

Agenda

Herefordshire Schools Forum

Date: **Friday 23 October 2026**

Time: **9.30 am**

Place: **virtual meeting platform**

Notes: Please note the time, date and venue of the meeting.

For any further information please contact:

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Agenda for the Meeting of the Herefordshire Schools Forum

Membership

Chairperson Paul Jennings
Vice-Chairperson Richard Foster

Kate Andrews
Alison Banner
Sarah Beard
Zayla Beecham
Emma Blankley
Beverley Blower
Adam Breakwell
Alex Davies
Stewart Debenham
Paul Deneen
Richard Foster
Nicki Gilbert
Andy Gosling
Georgie Griffin
Kate Joiner
Tim Knapp
Rose Lloyd
Rachel Ussher

Stuart Wetson
Dave Williams

Academies
Local Authority Maintained Primary School

Academies
LA maintained secondary schools
Diocese of Hereford
Academies (Primary)
Academies (Primary)
PRU - Management Committee
Maintained Primary - headteacher
Academies (primary)
Maintained Primary - headteacher
Trade Unions
Local Authority Maintained Primary School
LA Special Schools
Secondary Governors
Primary Governors
Academy Special School
Academies
Early Years Providers
LA Maintained Primary School (nursery class)
LA maintained secondary schools
16-19 providers

Agenda

		Pages
1.	ELECTION OF CHAIRPERSON To elect a chairperson for the ensuring year.	
2.	ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRPERSON To elect a vice-chairperson for the ensuing year.	
3.	APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE To receive apologies for absence.	
4.	NAMED SUBSTITUTES (IF ANY) To receive any details of Members nominated to attend the meeting in place of a Member of the Forum.	
5.	DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST To receive any declarations of interest by Members in respect of items on the Agenda.	
6.	MINUTES To approve and sign the minutes of the meeting held on 10 July 2026.	5 - 10
7.	DSG DEFICIT MANAGEMENT PLAN AND SEND REFORMS To provide an update to the Schools Forum on the DSG Deficit Management Plan and SEND Reforms.	11 - 50
8.	F40 UPDATE To receive a verbal update on the work of f40.	51 - 54
	PRESENTATION SLIDES FOR ITEMS 9-12	55 - 76
9.	DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT 2026/27 QUARTER 1 OUTTURN To provide an update to the Schools Forum on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) outturn as at 30 June 2026 (Quarter 1).	77 - 82
10.	SCHOOLS NATIONAL FUNDING FORMULA 2027/28 UPDATE To provide an update to the Forum on the Schools National Funding Formula 2027/28, including the recommendations of the Budget Working Group (BWG) on the Herefordshire schools' budget 2027/28.	83 - 88
11.	REQUEST TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE TO DISAPPLY THE SCHOOL FINANCE REGULATIONS To request the continued support of Schools Forum in respect of a Disapplication request to the Secretary of State for Education for exceptional circumstances for Eastnor Primary School's rent of additional classrooms.	89 - 92
12.	DE-DELEGATIONS AND EDUCATION MANAGEMENT FUNCTION PROPOSAL 2027/28 To request Schools Forum agree the De-Delegated Services and the Education Management Function for 2027/28.	93 - 100

13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 19 January 2027, 9:30am





Minutes of the meeting of Herefordshire Schools Forum held at virtual meeting platform on Friday 10 July 2026 at 9.30 am

Present: Mr P Jennings (Academies) (Chairperson)
Mr R Foster (Local Authority Maintained Primary School) (Vice-chairperson)

Ms B Blower	PRU - Management Committee
Mr A Davies	Academies (primary)
Mr S Debenham	Maintained Primary - headteacher
Mr P Deneen	Trade Unions
Ms N Gilbert	LA Special Schools
Mr C Lewandowski	Trade Unions
Ms W Priday	Diocese of Hereford
Mr D Williams	16-19 providers

In attendance:

Officers: Democratic Services Officer, Finance Business Partner for Education and Schools, Head of Strategic Finance, Head of Learning and Achievement, Senior Finance Business Partner and Service Director, Education, Skills and Learning

31. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from members: Kate Andrews, Sarah Beard, Andy Gosling, Georgie Griffin, Tim Knapp, Hayley Manns, Kate Joiner & Rose Lloyd.

Officers: Cllr Ivan Powell – (Cabinet Member Children and Young People), Hilary Jones – (Head of Additional Needs), Wendy Pickering and Kirsty Lister (Strategic Finance Manager)

32. NAMED SUBSTITUTES (IF ANY)

Wendy Priday was in attendance as a substitute for Georgie Griffin.

33. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Paul Deneen declared an interest as member of the Trade Union.

34. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 March 2026 were agreed as an accurate record.

35. DSG DEFICIT MANAGEMENT PLAN AND SEND REFORMS

The forum received an update on Herefordshire's SEND Reform Plan, which was submitted on 19 June following co-production with a wide range of partners including education, social care, health services and parent carer representatives.

The plan was linked to the High Needs Stability Grant, which could see up to 90% of the High Needs deficit written off (to 2025–26) if the plan is approved. The plan will undergo extensive quality assurance, with a final decision by the Secretary of State expected in September. If

not approved, a revised submission can be made, although this would delay associated funding.

It was highlighted that the reform programme is both ambitious and necessary, aiming to address challenges in the current SEND system and the growing High Needs deficit. The plan was developed within tight timescales and despite delays in receiving key national guidance.

Members were advised that, if approved, the majority of the existing deficit would be written off, although a residual deficit would remain. There would continue to be financial pressures over the next three years, with expenditure expected to rise in the short term before gradually reducing as reforms take effect. The year one implementation funding of £1.2 million was noted as limited, particularly given the requirement to establish multidisciplinary support teams.

The reform model focuses on creating a more inclusive and joined-up 0–25 SEND system, with greater emphasis on meeting children's needs within mainstream settings wherever appropriate. This includes earlier intervention, reduced reliance on waiting lists, and the introduction of a coordinated “front door” approach to accessing support. Implementation will take place over three years, with a phased transition and parallel operation of existing systems.

Members noted the introduction of locality-based multidisciplinary teams, comprising professionals such as educational psychologists, speech and language therapists, and occupational therapists. These teams would work directly with schools, focusing on building staff capacity and supporting whole-school approaches rather than individual withdrawal interventions. Year one would pilot the approach in two clusters, with full county rollout planned over subsequent years.

The importance of collaboration with schools was emphasised, including engagement with new support structures, participation in networks, and identification of staff development needs.

Additional tools such as a SEND portal, assistive technology lending library, and in-school triage services would support implementation.

Members were reassured that the reforms do not reduce the role of special schools. Instead, addressing the current shortfall in specialist provision remains a priority. Plans are in place to expand local capacity, including new SEMH intervention places, additional autism provision, and the development of a new special school in Ross-on-Wye by 2027, alongside ongoing capital improvements and accessibility works.

Key risks included recruitment challenges, managing the transition between systems, and ongoing financial pressures. However, Members agreed that the reforms present a significant opportunity to improve outcomes for children and young people by enabling earlier access to support and reducing delays within the system.

The forum were extremely supportive of the SEND reform programme and the pilot initiative offering their sincere thanks to all the officers involved.

In response to questions:

1. Members were advised that the SEND deficit was not expected to be eliminated within the Government's set three-year reform timeframe and acknowledged that financial pressures would continue in the short to medium term.
2. Members were reassured that there were no plans to remove children from existing settled placements and that the intention was to reduce reliance on

- independent placements gradually over a three to five-year period as local provision developed.
3. Members were informed that the financial position would be closely monitored and regularly reported to the Forum and Budget Working Group, whilst the Council continued to lobby for improved SEND funding through organisations such as the F40 group.
 4. Officers acknowledged the challenges associated with cross-border funding arrangements and confirmed that responsibility for funding rested with the pupil's home authority. Members were advised that new Government guidance on these arrangements had recently been published and officers would review and provide a more detailed briefing to a future Budget Working Group and Schools Forum meeting.

Action: A briefing on cross-border funding arrangements to be provided to the Budget Working Group and Schools Forum.

36. DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT 2025/26 OUTTURN

Members received an update on the 2025–26 year-end Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) position.

It was reported that the overall deficit at year end was £16.4 million, an improved position compared to the originally forecast £20 million deficit. The majority of the deficit (£17.5 million) relates to the High Needs Block, partially offset by smaller underspends across other blocks.

Underspends totalling approximately £8 million were noted, primarily driven by lower-than-expected costs in independent school fees, alternative provision, and elements of complex needs provision, alongside a £1 million underspend in the Early Years Block. This helped reduce the overall deficit position. However, these were partially offset by overspends, particularly in top-up funding for post-16 provision and maintained schools.

Members were advised that small underspends were also recorded within the Schools Block and Central Services Schools Block. The Schools Block underspend related to lower-than-anticipated traded union facilities time, while the Central Block variance reflected additional income in admissions offsetting higher Department for Education licence costs.

It was clarified that the Early Years underspend largely reflects a timing issue linked to the previous year's £1 million overspend, particularly relating to the placement of Easter payments across financial years. This had been anticipated but only confirmed following final funding adjustments.

The cumulative DSG deficit now stands at £36.3 million, which is lower than the previously forecast position of around £40 million. Based on this figure, Members noted that approximately £33 million could potentially be written off through the High Needs Stability Grant, subject to approval of the SEND Reform Plan.

Positive national feedback on submitted plans was highlighted, with an indication that funding is likely to be released where robust plans are in place. Subject to approval, it is anticipated that funding could be received in late October or early November.

In response to questions;

1. It was explained that, although the anticipated grant funding would provide significant financial relief, substantial deficits are expected to remain for several years. Forecasts indicated that High Needs Block pressures would continue to increase over the medium term, with the cumulative DSG deficit remaining significant despite the reforms.
2. It was emphasised that the financial position remained challenging and that both the additional funding and SEND reforms would take time to have a meaningful impact.
3. Members were reassured that funding would not be diverted from other elements of the Dedicated Schools Grant to support High Needs pressures, and that schools, early years and central services budgets would continue to receive their allocated funding.
4. It was noted that Herefordshire's financial position compared relatively favourably with many other authorities but acknowledged that rising SEND costs remained a national issue requiring further Government action and long-term reform.

37. DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT UPDATE AND 2027/28 BUDGET PLANNING

Members received an update on the budget planning for 2026/27, and the services funded through de-delegation arrangements. Attention was drawn to Appendix A which provided details of the services delivered and invited primary and secondary maintained school representatives to identify any additional information they might require ahead of the October meeting, when approval of the de-delegated services would be considered.

It was noted that a review of some existing arrangements, particularly the contingency budget, was being undertaken in light of changes to DSG regulations and increasing High Needs pressures.

Members were informed of significant forthcoming changes to free school meal eligibility processes, which may require a review of the current arrangements. It was outlined that schools may have greater flexibility in carrying out eligibility checks in future and indicated that proposals would be brought to a future Budget Working Group and Schools Forum meeting for consideration, including options for alternative service level agreements and administrative support for schools.

The forum commended officers for their work in promoting free school meal eligibility and ensuring schools understood the importance of identifying and supporting eligible families. It was noted that some parents remained reluctant to apply due to perceived stigma associated with free school meals, and consideration was suggested around how the support is described and promoted.

38. REVISIONS TO HEREFORDSHIRE'S SCHEME FOR FINANCING SCHOOLS

Members received an update on the Scheme for Financing Schools. It was noted that a review had been undertaken previously including local consultation and implementation of changes for 2025–26.

The Department for Education had since issued updated statutory guidance, confirming that there were no required or recommended changes for this year.

In light of the recent review, no further amendments to the scheme were proposed. Members were advised that the scheme would be updated to reflect the new date and formally republished.

39. ANNUAL REVIEW OF SCHOOLS FORUM MEMBERSHIP

Members received the annual review of Schools Forum and Budget Working Group membership based on spring census data to ensure proportional representation. It was recommended that one academy representative seat be removed from both groups and reallocated to maintained secondary representatives. This change would be implemented using existing vacancies on the Forum and a forthcoming vacancy on the Budget Working Group

Resolved that one seat be removed from academies on both the forum and budget working group and reallocated to maintained secondaries.

40. DATES OF MEETINGS AND WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2026/27

Resolved that the work programme and future dates for 2026/27 were agreed.

Friday 23 October 2026 9:30am

Tuesday 19 January 2027 9:30am

Friday 19 March 2027 9:30am

Friday 16 July 2027 9:30am

On behalf of the forum, the Chair offered his sincere thanks and appreciation to Nikki Emmett, who was standing down from the Budget Working Group, in recognition of her many years of service, support and valuable contributions to both the Budget Working Group and Schools Forum.

The Chair also acknowledged that this would be Chris Lewandowski's final Schools Forum meeting and thanked him for his significant contribution over many years, including his work representing union members, serving on various panels, and helping to shape policy through his constructive challenge and commitment to improving outcomes.

The meeting ended at 10.36 am

Chairperson



Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Deficit Management Plan – 2026 - 2029

This updated plan brings together the DSG deficit actions, the signed Local SEND Reform Plan, the place sufficiency plan, the latest data and the agreed financial assumptions. For children and young people with SEND, our plan focuses on earlier help, more local specialist places, a broader alternative provision offer, efficient transport arrangements and value for money.

Glossary table – terms used throughout this plan

Term	Full wording	Plain English explanation
AP	Alternative provision	Education arranged outside mainstream school, usually for children who cannot currently access mainstream education.
APST	Alternative Provision Specialist Taskforce	A multidisciplinary team supporting pupils attending HPRS.
ASD	Autism	Autism, including needs linked to social communication, sensory processing and flexibility of thought.
Assistant EP	Assistant educational psychologist	A practitioner who supports the work of educational psychologists.
BSIL	Best Start in Life	The early years and family support programme focused on improving outcomes for children and families.
BSIP	Best Start Inclusion Practitioner	A practitioner providing early SEND support through Best Start Family Hubs and related settings.
DSG	Dedicated Schools Grant	Government funding provided to local authorities for schools and education-related funding, including high needs funding.
EAH	Experts at Hand	A SEND reform workstream providing specialist advice and support earlier.
EHCP	Education, Health and Care Plan	A statutory plan for a child or young person with special educational needs.

EHCNA	Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment	A statutory assessment which may lead to an EHCP.
EHE	Elective home education	Education provided at home by parents or carers by choice.
EOTAS	Education Otherwise Than At School	Education arranged other than at school.
EP	Educational psychologist	A psychologist who supports learning, development, emotional wellbeing and inclusion.
FF	Families First	Herefordshire's Families First approach to earlier, joined-up family help.
H3	Home, Hub and Hospital provision	Run by HPRS for children with health needs, including mental health needs, who are unable to attend their mainstream school.
HNB	High Needs Block	The part of the DSG used to fund support and provision for children and young people with higher levels of SEND.
HPRS	Herefordshire Pupil Referral Service	Herefordshire's only registered alternative provision school, run across a number of sites.
ICB	Integrated Care Board	NHS body responsible for planning local health services.
INMSS	Independent and non-maintained special schools	Non-maintained special schools are specialist, non-profit schools approved by the Secretary of State. They are independent of local authority control, usually run by charities or trusts, and charge fees on a non-profit basis. Independent schools are privately run and may make a profit.
LINC	Learning, Inclusion, Nurturing Children	SEMH intervention provision for children in KS1 and KS2.
LISO	Local Inclusion Support Offer	The local offer of support to help schools and settings meet children's needs earlier.
MLD	Moderate learning difficulties	Learning needs that are greater than typical but not usually as complex as severe learning difficulties.
NEET	Not in education, employment or training	Young people aged 16 to 25 who are not in education, employment or training.

OT	Occupational therapist	A professional who supports children and young people with daily living, sensory, physical or functional needs.
PMLD	Profound and multiple learning difficulties	Very complex learning needs, often alongside physical, sensory or health needs.
PVI	Private, voluntary or independent nursery	Early years settings not run directly by the local authority or a maintained school.
SALT	Speech and language therapist	A professional who supports children and young people with speech, language and communication needs.
SEMH	Social, emotional and mental health needs	Needs linked to emotional wellbeing, behaviour, mental health or social development.
SEN2	DfE census of local authority SEN data	The annual Department for Education return about children and young people with SEN.
SEND	Special educational needs and disabilities	A broad term covering children and young people who need additional support because of learning needs, disability or both.
SLCN	Speech, language and communication needs	Needs linked to understanding language, using language or communicating with others.
SLD	Severe learning difficulties	Significant learning needs requiring specialist support.
SRO	Senior Responsible Officer	The senior officer responsible for delivering the SEND Reform Plan.
SRP	Specialist resourced provision	Now to be called a specialist inclusion base.
SSA	Statutory school age	Children and young people who are of compulsory school age.
VFM	Value for money	Making sure funding is used effectively and has a clear impact.

Executive summary

Herefordshire faces significant and sustained pressure on the Dedicated Schools Grant High Needs Block. The historic DSG deficit of £17.2m at the end of 2024/25 has been overtaken by a forecast cumulative deficit of £38.2m by March 2026. The key drivers are rising numbers of children and young people with Education, Health and Care Plans, increasing complexity of need, insufficient local specialist capacity, growth in the use of unregistered alternative provision and EOTAS, post-16 pressures, transport impacts and reliance on independent and non-maintained special schools.

This three-year plan sets out a single, joined-up approach to reducing the rate of deficit growth. It does not assume that the deficit can be eliminated within three years. Instead, the plan sets out the actions that will be taken over this period to slow escalation, improve value for money and build the local capacity needed to support children and young people earlier, closer to home and in less costly provision where appropriate.

Over the three years of this plan, we aim to move support earlier, help more schools meet needs well, create more local places, and keep a secure grip on spending.

This will be achieved by:

- Strengthening early intervention through the Local Inclusion Support Offer, Experts at Hand, outreach, transition support, SENCO networks and graduated approach tools.
- Managing demand by reducing avoidable escalation to EHC needs assessments, independent placements, EOTAS and high-cost alternative arrangements.
- Increasing local sufficiency through a phased programme of mainstream support bases, expanded special school places and increased alternative provision.
- Improving support pathways through SEMH intervention, including LINC, Alternative Provision Specialist Taskforce outreach, HPRS relocation and expansion, and clear referral, review and reintegration arrangements.
- Strengthening financial grip through quarterly cost-driver reviews, a shared dashboard, transport impact assessment, commissioning controls and value-for-money reporting.
- Reviewing progress regularly across the three years so the plan can respond to changes in demand, delivery and financial pressures.

Purpose and statutory context

The purpose of this three-year DSG Deficit Management Plan is to show how Herefordshire Council will manage High Needs Block pressures over the period of the plan. It sets out how we will comply with DSG conditions of grant, monitor High Needs Block spending, identify opportunities to improve value for money, continue to slow the rate of in-year spend, and maintain strong engagement with schools, settings, partners and families.

This revised version aligns the DSG plan with the signed Local SEND Reform Plan, June 2026. The DSG plan should therefore be read as the three-year financial and operational delivery plan that supports the wider SEND reform programme.

Over the three years of this plan, we will:

- Comply with DSG grant conditions and maintain clear financial oversight.
- Provide assurance to the Department for Education, Schools Forum and local governance that High Needs funding is being used effectively.
- Link financial decisions to better outcomes for children and young people.
- Reduce reliance on high-cost independent and out-of-area placements by strengthening local support and provision.
- Track progress through a shared reform and DSG dashboard, including demand, placements, workforce, transport, attendance, exclusions and finance.
- Review progress regularly so the plan can be adjusted as demand, delivery and financial pressures change.

Local context and financial position

Financial context

Herefordshire entered DSG deficit in 2019/20 as High Needs expenditure increased faster than DSG income. By the end of 2025/26 the DSG deficit stood at £36.3m. The current forecast position is significantly more challenging, with a forecast cumulative deficit of £62.2m by March 2027.

Financial indicator	Updated position for this plan
Historic DSG deficit	£36.3m at the end of 2025/26, retained as historic context.
Current forecast deficit	£62.2m by March 2027.
Main financial drivers	EHCP growth, independent and non-maintained placements, post-16 top-ups, alternative provision and EOTAS, specialist placement growth, transport and complexity of need.
How savings will be treated	Savings are indicative placement savings only and are subject to further financial impact and investment recovery tracking.
Transport	Transport is included as a separate impact area and will not be assumed as a saving unless evidenced through transport reporting.

Demand and needs profile

In 2025, 21.7% of pupils in Herefordshire schools were identified as having SEND, and 5.1% had an Education, Health and Care Plan. The latest reform data template uses 2,048 EHCPs as the baseline (SEN2 2026) and forecasts 3,842 EHCPs by 2029, an increase of 1,424 by 2029.

Demand indicator	Position used in this plan
SEND prevalence	23% of pupils identified in Herefordshire as SEND in 2025 – 5717 pupils (EHCP and SEN Support). This number only reflects school age children and those attending Herefordshire schools. It does not include younger children or post-16 or those attending a school in neighbouring authorities.
EHCP prevalence	5.1% of pupils held an EHCP in 2025.
EHCP baseline	2,048 EHCPs.
EHCP forecast	3,842 EHCPs by 2029

Forecast increase	A further 1,424 EHCPs forecast by 2029 (70% increase).
Primary needs profile	36.1% SEMH, 25.3% ASD, 14.7% SLCN. These three areas account for 76.1% combined.
Post-16 pressure	16 to 19 EHCPs forecast to rise from 400 to 793 by 2029. NEET young people (with SEN) are forecast to rise from 17 to 41 (410% increase) in the same period
Elective home education	SEN EHE forecast to rise from 94 to 180 by 2029. (91.4% increase)

Placement pressures

The placement profile highlights a longstanding shortage of specialist provision, with capacity failing to keep pace with the increasing needs of children and young people. This has resulted in a mismatch between need and the availability of appropriate local placements. Consequently, there has been growing reliance on independent and non-maintained special schools, out-of-county placements, alternative provision, Education Otherwise Than at School (EOTAS), and bespoke support packages.

Placement measure	Position used in this plan
Independent / non-maintained placements	231 placements budgeted with 110 growth placements throughout 2026/27 part of the agreed High needs block for 2026/27, 12% of the EHCP cohort at January 2026 census.
Local special school placements	444 current local special school placements, commissioned.
Resource / specialist base placements	113 placements in 2026, commissioned.
Alternative provision capacity	64 statutory AP places plus 25 H3 hospital school places.
AP demand	64 current statutory AP places, with demand around 100 pupils.
AP pupil growth	AP pupils rose from 134 in 2024 to 254 in 2025 and 360 in 2026; placements rose from 137 to 274 and 430.
EOTAS / educated elsewhere	5.2% (N=106) educated elsewhere including 2% (N=41) EHCP EOTAS.

Financial assumptions and cost avoidance methodology

This plan uses the updated unit costs confirmed for this version. The figures should be treated as indicative placement savings only. They are not cumulative and do not yet fully include capital costs, transport, statutory casework, related services, inflation, on-costs or set-up costs. A full financial impact and investment recovery tracker will be developed through the governance arrangements.

Cost used	Value to use in this plan	Use in this plan
Independent / non-maintained placement	£56,000	Used as the core comparator for financial modelling.
Local special school placement	£17,283	Used to estimate placement cost difference when a local special school place avoids or replaces an independent placement.
Resource base placement	£6,539	Used for mainstream resource base cost comparisons.
SEMH resource base placement	£10,539	Used where SEMH resource base provision is the relevant local alternative.
Transport	Separate impact area	Tracked separately through Home to School Transport governance.

Important note on savings

The figures in this plan are indicative placement savings only. They are not cumulative and need more work to include capital, transport, set-up costs, staffing, statutory casework, inflation and related services.

If successfully achieved, these measures are expected to reduce the forecast deficit by up to **£91.7m**, significantly improving the overall financial position. This assumes that all of the proposals and actions outlined within this report are implemented in full and delivered within the planned timescales.

It should be noted that the figures do not include the potential impact of the High Needs Stability Grant. Subject to approval by the DfE, the grant could provide funding equivalent to 90% of the cumulative deficit up to the end of the 2025/26 financial year. Based on current projections, this could result in approximately **£32.67m** of the deficit being covered by the DfE, further reducing the financial burden on the authority.

As the outcome of the High Needs Stability Grant application process has not yet been confirmed, this funding has been excluded from the forecasts shown below to provide a prudent assessment of the financial position. Confirmation of any award is expected during the **Autumn Term 2026**, at which point the financial projections will be updated accordingly. The grant therefore represents a potentially significant opportunity to improve the authority's overall deficit position beyond the actions already identified in this report.

Theory of change

The plan is based on our intention that: if Herefordshire gives help earlier, helps schools feel more confident, creates more local specialist and alternative provision, and keeps a closer check on spending, fewer children and young people should need crisis responses, EOTAS, out-of-county independent placements or long-term high-cost packages.

Input	Activity	Expected difference
SEND Reform Plan, governance and transformation funding	Develop and deliver Experts at Hand, Local Inclusion Support Offer, APST outreach and locality support.	Earlier support, fewer avoidable escalations and increased school confidence leading to reduced spend.
High Needs Capital, sufficiency planning and trust engagement	Create and phase in local mainstream support bases, special school places and AP capacity.	More children educated locally, reduced reliance on independent provision, better travel patterns leading to continued reduction in spend.
Finance, commissioning and dashboard oversight	Quarterly cost-driver reviews, placement decision scrutiny and value-for-money statements.	Improved financial grip and clearer evidence of impact including reduced spend.
Co-production with families, schools and children and young people	Use lived experience and school feedback to shape provision, pathways and communications.	Improved confidence, fewer disputes, better system responsiveness leading to reduced spend.

Workstream 1: Intervention First and Experts at Hand

This workstream will make specialist advice easier to access, help mainstream schools meet needs earlier, and reduce avoidable escalation. It links to Building Blocks 1 and 2 of the Local SEND Reform Plan.

Action	Milestone / timescale	Lead	How we will know
Develop and publish one joined-up Local Inclusion Support Offer and Experts at Hand access route.	Draft by September 2026; published by December 2026; evidence of use by March 2027.	Head of Additional Needs / SEND Reform Programme Manager	Schools and settings use one agreed route with clear thresholds and triage.
Deliver Experts at Hand in two pilot localities aligned to Family Hubs.	Pilot clusters confirmed by September 2026; workforce live by December 2026; operational across two clusters by March 2027.	Head of Additional Needs / ICB delivery partners	EAH active in two localities; Year 1 we will have recruited 16 EAH roles.
Recruit and deploy Year 1 EAH workforce.	Recruit: • 2 x SALT • 2 x OT • 3 x EPs • 3 x Assistant EPs • 1 x School Inclusion Adviser • 1 x Advanced SALT Practitioner with further roles to support the Year 1 target.	Head of Additional Needs / health partners	16 x EAH roles in Year 1 and 23 by Year 3.
Commission outreach from special schools and HPRS as part of Experts at Hand.	Specification agreed by September 2026; delivery starts by December 2026; impact reported by March 2027.	Commissioning leads	80% of schools requesting outreach will have received support within 4 weeks by March 2027.

Further develop SENCO networks, graduated approach tools and transition support.	Ongoing through 2026/27, with termly reporting.	SENCO Advisers / Additional Needs Service	Improved confidence, reduced escalation, stronger transition planning.
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Experts at Hand funding model Year 1-3 below:

H:\SEND Reform Data\Experts at Hand Spend Plan Updated DMP.xlsx

Workstream 2: Managing demand and reducing escalation

This workstream focuses on meeting needs earlier, so fewer children and young people need statutory assessment, specialist placements, EOTAS or independent provision because support came too late.

Action	Timescale	Lead	How we will know
Appoint a SEND Sufficiency Lead to implement shared needs analysis process to inform provision planning, workforce and commissioning.	Completed by November 2026; used for at least two key planning decisions by March 2027.	Head of Education Development / Data Analyst	Governance records show decisions based on the shared needs analysis.
Strengthen early intervention support in schools through workforce development – training, coaching, modelling and support	Training offer developed with school leaders by December 2026	Experts at Hand Lead	Training offer on the SEND Portal by January 2026. 80% requesting training will have training sessions booked by March 2027
Continued delivery of early intervention support in schools through Inclusion Outreach, EAH, APST and specialist outreach.	Routine offer by March 2027 with termly reporting.	Head of Additional Needs / SEND Reform Programme Manager	Stabilising trend in EHCNA requests, EHCPs and independent placements.
Improve dispute resolution through moving forward / signposting meetings where EHCNA is not agreed.	Operating by September 2026; reporting by March 2027.	Additional Needs Service Manager	Downward or stabilising trend in complaints and mediation requests and reduction in tribunal / remedy costs.
Recruit and introduce Best Start in Life Inclusion Practitioners to provide early SEND support through Best Start Family Hubs, network sites and home visits. Practitioners will offer advice, navigation, modelling, short focused interventions and	Advertise and recruit September 2026. Practitioners in post no later than January 2027.	Early Years SEND Manager	Families can access early SEND advice through Family Hubs; settings receive timely support and modelling; children with emerging needs are identified earlier; transition into Reception is better planned leading to fewer escalations to EHCNA

transition support for children aged 0 to 5 with emerging or additional needs.			;
Embed Families First ways of working to strengthen early help for children and families, including those with SEND. This will include use of the Family Help Assessment and Plan, Family Help Lead Practitioners, Team Around the Family arrangements, locality Family Help Teams and short pieces of direct work where needed.	New ways of working embedding from September 2026	Families First Service Manager	Families receive support earlier; practitioners use one assessment and one plan; education, health, social care and community partners work together more consistently; fewer families escalate because support was delayed or fragmented and they feel confident their child's needs can be supported.
Use Early Years SEN Inclusion Funding and Transition Funding to support children earlier, reduce gaps in support, and prevent unnecessary escalation to statutory assessment where needs can be met through targeted early intervention.	Ongoing, with annual review and termly monitoring	Early Years SEND Manager	Children receive earlier support; settings can evidence impact; schools receive earlier notice of transition needs; fewer gaps in support at Reception leading to fewer escalations to EHCNA

Workstream 3: Sufficiency of local specialist places

This workstream is central to reducing pressure on the budget. Herefordshire will increase local capacity through mainstream inclusion bases, resource bases, special school places and alternative specialist options. The programme is designed to reduce reliance on independent and non-maintained placements, reduce travel pressure and help more children learn closer to home.

Alternative Provision is both a pressure and an important part of the solution. HPRS currently has 64 statutory AP places, with current demand around 100 pupils. Herefordshire will expand AP as part of a tiered local system, ensuring AP is used for prevention, stabilisation, time-limited intervention and reintegration rather than becoming a default long-term pathway.

There is a strong interdependency between these projects. As new provision is developed and brought online, the system will be recalibrated to ensure that children are placed in the most appropriate educational setting for their needs.

At present, a number of children are placed in provision that is not the best match for their needs due to capacity constraints across the system. As new projects are delivered and children are moved into more appropriate placements, places will be released in other settings. This will improve the overall efficiency of the system, create additional capacity, and help ensure that children can access the right provision at the right time.

Planning assumptions used

The plan will use 444 current commissioned local special school placements, 113 commissioned resource / specialist base placements and 64 registered AP places as the baseline.

What is needed	Position used in this plan for final plan	Provision development
Increase Early Years SEND assessment places	Additional 8 places by September 2026	Widemarsh Explorers
Increase primary SLCN and ASD specialist base capacity.	16 SLCN / ASD places by September 2026.	Hampton Dene
Increase secondary ASD specialist base capacity.	Additional 8 by September 2026. Further 8 places September 2027	Aylestone ASD base
Increase primary SEMH specialist base capacity..	Additional 8 by September 2026.	Trinity Primary SEMH base

Increase intervention SEMH provision for Year R, KS1 and KS2.	22 places by September 2026.	St Martin's SEMH provision
Increase primary SLD / PMLD and complex specialist capacity.	Additional 10 places by October 2026	Blackmarston building work
Increase all age SLD / PMLD and complex specialist capacity.	45 additional places phased over four years.	Westfield rebuild / expansion
MLD KS1 and KS2 provision with associated ASD / SEMH / SLCN needs.	25 places in September 2027 plus 15 places in September 2028.	Ryefield MLD provision
MLD KS3 and KS4 provision with associated ASD / SEMH / SLCN needs.	55 additional places by 2030	Collocated with SEMH special school
Specialist SEMH provision for children and young people whose needs cannot be met through mainstream support bases.	80 places by 2030.	SEMH special school
Further commissioning discussions with existing providers to explore increasing commissioned numbers, including with post 16 providers		
Increase statutory AP places for KS3 and 4	36 places by 2030	HPRS relocation and expansion
Develop statutory AP places for KS1 and 2	30 places by 2030	Redevelop St David's following HPRS relocation
Develop Tier 2 AP Intervention pathways	100 places by 2029	New AP School

Below is a strategic overview of the projects and associated funding that will enable the planned expansion, along with the key milestones that will drive delivery and impact.

Project	Additional places	Start Date	Capital £m
Create MLD specialist provision: Ryefield Centre 25 places	25	Sep-27	£0.45m
Create MLD specialist provision: Ryefield Centre Additional 15 places	15	Sep-28	
expansion of autism base at Aylestone High. Increase 8 places	8	Sep-27	£0.085m
HPRS New site to provide KS3/4 places 36 new places	36	Sep-28	£6.0m
HPRS New site to provide KS2 places 30 new places	30	Sep-28	
New Alternative Provision Centre 75 places	75	Sep-28	£6.0m
New Alternative Provision Centre 25 places	25	Sep-29	
Rebuild/Expansion of Westfield School 10 places	10	Sep-29	£6.25m
Rebuild/Expansion of Westfield School 10 places	10	Sep-30	
Total Additional Places	234		£18.785m

Workstream 4: Financial management, transport and value for money

This workstream sets out how spending will be checked and challenged. It will link expenditure, placement decisions, sufficiency delivery, transport and outcomes through one dashboard and governance cycle.

Action	Timescale	Lead	How we will know
Run quarterly cost-driver reviews, including independent placements, post-16, AP, EOTAS, transport and top-ups.	Quarterly from 2026/27.	Head of Strategic Finance / DSG Monthly Governance Group	Clear evidence of challenge, decision-making and action on cost drivers.
Produce a value-for-money statement.	By March 2027, then annually.	SRO / Head of Strategic Finance	Statement shows what was prioritised and why.
Develop financial impact and investment recovery tracker.	Prototype during 2026/27; refined as sufficiency projects open.	Finance / Education Development / Commissioning	Savings, costs and benefits tracked consistently.
Apply travel impact assessments to all new SEND and AP proposals.	Methodology agreed in 2026/27; applied to all active proposals.	Head of Transport and Access Services	Start and end-of-year specialist transport costs compared on the same basis.
Review administrative charges and recoupment for out-of-county pupils.	Annual review.	Head of Additional Needs / Finance	Charges are reviewed and recovery opportunities are pursued.
Review post-16 top-up expenditure with mainstream college providers.	During 2026/27 and 2027/28.	Education Development Lead / Post-16 Inclusion Adviser / Finance	Improved alignment of post-16 funding and reduced escalation of high-cost top-ups.

Key performance indicators and dashboard measures

The DSG plan will use the measures in the signed Local SEND Reform Plan to track progress. These measures will be monitored through the shared dashboard and reported through the SEND Reform Programme Board, SEND & AP Partnership, SEND & AP Strategic Assurance Board, Schools Forum and DSG finance governance as appropriate.

Theme	Metric	Baseline	Target
Inclusion	All CYP with EHCPs in mainstream settings including SRP	61.6%	65% by Year 3.
Inclusion	SSA CYP with EHCPs in mainstream settings including SRP	44.5%	48% by Year 3.
Local specialist provision	CYP with EHCPs in maintained / academy special school	15.8%	19.5% by Year 3.
Independent placements	CYP with EHCPs in independent placements	12.1%	8% by Year 3.
Out-of-county independent placements	CYP with EHCPs in independent schools out of county	8.5%	7.5% by Year 3.
EOTAS	CYP with EHCPs who are EOTAS	2%	1.5% by Year 3.
Demand	Requests for statutory assessment	582	No more than +5%.
EHCP numbers	Number of EHCPs maintained	2,048	No more than +10% by Year 3.
Attendance	Attendance for CYP with EHCPs	86.8%	88.5% by Year 3.
Experts at Hand	Number of recruited EAH roles	N/A	16 in Year 1, 23 by Year 3.
Access to expertise	CYP without EHCP supported by SALT / support workers	875	1,500 by Year 3.

Access to expertise	CYP without EHCP supported by OT / support workers	169	350 by Year 3.
Access to expertise	CYP without EHCP supported by EP / support workers	62	150 by Year 3.

Workforce and capacity assumptions

Workforce is a key risk and success factor. The phased Experts at Hand approach must be delivered without over-stretching specialist staff or drawing all capacity back into reactive statutory processes. The workforce plan will therefore protect time for consultation, coaching, modelling, outreach and prevention.

Workforce area	2025/26 baseline	2028/29 forecast / target
SALT FTE	22.5	34.12
OT FTE	9.94	13.41
EP FTE	7.62	18.08
Experts at Hand roles	N/A	16 in Year 1; 23 by Year 3

Risks, dependencies and mitigations

Risk	Impact	Mitigation	Owner / route
Workforce recruitment and retention challenges, especially SALT, OT and EP roles.	Delayed or reduced delivery of EAH, outreach and early intervention.	Agree a minimum operational model, phase roll-out by locality, use task shifting where appropriate and monitor vacancies through governance.	SRO, Head of Additional Needs, health delivery partners.
Capital delivery slippage.	Delayed place creation and continued reliance on independent / out-of-area placements.	Use phased delivery plans, readiness checks, exception reporting and early escalation to	Education Development Lead / Sufficiency Lead.

		High Needs Capital Board and SEND governance.	
Rurality and small school constraints.	Uneven access to EAH and reduced ability to host inclusion bases.	Use locality delivery, clustered support, outreach, grouped sessions and targeted support to remote schools.	SEND Reform Programme Manager.
Funding uncertainty beyond the three-year reform period.	Risk to sustainability of prevention and specialist workforce.	Develop business cases using DSG impact data, joint commissioning opportunities and evidence of reduced independent placement growth.	SRO / Finance / Joint Commissioning.
Variation in school inclusion practice.	Inconsistent outcomes, attendance, exclusions and placement stability.	Use data to identify priority schools, strengthen SENCO and leadership support, school improvement, coaching and outreach.	Head of Additional Needs / School Improvement.
Transport pressures offset placement benefits.	Local placement expansion may not deliver expected net value.	Apply travel impact assessment to all proposals and report through Home to School Transport Steering Group.	Head of Transport and Access Services.

Governance and reporting

The plan will keep monthly DSG finance checks and link these to SEND reform governance. This means finance, places, commissioning, workforce and outcomes are looked at together, not separately.

Meeting / group	Purpose	Frequency
DSG Monthly Governance Group	Review expenditure, cost drivers, mitigations and financial risks.	Monthly

SEND Reform Programme Board	Oversee delivery of reform workstreams, risks, dependencies, dashboard and milestone delivery.	Every 4 weeks
SEND & AP Partnership	Monitor SEND and AP strategy delivery, action plan and operational performance.	Every 6 weeks
SEND & AP Strategic Assurance Board	Provide strategic leadership, challenge, assurance and escalation.	Every 6 weeks
Children and Young People's Joint Commissioning Forum	Coordinate joint commissioning across the Local Authority and NHS partners.	Monthly
Schools Forum / Budget Working Group	Receive updates on DSG plan, financial position, Schools Forum decisions and school-facing impacts.	As scheduled
Home to School Transport Steering Group	Review travel impact assessments, transport costs and mitigations.	As scheduled

Implementation priorities for 2026/27

Publish and mobilise the updated Local Inclusion Support Offer and Experts at Hand access route.

Confirm and deliver the two EAH pilot clusters aligned to Family Hubs.

Deliver the Year 1 EAH workforce model and protect time for prevention, consultation and modelling.

Open or commission 22 Tier 2 KS1/2 LINC places and maintain commissioned capacity through the academic year.

Complete shared needs analysis and use it to inform at least two key planning decisions by March 2027.

Progress the sufficiency pipeline, including Hampton Dene, Aylestone, Trinity, St Martin's, Ryefield, Westfield and alternative specialist capacity options.

Agree and apply travel impact assessment methodology to all new SEND and AP proposals.

Set up quarterly cost-driver reviews and produce the first value-for-money statement by March 2027.

Use the shared dashboard for routine governance reporting, with clear escalation routes and decision records.

Year 2 priorities: 2027/28

Expand Experts at Hand and outreach activity based on Year 1 learning.

Use dashboard data to identify schools, settings and cohorts needing more targeted support.

Continue delivery of the sufficiency pipeline, including further specialist and Alternative Provision development.

Review whether early intervention activity is reducing escalation to EHCNA, EHCPs, EOTAS and independent placements.

Strengthen locality working between education, health, social care, Families First and community partners.

Refresh the financial impact tracker using actual costs, placement data and transport information.

Year 3 priorities: 2028/29

Review the overall impact of the three-year plan.

Update demand forecasts, placement trends and financial assumptions.

Test whether the sufficiency programme is reducing reliance on independent and non-maintained placements.

Review whether the Local Inclusion Support Offer, Experts at Hand, Best Start Inclusion Practitioners, Families First and Alternative Provision pathways are reducing escalation.

Confirm the next phase of local place development and commissioning.

Prepare the next DSG Deficit Management Plan.

Statement of Assumptions and Risk

The delivery of the planned DSG deficit recovery is subject to a number of strategic, operational and financial risks. Financial projections contained within this plan represent the Local Authority's current best estimate and are based on a set of assumptions regarding demand, expenditure controls, sufficiency developments, SEND reforms and the delivery of identified savings.

Where planned interventions do not achieve the anticipated outcomes, are implemented later than planned, or require amendment following consultation or decision-making processes, the Authority reserves the right to revise the actions, financial forecasts and recovery timetable within future iterations of the Deficit Management Plan. Progress against all actions will be monitored through established governance arrangements and reported regularly to relevant decision-making bodies.

SEND Reform Update

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Progress so far



SEND REFORM

Putting children and young people first



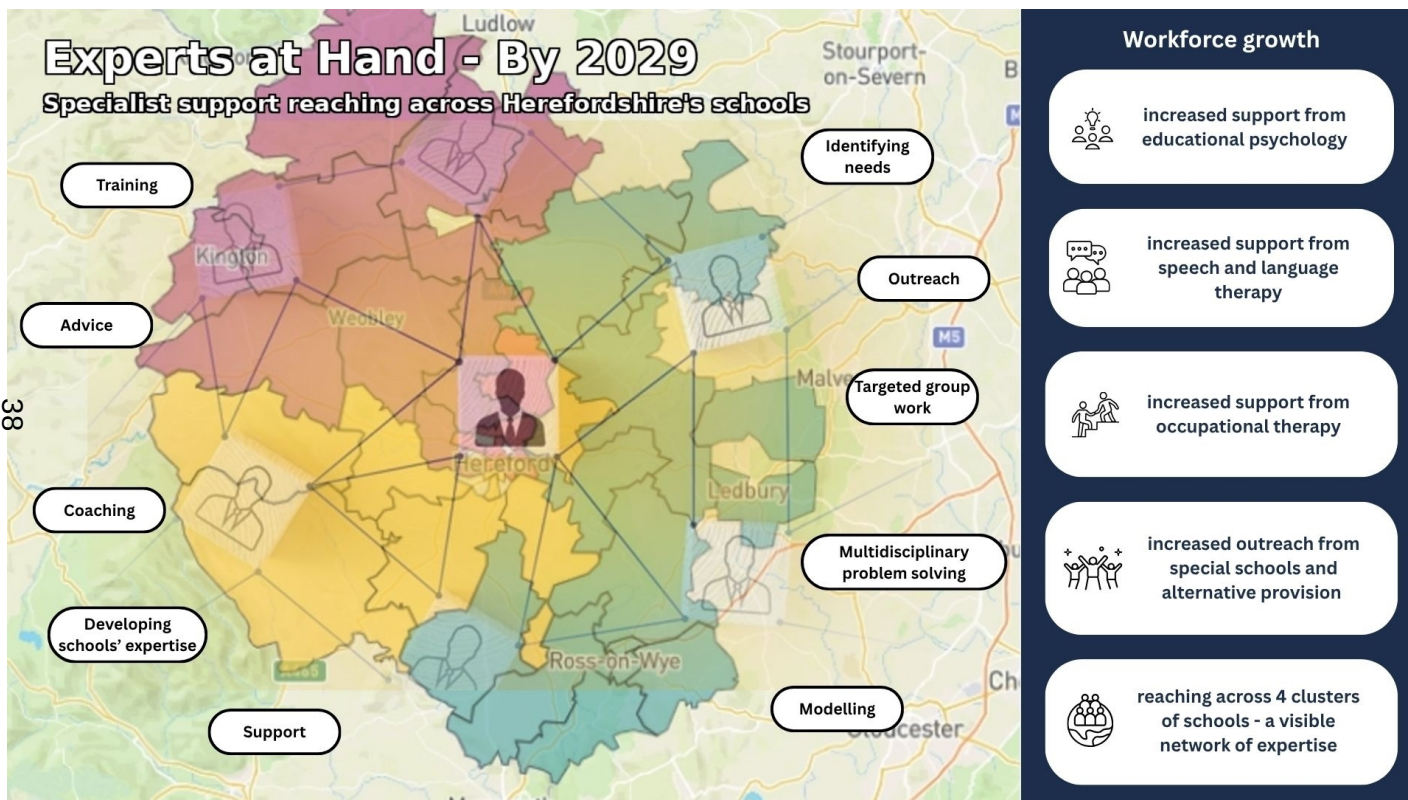
- Herefordshire's SEND Reform Plan was submitted on 19th June in line with the deadline. Co-produced with partners.
- Plan was approved 2nd October.
- Herefordshire is now eligible to receive a High Needs Stability Grant covering 90% of DSG deficit accrued up to the end of financial year 2025 to 2026.
- The indicative High Needs Stability Grant allocation for Herefordshire Council is £32,702,604.

Reform Plan progress – Q2



- Updated SEND sufficiency and demand projections completed.
- All schools engaged regarding inclusion base opportunities.
- Additional specialist capacity delivered:
 - Hampton Dene: +16 places
 - Blackmarston expansion operational
 - Aylestone expansion commenced
 - Weobley inclusion space created through relocation of modular village
- Ryefield consultation concluded
- Continued work on AP and specialist provision development.
- The LINC opened, increasing Tier 2 support capacity.

Reform Plan progress – Q2



- Experts at Hand workforce recruited:
 - Educational Psychologists
 - Speech and Language Therapists
 - Occupational Therapists
- Pilot clusters confirmed.
- Single Front Door model developed.
- Joint commissioning arrangements established.

Reform Plan progress – Q2



- Revised DSG Deficit Management Plan approved and aligned with SEND Reform priorities.
- Updated SEND demand and sufficiency projections incorporated into financial planning.
- Investment focused on:
 - Expanding local specialist provision.
 - Increasing inclusion capacity in mainstream schools.
 - Strengthening early intervention and outreach support.
 - Reducing reliance on independent and out-of-county placements.
- Financial modelling now reflects anticipated growth in SEND demand and planned provision developments.

Reform Plan what next - Q3



- Co-produce offer of support with schools over the next term.
 - Experts at Hand
 - Outreach/Inreach offer from special provision
- Launch and test integrated support offer.
- Continue expansion of local specialist capacity.

What This Means for Leaders



- Please make time to attend briefings / encourage SENCOs to attend briefings
- Primary heads was 08/10/26
- Secondary Heads: 09/10/26, 1pm
- SENCOs: 12/10/26, 3.30pm
- Cluster 1 and 2 SENCOs and Heads: 15/10/26, 12pm

Deficit Management Plan Update

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The plan sets out a three-year programme to improve SEND outcomes whilst restoring financial sustainability. It has been updated to align more closely with the SEND Reform Plan as well as the new financial reporting year.

Rising demand, increasing complexity of need, growth in EHCPs and dependence on specialist provision require a whole-system response.

Four linked workstreams focus on early intervention, inclusion, sufficiency and value for money.

Increasing Demand

- Growth in EHCPs and complexity of need
- Rising SEMH and neurodevelopmental presentations

System Pressures

- Reliance on specialist and independent provision
- Increasing transport and placement costs

Required Response

- Earlier intervention and stronger inclusion
- Increased local specialist capacity
- Better value for money and sustainable services

Workstream 1: Intervention First & Experts at Hand

- Publish joined-up Local Inclusion Support Offer and Experts at Hand pathway
- Deliver Experts at Hand pilots in two Family Hub localities
- Recruit 16 EAH roles in Year 1, rising to 23 by Year 3
- Commission special school and HPRS outreach support
- Strengthen SENCO networks, graduated approach tools and transition support
- Success: single access route, outreach within 4 weeks, increased school confidence and reduced escalation

Workstream 2: Managing Demand & Reducing Escalation

- Appoint SEND Sufficiency Lead and embed shared needs analysis
- Develop workforce training, coaching and modelling for schools
- Expand Inclusion Outreach, EAH, APST and specialist outreach
- Improve dispute resolution and signposting processes
- Introduce Best Start Inclusion Practitioners through Family Hubs
- Embed Families First and Early Years inclusion funding to provide support earlier

Workstream 3: Sufficiency of Local Specialist Places

- Expand Early Years, ASD, SLCN and SEMH specialist provision
- Increase Blackmarston and Westfield specialist capacity
- Develop Ryefield MLD provision and SEMH special school capacity
- Expand HPRS and primary/secondary Alternative Provision
- Create Tier 2 AP intervention pathways
- Reduce reliance on independent and out-of-county placements and educate more children locally

Workstream 4: Financial Management, Transport & Value for Money

- Quarterly reviews of key cost drivers and placement trends
- Annual value-for-money statement
- Financial impact and investment recovery tracking
- Travel impact assessments for all new SEND/AP proposals
- Review recoupment, charges and post-16 top-up expenditure
- Use one dashboard to connect spending, outcomes, transport and sufficiency

Success Measures (Year 3 Targets)

- EHCP pupils in mainstream settings: 61.6% → 65%
- SSA EHCP pupils in mainstream: 44.5% → 48%
- Special school placements: 15.8% → 19.5%
- Independent placements: 12.1% → 8%
- Out-of-county placements: 8.5% → 7.5%
- EOTAS: 2% → 1.5%
- Statutory assessment requests: no more than +5% growth
- EHCP volume growth: no more than +10%
- Attendance for EHCP pupils: 86.8% → 88.5%
- Experts at Hand workforce: 16 roles Year 1, 23 by Year 3
- Increased SALT, OT and EP access for children without EHCPs

F40 Update

F40 Statement

- f40 remains concerned that there is no clear, strategic plan to remove funding inequities from the education system. At a time of significant reform, which is placing even greater emphasis on mainstream inclusion, it is essential that funding for our schools is both sufficient and equitable.
- There remains a variation in education funding (Dedicated Schools Grant) of more than £5,000 per pupil from the highest to lowest funded areas – well beyond any local area adjustment or demographic variation.
- This variation in funding levels, alongside rising demand for SEND support, wider demand and inflationary pressures, and falling pupil rolls, is placing our schools in an intractable position and putting many, particularly small schools, into deficit.
- The system is subject to significant reform, with both the Schools White Paper and SEND reforms directly affecting the education system, and the wider social care and health reforms also significantly impacting services that support education providers.

F40 Statement

- We welcome the SEND reforms and their direction of travel, bringing together golden threads that are focussed on locality and community-based commissioning and services, alongside greater inclusion and earlier intervention. As such, we think this requires a full review of the way in which education funding is distributed to remove historic funding protections and ensure equity, along with:
 - Increased education funding to ensure schools have sufficient to successfully implement the reforms and deliver an excellent education for all.
 - Clear, strategic coherence of funding policy across the system, ensuring equity and sufficiency of funding across provider types, removing current inconsistencies and barriers to inclusion
 - A review of the schools National Funding Formula and per pupil funding to assess how well the formula is working for schools and to ensure basic entitlement funding levels are aligned with the costs of running a school, removing the need for an additional minimum funding level factor
 - A clear funding strategy, linked to earlier intervention policy reforms, which sets out a simple and transparent approach to reducing escalation of needs and high-cost placements, and enables the movement of funding back into our mainstream schools
 - More emphasis on local decision making to ensure Schools Forum groups have discretion to meet the needs of the local area and communities
 - An agreed approach to ensure funding policy and formulae remain flexible and responsive to changing needs over time

It is our belief that to successfully deliver the ambitious and much-needed policy reforms, we must be equally ambitious and undertake a full review and transformation of the education funding systems.

Schools Forum

23 October 2026

DSG Forecast Outturn Q1 2026/27

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2026/27 Quarter 1 DSG Outturn

DSG Allocation	DfE Funding £'000	DfE Outturn (Inc Block Transfers) £'000	Variance £'000
Schools Block	143,984	143,984	0
Less recoupment	-75,632	-75,632	0
Less NNDR	-1,306	-1,306	0
Schools Block	67,046	67,046	0
High Needs Block	30,652	56,373	25,721
Less recoupment	-5,795	-5,795	0
High Needs Block	24,857	50,578	25,721
	27,472	27,472	0
Early Years Block	27,472	27,472	0
	963	963	0
Central School Services Block	963	963	0
Net Expenditure	120,338	146,059	25,721

* Funding as per DfE website July 2026 allocation update

High Needs Forecast Variances

- Schools Forum recommended a High Needs budget of £50.8 million for 2026/27, with a funding gap of £25.9 million.
- The Q1 forecast outturn position indicates that the in-year deficit will be lower than when the budget was set. The latest forecast end-of-year position indicates an overspend of £25.7 million.
- A net £0.2 million reduction in the deficit as detailed:

DSG Forecasted Variances	Q1 £m
School Top Ups (Mainstream and Special)	0.4
Special School places	0.2
Cost Pressures	0.6
Independent placements	-0.6
Complex Needs	-0.2
Mitigations	-0.8
Net Forecasted Variance	-0.2

High Needs Block Outturn - June 2026

High Needs Block	Budget £m	Outturn £m	Variance £m
Special School Places	2.562	2.760	0.199
PRU Places	1.340	1.340	0.000
PRU Top Ups	0.867	0.867	0.000
Early Years SENIF Grants	0.270	0.270	0.000
DSG Complex Needs Contributions	1.413	1.189	(0.224)
Early Years Resource Bases	0.118	0.124	0.007
Resource Provisions - School Age	1.513	1.549	0.036
SEN Support Services	1.820	1.738	(0.082)
Inter Auth Recoupment	0.095	0.149	0.054
Fees to Independent Schools	21.634	21.046	(0.588)
S19 Education costs	0.325	0.325	0.000
Tier 4 Hospital School Provision	0.040	0.040	0.000
High Needs – School Top Ups	7.741	8.440	0.699
High Needs – Special Top Ups	6.494	6.200	(0.295)
High Needs – Post 16 Top Ups	5.018	5.018	0.000
High Needs Contingency (Block Transfers)	(0.436)	(0.477)	(0.041)
High Needs Block Budget Requirement	50.813	50.578	(0.235)
High Needs Block 2026/27 Net Allocation	(24.857)	(24.857)	-
High Needs Block 2026/27 Forecast Deficit	25.956	25.721	(0.235)

Cumulative Deficit Balance

- At 31 March 2027 this forecasted outturn would mean the cumulative DSG deficit balance would be **£62.0 million**, as analysed in the table below:

DSG Deficit	Pre 2022/23 Balance £m	2023/24 £m	2024/25 £m	2025/26 £m	2026/27 Forecast £m
Outturn	1.1	5.0	13.8	16.4	25.7
DSG Deficit Cumulative balance	1.1	6.1	19.9	36.3	62.0

Note: This table does not include the £32.7 million High Needs Stability Grant expected to be paid on the 30 November 2026.

National Funding Formula Update 2027/28

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National Funding Formula Update 2027/28

- The DFE published the preliminary information regarding the NFF 2027/28 on the 2 October 2026, the same principles apply to 2027/28 budget, as did for the 2026/27 budget:
 - Fund schools at the National Funding Formula (NFF) values.
 - Fund schools at the maximum permitted Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) (2026/27 value 0%).
 - De-delegations to be agreed for 2027/28, with those continuing to be increased in line with 2026/27 assumptions and finalised once allocations are published in December 2026.
- Assume draft budgets will be circulated in January 2027 with final budgets confirmed in March 2027.

National Funding Formula Update 2027/28

- Teacher's Pension Employer Contributions – will reduce from 28.6% to 17.6% from April 2027, with corresponding funding reduction incorporated into the NFF.
- 2026/27 Schools Budget Support Grant – Confirmation that this grant will be rolled into the NFF for 2027/28
- FSM Expansion Grant – Will not be rolled into the NFF for 2027/28 but additional funding will be received through Schools Block Allocations 2027/28 to passport to schools.
- Potential for future changes to HNB SEND element 2 funding of £6,000 per pupil following DfE consultation in summer 2026. Feedback due in autumn 2026 but no changes to NFF confirmed for 2027/28 as DfE to run pilot scheme initially (Herefordshire not part of).

2027/28 Exceptional Circumstances Disapplication Request

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Exceptional Circumstances Disapplication

- Each year, local authorities can submit requests to 'disapply' certain regulations governing their local funding formulae.
- Applications to be submitted by 16 November 2026, to ensure decisions are communicated back to local authorities prior to the APT submission deadline.
- Herefordshire is proposing to submit 1 disapplication request on behalf of Eastnor Primary School, the disapplication relates to the rent of additional classrooms. The disapplication is for the value of **£18,919**.
- Schools Forum approval is required as part of the submission process. This disapplication has been previously supported by Schools Forum for the last 3 financial years.
- The 2027/28 financial year falls within the period of the 3-year contract review, the cost of the existing agreement has been adjusted to reflect inflationary increases.

2027/28 De-delegated Services

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De-delegated Services

- Maintained schools have for several years chosen to de-delegate a number of services, the table below outlines those in place for the 2026/27 financial year.

De-delegations	APT calculation basis	Total Amount
Access Budgeting Software	Total no of schools	23,055.58
FSM Eligibility Checking Service	Primary & Secondary	13,549.64
EAL Service	Primary, Secondary, Ever6 FSM & EAL	54,760.97
Trade Union Facilities Service	Primary only	20,245.82
School Improvements Service	Primary & Secondary	67,228.08
Contingencies	Primary & Secondary	11,222.16
Behaviour Support Team	Primary only	31,119.90
Total De-delegations		221,182.15

- For 2027/28, we are proposing several changes to these services to strengthen the overall offer to schools and ensure it continues to meet their needs. Further details of these proposed changes are provided in the following slides.

Proposed changes for 2027/28

ACCESS BUDGETING SOFTWARE

- This item relates to the budgeting software package (Access) used by schools for budget setting and submission of 5 year plans.

8 **Proposal for 2027/28:**

- To be **removed** from the de-delegations and charged via the core Hoople SLA packages.

Proposed changes for 2027/28

FSM ELIGIBILITY CHECKING SERVICE

- This service supports the administration and verification of Free School Meal eligibility and is delivered by the Revenue & Benefits team within Hoople Ltd.

⁶⁹ **Proposal for 2027/28:**

- With the significant FSM changes introduced this September, it is proposed that this de-delegation **remains unchanged** (other than an inflationary rise) as the administrative support provided by Hoople offers valuable assistance to schools.

Proposed changes for 2027/28

EAL SERVICE

- This item relates to the service that supports pupils with English as an Additional Language (EAL), including the provision of assessment support, observations, and monitoring visits for maintained schools. The EAL Service has experienced increasing demand from schools for specialist assessment, intervention and support for newly arrived bilingual learners and their families.

Proposal for 2027/28:

- Following a review of service requirements, the **de-delegation has been revised** to incorporate a core package of teacher and teaching assistant support, funded through the de-delegated arrangement.

Proposed changes for 2027/28

TRADE UNION FACILITIES

- The local authority provides facilities time to recognised trade unions to comply with the need for employers to have appropriate arrangements for trade union recognition, consultation and negotiation.

Proposal for 2027/28:

- Other than the annual inflationary rise (rate TBC in January 2027) we propose that this item **remains unchanged**.

Proposed changes for 2027/28

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENTS SERVICE

- The School Improvement Service provides strategic leadership, challenge, and support to schools to secure and sustain high-quality education outcomes for all pupils. This includes performance monitoring, targeted intervention & advice and inclusion support.

Proposal for 2027/28:

- To strengthen the support available to schools, the team has been re-aligned, **providing additional capacity** and resources to support a greater number of maintained schools.

Proposed changes for 2027/28

CONTINGENCIES

- This item provides a small contingency within the de-delegated budget to manage any funding shortfalls resulting from academy conversions, as well as other unforeseen costs that may arise during the year.

Proposal for 2027/28:

- Due to the small allocation and proposed rises in other de-delegated items, we propose that the contingency is **removed** for 2027/28.

Proposed changes for 2027/28

INCLUSION OUTREACH TEAM (previously Behaviour Support Team)

- The Behaviour Support Team has been restructured as the Inclusion Outreach Team, with a revised model that combines advisory teachers and intervention specialists to deliver targeted, direct support to all schools.

Proposal for 2027/28:

- As the service offer has evolved and now provides targeted support to all schools, we propose that this item is **removed** from de-delegations for 2027/28.

Summary of Changes 2027/28

- Considering the proposed changes highlighted in the previous slides, the overall increase on de-delegations would be **approximately £48k** (pending final inflation figures in January 2027).

	2026/27	2027/28 PROPOSED	VARIANCE	
De-delegations	Total Amount £	Total Amount £	Variance	Variance reason
Access budgeting software - computer license	23,055.58	0.00	-23,055.58	Removed and charged through Hoople core SLA
Free school meals eligibility checking	13,549.64	13,884.32	334.68	Unchanged - inflation applied (modelled with 2.47%)
English additional language service - (EAL)	54,760.97	104,073.73	49,312.76	Core team for EAL service established. Re-introduction of EAL Teaching Assistant and EAL Team leader role
Trade union facilities agreement	20,245.82	20,745.89	500.07	Unchanged - inflation applied (modelled with 2.47%)
School improvement service	67,228.08	129,421.92	62,193.84	School improvement advisors increased from 0.6 FTE to 1.6 FTE in 27/28
Contingencies	11,222.16	0.00	-10,488.00	Contingency removed for 27/28 as no longer required
Behaviour support service	31,119.90	0.00	-31,119.90	Behaviour support team charge removed as Inclusion Outreach offer now in place and open to all schools
Total De-delegations	221,182.15	268,125.86	47,677.87	

Education Management Functions (EMF)

- The table below highlights the current EMF charges for 2026/27 compared to the proposal for 2027/28 (apply inflation inline with APT rate).
- This is the approach that has been applied in previous financial years.
- EMF contributes to services including Statutory HR & Finance, NC Monitoring & Moderation, Internal Audit, Property Services & Governor Services.

Education Management Functions	Total Amount £	Total Amount £	Variance	Variance reason
Education Management Functions	140,119.68	143,580.64	3,460.96	Inflation modelled at 2.47% (as same as 26/27) but will update with actuals in Jan 27
Total Education Management Functions	140,119.68	143,580.64	3,460.96	



Title of report: Dedicated Schools Grant 2026/27 Quarter 1 Outturn

Meeting: Herefordshire Schools Forum

Meeting date: Friday 23 October 2026

Report by: Head of Strategic Finance (Deputy S151)

Classification

Open

Decision type

This is not an executive decision

Wards affected

(All Wards)

Purpose

To provide an update to the Schools Forum on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) outturn as at 30 June 2026 (Quarter 1).

Recommendation(s)

That:

- a) Schools Forum note the Quarter 1 outturn position of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for 2026/27.

Key considerations

1. Herefordshire's Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) allocation for 2026/27 is as follows:

Block	Gross Allocation £m	Recoupment £m	NNDR Adjustment £m	Net Allocation £m
Schools Block	143.984	(75.632)	(1.306)	67.046
Central Block	0.963	-	-	0.963
High Needs Block	30.652	(5.795)	-	24.857
Early Years Block	27.472	-	-	27.472
DSG Allocation 2026/27	203.071	(81.427)	(1.306)	120.338

2. The DSG allocation is as per the latest published allocations in July 2026. This reflects the 2026/27 import/export adjustments in the High Needs Block.
3. The forecast deficit on the High Needs Block at the time of budget setting for 2026/27 was £25.9 million. As at Quarter 1, the DSG is forecast to overspend by £25.7 million, which relates to the pressures on the High Needs Block. The below table shows the Quarter 1 outturn by block:

Block	Budget £m	Forecast £m	Variance £m
Schools Block	67.046	67.046	-
Central Block	0.963	0.963	-
High Needs Block	24.857	50.578	25.721
Early Years Block	27.472	27.472	-
Total DSG 2026/27	120.338	146.059	25.721

4. The main reasons for the variance of £0.2 million compared to the expected in-year deficit is because of reduced complex needs placements, and independent placements and alternative education provisions average cost being lower than estimated in the budget. This is offset by increased top up payments for pupils in mainstream provision.

Cumulative DSG Deficit and the High Needs Support Grant

5. The cumulative forecast deficit on the High Needs Block at the end of 2026/27 is currently £62.0 million, which is analysed as follows:

DSG Deficit	2022/23 £m	2023/24 £m	2024/25 £m	2025/26 £m	2026/27 £m
Outturn	1.1	5.0	13.9	16.4	25.7
Cumulative DSG Deficit Balance	1.1	6.1	19.9	36.3	62.0

6. The cumulative DSG deficit is accounted for as an unusable reserve on the Council's balance sheet, as permitted via statutory instrument, which will remain in place until 31 March 2028. This enables all local authorities to ring-fence the DSG deficit from the overall financial position in the statutory accounts.
7. The Department for Education (DfE) announced on 23 February 2026 that local authorities would receive funding via a new High Needs Stability Grant (HNSG) to offset 90% of its historic DSG deficits up to and including the 31 March 2026. This would equate to £32.7 million based on the 2025/26 outturn position. Council's will then have to fund the remaining 10% from its Earmarked Reserves, which would equate to £3.6m.
8. However, allocations of the HNSG will only be paid once a local authority has developed and submitted to the DfE a Local SEND reform plan which is then approved as meeting the required criteria. Herefordshire Council submitted its SEND reform plan on 19 June 2026 in line with the deadline and have been in regular communication with the DfE over the summer term, we await final feedback from the DfE. If the plan meets the DfE requirements on first assessment, HNSG funding is expected to be paid sometime during autumn 2026.
9. On 2 October 2026, Herefordshire Council received confirmation that its SEND Reform Plan had been approved. As a result, the Council is due to receive £32.7 million of HNSG funding on 30 November 2026.

Community impact

10. Increasingly schools funding is directed by government, and the council can only allocate funding given by government. School governing bodies retain the responsibility to spend the school budget on meeting pupil needs. Schools, colleges and post-16 providers and potentially parents will need to be consulted on any changes to the high needs services.

Environmental Impact

11. This is a consultation with Schools Forum on school funding and will have no direct environmental impacts. School governing bodies and trustees are responsible for deciding on expenditure and they will be encouraged to minimise waste and resource use in line with the Council's Environmental Policy.

Equality duty

12. The Public Sector Equality Duty requires the Council to consider how it can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations and demonstrate that it is paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services.
13. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows: A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to – (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act; (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
14. In relation to school finance, it is the responsibility of individual governing bodies to commit expenditure according to individual pupil need. Changes in high needs provision will require consultation with users and further advice from legal services will be sought should this be necessary. However, the decisions of the school forum should have regard to this duty and the potential implications of any decisions made.

Resource implications

15. This report relates to the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) only.

Legal implications

16. The Schools Forum is a statutory decision making and consultative body constituted in line with the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, and its associated regulations, including the Schools Forum (England) (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020, to enable members of the local school community to work in partnership with Herefordshire Council when making decisions about school funding and finances.
17. The funding of schools is prescribed by the Department for Education (DfE) through the School and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations 2026.

Risk management

18. Budget Working Group (BWG) reviews all reports and proposals in detail prior to making recommendations to the Schools Forum. This two-stage process helps to ensure greater scrutiny of budget proposals and mitigate against any risks that may be identified. Any identified risks will be monitored and managed by the Children's and Young People directorate jointly with the Schools Forum.

Consultees

19. Budget Working Group (BWG) was consulted on 9 October 2026, who noted the contents of the report.

Appendices

Schools Forum Presentation Slides

Background papers

None.

Glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.

BWG Budget Working Group (of Schools Forum)
DfE Department for Education
DSG Dedicated Schools Grant
HNSG High Needs Stability Grant
NNDR National Non-Domestic Rates



Title of report: Schools National Funding Formula 2027/28 Update

Meeting: Herefordshire Schools Forum

Meeting date: Friday 23 October 2026

Report by: Head of Strategic Finance (Deputy S151)

Classification

Open

Decision type

This is not an executive decision

Wards affected

(All Wards)

Purpose

To provide an update to the Forum on the Schools National Funding Formula 2027/28, including the recommendations of the Budget Working Group (BWG) on the Herefordshire schools' budget 2027/28.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- a) **Schools Forum to review the budget approach for setting the schools 2027/28 budget; and**
- b) **Agree the draft 2027/28 budget to be prepared in line with the approach taken in 2026/27.**

Alternative options

1. Alternative options will be fully considered by the Budget Working Group (BWG) prior to formulating final budget recommendations for consideration by Schools Forum in January 2027. At this stage only a preliminary view has been sought in order to determine how the budget proposals can be developed further. The high needs budget will require further detailed work following the expected Department for Education (DfE) funding announcement in December 2026 and recommendations will be agreed by Schools Forum in March 2027.

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
Stacey Carter, Head of Strategic Finance (Deputy S151), Email: Stacey.carter@herefordshire.gov.uk

Key considerations

2. The DfE published the preliminary information regarding the NFF 2027/28 on the 2 October 2026. Final NFF allocations and supporting documentation (including operational guidance) will be published in Autumn 2026. We expect that the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) allocations using the NFF will be published in December 2026 as in previous years.
3. The authority proforma tool (APT) will be released for local authority submissions in mid-December 2026 with a deadline return date towards the end of January 2027. This is like previous years. The APT will again be populated from schools block data, primarily drawn from the autumn 2026 school census.
4. In light of the funding announcement, the Budget Working Group (BWG) at its meeting on 9th October 2026 considered the principle that **Herefordshire's approach to school funding for 2027/28 should be in line with the approach used for 2026/27 whilst incorporating any changes directed by DfE**
5. Potential key updates for the National Funding Formula 2027/28:

Teachers Pensions Employer Contributions

From April 2027, employer contribution rates for the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS) will decrease from 28.6% to 17.6%. Funding for schools and other eligible education settings will be reduced from 1 April 2027 to reflect the decrease in pension costs

The funding reduction in respect of pensions will be incorporated into the schools NFF and the equivalent local authority funding formulae from the start of the financial year 2027/28.

The adjustment will be incorporated into the schools NFF and the local funding formulae in 3 ways, reflecting the 3 different ways in which schools are funded. That is through adjustments to the:

- Basic per pupil factor, the lump sum and the FSM6 factor values.
- Minimum per pupil levels.
- Baseline for each school, which is used to calculate funding protections for schools funded through the funding floor.

This methodology mirrors the methodology used when funding in respect of pension contributions was rolled into the schools NFF in the 2025/26 financial year, following the previous upwards valuation in pension contributions.

Published guidance in July 2026 details the proposed reductions to each factor, for both maintained schools and academies. The guidance also includes an online calculator tool for academies to estimate their funding reduction for April 2026 – August 2026 before the deductions are published.

Rolling in Previous Grants

The Schools Budget Support Grant (SBSG) provided schools with additional funding in financial year 2026 to 2027 to support them with overall costs, including the:

- Costs of the schools teacher pay award from September 2026.
- Local government services pay award in respect of support staff in 2026/27.

The Schools Budget Support Grant (SBSG) was rolled into the NFF for 2026/27 and the latest published NFF guidance confirms the mainstream schools' element of the SBSG 26 is being rolled into the schools NFF for 2027 to 2028, ensuring that this funding continues to form part of schools' core budgets going forward

The Free School Meals (FSM) Expansion grant provides extra funding to mainstream schools, special schools and alternative provision schools. This is to help with the additional costs of free meals following the expansion to FSM eligibility to all children in households receiving Universal Credit. The expansion was introduced in September 2026 and a separate grant was provided for 2026/27.

Due to the lag in data used to calculate the 2027 to 2028 NFF, the funding allocated to local authorities through the schools NFF will not take into account the FSM expansion. As a result, local authorities will receive additional funding through their dedicated schools grant (DSG) schools block allocations, when that is issued in December 2026. This will reflect the increase in FSM-eligible pupils that they will have to fund through their local mainstream schools formula

Upfront SEND Funding into Mainstream Schools

DfE carried out a consultation over the summer regarding the possibility of permitting local authorities to pass more high needs block funding directly into the core budgets of mainstream schools, and for expressions of interest in participating in the pilot. A response to this consultation will be published in Autumn 2026.

Herefordshire Council provided a response to the consultation but did not express an interest in participating in the pilot, as the DfE was not clear in its communications on the financial implications and if additional funding would be provided to ensure it did not create an additional pressure on the high needs block.

Therefore, for 2027/28, schools budget setting will remain as per previous years with £6,000 as the element 2 threshold.

National Funding Formula

As per previous years, all local authorities must continue to move their local formula factor values at least a further 10% closer to the NFF Value. Herefordshire already mirrors the National Funding Formula.

The schools NFF for 2027 to 2028 will use the same factors that were used in the 2026 to 2027 NFF.

The core formula factors are:

- pupil-led factors:
 - basic entitlement
 - deprivation (free school meals ever6 (FSM6)
 - income deprivation affecting children index 2019 (IDACI)
 - low prior attainment,
 - English as an additional language and mobility
- school led factors:
 - lump sum
 - sparsity
 - premises factors (rates, PFI, split sites and exceptional premises).

Funding protection in 2027 to 2028 through the operation of a minimum per-pupil level (MPPL) and the funding floor will continue

These factors will operate in the same way in the NFF for 2027 to 2028 as they did in 2026 to 2027, though the factor values will be updated.

Growth and falling rolls funding will continue, where applicable, to local authorities.

The factor values assigned to each factor for 2027 to 2028 will be confirmed alongside the publication of the schools NFF allocations later in autumn 2026.

The schools NFF for 2027 to 2028 will include additional funding in respect of improved maternity pay from September 2027, as committed to in the Every child achieving and thriving schools white paper.

Minimum Funding Guarantee

It is currently unclear how the adjustments to the Teacher Pension Contributions will affect the Minimum Funding Guarantee.

Disapplication's

All disapplication's are to be submitted before the 16 November 2026, this is to ensure decisions are communicated back to Local Authorities prior to the APT submission deadline. As per previous years, Herefordshire will be submitting one disapplication for 2027/28, which is noted under a separate agenda item.

Block Transfers

As in previous years, local authorities will be allowed to transfer up to and including 0.5% of the schools block into another block, with Schools Forum approval, without submitting a disapplication request. For a transfer exceeding 0.5%, or without school's forum approval, a disapplication request must be submitted to the Secretary of State.

De-delegations

The latest guidance published regarding the NFF 2027/28 did not include any specific updates in relation to de-delegations, therefore we are assuming there will be no change to the principles and process of the de-delegated services. The details of Herefordshire's proposals for de-delegated services are noted under a separate agenda item.

6. Therefore, as per previous years, we propose to follow the following principles:

- Seek to fund schools at the National Funding Formula (NFF) values.
- To fund schools at the maximum permitted Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) (2026/27 value 0%).
- De-delegations to be agreed for 2027/28, with a proposed annual increase assumed in line with 2026/27, and will be reviewed once allocations are published in December 2026.

7. Using 2026/27, the indicative timescale for setting the schools budgets is as follows:
 - School budgets will reflect the schools funding settlement for 2027/28 and October 2026 verified School Census data (subject to this being provided by the DfE no later than mid-December).
 - Publication of 2027/28 individual school budgets are expected to mirror last year's timeline, following final budget decisions taken by Schools Forum at the March 2027 meeting.

Community impact

8. Increasingly schools funding is directed by government, and the council can only allocate funding given by government. School governing bodies retain the responsibility to spend the school budget on meeting pupil needs. Schools, colleges and post-16 providers and potentially parents will need to be consulted on any changes to the high needs services.

Environmental Impact

9. This is a consultation with Schools Forum on school funding and will have no direct environmental impacts. School governing bodies and trustees are responsible for deciding on expenditure and they will be encouraged to minimise waste and resource use in line with the Council's Environmental Policy.

Equality duty

10. The Public Sector Equality Duty requires the Council to consider how it can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations and demonstrate that it is paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services.
11. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows: A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to – (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act; (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
12. In relation to school finance, it is the responsibility of individual governing bodies to commit expenditure according to individual pupil need. Changes in high needs provision will require consultation with users and further advice from legal services will be sought should this be necessary. However, the decisions of the school forum should have regard to this duty and the potential implications of any decisions made.

Resource implications

13. This report relates to the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) only.

Legal implications

14. The Schools Forum is a statutory decision making and consultative body constituted in line with the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, and its associated regulations, including the Schools Forum (England) (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020, to enable members of the local school community to work in partnership with Herefordshire Council when making decisions about school funding and finances.
15. The funding of schools is prescribed by the Department for Education (DfE) through the School and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations 2026.

Risk management

16. Budget Working Group (BWG) reviews all reports and proposals in detail prior to making recommendations to the Schools Forum. This two-stage process helps to ensure greater scrutiny of budget proposals and mitigate against any risks that may be identified. Any identified risks will be monitored and managed by the Children and Young People directorate jointly with the Schools Forum.

Consultees

17. Budget Working Group (BWG) was consulted on 9th October 2026 and recommended the 2027/28 school budget be prepared on the same basis as 2026/27 in the absence of the final DfE operational guidance and technical notes. BWG will consider the budget proposals further once the DfE have announced the final DSG allocations and guidance in December 2026.

Appendices

Schools Forum Presentation Slides

Background papers

[Teachers' pension employer contributions funding adjustment: methodology - GOV.UK](#)
[Schools national funding formula summary policy document for 2027 to 2028 - GOV.UK](#)

Please include a glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.

ACA	Area Cost Adjustment
APT	Authority Proforma Tool
BWG	Budget Working Group (of Schools Forum)
DfE	Department for Education
DSG	Dedicated Schools Grant
FSM	Free School Meals
MFG	Minimum Funding Guarantee
NFF	National Funding Formula
SBSG	Schools Budget Support Grant
TPS	Teachers Pension Scheme



Title of report: Request to the Secretary of State to Disapply the School Finance Regulations

Meeting: Herefordshire Schools Forum

Meeting date: Friday 23 October 2026

Report by: Head of Strategic Finance (Deputy S151)

Classification

Open

Decision type

This is not an executive decision

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose

To request the continued support of Schools Forum in respect of a Disapplication request to the Secretary of State for Education for exceptional circumstances for Eastnor Primary School's rent of additional classrooms.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- a) **To consider the request to disapply the Regulations which is outlined within this report; and**
- b) **Schools Forum to advise the Corporate Director, Children & Young People of Schools Forum's support or otherwise.**

Alternative options

1. If a disapplication is not approved, then this 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.

Key considerations

2. The funding of schools is prescribed by the Department for Education (DfE) through the School and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations 2026.
3. The Local Authority (LA) may submit an application to the Secretary of State for Education to disapply these regulations with the support of Schools Forum. In exceptional circumstances the LA may also submit a request with the support of Schools Forum.
4. If a request to disapply the regulations is approved by the Secretary of State for Education, then the approval is for that year only and further requests will be required to be submitted in future years if disapplication of the regulations is to continue.
5. Disapplication requests for 2027/28 financial year must be submitted on or before 16 November 2026.
6. Schools Forum is requested to continue to support the disapplication request for 2027/28 financial year for £18,918.48 to be set as exceptional funding to support the rent payment of additional classroom space. This request was previously supported by Schools Forum in the last three financial years. As the 2027/28 financial year falls within the period of the three year contract review, the cost of the existing agreement has been adjusted to reflect inflationary increases.

Community impact

7. Increasingly schools funding is directed by government, and the council can only allocate funding given by government. School governing bodies retain the responsibility to spend the school budget on meeting pupil needs. Schools, colleges and post-16 providers and potentially parents will need to be consulted on any changes to the high needs services.

Environmental impact

8. This is a consultation with Schools Forum on school funding and will have no direct environmental impacts. School governing bodies and trustees are responsible for deciding on expenditure and they will be encouraged to minimise waste and resource use in line with the Council's Environmental Policy.

Equality duty

9. The Public Sector Equality Duty requires the Council to consider how it can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations and demonstrate that it is paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services.
10. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows: A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to – (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act; (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

11. In relation to school finance, it is the responsibility of individual governing bodies to commit expenditure according to individual pupil need. Changes in high needs provision will require consultation with users, and further advice from legal services will be sought should this be necessary. However, the decisions of the school forum should have regard to this duty and the potential implications of any decisions made.

Resource implications

12. The school's budget is fully funded by Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).

Legal implications

13. The Schools Forum is a statutory decision making and consultative body constituted in line with the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, and its associated regulations, including the Schools Forum (England) (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020, to enable members of the local school community to work in partnership with Herefordshire Council when making decisions about school funding and finances.
14. The funding of schools is prescribed by the Department for Education (DfE) through the School and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations 2026.

Risk management

15. Budget Working Group (BWG) reviews all reports and proposals in detail prior to making recommendations to the Schools Forum. This two-stage process helps to ensure greater scrutiny of budget proposals and mitigate against any risks that may be identified. Any identified risks will be monitored and managed by the Children and Young People Directorate jointly with the Schools Forum.

Consultees

16. Budget Working Group (BWG) was consulted on 9 October 2026 regarding the disapplication request and recommended the disapplication of £18,918.48 be approved by Schools Forum at the meeting on 23 October 2026.

Appendices

Schools Forum Presentation Slides

Background papers

None.

Glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report

BWG	Budget Working Group (of Schools Forum)
DfE	Department for Education
DSG	Dedicated Schools Grant
LA	Local Authority



Title of report: De-Delegations and Education Management Function Proposal 2027/28

Meeting: Herefordshire Schools Forum

Meeting date: Friday 23 October 2026

Report by: Head of Strategic Finance (Deputy S151)

Classification

Open

Decision type

This is not an executive decision

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose

To request Schools Forum agree the De-Delegated Services and the Education Management Function for 2027/28.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- **Consider the proposals for 2027/28 mainstream maintained schools De-Delegated Services and the Education Management Function set out in this report; and**
- **Schools Forum to advise the Corporate Director, Children & Young People of Schools Forum's support or otherwise.**

Key considerations

1. During budget setting each year, Schools Forum will be asked to approve the de-delegation of funding for centrally provided support based on a per pupil rate, considered to be a fair way of accounting for the size of the school and its budget.
2. The final de-delegation budget will be determined once the October 2026 pupil numbers are confirmed in the Authority Pro Forma Tool (APT), which is used to calculate the schools' budgets. The details of which will be presented to Schools Forum in January 2027.
3. For the purpose of this report, inflation has been applied to services as per 2026/27 budget setting (2.47%). This will be updated once the final Schools Block has been confirmed by DfE in December 2026 and the final inflation will be confirmed at the Schools Forum meeting in January 2027.
4. Schools block de-delegation does not apply to academies, special schools or pupil referral units (PRUs).
5. The Forum will be required to vote on each service separately and by sector. Academy school representatives cannot vote on de-delegated services.

Recommendations for De-Delegations 2027/28

6. The proposed De-delegations for 2027/28 are as follows:

A. Access Budgeting Software

Access Education Budgets is a cloud-based school budgeting and financial planning system designed for schools, academies, and multi-academy trusts. It supports budget creation, forecasting (up to five years), scenario planning, salary modelling, and financial reporting.

Proposal to **remove** from the de-delegations for 2027/28 and will be charged via the core Hoople SLA packages.

B. Free School Meals (FSM) eligibility checking

Eligibility checks to confirm entitlement to Free School Meals (FSM). Data is processed on the relevant systems, notifications issued to schools along with real time access system for schools to check eligibility dates. FSM legislation changed on the 1 September 2026 so increased work is required to establish pupils who meet the new criteria and annual checks on eligibility for all pupils.

With the significant FSM changes that came into effect this September, it is proposed that this de-delegation **remains unchanged for 2027/28** (other than an inflationary rise).

Proposed de-delegated funding for 2027/28:

Primary per pupil rate	£	1.43
Secondary per pupil rate	£	1.09
Total De-delegated funding 2027/28	£	13,884.32

C. English Additional Language (EAL) Service

The EAL Service provides advice and support to Herefordshire schools for underperforming ethnic minority groups and bilingual learners. The service offer to LA maintained schools provides a range of support including assessments, interventions for nursery children, parent engagement support, exam preparation and delivery, and various training, observations and advice for staff. The EAL Service has experienced increasing demand from schools for specialist assessment, intervention and support for newly arrived bilingual learners and their families.

For 2027/28 de-delegations, the core EAL team has been reviewed and an additional EAL Teaching Assistant and Team Leader have been incorporated into the service. The addition of these new posts will increase capacity for direct pupil support, enable earlier intervention, strengthen strategic oversight and ensure schools continue to receive timely, high-quality support to improve outcomes for EAL learners.

Therefore, to support the continued increase in demand for EAL provision, it is proposed that the EAL Service de-delegation for 2027/28 is **approved at the adjusted rate**, incorporating the revised staffing structure required to meet service needs.

Proposed de-delegated funding for 2027/28:

Primary and Secondary per pupil rate	£	2.32
Ever6 FSM per pupil rate	£	14.08
EAL per pupil rate	£	73.10
Total De-delegated funding 2027/28	£	104,073.73

D. Trade Union Facilities Service

The local authority provides facilities time to recognised trade unions to comply with the need for employers to have appropriate arrangements for trade union recognition, consultation and negotiation. Primary schools have previously voted to de-delegate this funding, whereas Secondary schools have chosen to buy back the service via a service level agreement (SLA).

It is proposed that this de-delegation **remains unchanged for 2027/28** (other than an inflationary rise).

Proposed de-delegated funding for 2027/28:

Primary per pupil rate	£	2.90
Total De-delegated funding 2027/28	£	20,745.89

E. School Improvement Service

The School Improvement Service provides strategic leadership, challenge, and support to schools to secure and sustain high-quality education outcomes for all pupils. The service works in partnership with maintained schools, and other stakeholders to promote continuous improvement, raise standards, and ensure statutory duties in relation to education quality and inclusion are met.

For 2027/28 de-delegations, the School Improvement Service has been reviewed, and an additional 1FTE School Improvement advisor has been incorporated into the service.

The revised state-funded School Inspection Toolkit places a significant emphasis on schools demonstrating strong leadership, effective governance, robust safeguarding, inclusion, curriculum quality, achievement, attendance and behaviour, and continuous improvement. The toolkit explicitly states that it can be used by school leaders to support self-evaluation and continuous improvement, with inspections focused on the effectiveness and impact of leaders' systems and processes.

In this context, additional school improvement capacity funded through de-delegation represents a prudent and preventative investment that supports schools before concerns escalate and reduces the need for more intensive intervention later. The local authority retains a statutory responsibility to promote high standards of education and educational opportunity for all children and young people. Providing school improvement support enables the authority to fulfil this duty while helping schools meet the increasingly demanding expectations set out within the inspection framework. Additional de-delegated funding would enable the local authority to:

- Provide early intervention and challenge where performance indicators suggest emerging weaknesses in attendance, behaviour, achievement, safeguarding or leadership.
- Support schools to undertake rigorous self-evaluation against the inspection toolkit and identify priorities for improvement.
- Deliver targeted support to schools requiring improvement in leadership and governance, which Ofsted identifies as a key determinant of effectiveness.
- Strengthen safeguarding culture, inclusion and provision for vulnerable learners, all of which are central themes within the inspection framework.
- Provide enhanced support to maintained schools experiencing staffing instability, financial pressures or recruitment challenges that may otherwise impact educational quality.
- Undertake monitoring and quality assurance activity to ensure that concerns are identified and addressed promptly before they affect outcomes for pupils.
- The inspection toolkit highlights that inspectors consider how effectively leaders secure continuous improvement and ensure pupils achieve, belong and thrive. Schools increasingly require specialist support to meet these expectations, particularly given rising levels of SEND, increasing complexity of pupil need, attendance challenges and workforce pressures. Additional school improvement capacity allows the local authority to provide both challenge and support, helping schools maintain strong performance and supporting those where performance is declining.
- Furthermore, de-delegated school improvement funding provides collective value for money. Maintaining a centrally resourced team allows expertise to be deployed rapidly across a number of schools, supports consistency of standards across the local area, shares effective practice and reduces the cost of individual schools procuring external improvement services independently. This collaborative approach helps ensure that all

maintained schools have access to high-quality improvement support regardless of size or capacity.

It is proposed that the School Improvement Service de-delegation for 2027/28 is **approved at the adjusted rate**, which reflects the revised staffing structure required to deliver the service effectively.

Proposed de-delegated funding for 2027/28:

Primary and Secondary per pupil rate	£ 12.34
Total De-delegated funding 2027/28	£ 129,421.92

F. Contingencies

The contingency de-delegated budget is a relatively small allocation that was originally intended to support areas such as shortfalls arising from academy conversions, unexpected costs (including census errors and employment tribunal costs etc).

Due to the small allocation of this service, and the current inability to roll forward any de-delegation reserves, it is proposed to **remove** from the de-delegations for 2027/28.

G. Inclusion Outreach Team (previously Behaviour Support Service)

The Inclusion Outreach Service is a key part of the Local Inclusion Support Offer, designed in response to feedback from schools to provide quicker support and more practical help in classrooms.

The team includes advisory teachers and intervention specialists working across domains:

- social, emotional and mental health
- communication and interaction
- cognition and learning needs

The Inclusion Outreach offer is now available for all schools, and therefore it is proposed to **remove** from the de-delegations for 2027/28.

7. The below table provides a summary of the de-delegated services, comparing the amounts for 2026/27 to those proposed for 2027/28:

	Budget 2026/27 £	Proposed 2027/28 £	Variance £
Access budgeting software	23,056	-	(23,056)
Free school meals eligibility checking	13,550	13,884	334
EAL Service	54,761	104,074	49,313
Trade Unions facilities time	20,246	20,746	500
School Improvement Service	67,228	129,422	62,194
Contingencies	11,222	-	(11,222)

Behaviour Support Service	31,120	-	(31,120)
Total De-Delegations	221,183	268,126	46,943

8. **Education Management Function**

The general duties part of the Education Services Grant (ESG) (relating to maintained schools only) ceased from September 2017. Local authorities are now able to deduct funding from maintained schools' budgets much the same way as for existing de-delegated items in order to fund these services, with the consent of maintained school members of Schools Forum.

The Education Management Function funding from Herefordshire's maintained schools covers the following services (relating to maintained schools only):

- Statutory HR and Finance
- National Curriculum monitoring and assessment
- Internal Audit
- Property Services
- Governor Services

Proposed Education Management Function funding for 2027/28:

Primary and Secondary per pupil rate	£ 13.69
Total Education Management Function 2027/28	£ 143,580.64

9. The below table provides a summary of the Education Management Function (EMF), comparing 2026/27 to the proposed amount for 2027/28:

	Budget 2026/27 £	Proposed 2027/28 £	Variance £	Comments
Education Management Functions	140,120	143,581	3,461	Inflated by 2.47% (26/27 rate) will update in Jan 27

Community impact

10. Increasingly schools funding is directed by government, and the council can only allocate funding given by government. School governing bodies retain the responsibility to spend the school budget on meeting pupil needs. Schools, colleges and post-16 providers and potentially parents will need to be consulted on any changes to the high needs services.

Environmental impact

11. This is a consultation with Schools Forum on school funding and will have no direct environmental impacts. School governing bodies and trustees are responsible for deciding on expenditure and they will be encouraged to minimise waste and resource use in line with the Council's Environmental Policy.

Equality duty

12. The Public Sector Equality Duty requires the Council to consider how it can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations and demonstrate that it is paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services.
13. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows: A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to – (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act; (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
14. In relation to school finance, it is the responsibility of individual governing bodies to commit expenditure according to individual pupil need. Changes in high needs provision will require consultation with users, and further advice from legal services will be sought should this be necessary. However, the decisions of the school forum should have regard to this duty and the potential implications of any decisions made.

Resource implications

15. De-delegated services are funded from the Schools Block within the Dedicated Schools Grant.

Legal implications

16. The Schools Forum is a statutory decision making and consultative body constituted in line with the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, and its associated regulations, including the Schools Forum (England) (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020, to enable members of the local school community to work in partnership with Herefordshire Council when making decisions about school funding and finances.
17. The funding of schools is prescribed by the Department for Education (DfE) through the School and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations 2026.

Risk management

18. Budget Working Group (BWG) reviews all reports and proposals in detail prior to making recommendations to the Schools Forum. This two-stage process helps to ensure greater scrutiny of budget proposals and mitigate against any risks that may be identified. Any identified risks will be monitored and managed by the Children and Young People directorate jointly with the Schools Forum.

Consultees

19. Budget Working Group (BWG) was consulted on 9 October 2026 and recommended the de-delegated services and education management function budgets for 2027/28 be approved as set out in this report, pending the DSG funding announcement and validated with the October 2026 School Census data. BWG will consider the budget proposals further once the DfE have announced the final DSG allocations in December 2026.

Appendices

Schools Forum Presentation Slides

Background papers

None.

Glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report

APT	Authority Pro-Forma Tool
BWG	Budget Working Group (of Schools Forum)
DfE	Department for Education
EAL	English Additional Language
ESG	Education Services Grant
FTE	Full Time Equivalent
HR	Human Resources
PRUs	Pupil Referral Units
SLA	Service Level Agreement