

CITY OF YORK SCHOOLS FORUM
Minutes of the Schools Forum meeting
held on Thursday 3rd July 2025
at 8.00am at Leyes Building

Present:

Dave Hewitt (Maintained Secondary Headteacher Representative) Chair, Lamara Taylor (Maintained Primary Headteacher Representative), Andrew Daly (Academy Representative), Steve Lewis (Academy Representative), Helen Winn (Academy Representative), Mark Hassack (Academy Representative), Gail Brown (Academy Representative), Ken Merry (16-19 representative), Chris Nichols (PRU Representative),

In attendance:

Cllr Robert Webb (Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education), Martyn Kelly (Director Children's Services CYC), Maxine Squire (Assistant Director, Education, Skills and SEND, CYC), Richard Hartle (Principal Accountant, CYC) Caroline Rigden (Governance Support Officer), CYC and Helen Marshall Groot (Head of Governor Services, CYC, Coordinator and Clerk)

1 Welcome / Apologies for absence

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies for absence were received from Helen Dalby, Jonny Uttley, Jemma Dunne

2 Minutes of the School Forum Meeting 8 May 2025

Previously distributed.

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed to be a true and accurate record and were duly noted as approved.

3 Matters arising not otherwise on the agenda

There were no matters arising.

4 York Health & Care Partnership Children and Young People's Plan

Previously distributed.

Maxine Squire presented the paper on behalf Sophie Gray, System Planning and Improvement Manager, explaining that the plan had also been widely shared, including with the York Schools and Academies Board (YSAB) and the maintained schools Headteacher group.

Summarising the draft children and young people's work plan, Maxine Squire explained that the plan brought together the work of the Integrated Care Board (ICB), Local Authority (LA) and other partners, setting out priorities for 2025 to 2028. Feedback was being sought through consultation on whether the priorities were right for the school system in York.

Forum members briefly discussed and were in agreement that the school system could not take the responsibility for all aspects of support and care for children and young people. The priorities were right, however careful thought on implementation and how the integrated neighbourhood teams would sit across all priority areas would be necessary.

Forum members formally received the plan.

5 **YSAB Working Party Updates**

Previously distributed.

Andrew Daly explained that the working group recommendations arising from the workstreams in 2024-25 (as shared in the paper) had been reviewed at the Directors briefing and the recent YSAB meeting. Overall, work completed had been positive and following the discussion at the previous Schools Forum meeting, the intention was to share the positive news of the collaborative work conducted publicly over the summer.

Maxine Squire provided a brief update on Poverty Proofing, explaining that the recruited audit team would commence training in the following week.

6 **Dedicated Schools Grant & Maintained Schools Outturn 2024-25**

Previously distributed.

Richard Hartle presented the reports for the 2024-25 financial year. The main paper set out the position on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), referring to the table in Annex 1 which had the headline figures. In summary, there was a £600k carry forward on the overall DSG into 2025-26. £236k of this was related to the commissioning budget commitment which carried forward each year. £61k was from the Early Years block due to funding allocations, which would be clawed back. The remainder was as a result of the £1.5m Safety Valve (SV) funding, and it was noted that without the SV, the High Needs block would have been running a significant in year deficit of £1m.

The maintained schools outturn in Annex 2 listed the balance end position for 2024-25 on revenue budgets. The key message was that the majority of schools ended with in year deficits. The overall balance position had been reduced by £200k, however this was less than predicted at start budget and revised budget in 2024.

The cumulative revenue deficit was now increasing steadily with nine out of 22 schools in a cumulative deficit position at the end of 2024-25. Start budgets for 2025-26 were being reviewed and schools would receive the LA view on start budgets in writing in the following week.

A forum member queried when Applefields conversion to academy status was expected. Richard Hartle responded that it was anticipated 1st September 2025 and noting the surplus position of Applefields (c£600k), explained that there would be an impact. While this would marginally offset by the removal of the St Barnabas overall deficit on academisation, also expected autumn 2025, it was predicted that there would be an overall revenue deficit by end of 2025-26.

Forum members discussed and agreed that the maintained school position was reflected in academies and illustrated the pressure being felt across the education sector noting the challenges being faced. The nature of the national funding formula system and a national demographic dip were highlighted as contributing factors. It was noted that York currently had the fifth lowest birth rate in country.

A forum member asked whether there would be consideration of a move to executive headteacher models for maintained schools. Maxine Squire responded that all models including shared leadership would need to be considered without compromising standards.

A forum member asked whether budgets for 2025-26 had been submitted. Richard Hartle explained the start budgets had been submitted in May and the LA had been assessing these with a view of whether accept, or request a revised budget.

A forum member asked if there had been an outcome from the spending review. Richard Hartle responded that there had been no detailed information shared. There was a 0.4% real terms increase in funding however inflation in the education sector was often higher than general inflation due to staffing costs and energy costs.

Further discussion followed relating to enacting structural changes which required both time and money however must be made on the basis of budget and what model of education schools could afford. It was widely agreed that there were challenging times ahead.

7 Schools Block top slice for High Needs Previously distributed.

Richard Hartle presented the draft consultation with schools on the Schools Block funding transfer to the High Needs Block (HNB), as had been discussed at previous meetings. The covering paper provided brief background and details of the proposed consultation. Subject to Schools Forum comments, the consultation would be shared as soon as possible with a closing date at the end of September 2025. Outcomes from the consultation would then be shared at the meeting on 16th October 2025 meeting with the formal request to the forum to instigate the funding transfer.

The consultation document provided background information, timescales, underpinning DfE regulations, a summary of the HNB position and underlying £1m deficit (subject to future funding allocations from DfE). It was intended that the neighbourhood cluster model would be shared with the consultation as an annex for explanation of proposed use for the funds generated. Forum members noted confirmation that SV funding would not be extended.

Richard Hartle continued, explaining that the modelling shared in the consultation (as previously reviewed by the forum) showed the position if the transfer was implemented in current financial year, 2025-26. Pending release of funding information over the summer, the model may be updated for presentation at the October meeting to be accurate for 2026-27.

Richard Hartle highlighted the proposed five consultation questions;

Q1: Do you understand why the local authority is proposing a 0.5% transfer from the schools block to the high needs block for 2026/27? Yes / No

Q2: Do you agree with a 0.5% transfer from the schools block to the high needs block for 2026/27? Yes / No

Q3: Regardless of your answer to Q2 (as the LA may still decide to pursue a transfer if the Schools Forum votes against), would you prefer the 0.5% transfer to be made under option 1 or option 2 as set out in Annex 1? Option 1 / Option 2

Q4: Do you agree with the proposal to direct the transferred funds to support the development of locality inclusion clusters as described at Annex 2? Yes / No

Q5: Are there any other comments that you wish to make about the proposals? SF comfortable with those questions?

Forum members were invited to provide comments and feedback.

A forum member asked whether the questions were based on other LAs that had run similar consultations. Richard Hartle responded that a number of other LA consultations had been reviewed, with some LAs asking up to 30 questions. The intention across the five questions was to get a balanced understanding of key aspects such as the AWPU reduction and the use of funds for the inclusion clusters.

A forum member commented that Q4 was an important question as the proposal was not to prop up the deficit in the HNB, but to ringfence funding for the benefit of the city in a specific inclusion cluster model. Forum members agreed that the city wide benefit and impact would need to be very clear.

Members noted that should the use of funds not be impactful, that the 0.5% would need to be applied year on year just to cover the shortfall in the HNB, which would only be moving funds from one deficit to cover another deficit. Richard Hartle pointed to the table laid out in point 9, explaining that the investment would need to generate savings of £1m plus. Maxine Squire explained that the modelling presented was on the basis that the funding generated from the 0.5% would be required for two years to implement the plans with the intention that this would lead to a reduction on the HNB. Maxine Squire continued that a change in behaviour was required or the pressure from the HNB would continue indefinitely. While there was no guarantee, the intention was that by using the funds effectively that the 0.5% would not be required after 2027-28.

A variety of causes for the HNB deficit were discussed including payment for private, out of city, provision and the subsequent need to review the profiles of those young people accessing it to identify why in city provision was no longer able to meet need. There were limits due to the SEMH provision at Danesgate Community working at and above capacity. The Inspire Centre had reduced day six pressure on Danesgate but there was currently no successful tier 1 response to SEMH need. Good practice models were being reviewed and the city needed to develop different ways of working and new skill sets. The city as a whole needed to begin to own the solutions as a system.

Maxine Squire highlighted that under the new Ofsted inspection framework, schools would have to demonstrate that their provision reflects the needs of the local community. At tier 1, capacity and ability to meet the changing need better in classrooms required development of staff. Better use of support services outside of school was also required and

could be achieved through the cluster model. This would involve efficient coordination to prioritise how to use external partners effectively.

Forum members robustly debated the impact that the top slice would have on schools already in deficit and the knock-on effect on in-school support. York was one of the lowest funded LAs in the country with a falling demographic. The level of support in schools directly affected outcomes and a holistic understanding of the impact was required. It was acknowledged that the consultation would generate similar strong feelings across York. Maxine Squire explained that the LA must consider the outcomes for every child, which may not be exam focused, highlighting that preparation for adulthood was the focus in special schools, not working towards national performance tables. In addition Maxine Squire highlighted that parents currently did not find the provision in York to be inclusive and the LA must take steps to respond to that.

Martyn Kelly commented that system leadership meant looking at the problem as a whole and could not focus on single schools or trusts. An academy representative highlighted that CEOs however had legal responsibilities to trustees and, as accounting officers, for the proper stewardship of a trust's financial resources. It was necessary to express concern about the financial impact the city wide decision would have on individual schools and trusts.

Cllr Robert Webb (Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education) commented that forum members were right to have the healthy debate and it was important to consider all the possibilities and impact. All members had a responsibility for all the children in the city and further discussions led to consensus that all members were committed to the York system and wanted the best outcomes for the young people in the city, though there remained concern on the financial situation.

The Chair asked that forum members consider the consultation questions as shared. The timeline was also overviewed.

A forum member asked who would be consulted and what the purpose of the consultation was. Richard Hartle explained that there was a duty to consult all schools maintained and academies. The outcome of the consultation was to help inform the Schools Forum members' decision when the LA formally asks for the 0.5% transfer for 2026-27 at the October 2025 meeting. Should Schools Forum members vote against the transfer then the outcome of the consultation would be shared with the Executive Members to inform their decision.

A forum member commented that all the different scenarios would need to be modelled and queried if the consultation should provide choices of how the funds were used, for example that it was either used to pay off the deficit or used to support the school system.

A forum member suggested that dedicated time would be needed to develop to a scenario for using the funds with sufficient detail that everyone could support. Martyn Kelly highlighted that in order to be successful any plan would need to involve other city leaders as a locality model and be bolstered by additional resources. Maxine Squire agreed to send out dates for solutions focused meeting which would need to have wide representation.

After further discussion and acknowledging the need to share the consultation as soon as possible, it was agreed to provide the two discussed options under Q4; to use the funds to pay off the HNB deficit or to ringfence and invest the money. The cluster model would be shared but it was suggested that it may also be important that the question allowed open answers for schools to provide any further ideas.

The Chair thanked forum members for their thoughtful contributions which demonstrated the passion all had in leading their schools and trusts.

8 School Cluster Model Update

Covered in the discussion in item 7.

9 Any other agreed business

The Chair explained that a member had raised the question of start time and how inclusive the 8am start was for members that had to travel. The member had asked for a later start time to be considered.

Forum members highlighted that similar discussions had been held previously. Colleagues favoured the earlier start time as it limited the impact on the rest of the working day. The move to 8am start a few years ago had significantly increased attendance at meetings and as such there was no support for an afternoon start or virtual meetings. A hybrid option will be looked into however the right technology needed to be in place for this to be successful. A slightly later, 8.30am, start time will be trialled for the October meeting. 9am was discussed however there would be complications caused by this also being the start of the school day and car park being full.

10. Date and time of meetings for the current academic year

Thursday 16th October 2025 at 8.30am.

Meeting closed 9:30