CUMBERLAND SCHOOLS FORUM

Draft MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON
10 September 2026
Council Chamber, Allerdale House, Workington
(and Microsoft Teams)

PRESENT

Nicky Corfield	(Maintained Primary Schools)
David Grimshaw	(Maintained Primary Schools)
Rhiannon Hughes	(Maintained Nursery Schools)
Ruth Lawler	(Secondary Academy)
Joanne Lloyd	(Maintained Primary Schools)
Lianne Lomas	(RC Diocese)
Elaine Lynch	(Cumberland Portfolio – Lifelong Learning & Development)
Chris McAree	(Secondary Academy)
Sophie McCabe	(Maintained Special Schools)
Michael Smillie	(Secondary Academy)
Kris Williams	(Special Academy)

Officers in Attendance:

Emma Hamer	(Assistant Director – Education, SEND & Inclusion)
Sarah Flockton	(Senior Manager – Strategic Development)
Sue Lowndes	(Interim Service Manager – Learning Improvement Service)
Natalie Bevan	(SEND & AP Lead and Transformation Manager)
Paula Gledhill	(Interim Group Accountant)
Sophie Scott	(Finance Manager – Education, SEND & Inclusion)
Gemma Benson	(Principal Auditor – Item 7)
Nicola Shiels	(Forum Support)
Lewis Morgan	(School Finance – Observer)

Observers:
None

Apologies for Absence

James Blackwell	(Maintained Primary Schools)
Danny Gee	(PRUs)
Declan McArdle	(Maintained Secondary)

PART 1: ITEMS LIKELY TO BE CONSIDERED IN THE PRESENCE OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

1. Appointment of Chair

Chris McAree was appointed as Chair of the Cumberland Schools Forum for the coming year.

2. Appointment of Vice-Chair

Michael Smillie was appointed as Vice-Chair of the Cumberland Schools Forum for the coming year.

3. Exclusion of Press and Public

It was agreed that all items would be considered in the public domain.

4. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest at this stage.

5. Minutes of Previous Meeting and Matters Arising

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 June 2026 were agreed as an accurate record.

Matters Arising:

i) **Item 3(i) RPA Option for Schools:** At the meeting held on 9 June 2026 it was agreed that Rhiannon Hughes and Joanne Lloyd, along with James Blackwell, would meet to consider the RPA option/insurance for schools with a view to reporting back findings early in the autumn term 2026. The meeting was held on 13 July with council representatives also in attendance and the notes of the meeting had been circulated with the agenda. A number of reservations about moving from the council insurance arrangements to RPA were discussed with a consensus view from the group that maintained schools should remain with the council insurance arrangements.
Following a vote, maintained representatives on the Schools Forum recommended that maintained schools should remain with the council insurance arrangements rather than moving to RPA.

ii) **Item 10 Any Other Business: School SEND Funding:** At the meeting on 9 June, Forum had noted that the funding bands had not been increased in recent years and it would be helpful to understand the implications of any change or increase. The minutes had not made clear the expectation that this would be presented and considered at a future meeting. It was reported that modelling work had been completed and it would be presented to the High Needs Working Group.

There were no other matters arising.

6. Summary of Audit Findings – School Audits 2025-26

Internal Audit undertook a small sample of school audits each year. Gemma Benson, Principal Auditor presented a report that summarised the findings from audits completed in 2025-26. The findings would be disseminated more widely to all schools via the Schools

Portal which would allow schools to consider their own arrangements in line with the findings in the report and put in place any necessary improvements.

Three school reviews had been completed during 2025-26, one secondary and two primary schools. Internal Audit reports were agreed with the Headteacher at the individual schools and included an action plan for improving controls. The agreed report was also provided to the Chair of Governors/Chair of Finance Committee so that governors could support heads in implementing agreed actions. Individual school audit findings were provided to the Audit Committee as part of Internal Audit's regular progress reports.

As a limited number of audits were undertaken each year, Internal Audit collated the findings from each review into a summary report that could be shared with all schools to assist them in ensuring that they operated appropriate controls in the areas identified.

As part of the ongoing development of the school audit programme, opportunities to expand school audit coverage was considered where it aligned with available resources, risks and priorities and in 2026-27 the audit plan would include an increased number of days allocated for school work. This would include training additional audit staff in this area.

The report set out the general areas where improvements could be made; some of which were similar to those set out in the previous year. Schools Forum was asked to note the summary report and the intention to distribute to all schools, for information, via the Schools Portal.

During the discussion about the report it was noted that Education SEND & Inclusion colleagues were working very closely with the school finance team to support a number of schools which would hopefully avoid the need to remove delegation from further schools.

There was some concern at the small number of schools that the team were able to audit each year. In response, colleagues explained that the plan was to increase the number of school audit visits annually. It was also important that all schools were taking any necessary actions as a result of the findings rather than simply noting them. The school finance team had been working together with the audit team in relation to fraudulent incidents with the school finance team introducing a check and challenge process internally to help mitigate potential fraud.

The LA Scheme for Financing Schools was available on the school portal. This would be refreshed and circulated again via the weekly e-mail to schools with a reminder about best practice. Schools could also contact their named finance contact with any queries.

It was suggested that it might be helpful to provide schools with a simple self-assessment tool; officers supported this and would investigate the development of the tool as a support mechanism for schools. In the interim, the checklist that was sent schools selected for audit ahead of the visit would be shared with schools.

Schools Forum noted the content of the report and the findings as well as the intention to circulate to all schools for information via the Schools Portal.

7. De-delegated Contingency Budget Monitoring YE 2025-26

A report presenting the provisional outturn position on the de-delegated contingency budget for the 2025-26 financial year as at 31 March 2026 was considered. The budget was forecast to underspend by £0.324m and in accordance with the Dedicated Schools

Grant conditions, the underspend would be carried forward into the Dedicated Schools Grant earmarked reserve.

As this was a de-delegated budget it therefore only related to maintained schools and not academies.

The de-delegated contingency budget for 2025-26 was £0.378m. DfE guidance stated that the contingency budget could be used for three purposes:

- Circumstances which were unforeseen when the school's budget share was initially determined
- Schools in financial difficulty
- Additional costs relating to new, reorganised or closing schools

Circumstances which were unforeseen when the school's budget share was initially determined.
The main areas of expenditure related to ill health retirements, administration costs relating to the administration of the Teachers' Annual Pension Return and temporary accommodation costs at the Gillford Centre PRU.

After appropriate challenge by Schools Forum the costs relating to temporary accommodation at the Gillford Centre and the Teachers' Pension Return costs had been reviewed. The temporary accommodation at the Gillford Centre had been removed therefore these costs had ceased and further costs related to the Annual Teachers' Pension return cost would be covered by other council budgets rather that the Schools' contingency budget.

One school had converted to an academy on 28 February 2026. The deficit amount set out in the report was 50% of the agreed deficit at conversion with the remaining 50% due to be met corporately by the local authority. A further two schools were expected to academise during 2026-27 and the school finance team would continue to challenge expenditure to ensure that spend did not increase significantly prior to academisation.

In January 2026, Schools Forum had agreed that £30,000 of the underspend at Q3 would be delegated back to the local authority to assist with challenge, support and training for deficit schools. The full amount was spent in 2025-26 and the report set out how it had been used.

Some external consultancy had been employed to support de-delegation but there were now internal staff in place to cover this work. Other use included supporting the cost of deploying SRMAs into schools with financial difficulties.

The Schools Forum noted the provisional outturn position in the contingencies budget for 2025-26 and expressed thanks regarding the academisation costs that had been picked up corporately. The School Finance Team were also thanked for their work to ensure that expenditure incurred by converting schools did not increase significantly prior to conversion.

8. High Needs Budget Monitoring YE 2025-26

A report presenting the provisional outturn deficit position on the High Needs (HN) block as at 31 March 2026 was considered. The cumulative budget deficit was forecast to be £33.126m as at 31 March 2026 which was an improvement on the forecast position at Q3, 31 December 2025.

A balanced High Needs budget had been set for 2025-26 with no planned transfer to or from reserves. The initial budget available for the HN Block was £39.556m based on the provisional HN block allocation from central government as confirmed in December 2024. There were no transfers from the Schools Block but since the initial budget was set the HN block allocation had been updated to reflect adjusted recoupment for HN places.

Performance against the High Needs Block budget was monitored monthly with reports presented to senior management, and to Executive on a quarterly basis, as well as to each Schools Forum meeting. The provisional in-year outturn showed an overspend of £7.587m as at 31 March 2026.

The key variances were detailed in the report and related to special schools, resourced provision, ISP and other placements, central SEN, residential ISPs, invest to save initiatives, post-16 ISPs, post-16 FE colleges and EHCP top-ups for pupils in mainstream school and early years providers.

The pressure against the High Needs Block continued to be due to specific budget pressures relating to the growth in demand for Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs) for children and young people with SEN which continued to rise.

Prior to Local Government Reorganisation, Cumbria took part of the Department for Education's Delivering Better Value for SEND programme and successfully applied for and received approval for a £1m grant for each new authority to support their improvement plans, the impact of which had been incorporated into Cumberland's DSG management plan. The DBV Programme ended on 31 March 2025.

In 2025 DfE announced that significant SEND Reforms would be set out in the Schools White Paper. When the paper was published it included the announcement that a High Needs Stability Grant would be introduced for local authorities and there had been indications that this would equate to 90% of the net DSG balance as at 31 March 2026, with the 10% remaining deficit falling to the local authority to fund.

The local authority submitted the SEND Reform Plan to DfE on 19 June 2026 with the outcome still awaited. Initial guidance indicated that, should the local authority meet the local SEND Reform Plan conditions, the grant would be received in the 2026-27 financial year. Should the local authority not receive the High Needs Stability Grant, the council would need to fund the cumulative deficit as at 31 March 2026 plus any in-year deficits in 2026-27 and 2027-28 when the statutory override ended on 31 March 2028.

The main focus for the Schools White Paper was inclusion within mainstream schools which would help to reduce the burden on special schools. The number of special school places in Cumberland had increased from 486 in 2023-24 to 550 in 2025-26 but there were also a high number of active tribunal cases which increased the burden on the SEND service and the wider Children & Families directorate. It also illustrated that significant additional places were needed.

An increase in the number of requests for EHCPs following government announcements regarding the reform of SEND was noted; the majority of new requests coming from parents. It was agreed that future reports should include the overall number of EHCPs.

The aim of the SEND Reform Plan was to re-shape the system and the final plan included details about process, whole systems, new models and a model to deliver Experts at Hand.

Details about quarterly returns had now been received and in terms of budget setting, this would be reprofiled once the decision from DfE had been received which may not be until the end of October. Indications were that there may not be sufficient funds within the system so there may be a tiered response to local authorities. Schools Forum to be kept updated.

Cumberland Schools Forum noted the provisional outturn for the High Needs Block budget as at 31 March 2026.

9. De-delegated Contingency Budget Monitoring 2026-27 Q1

A report setting out the draft forecast outturn position on the de-delegated contingency budget for the 2026-27 financial year as at 30 June 2026 was presented. The budget was forecast to underspend by £0.299m and in accordance with the Dedicated Schools Grant conditions, the underspend would be transferred back to the DSG reserve at year end.

This was a de-delegated budget so it related only to maintained schools and not academies.

The de-delegated contingency budget for 2025-26 was £0.378m. DfE guidance stated that the contingency budget could be used for three purposes:

- Circumstances which were unforeseen when the school's budget share was initially determined.
- Schools in financial difficulty
- Additional costs relating to new, reorganised or closing schools

Circumstances which were unforeseen when the school's budget share was initially determined.

The main area of expenditure related to ill health retirements and costs related to the deficit balances of academising schools.

As a result of challenge in the previous year by Schools Forum, education teams and the schools finance team had reviewed several costs coming through this cost centre including costs related to the teachers' pension return and it was noted that these costs had ceased from this cost centre in the 2026-27 financial year.

During the 2025-26 financial year, one school had converted to an academy (28 February 2026) with a further school academising on 1 May 2026. A further two schools were expected to academise during 2026-27. The deficit shown in the forecast was 50% of the deficit agreed to be paid at conversion for the first two converting schools. The remaining 50% would be picked up corporately by the Local Authority. The schools finance team would continue to challenge spend in the two converting schools to ensure it remained at a reasonable level between now and the date of conversion.

At the meeting on 14 January 2026, Schools Forum had agreed that £30,000 of the 2025-26 underspend on the de-delegated contingency fund budget would be delegated back to the Local Authority to assist with challenge, support and training for deficit schools. As reported earlier the £30,000 had been fully spent with a full breakdown of all spend set out in a previous report.

At the January 2026 meeting, it had also been agreed that Forum would annually review the amount to be delegated back to the local authority to assist with challenge, support and training for deficit schools. For the 2026-27 financial year it was proposed that £90,000 be

allocated from the contingency to provide tailored resource to the local authority in relation to deficit school budgets.

In discussing the report an approximate breakdown of the use of the proposed £90k was provided. It was anticipated that it would cover costs for training sessions, an improved training offer, the deployment of consultant SRMAs to help schools implement proposed changes in a tailored way. It was also noted that the level of support to schools in financial difficulty provided by LIS had also increased.

Forum felt that £90k was a significant amount to come from the contingency budget and members asked about the financial impact and whether the number of schools facing financial difficulty was reducing. The maintained school balances paper set out that the number of deficit schools had reduced and the importance of supporting colleagues to challenge and support schools was recognised. It was further noted that, without the de-delegation back to the LA of £30k in 2025-26, it was likely that delegation would have been removed from more schools.

Maintained school representatives on Schools Forum noted the forecast outturn position as at Q1 for the contingency budget 2026-27 and approved that £90,000 of the 2026-27 underspend on the contingency fund be reallocated to provide tailored resource to the local authority in relation to deficit school budgets. Future monitoring reports to include breakdown of how £90,000 was allocated.

10. High Needs Block Budget Monitoring 2026-27 Q1

A report setting out the forecast deficit position on the High Needs (HN) as at 30 June 2026 was considered. The in-year budget deficit position was forecast to be £6.715m resulting in the cumulative deficit forecast to be £33.840m as at 31 March 2027.

A balanced High Needs budget had been set for 2026-27 with no planned transfer to or from reserves. The initial budget available for the HN Block was £45.132m based on the provisional HN block allocation from central government as confirmed in December 2025. There had been no transfers from the Schools Block but since the initial budget was set the HN block allocation had been updated to reflect adjusted recoupment for HN places.

Performance against the High Needs Block budget was monitored monthly with reports presented to senior management, and to Executive on a quarterly basis, as well as to each Schools Forum meeting. The projection against the budget as at Q1 showed that the budget was projected to overspend by £6.715m, in year, as at 31 March 2027.

The key variances were detailed in the report and related to special schools, resourced provision, ISP and other placements, central SEN, residential ISPs, invest to save initiatives, post-16 ISPs, post-16 FE colleges and EHCP top-ups for pupils in mainstream school and early years providers.

The pressure against the High Needs Block continued to be due to specific budget pressures relating to the growth in demand for Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs) for children and young people with SEN. The report also included a table providing additional detail about the numbers of places funded within the forecast.

In 2025 the DfE had announced that there would be significant reforms to SEND which would be detailed in the Schools White Paper. The White Paper – Every Child Achieving and Thriving was published on 23 February 2026.

The SEND Reform guidance had a particular focus on improving inclusion within mainstream settings and highlighted the need for Experts at Hand. The guidance remained limited in relation to the financial implications from the white paper but it did refer to funding for local authorities to support the Experts at Hand initiatives, inclusive mainstream funds for early years settings and schools to support inclusion in mainstream and a High Needs Stability Grant to support local authorities at the end of the statutory override.

The Office for Budget Responsibility forecast that DSG High Needs Block deficits would reach £14bn nationally by 2027-28. As a result, government had announced the introduction of a High Needs Stability Grant to Local Authorities which was expected to provide a grant which was 90% of the High Needs DSG Deficit at 31 March 2026. Section 251 Data, DSG S151 Assurance Data and Revenue Outturn data would be used to determine the amount of grant. For Cumberland Council this was forecast to be £22.477m and while this was welcome news it was noted that the remaining 10% of the deficit would fall to the Local Authority to fund.

To be eligible for the grant the local authority must meet local SEND reform plans conditions, and each local authority had been allocated a DfE colleague as well as a DfE finance expert to provide support. The final SEND Reform Plan was submitted on 19 June 2026 with the outcome awaited. Initial guidance indicated that, should the local authority meet the local SEND Reform Plan conditions, the grant would be received in the 2026-27 financial year.

It was expected that the High Needs Stability Grant would be a one-off payment to local authorities, so it was imperative that the council make sufficient transformation to manage the 'in year' balance year on year. The 'in year' deficit balance in 2026-27 was forecast to be £6.408m, plus maintained school balances. This would require significant work including increased SEND sufficiency. The increase in special school places, RP and AP places within the Cumberland area would allow appropriate sufficiency to deliver places to Cumberland children and young people within the Cumberland area and to subsequently reduce children and young people needing to access provision out of area. The current shortfall in provision in Cumberland meant that several children and young people were attending independent special schools out of area at an average cost of £0.052m plus home to school travel costs that, in some cases, were £0.027m per annum.

In Cumberland Council the number of special school places funded had increased from 486 in 2023-24 to 550 in 2025-26. There were, however, a high number of active tribunal cases for Cumberland children and young people which increased the burden on SEND colleagues as well as colleagues in the legal team who supported the SEND service and the wider Children and Family Wellbeing directorate.

In terms of the High Needs deficit, it was noted that there was varied evidence in terms of comparison to deficit levels in other LAs but there were very few that did not have an in-year deficit. Government focus was on whole school inclusion; SEND reform would shape future budget and with no additional funding likely it was important to work together to support CYP.

It was also noted that mechanisms were in place to track Cumberland CYP living along the border with Westmorland & Furness who were attending Westmorland schools and these numbers were decreasing.

Cumberland Schools Forum noted the current projection on the HN Budget as at 30 December 2025.

11. Maintained School Balances

Schools Forum considered a report that summarised the projected mainstream school balances. Based on school budget plans submitted in May 20265, the net deficit balance was projected to be £9.019m as at 31 March 2027. This comprised of 91 schools proposing surplus balances totalling (£6.061m) and 32 schools proposing deficit balances totalling £15.080m.

Maintained schools were required to submit a three-year budget plan to the finance team each year by 31 May. The plans were reviewed to check that the funding assumptions were reasonable and that expenditure plans were achievable. A summary report was provided to the Assistant Director, Education, SEND & Inclusion who approved the budgets. Schools that submitted a budget that could not be approved, because they were forecasting a deficit balance or for other reasons, were required to re-submit a revised budget by 31 October. Schools that proposed a deficit budget in May must apply for a licensed deficit and return a forecast year-end outturn as at 30 September and 31 December. In accordance with LA Scheme for Financing Schools a summary report was provided to Schools Forum.

As at 31 March 2026 the forecast net deficit balance for maintained schools was (£7.597m). Based on schools' own projections from their May budget submissions the net deficit balance was predicted to become a deficit balance of (£9.019m) as at 31 March 2027 which was an increase of £1.422m compared to the 2025-26 financial year. Of the 91 schools that were predicting surplus balances for 2026-27, a total of 57 schools were predicting balances in excess of the allowable 8% (nursery, primary, special and PRUs) and 5% (secondary) thresholds.

The number of schools with a deficit balance was predicted to be 32 as at 31 March 2027. Of the 32 forecasting deficit balances from 2026-27, two of them were predicting a surplus balance at the end of 2027-28. 8 schools that that were forecasting deficit balances from 2026-27 were also predicting deficit balances at the end of 2028-29.

Secondary schools continued to display the most significant budget difficulties with 6 out of 7 maintained secondary schools predicting deficit budgets in 2026-27. The 6 secondaries predicting deficit budgets in 2026-27 had also been in deficit in 2025-26 and the net deficit balance for these secondaries was predicted to increase by £1.964m.

All deficit schools had been requested to submit deficit recovery plans. Ten plans remained outstanding and would continue to be chased by the school finance team.

During the discussion a number of points were raised, including:

- Was there a need for more strategic planning by the LA? Colleagues reassured that school organisation strategic was ongoing.
- There was some frustration that academies were required to balance budgets but it was pointed out that maintained schools were expected to have a balanced in-year budget; achieving this would enable those schools in a deficit position to begin to make inroads into the deficit.
- The picture in relation to secondary schools was worsening picture.
- That 25% of deficit schools no longer had a deficit was welcomed.

- Delegation had been removed from one school more rigour to in terms of challenge and support for schools.
- Schools not managing the budget position well required to change things around.

Schools Forum noted the projected school balances for maintained schools.

12. School Performance Statistics and Compliance

Schools Forum considered a report setting out schools' performance data for Cumberland maintained schools and PRUs in relation to financial data returns. The report also included details about the LA Finance Team for transparency.

This was a regular report highlighting the compliance to deadlines of both schools and the Local Authority Schools Finance Team and provided the Forum with the wider implications of such deadlines not being met effectively.
The Cumberland Schools Finance Team continued to work to increase the dialogue between schools and the local authority as well as to improve the communications coming from the team. By increasing communications and improving the relationship with schools it was hoped compliance would improve as the implications of missed deadlines could be identified.

As part of the LA Scheme for Financing of Schools and PRUs there was an expectation on every school to submit specific financial returns by set deadlines with a similar expectation on the Schools Finance Team to provide schools with the data needed to make informed decisions.

The report detailed the main deadlines in 2026-27 that maintained schools had been asked to comply with. Each return was set out with the compliance rates for all deadlines as well as the methods that had been used to inform and remind schools of the requirement to submit the returns. Specific schools were also chased where returns remained outstanding and overdue via email and telephone by their specific school finance team contact.

As well as the maintained school deadlines, the Local Authority Schools Finance Team were also obliged to meet the deadlines set upon them. These included the publication of monthly tabs, publication of School Budget Shares by 28 February and publication of three-year budget packs. The May 2026 Budget Pack and the School Budget Shares documents were published on time.

In the current financial year all monthly tab reports had been issued on time which was a significant improvement on the previous year. The Schools Finance Team continued to work actively with IT colleagues to ensure that this continued throughout the year and although the position had improved recently, work would continue to ensure that the process improved further.

Whilst reviewing the returns submitted from schools, the School Finance Team had also been increasing their challenge and support to deficit schools.

In 2025-26, meetings had been held with 26 schools, providing the opportunity to provide additional challenge to those schools with deficit and allow for open and frank discussions about the challenges faced and resources available to support schools. These meetings were generally held alongside the School Improvement Service which enabled all-round support to schools to be considered. Due to year-end workload commitments frequency of these meetings had slowed however, schools that were forecasting an in-year deficit had

been advised that meetings would be held in October to discuss their deficit budgets. The Schools Finance Team was currently arranging these meetings.

As previously reported, as part of the increased challenge to schools, and in line with the LA Scheme for Financing of Schools and PRUs, the local authority had removed financial delegation from one Cumberland school.

The decision of the Local Authority to take financial delegation from the school was not taken lightly and had resulted in a significant amount of work for both the school and the LA but good progress had been made in recent months to understand what was required to bring a balanced in-year budget. Work was ongoing to reduce expenditure going forward and to review all contracts in place within the school; the school leadership team had worked closely with the Learning Improvement Service and the Schools Finance Team and the engagement had been invaluable to the works needed.

It was noted that progress had been made since delegation had been withdrawn and while it would take time, it was anticipated that the situation would improve in future.

The main discussion focussed on ways to support schools' financial management whilst protecting school leaders, new and existing as well as school governors.

Some of the reasons for late returns included timing of governor meetings, lack of understanding, schools without a business manager, schools buying into the same bursary service, changes in school staff, etc. Schools Forum considered how to support schools better, generally and in relation to better understanding of deadlines and how to meet them. Colleagues were reminded that the number of returns was fewer for non-cheque book schools but there was a need for more governor and headteacher training. Michael Smillie and Ruth Lawler were part of the Cumberland business managers network and were willing to support schools if they could. Finally, it was noted that a letter was being prepared to send to governing bodies setting out each of the returns together with the associated dates and deadlines.

The Cumberland Schools Forum noted the report and implications of the delays in submissions.

13. High Needs Group – Modelling Requests for 6 October Meeting

Given the scale of the SEND reforms there was a view that the terms of reference of the High Needs Working Group should be revisited; perhaps with a move towards the establishment of specific task and finish groups when an issue or issues needed to be explored in more detail.

It was acknowledged that a challenge with the current working group was that it could very quickly become a discussion group around practice rather than about funding and school budgets.

It was agreed that Natalie Bevan would work with Kris Williams to scope the purpose of the group going forward and that meetings of the High Needs Working Group would be put on hold pending the outcome of this scoping work. It was further suggested that it might be helpful if a colleague from a mainstream school was also involved.

School Forum members were reminded that they were not the decision makers on the HN Block.

14. Date of Next Meeting

i) The next meeting of the Schools Forum would be held on Thursday, 5 November 2026. This would be an in-person meeting, beginning at 9.30am, at Cumbria House, Carlisle. An additional single item meeting had been arranged to consider the Schools Funding Formula 2027-28. The meeting would be held via Microsoft Teams on Monday, 12 October 2026 starting at 4pm. An invitation for the meeting had been shared.

ii) A proposed schedule of dates for meetings of the Cumberland Schools Forum and associated working groups during 2027 had been circulated with the agenda. Any comments on the proposed dates to be forwarded to Nicola Shiels otherwise the proposed dates would be finalised at the November meeting before being shared. Future meetings would generally be in person meetings.

15. Any Other Business

DfE was consulting on plans to change how funding for children with special educational needs (SEND) was distributed in mainstream schools in England. The consultation aims to give schools a greater share of SEND funding rather than relying on LA top-up funding. This proposal was part of the government's wider SEND reform programme and was intended to help schools provide support earlier, reduce bureaucracy and create a more inclusive education system. The consultation was open to LAs, mainstream schools, representations of school funding and finance arrangements and parent carers. The closing date was 18 September 2026.

There had been an opportunity to be involved in a pilot but Cumberland had declined to take part. LA colleagues were completing the response which would be shared when completed.

There were no other items of business.

NS/ES&I
October 2026