will be allocated to that setting for the period between the agreed opening date of a unit/ date that the commissioned number of a setting is implemented and the receipt of census funding.

This will be achieved by the total pro-rata allocation of £10,000 per agreed commissioned place. This funding will be allocated whether a new school place at an SEN unit is filled or not.

- Additional Funding will be calculated on an individual school basis termly and paid to setting at the beginning of the following term.
- Eligible pupils will be those at settings that have either established new SEN units after September 2023 or for additional capacity created at SEN units introduced after September 2023
- Funding is not available for any existing capacity or commissioned places in operation before September 2023
- Only settings with pupils registered on roll at that establishment will be eligible for additional funding.
- Funding will only be allocated for Sunderland residents (allocated through Sunderland's EHCP placement panel).
- Funding will only be available to support commissioned places at SEN units and not general school admissions.
- Additional tiered top up funding will be allocated on the placement of pupils to each setting.

2.2 Therefore, funding agreed will be allocated to maintained schools on the following basis.

Total Funding Allocated = (A x B / C) X D where

A = Number of new places commissioned by Local Authority

B = Unit of funding

C = Number of Months each place was available in financial year

D = Number of months remaining from the opening date of a unit/ agreed expansion date of an existing unit to 31 March the following year i.e., September 2023 – March 2024 = 7 months

If a pupil was not registered at a setting in Autumn Census in the year of opening the above calculation would also be applied to the following financial year

Funding allocated will be allocated to academies on the following basis.

Total Funding Allocated = (A x B / C) X D where

A = Number of new places commissioned by Local Authority

B = Unit of funding

C = Number of Months each place was available in academic year

D = Number of months remaining from the opening date of a unit/ agreed expansion date of an existing unit to 31 March the following year i.e., September 2022 – March 2023 = 7 months. With amount allocated for following financial year based on the remainder of the academic year = 5 months.

If a pupil was not registered at a setting in Autumn Census in the year of opening the above calculation would also be applied to the following academic year

- 2.3 Where an Academy commences repayment via recoupment the above would not apply. Academies will be required to share GAG statements with TfC in advance of monthly payment to ensure appropriate and accurate payment is made.
- 2.4 Additional funding will be required from the High Needs Block annually to deliver the above proposal. Projected funding requirements will be reported in March of each year to Schools Forum.

3.0 Units Opened in 2024/25 and Ongoing Financial Requirements

- 3.1 In February 2024 Schools Forum approved allocations totalling £0.202m for 32 places (19 months) at Resourced Provisions at Hudson Road Primary School and Mill Hill Primary School that were to be established for the 2024/25 academic year.
- 3.2 To date 13 places have been filled with £0.052m of that allocation utilised to fund those places. There are currently 6 pupils on roll at the SEMH provision at Hudson Road Primary School and 7 pupils on roll at the ASD provision at Mill Hill Primary School
- 3.3 The funding requirement for remaining places is estimated to be £0.072m. However, should the two provisions not be full by October 2025 Census there will be an ongoing requirement to fund any surplus places in the following financial year

4.0 New Provision and New Financial Requirements (2025/26)

- 4.1 Capital developments have commenced to deliver two more ASD Resourced Provisions for the city in time for the 2025/26 academic year. A provision at Hetton Lyons Primary School will provide 16 places for primary aged children in the Coalfields and a provision at Redby Primary School will provide 16 places for primary aged children in North Sunderland.
- 4.2 The financial requirement to support the two provisions is projected to be £0.128m. This is calculated as

A: Number of Places Commissioned = 32

B: Unit of Funding = £0.004m

C: Number of Months in FY = 12

D: Number of Months till funding available via census = 12

2025/26 requirement = £0.074m (Sep 2025 - Mar 2026) 32 x £4k x 7/12

2026/27 requirement = £0.053m (Apr 2026 - Sep 2026) 32 x £4k x 5/12

5.0 Projected Financial Requirement 2025 – 2027

- 5.1 The table below provides the maximum financial requirement to meet the needs of the four SEN Resourced Provisions that are either currently in development or have opened but did not reach capacity in the previous financial year. Should further units be developed in this period approval for additional funding will be requested as appropriate.
- 5.2 Funding requested is based on current funding rates. Should this be subject to future change Schools Forum will be updated accordingly.

Year	Financial Requirement
2025/26	£0.150m
2026/27	£0.053m

6.0 Next Steps

- 6.1 Schools Forum is requested to consider and decide on the processes outlined above and to approve the financial allocation sought.
- 6.2 It is recommended that further approvals are sought annually with any additional funding requests subject to further approval.
- 6.3 Any change to the above process resulting from deviation from the current funding model will be subject to further approval from Forum.

