

Minutes of a meeting of the Leicestershire Schools' Forum held via Teams on Thursday, 6th November 2025.

Present

Chair/Vice-Chair

Martin Towers	Academy Secondary Governor
Suzanne Uprichard	PRU Representative & Maintained Primary School Governor

Members Attendance

David Warwick	DNCC Representative
Ed Petrie	Academy Primary Headteacher
Peter Leatherland	Academy Secondary Headteacher
Phil Lewin	Maintained Primary Headteacher
Rosie Browne	Academy Primary Headteacher
Kate Nicholson	Academy Secondary Headteacher
Lauren Charlton	Academy Primary Trustee
Dr Jude Mellor	Academy Secondary Headteacher
Kelly Dryden	Academy Special School Headteacher
Simon Grindrod	Academy Secondary Governor
Adina Murataj	Maintained Primary Governor

In Attendance

Sarah Davis	Chief Finance Officer Oak MAT
Nerinder Samaria	LCC Strategic Finance Manager
Rebecca Wakeley	LCC Senior Education Effectiveness Partner
Tim Browne	LCC Director for Education, SEND & Inclusion
Michelle White	LCC Head of Service SEND & Children with Disabilities
Mr Pugsley	LCC Elected Member
Renata Chantrill	LCC Head of Service Business Support, Education Quality, Performance and Planning
Rachel Firth	LCC Senior Finance Business Partner
Victoria Edwards	LCC Executive Head of Oakfield
Salik Khan	LCC Education Finance Manager
Beth Clements	LCC Head of Service Education & Inclusion
Callum Payne	LCC Clerk for Leicestershire Schools' Forum

Apologies for absence

Beverley Coltman	PVI Early Years Provider
Dan Cleary	Academy Secondary Headteacher
Felicity Clarke	Academy Primary Headteacher
Julian Kirby	Academy Secondary Headteacher

1. **Apologies for absence/Substitutions.**

Apologies were received from Beverley Coltman, Dan Cleary, Felicity Clarke and Julian Kirby. There were no substitutions.

2. **Minutes of the Meeting held on 9th September 2025 (previously circulated) and matters arising.**

Phil Lewin highlighted that the previous minutes referenced an October 2025 budget deadline. Although this has since been revised to November 2025, the Forum agreed this would not be amended as it was correct at the time.

No further matters arising were raised.

3. **Proposal To Extend The SEN Investment Fund For 2026-27**

Renata Chantrill presented the consultation feedback about the proposed 0.5% transfer from the schools block to the high needs block for 2026–27.

Renata stated that there were 31 valid responses received, mostly from secondary schools with 85% of responses stated that they disagreed with continuing the SEN Investment Fund.

Renata advised there is a £45m predicted overspend on high needs this year with a cumulative DSG deficit of £109.5m projected among a continued demand for outreach and graduated support.

Renata outlined two options for sustainable funding of Oakfield outreach:

Option one is to continue with the school block transfer for 26/27 to create an ongoing SEN Investment Fund which would be used to fund an ongoing multidisciplinary outreach and graduated response model from Oakfield school. The final methodology for that transfer for determining contributions would need to be confirmed when funding allocations have been announced by the DFE.

Option two is to continue the multidisciplinary outreach and graduated response model from Oakfield, but rather than through a school block transfer, we would be looking for a per pupil contribution from mainstream schools. Schools would also be asked to commit to supporting ongoing mainstream inclusion to make sure that we

are collectively building a more sustainable financial position for the Leicestershire education system going forward.

Renata informed all that an indicative per pupil contribution level would need to be agreed based on creating that sustainable outreach and graduated support model across primary and secondary mainstream education and just noting concerns within the consultation around equity of contributions, a per pupil contribution model would introduce a standard contribution per pupil, which would effectively mean there would be more equity on a contribution basis.

Suzanne Uprichard raised concerns that a pay-per-use or voluntary model might increase permanent exclusions due to schools avoiding costs.

Renata clarified that the per-pupil contribution is intended as an insurance-style model and not pay-as-you-go and explained that fewer participating schools would undermine the viability.

Pete Leatherland raised an issue in that there was too much material to read with short notice and asked for an alternative method of distribution to be considered for future meetings.

Pete asked which option would be used and how either helps reduce the high needs deficit, given the overspending on placements.

Pete also questioned how Oakfield fits with statements made by Victoria previously and queried the lack of measurable deficit-reduction criteria.

Renata explained that the overspend comes from placement costs and EHCP volumes with over 8,311 EHCPs, a 15% rise since January.

Tim Browne confirmed to all that the deficit cannot legally be paid down using transferred funds and emphasised the aim is to slow future deficit growth through early intervention and fewer exclusions/EHCPs.

Tim also noted for all that the DfE will push for stronger mainstream inclusion.

Victoria Edwards stated that the model provides early, appropriate support to stabilise provision and outlined that the current outreach framework has been built using the SENIF.

Victoria advised that option 2 will result in bringing in less money which risks the graduated model.

Martin Towers asked how staffing and budgeting work under an optional per-pupil model, since contributions might vary.

Victoria explained that the per-pupil model is not pay-as-you-go but is a nominal fee per school. Victoria advised that schools opting out, if option 2 was selected, cannot access the service.

Victoria highlighted the need for a stable universal structure and noted similar models operate in secondary inclusion partnerships.

Jude Mellor asked how much Oakfield already receives from the £2.8m SENIF and about recruitment progress and whether roles were permanent or temporary .

Victoria advised that recruitment has been successful with most posts starting in January. Some posts are permanent to run services while others are temporary pending future funding decisions.

Renata provided a breakdown of SENIF spending with £2.1m being spent on recruitment, £0.4m on training and £0.3m in-school AP offers.

Jude queried Oakfield's total financial scale and Rachel Frith responded to advise that currently, Oakfield costs about £9m annually. Jude expressed concern about sustainability without the SENIF.

Tim warned that the Oakfield outreach cannot continue without new funding (~£2m needed).

Phil expressed concerned about schools that are already in deficit due to falling numbers would be unable to opt into a voluntary model. Phil also stated that he is unaware of managed moves being used in Leicestershire.

Phil also raised a fact that schools would have to accept an agreed number of SEND pupils and feels that governors would be struggling to accept more SEND pupils.

Phil recognised the importance of early intervention but questioned the feasibility.

Pete asked why the per-pupil question was not in the consultation and feels that option 2 lacked modelling and seemed last-minute and stated that he believes option 2 is preferable but is too unclear to support.

Renata gave some indicative figures stated that we have 100,000 mainstream pupils within Leicestershire and if we needed to raise £2.8m, this equates to £28 per pupil and that's that service size and cost depends on participation.

Tim informed all that the number of EHCP applications from parents is now around 48% which is driving pressures.

Rosie Browne asked whether schools opting in could be given a maximum cost cap to reduce risk.

Tim stated that a minimum contribution level would be essential and hoped for broad participation to maintain viability.

Martin highlighted that schools in deficit may want to contribute but cannot and requested sight of last year's Secretary of State business case and evidence of delivery against it.

Tim responded to say that the business case will be made available. Tim explained that no impact was expected yet due to the timing of the recruitment and reiterated the SENIF focus is early intervention, not deficit reduction.

The LA made the following recommendation:

- a) Note the responses to the consultation on a further 0.5% transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for the 2026/27 financial year.
- b) Consider the two options set out in paragraphs 24-37 for funding a sustainable outreach and graduated support offer to mainstream schools through Oakfield School. Options include:
- A 0.5% Schools Block Transfer to the High Needs Block, or
Yes: 2 No: 10 Abstained: 1
 - A per-pupil contribution from schools and a commitment from schools to supporting ongoing mainstream inclusion.
Yes: 0 No: 10 Abstained: 3
- c) Agree which option the Forum recommend to Cabinet.

Jude stated that she would have considered option 1 but finds it morally problematic given inequitable contributions caused by DfE rules. Jude advised that she abstained on option 2 due to the lack of clarity.

Pete stated that he felt option 2 would be acceptable if it was compulsory but the optionality and lack of detail prevented him supporting this.

Kelly Dryden advised that she thinks option 2 is conceptually the better model, but insufficient modelling makes it risky.

Phil stated that he voted for option 1 to ensure continuation of early-stage support despite the imperfections.

Martin advised he voted no to both options due to the lack of visible impact so far and needs evidence before supporting further funding.

Tim asked what alternative solutions members would support given the system pressures.

Jude agreed that option 2 has potential if properly developed and consulted on and believe a more comprehensive system-wide approach is needed.

Suzanne emphasised that the children are at the centre of this, many of whom currently receive inconsistent or inadequate support and urged action to maintain and improve provision based on what she witnessed at Oakfield.

4. **Exceptional Premises Factor – Disapplication Request**

Salik explained that the application request concerns the exceptional premises factor, which is part of the national funding formula and stated that local authorities cannot adjust this factor without DfE approval.

Salik noted that seven schools in the cluster require exceptional support because they must pay rental costs for central buildings or support facilities.

Salik explained these costs arise due to site limitations, planning restrictions or lack of suitable provision, meaning the schools must lease premises.

Salik reported that a similar application was made last year and approved by the DfE.

Salik advised that the financial cost is around £82,000 in 2025/26 and a similar cost is expected for 2026/27.

Suzanne asked whether the amount is expected to decrease in the future or remain the same assuming the same number of schools still need support. Salik responded that he expects the rate to increase slightly due to inflation, though it should remain stable or near the current level overall.

Salik noted that before approval, the DfE will review rental agreements for evidence to support the request.

The LA made the following recommendation:

- It is recommended that Schools Forum approves the continuation of the exceptional premises factor for 2026-27.

Yes: 13 No: 0 Abstained: 0

- It is further recommended that Schools Forum endorses the submission of a disapplication request to the DfE to allow this factor to remain operational within the local formula.

5. **Update on Phase 1 consultation on transitioning to a Banded Model for EHCP Funding (Verbal Update)**

Renata reported that phase one of the consultation on potentially moving to a banded model for EHCP funding was released in September and closed on 19th October 2025.

Renata shared that the consultation received just over 90 responses, including 20 from schools and the rest mainly from parents and carers.

Renata noted that 92% of schools who responded were in favour of moving to a banded model and explained that parents and carers were less positive and that the team now needs to carry out significant analysis of the qualitative feedback from the survey.

Renata highlighted that the feedback gathered is useful for improving the needs descriptor model that was part of the consultation and added that the feedback will also help shape a future communication strategy, especially aimed at parents and carers, if the model is formally implemented.

Renata stated that the next step is to use the consultation feedback to shape the next iteration of the needs descriptor model, with work planned over the coming months. Renata advised of additional developments of the needs descriptor model.

Renata also advised that preparation for phase two of the consultation are taking place which will focus on the funding linked to each band and confirmed that phase two is intended to be launched in early 2026.

6. Any other business

Martin notes that there have been two no votes and asks what the current position is, specifically whether LCC will go to the Secretary of State or to Cabinet.

Tim explained that cabinet will next discuss the implications for Leicestershire and the wider high needs deficit and that cabinet will make a decision on 18th November about whether to proceed with a schools block transfer to the Secretary of State.

Tim advised that if cabinet does not agree, discussions will be needed on funding Oakfield outreach without per-pupil school contributions, mainstream inclusion responsibilities becoming statutory under the white paper and adjusting the budget and reviewing the Oakfield offer after the current SEND Investment Fund.

Phil asked Renata to clarify her earlier point that there was little feedback from primary heads. Renata confirmed that 77% of respondents were from secondary schools.

Phil suggested exploring into why primary heads are not engaging. Martin requested an updated register of members and also offered to contact people and take action to improve participation.

Jude noted that the SEND Investment Fund consultation was only shared in the Headteacher Updates, whereas important consultations have previously been sent as standalone emails and suggests that significant consultations should be highlighted more prominently.

Callum Payne advised that he will liaise with Martin around membership, noting some primary heads have recently shown interest in joining.

Pete asked Phil whether there is a Primary Heads Network meeting and Phil confirms there is and is similar to secondary and agrees this could be a good channel and will raise it with Leicester Primary Heads.

Salik confirmed the forum membership review was done with Callum and also offered help with recruiting members and suggests using their teachers' letter to reach maintained schools.

Tim advised that he and Jane have met with Matt Williams and Nicole Brown to discuss making the Headteachers' Briefing easier to navigate and noted the difficulty of balancing too much and too little information.

Tim stated that he and Rebecca Wakeley will explore presenting the briefing differently and invites feedback.

Simon Grindrod observed that schools and governors attend because topics like SEND are important but often feel expected to vote through decisions. Simon feels that when the forum disagrees, decisions still go to the DfE making participation feel symbolic.

Simon argues that the forum should be a place to work issues out collaboratively and not just rubber-stamp proposals.

Pete agreed with Simon's comment and stated that if this issue had come earlier, feedback on "option 2" could have been meaningful.

Pete advised that because the deadline is mid-November, it feels like whatever the forum says now won't matter as it will be pushed through.

Tim appreciated Pete's point and reiterates the local authority's desire to work collectively. Tim stated that cabinet may still decide to request a disapplication, but it's possible to withdraw the request if wider consultation is preferred.

Tim advised that he will speak to secondary heads next week and could start a wider debate then.

Phil stated that the Leicester Primary Heads have a meeting soon.

Tim confirmed he has been asked to attend that meeting too, so the same discussion can take place there.

7. **Date of next meeting**

The next meeting is due to take place on Monday 23rd February 2026.