

## Schools Forum

Date: 22 January 2026

Time: 08.00 to 10.30

Venue: MS Teams

Paper

# A

Public

## MINUTES OF SCHOOLS FORUM HELD ON 22 JANUARY 2026 – HELD VIA MS TEAMS

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

1	<b>Apologies</b>	
	<p>William Dowell opened the meeting, welcoming members and noting apologies. Several attendees indicated they might need to step in/out due to operational pressures in their settings.</p>	
2	<b>Minutes and Matters Arising</b>	
	<p>The minutes from 11 December 2025 were accepted as a true reflection of the meeting.</p>	
3	<b>Opening to Meeting</b>	
	<p><b>Minutes and Matters Arising:</b></p> <p>Several actions were linked to Samantha Bradley, whose absence meant vacancy-related checks had not been completed. Additional interest had been expressed in the High Needs Monitoring Group, including from members such as Shelly. A meeting date will be arranged later in the term once the LA fully considers the current position and pending contributions from Stephen A. Waters.</p> <p>Modelling of the block transfer had been completed collaboratively by John Rowe, Jo Morris and Stephen A. Waters, ready for Forum consideration later in the meeting.</p> <p>John Rowe confirmed he would present an overview of additional funding streams, such as the GSP and inclusion development grants, in advance of later decision-making as part of this meeting</p> <p>No further matters were identified.</p>	



4	<p><b>Paper B – Schools Block (DSG) 2026–27</b></p> <p>Presented in detail by Jo Morris. Key points:</p> <p><b>4.1 Overall Schools Block</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Schools Block rose by approximately <b>£10 million</b>, reflecting a <b>4.55% increase</b>.</li> <li>• Funding is generated through Primary (PUF) and Secondary (SUF) Units of Funding, which increased by <b>5.06%</b> and <b>5.1%</b> respectively.</li> </ul> <p><b>4.2 Pupil Demographics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Total pupil numbers fell by <b>343</b> from the October 2024 census, a factor influencing distribution.</li> <li>• Historical premises spend continues to be factored into the block calculation.</li> </ul> <p><b>4.3 Growth Funding</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Growth funding rose significantly from <b>£381,000 to £679,000</b> (an 80% increase).</li> <li>• Internal checks confirmed the LA does <b>not</b> require such a high level of growth funding for 2026–27.</li> <li>• The surplus will be recycled back to schools through the NFF.</li> </ul> <p><b>4.4 Additional Grant Roll-ins</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Schools Budget Support Grant and National Insurance adjustment grant have been subsumed into the DSG, representing <b>£6.6m</b> (2.98% of the annual increase).</li> </ul> <p><b>4.5 Affordability of NFF</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Authority Proforma Tool (APT) demonstrates that the LA can fully fund the National Funding Formula (NFF) values in 2026–27.</li> </ul> <p>Forum noted the paper.</p>	JM
5	<p><b>Paper C – High Needs Block Monitoring 2025–26</b></p> <p>Comprehensive update by Stephen A. Waters.</p> <p><b>5.1 Overall Deficit Position</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In-year High Needs deficit: £24.524m.</li> <li>• When combined with carried-forward deficit (£17.566m), total deficit reaches £42.089m.</li> <li>• The centrally retained High Needs budget is £35.48m (excluding £10.867m place funding).</li> </ul>	JR/SB



Shropshire is the 50th worst-funded LA for High Needs on a per-pupil basis nationally.

## **5.2 Key Cost Pressures**

### **5.2.1 Top-Up Funding – Mainstream Schools**

- Forecast spend: £14.271m, a 45% increase on the previous year.
- Growth is affected by rising numbers of EHCPs but funding increases outstrip EHCP growth, due to improved banding structures, enhanced funding for hubs, and GSP usage.

### **5.2.2 Top-Up Funding – Special Schools**

- Spend increased to £11.932m (excluding TMBSS).
- Reflects full-year impact of previous banding uplifts to support LA strategy to build capacity in local special schools.

### **5.2.3 Independent Special Schools**

- Forecast expenditure: £23.259m — approximately 50% of the entire High Needs Block.
- Though the spend continues to rise, the rate of increase is slowing, following years of steep escalation.

### **5.2.4 Post-16**

- Overspend of £1.47m, largely due to a small number of high-cost placements in independent specialist provision.

### **5.2.5 SEN Support Services**

- Overspend of £1.619m, reflecting increased reliance on agency staffing, rising sensory service costs, and specialist therapy support.

#### **Members raised concerns about:**

- Structural underfunding,
- Rising complexity of need,
- Comparisons with neighbouring LAs (e.g., Herefordshire, Telford & Wrekin).

Stephen A. Waters committed to bringing back comparative data and analysis on the national formula's inequities.

## **5.3 National Context**

- Statutory override for DSG deficits remains until March 2028.
- DfE met Shropshire leaders in July and indicated the LA is focusing on “the right areas” of mitigation (building SEND hubs, reducing exclusions, top-up scrutiny).
- The long-delayed SEND White Paper is expected later this term.

## **5.4 Leadership Commentary**

David Shaw and others stressed:

- Demand is rising at every phase including post-16.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The LA is operating within “historic structural disadvantages” in funding.</li> <li>• Although no major national financial remedy is expected in 2026–27, efforts must continue to influence Treasury and DfE.</li> </ul> <p>Members also requested a concise historical context paper to clarify how the deficit position evolved.</p>	
6	<p><b>6. Early Intervention and Inclusion Investment</b></p> <p>John Rowe presented detailed analysis of LA investments aimed at reducing demand on statutory provision.</p> <p><b>6.1 Early Years Intervention Grant</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• £639k issued April 2025 to early years settings.</li> <li>• Supported by Early Years SEND Officers to improve transition and SEN identification.</li> </ul> <p><b>6.2 Step-Up to School Fund</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• £161k invested to prevent funding gaps when children move from nursery to school without an EHCP decision.</li> <li>• Lisa Taylor confirmed this supports: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Children awaiting CDC/MDA assessment,</li> <li>○ Children with no prior early years education but entering Reception with significant needs,</li> <li>○ Smooth transition panels across summer and autumn.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>6.3 GSP (Graduated Support Pathway)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• £1m of non-statutory targeted support for pupils whose needs do not yet require EHCPs.</li> <li>• 114 children supported in-year.</li> </ul> <p><b>6.4 Inclusion Development Grants (Primary &amp; Secondary)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• £633k primary (capital &amp; revenue) + continuation of secondary grants.</li> <li>• Recorded a <b>67% reduction in exclusions</b> since 2024 — attributed to culture change, strong school engagement and targeted funding.</li> </ul> <p><b>6.5 Forward Outlook</b></p> <p>Much of this provision is funded by the <b>Change Programme</b>, which is time-limited. A sustainable Local Inclusion Support Offer (LISO) is required, aligned to DfE’s high-needs operational guidance.</p>	SW/JR



7	<p><b>7. Block Transfer Modelling (Schools → High Needs)</b></p> <p>Extensive modelling presented by Jo Morris.</p> <p><b>7.1 Options Analysed</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Option 1 – 0.5% transfer</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Equivalent to £33 per pupil.</li> <li>○ Real terms increase to school budgets (excl. grants): <b>1.34%</b>.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Option 2 – No transfer</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Equivalent to £116 per pupil.</li> <li>○ Increase: <b>1.86%</b>.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Option 3 – 1% transfer</b> (<i>not permissible this year due to missed deadline</i>) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Increase: <b>0.82%</b>.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>7.2 Impact on Schools</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 147 schools modelled; majority remain “gainers”.</li> <li>• 8 schools with static NOR still see increases up to 10.38%.</li> <li>• 24 schools experience reductions linked to NOR decreases, not the transfer itself.</li> <li>• Crucially, <b>minimum per-pupil funding levels remain protected</b>, as confirmed during the meeting.</li> </ul> <p><b>7.3 Vote</b></p> <p>After extensive discussion, Forum approved <b>Option 1 (0.5%)</b> with explicit inclusion of the requirement to maintain <b>national minimum per-pupil funding levels</b>.</p> <p><b>Votes For: 12   Against: 0.</b></p>	SW
8	<p><b>8. Early Years Block 2026–27</b></p> <p>Presented by Dan Steele.</p> <p><b>8.1 Funding Overview</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Total EY DSG rises by <b>£9m</b>.</li> <li>• Hourly rate increases: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 3–4 years: +46p</li> <li>○ 2 years: +55p</li> <li>○ 9 months: +52p</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	JR



	<p><b>8.2 Allocation Strategy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Three entitlement blocks totalling c. £48m distributed.</li> <li>• £1.25m retained for SEND support officers and planned Early Years SEND hubs.</li> <li>• £300k retained for sustainability/disadvantage fund. Forum unanimously approved the Early Years allocation.</li> </ul>	
9	<p><b>9. Work Programme</b></p> <p>John Rowe confirmed updates would include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A full review of inclusion grants and their impact;</li> <li>• Contextual papers requested by members (historical funding inequity, modelling explanation). Date corrections were noted.</li> </ul>	
10	<p><b>10. Communications</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continued F40 lobbying.</li> <li>• Forum agreed the long-awaited external letter should only be released once the SEND White Paper is published.</li> <li>• The Chair thanked Forum members for navigating difficult and technical decisions. Appreciation was expressed for the extensive work of Jo Morris and John Rowe, particularly in the absence of Samantha Bradley.</li> <li>• The meeting closed at 10:30.</li> </ul>	
13	<p><b>Future Meeting Dates</b></p> <p>Thursday 19 March 2026 (tbc) MS Teams  Thursday 18 June 2026 (tbc) MS Teams  Thursday 10 September 2026 (tbc) MS Teams  Thursday 12 November 2026 (tbc) Face to Face</p>	

