



Shropshire Council
Legal and Democratic Services
Guildhall,
Frankwell Quay,
Shrewsbury
SY3 8HQ

Date:

**Committee:
Schools Forum**

Date: Thursday, 18 June 2026
Time: 9.00 am
Venue: MS Teams

You are requested to attend the above meeting.
The Agenda is attached

Tim Collard
Service Director – Legal and Governance (Monitoring Officer)

Members of Schools Forum

Mark Rogers
Reuban Thorley
Alison Ashley
Bill Dowell (Chair)
Sarah Godden
Mark Cooper
Sue Lovecy
Carla Whelan
Sarah North
Georgia Moss
Sarah Finch
Lisa Henshall

Rachel Williams
David O'Toole
James Pearson
James Staniforth
John Hitchings (Vice-Chair)
Shelley Hurdley
Mark Davis
Gemma Martin
Sarah Beard
John Boken
Andrew Smith
Caroline Clode

Your Committee Officer is:

Jo Morris DSG Funding Officer, Learning and Skills
Tel: 01743 256244
Email: jo.morris@shropshire.gov.uk

AGENDA

1 Apologies

2 Minutes and Matters Arising - 21 May 2026 (Pages 1 - 4)

Paper A attached.

3 Early Years Inclusion Fund (John Rowe) (Pages 5 - 8)

Attached.

4 Schools Forum Work Programme 2026-27 (John Rowe/Jo Morris)

Paper C attached.

5 Communication (and reports to follow)

6 Future meeting dates

Thursday 10 September 2026	8.30 - 10.30	Microsoft (MS) Teams
Thursday 12 November 2026	9.00 – 11.00	Face to Face TBC
TBC	8.30 - 10.30	Microsoft (MS) Teams
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MINUTES OF SCHOOLS FORUM HELD ON 21 MAY 2026 – HELD VIA MS TEAMS

NOTES WERE PRODUCED USING AI VIA COPILOT AS AGREED BY FORUM AT THE BEGINNING OF THE MEETING

CHAIR: WILLIAM DOWELL

KEY LA LEAD: JOHN ROWE

1	Apologies	
	William Dowell opened the meeting, welcoming members and noting apologies. Carla Whelan and Beck Preece from Empower Trust both sent apologies. Gemma Martin from Hereford Diocese sent apologies and advised that Sarah Beard would replace her from June 2026. James Staniforth from Shrewsbury College advised he would be 15 minutes late. Multiple attendees left early for other meetings (recorded in chat.) Several attendees indicated they might need to step in/out due to operational pressures in their settings. Acknowledgement of contributions and thank you to departing members - Marilyn Hunt and Mark Rogers. Recognition of their influence and representation of wider sector views.	WD
2	Minutes and Matters Arising	WD
	The minutes from 22 January 2026 were accepted as a true reflection of the meeting.	WD
	Matters Arising: High Needs Monitoring Group - Did not meet due to urgent DfE demands relating to SEND reforms. DSG Data and Submissions - significant workload pressures due to tight DfE deadlines for submission of documentation. Growth Funding (2027) - Not yet available; further internal modelling to be undertaken based on projected spend. Other items covered within main papers.	JR JR JM
3	Local Authority Update (John Rowe / David Shaw) Financial Context (Council-wide) Position remains serious but improving. Shift from crisis response to financial sustainability planning. Medium-term financial plan includes: £121m exceptional financial support (loan)	JR/DS

	8.99% council tax increase. Continued focus on: Cost control, Statutory services, financial governance improvements. Ofsted/CQC Thematic Review (April–May) Strengths identified: Improved SEND partnership working Stronger governance and leadership grip Better use of data and outreach Positive evidence of inclusive practice (e.g. Outshine). Areas for development: Inconsistent impact felt by families Navigation of local offer remains challenging Capacity issues (EHCPs, ND assessments) Need for stronger voice of children and young people Further development of AP and EBSA support.	
4	Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Monitoring – Paper B Overall Position In-year deficit (2025–26): £28.09m Cumulative deficit: £45.655m Key Pressures High Needs Block overspend: ~£29.8m Main drivers: Top-up funding to mainstream schools (increasing EHCP demand) Top-up funding to special schools Independent special school placements (largest cost pressure). Additional Pressures Post-16 placements (significant increase) SEND staffing and support service costs. Early Years Block Underspend (~£1.39m), driven by lower take-up and support costs.	SW
5	High Needs Block & High Needs Stability Grant Government intervention to address DSG crisis: 90% deficit write-off via grant (Autumn 2026). Risks remain: Unknown future funding (2026–28) Statutory override ends March 2028 LA will be responsible for residual deficits thereafter Strategic Discussion Highlights System Challenges Demand for EHCPs rising rapidly. Significant reliance on expensive independent provision. Workforce pressures increasing in schools.	SW



	Strategic Direction Expansion of inclusive mainstream capacity. Reduction in reliance on independent placements. Development of SEND sufficiency strategy (including new provision needs). Government to write off 90% of high needs deficits up to 2025–26. For Shropshire: Approx. £41m grant expected Remaining ~£4.5m to be funded by the council. Funding conditional on submission of SEND reform/DSG management plan by 19 June.	
6	“Experts at Hand” Programme (SEND Reform) Overview New national initiative to build early intervention capacity. Funding: ~£1.9m in year 1 (increasing in later years). Key Components Increased workforce: Educational Psychologists Speech & Language Therapists Occupational Therapists Inclusion advisory support for all settings. Locality-based model of delivery. Focus on: Early identification Targeted support Whole-school inclusion improvement. Risks Workforce recruitment challenges Funding uncertainty beyond 3 years Need for system-wide coordination (LA, trusts, partners). Governance & System Leadership Cabinet paper (June) to set out: Whole-system SEND strategy Locality-based operating model Integrated approach across education, health, and care.	SC
7	Primary and Secondary Development Grant Outcomes Significant reduction in permanent exclusions: Secondary exclusions reduced from 61 to 14 (comparable period). Suspension levels remain high. Future Funding confirmed to continue for 2026–27. Beyond that subject to DSG review. Key Issue Raised	JR



	Impact on staff wellbeing and workload. Need to balance inclusion with workforce sustainability.																									
8	Premises Costs Proposal (Paper D) Proposal - Transfer responsibility for certain premises-related costs from DSG to schools. Decision - Agreement in principle, subject to: Review of lease/rent arrangements and assurance that schools are not exposed to disproportionate cost increases.	JM/RW																								
9	Work Program and Actions – work program reviewed Actions <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Action</th><th>Owner</th><th>Deadline</th></tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Submit SEND reform / DSG management plan to DfE</td><td>LA (John Rowe / team)</td><td>19 June</td></tr> <tr> <td>Develop detailed SEND data/dashboard linkage for Forum</td><td>John Rowe</td><td>Next meeting</td></tr> <tr> <td>Provide context on placement data vs cost (numbers/location)</td><td>LA</td><td>Next meeting</td></tr> <tr> <td>Further analyse suspension data (including days lost)</td><td>LA / Education Access</td><td>Next meeting</td></tr> <tr> <td>Review premises lease/rent risks before cost transfer</td><td>LA (Estates)</td><td>Before implementation</td></tr> <tr> <td>Share SEND governance structure (ToR) with Forum</td><td>LA</td><td>Next meeting</td></tr> <tr> <td>Continue stakeholder engagement on Experts at Hand model</td><td>LA</td><td>Ongoing</td></tr> </tbody> </table>	Action	Owner	Deadline	Submit SEND reform / DSG management plan to DfE	LA (John Rowe / team)	19 June	Develop detailed SEND data/dashboard linkage for Forum	John Rowe	Next meeting	Provide context on placement data vs cost (numbers/location)	LA	Next meeting	Further analyse suspension data (including days lost)	LA / Education Access	Next meeting	Review premises lease/rent risks before cost transfer	LA (Estates)	Before implementation	Share SEND governance structure (ToR) with Forum	LA	Next meeting	Continue stakeholder engagement on Experts at Hand model	LA	Ongoing	JR/WD
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10	Communications Next Meeting Scheduled for 18 June Standard timings clarified - generally 08:30–10:30 unless face to face – then 09.00-11.00. The meeting closed at 10:37.	JR/WD																								
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Shropshire Council Inclusive Early Years Fund Strategy, 2026 to 2027

The inclusive early years funding (IEYF) is paid to Shropshire Local Authority under section 14 of the Education Act 2002. [Inclusive early years fund for 2026 to 2027: methodology - GOV.UK](#) explains how the Department for Education has calculated inclusive early years fund funding rates for each local authority.

The Secretary of State for Education has issued the following guidance [Inclusive early years fund for 2026 to 2027: conditions of grant and operational guidance for local authorities - GOV.UK](#) which provides detail on how the funding should be managed by local authorities.

The inclusive early years fund is subject to the [DfE standard grant funding agreement terms and conditions](#).

Overview of Shropshire Early Years Settings

Number of group and school based Early Years settings in Shropshire with children accessing 3 and 4-year-olds universal 15 hours entitlement	188
Total Number of children in these provisions	3585

Funding Overview

LA rate per PTE*	Universal Hours PTEs	IEYF Allocation
£54.09	3,605	£195,354.95

*PTE = Parttime Equivalent

The [DfE guidance](#) states:

Local authorities should ensure providers receiving an allocation from the IEYF receive an amount that is substantial enough to effect meaningful change in inclusive practice at setting level. We recommend this is in the region of £1,000 per setting. This is to ensure providers receiving the grant have a sufficient level of funding to develop mainstream inclusive practice. As such, local authorities are not required to fund all providers in their area and could apply a minimum funding threshold to achieve meaningful allocations.

Applying the recommended £1,000 de minimis presents a number of challenges within Shropshire.

The calculation for IEYF is based on the number of children accessing 3 and 4-year-olds universal 15 hours entitlement. Childminder size means they will have a small number of eligible children resulting in funding not being substantial enough to make meaningful change to inclusive practice. Therefore, childminders are not included within the IEYF allocation.

The rurality of the county has provided a challenge with Shropshire having a significant number of smaller providers, 110 (58.51%) settings, who would not be awarded IEYF if the recommend

£1,000 de minimis was applied. Therefore, Shropshire Local Authority has developed its own formulaic approach to target the SEND need in the area.

Shropshire has set its de minimis threshold at £750.

All funds from providers where their allocation falls below the £750 de minimis threshold have been combined giving a total amount of the fund to be redistributed as £32,568.19. This will be redistributed amongst settings below the £750 threshold but in an area of deprivation as indicated by the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI). This follows the recommendation of using deprivations as a proxy for SEND need, recognising the correlation between SEND and deprivation in the early years.

These two actions (de minimis of £750 and redistribution of funds in areas of deprivation) changes the number of settings receiving funding from 78 (41.5%) to 148 (78.72%)

The early inclusion funding will support providers in adopting setting-wide inclusive practices and intervening early to support children with SEND.

The funding will be paid upfront, requires no panel or application process and is not tied to individual children.

Local Authorities are required to ensure providers are using the fund for its intended purposes and should expect early years providers to retain financial records (for example, a detailed spreadsheet or receipts if appropriate) showing how the funds have been spent.

Shropshire will expect providers who receive an allocation of IEYF to:

- Provide a summary showing what the provider intends to use the IEYF for. This should support providers to become more inclusive of children with SEND through activities such as:
 - strategic planning
 - workforce development
 - adaptations or resources to create an inclusive environment

Further guidance will be available from the DfE in due course.

- Complete a review form at the end of the year detailing how IEYF has been used and the impact.

All Shropshire Early Years staff will ask providers about their deployment of Shropshire Ordinarily Available Guidance.

Early Years SEND Support Officers and Education Quality Advisors (SEND & AP) will sample a range of providers to as part of Early Years Inclusion Funding quality assurance visits to understand the use of funding and any emerging trends.

The funding cannot be used:

- as a substitute for entitlements funding, early years pupil premium, disability access funding, SEN inclusion funding or high needs funding

- for contingency purposes
- for local authority central or administration costs

Providers who do not receive an IEYF allocation will be supported by Shropshire Local Authority in implementing setting-wide inclusive practices. These settings will be prioritised for pre-funded training based on the Shropshire Universal Inclusive Practice Guidance for the Early Years. After completing the training, providers will be assisted in reviewing their universally available provision and developing a plan for further improvement. Additional support will include a coaching visit during the allocated support period, followed by a final visit to evaluate progress.

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