

Schools Forum Briefing

From the meeting held on 6 December 2024

This Briefing provides a summary of key discussions and decisions taken by Forum at their most recent meeting. If you want to find more detail, the minutes and papers from all meetings are in the public domain and can be found on the [Norfolk Schools Forum website](#) along with contact details for Forum representatives.

Provisional DSG Allocations for 2025/26 and Autumn DSG Consultation

Schools Forum Members heard a report on the Provisional Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) allocations for the coming year. They heard that the Department for Education (DfE) did not release the usual National Funding Formula (NFF) allocations in July this year, instead publishing provisional allocations online at the end of November, but this was without the provisional Authority Proforma Tool (APT) that the LA uses each year to provide school level technical papers to accompany the annual DSG consultation. This means that the LA are unable to provide the usual technical papers to support schools with understanding the implications of any proposed changes to formula, as well as their planning for the coming year.

The actual Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) allocations, based on the October 2024 census, are expected in the coming weeks. The provisional allocation is just over £841 million (excluding funding for Early Years, growth and falling rolls). The DfE will be issuing the 25-26 APT alongside and the LA have committed to sharing school level provisional allocations as soon as possible.

Members agreed to continue to set the Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) for 2025/26 at the highest allowable level, to provide the maximum level of protection for schools.

Members highlighted concerns regarding pay awards being largely unfunded, with less than 1% increases once grants had been

accounted for, offering no coverage for inflation, alongside the impact of falling rolls. Officers acknowledged the lower funding increase compared to the usual 2-3% and awaited potential new grants.

Notional SEN Allocation Methodology

Feedback from the autumn DSG consultation revealed mixed opinions on whether to adopt the DfE recommended approach to Notional SEN Allocation methodology, or to retain the existing methodology. It was agreed at the November meeting to consider alternative methodologies that align more closely with the DfE approach.

Therefore, Schools Forum heard a report comparing Norfolk's Notional SEN budget methodology with those of local and statistical neighbours, as well as the DfE recommended approach. The report proposed aligning Norfolk's methodology with the DfE approach from April 2025.

The methodologies of statistically similar authorities were examined; all allocated a higher percentage of their Schools Block to Notional SEN compared to Norfolk in 2024/25. The comparison highlighted more variation in methodologies than consensus on approach, even where authorities appeared to primarily follow the fundamentals of the DfE recommend approach. Consideration was given as to



a future formula that would work within the recommended approach for an increased Norfolk's allocation to the national average of 12%.

Options were presented to the Forum Members. Forum Members universally agreed to recommend what was agreed to be the most balanced approach, which aligned more closely with the DfE recommendations. This option still utilises a majority of low prior attainment funding, but with a significant recognition of deprivation funding, with the weightings designed to approximate a methodology that aligns with the DfE recommended approach for a Notional SEN budget of 12% of the budget share to support future planning.

Although it was agreed this approach minimised negative impacts, it was noted that some schools would experience significant changes, necessitating further discussions on how to support them. This detailed consideration aimed to ensure that Norfolk's Notional SEN budget methodology would be fair, transparent, and aligned with national standards, while also addressing local needs and circumstances.

Element 3

Members heard a report highlighting the extensive engagement undertaken over 6 months, including through the DSG consultation survey and events and the Local First Inclusion Reference Group, indicating a shared agreement on the need for change.

Despite various elements having individual pros and cons, and lacking complete consensus, the proposed approach aimed to find an overall solution. Key principles such as transparency, clarity, flexibility, and collaboration were emphasised, ensuring funds are directed to their intended purpose, especially for children and young people with the highest needs.

The proposal suggested extending current arrangements into the summer term, acknowledging challenges faced by a few schools with the existing funding structure.

These issues were being discussed, and the Unexpected Situation Support Fund could address unique cases. The new approach would start in the new academic year. Officers committed to ongoing collaboration, sharing updates, and effective communication to ensure long-term success. There would be further communications in early January around this, [following an update issued by the LA](#) in December via e-courier.

The proposed revised model from the start of the new academic year, September 25, consists of:

- a formulaic element, equivalent to the part-year effect of the block transfer, distributed on the basis of the NFF factors and values
- cohort funding considered and identified on a whole school basis where additional resources are required to deliver provision to meet the needs of children with the highest level of SEND within mainstream provision (likely to be those with a weighted INDES score of 100 and above)

Forum Members expressed their universal support for the paper, acknowledging the significant effort involved and its balanced presentation of discussions, recognising the considerable investment in the paper.

Officers noted that a test and learn approach would be necessary in the first academic year, with the government also signalling rapid changes to SEND reforms. A Forum Member asked about measurable success; they heard that the goal was to direct funding where there was a clear need, ensuring that it supported appropriate interventions, and that schools could work with the Local Authority to accomplish this.

Members heard that that Element 3 payments would be made termly, with amendments if necessary. Although DfE guidance suggested monthly payments, this would involve significant administration for both schools and the LA; a termly approach was seen as a reasonable balance and clear timeline for payments would be provided. The aim would be to provide funding clarity via regular school meetings, with the importance of schools submitting information by the deadline being highlighted.

Schools Forum Members asked for clarification on the Schools Block to High Needs Block transfer, specifically its necessity for this and future years. Officers responded that they would discuss with the DfE the desire to move away from a block transfer from 2026/27, but that DfE support was needed in order to do this. However, the proposed revised model is purposefully designed to facilitate transition to this through the allocation of the formulaic element on NFF factors and values. The situation would be reviewed ahead of 2026/27.

Schools Forum Substitutes

Schools Forum proposed the setting up of a mechanism for the Committee Officer to maintain an up-to-date list of substitutes. Officers noted that with upcoming member nominations, there might be more candidates than roles, providing a good opportunity to arrange substitutes.

Forum Members suggested training for new members and substitutes on the remit of the Schools Forum, which officers agreed to address.

Thanks to Mike Grimble

Schools Forum voiced their sincere thanks to Mike Grimble, who retired from Norfolk Schools Forum after 29 years, and noted that there would be a vacancy for a Primary school representative on the Forum.