

Norfolk Schools Forum Minutes

Meeting details

Time and date of meeting: Wednesday 2 July 2025 at 09:00am

Venue: Cranworth Room, County Hall

Present

| Name | Organisation | Representing |
|----------------------|--|--------------------------------------|
| Martin White (Chair) | Nebula Federation | Maintained Primary Schools |
| Stephen Beeson | Norwich Diocesan Board of Education | Diocese Representative |
| Martin Colbourne | City College Norwich | 16-19 Representative |
| Bob Groome | National Education Union | School Unions |
| Glyn Hambling | Unity Education Trust | Alternative Provision Representative |
| Carole Jacques | Earlham Nursery School | Maintained Nursery Schools |
| Owen Jenkins | Broad Horizons Education Trust | Mainstream Academies |
| Peter Pazitka | St. John the Baptist Multi Academy Trust | Mainstream Academies |
| Sarah Shirras | The Hive Federation | Maintained Primary Schools |
| Matthew Smith | Sheringham Woodfields School | Maintained Special Schools |
| Daniel Thrower | Wensum Academy Trust | Mainstream Academies |
| Joanna Tuttle | Aylsham High School | Maintained Secondary Schools |

Also Present

| Name | Role |
|-------------------|---|
| Hollie Adams | Committee Officer, Norfolk County Council |
| 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 | Assistant Director – LFI Programme and DSG Strategic Lead |
| Jane Hayman | Director of Belonging and Inclusion |
| Jonathan Nice | Senior Advisor – Teaching and Learning |
| David Oldham | Senior Advisor – Intervention |
| Nicki Rider | Assistant Director – SEN and Alternative Provision Strategy and Sufficiency |
| James Wilson | Director of Strategy and Outcomes |

1. Welcome from the Chair

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. He updated the Forum that Sarah Porter had resigned as a Forum Member and the position would be duly appointed to.

2. Apologies and Substitutions

- 2.1 Apologies were received from Joanne Philpott, Adrian Lincoln, Sara Tough OBE, Stuart Allen, Lacey Douglass and Rachel Quick.

3. Minutes of last meeting held on Friday 9 May 2025

- 3.1 The minutes of the meeting held on Friday 9 May 2025 were agreed as a true record of proceedings.

4. Matters Arising

- 4.1 The Chair discussed action for himself to write to the Department for Education (DfE) about National Insurance. This letter had been written and sent, but was returned to sender, with advice that this type of correspondence needed to be sent through the Department for Education (DfE) website. Janine Wynn had been contacted for assistance.
- 4.2 The Chair **asked** for the ongoing log of actions to be added to future agendas.
- 4.3 The Norfolk Schools Forum **RESOLVED** to **NOTE** the summary of actions from the May 2025 meeting.

4.a Ongoing consultations

- 4a.1 Officers discussed the work on the Core Schools Budget Grant, which was ongoing. The decision would be taken by the LA, but the Forum would be kept updated. The consultation would close on 11 July; eighteen responses had been received so far
- 4a.2 The chair **asked** for “update on ongoing consultations” to be added to future agendas.

5. Strategic Planning: 2025 Spending Review & National Announcements

- 5.1 Officers introduced the report, providing an update on the key elements likely to impact upon Norfolk's education system following the Government's Spending Review announcement on Wednesday 11 June 2025. While specific implications were still being understood, a summary was provided of the key elements enabling consideration of potential impact upon the early years and the broader school system in Norfolk.
- 5.2 The following key elements were highlighted to the Schools Forum:
- There had not yet been an announcement from Government regarding SEND reforms, and it was believed that the update would be received nearer the end of 2025.
 - Levels of mainstream school funding were identified as a key area of concern, as it was there was not significant additional funding provided by Government.

- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities transformation funding had been suggested but it would not be enough to cover the system deficit.
- Local Authorities would face a challenge related to cashflow and Norfolk County Council was waiting to hear whether future Government announcements would address the deficit.
- The council's consultation date may need to be amended depending upon when the modelling tool provided by Government would be available.
- There was no suggestion at that time that there would be a change to the minimum funding guarantee arrangements by Government.
- Free school meals Government policy would change from 2026-27; funding for this change would be separate to the Dedicated Schools Grant.

5.3 The following points were raised and discussed:

- Sarah Shirras discussed the issues which could be caused for schools by the change in funding for Free School Meals if funding does not fully cover costs.
- Issues related to funding for the Breakfast Club programme were discussed. Sarah Shirras shared her school's experience that the funding was not sufficient to cover costs, further impacted by the fee for parents previously access the breakfast club being reduced as most parents were using the vouchers. Officers noted that schools which already had successful before-school activities, this policy had not always been cost effective. Glynn Hambling noted that some schools did not sign up because of the number of unknown factors. Officers **agreed** to feedback issues to the DfE.
- Matthew Smith shared that Government had asked for his school to broker transport so more children could attend breakfast club, which was not possible or suitable. Because of this the offer for special needs children was not inclusive.

5.4 Dawn Fower gave an update on Safety Valve discussions with the Department for Education (DfE). The Council had submitted its revised plan to DfE to deliver best value within the current framework, and included detail on why, without reforms, the Council would not be able to balance the position in year. DfE had replied that the submission did not meet their criteria, but the reasons why were not clear. The Council would work with DfE to try and reach a resolution. Conversations were being held with other local authorities; the consensus was that it was best to be open with DfE about scale of the challenge.

5.5 The following points were raised and discussed:

- The Chair asked how the Council's consultation response was agreed. Officers confirmed that relevant lead Members were consulted with while Officers developed the response.
- Martin Colbourne asked about the statutory override extension. Officers confirmed that it had been extended for two years until March 2028. There would be risks to cashflow in this time and the Council was reliant on borrowing to cover the deficit. The Council had committed £5.5m per year alongside the DfE contribution but the DfE contribution had since paused. The Council continued with its contribution and, overall, had invested more than was expected when the agreement was made through additional interventions and the cost of servicing the debt.
- Officers had asked the Local Government Association to research how many councils would run out of cash in the statutory override extension period. There

was suggestion that the deficit was worse now than reported in the previous submissions to Government.

- Matt Smith queried what would happen if the DfE did not put forward money for the 2 proposed special schools. Officers replied that options were being explored and would likely include additional borrowing, reviewing the programme or deciding not to go ahead.

5.6 Officers discussed that the rate of Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) had increased more in Norfolk than nationally. SEN support increased by 0.3% which was lower than the national rate but there were higher rates of children in specialist provision and mainstream schools. The data from the SEND census would encourage the sector to consider if there were any impacting factors.

5.7 The following points were raised and discussed:

- Matthew Smith asked if anything could be learned from Nottinghamshire who had a very low number of children with EHCPs. Officers replied that this county had always had low figures, and it is unclear why.
- Joanna Tuttle felt it would be helpful to have data on transition points, particularly nursery to reception, and comparison with statistical neighbours to identify if there was a correlation with rates of EHCPs.
- Officers noted that the increase in EHCPs was impacted by improvements in capacity to deliver them. The level of issuance was now evening out as demand matched capacity to deliver. Officers noted that whilst, in broad terms, a reduction in EHCP requests could be considered a positive indicator of greater confidence to meet need at SEN support level, an EHCP referral should not be viewed as negative if the existence of an EHCPs could help support children with additional needs to remain in a mainstream school and improving inclusivity, mitigating the need for a specialist placements.
- Stephen Beeson discussed the points set out at section 5.10 of the report, noting that the timescale for this was not clear. Officers confirmed that the questions were for wider consideration generally, including with other groups and Government.
- Jayne Hayman had attended the DfE RISE conference on Reception Quality which had included useful information on transition and preparedness for school.
- The Chair noted that the report showed the Local Government Association were asking government to write off the deficit; if the deficit was written off, ongoing issues of in-year deficits would still need to be addressed.

5.8 Having considered and commented on the impact of the recent announcements on Norfolk and whether there was any additional activity the system in Norfolk could be undertaking to increase mainstream inclusion within the limited resources available within the whole system, the Norfolk Schools Forum **RESOLVED** to **NOTE** the report.

6. DSG Consultation Preparation 2026-27

6.1 Officers introduced the report, which set out the proposed arrangements for the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Consultation with mainstream schools, including proposed dates and key items to be included in the consultation documents, and current LA expectations regarding Early Years and Special Schools consultation. The annual

consultation was due to commence in Autumn 2025.

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

- Dedicated Schools Grant block transfer: the Council had been clear to DfE the view in Norfolk that the process was not effective and should not continue so that funds can remain in mainstream schools but were yet to receive a response from the DfE. At this stage, the Council were not intending to include it within the consultation unless required by the DfE.
- Consultation around notional SEND methodology was not expected.
- Affordability of the funding formula was likely to be included
- Potential changes to Norfolk's approach to the Minimum Funding Guarantee was likely to be included.
- Intention to consult on the funding arrangements for children receiving alternative provision due to not being able to attend school on health ground (medical needs). The number of children under this definition had increased by 227% in 4 years, mostly related to increase in social, emotional and mental health needs. The consultation would form part of a comprehensive redesign of AP for this group across 25/26, with consideration of the interrelationship between school census and the AP census whereby funding would follow the child. Additional details were set out in the paper. Consultation with schools would take place from the 3-24 October. There would be 2 online and 1 face to face sessions. Consultation with Schools Forum would cover falling rolls, growth fund and normal delegation and central budgets.
- The Early Years consultation would be a full consultation, including considering how to deal with additional funding or grants received in year and whether Norfolk should offer a higher rate for Early Years providers for families of 2-year-olds via the disadvantaged funding due to a drop off in its use.
- A full review of special school funding formula was not proposed at that time, as it was felt that it was unclear if a judgement could be made on the efficacy at this stage given late DfE grants, though it was acknowledged that conversations continued regarding associated residential provision

6.3 The following points were raised and discussed:

- Sarah Shirras shared that head teachers did not always understand the information in the consultation and **suggested** that a separate session or additional information provided to them would be helpful. Jonathan Nice **agreed** that this was an area to explore further and would discuss with Sarah.
- Owen Jenkins felt it would be helpful for special school funding for 2027/28 to start being explored in early 2026.
- Joanna Tuttle was concerned that some of the items set out in the report would de-incentivise inclusive schools; for example, the fall in element 3 linked to block transfer would impact on provision provided to fund inclusive action. Officers replied that work was needed to explore how the shift in funding to mainstream schools would work. Joanna Tuttle suggested that the interaction of the reduction in element 3 and block transfer should both be included in the consultation. Officers reflected that there may be a need to consider notional SEN methodology and percentage to consider this issue and **agreed** to review.
- Matthew Smith felt that maintained special schools should be included in de-delegation of school budgets.

- Matthew Smith was concerned that there was £1m prior year underspend unaccounted for in Early Years. Officers clarified that DfE modelling methodology resulted in an underspend in the 3-to-4-year block, but because of the way the formula works, underspends could not be reliably predicted before the end of the year (as per the DfE requirements) and could not be distributed in-year and the overall DSG block for Early Years was in an overspend meaning that the Council were required to offset it at year-end .
- Peter Pazitka asked who made the final decision on the percentage of Notional SEN. Officers clarified that the Forum would make a recommendation to Council who made the final decision through a Cabinet Member delegated decision.
- The Chair suggested that section 5.9 should also include special schools and maintained nurseries. Officers responded consideration of buy backs would also be included.
- Glynn Hambling queried the use of 3-5 years, as discussed at section 5.4. Officers clarified that specific requirements during the 3-5 year window were set out by the DfE.
- The Chair asked when the Council would review the special school funding formula; Officers replied that initial discussions would be held with head teachers in December 2025 and a timescale would be drawn up from this. The Forum would be updated.

6.4 Having considered and commented accordingly, the Norfolk Schools Forum **RESOLVED** to **NOTE** the following:

1. The key elements identified to be consulted upon, based upon the current information available to the local authority.
2. The proposed consultation arrangements

7. Update to Scheme for Financing Schools

7.1 Officers introduced the report, which was produced as per the obligation for Local Authorities to consult on and publish schemes for financing schools, setting out the financial relationship between them and the schools they maintain.

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

- There were no direct provisions for 2025-26 from the Secretary of State but local changes had been brought for requested updates to the scheme. It was a requirement to consult with schools on these changes.
- The two updates to the scheme were
 - Adding more clarification on reporting of leases under RFI16 to the local authority.
 - Additional wording proposed for addition, set out on page 48.
- These changes would be part of the consultation.

7.3 Having considered the report, the Norfolk Schools Forum **RESOLVED** to **NOTE** the following:

1. The key elements identified to be consulted upon, based upon the current information available to the local authority.
2. The proposed consultation materials.

The Forum broke from 10:40 until 11

8. Norfolk Schools Forum Constitution and Ways of Working

8.1 Officers introduced the report, which provided Forum Members with a copy of a refreshed draft constitution, seeking to align the Norfolk Schools Forum with the required regulations as well as incorporate current best practice. Once agreed, the final constitution would take effect from September 2025, to align with the new academic year.

8.2 The following key elements were highlighted to the Committee:

- The constitution had been developed with input from the Governance team, the Chair of the Forum, and through previous Forum feedback. Comments from the Forum would be taken forward for discussion with Governance and the final version would be brought for adoption at the September meeting following amendments.
- There had been a previous request to increase the number of representatives on the Forum for 16-19 to two; this would leave room for one more non-school Member.
- The constitution would be reviewed annually or when there were changes to legislation

8.3 The following points were raised and discussed:

- Glynn Hambling queried whether proportional representation from each part of the sector was calculated based on the overall number of places on the Forum or already-filled places. Officers **agreed** to clarify this and **agreed** that up to date percentage balances would be reported in future agendas.
- Matthew Smith felt that de-delegation should involve maintained special schools and nurseries. It was confirmed that maintained special schools and nurseries are given the option to 'buy back' rather than de-delegate and Officers **agreed** that this would be clarified in the final version.
- Carole Jacques asked for legal duties vs local guidance to be set out clearly; Officers **agreed** to explore this.
- The Chair was concerned about how induction for new Forum Members would be implemented. Officers replied that mechanisms for taking this forward would be shared in September.
- The Chair asked about the election procedures set out in appendix 1; each school or federation was eligible to one vote, and he was concerned that federations with more than one school would only have one vote to represent all the schools. A discussion was held about this, including suggestions that there be one vote per school or use of a block voting system, and discussing the different Governance arrangements across Academy Trusts, which also only received one vote. Following discussion, no change to the election voting procedures was suggested.
- Matt Smith asked if all maintained special schools got a vote. Officers **agreed** to explore the method for voting for maintained special schools' representatives.
- The Chair discussed non-school membership. Officers confirmed that the "ways of working" report being brought to a future meeting would set out who could vote and on what items.

- Stephen Beeson wondered if there should be an election process for substitute members. Officers felt the best approach would be for individuals to name their own substitute, to be added to a list of named substitutes who could then receive training. It was **agreed** that the second sentence in paragraph 2.8 should be removed. It was also **agreed** that officers would send information updates and agendas to the representatives named on the list of substitutes so they could be fully informed. A pool set up of substitutes was also suggested.
- An addition to this section of the constitution was **agreed** to require substitutes to have relevant skills and experience.
- The Chair suggested a code of conduct would be helpful. Officers advised that the Council had one for Council Members and it could be possible to adapt this. It was **agreed** that one would be developed.
- Paragraph 2.12 was **agreed** for amendment to say that “elected members” who fail to attend three consecutive meetings without a satisfactory explanation will have their membership reviewed by the Forum.
- A discussion was held about whether meetings were required to be held in County Hall. Officers replied that there was a legislative requirement to make meetings available for people to be available online, which was possible from County Hall, and Sara Tough had previously moved the meetings to County Hall to bolster the Forum’s status and to improve facilities. It was **agreed** section 3.1 would be amended to state that meetings would “usually” be held at County Hall.
- The Chair was concerned about the quality of debate if hybrid meetings were pursued.
- Owen Jenkins clarified that the legislation stated that meetings would only need to be made public via a recording if held virtually, meaning that hybrid meetings or streamed in-person meetings were not required as long as the public could access them.
- Officers discussed that Council meetings held in the Council Chamber were filmed and displayed on the Council’s YouTube page, for accessibility. Glynn Hambling was concerned about this, as it would require Forum Members to be filmed.
- It was **agreed** the meetings would continue to be held in person, with arrangements continuing to be made for public access, but they would not be filmed.
- Section 3.3 was discussed. The intention was for Officers to support the Chair in the meeting to summarise decisions taken so they could be sent out to representatives quickly.
- It was **agreed** that the wording about quorum would be clarified and made clearer to indicate whether a quorum was to be calculated from the overall membership required, or the people currently elected.
- Carole Jacques discussed the section on retention of funding for responsibilities, at section 3.7 of the constitution. Officers clarified that this was a responsibility for mainstream schools. Information on maintained nurseries **was agreed** for inclusion as well, and Officers would check the requirements for this.
- The section on working groups was discussed. Carole Jacques asked if minutes from these meetings could be produced for feedback to the Forum. Officers confirmed that minutes were not proposed from these meetings, to allow more free and open discussion; if minutes were produced and presented to the Forum, they would be required to be publicly available.

- Glynn Hambling **suggested** changing “drafted decisions” in paragraph 4 of part 3.9, to “recommendations”. Stephen Beeson suggested that the working group papers be shared with the Forum. Officers confirmed that including them in agendas was not proposed as this would mean they would also need to be made publicly available, but they could be circulated separately to Forum Members if needed.
- The provision of bacon sandwiches and drinks at meetings was discussed. Stephen Beeson felt that if a member of the public attended a meeting, they would see this as an unnecessary extravagance, since the Forum was making decisions on spend of public money. The Chair also noted the amount of waste produced, since not all food was eaten. It was **agreed** that there would not be bacon sandwiches at future meetings; coffee and tea would continue to be provided along with individually wrapped biscuits, to reduce food waste.
- Loss of earning was discussed and it was suggested it had historically related to governors. Officers stated that the budget was set based on historic claims and any increase in claims would require an increase in budget. Mileage was **agreed** to be added as a reasonable expense.
- It was confirmed that academies based in other counties but with schools in Norfolk would be included for identifying representatives.
- Joanna Tuttle asked if urgent decisions could be taken over MS Teams. Following discussion, it was **agreed** that a line would be included to state that the preferred option for taking urgent decisions would be considered by the Chair on each occasion depending upon the nature of the decision and the urgency.
- A discussion was held about representation on the Forum for 16-19. It was **agreed** to keep representation as it was, with one representative.
- The LFI Executive Board was no longer needed as there were now other governance arrangements in place to explore for the areas under its remit. It was proposed that a high needs working group be set up to explore issues and support the work of the Forum. this would take on some of the work from the LFI Executive Board.
- Owen Jenkins noted that the Forum had a responsibility to provide a view on areas that impacted on high needs funding, and that a working group would be a good place to have these discussions. The working group could then express a view to the Forum for review.
- Officers confirmed that the terms of reference of the high needs working group would be developed by working groups at their first meeting. The Forum asked for initial volunteers to develop the terms of reference and **proposed** Glynn Hambling, Joanna Tuttle, Carole Jacques and Owen Jenkins for this working group.
- A discussion was held about the Early Years Consultative Group. Glynn Hambling suggested that Schools Forum should be formally represented on the group, to feed back to the Forum. It was **agreed** that the terms of reference of the Early Years consultative group would be developed to indicate that representatives from the Schools Forum would be a link between the two. It was **agreed** that the group should sit separate to the forum. it was **agreed** that two members would be put forward to sit on the Early Years Consultative Group and report feedback to Schools Forum meetings.

8.4 The Norfolk Schools Forum **RESOLVED** the following:

1. To note the draft consultation and highlighted areas which were additions or amendments from the current consultation.
2. That the number of 16-19 representatives would be 1.
3. To Agree that the High Needs Working Group should be established and that the initial Members to draft the terms of reference would be Glynn Hambling, Joanna Tuttle, Carole Jacques and Owen Jenkins
4. To **agree** that the Early Years Consultative Group would **not** become a formal working group of the Schools Forum but would have formal representatives.
5. To put forward Matthew Smith and Sarah Shirras as the maintained schools representatives to sit on the Finance Consultative Group

9. Forward Work Programme

- 9.1 Officers introduced the report, which detailed the current forward work programme for the Norfolk Schools Forum during the 2025/26 academic year.
- 9.2 Officers agreed to review what day meetings were held on based on a concern about attendance at meetings held in the early part of the week in the case of Ofsted inspections.
- 9.3 The Norfolk Schools Forum **RESOLVED** to **NOTE** the current forward work programme.

10. Any Other Business

- 10.1 There was no other business to consider

11. Date of Next Meeting

- 11.1 The date of the next Norfolk Schools Forum was confirmed for 9am on Wednesday 24 September 2025, in the Edwards Room at County Hall.

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 12:37

**Martin White, Chair
Norfolk Schools Forum**