

**ROTHERHAM SCHOOLS' FORUM
FRIDAY 13 JUNE 2025**

Present:-

Mark Windle – Badsley Primary (Primary Maintained) (in the Chair)
John Barnett – Thorogate Junior and Infant (Primary Maintained)
Carol Brookes – Wales High School (Academy)
Chris Eccles – Oakwood High School (Academy)
David Horrigan – Maltby Learning Trust (Primary Academy)
Lee Morritt – Aspire
Colin Price – NEU Representative
Mark Ryan – RNN Group
Sascha Schofield –Governor Representative (Special School Academy)
Karen Smith - Nexus MAT (Special Academy)
Cary-Anne Sykes – Head of Service (SEND)
Nevine Towers - Head of Business and Operations (Primary Academy)

Joshua Amahwe – Head of Finance, CYPS
Mark Cummins, SEND Project Lead, CYPS
Niall Devlin – Assistant Director, Education and Inclusion
Angela Kemp – Secretary to the Rotherham Schools Forum

Apologies were received from:-

Kate Blyth – Rawmarsh Ryecroft Infants (Maintained)
Dr Sipra Deb - Wickersley Nursery (PVI Nursery)
Paul Higginbottom – Swinton Queen Primary (Academy)
Lisa McCall – Wales High School (Academy)
Lynsey Hadfield - Executive Head, Arnold Nursery (Maintained)
Louise Keith – Principal Finance Officer, CYPS
Steve Scott – Happy Kids (PVI Nursery)
Pam Ward – Head of Service, Education, CYPS
Sarah Whitby – Head of Service – Access to Education

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed everyone to today's meeting and introductions were made.

The Chair proceeded to share the very sad news that Alan Richards, a long-standing governor representative on the Rotherham Schools Forum had passed away. The Forum paid tribute to Alan's service and contributions to the Forum. The Forums' thoughts were with Alan's family members and the wider school community.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Consideration was given to the minutes of the previous meeting held on Friday 28th March 2025.

Resolved:

- That the minutes of the meeting held on 28 March 2025 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

There were no matters arising during the consideration of the previous meeting minutes.

5. MEMBERSHIP AND CONSTITUTION OF THE ROTHERHAM SCHOOLS FORUM (STANDING ITEM)

Consideration was given to the membership and constitution of the Schools' Forum and suggested changes were put forward for the Forum's approval.

Resolved:

- That the appointment of Councillor Simon Currie as a Primary School Governor representative for a term of 3 years be agreed.
- That the appointment of Mehdi Najefi as a Primary School Governor representative for a term of 3 years be agreed.

6. SCHOOLS BUDGET - 2024-25 OUTTURN AND 2025-26 LATEST UPDATE

The Head of Finance (CYPS) presented a report on the school's budget 2024/25 outturn position and the latest position of the school's budget for 2025/26 and commented on the following:

- The breakdown of the DSG funding blocks and the total DSG funding allocated for 2024/25 together with the latest confirmed DSG funding allocations for 2025/26.
- The carry forward of school balances to support the budget.
- The final outturn position for all Rotherham maintained schools (including nurseries and PRU) for 2024/25.
- The action being taken to assess schools who had significant surplus balances at year end.
- The cost pressures within the High Needs Block which was reflective of the increased pressures within the SEND system and how the position compared with the assumptions outlined in the Safety Valve Agreement.
- The increased funding received at year end for the expansion of

childcare and nursery entitlement which had contributed to the underspend position on the Other Central DSG budgets.

- The closing deficit position of the DSG reserve account for 2024/25 which had been rolled forward into 2025/26.
- The four schools that had submitted deficit budgets for 2025/26 and the ongoing dialogue that was taking place with those schools to ensure budget recovery plans were in place.
- The continuing cost pressures and associated financial risks facing schools in 2025/26 which related to Teachers pay award, NJC pay offer, increase in employers NI contributions, inflationary pressures and falling pupil numbers.

Discussion ensued and comments were raised by members of the Forum which reflected on the changing landscape of provision in schools and the associated affordability of provision in the future, including cost pressures associated with meeting increasing SEND need in schools and the suggestion that this should also be included as a financial risk facing schools.

Resolved:

- **That the Schools Forum noted the final reported position for Local Authority (LA) maintained schools and the centrally retained Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) budgets for 2024/25.**
- **That the Schools Forum noted the latest budget projections of Rotherham's maintained schools for 2025/26 and the identified financial risks against the schools DSG budgets.**

7. SCHEME FOR FINANCING SCHOOLS UPDATE

Consideration was given to the report presented by the Head of Finance (CYPS), which set out the main amendments required to the Scheme for Financing Schools in order to bring it in line with the Department for Education's (DfE) latest version, updated as of 27th March, 2025.

Discussion emerged in relation to the notice period stipulated should schools intend to seek alternative insurance arrangements and whether that notice period was reciprocated by the LA should alternative insurance arrangements be sought by the LA. The Head of Finance agreed to follow this up and report back.

Resolved:

- **That the Schools Forum noted the updates to the Scheme for Financing Schools sections highlighted in yellow.**
- **That the Schools Forum noted the Department for Education's (DfE) latest version, updated 27th March 2025.**

- **That the Schools Forum agreed for the Updated Scheme for Financing Schools be disseminated to schools.**

8. HIGH NEEDS BUDGET AND FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS 2025/26

Joshua Amahwe, Head of Finance (CYPS) presented the funding arrangements of the High Needs budget block and the approach that had been taken to determine the 2025/26 budget and referred to the following:

- The confirmed high needs block funding for 2025/26 which represented an increase of £4 million compared to the final 2024/25 position and included the 0.5% funding transferred from schools to the high needs block as previously agreed by Schools' Forum earlier this year.
- The High Needs funding framework being driven primarily by the Department for Education with there being no significant changes to the structure of the funding system from previous years.
- The context for budget planning for 2025/26 which was one of increasing demand and financial pressures.
- Prevailing cost pressures within the High Needs Block amid an increase in the number of local children with an education, health and care plan that required specialist support and independent specialist placements.
- The proposed rates for specialist places and the top-up funding required across the sector during the next financial year
- The funding uplift provided for local special schools which the Forum was encouraged to recognise was above the recommended minimum funding guarantee (MFG) of 0%.
- The forecasted accumulated DSG deficit which included a deficit brought forward from 2024/25 together with the planned in year deficit for 2025/26 which was adrift of the target assumed in the Safety Valve Agreement and continued to be closely monitored.

Discussion ensued around the funding allocation for special school places and concerns were shared that this had remained unchanged for several years and did not reflect the substantial changes seen over the past decade within this area of provision. In addition, concern was also expressed that the uplift applied to meeting the needs of EHCP pupils did not appear realistic when factoring in associated staffing costs, pay awards and employer NI contributions.

Discussion continued to focus upon the financial challenges facing schools, how Rotherham's position compared with other Local Authorities and the factors that continued to impact the High Needs Block which reflected the SEND system across the country.

Forum Members were advised that a decision with regards to the ongoing management of the Safety Valve deficit was still awaited and expected to be shared in the Autumn.

Resolved:

- That the Schools Forum noted the high needs funding settlement for 2025/26.
- That the Schools Forum noted the proposed funding requirements for 2025/26, particularly in relation to the number of commissioned specialist places and the payment of top up funding to mainstream, special schools/academies and other providers and settings.

9. SEND SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY - ANNUAL UPDATE

Mark Cummins, SEND Transformation Project Lead presented an update in relation to Rotherham's SEND Sufficiency progress and future planning arrangements and commented on the following:

- The current SEND Sufficiency Strategy which had formed part of the Local Authority's Safety Valve Agreement that was due to run until the end of 2025/26.
- The development of 100 new resource provision placements along with the implementation of a local accessibility capital funding framework which had created an increase in in-borough SEND capacity that was now open and moving towards capacity across all primary and secondary settings.
- The latest numbers of mainstream accessibility capital projects which had been funded to provided improved access to curriculum and the creation of additional provision across special school settings.
- The current number of active EHCPs.
- Current Place Planning arrangements which had shown a continued growth of special school placements and an increase in the numbers of young people educated in mainstream settings which had reduced the number of independent placements required.
- Rotherham's latest comparative data to the national position as at 31st March 2025 which was set out in detail within the report. A further updated position was expected to be available towards the end of June 2025.
- The development of a new SEND Sufficiency Strategy post Safety Valve period which was now underway and the engagement work taking place with key stakeholders within the SEND system to understand current pressures and key areas of focus.
- Future place requirement projections based on a 'if nothing changes' basis which were detailed in paragraph 1.11 of the report.
- The approval process and timescales for implementing the new SEND Sufficiency Strategy which was expected to be from April 2026.

Discussion ensued in relation to the Independent Specialist Provision position and the work that was ongoing to improve the understanding of why there was more Post 16 / FE specialist provision required in

Rotherham compared to the national position.

Resolved:

That the Schools Forum received and noted the update provided.

10. SCHOOLS FORUM FORWARD PLAN

The current version of the Forward Plan was reviewed, and members of the Forum were invited to add any relevant issues which they felt should form the basis of a future report.

Resolved:

- **That the Forward Plan be noted and that any additions to the Forward Plan be submitted to the Secretary of the Forum for inclusion.**

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There were no other urgent business items raised.

The Chair of the Forum concluded business and thanked everyone for their attendance and contributions.