

Norfolk Schools Forum

Date: **Friday 9 May 2025**
 Time: **9am**
 Venue: **Cranworth Room, County Hall, Martineau Lane,
 Norwich, NR1 2UA**

Membership

Martin White (Chair)
 Stuart Allen
 Helen Bates
 Stephen Beeson
 Martin Colbourne
 David Cousins
 Steven Dewing
 Lacey Douglass
 Glyn Hambling
 Carole Jacques
 Owen Jenkins
 Peter Pazitka
 Joanne Philpott
 Sarah Porter
 Rachel Quick
 Sarah Shirras
 Matthew Smith
 Daniel Thrower
 Joanna Tuttle
 Vacancy
 Vacancy
 Vacancy

Organisation

Nebula Federation
 Mile Cross Primary School
 Roman Catholic Church Diocese
 Norwich Diocesan Board of Education
 City College Norwich
 Eastern Multi-Academy Trust
 Sapientia Education Trust
 Freelance Early Years Advisor
 Unity Education Trust
 Earlham Nursery School
 Broad Horizons Education Trust
 St. John the Baptist Multi Academy Trust
 Ormiston Academy Trust
 Unity Schools Partnership
 The Wherry School
 The Hive Federation
 Sheringham Woodfields School
 Wensum Academy Trust
 Aylsham High School

Representing

Maintained Primary Schools
 Maintained Primary Schools
 Diocese Representative
 Diocese Representative
 16-19 Representative
 Mainstream Academies
 Mainstream Academies
 Early Years Representative
 Alternative Provision Representative
 Maintained Nursery Schools
 Mainstream Academies
 Mainstream Academies
 Mainstream Academies
 Mainstream Academies
 Special School Academies
 Maintained Primary Schools
 Maintained Special Schools
 Mainstream Academies
 Maintained Secondary Schools
 Joint Consultative Committee
 Joint Consultative Committee
 Mainstream Academies

Officers:

Michael Bateman	Assistant Director – SEND, Strategic Improvement and Early Effectiveness
Martin Brock	Accountant (Schools, Special Educational Needs and Early Years)
John Crowley	Assistant Director – Intelligence and Education Sufficiency
Samantha Fletcher	Assistant Director – Education Strategy
Dawn Fowler	Dedicated Schools Grant Strategic Lead
Jane Hayman	Director of SEND and Inclusion
Nicki Rider	Assistant Director – SEN and Alternative Provision Strategy and Sufficiency
Sara Tough OBE	Executive Director of Children's Services
James Wilson	Director of Sufficiency Planning and Education Strategy

**For further details and general enquiries about this Agenda
 please contact the Committee Officer:**

Laine Tisdall on 01603 222 053
 or email committees@norfolk.gov.uk

Agenda

1. **Welcome from the Chair**
0900 to 0905
2. **Apologies for Absence**
0905 to 0910
3. **Minutes**
To approve the minutes of the meeting held on the following dates:
 - Tuesday 4 March 2025
 - Wednesday 26 March 2025*0910 to 0920***Page 4**
Page 9
4. **Matters Arising**
 - **Summary of Actions from March 2025 Schools Forum**
*0920 to 0930***Page 21**
5. **Strategic Planning (including Local First Inclusion)****Page 27**
 - **Alternative Provision**
 - **Celebrating the programme success to date**
 - **Forward plan for reports during 2025/26***0930 to 1030 (Information and Discussion)*
6. **Update on Element 3 Funding Assurance****Page 42**
1030 to 1100 (Information and Discussion)
Coffee Break
7. **DSG Final Outturn and Balances 2024-25****Page 46**
1115 to 1145 (Information and Discussion)
8. **National Insurance Contributions Grant 2025-26****Page 63**
1145 to 1200 (Information and Discussion)
9. **Early Years Expansion Grant 2025-26****Page 68**
1200 to 1215 (Information and Discussion)
10. **Norfolk Schools Forum Constitution and Ways of Working****Page 70**
1215 to 1230 (Decision)
11. **Norfolk Audit Services – Annual Audit Report****Page 74**
1230 to 1245 (Information and Discussion)
12. **Forward Work Plan****Page 77**
1245 to 1255 (Information and Discussion)

13. Any Other Business

1255 to 1300

14. Date of Next Meeting

Martin White

Chair, Norfolk Schools Forum

Date Agenda Published: Friday 2 May 2025



If you need this document in large print, audio, Braille, alternative format or in a different language please contact 0344 800 8020 or (textphone) 18001 0344 800 8020 and we will do our best to help.

Norfolk Schools Forum

Minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday 4 March 2025 at 9am on Microsoft Teams

Present

Martin White (Chair)
Stuart Allen
Stephen Beeson
Steven Dewing
Glyn Hambling
Carole Jacques
Owen Jenkins
Joanne Philpott
Sarah Porter
Rachel Quick
Sarah Shirras
Matthew Smith
Joanna Tuttle
Vicky Warnes

Organisation

Nebula Federation
Mile Cross Primary School
Norwich Diocesan Board of Education
Sapientia Education Trust
Unity Education Trust
Earlham Nursery School
Broad Horizons Education Trust
Ormiston Academy Trust
Unity Academy Trust
The Wherry School
The Hive Federation
Sheringham Woodfields School
Aylsham High School
National Education Union

Representing

Maintained Primary Governors
Maintained Primary Schools
Diocese Representative
Mainstream Academies
Alternative Provision Representative
Maintained Nursery Schools
Mainstream Academies
Mainstream Academies
Mainstream Academies
Special School Academies
Maintained Primary Schools
Maintained Special Schools
Maintained Secondary Schools
Joint Consultative Committee

Substitute Members Present

Louise Clements McLeod

Organisation

Halcyon Federation

Representing

Joint Consultative Committee

Also Present

Michael Bateman
Maisie Coldman
Dawn Filtness
Samantha Fletcher
Jane Hayman
Megan Hughes
Alison Toombs
James Wilson
Nicki Rider

Title

Assistant Director – SEND, Strategic Improvement and Early Effectiveness
Committee Officer, Democratic Services
DSG Strategic Lead
Assistant Director – Education Infrastructure and Partnerships
Director – SEND and Inclusion
Trainee Committee Officer, Democratic Services
Senior Advisor – Inclusion
Director for Sufficiency Planning and Education Strategy
Assistant Director- SEN and Alternative Provision Strategy and Provision

1. Welcome from the Chair

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed Forum Members to the Extraordinary Meeting.
- 1.2 The Chair welcomed Stuart Allen, as this was his first meeting as a Member of the Norfolk Schools Forum.

2. Apologies and substitutions

- 2.1 Apologies were received from Martin Brock, Peter Pazitka, and Bob Groome (substituted by Louise Clements McLeod).

3. Element 3 Funding Model

- 3.1 Officers introduced the report.
- 3.2 The following key elements were highlighted to the Schools Forum:

- The formulaic element accounted for only a small portion of the total Element 3 funding. Most of the funding would be distributed through a thorough analysis of student cohorts and schools' submissions of provision maps. It was important to note that the funding should not be viewed in isolation; schools that received little or no funding from the formulaic element could still qualify for Element 3 funding.
- Schools were asked to provide an overview of their Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) provision by submitting Identification of Needs Descriptors in Educational Settings (INDES) and graduated provision maps across cohorts. Although this was acknowledged as a significant amount of work, it was emphasised that doing so would provide valuable context to address any shortcomings in the formula being used.
- Allocations for the formulaic funding for 2025-26 had been calculated using a formula that mirrored the National Funding Formula through the Authority Proforma Tool, which supported the LA's plan to move away from block transfers in the coming years. It was noted that any deviations from the National Funding Formula could complicate future efforts to achieve this transition.
- Communicating the funding allocation posed a challenge. It was suggested that postponing all communication until Easter would facilitate a clearer presentation of the information.
- The initial draft communications shared with Forum Members needed refinement, especially for maintained schools that lacked the infrastructure of academies. Efforts were underway to provide tailored advice for individual maintained schools.

3.3 The following points were raised and discussed:

- The Vice-Chair questioned whether the Core Schools Budget Grant (CSBG) consultation and its decisions would be taken into account when making this decision. The impact on special schools, mainstream schools, and alternative provision in relation to Band 4B funding was emphasised. Officers clarified that the two topics need to be treated separately for the time being. This was because the CSBG consultation only related to special schools and alternative provision, whilst Element 3 funding related only to mainstream schools. The Vice-Chair expressed concern that for special schools and alternative provision, these funding changes could result in a dual impact. Officers acknowledged that trusts operating both special schools and alternative provision would be affected; however, it was emphasised that these were separate issues. The Vice-Chair agreed that they were but reiterated that they should not be viewed in isolation.
- A Forum Member sought clarification on whether Enhanced SEND Provisions (ESPs) were excluded from the payment but still included in the overall process, and whether cohort funding was roughly equivalent funding to what was previously known as Bands 4B and 4C. Officers confirmed that cohort funding was roughly equivalent to Bands 4B and 4C and that ESPs still existed. It was highlighted that ESPs should be included in the Graduated Provision Maps submitted by schools and they would factor into funding considerations. Schools with a high level of formula funding were expected to allocate those funds for SEN provision, whether that be ESPs or other forms of support.
- A Forum Member acknowledged that there was not a perfect solution moving forward. It was highlighted that the original formulaic approach would be the most sensible approach to move away from the need for a 1.5% block transfer. It was further noted that communications had already been sent out indicating this direction and any changes would add complication.
- A Forum Member expressed support and highlighted the importance of considering the funding model within a broader context, as well as ensuring the second part of Element 3 reflected overall school provision. However, concern was raised about the unclear details related to Element 3, as there was a fear that schools could be

disappointed when allocations were announced.

- A Forum Member questioned the language used regarding a "cliff edge" in the future if a formulaic approach was not adopted. Further clarification was sought on the reasoning behind this. Officers explained that if the National Funding Formula was not followed this year and the block transfer was removed next year, schools with zero funding would face the similar issues at that point.
- The Chair shared concerns regarding the Element 3 Formula Funding approach and suggested that a funding approach excluding the Minimum Funding Guarantee and Minimum Per Pupil Level (MPPL) would be fairer. The MFG and MPPL were provided to schools for a reason, and thus, the Chair did not consider it to be extra money or that the school was double funded. It was highlighted that although the funding represented only a small portion of the Element 3 funding, there was concern that the system could not compensate for the resulting losses. Officers acknowledged that schools would face uncertainty until Easter. However, assurances were made that if schools could prove a legitimate need, funding would be provided, even if it risked overspending. Ongoing dialogue would be encouraged to seek efficient solutions.
- A Forum Member questioned why all of the 1.5% block transfer related to Element 3 and not other aspects of the High Needs Block. Officers responded by explaining that significant investment had been made in mainstream schools through the High Needs Block. With the money no longer coming through from the block transfer and was back in mainstream schools, the money would no longer be available within the High Needs Block to redistribute. It was emphasised that while Element 3 funding remained at a high level, but that it was not possible to fund the mainstream schools, effectively, twice.
- A Forum Member noted that a block transfer was utilised before Element 3 and highlighted concern that independent provisions would still receive a substantial amount of funding, and not equally receive the impact of the funding changes. They raised uncertainty on why the Element 3 funding, which was previously in I03 as the income line, was now being integrated into the main budget. While it was acknowledged that next year's communication would clarify this situation, there was still a concern about the complexity of the system and schools' understanding of the changes. Additionally, doubts were raised about whether schools had requested the funding that was actually needed, rather than what schools thought they could get. These factors made it challenging for the Forum Member to support the LA proposal. Officers clarified that the funding was Element 3 funding and that it would show on the I03 budget line on the budget share tracker, and that it is separate from the budget share. It was also highlighted that an Authority Proforma Tool (APT) was being used to closely mirror what would have happened if there was not a block transfer from September.
- A Forum Member raised concern that protections would kick in at a higher level and if it was I03, these protections would not count. An example was used of minimum per-pupil funding being applied at a higher level than the Element 3 funding, which would effectively eliminate it, with no guarantee that other processes would compensate for this loss. Officers clarified that under the formulaic approach, schools with a zero allocation would not see an element 3 element on their budget tracker, but it did not mean protections have been removed. Instead, funding will continue to be allocated based on cohort needs, as assessed through ongoing submissions and reviews.
- A Forum Member supported the principle of ensuring funding directly met children's needs and emphasised the importance of scrutiny in the allocation process. However, concern was raised when it was suggested by multi-academy trusts in the previous meeting that it was not required for them to demonstrate how the Element 3 funding was being used. A particular concern was that funding would be pooled centrally within the

trusts rather than being directed back to the individual schools that applied for it. It was queried whether this issue had been addressed to ensure that children were ultimately receiving the allocated funding. Officers confirmed that a moderation and external assurance process would apply to all schools and academies. Concerns about audits and external oversight were acknowledged, and specifics of this assurance process were still being discussed.

- A Forum Member highlighted a perceived difference in opinion between academy and maintained school representatives. Clarification was sought on whether there was any difference in the calculation method for funding between the two and whether the way maintained school's finances were presented, along with council mechanisms for financial management, contributed to this perception. Officers confirmed that there was no difference in how the funding was calculated or presented between the two and that the budget share information was structured the same way for both. It was highlighted that both would receive zero allocation through this route and that it came down to the individual situation of the schools and academies and the protections in place for them.
- A Forum Member noted that within an academy trust, it would be unlikely that all schools would receive zero funding, allowing for a broader perspective on the benefits and drawbacks of the system. In contrast, standalone maintained schools would only see their individual allocation, which would make it harder to grasp the overall system and mitigate the impact.
- A Forum Member emphasised that the communication should focus on the start of the process, particularly regarding the needs analysis and moderation, to ensure needs for all students were addressed effectively.
- The Vice-Chair expressed uncertainty about whether waiting until April would be beneficial. However, it was emphasised that sharing consistent information was crucial to avoid confusion and reassure headteachers and governors about the process moving forward.
- Glyn Hambling left the meeting at 09:59am.
- A Forum Member highlighted that communication regarding Element 3 funding should be more specific, as there was confusion about how much money should be allocated in budgets. The importance of finance officers being well-informed with clear guidance was emphasised so they can properly guide schools in budgeting. It was suggested that all communication should be presented with the bigger picture in mind, to make the conversation around budgeting easier for schools.
- A Forum Member commented on the importance of sending out communications as soon as possible, particularly due to the potential lack of budgeting experience among maintained schools. The urgency for clear funding information was highlighted, especially as it related to ongoing restructures and the schools' ability to plan for essential services such as wraparound care and free school meals. Officers acknowledged the need for clear and detailed advice. However, there was uncertainty about whether releasing the formulaic funding information at this time would be beneficial since the final outcomes for all schools would not be known until Easter.
- A Forum Member further emphasised resistance around parts of communications being released as it could create a vacuum in understanding the bigger picture.
- Several Forum Members asked for further clarification on whether the indicated Easter timeframe referred to before, during or after the Easter holidays. It was enquired whether additional resources could be allocated to help distribute the information sooner. Officers stated that it would be more beneficial to consult with their colleagues and provide an

answer after the meeting. However, there was a preference to wait until after the Easter holidays to ensure a thorough process and to avoid providing any information that might not be helpful during the holidays. A Forum Member expressed dissatisfaction with the response, stating that communications should be sent out before the Easter holidays. This was particularly important for maintained schools, as the budget planning process was currently ongoing.

- The Chair asked that clear instructions be provided to finance support officers attending the budget-setting workshop the next day.
- Officers summarised the various viewpoints that were expressed on the proposed options. It was noted that there was not a full consensus on whether to proceed with the LA proposal or an alternative approach. While the Chair himself expressed reservations about moving forward with the original approach, on asking the Forum whether Members shared this view, no further objections to the LA proposal were expressed.
- As it was noted that there was no consensus amongst Forum Members to share partial or complete information, officers expressed a preference for releasing all information at once.
- Officers confirmed that due to the scale of the task, publication before the Easter holidays could not be guaranteed, however the team were working as quickly as possible and would update the Forum on the timeline.

3.4 Having considered and commented on the report accordingly, the Norfolk Schools Forum **RESOLVED to:**

- 1) Move forward with the LA proposal to distribute the c. £9.7m Element 3 Formula Funding via the National Funding Formula for Norfolk.
- 2) Ask volunteers including the Maintained Primary representatives and Owen Jenkins to proofread communications.

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 10:20

**Martin White, Chair
Norfolk Schools Forum**



If you need this document in large print, audio, Braille, alternative format or in a different language please contact Customer Services on 0344 800 8020 and we will do our best to help.

Norfolk Schools Forum Minutes

Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 26 March 2025 at 9am, Edwards Room, County Hall

Present

Martin White (Chair)
Stephen Beeson
Martin Colbourne
Steven Dewing
Lacey Douglass
Glyn Hambling
Carole Jacques
Owen Jenkins
Peter Pazitka
Joanne Philpott
Rachel Quick
Sarah Shirras
Matthew Smith
Daniel Thrower
Joanna Tuttle

Organisation

Nebula Federation
Norwich Diocesan Board of Education
City College Norwich
Sapientia Education Trust
Freelance Early Years Advisor
Unity Education Trust
Earlham Nursery School
Broad Horizons Education Trust
St. John the Baptist Catholic MAT
Ormiston Academy Trust
The Wherry School
The Hive Federation
Sheringham Woodfields School
Wensum Academy Trust
Aylsham High School

Representing

Maintained Primary Governors
Diocese Representative
16-19 Representative
Mainstream Academies
Early Years Representative
Alternative Provision Representative
Maintained Nursery Schools
Mainstream Academies
Mainstream Academies
Mainstream Academies
Special School Academy
Maintained Primary Schools
Maintained Special Schools
Mainstream Academies
Maintained Secondary Schools

Also Present

Martin Brock
John Crowley
Dawn Filtness
Samantha Fletcher
Jane Hayman
Adrian Lincoln
Debbie Mallett
Jonathan Nice
David Oldham
Sarah Porter
Nicki Rider
Laine Tisdall
Alison Toombs
James Wilson

Title

Accountant – Schools, SEN, and Early Years
Assistant Director – Intelligence and Education Sufficiency
Dedicated Schools Grant Strategic Lead
Assistant Director – Education Strategy
Director – SEND and Inclusion
Observer (NASWUT)
Observer
Senior Advisor – Teaching and Learning
Observer
Observer (Unity Schools Partnership)
Assistant Director – SEN, Alternative Provision and Sufficiency
Committee Officer, Democratic Services
Senior Advisor – High Needs SEND Operations
Director of Sufficiency Planning and Education Strategy

1. Welcome from the Chair

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed Forum Members and officers to the meeting.
- 1.2 The Chair announced that Adrian Ball had resigned from his position as a Mainstream Academy Representative. An election to fill the vacancy would be held forthwith
- 1.3 It was noted that Bob Groome and Vicky Warnes had come to their end of their term as Union representatives on the Schools Forum. The unions had been contacted to arrange the election of new representatives.

- 1.4 Sarah Porter's term of office as a Mainstream Academy Representative had concluded. The Chair noted that Sarah was attending today's meeting as an observer.
- 1.5 Peter Pazitka was welcomed to the Schools Forum, as this was his first meeting as a Mainstream Academy Representative.

2. Apologies and substitutions

- 2.1 No apologies were received

3. Minutes

- 3.1 The minutes of the meeting held on Friday 31 January 2025 were approved as an accurate record of proceedings.

4. Matters Arising

- 4.1 Officers advised that there had been engagement with the Department for Education (DfE) regarding Element 3 assurance, but no conclusions had been reached by the time of this meeting. It was intended that a report on this subject would be brought to the May 2025 meeting of the Schools Forum.
- 4.2 The Schools Finance Consultative Group was being reviewed, with officers holding a meeting next week to see how the group could be restarted once the 2024-25 financial year had concluded.
- 4.3 The following points were raised and discussed.
- Stephen Beeson noted that there were some matters arising from the Extraordinary Schools Forum meeting held on Tuesday 4 March, relating to Element 3 communications. Concern was expressed that the communications were not clear, with clarification required before Easter 2025 due to schools being in their budget setting procedures. Officers agreed to utilise Schools Forum volunteers to help shape future communications. It was acknowledged that it was difficult to communicate the information in a simple format
 - Joanne Philpott noted that while she was able to understand the Element 3 communications due to being a Schools Forum member, it was acknowledged that it would be difficult for headteachers and staff to understand, given the usage of complex terminology. A balance needed to be struck in future between the depth of communications and readability.
- 4.4 The Norfolk Schools Forum **RESOLVED** to **NOTE** the Summary of Actions from the January 2025 meeting.

5(1). Strategic Planning (including Local First Inclusion) Part 1 – Local First Inclusion Programme Update, Impact and KPIs

- 5.1 Officers introduced the report, which focussed on the projects being delivered as part of the Local First Inclusion (LFI) programme, the impact and setting out a period of reflection to ensure that the programme governance was working for its intended purpose of supporting and challenging that delivery in the short, medium and long term.

5.2 The following key elements were highlighted to the Schools Forum:

- Communication from the DfE regarding the Safety Valve programme had been received late yesterday. A further update was to be submitted to the DfE by the end of April 2025. While there was no new funding available at present, but the DfE was prepared to release agreed payments provided that the plans represented best available value for money under the current statutory arrangements. The communications were broadly positive, setting the tone for the Government working with local authorities in different ways. The DfE would not be publishing an update due to the pre-election period, although officers believed they were permitted to share this with the Schools Forum.
- While it was acknowledged that LFI was a long-term project given that capacity was stretched across the entire system, the latest data was cause for cautious optimism.
- Recent data from the Zone Inclusion Partnership (ZIP) in King's Lynn illustrated a reduction in permanent exclusions. There was a possibility this was the start of a reversal in the rate of permanent exclusions across the entirety of Norfolk.
- While the number of referrals for an Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCPs) had increased year-on-year in Norfolk, there was early evidence of a reversal in the trend from October 2024. Officers were taking a cautious approach to the data, which appeared to show fewer EHCP requests across the last five months compared to the same period in 2023 and 2024. This was a possible indicator of the impact of the LFI programme in Norfolk.
- It was acknowledged that much work still needed to be done in several areas, in particular reducing waiting lists for neurodiverse assessments.
- National reform of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) sector was awaited. Officers stressed it was paramount that Norfolk County Council led the way in driving change
- It was possible to compare Norfolk's data with other local authorities in the Safety Valve programme, e.g. Wiltshire Council's data seemed to suggest that the increase in EHCP requests year-on-year appeared to have plateaued recently.
- Identification of needs descriptors in educational settings (INDES) data was included within the report, which could be provided to individual schools if requested.

5.3 The following points were raised and discussed:

- The Chair requested clarity on the statement within OFSTED's inspection framework from January 2023, which mentioned that "*the local area partnership must work jointly to make improvements*". Officers stated there was an expectation from OFSTED that the various elements of the system had to work collaboratively to improve matters.
- The Vice-Chair commented there was a need to ensure a robust mechanism of reporting LFI improvements to communities and the wider system, as the programme was now in its second year. Officers stated that regular LFI updates were provided through various communications groups, acknowledging that more needed to be done in this area to promote breakthroughs and improvements. Work was underway to look at the different layers of communication from the local authority and how they interconnected, to ensure that the right mechanisms to share good practice and gather key issues in the correct manner.
- Martin Colbourne stated that it would be welcome to provide a summary of each Key Performance Indicator (KPI) in future reports, as this would aid understanding of the trends and performance. Officers agreed to this, noting that Norfolk County Council's Scrutiny Committee had made the same request at their meeting the previous week.

- The Chair asked why INDES data was not previously available. Officers stated this data was only available previously for high needs children across Norfolk, it was only recently that it was expanded across Norfolk to include other indicators.
- Joanna Tuttle stated that while the King's Lynn case study within the report was welcome, the KPIs did not reference alternative provision (AP). An update on the secondary AP programme was requested, as this had previously been a success story. Officers acknowledged that the report was largely based around the King's Lynn ZIP scheme commencing. A graduated delivery of opening AP centres was planned over the next two to three years, with discussions underway with the secondary school system, AP Steering Group and the LFI Reference Group. The most important KPI for AP was permanent exclusion data. A deep dive into this topic could be brought to a future meeting of the Schools Forum.
- Joanna Tuttle commented that attendance rates for ZIP meetings could be a useful KPI to see which schools were regularly attending, as this would provide important data in terms of monitoring the system and providing challenge where necessary. Officers confirmed that attendance was being monitored and that such data could be reported to the Schools Forum. The ZIP meetings commenced with the intention of building working relationships, with each inaugural meeting in a zone utilising the same agenda. The second meeting in each zone intended to build upon the relationships created in the inaugural one. It was noted that there had been a different feel at each ZIP launch meeting, which illustrated the importance of building working relationships with colleagues.
- The Chair queried the second recommendation within the report regarding the Schools Forum encouraging increased inclusivity in mainstream Norfolk schools, as individual Schools Forum members were already heavily involved with various groups and boards. Officers acknowledged the role that Schools Forum members were playing, noting that the current direction of travel from the Government was towards more mainstream provision, and asking the question in case it prompted any further opportunities. There was an aim to conduct further meetings and pool ideas to work towards this goal.
- Owen Jenkins commented it was paramount to use the expertise of Schools Forum members to test how ideas and initiatives would land within the system. It was reaffirmed that the Schools Forum was continually supportive of the LFI programme, with individuals promoting it through their working groups. Officers suggested that future communications could look at increasing the involvement of system leaders within the LFI. Local authorities would be obliged to pivot towards new ways of working once the government announced its SEND reforms. There would be a period of time after the White Paper was published where officers had to consider the reforms, their impact and an initial response. Owen Jenkins commented that the Schools Forum tended to take a reactive approach to such matters. It was suggested that a proactive approach may be necessary in the run up to the White Paper.
- Joanne Philpott stated that the narrative around the LFI had been bleak for a significant period of time. There was a potential leadership role for Schools Forum members to reshape the narrative towards cautious optimism, given the positive trends that were being identified.

5.4 Having considered and commented accordingly, the Norfolk Schools Forum **RESOLVED** to **PROVIDE** feedback on the following:

1. Programme progress, impact and KPIs
2. The leadership role that Schools Forum members could play in increasing inclusivity in mainstream schools in Norfolk

5(2). Strategic Planning (including Local First Inclusion) Part 2 – DSG Modelling

5.5 Officers introduced the report, which provided an overview of the latest financial modelling for the High Needs Block in Norfolk. It included the latest forecast for the 2024-25 financial year, the budget for 2025-26, and the latest medium-term modelling. The modelling considerations over the short-, medium- and longer-term were also explored, as well as consideration of the key risks, uncertainties and issues, such as the influence of sensitivity in demand for independent provision, challenges associated with the delivery timelines of capital projects, and financial risks for the local authority related to 'bank rolling' the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) cumulative deficit.

5.6 The following key elements were highlighted to the Schools Forum:

- It was important to be transparent and realistic regarding the latest financial data. This was a challenge facing local authorities across England, which the DfE had now acknowledged. Reforms were expected to be announced, possibly as early as Summer 2025.
- The financial data illustrated the realistic level of spend in the medium-term, unless there were major unexpected changes.
- It was acknowledged that while Norfolk currently had one of the largest High Needs Block deficits within England, the problems being faced were not unique to the county.
- Discussions were underway as to how to achieve an in-year balanced position and potentially pay off the deficit. Officers had concluded that reducing the in-year deficit was the only realistic goal achievable at present. Concern was expressed that an outside commissioner could potentially come in and demand radical changes in a short time period. The emerging positive trends in the LFI were important in this respect, illustrating that the system needed to continue working together to resolve the issues.
- In theory, the DSG was separate from Norfolk County Council's core budget. However, there was a cost to the local authority of approximately £10m per year just to service the level of the existing deficit. As this was council taxpayers' money, this necessitated the current conversations around the DSG.
- Hope was expressed that a smaller in-year deficit could be achieved during the 2025-26 financial year, compared to the budget if demand reduced for specialist provision.
- With the end of the 2024-25 financial year rapidly approaching, it was hoped that the current projections remained reliable. The figures in the report were as at the end of January 2025, which were the last publicly available ones to date. Norfolk County Council was in the process of finalising its Period 11 financial report, as at end of February 2025. Finances remained stable during this month.
- The end of year deficit was forecast at a much higher level given what was projected when the 2024-25 budget was set in early 2024. Since the budget was set, there had been significant growth in certain areas such as children not on a school roll, requiring additional support to be provided here, and a significant uptick in independent school provision. This effectively meant that the 2024-25 financial year commenced in a worse position than when the budget was set. Pressures had continued throughout the year.

- A c. £59m in-year deficit was being forecast for 2024-5, with a cumulative deficit of c. £125m projected. The figures were predicated on receiving the DfE Safety Valve funding during 2024-25. There was still uncertainty as to whether this funding would be received in this year.
- The number of Specialist Resource Base (SRB) places within the 2024-25 budget was lower compared with the forecast. 524 places were in the budget, but only 457 were in operation. This variance was due to (i) an agreement with a trust which were currently not accepting referrals and these places were not being paid for through the High Needs Block, and (ii) as there was an introductory period before an SRB became live, Norfolk County Council was contributing towards staffing costs and those place numbers were included within the budgeted places in 2024-25, but future place plans would only include those available for placement.
- With regard to the 2025-26 budget, Norfolk County Council had attempted to look at the medium-term, before any SEND reforms had an impact. Officers continued to examine options to see what could be done to stabilise the system in Norfolk. Trends and impacts were being monitored, to see what elements could be controlled and influenced.
- Given the complexity of the system and model, changes were identified since the 2025-26 budget was set. Officers debated whether the modelling should be updated to reflect the changes, ultimately agreeing to do so. A level of growth in the independent sector was presumed during the budget-setting exercises. This had seen the figures for 2025-26 set at a higher level than what was currently being anticipated, which would have a knock-on effect on the beginning of the new financial year.
- Projections into the 2026-27 and 2027-28 financial year were included within the report. Officers were attempting to produce a realistic forecast with the available controls in the independent sector. The spend in this sector was projected to increase in 2026-27, but a small reduction was forecast for 2027-28, as this was when the new state special schools were anticipated to open.
- The proposed removal of the block transfer from 2026-27 was included within the modelling.
- Growth was anticipated within the post-16 sector during the coming years, given increasing demand for places. The increasing number of children not on a school roll pre-16 were then re-entering education post-16, which was increasing the demand.
- It was noted that a 1% increase in the average cost of independent places would equate to around £600,000. This could accumulate rapidly over time.

5.7 The following points were raised and discussed:

- The Chair queried the reason behind 80% occupancy of SRB places being the optimum figure. Officers explained that SRBs operating at 100% occupancy was not an ideal outcome, as this resulted in no available capacity to ensure children were in the right placement. It was noted that the turnaround model for occupancy at SRBs effectively meant there were gaps during the course of an academic year while a child was reintegrated into mainstream education. The knock-on effect was that the SRB space was not yet available for another child to occupy.
- The Chair asked if the maximum number of SRB places (524) in the budget would never be reached normally due to the practicalities of the turnaround model. Officers clarified that the 524 figure was a snapshot in time of the number of places that Norfolk County Council expected to pay for at the end of the 2024-25 financial year which were expected to be open.
- The Chair stated that the 80% occupancy target for SRB places would mean that some of the 524 places would always be vacant. An officer stated that a sustainably funded structure was key in this area. There would always be fluctuation in AP and SRB occupancy across Norfolk.

- Stephen Beeson noted that the table showed a 25% overspend on independent school places and 7% over capacity, which did not fit with the narrative of independent sector saturation. Officers clarified that during budget planning for 2024-25, independent providers were reporting that they were at capacity and not planning to expand further. The budget was based upon this information. However, before the end of the 2023-24 financial year, requests were outstripping capacity. It was noted that an independent provider was planning to open a new special school in the Downham Market area shortly, in the same area as one of Norfolk County Council's planned special schools. This would almost certainly have an effect on the figures for 2025-26.
- Matthew Smith expressed concern that the average cost per independent place had now increased. While it was appreciated that there was an increase in demand which had to be accommodated, it was queried as to how this fitted in with the aim to reduce reliance on the independent sector. An officer stated that Norfolk County Council operated within a demand-led market. There was also the element that if a child was placed by tribunal, the school in question could effectively quote their own price to Norfolk County Council, despite the work undertaken to limit costs in this area. Government support to regulate the independent sector was not yet available. This had meant that the average cost per place was underestimated when the 2024-25 budget was being set.
- Steven Dewing commented there were discussions in 2024 that a number of children in independent places were coming towards the end of their education. It was suggested that the year group data in independent schools be analysed in future budget-setting exercises. Officers confirmed that this data was being looked at to see what could be made public. There was a significant cost difference between placements where the child was leaving education and new placements, which was a driver behind the increase in average cost per placement in the independent sector. It was noted that the majority of independent placements in the secondary sector were set under old contracts which had a different set of terms and conditions. These providers were now adjusting their offers as per market conditions.
- Joanne Philpott queried what Norfolk County Council's strategy to reduce the number of families who were choosing to withdraw their children from education, as there was a significant cost element linked to the number of children not on a school roll if they were unable to meet needs through home education. Officers outlined that within the LFI, there was a package of transformation around children not in school or at risk of leaving school. This encompassed attendance issues, children on reduced timetables, and those with health and anxiety issues. In addition, the capacity of APs and SRBs also had to be considered. An underlying transformation strategy was being established by officers, with an emphasis on preventative work and reintegration. A series of workstreams and projects was planned, which would align with the LFI programme.
- Joanne Philpott asked if home education would be included in the workstreams to reduce the number of children not on a school roll or at risk of leaving school. Officers acknowledged there was a cohort of previously elective home educated children whose needs were no longer able to be met through home education that had to be considered within these plans. Norfolk County Council aimed to foster trust between families and the whole system. Communication of the offer was key to fostering trust, while also providing schools with assurance.
- Steven Dewing expressed concern regarding a potential lack of focus on home education within LFI workstreams over the last twelve months. Further work needed to be done in this area. Officers proposed that home education could be added to the LFI Reference Group's forward work programme. It was noted there was emerging national activity in this area. Effectively, there was a "new normal" in terms of the range of needs in the education system, compared to 1980 and 2020, when most of the legislation was introduced.

- The Chair expressed grave concern that the cumulative deficit was forecast to reach £186m by the end of the 2025-26 financial year. Officers stated that a realistic approach to the projection was being taken, given the circumstances when the budget was being planned in January 2025.
- The Chair queried if the cumulative deficit figure was known by schools, as it was a key message to show the level of deficit being held by the local authority. This would enable a greater understanding of the issues being faced in Norfolk. Officers expressed concern that a narrative could form that the local authority was only interested in money rather than children. There was a need to work out how the messaging behind the deficit would be received.
- Carole Jacques expressed concern that there was only one mention of early years within the report. All LFI interventions started in schools, which could be reduced if there was targeted intervention during early years. This was causing the issues with catchup and provision within the system, whereas if early years had the capacity to intervene, it could reduce pressures across the whole system. At present, early years did not have this capacity. Officers stated work was underway within early years regarding targeting intervention, acknowledging that this needed to be communicated more effectively. Some of the LFI workstreams were commencing in early needs given the acute requirement for intervention in this sector.
- The Chair expressed concern that the cumulative deficit was projected to be over £300m by the end of the 2027-28 financial year, which would probably not be permitted. Officers acknowledged that a “tipping point” was likely to be reached in the near future, which would pose significant issues for Norfolk County Council. It was likely that the external auditors could pre-empt this issue. However, it was stressed that this was a national issue, which other local authorities were also facing. There was a possibility that the Government would step in and provide funding.
- Stephen Beeson noted there was a significant increase in the valuation per independent placements between 2025-26 and 2026-27 which was not referenced in the report. This was a significant change in assumptions. Officers stated that the figures represented the forecast at the end of the financial years that included part year effects, and an average could not be calculated from the numbers presented. It was suggested that a footnote be added to the table in future iterations of the report, to highlight that this was an assumption of the worst-case scenario.
- Martin Colbourne queried if Norfolk County Council was still working on the basis of a £70m overspend, given identified movement on figures. Officers confirmed this was the case, with placement numbers and data around average costs being scrutinised. Adjustments would be made to projections accordingly.
- Martin Colbourne commented that there was a significant risk to Norfolk County Council regarding independent schools, as they had the ability to react quickly to changes in the market and increase their prices accordingly. Officers stated that there was possible political will within the Government to address this issue, potentially through a system of tariffs.
- Matthew Smith suggested adding a footnote to future reports to highlight the drop in Element 3 for 2026-27 and 2027-28 being directly linked to the removal of the block transfer, as this would aid the public in understanding the figures
- Matthew Smith asked if the reduction in independent places by 150 during the 2027-28 financial year was due to modelling or aiming to move children into the new state special schools. An officer stated that an increase in special school places was anticipated when the new state schools opened, which would mean fewer independent placements to replace leavers. The calculations presumed that there would still be more children in specialist provision than in every other year to date.

5.8 Having considered and commented accordingly, the Norfolk Schools Forum **RESOLVED** the following:

1. To **NOTE** the report.
2. To **PROVIDE** feedback regarding leadership role that Schools Forum members could play in increasing inclusivity in mainstream schools in Norfolk

6. Final Pupil Variations

6.1 Officers introduced the report, which provided information regarding final amendments to pupil variations applied in the Authority Proforma Tool (APT) submission for 2025-26, following the initial presentation of draft pupil variations at the January 2025 Schools Forum meeting

6.2 The following key elements were highlighted to the Schools Forum:

- A minor tweak was necessary, as an incorrect rates figure was identified for Silfield School. This was corrected within the submission, with the APT recalibrated.
- £718,561 worth of pupil variations was estimated in January 2025.
- Due to pupil variations, all schools were tweaked by minor amounts.

6.3 The Norfolk Schools Forum **RESOLVED** to **NOTE** the report.

7. Norfolk Schools Forum Constitution and Ways of Working

7.1 Officers introduced the report, which presented a proposed structure for the Norfolk Schools Forum constitution, which would be reviewed and discussed in upcoming meetings with the intention of finalising by July 2025. The constitution was last reviewed in March 2019.

7.2 The following key elements were highlighted to the Schools Forum:

- It was noted that the Norfolk Schools Forum was a meeting held in public, which members of the local media had previously attended. This needed to be made clear in the proposed constitution.
- A membership review was planned. Consideration was given towards ensuring that there were enough representatives for mainstream schools on the Schools Forum, given the number of academies in Norfolk.
- It had been agreed to maintain the term length of representatives at four years.
- The trade union representative role needed to be reviewed, as under the existing structure the representatives were members of Joint Consultative Committees (JCCs). As the JCCs no longer existed, discussions were planned with trade unions to ensure proportionality.
- Nominations for the three mainstream academy representative vacancies were to be opened later this week.

7.3 The following points were raised and discussed:

- Joanne Philpott highlighted that post-16 education only had one representative at present. More representatives could be an option to consider, given the differences between college funding and sixth form funding. Officers agreed to look at a more representative approach within the new structure, to more clearly define this.
- Steven Dewing highlighted that some academy trusts had their own sixth forms attached to their establishments.

- An officer stated that the Early Years Consultative Group were of the view that they should be their own fully-fledged group rather than acting as a sub-group of the Schools Forum. It was suggested that whether they were a sub-group or not, a strong link between both be constituted in the terms of reference.
- The Chair asked if the Schools Forum relied on the Early Year Consultative Group for consultations and whether it should become a sub-group of the Schools Forum. Joanna Tuttle stated that the group wished to have some autonomy on discussions.
- Owen Jenkins suggested that a Funding Distribution Sub-Group be established, given the need for in-depth financial discussions regarding grants. Officers agreed to look into this for May 2025.
- The Chair queried the reasons behind the formation of sub-groups. Officers stated that there had been research into the structure of other Schools Forums, which highlighted the use of sub-groups. They were potentially useful whenever the Schools Forum was required to make an in-depth decision, as they provided the opportunity to unpick proposals in significant detail. It was noted that some Schools Forums were meeting less frequently and using sub-groups to take on some business.
- Carole Jacques asked if published minutes could be provided from sub-groups. Officers stated that while the system of sub-groups had not yet been set up, this suggestion would be examined to ensure that appropriate notes were provided to the Schools Forum.
- The Vice-Chair stated that simplicity was the way forward for the Schools Forum, given that this was a voluntary role for all representatives.
- The Chair requested proposed models of the future Schools Forum structure for inclusion in the agenda for the May 2025 meeting. This was **agreed** to by officers.
- Steven Dewing stated that the future of the Schools Forum needed to be considered given the advent of local government reorganisation.
- The Vice-Chair queried if the Schools Forum required an odd number of representatives, given the need to vote on certain matters. Officers agreed to include wording about deadlocks into the new constitution.
- Schools Forum Members **AGREED** to increase the number of mainstream academy representatives to twelve members.
- The Vice-Chair stated that there needed to be consideration of attendance rates for Schools Forum members, along with designated substitutes.
- Sarah Shirras requested clarification on attendance requirements for the Schools Forum. Officers confirmed that discussions would be held on this matter forthwith.
- Rachel Quick requested clarification around the wording for special school representatives, as it was a requirement for the headteacher to be a special school representative if it was a mainstream school, while anyone could represent an academy. An officer stated this could be looked at as part of the review.
- Steven Dewing queried whether individual members needed to find their own substitutes or whether this was organised by Democratic Services. Officers confirmed that the constitution would be rewritten to potentially identify a pool of substitutes for each group.
- Peter Pazitka asked if there was an option for Schools Forum meetings to be held remotely. Officers stated that while Forum Members had expressed their preference for face-to-face meetings, this was an option that could be considered at the May 2025 meeting.

- 7.4 Having considered and commented accordingly, the Norfolk Schools Forum **RESOLVED** the following:
1. To **PROVIDE** feedback on the following elements:
 - Additional content for inclusion
 - Exploration of additional sub-groups
 - Regularity of Schools Forum meetings to ensure effective governance and decision-making
 2. To **APPROVE** the following elements:
 - That Schools Forum representatives be appointed for a term of four years
 - That the number of mainstream academy representatives be increased to twelve members
 - That the three Mainstream Academy vacancies be filled using the existing nominating and voting process
 - That engagement with trade unions take place for future representation as part of the constitution review
 - That trade unions be allowed to nominate substitutes for the next two Schools Forum meetings
- 8. Non-DSG Consultations**
- 8.1 Officers introduced the report, which outlined the approaches taken by the local authority for consulting on the distribution of four grants received outside of the DSG during the 2024-25 financial year. These grants included the Core Schools Budget Grant, Teachers' Pension Employer Contribution Grant, Teacher's Pay Additional Grant, and Early Years Budget Grant. The report detailed the consultation undertaken for each grant, the feedback received, and the final decisions made by the local authority.
- 8.2 The following key elements were highlighted to the Schools Forum:
- The key change for the 2025-26 financial year was that the DfE planned to combine four different grants into a new, single Core Schools Budget Grant.
 - Additional grant funding for mainstream schools with special units and resourced provision was planned to be made as part of the National Insurance Contributions (NIC) support grant.
- 8.3 The following points were raised and discussed:
- Matthew Smith suggested that a technical paper on NICs could be useful for consideration by the Schools Forum, if the need arose to consult on this item.
 - Owen Jenkins commented that the DfE's methodology had no bearing on staffing costs. There was a need for conversations on this topic. Officers stated that the allocations for 2025-26 would be known soon. Engagement with representatives could take place to find the best approach going forward.
- 8.4 Having considered and commented accordingly, the Norfolk Schools Forum **RESOLVED** to **PROVIDE** feedback on approaches to future consultations for non-DSG grants received by the local authority in-year.

9. Norfolk Schools Forum Forward Work Plan

- 9.1 Officers introduced the current forward work plan to the Forum.
- 9.2 The Norfolk Schools Forum **RESOLVED** to **NOTE** the forward work plan.

10. Any Other Business

- 10.1 There was no other business to consider.

11. Date of Next Meeting

- 11.1 The next meeting of the Norfolk Schools Forum was confirmed for **9am on Friday 9 May 2025**, to take place in the **Cranworth Room** at **County Hall**

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 12:08

**Martin White, Chair
Norfolk Schools Forum**



If you need this document in large print, audio, Braille, alternative format or in a different language please contact Customer Services on 0344 800 8020 and we will do our best to help.

Minutes Item No.	Agenda Item	Action	To Do	By Whom	Response
4.3, bullet point 1	Matters Arising	Stephen Beeson noted that there were some matters arising from the Extraordinary Schools Forum meeting held on Tuesday 4 March, relating to Element 3 communications. Concern was expressed that the communications were not clear, with clarification required before Easter 2025 due to schools being in their budget setting procedures. Officers agreed to utilise Schools Forum volunteers to help shape future communications. It was acknowledged that it was difficult to communicate the information in a simple format	Future comms around Element 3 to be shaped in a simpler fashion, using SF volunteers.	Jane Hayman / Jonathan Nice	Latest comms was shared with and informed by feedback from volunteers, thank you. The LA will look to take this approach for future comms.
5.3, bullet point 3	Strategic Planning (including Local First Inclusion) Part 1 – Local First Inclusion Programme Update, Impact and KPIs	Martin Colbourne stated that it would be welcome to provide a summary of each Key Performance Indicator (KPI) in future reports, as this would aid understanding of the trends and performance. Officers agreed to this, noting that Norfolk County Council's Scrutiny Committee had made the same request at their meeting the previous week.	Narrative for each KPI to be included in future reports.	Michael Bateman / Dawn Filtness	This will be included in future relevant reports that cover KPIs

5.3, bullet point 5	Strategic Planning (including Local First Inclusion) Part 1 – Local First Inclusion Programme Update, Impact and KPIs	Joanna Tuttle stated that while the King's Lynn case study within the report was welcome, the KPIs did not reference alternative provision (AP). An update on the secondary AP programme was requested, as this had previously been a success story. Officers acknowledged that the report was largely based around the King's Lynn ZIP scheme commencing. A graduated delivery of opening AP centres was planned over the next two to three years, with discussions underway with the secondary school system, AP Steering Group and the LFI Reference Group. The most important KPI for AP was permanent exclusion data. A deep dive into this topic could be brought to a future meeting of the Schools Forum.	Potential future item for the forward work programme	Michael Bateman / Dawn Filtness / Jane Hayman	Included within the Strategic Planning item on this agenda.
5.7, bullet point 14	Strategic Planning (including Local First Inclusion) Part 1 – DSG Modelling	Stephen Beeson noted there was a significant increase per independent placements valuation between 2025-26 and 2026-27 which was not referenced in the report. This was a significant change in assumptions. Officers stated that the figures represented the forecast at the end of the financial years that included part year effects, and an average could	Footnote to be added to table for future reports	Michael Bateman / Dawn Filtness	This will be included in future relevant reports

		not be calculated from the numbers presented. It was suggested that a footnote be added to the table in future iterations of the report, to highlight that this was an assumption of the worst-case scenario.			
5.7, bullet point 17	Strategic Planning (including Local First Inclusion) Part 1 – DSG Modelling	Matthew Smith suggested adding a footnote to future reports to highlight the drop in Element 3 for 2026-27 and 2027-28 being directly linked to the removal of the block transfer, as this would aid the public in understanding the figures	Footnote to be added to table for future reports	Michael Bateman / Dawn Filtness	This will be included in future relevant reports
7.3, bullet point 1	Norfolk Schools Forum Constitution and Ways of Working	Joanne Philpott highlighted that post-16 education only had one representative at present. More representatives could be an option to consider, given the differences between college funding and sixth form funding. Officers agreed to look at a more representative approach within the new structure, to more clearly define this.	Potential inclusion for May or July 2025 report	Samantha Fletcher	This will be included as part of the considerations in the development of the constitution that will be presented in draft for full discussion at the July Meeting.

7.3, bullet point 3	Norfolk Schools Forum Constitution and Ways of Working	An officer stated that the Early Years Consultative Group were of the view that they should be their own fully-fledged group rather than acting as a sub-group of the Schools Forum. It was suggested that whether they were a sub-group or not, a strong link between both be constituted in the terms of reference.	Potential inclusion for May or July 2025 report	Samantha Fletcher	This will be included as part of the considerations in the development of the constitution that will be presented in draft for full discussion at the July Meeting.
7.3, bullet point 5	Norfolk Schools Forum Constitution and Ways of Working	Owen Jenkins suggested that a Funding Distribution Sub-Group be established, given the need for in-depth financial discussions regarding grants. Officers agreed to look into this for May 2025.	Potential inclusion for May or July 2025 report	Samantha Fletcher	This will be included as part of the considerations in the development of the constitution that will be presented in draft for full discussion at the July Meeting.
7.3, bullet point 7	Norfolk Schools Forum Constitution and Ways of Working	Carole Jacques asked if published minutes could be provided from sub-groups. Officers stated that while the system of sub-groups had not yet been set up, this suggestion would be examined to ensure that appropriate notes were provided to the Schools Forum.	Potential inclusion for May or July 2025 report	Samantha Fletcher	This will be included as part of the considerations in the development of the constitution that will be presented in draft for full discussion at the July Meeting.
7.3, bullet point 9	Norfolk Schools Forum Constitution and Ways of Working	The Chair requested proposed models of the future Schools Forum structure for inclusion in the agenda for the May 2025 meeting. This was agreed to by officers.	Potential inclusion for May or July 2025 report	Samantha Fletcher	This will be included as part of the considerations in the development of the constitution that will be presented in draft for full

					discussion at the July Meeting.
7.3, bullet point 11	Norfolk Schools Forum Constitution and Ways of Working	The Vice-Chair queried if the Schools Forum required an odd number of representatives, given the need to vote on certain matters. Officers agreed to include wording about deadlocks into the new constitution.	Potential inclusion for May or July 2025 report	Samantha Fletcher	This will be included as part of the considerations in the development of the constitution that will be presented in draft for full discussion at the July Meeting.
7.3, bullet point 15	Norfolk Schools Forum Constitution and Ways of Working	Rachel Quick requested clarification around the wording for special school representatives, as it was a requirement for the headteacher to be a special school representative if it was a mainstream school, while anyone could represent an academy. An officer stated this could be looked at as part of the review.	Potential inclusion for May or July 2025 report	Samantha Fletcher	This will be included as part of the considerations in the development of the constitution that will be presented in draft for full discussion at the July Meeting.
7.3, bullet point 17	Norfolk Schools Forum Constitution and Ways of Working	Peter Pazitka asked if there was an option for Schools Forum meetings to be held remotely. Officers stated that while Forum Members had expressed their preference for face-to-face meetings, this was an option that could be considered at the May 2025 meeting.	Potential inclusion for May or July 2025 report	Samantha Fletcher	This will be included as part of the considerations in the development of the constitution that will be presented in draft for full discussion at the July Meeting.

Schools Forum Action Note – Wednesday 26 March 2025

8.3, bullet point 1	Non-DSG Consultations	Matthew Smith suggested that a technical paper on NICs could be useful for consideration by the Schools Forum, if the need arose to consult on this item.	Potential future item for the forward work programme	Dawn Filtness / Martin Brock	This will be included in future relevant reports
---------------------	-----------------------	--	--	------------------------------	--

Schools Forum

Item No: 5

Report title:	Strategic Planning (including Local First Inclusion)
Date of meeting:	9 May 2025

Executive summary

This regular report to Schools Forum and for this meeting focuses on:

- Alternative Provision
- Celebrating the programme success to date
- Forward plan for reports during 2025/26

We have also met with the specialist advisers commissioned by the DfE as part of the Safety Valve / enhanced monitoring and support process and will be submitting a further version of our programme plan and finance model to DfE at the start of the summer term. This follows on from the submissions in 2024 (April, June, October) and we are hopefully will enable the flow of funding from DfE to NCC again, including retrospective payments.

The timescale between notification of the need to submit further information and date of Schools Forum May meeting means that it would not be possible to include details in this paper, however, we will be able to provide a brief verbal update during the meeting.

Schools Forum are asked to:

- **Consider the information provided and to provide feedback and comment with regard to programme progress**
- **Consider the leadership role that Schools Forum members can play in helping the local authority to celebrate the success of the programme and, in turn, increasing county-wide consistency of inclusivity in mainstream schools in Norfolk**

1. Introduction

- 1.1 A comprehensive update on the overall LFI programme was provided to the March 2025 Schools Forum meeting and this coincided with a similar update to the NCC Scrutiny Committee.
- 1.2 In future reports to Schools Forum will focus on specific elements of the programme and, when developed further as part of a refresh of internal and external governance of the programme, will include a revised set of 'top 10' key performance indicators.
- 1.3 This report focuses on 3 elements:
 - Alternative Provision
 - Celebrating the programme success to date
 - Forward plan for reports during 2025/26
- 1.4 We will also provide a verbal update in the May meeting following the resumption of contact with the DfE regarding our Safety Valve plan. Following correspondence received in early April (with a request to submit an updated plan by 30 April and our understanding that this applies to other LAs within the SV EMS process) we have met specialist DfE finance and SEND advisers, discussed the information provided to Schools Forum in recent meetings and provided a further formal submission. Our understanding is that if the submission meets the 'value for money' requirements set out by the DfE in those discussions then the Safety Valve payments will resume, including retroactive payments, and a revised framework for monitoring our programme will be established.
- 1.5 As can be seen from the recommendations to Schools Forum we are again seeking support of Members of the group to '*...consider the leadership role that Schools Forum members can play...[regarding]...inclusivity in mainstream schools...*'. As can be seen from the full wording of the recommendation we have reflected on the discussion at the last meeting on this point and have endeavoured to provide more clarity on the specific role that we believe school leaders within the Schools Forum group can play.

2. Focus on specific elements of the LFI programme

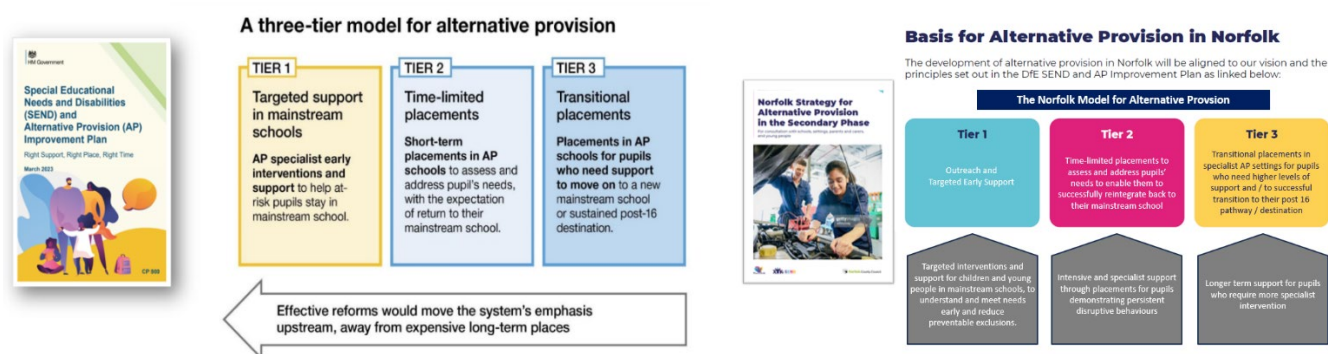
2.1 Alternative Provision – position statement

- 2.1.1 Project 4 within the LFI programme is focussed on establishing new SEMH SRBs within the secondary phase as part of the transformation of our AP system, moving from a centralised to a collective model of delivery reflecting the most effective AP systems elsewhere in England and evidenced under DfE led research via ISOS.
- 2.2.2 Project 4 is aligned to wider AP transformational change relating to vulnerable children who are missing school through the newly established Vulnerable Children in Education Board and spanning workstreams covering school attendance (including part time timetables), S19 duties and the role of the Transitional Education Service and AP Commissioning/Medical Needs.
- 2.2.3 Together, the activity within Project 4 and aligned transformation will bring about a cohesive AP system reflecting the national 3-tiered model. Project 4 (and aligned activity in Project 7 for the primary phase) is establishing new provision to address current gaps in Tier 2 provision to enable a seamless AP system to respond to the needs of children earlier and more flexibly.
- 2.1.2 The key activities for this project in the current academic year to date include, scoping initial offers, reviewing sufficiency needs, developing cost-effective designs, and progressing capital work. We have noted positive feedback from the first 'Local planning meeting partnership', as part of the initial testing of the new model in Kings Lynn and aligned to the first new secondary SEMH SRB hosted by Kings Lynn Academy. The project is making steady progress with this capital development.
- 2.1.3 In the March report to Schools Forum we set out the main outcome judgement criteria that Ofsted use for the inspection of the 'local area' within the Area SEND & AP inspection framework. To continue to set out our improvement work in that context below is the specific criteria that Ofsted/CQC will consider as part of full area inspection with regard to alternative provision arrangements across the county:
- *the local authority identifies children and young people's needs accurately and arranges suitable full-time educational provision to meet the needs of children or young people who require alternative provision as early as possible, for example, ensuring that full-time education for children and young people who have been excluded begins no later than the sixth day of the exclusion*
 - *the local authority ensures that there are intervention plans for each child and young person in alternative provision, including clear objectives and plans for their next steps, such as returning to mainstream education*

- *the local authority maintains strong oversight arrangements for alternative provision it commissions, including oversight of each alternative provision's safety and suitability, and in particular of alternative providers that are not registered as schools*

2.1.4 Therefore, we need to assess our current AP provision, the plans we already have in place and our collective action to improve further in this context.

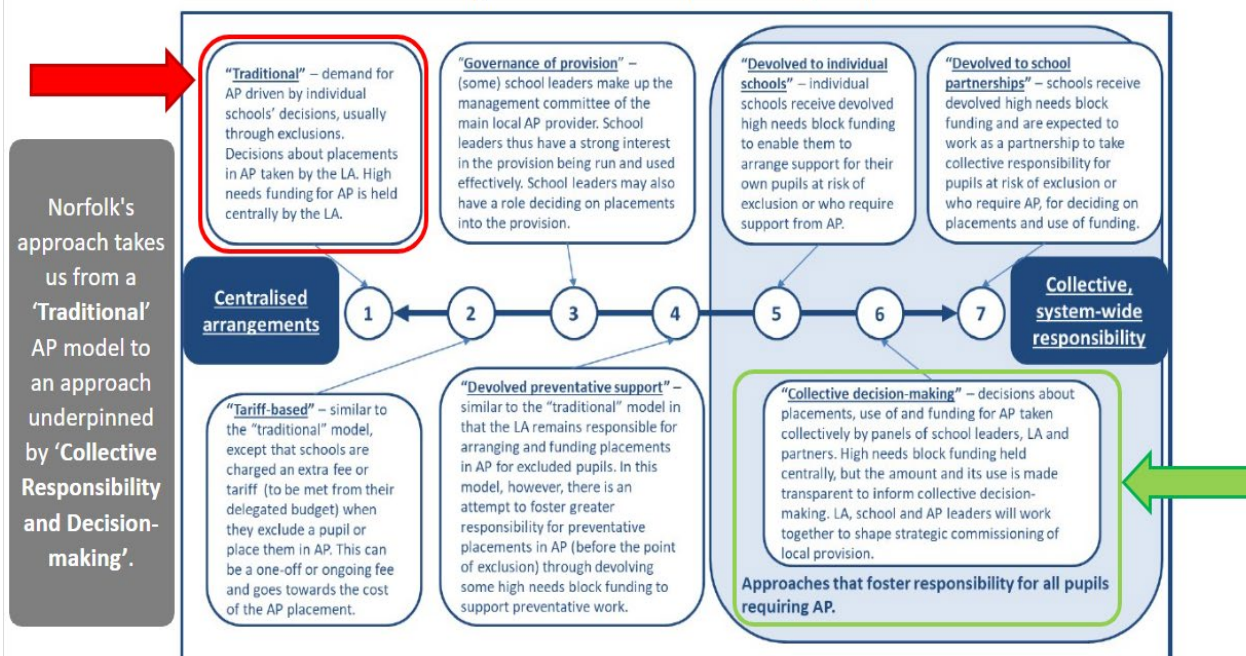
2.1.5 Norfolk's arrangements for Alternative Provision (AP) replicate national best practice following the three-tiered pathway of delivery as set out in the DfE SEND & AP Improvement Plan:



2.1.6 Our AP system has been co-designed with Norfolk School leaders and informed by what children, young people and families have told us will make a difference to them, namely stronger emphasis on early support with greater system agility to respond to children's individual needs collectively prior to escalation and ultimately, exclusion.

2.1.7 The strategy has been informed by a comprehensive analysis of data and intelligence which has identified Norfolk's principal cause of permanent exclusion is persistent disruptive behaviour within the secondary school population. The AP Strategy has been developed to provide additional pathways for this group, equipping mainstream schools with both greater resource and provision, but also a direct role in delivering earlier support prior to exclusion. This new provision complements existing provision for primary school children.

2.1.8 The strategy has been overseen by Norfolk's Alternative Provision Steering group which includes leaders from Multi-Academy Trusts, (including the CEO of Norfolk's AP Academy MAT, Unity Education Trust), the LA and Mark Vickers, Ofsted's external adviser for Inclusion.



2.1.9 Tier 1 Provision

Tier 1 aims to deliver a range of early support in mainstream for children who have known risk factors which could leave them vulnerable to exclusion or leaving the mainstream school system. Some of this support is already operational, with new support offers in development through LFI Project 4.

Operational:

- ✓ **SEND and Inclusion phone line:** a dedicated phone line for parents, schools and other professionals to access advice, guidance including support for children who are at risk of exclusion.
- ✓ **A rapid response Inclusion Adviser service:** a team of professionals deployed directly to schools to facilitate inclusive practice and other preventative support including whole school curriculum and behaviour policies, risk assessment planning and enhanced assessments and pupil plans.
- ✓ **Norfolk STEPs:** A comprehensive programme designed to support school in promoting positive behaviour through evidence-based principles of de-escalation strategies, behaviour analysis and differentiated planning, and the safe and effective use of restrictive physical intervention within legislative frameworks.

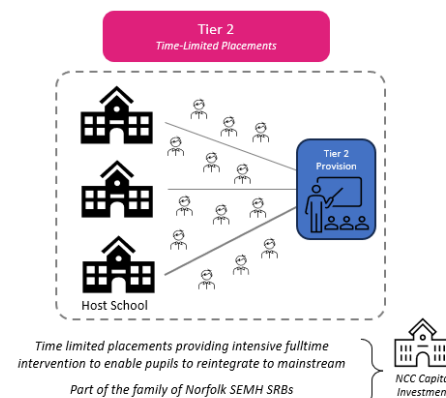
In development:

- ✓ **Universal Trauma Informed Practice (TIP):** delivered by the Virtual School CiC, enabling all schools to embed the principles of TIP across all mainstream schools, with an additional targeted offer to at risk children within secondary.
- ✓ **Targeted KS2 outreach:** based on evidence that pupils excluded due to persistent disruptive behaviour in Year 7 and 8 have identifiable indicators in Years 5 and 6, a targeted offer of intervention and support is available to 200 Year 6 children with this profile is being developed under Project 4.

- ✓ **Reintegration and DOWIMM:** targeted programme of intervention to support the success of Managed Moves for children at risk of exclusion based on evidence which confirms that LA supported Managed Moves have a 75% success rate, compared to only 25% for those which are unsupported.

2.1.10 Tier 2 Provision

Time limited support for children is delivered by mainstream schools for the mainstream school system under the SEMH Specialist Resource Base programme, across primary and secondary, facilitated by LA leadership and in partnership with registered Alternative Provision academies. Unit provision in mainstream schools for children who are at risk of exclusion or whose social, emotional and mental health needs present barriers to learning enables children to access provision which meets their immediate presenting needs and provides a stabilising intervention enabling successful reintegration to mainstream school.



Children remain enrolled at their home school providing a structured pathway for reintegration and access to the provision is not predicated on a child being permanently excluded. The placement is underpinned by a home to host school agreement setting expectations of the school-to-school partnership, parental agreement, and each child receives a targeted intervention plan within the SRB with clear objectives in support of successful mainstream reintegration.

Longitudinal analysis of our longest established provisions evidences a high rate of reintegration success **with over 60% of children still in mainstream school 3 years after accessing of the provision.**

The Tier 2 SEMH SRB programme is undergoing substantial growth as part of Local First Inclusion investment, (see Chapter 10) as follows:

- **Primary:** Total places 2024 – **88**, total places planned under Local First Inclusion - **192**.
- **Secondary:** Total places 2024 – **32**, total places planned under Local First Inclusion – **314**.

2.1.11 Tier 3 Provision

Tier 3 provision is delivered by three AP Academies, UET Pathfinder, UET Compass and Pinetree, all part of the Unity Education Academy Trust (UET).

UET Pathfinder: delivers 350 longer term placements across KS1-4 for children who have been permanently excluded or are missing education for other reasons.

The commissioning of places is underpinned by a formalised Funding Agreement between the LA and the MAT setting requirements for delivery and partnership. Children enrolled at UET Pathfinder often have highest levels of long term need where mainstream reintegration is less suitable for their educational needs. The Academy and LA work in partnership to facilitate transition of children to special school provision (primary) or sustained post 16 destinations (secondary) following intensive assessment and intervention. Development is underway to establish structured partnership between the Academy and FE Colleges to facilitate staged transitions for KS4 pupils who are at greater risk of being NEET utilising college vocational curriculum pathways.

UET Compass: a specialist Alternative Provision delivering 65 longer term therapeutic education placements across KS2-3 who present with severe and challenging behaviours, emerging or acute mental health needs, including attachment issues and/or developmental trauma. The provision is supported by integrated therapy offer, commissioned and funded by the ICB delivering clinical intervention to children. All children enrolled at UET Compass have an EHCP reflecting the holistic nature of their needs requiring integrated provision. Strong multi-agency governance systems are in place between the LA, ICB, NHS Trust and MAT Leadership to ensure quality of provision. Outturn data for 23/24 showed that 100% of pupils who had been on modified timetables in their previous setting were now accessing education in school full time, 80% making good academic progress and 80% meeting or exceeding their outcomes set out in their EHCPs, including clinical health outcomes.

Pinetree Academy: a specialist Alternative Provision delivering 40 placements across KS3-4. *“Pupils arrive at the Pinetree School having had numerous failed educational experiences. All are pupils with SEND. Here, they are supported to get back into school and succeed. Over time, pupils become more motivated and gain qualification they need to move on to appropriate college placements at age 16. Pupils’ work is adapted to meet their own individual needs but is appropriately challenging. Pupils study a curriculum that contains a high focus on academic knowledge, together with work on life skills, developing resilience and tolerance”* Pinetree School Ofsted Inspection report, 2023.

As part of the wider AP Strategy, work is underway with Unity Education Trust to consider the relative ratio of places across the UET estate, particularly between UET Pathfinder and Compass Academies. This is to ensure the requisite balance of places based on sufficiency needs and considering the longer-term impact of Tier 2 provision on the system. It is recognised that those who are excluded in the primary phase have a greater level of need associated with complex SEND. The review will consider the need to realign numbers between Pathfinder and Compass to respond to this.

2.1.12 Other Alternative Provision

Transitional Education Service (TES): has oversight of all children who do not have a school place or for whom EOTAS packages have been arranged for children with EHCPs. It provides direct oversight of all cases and take a child centred approach to planning and commissioning alternative education provision, taking account of children's prior learning, interests and wider needs, including safeguarding concerns so that education continues to be a protective factor. Attendance is closely monitored to ensure children remain engaged with provision and the delivery of education of regularly reviewed through discussion with children, parents and carers and adapted when appropriate. Children who are too unwell to attend school receive education provision from the Medical Needs Service following identification by their school, or other agencies, and is underpinned by a [Joint Medical Protocol](#) with health. All children receive an individualised curriculum, underpinned by a plan with clear objectives including routes to onward placement in school or post 16.

Unregulated AP commissioned by schools: schools commission unregulated AP under their powers to direct children off site to improve behaviour. Children's Services publishes an [Unregulated AP directory](#) to ensure it has full understanding of the range of unregulated AP available locally. This information is supplemented by comprehensive guidance to schools to ensure that the AP they commission accords with statutory guidance. The LA emphasises that inclusion of an unregulated AP in the directory does not represent an endorsement or quality kitemark so that schools understand that they retain responsibility for individual children's placements, including safeguarding and quality assurance. The LA provides model policies, templates, [advice and guidance](#) to schools on their use of unregulated AP to ensure that children's placements in AP are safe, meaningful and have clear objectives and outcomes. The LA monitors use of Unregulated AP via mandatory Attendance data returns from schools identifying where schools may have disproportionate rates of "B" coding or other absence codes. This helps the LA to target advice and support to schools and deploy support from our core Tiered model of AP.

Quality Assurance: Norfolk's AP System is underpinned by a comprehensive infrastructure of Quality Assurance, from strategic level through to arrangements for provider oversight including individual children and their placements.

- **Executive Transformation Board for children out of school:** a leadership governance group with specific oversight of children out of school, leading transformation activity and ensuring robust quality assurance practice within Alternative Provision, with close links to the Norfolk Children's Safeguarding Partnership and Children and Young People's Strategic Alliance.
- **Joint LA Unity Education Trust Governance Groups:** leadership governance groups between the LA and UET to provide oversight of quality of provision as part of UET Alternative Provision, including a specific multi-agency governance board with the ICB and Norfolk and Suffolk Foundation Trust to provide leadership oversight of education and clinical quality at UET Compass Academy.
- **SEND Multi-Agency Assurance Group:** a multi-agency group which coordinates assurance activity for SEND, undertaking focused scrutiny, audits and deep dives into the SEND and AP system to improve understanding of the effectiveness of the area's arrangements for SEND, including Alternative Provision.
- **Intelligence and information sharing group with Ofsted and DfE:** regular meetings between LA Officers and both DfE and Ofsted to share information and intelligence of the Norfolk education system, schools and MATs, with specific consideration of the unregulated AP system and its relationship to illegal schools and child safeguarding.
- **LA led School Improvement activity:** formalised structures of LA support and intervention in the school system, especially in LA maintained schools (including those hosting Tier 2 provision).
- **Infrastructure support and challenge to Tier 2 provision:** LA led system support and challenge to Tier 2 SEMH SRBs delivered by local senior leaders in special schools, LA Senior Advisers, Educational Psychologists and other specialists. Where necessary, this includes specific commissioning of external QA audits in partnership with school leaders to ensure ongoing development and improvement of practice and delivery.
- **Rolling programme of QA audits and visits of the AP system, particularly Unregulated AP:** led by a Senior Adviser with previous education inspection experience, a rolling programme of QA visits to schools and the unregulated AP sector to assess providers against local standards based on national guidance. The programme facilitates provider improvement, safeguards children and informs local knowledge and intelligence to invoke more formalised intervention through LA school improvement powers, Regional Director/DfE/Ofsted escalation, LADO or Higher-Level Concerns process.
- **Higher Level concerns process:** structured arrangements for LA oversight and intervention with unregulated AP providers where significant concerns exist resulting in formalised remedial action planning and decision-making regarding children's placements, alerts to the wider education system and escalation through more formal channels, such as DfE, Ofsted and in extreme cases, the police.

2.1.13 Areas for Development

- **Implementing the responsibility-based model of AP** - a collaborative rather than centralised system with shared accountability and decision-making which evidence demonstrates achieves better for children.
- **Developing more Tier 2 provision**, with significant emphasis on the secondary phase to support children with appropriate provision far earlier and before point of exclusion in recognition that Norfolk's highest numbers of permanent exclusions are of secondary age pupils for persistent disruptive behaviour.
- **Developing localised partnerships** of schools to bring together local education leaders with the LA to provide support and challenge on inclusive practice and make collective decisions on children's movement and placement within the AP system.
- Through those partnerships, **building "step down" routes** for children between Tiers of AP to provide stronger pathways for reintegration, especially for those in Tier 3 provision.
- **Reviewing Norfolk Medical Needs offer**, to reduce perverse incentives which take children out of school based education and to facilitate stronger reintegration pathways, especially for children who experience anxiety in attending school in partnership with health.
- Addressing **capacity gaps** in special school places and AP resulting in higher numbers of children receiving education out of school than should be the case.
- Introducing formal **contractual frameworks for unregulated AP, tutoring and e-learning** to have stronger grip on provider commissioning, expectations of delivery, quality and outcomes for children, with system understanding that AP is an intervention not a destination.
- Developing **partnerships between FE colleges and AP Academies** providing more flexible curriculum pathways for children hardest to engage, increasing successful transition and reducing overrepresentation of excluded children in the NEET population.

We are on a trajectory to have fewer exclusions this academic year.

	Exclusion referrals	Withdrawn following LA support	Total Exclusions Confirmed
23/24	422	113 (27%)	309
24/25 (to end of Spring term)	225	38 (17%)	187

These are early signs of positive impact of our developing strategy but should be treated with caution in so far that this is an in-year position. Additionally, the figures need to be considered alongside other metrics relating to children who are falling out of the school system by other routes (i.e. numbers moving into EHE, those under medical needs provision, those where EOTISC programmes are being sought through EHCPs).

2.1.14 Timelines

The GANNT chart sets out the high-level timeline for delivery of the Tier 2 secondary bases. To note, the implementation dates are a “from” date (i.e. 128 places will be available from Sept 2026 and will be delivered through the course of the growth plan). All places will be realised by Sept 2029.



Local Planning meeting partnerships (LPMPs) will be developed in advance of provision coming on stream. Composition of LPMPs will be communicated to schools by the end of half term, with roll out commencing from Summer half term 2. We anticipate all LPMPs to be operational from September 2025. This will enable identification of cohorts for both the wider offer of support through the AP system and prioritisation for the new placements when they become available.

2.2 Celebrating the programme success to date

- 2.2.1 We have reiterated in recent reports to Schools Forum and NCC Scrutiny Committee, and in our latest discussions with the DfE, that the original aims of the LFI programme remain, i.e. to meet needs more effectively and earlier, with a focus on mainstream inclusion and increasingly through SEN Support arrangements, alongside developing sufficient specialist provision and ‘living within our means’
- 2.2.2 In the academic year to date we have continued to press ahead with ambition and urgency and our inclusive model is becoming tangible, through on the ground delivery, piece by piece. These are the core developments that we have been working on together,
- Inclusion Phone-line live and available for parents and professionals through a single route
 - Launched the first of our new School & Community Zones, building on the success in the first year of our programme with 15 new School & Community Teams focussed on SEN Support through advice in schools and in the home

- Launched our 'team around the school model' with a commitment from health colleagues to 'locate' their commissioned services through this model in addition to children's services free at the point of delivery SEND & AP services
- Comprehensive take up of Children's Services developed indicator / self-evaluation tools (INDES & IPSEF) by mainstream schools embedded and sustained and now supporting our revised Element 3 funding model, directing funding at SEN Support & EHCP cohorts, provided time-limited allocations alongside support at cohort level for school based 'enhanced SEND provision (ESPs)
 - 21,399 INDES for children and young people
 - IPSEFs for all settings
 - Graduated Provision Maps (GPMs) for 397 schools
- Initial secondary SEMH SRB operational within mainstream high school to shape the model fully prior to full county-wide roll-out
- Special School outreach model redesigned with greater county-wide co-ordination to complement Zone and Team around the School working model
- New NDD pathway/support model approved within ICB for implementation
- 16 more Specialist Resource Bases operational this last term, adding to the first wave of places in 2023/24. Capital programme progressing for the remaining bases up to 2026 and data showing the majority of time-limited placements result in ongoing and sustained mainstream provision avoiding special school referral
- Educational Psychology Service benefiting from increased direct funding from NCC General Fund to reduce reliance on trading and in turn to increase county-wide consistency for SEN Support

2.2.3 We are also now able to directly attribute programme benefits to the range of projects implemented since April 2023, and are encouraged to note a range of green shoots across key indicators of our performance:

- EHCP referrals have now been on a reducing trajectory for 6 months in a row
- Whilst exclusions continue to be high county-wide we have seen a significant reduction in one of our largest towns, Kings Lynn, following the combined work of our team around school and secondary SEMH SRB pilot (full details in section below)
- School & Community Teams are intervening early, contributing to effective SEN Support arrangements, and their impact being celebrated through parent and professional responses to surveys

2.2.4 However, despite these successes, the overall position remains one of considerable challenge, in particular:

- An ongoing rise in exclusions and a reliance on the LA to provide educational provision directly, via tutors and online resources, for children not currently able to attend school for reasons of medical absence and/or resistance to admissions within mainstream schools whilst assessments regarding special educational needs are clarified

- Delays to some capital schemes due to the outcome of feasibility studies, for example highlighting increased costs due to the need for full new build compared to assumptions of possible refurbishment of existing spaces, and now a significant delay to the opening of the two new special schools due to DfE processes.
- There are still considerable wait times for key health services, in particular in relation to assessments for neurodiverse children and support for children with emotional and mental health needs
- A continued rate of referral for special school provision which is well above the national average and well above what can be afforded within the allocated High Needs Block

2.2.5 We continue to anticipate the national SEND reforms in the summer term this year and understand that the government planning for these will be informed by the recent parliamentary call for evidence (entitled 'SEND in Crisis'), which NCC provided a response to, and also feedback from the ISOS Partnership who have been commissioned by the DfE to survey current 'Safety Valve' LAs regarding their experience of that process to date. We will reflect changes needed to the LFI programme as necessary when the DfE set out the scope and, ultimately, detail of the reforms and adjust the scheduling of our LFI programme and other SEND strategic improvement work (in particular Norfolk Area SEND & AP Strategy – NASAPS) accordingly.

3. Forward plan for reports during 2025/26

- 3.1 We want to ensure that future reporting to Schools Forum regarding the Local First Inclusion programme is further aligned with other reporting of the programme, in particular with the other public domain reporting through Norfolk County Council Scrutiny reports (on a quarterly basis) and the current governance arrangements for the LFI Executive Board (currently on a bi-monthly basis) and LFI Reference Group (currently on a half-termly basis).
- 3.2 A forward plan exists for reporting to the Scrutiny Committee and Reference Group (we are currently reviewing the terms of reference / forward plan for the Executive Board) and it would seem sensible to align those forward plans with the regular reporting to Schools Forum.

3.3 The current forward plan for **NCC Scrutiny Committee** sets out the themes of reports for the remainder of 2025 as:

- June: If government have set out their plans for national SEND reforms in sufficient time, this would be a key focus of the report, with commentary on how those reforms (when implemented through new legislation) will lead to changes to our Local First Inclusion and Norfolk Area SEND & AP Strategy programmes of work. We would also hope that, in parallel to practice changes, the government would also set out their plans in relation to current Safety Valve funding agreements and the associated 'statutory override' accounting mechanism.

In addition to any government announcements, we will also set out the latest planning for the implementation of a revised Element 3 'top-up' funding model for mainstream schools, based on the autumn 2024 Dedicated School Grant consultation, and to be implemented from September 2025.

- September: We would anticipate further commentary on national SEND reforms, both in terms of the progress of a white paper through the parliamentary process, but also detail that would likely be set out by the DfE through national and regional conferences etc.

We would also be in a position to reflect on the latest set of national comparator data (both in terms of 'SEN2' for key SEN Support and EHCP figures in relation to national average but also headline key stage 2 results from the summer).

Regarding the role out of the LFI programme overall, September would likely be a good point to update on the latest capital developments for specialist resource bases. We would hope that well before this, we would have clarity from the DfE on the two new special school capital schemes, in Great Yarmouth and Downham Market, and would be able to set out a more definitive timeline for build and opening date.

- December:
In anticipation of inspection via Ofsted/CQC in early 2026, we would be in a position to provide an overview of our self-evaluation framework, setting out the progress that we had made within our Norfolk Area SEND & AP Strategy action plan and the areas that will be priority for focussed improvement in 2026.

3.4 The current forward plan for **LFI reference group** includes:

- Children on a part-time timetable and in receipt of medical needs provision (including those at risk of exiting mainstream provision)
- Parental confidence
- Post 16 planning and provision

- Reaching a shared view on the appropriate provision to meet different needs
- SEND curriculum development (following initial discussion during the March 2025 meeting and anticipated Government announcement on curriculum)

3.5 It is important that the sequence is established whereby discussions at LFI reference group occur first of all (where appropriate) and the output of those discussions informs reporting to Schools Forum. An overview of Elective Home Education (EHE) and Early Years activity within the LFI programme has been requested by Forum Members and will be brought to future meetings.

3.6 We also believe that it would be sensible to consider establishing a High Needs sub-group of Schools Forum (which will be the subject of a paper within the July meeting regarding over-all governance) and if this were to happen then clearly alignment of forward planning between that group and the LFI reference group would be critical to ensure that duplication of effort does not occur.

4. Schools Forum are asked to:

Schools Forum are asked to:

- **Consider the information provided and to provide feedback and comment with regard to programme progress**
- **Consider the leadership role that Schools Forum members can play in helping the local authority to celebrate the success of the programme and, in turn, increasing county-wide consistency of inclusivity in mainstream schools in Norfolk**


Officer Contact

If you have any questions about matters contained in this paper, please get in touch with:

Officer Name: **Tel No:** **Email address:**

Michael Bateman

michael.bateman@norfolk.gov.uk

	<p>If you need this report in large print, audio, Braille, alternative format or in a different language please contact 0344 800 8020 or 0344 800 8011 (textphone) and we will do our best to help.</p>
---	---

Schools Forum

Item No: 6

Report title:	Update on Element 3 Funding Assurance
Date of meeting:	9 May 2025

Executive summary

This report is to provide an update on the consideration of how assurance is provided in relation to the appropriate use of Element 3 funds within in Norfolk. This follows previous discussions at Schools Forum meetings earlier in the year.

This report aims to address the concerns raised regarding the approach to seeking assurance that the LA detailed in January's Element 3 guidance, whilst keeping in mind previous concerns raised by school leaders in Norfolk regarding the appropriate use of Element 3 funds and how the LA can ensure that they are utilised as intended. The Department for Education (DfE) has provided the LA with guidance, which has informed the LA's considerations.

Schools Forum are asked to:

- **Consider and comment upon the update regarding Element 3 funding assurance**

1. Background

Through the workshops regarding Element 3 during summer 2024 and then the subsequent LFI Reference Group meetings in the Autumn, there was a clear message from education leaders that there should be some form of assurance in the system that funds were being sought and utilised for the purposes intended. This was particularly driven by the desire to ensure that there was a fair system in place in Norfolk alongside suggestions shared that some schools had sought to 'maximise their income' or were substituting Element 3 funds for spend that had previously been funded from core schools' budgets as budgets tightened, and such behaviours had contributed to the significant increase in demand for Element 3 funding, along with genuine increases being seen in relation to both the quantity and complexity of need in mainstream schools.

As an initial response, the LA set up a first round of audit assurance visits to a sample of schools and academies. It was always anticipated that there would be learning in terms of process and approach given that it was the first undertaking of such visits, as well as potentially learning from substance of any findings that could be used to inform future design and ways of working.

Thank you to those who did participate in the audit assurance work and to those who provided feedback on the experience to inform learning. Whilst findings were specific to individual settings, the work did identify the risk that, based upon the evidence seen, not all Element 3 funds were being used, or wholly used, for the purposes provided and that settings fully understood that funds should be returned if the relevant child left (based upon 23/24 arrangements where funds were linked to a specific child).

Through this process, and in response to the Element 3 guidance for the 2025/26 academic year, we have received feedback from some Trusts regarding the LA's jurisdiction to conduct assurance work, though there seems consensus that the LA should implement some form of assurance to support the goal of a fair system.

2. DfE Guidance

As agreed at previous Schools Forums, the LA has discussed with the DfE the options regarding assurance in relation to Element 3 funding. The DfE were clear that the LA cannot audit academies per se, but the LA does have the right to request evidence of the use of Element 3 funding and that this is applicable to both maintained schools and academies.

In summary, the DfE advised that:

- the LA could request evidence of the use of Element 3 (top-up) funds to support the needs of children and young people with SEND, both in advance of allocation of funds and through review processes, such as EHCP annual reviews. This was applicable to both maintained schools and academies.
- it is for the LA to determine appropriate levels of top-up and targeted funding for all schools and colleges, including academies, and that LAs do have the right to request cost information and spend from academies, in line with what you would reasonably request from maintained schools.
- it was appropriate that the LA's S151 would want assurance that High Needs Block funds were being used for the purposes provided, rather than just for schools funding more generally.

- the LA may want to consider reviewing the EHCP annual review process (or similar for funds provided for those without an EHCP) to ensure that it captured such evidence, to support future decision making regarding the support needs of the child or young person, as well as to provide the LA with the appropriate assurance regarding use of funds.

3. System changes already underway to support increased assurance

The key to assurance is ensuring that, as a system, we have the right processes in place upfront enabling good decision making, and that we have arrangements in place to review the impact of interventions and support that confirm appropriate use of resource and enable future decision making.

The ongoing roll out of the SEND and Inclusion Support model across the county (including Team around the School meetings and Zone Inclusion Partnerships) along with the recent changes in relation to Element 3 allocation from the 25/26 academic year (including use of Graduated Provision Maps and Identification of Needs Descriptors in Educational Settings) will provide much more of a granular view than the LA did not previously have of the needs of the children within schools, the provision put in place to meet those needs and how that provision is funded.

4. View of the Local Authority

An area that requires further consideration by the LA is the process in relation to Annual Reviews for those with EHCPs and reviews of INDES for all children. This is in line with the guidance from the DfE.

Aside from this, the LA have reflected upon the initial audit assurance work and feedback received, the other advice from the DfE, and the arrangements that we now have in place in relation to Element 3 funding.

Whilst the key to assurance is ensuring that, as a system, we have the right upfront processes and decisions in place, the LA remains of the view that, if required, assurance can be sought through the request of evidence that the appropriate support and interventions have been provided to children in line with the agreed plans and that funding has been used for the purposes that it was provided for in the first place, and this should apply to all schools and academies (i.e. equality should exist).

The arrangements in place and the guidance from the Department for Education confirm that standalone assurance audits are not necessary to gather such evidence, but the LA does expect open and transparent engagement and dialogue with schools, whether locally maintained or academies.

We are, therefore, proposing that we do not have a further, stand-alone additional Element 3 audit assurance process. Instead, our intention would be to use the new Element 3 arrangements (including the sharing of INDES and GPMs identifying the needs, support and spend information as these are updated and the moderation) through any submissions as well as discussions to give ourselves the relevant assurance. Such dialogue should include the LA being able to challenge spend and the appropriateness of it, and seek suitable evidence, regardless of the type of school.

We will also think about other key touch points, such as annual reviews and team around the school meetings, to give us a further lens on E3 funding. Our ask of schools is that, when we ask, they work with us in a transparent and open way. For the sake clarity, if schools do not provide appropriate evidence, then this does imply that we would be unable to make decisions and award Element 3 funding.

Therefore, we will publish revised guidance incorporating this position to replace that published in January. We propose working with Schools Forum colleagues who have previously offered support in this space around the specific wording within the guidance.

In relation to locally maintained schools, we will consider the routine audit programme and whether it should be amended to specifically consider E3 spend as part of risk-based considerations. This is in a similar way as we would expect the DFE to consider a risk-based approach to their audit programmes of academies and trusts.

5. Schools Forum are asked to:

- **Consider and comment upon the update regarding Element 3 funding assurance**

Officer Contact

If you have any questions about matters contained in this paper, please get in touch with:

Officer Name:
Dawn Fowler

Tel No:
01603 228834

Email address:
dawn.fowler@norfolk.gov.uk

Schools Forum

Item No: 7

Report title:	DSG Final Outturn and Balances 2024-25
Date of meeting:	9 May 2025

Executive summary

The overall DSG outturn position for all four blocks was a £55.878m¹ overspend for 2024-25, including:

- an overspend within the High Needs Block of £56.989m (including £39.543m deficit budgeted for),
- an underspend within the Schools Block of (£0.109m),
- an underspend within the Early Years Block of (£1.033m), and
- an overspend within the Central Schools Services Block £0.031m

The Dedicated Schools Grant deficit brought forward into the 2024-25 financial year was £81.513m. The LA made a contribution of (£5.500m) to the DSG deficit in 2024-25. The LA did not receive any Safety Valve funding from the DfE during 2024-25 as payments were paused. The LA is awaiting further announcements from the DfE regarding the future profile of Safety Valve funding to be received.

The combined cumulative year-on-year overspend on the Dedicated Schools Grant is now £131.891m as at 31 March 2025.

Maintained schools' balances have reduced from (£14.820m) as of 31 March 2024 to (£13.914m) as at 31 March 2025.

This paper is for information and discussion with the NCC's Cabinet due to approve the final outturn position and balances in June.

Comments from Forum are welcome and, where appropriate, will be shared with NCC's Cabinet.

1. Introduction

This report outlines the final outturn for the Dedicated Schools Grant for 2024-25.

The Dedicated Schools Grant can only be used for specified purposes and must be accounted for separately from the other Children's Services spending and funding.

The Dedicated Schools Grant funds the Schools Block, Central Schools Services Block, the High Needs Block, and the Early Years Block.

The Schools Block has two main elements, the amounts delegated to schools and the amounts held centrally for pupil related spending, this includes de-delegated budgets and growth fund. Once funding is delegated to schools, any over or underspend is shown within school balances.

The Dedicated Schools Grant Budget and changes to schools and early years local funding formulae for 2024-25 were agreed at Norfolk County Council's January 2024

¹ All figures rounded to 3 decimal places

2. Variations on Dedicated Schools Grant Funded Budgets

The overall DSG outturn position for all four blocks was a £55.878m² overspend for 2024-25, including:

- an overspend within the High Needs Block of £56.989m (including £39.543m deficit budgeted for),
- an underspend within the Schools Block of (£0.109m),
- an underspend within the Early Years Block of (£1.033m), and
- an overspend within the Central Schools Services Block £0.031m

The Dedicated Schools Grant deficit brought forward into the 2024-25 financial year was £81.513m. The LA made a contribution of (£5.500m) to the DSG deficit in 2024-25. The LA did not receive any Safety Valve funding from the DfE during 2024-25 as payments were paused. The LA is awaiting further announcements from the DfE regarding the future profile of Safety Valve funding to be received.

The combined cumulative year-on-year overspend on the Dedicated Schools Grant is now £131.891m as at 31 March 2025.

2.1 Schools Block (inc. Centrally Retained)

Norfolk received a total allocation of £635.437m of Schools Block DSG. A transfer of 1.5% (£9.532m) was made from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block with the Secretary of State's agreement.

A top slice was made for the growth fund of £1.257m, agreed by Schools Forum.

Also, Norfolk moved onto the central National Non-Domestic Rates (NNDR) payments system from April 2024, with the DfE paying schools' Rates invoices to billing authorities directly. £5.785m was budgeted from the Schools Block DSG allocation, which DfE recouped from the LA's DSG during the year to meet the costs of central payments.

The remaining Schools Block funding of £618.863m was allocated to schools via the agreed funding formula for 2024-25, based on National Funding Formula methodologies as consulted on with schools and discussed with Schools Forum in autumn 2023.

Of the £618.863m allocated to schools, £0.918m was de-delegated from schools to be held centrally as agreed by Schools Forum.

At the end of the 2024-25 financial year, there was an underspend of (£0.109m) against the centrally retained Schools Block elements due to a combination of:

- an overspend on de-delegated budgets due to increased demand;
- an underspend of the Growth Fund due to final growth allocations being less than estimated for budgeting based on admissions (further detail below);

² All figures rounded to 3 decimal places

- a retrospective payment made for Brisley/Weaseham merger clarified to be an amalgamation by the DfE;
- an underspend relating to the closure of Marsham school in-year;
- refunds of de-delegation charges (if required) for in-year academy conversions;
- a small amount of historic rates refund income received.

As previously discussed, the budget for the growth fund is difficult to estimate, given the factors that can impact upon the final demand. This has resulted in under and overspends in previous years. For example, for 2024-25, the decisions of local academy trusts to offer additional places voluntarily to meet parental preference impacted on the need to support others from growth budget; this reflects the position in the Wymondham locality. For Diss and Thetford, despite high catchment figures in these areas, the demand did not materialise because of parental preference applying elsewhere.

The allocations made for growth in 2024-25 were as follows:

School	Budgeted Growth	Budgeted (£)	Actual Growth	Allocated (£)	Variance (£)
Sept'24 Growth:					
Ormiston Victory Academy	90	263,655	90	259,324	(4,331)
Trowse Primary	15	31,168	15	30,656	(512)
Downham Market Academy	30	87,885	30	86,441	(1,444)
North Norwich (Sewell Park Academy)	30	87,885	15	43,221	(44,664)
Wymondham High	30	87,885	0	0	(87,885)
Thetford Academy	30	87,885	0	0	(87,885)
Diss High	30	87,885	0	0	(87,885)
Wayland Academy	30	87,885	0	0	(87,885)
Greenpark Academy	30	62,335	20	40,874	(21,461)
Wymondham College Prep	30	62,335	0	0	(62,335)
Basic Need Contingency:	60	125,000			(125,000)
Hethersett Academy			35	100,848	100,848
St Michael's CE VA Junior			20	40,874	40,874
Pre-Opening Costs:					
Silfield Primary Academy		97,500		195,000 ³	97,500
Post-Opening Costs:					
Cringleford Prep		88,000		88,000	0

³ Only half of the pre-opening costs for Silfield Primary Academy were budgeted for 2024-25, but there was sufficient funds to pay the full £195,000 in 2024-25, reducing the 2025-26 requirement from Growth Fund.

	405	1,257,303	225	885,238	(372,065)
--	------------	------------------	------------	----------------	------------------

The (£0.109m) underspend on the Schools Block has been transferred to the Dedicated Schools Grant reserve and will contribute to mitigating the overall DSG deficit in line with DfE/CIPFA guidance.

Variances against each of the de-delegated budgets are detailed in the 'Schools Block: Centrally Retained Items' table below.

Table 1: Schools Block: Centrally Retained*

	Approved Budget £m	Outturn £m	Over / (Underspend) £m	Over / (Underspend) as a % of the budget
Retained items:				
Growth Fund	1.257	0.885	(0.372)	(30%)
De-delegation Staffing Costs	0.891	1.013	0.122	14%
Free Schools Meal Eligibility	0.027	0.027	0.000	0%
Other:				
Brisley/Weasenham Merger (retrospective, agreed at Schools Forum)		0.241	0.241	n/a
Academy Conversions in-year (returned de-delegation income)		0.024	0.024	n/a
School Closure (Marsham)		(0.123)	(0.123)	n/a
Historic Rates Refunds		(0.001)	(0.001)	n/a
Schools Block: Centrally Retained	2.175	2.066	(0.109m)	(5%)

*All figures rounded to 3 decimal places

2.2 Central Schools Services Block

The Central Schools Services Block overspent by £0.031m, due to under-estimation of the licences cost during budget-setting (the DfE usually provide exact licences costs for budgeting but had not done this for 2024-25 due to ongoing negotiations at the time).

Table 2: Central Schools Services Block*

	Approved Budget £m	Outturn £m	Over / (Underspend) £m	Over / (Underspend) as a % of the budget
Fees to boarding schools for pupils with SEN	0.100	0.100	0.000	0%
Servicing of Schools Forum	0.030	0.030	0.000	0%
Admissions	0.487	0.487	0.000	0%
LA responsibilities held for all schools ⁴	2.502	2.502	0.000	0%
Central Teachers' Costs from CSS (TPPG)	0.298	0.298	0.000	0%
Central Licences Scheme	0.813	0.875	0.062	8%
Less: DfE in-year CSS Block adjustment (towards increased licence costs)	0.000	(0.031)	(0.031)	n/a
Central School Services Block	4.231	4.262	0.031	<1%

*All figures rounded to 3 decimal places

The £0.031m overspend on the Central Schools Services Block has been transferred to the Dedicated Schools Grant reserve at year end as part of the DSG deficit.

2.3 High Needs Block

The High Needs Block overspend at year end was a total of £56.989m.

The High Needs Block had been initially set with a budget deficit of £39.543m for 2024-25 based on the DSG Management Plan submitted to the DfE as part of the Safety Valve programme in January 2024 (the budget was for higher expenditure than DSG HN block income). This budget variance is included within the overall overspend figure for 2024-25 as it represents a shortfall in DSG income compared to projected expenditure at the time of the DSG management plan.

The final outturn of £56.989m overspend for High Needs Block is, therefore, £17.446m higher than in the DSG Management Plan submitted in January 2024 and, therefore, the budgeted deficit. The outturn on other DSG blocks has offset this by (£1.111m) and, therefore, the overall DSG outturn for all blocks is approximately £16.335m higher than expected in the submitted original DSG Management Plan for 2024-25.

The High Needs Block outturn is a reduction of (£2.227m) compared to the estimated position reported to Schools Forum in March'25 (period 10 monitoring) of £59.216m

⁴ Includes contributions of £0.010m to the Norfolk Governors Network, £0.010m to the Norfolk Association of Special School Heads, £0.050m to Educate Norfolk

overspend for HN Block⁵. Since the period 10 forecast, the main reductions in the High Needs Block were:

- a reduction in the independent placements cost of (£1.092m), following final information about actual placements (prudent approach previously taken regarding those in the 'pipeline' and contingencies note required, including the crediting remaining CSBG and TPECG24 grants toward the cost of fees where additional costs already recognised through fee uplifts paid through the DSG
- a reduction in the projected final spend related to the Unexpected Situations Support Fund (Element 3) that had been previously prudently forecast (£0.413m);
- a review of several projections related to investment to bring new services online (e.g. Inclusion/AP, SRB support costs and contingency funding) resulted in final outturn lower than previous prudent forecasts (£0.607m);
- identification of a forecasting error in relation to the DSG contribution to CAMHS (£0.142m);

The table below shows the breakdown of the High Needs Block budget in accordance with how the budget was set and shared with Schools Forum.

⁵ There were forecast variances on the other blocks of £0.049m on Schools CSS Blocks and (£0.552m) on EY Block, providing an overall overspend forecast of c. £58.7m across the DSG.

Table 3: High Needs Block*

	Budget £m	Outturn £m	Over / (under)spend £m	Over / (under)spend as a % of budget
Maintained / Academy / Free Special Schools (inc. pupils in other LA's)	59.636	60.553	0.917	1.5%
Specialist Resource Bases & Deaf Resource Bases	10.088	9.128	(0.960)	(10%)
Independent Special Schools	44.482	54.882	10.400	23%
Alternative Provision	3.035	2.590	(0.445)	(15%)
Academy AP including permanent exclusion income	7.202	7.486	0.284	4%
Post-16 (Further Education)	10.835	10.877	0.042	<1%
Other Provisions ⁶	7.853	16.160	8.307	106%
Inclusion fund (including mainstream SEN / EHCP support)	34.848	34.357	(0.492)	(1%)
Speech & Language, Sensory, Youth Offending and Child & Adolescent Mental Health support & contributions	3.780	3.638	(0.142)	(4%)
High Needs Inclusion Infrastructure ⁷	6.811	6.518	(0.293)	(4%)
Other, including TPG/TPECG and new school start-up costs	2.660	2.695	0.035	1%
DfE in-year Adjustments (import/export)	0.000	(0.208)	(0.208)	n/a
Total Budget vs Expenditure	191.230	208.676	17.446	9%
Plus: DSG Shortfall (for Deficit Budget set from Reserves)			39.543	
High Needs Block Budget Vs Final Outturn	191.230		56.989	

*All figures rounded to 3 decimal places

The projected variances were shared in the March 2025 report ([section 2 of item 5.2, supplementary agenda](#)) to Schools Forum along with some high-level narrative regarding the significant variances to the budget set, including specialist placements, Specialist Resource Bases, Inclusion Funding (Element 3), and children not on a school roll and can be referred. The final variances are detailed below and are in line with that narrative.

The largest variance during the year was for independent special school placements with an overspend of **£10.400m** due to £8.560m. At the time that the budget was set, there had been relative stability in growth of the independent sector and the sector was indicating it was saturated, along with significant other provision opening, which meant that there had been a forecast reduction in the number of places for 2024/25. However, this did not occur and there was subsequent growth resulting in 1054 placements at the end of the year compared to a budget for 986.

Other significant areas of variance (large value or percentage) were:

- Other provisions – total overspend of **£8.307m**. This area comprises of a number of elements all increased due to significant additional demand including:

⁶ Other provisions include Section 19 costs, Medical Needs provision, various other provisions and therapies to meet specific needs, and personal budgets.

⁷ High Needs Inclusion Infrastructure includes contribution to School and Community Teams, Services to Home Educators, Sensory Support, Learning Support, Access Through Technology, Critical Incidents, Specialist Learning Teachers and SEMH Practitioners, HN infrastructure for LFI.

- Section 19 – overspend of £5.696m due to increase in demand of 187 places for 2024-25 (456 increasing to 643 places). There was a significant increase in demand after the budget was set that meant the year started with a higher number than anticipated. Additionally, there was reduced capacity to at UET Pathfinder than anticipated, particularly with the number of pupils staying long term in this service significantly increasing.
- Medical Needs - overspend of £0.853m due to an increase in demand of 168 places for 2024-25 (296 increasing to 464 places) at any one point in time, partially due to pupils remaining supported by the service for longer.
- SEN Additional/Other Provisions/Therapies/Personal Budgets - overspend of £1.758m. The increase in demand (additionally 111 places during the year) reflected that seen within section 19 and medical needs. Additionally, at the time the budget was set, there had been anticipated reductions as other provision came online, but this has not occurred (reflecting the much-discussed ongoing pressures in the system).
- Maintained special schools/academies/free schools – an overspend of **£0.917m** mainly due to increase of 58 places compared to budget (2232 places) to actual (2290 places) for 2024-25. Additionally, there is an overall trend of bandings shifting toward the higher cost bands continues, with more pupils having revised bandings agreed during the year.
- Specialist Resource Bases – an underspend of (**£0.960m**) due to delays to 2 new SRB bases, some support staff costs, specialist interventions and contingency not fully required, removal of an internal recharge for provision, and additional SRB placement income collected. Predicting opening dates for new SRBs can be very challenging due to the potential for delay within various elements of the process, including planning, school organisation and construction timelines. For the purposes of revenue budgeting, the earliest opening date on the critical path was presumed at the time of preparing the budget. During the year 46 additional SRB places were added (48 new places across 5 new SRBs, a cessation of payment for 8 places at an existing SRB where there is a pause in placements with the school, and 6 new places added at an existing SRB).
- Inclusion Funding (including mainstream SEN/EHCP Support and Inclusion / AP support) – the 2024/25 final allocations outturn is £35.686m, which includes an allowance for Unexpected Situations Support Fund requests that are awaiting decision. Due to the 2023/24 recoupments of -£1.329m, this means that there is an overall underspend of (**£0.492m**). This includes an overspend of £0.080m for Early Years Complex Needs cases from High Needs Block.
- Alternative Provision – similar to the SRB bases, the revenue budget presumed an earliest possible delivery of bases whilst being aware that critical path for delivery had a number of variables that could increase the timeline. This has resulted in an underspend of (**£0.445m**) as the timelines have become clearer, alongside an element of duplication elsewhere in the budget. Partially offset by an increase in provision for 4 pupils in AP (Catch 22 and Pinetrees) as well as £51k of additional 1:1 support agreed.
- Academy AP including permanent exclusion income – an overspend of **£0.284m** including additional 1:1 support cost of £0.090m. The remaining variance was due to demand exceeding expectations at the time that the budget was set, partially offset by PEX income of (£0.705m) exceeding expectations, which included

regulation charges, and the additional local charging arrangement agreed with Schools Forum historically.

- Speech & Language, Sensory, Youth Offending and Child & Adolescent Mental Health support & contributions – a reduced contribution agreed for CAMHS resulted in an underspend of (£0.142m).

In addition to variances to the original budget set, a further variance was created due to DSG High Needs Block adjustments, with the LA receiving additional HN Block DSG income in-year of (£0.208m) due to recalculation of the 'import/export' adjustment in Norfolk's favour.

2.4 Early Years Block

The Early Years Block underspent by (£1.033m) constituted of two parts: (i) a final adjustment to the 2023-24 Early Years Block of (£0.470m) in Norfolk's favour due to over-estimation of the 2023-24 creditor in March'24, and (ii) an underspend of (£0.563m) against the 2024-25 EY Block allocation, which is the expected final position based on an estimated clawback of 2024-25 DSG of £2.348m for the January 2025 Part Time Equivalent final adjustment that is expected to happen after year-end in July 2025.

The LA had planned the formula for 2024-25 based on the initial published allocation of £71.334m, later increased in-year by the DfE to £75.912m based on updated Census data.

The final EY Block allocation for disadvantaged 2-year-olds and for 3 and 4-year-old funding will be based on Part Time Equivalent (PTE) data as follows:

- $5/12^{\text{th}}$ x January'24 census to cover the April'24-August'24 period.
- $7/12^{\text{th}}$ x January'25 census to cover Sept'24-March'25 period.

The final EY Block allocation for working parent entitlements (including children of 9 months old up to and including 2-year-olds) will be based on Part Time Equivalent (PTE) data as follows:

- Additional headcounts that took place in the summer and autumn of 2024, and the January 2025 census.

The estimation of the year end accrual is necessary to show a more realistic position for the financial year compared to not entering an adjustment (some LAs choose not to). Without the accrual, which suggests DSG income for 24-25 will reduce when the final July 2025 adjustment is made by DfE, the EY Block would show a much larger underspend for the financial year, but this would then be subsequently adjusted outside of the financial year. The LA wishes to report the most realistic position of the underspend for the 24-25 financial year and chooses to estimate the accrual for final DSG income in the accounts. This estimate is difficult to achieve with 100% accuracy because the LA does not receive the data submitted to DfE by academies with nursery classes, so has to estimate using data submitted through the EY portal.

An accrual has been entered into the year-end accounts for the DSG adjustment expected to take place in July 2025 based on the census in January 2025, which is estimated to reduce the final EY Block allocation for 2024-25 from the current published figure of (£75.912m) to (£73.564m). A further (£0.470m) of income was received in 2024-25 due to an overestimation of DSG claw back at the previous year end of the

final 2023-24 EY adjustment received in July 2024. Together, this brings the total income at outturn for the financial year to (£74.034m).

Excluding the (£0.470m) adjusted retrospectively for 2023-24 and based on the expectation of a final DSG claw-back estimated at £2.348m in July 2025, the EY Block underspent by (£0.563m) in 2024-25, which is less than a 1% variance in-year.

The challenges described in relation to estimating the 2024-25 clawback are similar to those experienced in relation to the 2023-24 clawback. The best estimation was made at the time using the data that was available to the LA, with the resulting clawback being over-estimated by (£0.470m). Unfortunately, the DfE do not publish their methodology for the final block calculation and given that the LA do not have access to all the data in a timely manner to be able to estimate it, it is difficult to identify changes in methodology that could improve accuracy.

The LA did approach the DfE about the possibility of distributing this funding to the early years sector during 2024-25. However, the DfE advised that the only way of doing this would be to submit a disapplication request to amend Norfolk's formula, and that this would not be considered by the DfE unless the LA were able to provide accurate estimates for the 2024-25 position. Unfortunately, the LA does not have access to the relevant data to be able to make such an estimate (see above) and so the submission of a disapplication request was not possible.

Based on the estimated final DSG adjustments expected in July'25, the key EY Block variances are (approximately but rounded) as shown on the table 4:

- Extra EY Block DSG of (£0.470m) in 2024-25 accounts generated from an over-estimated claw-back of DSG in 2023-24 following year end in July 2024;
- An underspend of (£0.451m) of SEN Inclusion Fund due to slightly reduced demand and maximising of DAF grant for eligible pupils for which expenditure incurred within SENIF is allowed to be offset by any remaining grant;
- An underspend of (£0.112m) from the agreed 0.25% contingency of £0.174m, unused except for meeting the cost of EYSG payments made to providers compared to the final amount received by the LA following a claw-back in summer 2024, with nowhere else to fund the shortfall from;
- An underspend of (£0.057m) on overall entitlements funding;
- An overspend of £0.055m on the EY Pupil Premium, with demand being higher than the final estimated funded amount to the LA.

Table 4: Early Years Block*

£m	Approved Budget (LA split of Dec'23 DSG)	DfE Adjustment to Jan'24 PTE Data (Mar'25 DSG)	DfE Early Years Block March'25 (Adjustment plus LA split)	Year End Outturn	Over/ (Underspend) to March'25 DSG Income		Jan'25 Data Creditor estimated for DSG Adjust Jul'25	Adjusted (estimated) Final over/ (Underspend)**	Over/ (Underspend) as a % of the Final EY Block Funding 24/25
Early Years Block	A	B	C (A+B)	D	E=D-C		F	G=E+F	H=G/(C-F)
Under 2's Place Funding	6.917	3.955	10.872	9.484	(1.388)		0.196	(1.192)	(11%)
2-Year-Old Place Funding	15.409	2.743	18.152	17.585	(0.567)		0.628	0.061	<1%
3 and 4-year-Old funding (inc. MNS)	42.492	(1.811)	40.681	40.242	(0.439)		1.513	1.074	3%
EY Block Contingency 0.25%	0.174	0.000	0.174	0.062	(0.112)		0.000	(0.112)	(64%)*
SEN Inclusion Fund (2/3/4yr old)	2.082	0.000	2.082	1.631	(0.451)		0.000	(0.451)	(22%)
Disability Access Fund	0.534	0.000	0.534	0.534	0.000		0.000	0.000	0%
Early years Pupil Premium	0.949	(0.308)	0.641	0.685	0.044		0.011	0.055	9%
Early Years Funded Services	2.776	0.00	2.776	2.776	0.000		0.000	0.000	0%
Initial 2024-25 Budgeted DSG	71.333	4.579	75.912	73.001	(2.911)		2.348	(0.563)	
DfE In-Year Adjustment	4.579								
Published DSG at March'25	75.912								
Estimated July'25 Adj for 2024/25	(2.348)				2.348				
	73.564								
Final 2023/24 EY Block Adj	0.470				(0.470)			(0.470)	n/a
Estimated Final EY Block 24/25	74.034				(1.033)			(1.033)	1%

*All figures are shown to 3 d.p. which affects casting down of figures (totals are correct to 3.d.p.)

**The total underspend per line is based on the initial budget plus in-year DfE adjustments (bringing EY Block income to £75.912m by March'25) plus an estimated creditor for the final adjustment to DSG that the DfE will make in July'25 based on January'24 census data. Note that this differs from how the LA may have split the increased DSG (£75.912m) if that higher amount had been initially received, as there may have been more initially apportioned to SENIF/Central Costs/Contingency based on the higher figure. The overall outturn is unaffected by this.

***The only cost charged to contingency was for an amount of EYSG grant that the DfE had clawed back, leaving the LA's EYSG over-allocated (providers had received additional funding compared to the final allocation from DfE) with nowhere else to charge the cost.

Table 5: Early Years Block Hours/PTEs

Funding element	Hours for Original Budget (Dec'23)	PTE for Original Budget (Dec'23 DSG)	Hours for in-Year Adjusted Budget (Mar'25)	PTE for in-year Adjusted Budget (Mar'25 DSG)	Hours for Estimated Final DSG Adjustment (July'25 DSG)	PTE for Estimated Final DSG Adjustment (July'25 DSG)	Hours for Outturn ⁸	PTE ⁹ for Outturn
Under 2's Place Funding	709,724	1,245.13	1,087,110	1,907.21	1,068,385	1,874.36	976,057	1,712.38
2-Year-Old Place Funding	2,151,858	3,775.19	2,508,086	4,400.15	2,426,558	4,257.12	2,464,625	4,323.90
3 and 4-year-Old funding (inc. MNS)	8,284,340	14,533.93	7,958,716	13,962.66	7,683,982	13,480.67	7,836,856	13,748.87
EY Block Contingency 0.25%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
SEN Inclusion Fund (2/3/4yr old)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Disability Access Fund	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Early years Pupil Premium	1,395,269	2,447.84	941,845	1,652.36	925,748	1,624.12	990,982	1,738.56
Early Years Funded Services	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

As with other blocks, the (£1.033m) underspend on the Early Years Block has been transferred to the Dedicated Schools Grant reserve and will contribute to mitigating the overall DSG deficit in line with DfE/CIPFA guidance.¹⁰

⁸ Base hours. Note that final hours funded to providers are not the same rate as funded to the LA due to supplements, contingency, SENIF, and funding for Centrally retained EY services. This difference forms part of the outturn variances in £m from the prior table, when converted from hours into funding variances.

⁹ PTE calculation for outturn has been based on hours/15hrs/38wks to give equivalence to the budget figure through DSG, giving an average PTE (due to stretched offer hours).

¹⁰ The regulations require the local authority to assess the deficit across the schools' budget. It is not permissible to split up the schools' budget, for example to say that a surplus on the schools, central services or early years block will not be used to offset the deficit on the high needs block.

3. Schools Balances

The Scheme for Financing Schools in Norfolk sets out the local framework within which delegated financial management is undertaken. Appendix 1 provides details of the Balance Redistribution Mechanism for information.

The table below compares Norfolk maintained schools' balances as at 31st March 2025 versus balances at 31st March 2024. In summary, the total of all maintained school balances as of 31st March 2025 is (£13.914m), which is a reduction of £0.906m in total compared to the previous total balances of (£14.820m) at the end of 2023-24. However, once the balances related to academy conversions and other in-year changes (e.g. school closures/amalgamations) have been adjusted for, the movement in total balances between years is a reduction of £0.721m.

For all of the tables below, please note that federations of schools report as a single balance but cover more than one school.

Table 6: School Balances 31st March 2024 vs 31st March 2025 (£000s)

School type	at 31/03/2024			Balance b/f for schools Academised during year	Balance b/f for schools Closed/ Amalgamated/ Federated during year	at 31/03/2025			Change between years	
	Surplus Balance	Deficit Balance	Total			Surplus Balance	Deficit Balance	Total	Surplus Balance	Deficit Balance
	(£'000)	(£'000)	(£'000)			(£'000)	(£'000)	(£'000)	(£'000)	(£'000)
Nursery	227	0	227	0	0	293	0	293	66	0
Mainstream	13,042	(1,469)	11,574	66	119	11,975	(1,873)	10,102	(1,067)	(405)
Special	3,011	0	3,011	0	0	3,516	0	3,516	505	0
Pooled Funds	7	0	7	0	0	3	0	3	(4)	0
Totals	16,288	(1,469)	14,820	66	119	15,787	(1,873)	13,914	(501)	(405)

The balances in the grey columns are no longer part of the overall balances but were included as at 31st March 2024. Therefore, the surplus balance figure as at 31st March 2025 has reduced for LA maintained schools by £0.316m as follows:

Surplus Balances as of 31 st March 2024	£16.288m
Academies no longer within balances as of 31 st March 2025	(£0.066m)
Closed/Federated/amalgamated no longer in balances	(£0.119m)
Balance as of 31 st March 2024 for comparison	£16.103m
Surplus Balances as of 31 st March 2025	£15.787m
Reduction of surplus balances between years	£0.316m

To aid understanding of the surplus and deficit balances, it is useful to consider the number of schools / federations that they relate to, as displayed in the table below. This shows that the number of LA maintained schools (including federated budgets) with deficits at 31st March 2025 has reduced by 5 (from 19 to 14), and the number of LA maintained schools (including federated budgets) and the number of schools with surplus balances at 31st March 2025 has reduced by 3 overall, but if removing the academy conversions and closed school from the comparison has increased by 5 from 117 (125 less 7 in-year academy conversions and 1 closure) to 122.

Table 7: School Balances – number of schools

School type	at 31/03/2024			No. of schools Academised during 2024-25	No. of schools Closed/ Amalgamated/ Federated during 2024-25	as at 31/3/2025			Change between years	
	Surplus Balance	Deficit Balance	Total			Surplus Balance	Deficit Balance	Total	Surplus Balance	Deficit Balance
Nursery	3	0	3	0	0	3	0	3	0	0
Mainstream	112	19	131	7	1	109	14	123	(3)	(5)
Special	9	0	9	0	0	9	0	9	0	0
Pooled Funds	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0
Totals	125	19	144	7	1	122	14	136	(3)	(5)

As additional context, there is variance as to the level of surplus and deficit balance that is held by Norfolk schools/federations, and the initial table below shows the average level of surplus and deficit. The following table shows the average value of balances by each type of school (the percentage of balances compared with the overall budget).

Table 8: Average balance per sector £000's

Type of school	Average Surplus Balance (£'000)	Average Deficit Balance (£'000)
Nursery	98	0
Mainstream	110	134
Special	391	0
Pooled Funds	3	0
Total	129	134

Table 9: Comparison of level of balance to budget share

Type of School	Position at 31/03/2025 (%)
Nursery	28.57
Mainstream	5.74
Special	9.20
Pooled Funds	0.00
All Schools	6.47

4. Financial Implications

Overall, the Dedicated Schools Grant was overspent by £55.878m in the 2024-25 financial year, resulting in a combined, cumulative year-on-year overspend on the Dedicated Schools Grant of £131.891m that is carried forward to the 2025-26 financial year, after accounting for the contribution from the LA made during 2024-25.

As previously reported, the Norfolk is currently working with the DfE and their specialist advisors as part of the Enhanced Monitoring and Support process in relation to Norfolk's Safety Valve agreement. Submissions have been made to the DfE in line with their requests and the LA is optimistic that agreement can be reached with the DfE to restart their contributions to offsetting the cumulative deficit, that are currently on hold. The medium term DSG financial plan was shared with Schools Forum at its March 2025 meeting, and the LA are expecting to review this (along with the longer-term plan) once the awaited SEN reforms are announced by the Government later this term.

Maintained schools' balances have reduced from £14.820m as of 31 March 2024 to £13.914m as at 31 March 2025, with a reduction in the number of schools that have cumulative deficit balances though an increase in the total deficit held by those schools. The LA will continue to work with those schools to seek to return them to a cumulative surplus position but there is a risk to the LA that any remaining deficit presents a financial risk if a schools with a deficit were required to academise.

Officer Contact

If you have any questions about matters contained or want to see copies of any assessments, e.g. equality impact assessment, please get in touch with:

If you have any questions about matters contained in this paper, please get in touch with:

Officer Name:
Martin Brock

Tel No:
01603 223800

Email address:
martin.brock@norfolk.gov.uk



If you need this report in large print, audio, Braille, alternative format or in a different language please contact 0344 800 8020 or 0344 800 8011 (textphone) and we will do our best to help.

Appendix 1: Balance Redistribution Mechanism

The Scheme for Financing Schools in Norfolk sets out the local framework within which delegated financial management is undertaken.

The legitimate purposes that balances may be held for are:

- Surpluses derived from sources other than the budget share e.g. contributions from parents for school trips where expenditure will not be incurred until the following year.
- As there will be no general contingency limit, a level of redistribution will be introduced if the school cannot provide sufficient evidence to justify its surplus. The Local Authority will reserve the right where schools have consistently built up significant excessive uncommitted balances to redistribute if deemed appropriate.
- Voluntary Aided schools are allowed to hold revenue monies to fund governors' liabilities towards DfE grant aided capital works. Evidence of the cost and timing of the project will be required to support this.
- Surpluses derived from Pupil Premium funding - this would mean that, for the purposes of calculating the contingency sum, the Pupil Premium would be excluded, but would be shown as a separate category in its' own right.
 - The amount of Pupil Premium allowed to be carried forward should not exceed the sum received in that financial year.
 - The brought forward sum for Pupil Premium will be pre-populated on the form.
- Surpluses derived from PE Sports Premium funding - this would mean that, for the purposes of calculating the contingency sum, the PE Sports Premium would be excluded, but would be shown as a separate category in its' own right.
 - The amount of PE Sports Premium allowed to be carried forward should not exceed the sum received in that financial year.
 - The brought forward sum for PE Sports Premium will be pre-populated on the form.
- As an exceptional circumstance, schools may use this category if an individual allocation amounting to more than 1% of the final budget share was allocated after the 1st February.
- Surpluses derived from community facility activities e.g. nursery that have been coded to I17 and E31/E32"

Building Maintenance Fund;-

- For mainstream schools that do not contract into BMPP the total amount lodged should be up to a maximum of £650 per pupil on roll at the time of the previous October Census, or £360,000, whichever is the lower.
- For special schools that do not contract into BMPP the total amount lodged can be up to a maximum of £815 per place at the time of the previous October Census.
- Schools with community assets that are required to have a sinking fund for regular repair and maintenance of those assets e.g. swimming pools, Multi-Use Games Areas (MUGAs) etc, may also lodge funds in Schools Building Maintenance Holding Account.
- Once lodged, funds cannot be returned to the school. The funds can only be used to fund building maintenance expenditure.

Schools Forum

Item No: 8

Report title:	National Insurance Contributions Grants 2025-26
Date of meeting:	9 May 2025

Executive summary

This paper sets out information about the National Insurance Contributions (NIC) Grants for 2025-26.

Schools Forum are asked to:

- **Consider the information provided about the NIC grants for 2025-26 for all provider types and provide any feedback or comment on the NIC element of the overall Core Schools Budget Grant that requires consultation with high needs settings.**

1. National Insurance Grant

The DfE published information for a new National Insurance Contributions (NICs) grant and Early Years National Insurance Contributions (EY NICS) grant for 25-26 in March'25. Nationally, this will provide schools and high needs settings with over £930 million in financial year 2025-26 to support them with their increased NICs costs. The DfE are also providing £25 million in respect of schools with early years provision and £155 million for post-16 schools and academies and further education colleges. Taken together, this is an increase of over £1 billion in the financial year 2025 to 2026.

The funding provided through the grant will be to support settings with NICs costs relating to both teachers and support staff, as they are both affected by the increase to NICs.

This funding from DfE will be split between mainstream schools, special schools and alternative provision (AP), local authority centrally employed teachers (CETs) (including support staff), early years (EY) settings (school run), and post-16 settings. The split reflects relative pupil and place numbers, and core funding amounts, across these different types of provision.

1.1 Mainstream schools/academies

Mainstream schools will be paid at the published rates by the LA when the funding is received from the DfE in September 2025 (or very shortly thereafter if received at the end of the month), and mainstream academies will be paid by the DfE in October 2025. Payments will include an initial payment for special units (SRB/DRBs) for April-August'25 based on 2024-25 academic year place numbers. An additional payment will be made in March 2026 for special units covering the period September-March'25 based on 2025-26 academic year place numbers.

The DfE expects to publish school level allocations online in May 2025.

The funding rates for 2025 to 2026 financial year are:

- a basic per-pupil rate of £78 for primary pupils, including pupils in reception
- a basic per-pupil rate of £68 for key stage 3 pupils
- a basic per-pupil rate of £77 for key stage 4 pupils
- a lump sum of £2400
- a FSM6 per-pupil rate of £75 per eligible primary pupil
- a FSM6 per-pupil rate of £60 per eligible secondary pupil

The DfE have published a calculator tool for mainstream schools online here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67dab91e69606cdea9e08839/NICS_2025-26_Calculator.xlsx

The DfE will make an additional payment to mainstream academies for the period April'26-August'26 as per the usual arrangements due to lagged funding through the National Funding Formula.

The DfE will roll funding for mainstream schools into the DSG Schools Block National Funding Formula for 2026-27. The special unit element of the funding will be outside of that, but DfE have not yet confirmed how that element will be rolled into 2026-27 and have stated that they will confirm it in due course.

1.2 Early Years

The grant will provide additional funding in respect of early years provision for the following EY settings:

- schools (both maintained and academies)
- governor-run academies and maintained nursery schools
- all other maintained nursery schools

The EY NICs grant will be paid by the DfE to the LA in September 2025, and the authority will be required to pass on the full amount of funding to early years providers based on local Part Time Equivalent (PTE) data.

The DfE have published the funding rates for Norfolk as follows (in line with national base rates, with authorities only receiving additional rates if they have an Area Cost Adjustment e.g. London Fringe):

Norfolk Base Rate	£ Rate per PTE
3- and 4-year-olds	58
2-year-olds	81
Under 2s	106

2.3 Centrally Employed Teachers

The LA will receive funding to fund the increased cost of Centrally Employed Teachers, funded on a per-teacher basis from the 2024 schools' workforce census, as well as an amount for centrally employed support staff.

The rate/allocation for Norfolk will be confirmed following publication of the schools' workforce census data in the summer.

2.4 High Needs Settings / NIC within Core Schools Budget Grant 25-26

Nationally £125m of NICs funding is for specialist high needs settings, including AP, is being allocated through the [core schools budget grant \(CSBG\) for 2025 to 2026](#).

The CSBG will provide additional NIC funding to local authorities, to pass on to the following special schools and AP schools:

- maintained special schools
- special academies and free schools
- pupil referral units

- AP academies and free schools
- independent special schools

The NICs element of the CSBG can also be used by local authorities to help with increases in fees for high needs provision in special post-16 institutions (SPIs) and independent training and learning providers (ITPs/ILPs).

The published rate is £496 for the NIC element of CSBG is per-place. The DfE will confirm the overall level of grant for Norfolk in May 2025, including making the first payment, with a second payment in September 2025.

For the NICs element of the 2025-26 CSBG, which does not have a 2024-25 equivalent, the LA may use the rates that the DfE uses for its allocations or vary the amounts per place in recognition that the staffing and other costs schools face can vary between individual schools, following consultation with their schools.

The DfE's guidance states that the LA should seek swiftly to confirm the allocations for individual special schools and AP schools, providing them with the earliest possible certainty over their 2025-26 budgets.

2.4.1 Consultation

It will be necessary for the LA to run a consultation with affected schools/AP providers for the allocation of £496 per-place, or a different amount/basis, of NIC funding in 2025-26 during the summer term to be able to confirm allocations as soon as possible.

The LA welcomes any feedback or comments including proposals for any alternative basis for distribution of the grant to special schools, academies, and AP providers to be included in the consultation.

More information about the NIC grant is available at: [National Insurance contributions \(NICs\) grant and early years National Insurance contributions \(EY NICs\) grant for 2025 to 2026 - GOV.UK](#)

2.5 Post-16

The post-16 NICs grant will provide additional funding for the following mainstream settings that receive annual funding allocations from Department for Education (DfE) for the provision of post-16 education:

- maintained school and academy sixth forms
- 16 to 19 academies
- 16 to 19 schools
- further education (FE) colleges
- sixth-form colleges
- designated institutions (including the new designated institutions that form part of higher education provider group structures)
- local authorities

The grant will cover the period April 2025 to March 2026, and will be paid by the DfE in a single payment in September 2025, either via the LA for maintained schools or directly by DfE for all other providers. The DfE is aiming to publish allocations in May.

The calculation will be made up of 3 components, depending on the situation:

1. All settings delivering 16-19 provision based on a percentage share calculated from 16-19 programme funding for the 2024-25 academic year.
2. Colleges delivering non-16-to-19-year-old activity based on a percentage share calculated from non-16-to-19-year-old income in the 2023-24 financial statements.
3. Centrally employed teachers (CETs) for local authorities based on headcount and salary costs of CET in adult education for the 2023-24 academic year.

More information about the Post-16 NIC grant is available at: [Post-16 National Insurance contributions grant methodology: April 2025 to March 2026 - GOV.UK](#)

Officer Contact

If you have any questions about matters contained or want to see copies of any assessments, e.g. equality impact assessment, please get in touch with:

If you have any questions about matters contained in this paper, please get in touch with:

Officer Name:	Tel No:	Email address:
Martin Brock	01603 223800	martin.brock@norfolk.gov.uk



If you need this report in large print, audio, Braille, alternative format or in a different language please contact 0344 800 8020 or 0344 800 8011 (textphone) and we will do our best to help.

Schools Forum

Item No: 9

Report title:	Early Years Expansion Grant 2025-26
Date of meeting:	9 May 2025

Executive summary

This paper sets out information about the Early Years Expansion Grant for 2025-26.

The information about the Early Years Expansion Grant for 2025-26, including the agreed methodology of allocation, is provided for information only.

In December 2024, the Department for Education (DfE) announced a new grant of £75m to support early years education. This grant helps early years providers prepare for the expansion of early education entitlements for working parents starting in September 2025.

The grant focuses on children aged 2 years and below, using specific formulas to calculate hourly rates for each local authority. It is a one-time payment for the financial year 2025 to 2026.

Local authorities in England received notification of their grant allocations in February 2025. The funds will be paid to LAs in July 2025 and must be passed in full to providers by the end of August.

Local authorities must ensure that the grant is only given to early years providers delivering the government's early education entitlements.

Norfolk's allocation is £919,056.

Although the grant conditions do not require LAs to consult with Schools Forum as to how early years' expansion grant funding is passed on to early years providers, LAs are encouraged to engage with providers to share details of how and when they plan to allocate the funding. In line with this guidance, LA Officers have discussed how best to disseminate the grant with our Early Years Consultative Group ahead of the deadline for confirming allocations to providers in April. It was agreed to allocate the funding with the following methodology:

- The grant supports registered early years providers delivering the Government's childcare expansion from 1 September 2025 that have signed a 2025-26 funding agreement by 31 July 2025
- The grant will be paid to private, voluntary, and independent sector providers only
- The award will be paid in August 2025 where all criteria has been met
- There are 462 providers eligible based on our data
- Awards will be determined using Spring 2025 claim data as of 9 April 2025
- A minimum payment will be set at £250 for 47 providers, all other providers will be paid at £0.885 per hour
- The award must be used by providers in relation to any costs incurred to deliver under 2 and 2-year-old funding (e.g. resources, staff, increasing places)

We informed providers on 10 April 2025 what the allocation for their setting will be.

There is an expectation that LAs will monitor how the grant is used.

The view of the Early Years Consultative Group, including school representatives, was that the grant should not be paid to school-run settings except for schools with separate Ofsted registration for children aged under 2. The group were concerned that early years settings (except schools) were not being given access to the National Insurance Contributions (NIC) grant (see separate paper on this agenda) and were aware of the financial pressures facing these provisions at the same time as they were seeking to expand to meet the Government's expectations. Therefore, they wanted to maximise the funding for those settings. School run settings, both maintained and academies, governor run settings (run under section 27 community powers, Education Act 2002) and nursery schools will receive an alternative grant, NIC (National Insurance contributions) grant. This funding is to support them to meet these additional costs that will, in turn, reduce the financial pressures they are facing whether they are expanding their provision or not.

More info about the grant is available at: [Early years expansion grant 2025 to 2026: conditions of grant and operational guidance for local authorities - GOV.UK](#)

Officer Contact

If you have any questions about matters contained or want to see copies of any assessments, e.g. equality impact assessment, please get in touch with:

If you have any questions about matters contained in this paper, please get in touch with:

Officer Name:
Jo-anne Lamb

Tel No:
01603 638096

Email address:
jo-anne.lamb@norfolk.gov.uk

Schools Forum

Item No: 10

Report title:	Norfolk Schools Forum Constitution and Ways of Working
Date of meeting:	9 May 2025

Executive Summary

The Norfolk Schools Forum Constitution is undergoing a review. This draft constitution will be presented to the July 2025 Schools Forum meeting.

This report proposes a forward plan for academic year 25-26 including the reduction to 5 planned meetings.

School Forum are asked to decide:

- The reduced number of meetings and their approximate timings for 2025/26.

1 Introduction

- 1.1** The Schools' Forum is reviewing the constitution. The draft will be presented at the July meeting for discussion and agreement.
- 1.2** In May and June, officers will collaborate with members of the Schools Forum in developing the constitution.
- 1.3** The objective of this short report is to propose a revised forward plan for the academic year from September 2025 to August 2026, including **provisional** dates for Schools Forum meetings (please note these are subject to change and we will confirm as soon as possible).

2 Forward Plan

- 2.1** The draft forward plan is provided as Appendix 1.

- 2.2 National guidance requires a minimum of 4 meetings per year. Historically, Norfolk has normally had 6 meetings (2 per term) and there were a number of years where the March meeting was cancelled due to lack of business. In the 2024-25 academic year, there have been two additional meetings agreed due to required business.
- 2.3 The new plan proposes reducing this to 5 meetings annually. This is to support the sufficient planning and preparation of both Officers and Forum Members and to enable effective and efficient use of everybody's time.
- 2.4 To inform Forum's decision making, the following provides a high-level list of the required business of the Forum including any requirements, to show alignment with the proposed Forward Plan:
- **Consideration and recommendation of the consultation content, as appropriate, in particular for the autumn DSG consultation** – historically Forum has undertaken initial consideration of the DSG consultation in the second half of the summer term to inform the preparation by the LA with a final review in September prior to publication – it is suggested that this pattern continues
 - **Consideration of DSG consultation outcomes and associated recommendations, including any proposed changes to the schools funding formula** – this is required in time to inform political decision making within the LA and in advance of APT deadline at the end of January; in practice, as in previous years, the LA would plan for this to be completed at the November meeting to enable relevant work to be completed ahead of the APT deadline and political decision making
 - **Recommendations in relation to the maintained schools funding formula, including Growth and Falling Rolls Funds, Minimum Funding Guarantee levels, Notional SEN budget and allocation methodology, and methodology for ensuring affordability (e.g. capping of gains or adjustments to factor values)** – this is required in time to inform political decision making within the LA and in advance of APT deadline at the end of January; in practice, as in previous years, the LA would plan for this to be completed at the November meeting to enable relevant work to be completed ahead of the APT deadline and political decision making
 - **Approval of block transfers** – the DfE publish the date after Schools Forum dates are normally set, but would be expected to be in November; therefore, planned for the November meeting, if required
 - **Approval of centrally held funding** – required in advance of the budget being set by the LA; planned for the November meeting as per previous years
 - **Approvals of de-delegations** – required in advance of the budget being set in January; planned for the November meeting as per previous years
 - **Consideration of the DSG budget** – required in advance of the budget being set by the LA; planned for the January meeting as per previous years for a final view, with provisional information shared at autumn meetings.

- **Recommendation of the Early Years funding formula** – this is required in time to inform political decision making within the LA and in advance of APT deadline at the end of January; in practice, as in previous years, the LA would plan to do this at the earliest opportunity when information is available from the DfE and any consultation is complete, so either at the November meeting or January meeting
- **View on pupil variations, where a disapplication request is not required** – as in previous years, would expect to provide the provisional variations at the January meeting and the final variations at the March meeting
- **Consultation on additional grants where required or recommended by DfE** – such consideration would need to be brought to any relevant meeting as it will be dependent upon the timing of grant announcements, the nature of the grants, timing of decisions required and guidance of DfE
- **Disapplication requests for other reasons** – such consideration would need to be brought to any relevant meeting as it will be dependent upon the timing of grant announcements, the nature of the grants, timing of decisions required and guidance of DfE
- **Scheme for Financing Schools updates** – where possible, these would be aligned with the timing of the DSG consultation considerations to allow for required consultation to be undertaken at the same time

3 Key Considerations

3.1 Schools Forum are asked to decide:

- The reduced number of meetings and their approximate timings for 2025/26.

Officer Contact

If you have any questions about matters contained in this paper, please get in touch with:

Officer Name: Samantha Fletcher **Email address:** samantha.fletcher@norfolk.gov.uk

Appendix 1 SCHOOLS FORUM **DRAFT** FORWARD PLAN – 2025/26 Academic Year

I – Information & Discussion D – Decision

Autumn Term		Spring Term		Summer Term	
Early autumn: September 24th 2025		Early spring: January 20th 2026		Late summer: June 26th 2026	
Strategic Oversight Report	I	Election of Chair/Vice Chair	D	Strategic Oversight report including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reports from Subgroups (as appropriate) • Review of Proportionality and Membership • Schools Forum meeting dates 26-27 	D
Provisional DSG Allocations for 2026/27 and Autumn DSG Consultation, including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mainstream Schools' Funding Formula • Early Years Funding Formula • Scheme for Financing Schools updates 	D	Strategic Oversight Report	I		
		Final DSG Allocations for 2026/27 and Proposed DSG Budget 2026/27	D		
	D	Pupil variations	I	Dedicated Schools Grant Outturn and preparation for 26/27 consultation	D
				Annual Audit Report (Norfolk Audit Service)	I
				Updates on Scheme for Financing Schools (Financial Regulations)	D
Late autumn: November 26th 2026		Late spring / early summer: March 17th 2026			
Strategic Oversight report (including reports from Subgroups as appropriate)	I				
DSG consultation outcomes and recommendations on funding formulae	D	Strategic Oversight report (including reports from Subgroups as appropriate)	I		
Block transfers, if required	D	Final pupil variations (only if changed from January)	I		
Disapplication requests, if required	D				
De-delegation/Central Schools Services Block	D				
Centralised items	D				

Schools' Forum

Item No: 11

Report title:	Norfolk Audit Services – Annual Audit Report
Date of meeting:	9 May 2025

Executive summary

This report is to update the School's Forum on the internal audit coverage for 2024/25, as well as the planned audit coverage for 2025/26

The summary of 2024/25 audit coverage is provided for information.

Schools Forum are asked to

- **consider and comment on which audit areas they consider as higher risk to potentially be included in our audit plan for 2025/26, following the agreed new approach.**

Summary of audit coverage for 2024/25

During 2024/25, we continued to offer the traded audit service in line with the Schools RAG Requirements. That was the last round of such audits before the new approach is adopted. Traded audits were completed at 19 schools during the year 2024/25. These audits have resulted in recommendations around the following topics which are regularly made in reports (medium or high priority findings included in over 25% of traded audit reports): -

Payments

- Not raising or authorising purchase orders for all goods and services in line with the Schools' Finance Policy
- Not checking the employment status for tax purposes on individuals engaged by the school to carry out work
- Not obtaining Governor approval for payments in line with the limits stated within the Schools' Finance Policy
- Not obtaining three written quotes in line with the limits stated within the Schools' Finance Policy
- Staff should not be reimbursed by BACS or cheque for expenditure and these reimbursements are not always authorised prior to purchases being made.

Assets

- Not completing the annual independent check of the assets on the asset register or getting this certified in line with the Finance Procedure Manual
- Not security marking items of high value or those deemed to be attractive and portable in line with the Finance Procedure Manual

We have not identified any significant increases in the types of recommendations being identified in comparison to previous years. However, many of the recommendations identified above are identified year-on-year at the different schools we visit.

No thematic audits were completed in 2024/25 with a focus on meeting the demand for traded audits and agreeing the new approach to audits for 2025/26.

The audit coverage for 2024/25 was considered sufficient by the Chief Internal Auditor to support a wider opinion that there is a sound system of internal control for the County Council in line with the requirements of the Accounts and Audit regulations.

25/26 approach

The new approach to the internal audit service for local maintained schools was agreed as part of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Consultation in October 2024. More information can be found here: [Dedicated Schools Grant \(DSG\) consultation - Norfolk Schools and Learning Providers - Norfolk County Council](#) including the slides from our engagement session for Internal Audit.

As per the documents included in the consultation, a minimum risk-based approach is in place, which includes audits of higher-risk topics and audits of higher-risk schools, identified through risk assessment and data analytics.

Audit approach timeline:

- Summer Term – data analytics and risk assessment
- Autumn Term – audits of higher risk areas
 - Area 1: Counter Fraud – Whistleblowing policies
 - Area 2: To be Confirmed
- Spring Term – audit of higher risks schools

Identifying higher risk schools

The framework for identifying these schools is in development but is expected to be based on risk indicators including time since last audit, RAG ratings, budget position, recent changes in management and other key indicators identified through data analytics.

Identifying high risk topics for audit

The audit topic of 'Counter Fraud – Whistleblowing' has been identified through consultation with the council's Risk and Fraud Lead. Further analysis is being completed to identify other key topics, which includes consulting with Schools Forum, Children's Services and a review of previous audit findings. These topics will only be areas under the control and management of schools; subjects such as payroll processing are currently planned to be included as part of the County Council's wider internal audit plan.

Areas to be considered include:

- Governance Arrangements
- Financial Controls
 - Purchasing
 - Income
- Risk Management
- Resource Management
- Information Technology
- Counter Fraud

Schools Forum are asked to

- **consider and comment on which audit areas they consider as higher risk to potentially be included in our audit plan for 2025/26, following the agreed new approach.**

Officer Contact

If you have any questions about matters contained within this paper, please get in touch with:

Officer name: Adrian Thompson
Telephone no.: (01603) 303395
Email: Adrian.thompson@norfolk.gov.uk



If you need this report in large print, audio, braille, alternative format or in a different language please contact 0344 800 8020 or 0344 800 8011 (textphone) and we will do our best to help.

	Autumn Term			Spring Term			Summer Term	
20/09/24 (Fri) 09:00 – 12:00	September (Cranworth Room, CH) Strategic Planning (inc. Local First Inclusion) Provisional DSG Allocations for 2025/26 and Autumn DSG Consultation, including for Mainstream Schools' Formula Early Years Funding Consultation Annual Audit Report (NAS)	 I D D I	31/01/25 (Fri) 09:00 – 12:00	January (Green Room, Archive Centre, CH) Election of Chair/Vice Chair Strategic Planning (inc. Local First Inclusion) Proposed DSG Budget 2025/26 (inc. Block transfer) Early Years Funding Formula Pupil variations 2025/26	 D I D I I	09/05/25 (Fri) 09:00 – 12:00	May (Cranworth Room, CH) Strategic Planning (inc. Local First Inclusion) Dedicated Schools Grant 2024/25 Outturn Annual Audit Report (Norfolk Audit Service) Norfolk Schools Forum Constitution & ways of working	 I I I D
19/11/24 (Tues) 09:00 – 13:00	November (Cranworth Room, CH) Strategic Planning (inc. Local First Inclusion) DSG consultation outcomes and Schools Block transfer EY Budget Grant update De-delegation/Central Schools Services Block Disapplication requests Centrally retained items	 I D I D D D	26/03/25 (Wed) 09:00 – 12:00	March (Edwards Room, CH) Next year's plan Strategic Planning (inc. Local First Inclusion) Final pupil variations (only if changed from January) Norfolk Schools Forum Constitution & ways of working	 I I I D	02/07/25 (Wed) 09:00 – 12:00	July (Cranworth Room, CH) Strategic Planning (inc. Local First Inclusion) Updates on Scheme for Financing Schools (Financial Regulations) Dedicated Schools Grant Consultation Preparation Norfolk Schools Forum Constitution & ways of working Implications of SEND reforms (if published)	 I D I D I
06/12/24 (Fri) 09:00 – 13:00	December (Cranworth Room, CH) Provisional DSG Allocations Element 3 Notional SEN Allocation formula	 I I D						