

SCHOOLS FORUM

At a meeting of the Schools Forum on Wednesday, 11 June 2025 at The Board Room - Municipal Building, Widnes

Present:

N. Hunt, (Chair) Pupil Referral Unit Representative
J. Wilson, Secondary Governor Representative
B. Holmes, Education, Inclusion and Provision, HBC
N. Shafiq, Financial Management, HBC
J. Jardine, All Through School Representative
K. Evans, Secondary Academy with a 6th Form Representative
J. O'Connor, PVI Representative
J. Coughlan, Primary School Representative (Infants)
C. Liku, Community Nursery Schools Representative
J. Robertson, Small Primary School Representative
J. Thompson, Community Special Schools Representative
B. Barton, 16-19 Provision Representative
R. Houghton, Primary Governor Representative
S. Ainsworth, Special Academy Schools Representative
M. Stapleton-Chambers, Education, Inclusion and Provision, HBC
K. Butler, Democratic Services, HBC

Also in attendance: 2 members of the public

ITEM DEALT WITH UNDER DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD

Action

SCF1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from:

- Karl Landrum – Primary School with a Nursery representative;
- Michelle Slingsby - Primary Academy representative; and
- Mark Tudor - Secondary Academy representative.

SCF2 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 February 2025 were agreed as a correct record.

SCF3 HALTON SCHEME FOR FINANCING SCHOOLS UPDATE

The Forum was presented with the latest version of the Halton Scheme for Financing Schools (SFFS),

applicable to maintained schools only, as updated for 2025.

It was noted that there were no directed revisions issued by the DfE since Schools' Forum last approved the Scheme for Financing Schools.

The updates described in paragraphs 3.2 and 3.3 were noted.

RESOLVED: That Schools Forum:

- 1) note any updates approved; and
- 2) agree to the latest version being made available, as statutorily required, to all maintained schools and on a website accessible for public inspections.

SCF4 SCHOOL BALANCES 2024-25

The Schools Forum considered a report from the Operational Director of Finance, which gave the level of Revenue and Devolved Formula Capital (DFC) funding brought forward from 2024-25 by Halton's maintained schools.

It was noted that whilst balances were still required to be reported to the Schools Forum, no excess surplus balance limits were currently in place. Schools Forum however, retained the right to require schools to provide further information as to how their balance would be spent, should they so decide.

Appendix A showed the revenue balance for each maintained school, along with their 2023-24 balance for comparison. Overall, Halton's net surplus school budget balance position for maintained schools at the end of 2024-25 was £6,192,994. The report summarised comparisons with the previous year's balances.

It was noted that out of 44 Maintained schools, 36 schools carried over a surplus balance and 8 with a Deficit position at the end of 2024-25. Of the 36 with a surplus balance, 25 (55% of all Maintained schools) had accumulated surplus balances above the original maximum thresholds and these were highlighted at Appendix A.

Appendix B showed the Devolved Formula Capital (DFC) balances for each maintained school, along with their 2024-25 balance for comparison. This had decreased by £50,975 to £240,097 at the end of 2024-25. This was

mainly due to the utilisation of additional capital funding to support schools with energy efficiency initiatives and developments.

RESOLVED: That the report is noted.

SCF5 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT OUTTURN 2024/25

The Forum was presented with the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) final outturn for 2024-25.

The DSG allocation for 2024-25 was £154,222,741 and was broken down as follows:

Schools Block	-	£ 111,188,230
CSSB	-	£ 751,280
Early Years Block	-	£ 15,204,021
High Needs Block	-	£ 27,097,210

There was no block transfer in current years against the High Needs Block which meant the balance of £111,188,230 was fully devolved to mainstream primary and secondary schools and academies through the local funding formula.

The total Academy Recoupment from the Schools Block in 2024-25 was £58,637,374; this was provided directly via the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) General Annual Grant (GAG) process. The balance of £52,550,856 was provided directly to Maintained schools via their Individual School Budget (ISB).

The High Needs Block had been revised for 2024-25 to £23,774,073 subject to recoupment of £3,305,167 for direct funding of high needs places. It was noted that in year spending was substantial due to ongoing pressures and increasing numbers of pupils with Educational Health Care Plans (EHCP). The notable areas of overspend included:

- Independent and Non-Maintained Special (INMS) out-borough placements;
- Post-16 SEND placements; and
- EHCP top-up funding in Maintained and Academy provision.

The final Early Years block allocation for 2024-25 was £15,204,021.

The final outturn position was summarized as follows:

DSG overspend	£9,120,418
Carry forward deficit balance	£5,348,546
Total DSG deficit carry over	£14,648,964

RESOLVED: That the report is noted.

SCF6 DELIVERING BETTER VALUE DFE GRANT

The Forum considered a report from the Director of Education, Inclusion and Provision, which provided an update on the progress and impact of the Delivering Better Value (DBV) workstreams to reduce the overspend against the High Need Block.

In March 2024, Halton received £1M of grant funding, primarily to build resilience across all educational systems to support and include learners with Social Emotional Mental Health Needs. It was anticipated that the impact of delivering the DBV work would reduce the needs of EHCP's and if successful, have a positive impact on both spend against the High Needs Block and the SEND transport spend. The total spent to date was £501,154.

RESOLVED: That the report is noted.

SCF7 SPEECH AND LANGUAGE SERVICE UPDATE

The Forum considered a report from the Director of Education, Inclusion and Provision, which provided an update on the current position of the Speech and Language service by Communicate – SLT CIC, the commissioned service for Halton Council and NHS Cheshire and Merseyside.

It was noted that following a tender process in 2023, the children and young people's Speech and Language Therapy contract was awarded to Communicate – SLT CIC. The service was jointly commissioned with NHS Cheshire and Merseyside, with HBC holding the contract.

The report outlined the key areas of provision that were prioritised according to the clinical risk to children and young people and statutory responsibilities. It was recognised that challenges were being faced as the demand for speech and language services had exceeded capacity, largely due to four main reasons, these were described in the report.

The report contained some data which included

current EHCP activity and also a breakdown of activity and allocation, with the special schools work, due to start in June/July. In addition to this information, a request was made for some data on waiting times and data on pupils in the Pupil Referral Unit.

Director -
Education,
Inclusion and
Provision

RESOLVED: That the report is noted.

SCF8 ELECTION OF NEW CHAIR

Nigel Hunt informed the Forum that he was due to retire at the end of the school year and therefore had stepped down as Chair of the Forum. A replacement was canvassed for but unfortunately no volunteers agreed to take over the role.

Jim Wilson (Deputy Chair) agreed to act up on a temporary basis until an alternative Chair was identified.

Members of the Forum was asked to give further consideration to the request and email the Clerk with any nominations. The item would be added again to the next agenda for further consideration/agreement.

RESOLVED: That Jim Wilson (Deputy Chair) would act up as Interim Chair of the Schools Forum with effect from October 2025.

Director -
Education,
Inclusion and
Provision

Meeting ended at 5.15 p.m.