ROTHERHAM SCHOOLS' FORUM
FRIDAY 12 JUNE 2026

Present:-

Mark Windle – Badsley Primary (Primary Maintained) (in the Chair)
John Barnett – Thorogate Junior and Infant (Primary Maintained)
Kate Blythe – Rawmarsh Ryecroft Infant (Primary Maintained)
Carol Brookes – Wales High School (Secondary Academy)
Dr Sipra Deb – Wickersley Nursery (PVI Nursery)
Lynsey Hadfield - Executive Head, Arnold Nursery (Maintained)
Paul Higginbottom – Swinton Queen Primary (Primary Academy)
David Horrigan – Maltby Learning Trust (Primary Academy)
Lee Morritt – Rotherham Aspire (PRU)
Mark Ryan – RNN Group
Karen Smith - Nexus MAT (Special Academy)
Nevine Towers - Executive Director of Business and Operations (Primary Academy)
Joel Wirth – Principal TRC and Deputy CEO Inspire Trust (Secondary Academy)

Joshua Amahwe – Head of Finance (CYPS)
Mark Cummins – Transformation Lead
Niall Devlin – Assistant Director, Education and Inclusion
Cary-Ann Sykes – Head of SEND
Sarah Whitby – Head of Service – Access to Education
Angela Kemp – Governance Advisor / Clerk to the Schools Forum

Apologies were received from:-

Councillor Simon Currie – School Governor Representative (Primary Maintained)
Councillor Victoria Cusworth – Cabinet Member for Children and Young People
Colin Price – NEU Representative
Steve Scott – Happy Kids (PVI Nursery)
Paula Williams – Special School Governor Representative (Special Academy)

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

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

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 27th March 2026.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 27th March 2026 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

It was noted that an update on Special School Place Planning would be presented to the Forum in September, and that the Schools Forum induction materials were currently in development.

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

Members noted that, following discussion and agreement with the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People's Services (CYPS), they would continue to receive agenda papers via the standard publication process but will not be formally invited to attend Schools Forum meetings. Notwithstanding this, and in line with the Forum's Terms of Reference, the Cabinet Member for CYPS will retain the ability to attend and contribute to meetings as appropriate.

6. SCHOOLS BUDGET - 2025-26 OUTTURN AND 2026-27 LATEST POSITION

The Head of Finance (CYPS) updated the Forum on the final 2025/26 outturn position for maintained schools and centrally retained DSG budgets, together with the latest 2026/27 funding and budget projections, highlighting the following:

2025/26 outturn position

- The overall surplus position for maintained schools at the end of 2025/26 was broadly in line with previous years (after adjusting for schools that converted in the year), with a small number of schools remaining in deficit and supported through recovery plans.

- A significant level of surplus balances was reported by some schools in 2025/26. Work has commenced through the clawback process to review those positions and agree appropriate use of funds, with outcomes expected by September.

- An overall deficit was reported in the centrally retained DSG budgets, primarily driven by significant pressures within the High Needs Block, although mitigated by underspend in early years. The high needs budget deficit is due to increased SEND demand, , alongside higher-than-anticipated pupil numbers and inflationary cost pressures.

- The centrally retained DSG overspend has been transferred to the DSG reserve and will be carried forward into 2026/27 in line with statutory override arrangements.

- The Government introduced a High Needs Stability Grant to support local authorities with significant historic DSG deficits. This financial support forms part of the wider SEND reforms and operates alongside the statutory override arrangements, which will remain in place until 31 March 2028.

2026/27 schools budget

- Detailed budget plans were submitted by all maintained schools by May 2026. Schools budget plans are currently being assessed by the council to ensure they are realistic and achievable. A small number of schools are forecasting budget deficit - this is consistent with the previous year. These schools would be supported through financial recovery plan arrangements.

- Key risks for school budgets in 2026/27 includes: uncertainty around teacher pay awards, ongoing inflationary pressures and falling pupil numbers.

- The High Needs Block continued to represent a significant financial risk, driven by increasing SEND demand, cost pressures, and reliance on high-cost placements. Risks are further compounded by uncertainty linked to SEND reforms and wider funding constraints.

Forum Members discussed the early years block underspend, with clarification provided that this was primarily due to the lagged funding system and differences between planned and actual pupil numbers. It was noted that a significant proportion of the reported underspend would be adjusted and recouped by the DfE following recalculation based on the January 2026 census data. Changes to the funding system from 2026/27, including termly census counts, were expected to reduce year end variances going forward.

Members discussed the impact and delivery of early years SEND support, highlighting rising levels of complexity in pupil needs. It was noted that work is underway with the Early Years team to strengthen tracking and monitoring, ensuring data is captured in a clear, consistent and usable format to support effective planning and provision.

Forum Members were also advised that further details on future PE and Sports Premium funding were awaited.

Resolved:

That the Schools Forum:

1. Noted the final reported outturn position for Local Authority maintained schools and centrally retained DSG budgets for 2025/26.

2. Noted the latest budget projections for Rotherham's maintained schools for 2026/27, including the identified financial risks relating to the schools and centrally retained DSG budgets.

7. SEND SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY ANNUAL UPDATE

Consideration was given to an update presented by the Transformation Lead on the SEND Sufficiency Strategy 2026–2029, noting its approval by Cabinet in February 2026 and its focus on improving local provision following the end of the Safety Valve programme.

The report highlighted progress made to date, including increased local specialist provision, expanded outreach, a strengthened graduated response, and improved quality assurance arrangements. Ongoing challenges were also noted, particularly rising demand and increasing unit costs.

Forecasts indicated significant future growth in demand for specialist, special school, post-16 and independent placements if unmitigated. The strategy set out key ambitions and was to be delivered through established workstreams, including resource provision, quality assurance, future sufficiency planning and post-16 pathways, all of which were now operational. It was also noted that this work aligned with forthcoming SEND reforms, with a local reform plan due for submission in June.

Members discussed KPI performance and benchmarking in relation to SEND provision and were advised that current levels remained above national averages, with a higher proportion of pupils in specialist settings and post-16 education. While progress had been made in narrowing these gaps, further work was required to align more closely with national and statistical neighbour averages, taking account of local context and rising demand.

Further discussion highlighted increasing EHCP requests and workforce pressures on SENCOs. Members noted plans to strengthen post-16 pathways through additional specialist capacity and partnership working with providers, alongside continued investment in mainstream inclusion through capital funding and resource provision.

Resolved:

That the Schools Forum noted the update.

8. LOCAL AREA SEND REFORM PLAN

Consideration was given to an update on the Local Area SEND Reform Plan proposals presented by the Service Director for Education and Inclusion.

The plan was informed by a programme of consultation, alongside financial modelling and a maturity assessment, culminating in the submission of an initial version to the DfE in May.

The plan has been based on key priorities to enhance early support, increase capacity, and strengthen provision, particularly in pre-5 and post-16 phases.

The “Experts at Hand” model was highlighted as a central approach, providing multidisciplinary, non-referral-based support for children without EHCPs, alongside increased specialist capacity and a focus on early intervention.

Improvements in data, parental confidence, the graduated response, and access to specialist support were also outlined.

It was noted that the annual 0.5% transfer into the High Needs Block was under review, with the intention to cease this transfer. This would result in approximately £1.4m being retained by schools each year, supporting schools to further develop their SEND provision.

Forum Members acknowledged the limited timeframe for consultation on the initial version but welcomed further planned engagement in developing future iterations of the plan.

Resolved:

That the Schools Forum noted the update.

9. EDUCATION, HEALTH AND CARE PLAN (EHCP) FUNDING MODEL, DECISION MAKING AND LINKS TO SECTION F

Consideration was given to a briefing paper presented by the Head of Service – SEND, which provided context and an overview of the Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) funding model.

The revised approach, trialled since September, had operated alongside the existing system and reflected a change in how funding was described, moving from hours to banded allocations, without altering the actual funding provided to children and young people. It was reiterated that no child’s funding would be reduced and that allocations would remain subject to annual review.

The banded model was noted to improve transparency and consistency, provide greater clarity regarding support (including unstructured times), and reduce reliance on referencing hours, which had previously led to challenges. It was confirmed that cases could be referred back to panel where additional need was evidenced, ensuring a fair and needs-led system.

Forum Members welcomed the model for its clarity and focus, as well as the shift in language. Planned sessions to support parents' understanding of Section F were also welcomed.

Resolved:

That the Schools Forum noted the update.

10. SCHOOLS FORUM FORWARD PLAN

The Forward Plan was reviewed by the Forum and Members were invited to suggest any relevant issues they considered appropriate for inclusion in future reports.

Resolved:

1. That regular updates on the Local Area SEND Reform Plan be included on the Schools Forum forward plan.

2. That any proposed additions to the Forward Plan be submitted to the Secretary of the Forum for consideration and inclusion.

11. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

There were no other urgent business items raised.

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