

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**



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