

**Minutes of the Leicestershire Schools Forum
via Microsoft Teams on Wednesday 12th February 2025 at 2pm.**

Chair / Vice-Chair

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

Attended

Alison Bradley	Assistant Director for Education, Send & Commissioning
Mrs Deborah Taylor	Lead Member for Children & Family Services
Jenny Lawrence	Finance Business Partner for Schools & High Needs
Michelle White	Head Of Service – Send & Children with Disabilities
Rebecca Wakeley	Senior Education Effectiveness Partner
Rosie Browne	Academy Primary Headteacher
Dr Jude Mellor	Academy Secondary Headteacher
Kath Kelly	Academy Secondary Headteacher
Simon Grindrod	Academy Secondary Governor
Alison Ruff	Maintained Primary Headteacher
Phil Lewin	Maintained Primary Headteacher
Adina Murataj	Maintained Primary Governor
Rebecca Jones	Maintained Primary Governor
Beverley Coltman	PVI Early Years Provider

Substitute

Jason Brooks (Kelly Dryden)	Maintained Special Headteacher
David Warwick (Samantha)	GMB Union

Observing

Laura Kendrick	Academy Secondary School Business Leader
Nerinder Samari	LCC Strategic Finance Manager
Heidi Webb	LCC Senior Finance Business Partner
Amanjit Sraw	LCC Finance Business Partner
Lisa Turland	Education Effectiveness Team Manager

Apologies

Beth Clements	Head Of Service – Education Inclusion
Ed Petrie	Academy Primary Headteacher
Felicity Clarke	Academy Primary Headteacher
Dan Cleary	Academy Secondary Headteacher
Val Moore	Academy Primary Governor
Kelly Dryden	Academy Special Headteacher
Jo Beaumont	Maintained Primary Headteacher
Carolyn Shoyer	Diocese Of Leicester Director

Samantha Cooke
 Peter Leatherland
 Lauren Charlton
 Rosalind Hopkins
 Robert Martin
 Lisa Craddock

DNCC Representative
 Academy Secondary Headteacher
 Academy Primary Trustee
 Maintained Special School
 Maintained Nursery Governor
 Post-16 Provider

1. Apologies for Absence/Substitutions.

Apologies received from Ed Petrie, Felicity Clarke, Dan Cleary Val Moore, Kelly Dryden, Jo Beaumont, Carolyn Shoyer, and Samantha Cooke. Jason Brooks attended as substitute for Kelly and David Warwick attended as substitute for Samantha. Peter Leatherland, Lauren Charlton, Rosalind Hopkins, Robert Martin, and Lisa Craddock did not attend.

2. Minutes of the Meeting held on 04/11/2024 (previously circulated) and Matters Arising.

Martin Towers discussed the minutes of the last Leicestershire Schools' Forum with forum members, presenting the opportunity to raise any issues or request amendments to the record. David Warwick requested an amendment to page 5, line 16: his query regarding the Element 3 disparity between Leicester City (approximately £16k) and Leicestershire County (£8k) funding was omitted. An explanation was provided regarding a difference in the approach the authorities take the disaggregation of funds. Kath Kelly then commented that the update/uplift in funding not occurring for a lengthy period. **David has requested the minutes of the forum be amended.**

The actions from the previous forum were reviewed:

1. Jane Moore provided Schools Forum with an overview of capacity within Leicestershire special provisions during the previous meeting.
2. Jane Moore reviewed the language used in the Resetting the SEN Finance System report to ensure clarity before submitting to the Leicestershire County Cabinet.

The 2024-25 Disapplication report was shared with school members to review. Martin Towers obtained the views of school members and provided feedback to the Local Authority (LA).

3. Schools Forum in Operation.

Martin Towers referred to The Leicestershire Schools Forum in Operation presentation shared with the agenda. Martin reiterated that the purpose of forum members was to represent a group of schools, not to represent themselves as an individual or an individual school. There were no questions raised.

4. De-delegation - School Improvement.

Rebecca Wakeley presented the report on de-delegation, which discussed the de-delegation of £18 per pupil from maintained schools' budget for LA school improvement functions. Rebecca noted that this is the same rate of de-delegation as 2023-24. Schools have engaged well with improvement functions provided by the LA and schools are in a strong position.

Through the presentation, Rebecca Wakeley addressed consultation with the Collaborative Committee and provided comments and feedback from the Committee on LA spends. The Committee discussed using de-delegated funding to fund mandatory school improvement and development, such as DSL training. The Committee also agreed key development priorities and actions for the LA's de-delegated funding.

Phil Lewin questioned paragraph 14 on page 32, which highlights activity to be funded separately through de-delegated funding, which Rebecca Wakeley explained and agreed to amend in any future reports.

The LA recommends that representatives from maintained schools approve the de-delegation of £18 per pupil for LA school improvement functions from maintained schools' budgets.

Yes: 4 **No:** 0 **Abstained:** 0

5. 2025-26 Schools Budget.

Jenny Lawrence presented the Schools Budget report, which fulfils the LA's roles as per the schools' budget, sets out the decisions required from Schools Forum, and builds upon several reports presented during 2024-25. The LA sought permission from Secretary of State to transfer 0.5% from the Schools Block to a SEND Investment Fund, which the Secretary of State approved. Jenny sought information on how other LAs have undertaken Schools Block transfers and other requests for approval from the Secretary of State, but the Department for Education (DfE) could not provide this information.

The report outlined an affordability gap caused by an increase in Free School Meals (FSM) eligibility, in which schools are funded from the October 2023 census, but LAs are funded from the October 2024 census. This left the LA with a financial gap of approximately £700k between the funding received and that required to deliver the National Funding Formula (NFF).

The report noted eleven primary schools experiencing falling rolls which will experience reductions in 2025-26 budgets. Jenny Lawrence noted it would be useful for a non-headteacher from Forum to be involved in discussions in developing the SEND Investment Fund.

David Warwick questioned whether the £2.75bn increase in schools spending announced by the Secretary of State in October was reflected in budgets. Jenny Lawrence confirmed all funding provided by the DfE had been factored into 2025-26 budgets.

Phil Lewin questioned whether there would be communications with schools to outline deductions to funding. Jenny Lawrence confirmed that schools will observe

their deductions in Section 251 or GAG funding statements, so would see the impact of the capping to enact the Schools Block transfer and the affordability gap. The LA will include reference to this in the school 2025-26 budget briefing aimed at maintained schools but partially applicable to academies.

Dr Jude Mellor questioned whether the LA could financially support schools impacted by declining birth rates and decreasing rolls in primary schools. The Growth fund is used to fund school growth from September to March, as well as fund opening schools. Jenny Lawrence confirmed that the growth fund can be used to fund falling rolls. However, the criteria set for schools to be eligible for this funding is specific; it is triggered by sudden drops in pupil numbers and requires numbers to return to that level within three to five years. Statistics show a steady decline in pupils, but no Leicestershire schools qualify for declining numbers funding.

Rebecca Jones questioned how the LA sets criteria for falling rolls funding, this is a policy agreed by Schools Forum. In relation to housing growth Jenny Lawrence clarified that the DfE compares school capacity with future pupil forecasts. The data provided by the DfE shows that there are no schools within the authority that meet these criteria. Rebecca questioned whether schools could address this funding with the LA to discuss their eligibility. Jenny confirmed that a school could raise this with the LA.

Suzanne Uprichard noted that housing rates may takes years to reflect actual need; houses built may not create expected pupil numbers, which makes this an unreliable factor. Simon Grindrod also questioned the requirement for building developers to consider school placements as part of planning. Jenny Lawrence confirmed that significant housing developments must consider additional infrastructure as part of planning and the Section 106 agreement between the County Council, District and Borough planning departments, and the developer, which includes roads, medical provisions, and schools. Jenny referred to the Planning Obligation policy on the LA website which requires developers to consider the number of houses to be built, the type of houses, and the expected ratio of children compared to local capacity; if this capacity is exceeded, the Section 106 agreement requires developers to fund school expansion or the build of new schools. David Warwick referred to reports online which discussed how developers can evade Section 106 responsibilities, however Jenny assured the forum that Leicestershire has a good history of holding developers to account for delivery the Section 106 agreement.

Jason Brooks questioned whether the LA had specific plans on how the 0.5% transfer to the SEND Investment Fund would be used. Alison Bradley shared that school leaders have volunteered to be part of this discussion with the LA to ensure strong governance and reporting on SEND Investment Fund spending. Agreements to SEND Investment Fund spending is expected to be in place by September 2025 with full visibility and transparency on implementation, impact, and how impacts will be measured. Jason has agreed to join this discussion – invites to meetings will be shared within the next three to four weeks.

NB. Following the meeting, it was agreed that Martin Towers and Suzanne Uprichard will also be invited to discussions with the LA regarding SEND Investment Fund spending.

The LA made the following recommendations:

1. That Schools Forum approved the retention of the budget to fund future school growth (Paragraph 17, Item 2).

Yes: 5 **No:** 0 **Abstain:** 4

2. That Schools Forum approved the retention of budgets to meet the prescribed statutory duties of the Local Authority and to meet historic costs (Paragraph 17, Items 3 & 4).

Yes: 7 **No:** 0 **Abstain:** 2

3. That Schools Forum approved the centrally retained early years funding (Paragraph 17, Item 5).

Yes: 8 **No:** 0 **Abstain:** 1

4. That Schools Forum note approved the use of the exceptional premises factor in respect of schools that incur rental costs for premises and / or sports facilities and the adjustments made in respect of age range changes. (Paragraph 38).

Yes: 7 **No:** 0 **Abstain:** 2

Dr Jude Mellow questioned whether premature retirement costs are getting larger. Jenny Lawrence confirmed that premature retirement costs cannot increase. And will reduce with time. Central school services contribute £673k to the £1.3m cost.

5. That Schools Forum noted the actions taken by the Local Authority in applying Capping to the National Funding Formula for the purposes of effecting a 0.5% transfer of funding from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block and to address an affordability gap (Paragraphs 36 - 42).
6. That Schools Forum noted the number and average cost of commissioned places for children and young people with High Needs (Paragraph 63).
7. That Schools Forum noted the approach to setting Early Years Provider payment rates for 2025-26 (Paragraph 68).

Beverley Coltman noted that fees are set at beginning of April and settings endeavour to give parents one full month notice for FEEE increases. Beverley questioned when funding rates would be announced. Jenny Lawrence confirmed that communications regarding funding rates are ready and will be released by the LA soon. LAs are required to issue rates by the end of February. Rates will continue to be set to enable the recovery of the early years deficit.

8. That Schools Forum approved the actions taken to align the Notional SEN Budget to the SEND population in schools and the action to be taken in respect of schools where it is insufficient to meet the aggregated value of High Needs Funding Element 2 (Paragraphs 76-78).

Yes: 3 **No:** 0 **Abstain:** 4

9. That Schools Forum noted the average per pupil funding to be considered for recoupment for excluded pupils and other purposes (Paragraph 79).

6. Any Other Business.

Suzanne Uprichard requested that agendas and minutes from Schools Forum are shared with schools through the Headteachers Briefing and through the Governors Bulletin once live on the LA website. **This was agreed by Jenny Lawrence.**

Jenny Lawrence and Alison Bradley are leaving the LA. Tim Brown will replace Alison Bradley at the end of February 2025. Nerinder Samari and Heidi Webb will replace Jenny's Schools Forum functions.

7. Date of Next Meeting.

The date for the next Leicestershire Schools' Forum is **Tuesday 10th June 2025** from **2pm – 4pm.**

8. Actions.

1. Previous Schools Forum minutes to be amended to reflect David Warwick's question on the discrepancy in Element 3 funding.
2. Schools Forum clerk to ensure agendas and minutes are shared through the Headteachers Briefing and Governors Bulletin.