

The KIRKLEES SCHOOLS FORUM PUBLIC (Schools Funding Consultative Group) meeting held on **Friday 10 October 2025** Cathedral House, Huddersfield at 10.00am

Present:

Name:	Category of Membership:
	Nursery School Head
Katie Pearson, Jenny Shore	Primary School Head
Andrew Fell	High School Head
Paul Brook	Special School Head
	Special Academy Head
Darren Christian (Chair), Laura Willimott, Dave Wadsworth, Ian Rimmer, Natasha Carmen	Academy Head
	Alternative Provision
Vicky Morris, Hazel Danson	Non-school Member
Mathew Pinder	School Governor
Liz Kilner (Minute Clerk), Emma Brayford, Martin Wilby, John Bartlett,	Officers in Support
Cllr Jane Rylah	Observers
	Others

1 Welcome, Introductions and Apologies for absence

Martin Wilby welcomed all to the meeting and introductions were completed.

Apologies were received as follows.

- Tom Brailsford – Executive Director – Children & Families
- Ian Rimmer – Secondary Academies
- Jo Anne Sanders - Service Director, Learning and Early Support
- Andi Gilroy-Sinclair - Maintained Nursery School
- Rik Robinson – Maintained Special Schools

John Bartlett updated that David Baxter now has a new role in the LA. David Baxter was thanked for all his work for Schools Forum. Work is in progress for the appointment of a replacement Finance Manager.

Martin Wilby summarised Schools Forum Membership updates.

- Natasha Carman has been appointed representing Secondary Academies.
- Darren Christian has been appointed in his new role as CEO representing Secondary Academies.

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- Laura Willimott has a new role but can be reappointed via the appointment process.
- We still have a vacancy for Primary Academies, the appointment process is ongoing.
- Schools Forum does have stable membership and work is ongoing to fill vacancies.

2 Election of Chair for 2025/26

RESOLVED: That Darren Christian be elected as Chair for a term of 1 year.

3 Election of Vice Chair 2025/26

RESOLVED: That Paul Brook be elected as Vice Chair for a term of 1 year.

4 Schools Forum Terms of Reference

Kirklees Schools Forum Constitution and Terms of Reference – July 2025 was circulated before the meeting.

Martin Wilby noted that a draft of the document was discussed at Schools forum briefing in July 2025 and the required amendments have been made. The key changes were summarised for the meeting.

Q: Excess balances and powers are not referred to in the Terms of Reference?

A: Decisions relating to Excess balances are a LA responsibility. Any proposals will be discussed at Schools Forum. There are no current proposals for discussion.

RESOLVED: That the Kirklees Schools Forum Constitution and Terms of Reference – July 2025 be approved.

5 Minutes of the Schools Forum Briefing held on 20 June 2025

The minutes were confirmed as an accurate record of the last meeting.

6 Matters arising and actions from the meeting held on 20 June 2025

a) DSG Close Down 2024/25 (Minute 3(d) refers)

It was noted that generally we compare the cost of state funded places at around £30K with independent places on average costing £60K+ to illustrate saving. These figures have been reported in the public domain in Cabinet reports.

7 Kirklees Education & Learning Partnership Board (standing item) Kirklees Education & Learning Partnership Board

Martin Wilby and Emma Brayford updated the meeting on the KELPB held on 24 September 2025.

- The summary of educational outcomes was discussed including KS2, Secondary and Post 16.

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- Discussion of the KELPB Terms of Reference, governor vacancies and KELPB succession planning took place.
- An update was provided by Jo Anne Sanders on the SEND Transition Plan and SEND Area Inspection Update.
- Term time dates for 2027 and beyond were discussed.
- There was an update on the Families First Partnership Programme.

8 High Needs Block (standing item)

Martin Wilby read out an update prepared by Jo-Anne Sanders the meeting on feedback from the SEND Area Inspection.

- The inspection was led by Ofsted and the CQC.
- Our outcome was the 'middle judgement' being 'The local area partnership's arrangements lead to inconsistent experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND. The local area partnership must work jointly to make improvements.' The emphasis was on the Partnership and not just the LA
- 'Inconsistent Outcomes' is the middle band outcome and it is where most Local Authorities come.
- The feedback positives were summarised for the meeting. The feedback was very positive about many things including our Big Plan and cluster working. We put children at the heart of what we're doing and decision making, we listen to children and young people's voices and that means that children and young people shape local developments that affect them for example, our student's getting involved in the design of the rebuilding of their schools.
- We also know there is more to do, and we are extremely ambitious for every child and family in Kirklees.
- Areas for focus were summarised for the meeting including.
 - Preparing for Adulthood (PfA)
 - Waiting times for some Health services (therapeutic services, Mental Health Services and access to wheelchair services)
 - Education Health and Care Plans
 - Communication.
- We have been preparing a post inspection plan 'Big Plan 3' and have a meeting with the DfE and NHS England on Monday and subject to sign off will publish this plan by Friday 17 October 2025.
- The Primary AP Pilot (as discussed at the last meeting) has been sent out for Expressions of Interest, and we should be in a position to report back at the next meeting on next steps.
- We held an AP review of existing provision (thanks go to Forum members, Helen Pearson, Darren Christian and Dave Wadsworth for coming to that session), this has informed next steps regarding what to extend/where there are gaps etc.
- The need to use independent and non-maintained Special Schools has increased, as has the cost. We are working through sufficiency priorities and have agreed to have a focussed conversation with Regions Group at the DfE about next steps.
- There is no further feedback on AP Free School.

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- Compliance for EHCPs continues to 'hold'. Our cumulative in year performance now stands at 54.4% which is better than last year's national average (SEN 2 was 46% and Kirklees last year was 22%).

Q: Is that 54.4% of EHCPs that hit the 20-week deadline cumulative year to date?

A: Yes. The challenge will now be to do Annual reviews within timescales.

Q: Do we still have a backlog of EHCP cases?

A: No, the backlog has been cleared.

Q: What is the delay with the AP free school?

A: This is a question for the DfE.

Q: The LA received the middle judgement, do we know who has received the top judgement and can we work with them to gather learning?

A: Wakefield received the top judgement and we do work with them closely. It was noted that the next SEND inspection will use the new framework.

9 Update on the national picture for school funding 2025/26

John Bartlett updated the meeting.

- We have not yet received any indicative figures for school funding and we think that this will be unlikely until after the Budget in November 2025.
- There is a feeling that budgets and funding will be very tight for the next two years.

Martin Wilby noted that an additional Schools Forum meeting may be required in the week commencing 15 December 2025 to allow proper consideration of funding issues.

ACTION: Martin Wilby to propose dates for an additional meeting and discuss with the Chair and Vice Chair.

10 Schools premises disapplication request 2026/2027

The Schools Premises Disapplication Request 2026/2027 was circulated before the meeting.

John Bartlett summarised the request for the meeting.

- Five schools incur additional premises costs (rents), due to individual and unique circumstances that the individual schools operate within. An example would be the rental charges for modular buildings.
- The five schools all meet the conditions for exceptional circumstances, namely that costs are more than 1% of schools budget and applies to fewer than 5% of schools in the local authority area.
- In addition to meeting the DfE criteria, the individual agreements with external providers have been requested for review and challenge. The information was subsequently confirmed with Schools Asset Management team.

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- The total amount to be funded in 2026/2027 through the application of the 'exceptional circumstances' disapplication request is £130,052. The list of schools where disapplication has been sought and subsequently approved has not changed for several years.

Q: Where is the £130k funded from?

A: The Main Schools Block.

Q: Some of these charges have existed for 20 year, are these rental costs really exceptional?

A: The costs are exceptional because of the original circumstance. These are exceptions as the circumstance apply to 5 schools of a total 180.

Q: Have Rent to Buy schemes been considered for the modular buildings?

A: We can investigate Rent to Buy options.

Q: Given the reduction in numbers of Primary children, would other school places be available close by?

A: We do need the places in these specific areas. Place provision is monitored very closely for schools.

Q: Is the cost for Birkenshaw disproportionate to the total budget of the school?

A: This is a two-form entry school and the additional school buildings were provided in 2012 for the addition of two year groups required when the Building Schools for the Future funding programme was withdrawn suddenly by a new coalition government.

RESOLVED: That Schools Forum support the application of the exceptional circumstances factor for the 2026/2027 financial year but there are concerns about the sustainability of this support.

ACTION: Martin Wilby to investigate if Rent to Buy options would be available for the modular buildings at some schools.

11 High Needs Block transfer disapplication 2026/2027

The High Needs Safety Valve Block Transfer 2026/2027 report was circulated before the meeting.

John Bartlett summarised the report for the meeting.

- In March 2024, as part of the ongoing performance and review of the Safety Valve agreement, the ESFA re-negotiated and agreed revised support for Kirklees Council. The ESFA have extended the agreement to nine years but maintained the overall contribution level of £33.5 million.
- One of the key changes for the continuation of the Safety Valve agreement is the level of contribution that is proposed for the schools block over the extended period, which increased from £11.5 million to £24.3 million.

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- There is a requirement to consult Schools Forum before a Local Authority submits a disapplication request. The deadline for Local Authorities to submit a disapplication request is 17 November 2025. This is likely to be before we receive the final school funding allocations for 2026/2027.
- Schools Forum have consistently reviewed and challenged the block transfers, approving the first block transfer of £1.6 million (2022/2023) in November 2021 and subsequently approving £2.1 million (2023/2024) in September 2022, £2.6 million (2024/2025) in October 2023 and £3.6 million (2025/2026) in October 24.
- In line with the revised (March 2024) Safety valve agreement, the contribution for 2026/2027 is £3.6 million.
- It is recommended that Schools Forum support the proposed £3.6m transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block for 2026/2027.

Q: When was the original end point?

A: The original 2026/27 end point was extended to 2029/30

Q: If the schools block increases, is the £3.6m fixed and the percentage reduced from 1%?

A: Yes, the £3.6m is fixed and the percentage will be below 1%.

Q: How much of the total contribution of £33.5m has been received so far?

A: We have received over half of the £33.5m so far and expect all to be received by 2029/30.

Q: Would the High Needs Block not achieve statutory duties if this was not agreed?

A: The £3.6m contributes to a reduction in the deficit.

RESOLVED: That the recommendation proposed £3.6m transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block for 2026/2027 is supported but Schools Forum do have serious reservations as the £3.6m transfer is not connected to the actual deficit and this does not address the fundamental question of underfunding of the High Needs sector.

12 Any Other Business

There were no items of Any Other Business for discussion.

13 Confirm minutes of last meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting were confirmed above.

14 Dates and time of next meeting

- 12 December 2025

The Chair thanked everyone for attending the meeting.