

To all members of the Sunderland Schools Forum

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

Date: 12th November 2025
Our TFC-SF/ZW

Dear Colleague

SUNDERLAND SCHOOLS FORUM

You are invited to attend a meeting of the Schools Forum, scheduled for Thursday 20th November 2025 – **kindly note SSF members are invited to attend at 8.30 am and Leaders from 8.45 am.**

The meeting will be held virtually, and a Teams appointment has been circulated.

AGENDA

25/47	<u>Review of Effectiveness of the Sunderland Schools Forum (SSF)</u> - Membership Review (appendix 1) - Terms of Reference (appendix 2- for information)	
25/48	Welcome, Introductions and Apologies SSF Vacancies/Appointment Proposals - 2 x Academies Primary - 2 x Academy Secondary and All Through - 1 x Roman Catholic Diocese - 1 x Maintained Faith School Headteacher/Representative <i>Lindsay Robertson will attend to represent North Primary Headteachers as a replacement for Mrs Lisa Wood</i> Apologies for absence submitted by Mr D Amos, Mr J Lines, Mrs J Maw and Mrs K Richardson.	
25/49	Declarations of Interest	
25/41	Minutes of Previous Meeting School Forum meeting, held on 19 th September 2025 (attached) (appendix 3)	
25/42	Matters Arising from the Minutes/Agreed Actions Action Log, from 19 th September 2025 (appendix 4)	
25/43	Feedback from Short Life Working Groups/Sub Groups • Audit and Assurance Sub-Group	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality Assurance Processes for Service Providers DBV Funding: High Needs Block Business Plan 	
25/44	Presentations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> MTFP Presentation (to be confirmed) 	Claire Emmerson
25/45	Reports for Discussion and Decision <ul style="list-style-type: none"> High Needs Block Commissioned Places (report to follow) <p style="color: red;">Voting: Voting: 2 (Maintained Primary; Maintained Special; Maintained Nursery; Maintained Pupil Referral Service; Maintained Faith School; Maintained Sector School Governor; Academy Primary, Infants and Junior; Academy Secondary and All Through, Academy Special</p> Planning Framework 2026/27 Update <p style="color: red;">Voting: 2 (Maintained Primary; Maintained Special; Maintained Nursery; Maintained Pupil Referral Service; Maintained Faith School; Maintained Sector School Governor; Academy Primary, Infants and Junior; Academy Secondary and All Through, Academy Special</p> 	PR and RL JH and DO
25/46	Any Other Business	
25/47	Date and Time of Next Meeting 11 th December 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
Tel: 07770 684760
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	Lindsay Robertson - Headteacher	Willow Wood 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	Vacancy		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

SCHOOLS FORUMS MEMBERSHIP – JULY 2025

8	Academy Primary, Infants and Junior	Audrey Bolam – Headteacher (Washington)	Oxclos e Primary		Y		Y	Y
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	Castleview Academy		Y			Y
21.	Academy Secondary and All Through	Vicki Pinkney - Headteacher	Hetton Academ y		Y			Y

SCHOOLS FORUMS MEMBERSHIP – JULY 2025

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

SCHOOLS FORUMS MEMBERSHIP – JULY 2025

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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	Lindsay Robertson - Headteacher	Willow Wood 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	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
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	Vacancy		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)	Oxclosure 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	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	Castleview 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	a. Central expenditure relating to school’s block b. Deficits on central expenditure to be funded from following year’s DSG. c. Voting procedures						

SUNDERLAND SCHOOLS FORUM

Minutes of the Meeting Held on Thursday 18th September 2025 at 8.30 am

School Forum Member Attendance

Voting

Colin Devlin (CD) (Vice Chair and Chair for the meeting)	Academy Secondary and All Through
Sarah Armstrong (SA)	Church of England Diocese
Michelle Barr (MB)	Private, Voluntary & Independent Nurseries
Audrey Bolam (AB)	Academy Primary, Infant and Junior
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 School
Andy Lewis (AL)	Teacher Association
John Lines (JL)	Academy Primary, Infants and Junior
Michael Little (ML)	Academy Special
David Martyn (DM)	Private, Voluntary & Independent Nurseries
Vicky Pinkney (VP)	Academy Secondary and All Through
Lauren Reeves (LR)	Academy Primary, Infant and Junior
Phil Smith (PS)	Academy Secondary and All Through
Courtney Snowball (CS)	Academy Primary, Infant and Junior
Donna Walker (CG)	Maintained Pupil Referral Services

Non-Voting

Sarah Bainbridge (SB)	Maintained Primary School
Lisa Wood (LW)	Maintained Primary School
Nicola Hill (NH)	Maintained Primary School

Together for Children Officers and Councillors

Cllr J Butler (JB)	Lead Member, Children’s Services
Richard Cullen (RC)	TfC Strategic, School Improvement
Debra Dixon (DD)	TfC Team Manager, Management Accounting Team
Claire Emmerson (CE)	Assistant Director of Finance
John Hope (JH)	TfC Technical Accountant Education Funding
Emma Leech (EL)	TfC Finance Business Partner
Ronnie Lynn (RL)	TfC Internal Strategic Lead, Education
Leigh Morris (LM)	TfC Team Manager, School Finance
Emma Nolan	TfC Finance Business Partner
Deborah Orr (DO)	TfC Head of Accounting and Finance
Kim Richardson (KR)	TfC Director of Education
Alan Rowan (AR)	TfC Capital Sufficiency Lead
Zena Wilkinson	Schools Forum Clerk

		Agreed Action
25/36	<u>Appointment of Chair and Vice Chair</u> Nominations/expressions of interest were invited for the position of Chair. The Clerk advised that JW had indicated that he would	

	<p>be happy to serve a further term of office and SSF members accepted the expression of interest.</p> <p>Nominations/expressions of interest were invited for the position of Vice Chair. SSF members nominated CD and CD accepted the nomination.</p> <p>SSF Members RESOLVED:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To appoint JW as Chair, for a period of 1 year. - To appoint CD as Vice Chair, for a period of 1 year. 	
25/37	<p><u>Welcome, Introductions and Apologies for Absence</u></p> <p>The Vice Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.</p> <p>The Clerk advised that apologies for absence had been submitted by JW and PS.</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"> • 2 x Academy Primary, Infants and Junior representatives • 2 x Academy Secondary and All Through • 1 x Roman Catholic Diocese • 1 x Maintained Faith School Headteacher/Representative <p>CS and CE were welcomed to their first School Forum meeting. KR explained that CE was the Assistant Director of Finance for Sunderland City Council (SCC) and provided an overview of her role. Members were advised that CE was in attendance as an observer.</p> <p>CD queried what processes were being implemented to detail the vacancies on the Sunderland School Forum (SSF), and the Clerk confirmed this information was detailed within Headteacher Cluster meetings. DW confirmed that she would raise the Academy Secondary and All Through vacancies at the next Secondary Headteacher meeting.</p>	DW
25/38	<p><u>Review of Effectiveness of the Sunderland Schools Forum</u></p> <p>CD advised that he had received a request to defer this item of business, explaining that it would be placed on the agenda for the next meeting and SSF members will be invited to attend at 8.30 am to consider this business and Leaders would be invited to join the meeting at 8.45.</p> <p>SSF Members RESOLVED:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To agree to defer this item of business until the next meeting. 	Clerk

25/39	<p><u>Declarations of Interest</u></p> <p>MH advised that as an elected Councillor he would raise declarations throughout the meeting, if appropriate. CE declared an interest in line with her position as Assistant Director of Finance.</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. 	
25/40	<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 3rd July 2025 as a true record. 	
25/41	<p><u>Matters Arising from the Minutes/Agreed Actions</u></p> <p>Matters Arising from the Minutes:</p> <p>There were no matters arising from the minutes.</p> <p>Members confirmed they had received a copy of the Action Log prior to the meeting.</p> <p>25/24 Reports for Discussion SSF members noted PR was in attendance to provide detailed of the EY Block Underspend.</p> <p>25/32 Matters Arising from the Meeting/Agreed Actions KR advised that Mr Robert Bell had presented information at the Inclusion Forum, which detailed the tripartite work currently being undertaken. KR explained that Mr Bell had invited schools to contact him if they had any pupils they believed may benefit from the interventions available. KR advised SSF members that a report would be presented once data was available, explaining that this was a 6 month pilot.</p> <p>25/35 Reports for Discussion KR advised that as the Audit and Assurance Sub Group had been formed this needed to be self-serving and recommended the Group identified a Chair. KR explained that it would be up to members of the Audit and Assurance Sub Group to the meeting frequency.</p> <p>The Clerk agreed to confirm the agreed membership of the meeting.</p>	Clerk (completed)
25/42	<p><u>Feedback from Short Life Working Groups</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusion <p>RL explained that an Inclusion Conference was held prior to the summer holidays and stated that a lot of good proposals were put</p>	

	<p>forward. RL stated that the Conference was followed by the Secondary Headteacher Forum, which also focused on inclusion.</p> <p>RL informed SSF members that a number of tasks were identified from the conferences/forums, and these would be taken forward and details would be reported back to the appropriate bodies in due course. RL exemplified that one of the tasks identified was maximising the Behaviour and Attendance Services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality Assurance Processes for Service Providers <p>PR advised SSF members that work was currently being undertaken, in conjunction with colleagues from Access and Inclusion and Commissioning and a framework for quality assurance was being drafted for service providers, including independent service providers. PR explained that the framework was in the process of being updated in line with the Department for Education (DfE) framework guidance, to ensure compliance.</p> <p>PR informed SSF members that a number of quality assurance visits had already been undertaken, under the framework, exemplifying these had been completed at New Beginnings, NUDGE, EBRC, Springboard and Education North East.</p> <p>PR stated that work was also being undertaken to understand the pupil cohort that was moving into the alternative provisions.</p> <p>PR assured SSF members that she was confident TfC were in a good place in relation to quality assurance processes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delivering Better Value (DBV) Funding: Probity <p>PR explained that the DBV initiative ended on 31st March 2025, but TfC had managed to extend the posts appointed to within the process, until the end of the Autumn Term.</p> <p>PR stated that she believed what was important was the deficit plan in relation to the High Needs Block (HNB).</p> <p>CD queried if the deficit plan could be considered by the Audit and Assurance Sub Group, or would this need to be finalised. PR explained that this was a jointly produced document, which was in the process of being updated, but stated that she believed it would be relevant to share.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Audit and Assurance Sub Group <p>SSF members confirmed this item of business had been considered within the meeting.</p>	PR
25/43	<p><u>Presentations</u></p> <p>SSF Members NOTED:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There were no presentations to be presented within the meeting. 	

Reports for Discussion and Decision

- SEN Resourced Provision Gap Funding 2025/26

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

- SEN Resourced Provisions Gap Funding 2025/26

SSF members welcomed AR to the meeting.

AR explained that the report presented detailed proposed funding models for 2025/26, following the agreed proposal to remove the financial implications between commissioning special educational needs places, at special schools, and commissioning special educational needs places at a resourced unit. AR advised that there had been some disparity in funding and the proposal enabled this to be levelled out. AR explained that to reduce the disparity the SSF had agreed to implement gap funding.

AR informed SSF members that when first implemented an ambitious plan was put in place and it was acknowledged that funding would not be linear, as it would be difficult to pinpoint how long gap funding would need to be paid.

AR highlighted that at a previous meeting the SSF had agreed to fund alternative placements at Hudson Road Primary School and Mill Hill Primary School. AR explained that the proposal was to continue to meet the funding costs of the resources, for the full placement numbers.

AR advised SSF members that if the funding was not utilised this would be reimbursed to the Dedicated School Grant (DSG) budget.

Cllr Butler withdrew from the meeting.

AR brought SSF members attention to Section 3 (Units Opened in 2024/25 and Ongoing Financial Requirements), sharing that the expectation was for all placements to be filled.

AR explained that an allocation of £0.202m had been agreed (for 32 places) and to date £0.052m of the funding had been utilised for the resources at Hudson Road Primary School and Mill Hill Primary School and the funding requirement for remaining places was estimated to be £0.072m but, if there were any vacancies following the October 2025 census there would be an ongoing requirement to fund any surplus placements in the following financial year.

AR brought SSF members attention to Section 4 (New Provisions and New Financial Requirements 2025/26) advising that Capital Development had commenced to deliver two more Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) resource provisions within the City: a provision at Hetton Lyons Primary School (for 16 places for primary aged pupils in the Coalfields area) and a provision at Redby Primary School (for 16 places in the North of Sunderland).

AR reported that the financial requirement to support the two new provisions was projected to be £0.128k.

AR reported that the funding being requested was based on current funding rates and, should this be subject to change, the SSF would be updated. AR advised that the financial requirement for 2025/26 was £0.150m and for 2026/27 £0.53m.

PR stated that in terms of filling the placements this had gone as expected, sharing that Mill Hill Primary School and Hudson Road Primary School were now full and it was anticipated that the new provisions would be filled across the academic year.

SSF members were advised that further proposals may be presented at a later date for 2026/27.

SSF members were invited to vote on the proposals put forward.

SSF Members **RESOLVED:**

- To approval the financial allocation, as detailed within the report.
- Further approvals would be sought annually, with any additional funding requests being subject to further approval.
- Any changes to the process, resulting from a deviation from the current funding model, would be subject to further approval from the SSF.

- Early Years Block Inclusion Underspend

SSF members welcomed PR to the meeting.

PR presented the following presentation:

- EY Underspend

PR explained that the Early Years Inclusion Funding was linked to the SEN ranges: 20% of pupils were assessed as Range 3; 66% as Range 4 and 14% as Range 5. PR explained that the criteria for the top level of funding was the need to identify 3 of 5 broad need areas.

PR advised SSF members that work had been undertaken on looking at applications, in terms of the Ranges, and this data had been used to inform how to go forward. PR explained that if the identified areas for top level funding was revised to 2 broad need areas the percentage of Range 5 funding applications would increase to 33%.

PR reported that in terms of the Early Years Block Inclusion funding there was an overspend in 2023/24, of £148,061 and an underspend in 2024/25, of £34,714.

PR advised that in terms of 2025/26, £113,00 had been allocated to date, based on an overall allocation of £560,000 from the revised criteria. PR stated that the increased pay range for Range 5 remained the same, but the processes implemented had made it easier for settings to access this funding, as the criteria had been reduced to 2 broad needs within the Ranges.

PR assured SSF members that a consultation process, with Nursery Headteachers, had been implemented before any changes were implemented.

SSF Members **RESOLVED:**

- To note and accept the EY Block Inclusion Underspend information, as presented.
- Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Update and Projected Outturn 2025/26

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

- Dedicated Schools Grant Update and Projected Outturn 2025/26

DD advised SSF members that the High Needs Block (HNB) expenditure had been reviewed over the Summer period and stated that she was confident the financial position detailed within the report was accurate.

DD reported that the DSG in year forecast outturn position was a projected deficit of £9,125,666; the DSG deficit balance brought forward from 2024/25 was £16,048,724, which had now decreased by £155,170 for 2024/25 financial year, following the Early Years Pupil number adjustment. DD reported that the amended DSG Reserve Balance, as of 31st March 2025, was £15,893,554.

DD advised SSF members that the overall projected deficit on the DSG Reserve, as at 31st March 2026, was estimated to be £25,019,220.

DD informed SSF members that she was working closely with SCC on mitigating the spend and future spending, sharing that an exercise had just been completed working with regional local authorities and it was hoped a response would be received which would identify Sunderland's position against other local authorities.

DD brought SSF members to Section 3.1 explaining that this detailed the HNB pressures for 2025/26, which was in line with the projections.

DD explained that Section 3.2 detailed the DBV mitigations planned to help address the deficit projections.

CD questioned whether Sunderland's position in comparison to other regional authorities mattered, for example would this provide any confirmation of protection or was there any sign from Government that there would be any mitigations to address the projected deficits. DD advised that she believed an update would be received in the near future but at the current time she was unaware of any proposals being put forward to mitigate the deficits. DD stated that in relation to providing comparative information she believed this could provide some comfort.

	<p>PR advised SSF members that she had attended the Regional ADS SEND Network and the DfE representative had confirmed that they had no details to share but there were plans to appoint a Regional Finance Advisor for HNB. PR stated that she believed there would be an expectation for local authorities to provide robust plans around their HNB deficits.</p> <p>SSF Members RESOLVED:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To note the content of the report. - To seek updates on the 2025/26 projected outturn position at the January 2026 and March 2026 SSF meetings. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Budget Planning Framework 2026/27 – De-Delegation of Trade Union Facilities Time</u> <p>JH advised members that a report would be presented, in the near future, on the De-Delegation of Trade Union Facilities time and, due to comments and concerns raised in 2024, he believed it would be beneficial for this to be discussed within Headteacher cluster meetings. JH stated that he was uncertain of the exact cost but believed it may be in the region of £3.50 per pupil. JH highlighted that this related to maintained primary schools only (excluding nursery and special schools).</p> <p>MH noted that the decision of whether or not to implement de-delegation arrangements was for maintained schools only and academies could take this forward as a service level agreement. MH questioned if there was any legal reasons why trade union facility time couldn't be offered as a service level agreement for all schools. JH advised that if the decision of the SSF was not to implement a de-delegation of trade union facility time then it could be offered as a service level agreement, in line with academies.</p> <p>AL provided an overview of the consequences if the de-delegation of trade union facility time was not agreed, explaining that this would mean trade union representatives would only be available outside of normal working time. AL explained that under the current release framework departments were financially compensated for trade union representatives absence. AL stated that a further option would be for case workers to take cases forward, but he highlighted that as there were only 3 case workers across the region this would result in delays to resolving issues.</p> <p>AL stated that he believed it was false economy for schools to consider not to approve the de-delegation of trade union facility time, highlighting that overall, it only equated to a small cost to primary schools.</p> <p>AL stated that he was happy to attend any Headteacher cluster group forum and would liaise with the Clerk.</p> <p>LM advised SSF members that the de-delegation process only applied to maintained primary schools and, as part of the SSF scheme of financial regulations, this must be considered annually.</p>	<p>AL/Clerk</p>
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	<p>LM explained that a service level agreement process was implemented historically and those schools who needed trade union support were invoiced.</p> <p>LM advised the meeting that Finance Officers were willing to attend Headteacher cluster meetings to explain the content of any reports being presented to SSF.</p> <p>DW advised that she was aware a proposal to transfer 0.5% of the SB funding to the HNB would be put forward in the near future. DW explained that she was aware Headteachers within multi academy trusts may not be able to make a decision on this and she had extended an open invitation for the appropriate representative, from multi academy trusts, to attend the Secondary Headteacher meeting in order that a decision could be made without delay.</p> <p>SSF Members RESOLVED:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To note the information presented. 	
25/45	<p><u>Any Other Business</u></p> <p><u>Changes to the School Admission Co-Ordination Scheme</u></p> <p>AR explained that he had circulated information to schools about proposed changes to the School Admission Co-Ordination Scheme and stated that he would recirculate the information. AR explained that this was the consultation stage of proposal to change the school admission criteria, advising that the changes included:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To review the travelling distances for schools to a straight line (rather than using the shortest route). <p>AR stated that he believed academies used a straight line to calculate the distances.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Proposals to drive up the Early Years Pupil Premium uptake, if eligible, and these would be prioritised. <p>AR stated that Early Years Pupil Premium would like it if schools opted for this proposal and stated that he would try to get the information recirculated via the Comms e mail.</p>	AR
25/46	<p><u>Date and Time of Next Meeting</u></p> <p>16th October 2025* 20th November 2025 11th December 2025* 15th January 2026 19th February 2026* 12th March 2026 21st May 2026 9th July 2026</p> <p>*These meetings may be cancelled dependent on business need. Meeting time 8.30 am - Meetings will be held virtually</p>	

Subject To Approval

Schools Forum Action Log

Date of Meeting	Agenda No	Request	Action	Responsible	Date of Completion	Remarks
18/09/2025	25/36	Welcome and Introductions	DW to invite nominations to join the School Forum at the next Secondary HT meeting.	DW		
18/09/2025	25/38	Review of Effectiveness of the SSSF	Action deferred until the October meeting	Clerk		
18/09/2025	25/42	Feedback from Short Life Working Groups	DBV Funding - PR to share copies of the deficit plan, when completed, to members of the Audit and Assurance Sub Group	PR		
18/09/2025	25/44	Reports for Discussion and Decision - Budget Planning Framework 2026/27 - De-delegation of Trade Union Facilities Time	AL's offer to attend Primary Headteacher cluster meetings to be raised with Area Chairs.	ZW		E mail circulated 25/9/25 - awaiting response
18/09/2025	25/46	Any Other Business	AR to re-circulate the proposals to change the School Admissions Co-Ordinator Scheme.	AR		

REPORT TO SUNDERLAND SCHOOLS FORUM

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

16 October 2025

Commissioning High Needs Places for 2026/2027 in Special Schools, Additional Resource Provisions (ARPs) and Alternative Provisions

1. Purpose of the Report

Schools' Forum members to consider the proposed commissioned places in special schools, Additional Resource Provisions (ARPs) post 16 providers, independent non-maintained special schools and alternative provisions for the academic year 2026/2027.

2. High Needs Place Funding 2026/2027

A series of discussions have been held with colleagues from the SEND Service to identify the number of children/young people who are due to transfer into new settings at the beginning of the academic year 2026/2027. An analysis of parental preference and TFC recommendations has been carried out to inform future commissioned place discussions for 2026/2027. All specialist settings have been contacted to confirm commissioned places for the academic year 2026/2027 based on the actual take-up of places in September 2025 and future projections, where available.

As of September 2025, there is a total of 1075 children and young people on roll in our special Schools. The number of Education, Health and Care plans being issued continues to increase each year. Current data from the Delivering Better Value Diagnostic work and analysis of SEN 2 trends, indicates a yearly percentage increase of around 12%. The majority of our special schools are at capacity, with some operating in-year waiting lists. It is anticipated these places will be utilised through the year as new EHCPs come through the statutory process.

Two new Additional Resource Provisions will open in the Autumn term of 2025. An Autism Provision, based at Redby Primary School offering 16 places and an Autism Provision at Hetton Lyons Primary School, which also creates an additional 16 places. Both of these provisions are currently accepting consultations. We are currently actively planning for a further SEMH Primary provision in the Coalfields area and a Cognition & Learning primary ARP in the East of Sunderland.

Appendix A identifies an increase in the Local Authority's commissioning arrangements for 2026/2027. The process identifies that commissioned numbers for Additional Resource Provisions and Special School places in 2026/27 will increase to 1839 in 2026/7 compared to 1802 in 2025/6. However, within this there is an overall predicted decline in Post 16 Independent Specialist Provision (predominantly ESPA and Hedley's College) and a growth in Additional Resource Provision numbers with the planned opening of two new provisions. Specialist School places remain largely unchanged due to some growth in capacity in 2025/6. Physical capacity to increase places in most of our local special schools is now a challenge. However, Together for Children are proactively exploring an expansion to our Additional Resource Provisions (see section on growth).

Pressures

- Numbers at Portland have been increased to 208. The school can accommodate the increased capacity but is now at its physical capacity in terms of space.
- Harry Watt is now operating from 2 sites with 190 pupils on roll, representing the maximum capacity of the two sites
- Despite a significant increase to Columbia Grange numbers there remains a waiting list in place for this school and given the rise in complex ASD presentations, this is unlikely to change and we continue to commission and use 10 places in the Nest provision, which provides a waiting list initiative to support children who have plans which name Columbia Grange
- The sharp rise in permanent exclusions experienced across the City means pressures on places for Alternative Provision and in particular 6-day provision remain acute as described the September paper to Schools' Forum. This is partly mitigated by School's Forum agreement to commission AP providers like East Boldon Alternative Provision (EBAP), Springboard and Education Plus NE.

Growth

- In response to the need to develop the City's early intervention offer, TfC have worked with Consilium Evolve and the DfE to expand the age group Evolve can work with and it now offers places to pupils in KS2 (from October 25)
- We are consulting on a proposal to create a further Additional Resource Base for SEMH at Gillas Lane and are in active discussions with several other schools around future plans for both Primary and Secondary ARPs
- We are consulting on a proposal to create a new primary ARP for Cognition and Learning in Valley Road Primary school
- Due to the pressures on places for 6-day provision across the City we have commissioned 45 places at East Boldon Alternative Provision, 40 places at Springboard and 16 places at Education Plus NE. A paper was shared with Schools' Forum in September on this development. Places are available to schools via VPP for short term intervention support.
- TfC are working with The Link School to convert their conference facility into suitable day 6 provision for up to 32 pupils. This will follow the assessment hub model and is expected to open September 2026. Renovation works will be undertaken in two phases with phase 1 being completed by September 2026 (additional 16 pupils) and phase 2 completed by September 2027 (another additional 16 pupils.)
- As provision increases at Link School and other registered providers, the use of unregistered providers to meet our statutory responsibilities for permanently excluded pupils will decrease. We will continue to work with unregistered provision to support them in becoming registered provision.

Underoccupancy

- North View: Currently has some Capacity due to a large year 6 cohort, which left in 2024/5 It is anticipated spaces will fill this academic year
- Sunningdale: Early Years' provision has some spaces due to recent expansion but these are likely to fill fairly quickly as under the 5 EHCP cohort is a significant growth area. There is no spare capacity in the main site of the school
- Hetton ARP: We have seen a decline in young people remaining open to Speech & Language Intensive Intervention Team in secondary. This is currently a criterion of the provision with places allocated via Language panel. We are looking to review allocation of places as feel there is still need across the City but we may need to also

look a slightly broader designation for the offer, whilst retaining the language specialism of the ARP

- Communication Hub: Has ran under occupancy during 2024/5. However, we have worked with the setting to revise the entry criteria and moved to offer to VPP, which does seem to be increasing referrals

Independent Non-maintained Specialist provision

Schools' Forum members are asked to note that in 2024/2025 we commissioned 116 places for children accessing independent specialist and / or non-maintained schools (compared to 114 in 2023/4) and a further 73 specialist post 16 placements Post 16 placements (compared to 79 in 2023/4). There are currently 99 children on roll in Independent Specialist and / or Non-Maintained schools as of October 10th 2025. However, it is likely there will be further places required as a result of tribunal challenge or placement breakdown in specialist settings throughout the current academic year. The greatest cost pressure in terms of the independent sector remains Ashbrooke, with 55 placements at an average cost of £96,000. Placements at Ashbrooke are still subject to strong pressure from parents and a high number of tribunal appeals for this setting.

Out of borough placements

Schools' Forum members are asked to note that in 2024/5 we had 47 children with EHCPs placed in Sunderland Schools. However, we placed 43 children within placements located in other Local Authority areas. Consultation requests from other neighbouring Local Authority areas are an ongoing concern, particularly for Columbia Grange, Harry Watt and Sunningdale and we are continuing to work with neighbouring LAs to deal with these in a more proportionate manner. However, often these requests are part of an active tribunal so other LAs are compelled by law to consult.

Post 16 places

The numbers of young people accessing Specialist Post 16 placements has slightly reduced in 2024/5. We also ask Forum to note we plan to increase commissioned places with Sunderland College from 180 to 200 in 2026/7. Despite some increase in Sunderland placements, most of this increase is due to increased demand from other Local Authority areas, in particular Northumberland, therefore ultimately cost neutral for Sunderland as funding is recouped via the ESFA import / export arrangements. However, as the Education Partnership Northeast is based in Sunderland it is our responsibility to inform ESFA of commissioned numbers for the whole group and we have worked with the College to predict the need of the group. Overall whilst Post 16 places have increased this represents a potential cost saving due to the decline in Independent Specialist placements.

Recommendations

School Forum members are asked to:

- (i) Consider and comment on the information provided in the report.
- (ii) Agree to the proposed commissioned numbers for 2026/27 in order for a submission to be made to the ESFA by November 2025
- (iii) receive an updated report in the meeting to be held in January 2026 should any changes have been made to the numbers presented in the report.

If you have any queries in relation to the above report, please contact Ronnie Lynn, Strategic Lead – Education (Alternative Provision), or Pamela Robertson, Strategic Lead – SEND (Special Schools, Additional Resourced Provisions and Post 16 places), in the first instance.

Appendix A

Special Units and Resourced Provisions								
Organisation / Provider	Type	2023/4	2023/4	2024/5	2024/5	2025/6	Current	Proposed 2026/7
		Agreed Places	Actual Places	Agreed Places	Actual Places	Agreed	Actual	Proposed
Academy 360 (all through)	Academy	35	34	35	34	35	35	35
Biddick Academy - secondary	Academy	35	35	35	33	35	33	35
Farringdon Academy Secondary	Academy	35	35	35	33	35	33	35
Hetton School (11-16) Secondary	Academy	10	5	10	5	10	5	10
Oxclose Primary Academy	Academy	7	5	7	6	7	6	7
Oxclose Secondary Academy	Academy	12	14	12	11	12	11	12
Thorney Close HI - Primary	Maintained	12	14	12	12	12	12	12
Hudson Road (SEMH) NEW Primary	Maintained	-	-	16	12	16	12	16
Usworth Colliery Primary	Maintained	14	15	26	26	26	26	26
Hetton Lyons Primary New Sept 2025	Academy	-	-	-	-	16		16
Washington CAP Secondary	Academy	27	27	27	27	27	27	27
Redby Primary ASD ARP NEW Jan 2026	Academy	-	-	-	-	16	0	16
*Gillas Lane SEMH ARP (new)	Academy							16
JFK – Treehouse Provision Primary	Academy	24	24	24	24	24	24	24
*Valley Road C&L NEW	Academy							16
Mill Hill primary School ARP	Maintained	-	-	16	14	16	16	16
Oxclose Nursery School	Maintained	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Total Special Units and Resourced Provisions		213	210	257	239	289	242	321

* Subject to successful consultations

Special Schools Including Post 16 Places								
Organisation / Provider	Type	2023/4	2023/4	2024/5	2024/5	2025/6	Current	Proposed 2026/7
		Agreed Places	Actual Places	Agreed Places	Actual Places	Agreed	Actual	Proposed
Barbara Priestman Academy	Academy	175	178	192	198	192	191	192
Columbia Grange – Primary	Academy	115	120	140	140	140	140	140
North View Academy – Primary	Academy	85	85	85	58	85	64	85
Portland Academy – Secondary	Academy	198	198	204	209	204	208	208 (+4)
Trinity New Bridge Academy* Secondary	Academy	134	134	134	133	134	133	134
Sunningdale School – Primary	Maintained	136	135	136	139	160	149	160
Harry Watt – ages 5-16	Academy	164	164	176	176	190	190	190
Total Special Schools* Including Post 16 Places		1007	1014	1067	1053	1105	1075	1,109 (+4)

Alternative Language Provision in Schools and Academies								
Organisation/ Provider	Type	2023/4	2023/4	2024/5	2024/5	2025/6	Current	Proposed 2026/7
		Agreed Places	Actual Places	Agreed Places	Actual Places	Agreed	Actual	Change
Valley Road Primary – Language Unit Provision – primary	Academy	10	8	10	8	10	8	0
Northern Saints Primary – Language Unit Provision	Maintained	10	7	10	8	10	8	0
New Penshaw Comm Hub (offers 12 week blocks 3 x per year) Primary	Academy	10	4	10	3*	10	4	0

Total Alternative Provision in Schools and Academies		30	19	30	19	30	20	0
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* Based on average for each of the 3 termly placement

Alternative Provisions								
Organisation/ Provider	Type	2023/4	2023/4	2024/5	2024/5	2025/6	Current	Proposed 2026/7
		Agreed Places	Actual Places	Agreed Places	Actual Places	Agreed	Actual	Proposed
KS1/2/3/4 Pupil Referral Service	AP	196	196	196	196	196	196	212 (+16)
Consilium Evolve - secondary	AP	48	48	48	48	48	48	48
Beacon of Light – secondary	AP	10	10	10	6	6	6	6
Foundation of Light - primary	AP	5	5	5	10	0	0	0
Hopesprings Sea View Road – secondary	IS	12	12	12	12	12	12	12
Hopesprings Millfield secondary	IS	14	14	14	14	14	14	14
Hopesprings Southwick secondary	IS				4	4	4	4
EBAP secondary	AP				45	45	45	45
Education Plus NE	AP				8	16	16	16
Springboard	AP				24	40	40	40
Endeavor Academy 14-16 provision (registered) based at Biddick NEW								5
Total Alternative Provision - Other		285	285	285	367	381	381	402

Post 16

Post 16 (General FE and training Providers)								
Organisation/ Provider	Type	2023/4	2023/4	2024/5	2024/5	2025/6	Current	Proposed 2026/7
		Agreed Places	Actual Places	Agreed Places	Actual Places	Agreed	Actual	Change
City of Sunderland	Post 16	127	129	150	179	180	180	200 (+20)
Springboard Sunderland Trust	Post 16	50	54	55	53	55	49	60 (+5)
Independent Specialist Providers	IS	73	74	74	73	*80	50	50 (est)
Specialist post 16 Funding	Post 16	25	40	40	46	*45	34	40 (est)
Non-Maintained Specialist Colleges	INMS	27	21	20	28	*20	23	25 (est)
Total Post 16 Places		302	318	339	379	380	336	375
* Estimates as places are spot purchased as required on an individual child basis through commissioning team								

Total Special: 1,109	Total Lang Provision: 30	Total Post 16: 375
Total ARP (all): 321	Total AP: 402	TOTAL 2,237

REPORT TO SUNDERLAND SCHOOLS FORUM

REPORT OF TOGETHER FOR CHILDREN FINANCE TEAM

20 November 2025

BUDGET PLANNING FRAMEWORK 2026/27

Purpose of the Report

To update Schools Forum on changes to the Schools Funding Formula for 2026/27 and the de-delegation of Trade Union Facility time.

Schools Funding Formula November 2025

Under normal circumstances, DfE would publish the provisional National Funding Formula (NFF) allocations in July at Local Authority (LA) level for the Schools, High Needs and Central School Services funding blocks for 2026/27.

Due to the delayed Autumn Spending Review, 2026/27 funding allocations along with the Authority Proforma Tool (APT) will not be issued until December 2025. The APT allows Local Authorities to model different options for their Schools Block funding formulae and at the same time act as the proforma which Local Authorities must submit in January 2026. The initial summary policy document was issued on 4 August 2025 regarding the structure of the formula, which remains unchanged for 2026/27. However, no funding information has been received at LA level as yet.

In 2026/27, each Local Authority will continue to set a local Schools Funding Formula, in consultation with local schools through the Schools Forum.

The structure of the Schools NFF for 2026/27:

The 2026/27 Schools NFF will use the same factors as the 2025/26 NFF.

- **Basic Entitlement Funding**

Per-pupil funding varies by educational phase including primary, KS3 and KS4 to support schools fairly.

- **Deprivation Funding**

Funding addresses deprivation using FSM, FSM6, and IDACI bands to support disadvantaged pupils.

- **Support for Low Prior Attainment**

Allocation based on EYFS and KS2 results helps students needing extra academic support catch up.

- **EAL and Mobility Funding**

Pupils would attract this funding if they entered state education in England during the last 3 years, and they have a first language other than English and those joining at non-typical entry points.

- **Lump Sum Funding**

A fixed amount given to all schools to support their basic operational running costs.

- **Sparsity Funding**

Eligibility for sparsity funding depends on the distance the pupils living closest to the school would have to travel to their next nearest appropriate same phase school.

- **Premises and PFI Funding**

Funding for business rates, Private Finance Initiative contracts.

- **Growth**

Additional funding for schools with growing pupil numbers.

- **Area Cost Adjustment**

ACA accounts for regional cost differences in teacher pay and labour markets across England.

- **Minimum Per Pupil Levels**

MPPLs ensure a baseline funding level per pupil regardless of other influencing factors.

- **Funding Floor Mechanism**

The funding floor ensures that a school's funding is protected year-on-year, preventing schools from seeing sudden excessive drops in their funding even where the core formula factors indicate that their funding would otherwise be lower. Local Authorities' funding formulae must include a minimum funding guarantee (MFG) that operates in a similar way to the funding floor.

Rolling in previous grants:

- The Schools Budget Support Grant (SBSG) and the National Insurance Contributions (NICs) grant will be rolled into the NFF for 2026/27.

To reflect the roll in of these grants the following factors have been uplifted:

- Primary, KS3 and KS4 basic entitlements (AWPU)
- Minimum per pupil funding factors (MPPL)
- Free school meals ever 6 (FSM6)
- Lump Sum

The core factor values will be increased as follows in respect of the grants.

Factor	NICs	SBSG	Total
Primary basic per-pupil	£78	£55	£133
Key stage 3 basic per-pupil	£68	£78	£146
Key stage 4 basic per-pupil	£77	£88	£165
Primary MPPL	£93	£66	£159
Secondary MPPL	£83	£91	£174
Primary FSM6 per-pupil	£75	£49	£124
Secondary FSM6 per-pupil	£60	£72	£132
Lump sum	£2,400	£2,086	£4,486

- Local Authorities will be required to move their local formula factor values at least 10% closer to the NFF factor value, except where local formulae are already 'mirroring' the NFF (that is, where the local formula factor is within +/- 2.5% of the NFF factor value). Sunderland's factors were within the allowed parameters compared to the NFF factors in 2025/26.
- Local Authorities will again be able to transfer up to 0.5% of their total Schools Block allocations to other blocks of the DSG, with Schools Forum approval.

Final DSG allocations will be published in December 2025. These final allocations will use the October 2025 census data.

As soon as the provisional funding is released, officers will work through the formula and inform Schools Forum members of the outcome at the January 2026 meeting.

Timeline

Late November 2025 Autumn Spending Review.

December 2025 (date unknown at this point) Following the Autumn Spending Review, DSG allocations will be published based on October 2025 census data and APT supplied to LAs.

January 2026 APT submission to DfE late January 2026.

February 2026 Local Authorities will confirm school budget shares to mainstream and special maintained schools, and pupil referral units (PRUs).

Forum Decisions

Transfer of Funding to the HNB (max 0.5%)

In 2025/26 it was agreed to transfer 0.5% funding from the Schools Block to support the High Needs Block, equating to £1.156m, due to increased demand pressures on the High Needs Block.

The transfer is in recognition of the ongoing demand on the HNB due to increasing numbers of pupils receiving an Education, Health and Care Plan and the movement of pupils to specialist settings, including permanent exclusions, the increase in number of post-16 commissioned places and top-ups and the increased cost of placements in Non-Maintained Independent Special Schools.

The funding transfer contributes towards these additional costs. Without the transfer, these additional costs will still be incurred and will contribute to a rise in the DSG deficit year-on-year.

A consultation document has been shared with all Schools regarding the potential transfer of funding. The results will be collated and shared with Schools Forum members prior to the November meeting.

De-delegation of Trade Union Facility Time

The Local Authority is required to consult the primary and secondary maintained school representatives on the Schools Forum every year regarding the de-delegation of centrally held budgets. De-delegated funds are a deduction from maintained schools' budget shares, after the calculation of Schools Block allocations. De-delegation can only apply to maintained primary and secondary school budgets. Academies, free schools, special schools, PRUs and nurseries cannot de-delegate. However, they can choose to buy into the same de-delegated services on a traded arrangement, at an agreed rate per pupil.

Decisions on de-delegation must be taken at the Schools Forum by primary and secondary sector representatives separately, every financial year. It requires the agreement of a simple majority of the maintained representatives for the relevant phase on the Schools Forum on a recommended per-pupil basis. For 2026/27 there are no secondary maintained schools, therefore this only applies to Maintained Primary Schools.

Schools Forum members are invited to note the following data:

- Currently, there are 33 Primary schools in the maintained sector.
- The per pupil rate for 2026/27 will be £3.50 as in 2025/26.

Recommendation

Schools Forum is asked:

- (i) to approve, or otherwise, the transfer of funding from the Schools Block to the HNB for 2026/27.
- (ii) to approve, or otherwise, the continuation of the de-delegation of Trade Union Facility Time at £3.50 per pupil in 2026/27.