

Minutes of the meeting of Herefordshire Schools Forum held at virtual meeting platform on Friday 21 November 2025 at 9.30 am

Present: **Ms A Banner (LA maintained secondary schools) (In the Chair)**

Ms B Blower	PRU - Management Committee
Mr A Davies	Academies (primary)
Mr S Debenham	Maintained Primary - headteacher
Mr P Deneen	Trade Unions
Mr R Foster	Local Authority Maintained Primary School
Ms N Gilbert	LA Special Schools
Mr P Jennings	Academies
Ms K Joiner	Academy Special School
Mr T Knapp	Academies
Mr C Lewandowski	Trade Unions
Ms C Perez	16-19 Providers
Ms R Ussher	LA Maintained Primary School (nursery class)

In attendance:

Officers: **Finance Business Partner for Education and Schools, Service Director, Education, Skills and Learning, Head of Additional Needs, Head of Strategic Finance (Deputy Section 151 Officer) and Head of Learning and Achievement**

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRPERSON

Paul Jennings was proposed and unanimously supported by members of the forum.

Resolved: that Paul Jennings be elected Chairperson of the Forum for the ensuing year.

2. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRPERSON

Richard Foster was proposed and unanimously supported by members of the forum.

Resolved: that Richard Foster be elected vice-chairperson of the Forum for the ensuing year.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Hayley Manns and Gemma Martin.

Officers: Wendy Pickering - Strategic Finance Manager.

Cllr Ivan Powell, Cabinet Member Children and Young People

4. NAMED SUBSTITUTES (IF ANY)

There were no named substitutes.

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Paul Deneen and Christopher Lewandowski declared an interest as members of the Trade Union.

6. MINUTES

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 11 July 2025 be approved as a correct record.

7. DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT 2025/26 QUARTER 2 OUTTURN

The Head of Strategic Finance (HSF) introduced the report. The following principal points were noted.

- The forecast deficit on the High Needs Block at the time of budget setting for 2025/26 was £20 million.
- At Q2 a deficit of £17.5 million is predicted. The reason for the variance was due to reduced complex needs costs and fees to independent schools and alternative provision.
- As at 31 March 2026 the forecasted outturn would mean the carried-forward DSG Deficit cumulative balance would be £37.5 million.

In response to member's questions, it was confirmed that the deficit was ring-fenced to the high needs block.

Compliments were given to the service for their hard work and positive impact that was visible from the introduction of resource bases and measures ongoing through the deficit management plan.

8. DSG DEFICIT MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Service Director, Education, Skills, and Learning (SDESL) introduced the item. The following principal points were noted.

- The slowing of the deficit position strongly indicated the deficit management strategies were having an impact. This was evidenced as there were still exponential increases in the number of children in the system.
- There was continued rises in pupils with Education Health Care Plans (EHCP) and capacity reached in Herefordshire special schools.
- Expansion of the resource-based program continued but the numbers of children attending independent placements was still rising.
- The primary need that dominated plans were needs in ASD closely followed by SEMH with no sign of slowing down with significant increases in early years identification and numbers of children with plans.
- The four key actions of the management plan were discussed with the key actions and updates reported.

In response to comments and questions it was noted:

- I. The SDESL explained that she and her team met regularly with the chief executive and that were a number of work streams looking to manage the costs and efficiencies of school transport. The pressures with school's transport had been represented back to central government.
- II. Updates and presentations discussed at the Budget Working Group would be distributed to the Forum ahead of the public meeting.

- III. Reassurance was given of the awareness to the growth coming through into secondary schools and the awareness of government reforms and how potentially that might influence the system.

On behalf of the budget working group Richard Foster explained that they had recognised and complimented the positive work the service was doing, what had been done and the impact that it was having despite the financial challenges.

The forum was appreciative of the SDESL and her team for the opportunities they offered young people, their excellent vision, their support of the most vulnerable, schools and the excellent support of young people in Herefordshire.

Action: Updates and presentations discussed at the Budget Working Group would be distributed to the Forum.

9. SCHOOLS NATIONAL FUNDING FORMULA 2026/27 UPDATE

The Head of Strategic Finance (HSF) introduced the report, the following principal points were noted.

- The DfE reported the announcement of the schools and high needs national funding formula (NFF) allocations for 2026/27 would be delayed and not be published until autumn this year.
- A summary policy document to help with planning, had been released which set out the structure of the schools NFF. It was noted there were no structural changes expected, and it was proposed to apply the same principles that was used for 25/26 to build the budget for 2026/27.
- There would be no transfer to the High Needs Block as the SEN protection scheme would cease for 26/27.
- The Schools Budget Support Grant (SBSG) and the National Insurance Contributions (NIC) grant would be rolled into the NFF for 2026/27. The funding would be rolled into the Schools Block in a similar approach to previous grants, by adding cash amounts to the NFF Factors.
- Free school's meals would be extended to all children in households receiving Universal Credit. It was expected that this would be funded via a new grant outside of the NFF.

On behalf of the Budget Working Group, Richard Foster confirmed that the group felt it was a sensible approach given the delayed timescales and recommended the option to the Forum.

In response to comments and questions it was noted:

- I. Birth rates were tracked closely with this academic year for reception predicted to be the lowest year which mirrored the national trend and impacted primary school numbers on roll. Schools in the main have been sustainable in terms of the drop in numbers and census information suggested that numbers were increasing. It was noted that Herefordshire had also seen a rise in, in-year transfers which although unpredictable had provided stability in terms of funding and numbers across schools.
- II. A list of section 106 developer contributions which had contributed to education and schools across the county to be provided to members.
- III. Assurance was given that education colleagues were working very closely with the planning department with regards to the impact of new housing developments within the county.

The Forum expressed their preferences for 106 contributions to be provided in full rather than in parts.

Resolved: That the Forum agree the draft 2026/27 budget be prepared in line with the approach taken in 2025/26.

Action: A list of developments attributed to schools and education from section 106 developer contributions to be provided to members.

10. REQUEST TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE TO DISAPPLY THE SCHOOL FINANCE REGULATIONS

The Head of Strategic Finance (HSF) introduced the item, explained that a request for a disapplication was needed to be submitted to the secretary of state each year for exceptional funding to support the rent payment of additional classroom space at Eastnor School. Approval would be required from the school's forum. If this were not approved, it would put the lease at risk due to insufficient funds available within the existing school budget, as the transfer of additional funds would no longer be permissible. This would negatively impact on quality of educational delivery at the school.

The Chair of the Budget Working Group confirmed the group had previously and would continue to support the disapplication for Eastnor Primary School.

Resolved that the forum approve the disapplication request in respect of Eastnor Primary School.

11. DE-DELEGATIONS AND EDUCATION MANAGEMENT FUNCTION PROPOSAL 2026/27

The Head of Strategic Finance (HSF) introduced the item, it was explained that for the budget setting each year, Schools Forum are asked to approve the de-delegation of funding for centrally provided support services. The De-Delegated services currently used were highlighted in the report. It was proposed that the same services were used again for 2026/27. It was good practice to consult the Forum ahead of the January meeting where a vote would be required on each service separately and by sector.

Resolved that the De-Delegated Services as listed in the report be used to form the draft 2026/27 budget.

(Voting on this item was restricted to local authority-maintained schools only)

12. SCHEME FOR FINANCING SCHOOLS (LMS SCHEME)

The Head of Strategic Finance (HSF) introduced the item. The following principal points were noted.

- The scheme for financing schools should be reviewed annually. There were revisions that needed to be made from the DfE with regards to leasing arrangements. The arrangement for insurance cover required updating and tightening up around licence deficits. The scheme also needed refinement and clarification around some of the wording and arrangements.

- There were several schools with allocated committed funds to their reserves for capital projects, which if they were experiencing financial difficulties, they could gain permission from the local authority to be able to redirect those to help balance the budget would be incorporated in to the scheme.
- Work would be undertaken, and a consultation would be put together and circulated with the hope of bringing back to the forum in January.

The Service Director, Education, Skills, and Learning fully endorsed the changes particularly consultation around schools in a deficit position and the redirection of capital reserves. She encouraged members to support and contribute to the consultation.

Schools Forum Vacancies

The Clerk informed the Forum that following the elections, there were still four vacancies for Academy Representatives and invited current members to advertise to fellow colleagues with any interested parties to contact her directly.

13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Friday 23 January 2026.

The meeting ended at 10.41 am

Chairperson