



Solihull Schools Forum

Minutes of Meeting

9:30am – 11:00am

Thursday 11th July 2024

SMBC Civic Suite Room 1

Homer Rd, Solihull B91 9SE

Member Category	Member Name	Institution	Attendance (Y/N/ Apols)
HEAD TEACHERS OF PRIMARY MAINTAINED SCHOOLS (4)	Lynn Clark	Marston Green Juniors (Northern)	Y
HEAD TEACHERS OF PRIMARY MAINTAINED SCHOOLS (4)	Bernie Farkas	Blossomfield Infants (Synergy)	Y
HEAD TEACHERS OF PRIMARY MAINTAINED SCHOOLS (4)	Richard Marshall	Oak Cottage (Evolve)	Apologies
GOVERNORS OF PRIMARY MAINTAINED SCHOOLS (4)	John McDermott	St Alphege Inf & Junior (Synergy)	Y
GOVERNORS OF PRIMARY MAINTAINED SCHOOLS (4)	Tim Baptiste	Oak Cottage (Evolve)	Y
GOVERNORS OF PRIMARY MAINTAINED SCHOOLS (4)	Paul Jackson	Castle Bromwich Junior School (Northern)	N
HEAD TEACHERS OF PRIMARY ACADEMIES (2)	Louise Minter	Streetsbrook I&EY Academy, (Synergy)	Apologies
HEAD TEACHERS OF PRIMARY ACADEMIES (2)	Holly Lynch	TGA Primary St James (Synergy)	Apologies
HEAD TEACHERS OF PRIMARY ACADEMIES (2)	Mark Pratt	Ulverley School (Mosaic)	Apologies
GOVERNORS OF PRIMARY ACADEMIES (2)	Antoinette Fisher	Dorridge Primary (Rurals)	Y
GOVERNORS OF PRIMARY ACADEMIES (2)	Lynda Mackay	Knowle CofE Primary (Rurals)	Apologies
SECONDARY ACADEMY MEMBERS (10 – principals [or representatives] or governors) Inc. AP Academy	Claire Smith (P)	Tudor Grange (Synergy)	Y
SECONDARY ACADEMY MEMBERS (10 – principals [or representatives] or governors) Inc. AP Academy	Charlotte Shadbolt (G)	Heart of England (Rurals)	Y
SECONDARY ACADEMY MEMBERS (10 – principals [or representatives] or governors) Inc. AP Academy	Darren Gelder (P)	Grace Academy (Unity)	Y
SECONDARY ACADEMY MEMBERS (10 – principals [or representatives] or governors) Inc. AP Academy	Stephen Steinhaus (P)	Solihull AP Academy	Y
SECONDARY ACADEMY MEMBERS (10 – principals [or representatives] or	Stuart Shelton	St Peters RC (Synergy)	Y

governors) Inc. AP Academy			
SECONDARY ACADEMY MEMBERS (10 – principals [or representatives] or governors) Inc. AP Academy	Clare Thorpe (HT)	Langley Secondary (Evolve)	Y
SECONDARY ACADEMY MEMBERS (10 – principals [or representatives] or governors) Inc. AP Academy	Andrew Best (G)	Smith's Wood Secondary Academy (Fairfax MAT)	N
REPRESENTATIVE OF MAINTAINED SPECIALIST PROVISION (1) attend on rota basis	Andy Simms	Hazel Oak	Apologies
REPRESENTATIVE OF SPECIALIST ACADEMIES (1)	Nicola Redhead	The Heights	Apologies
REPRESENTATIVE OF PUPIL REFERRAL UNITS (1)	Eleanor Clarke	Triple Crown Centre (Mosaic)	Y
ELECTED MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL (4)	Councillor Annette McKenzie (Conservative)		Y
ELECTED MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL (4)	Councillor Andrew Burrow (Conservative)		Y
ELECTED MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL (4)	Councillor Karen Grinsell (Conservative)		Y
ELECTED MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL (4)	Councillor Samantha Gethen (Conservative)		Y
TRADE UNION REPRESENTATIVES (2)	David Lewis	TU Rep	Y
TRADE UNION REPRESENTATIVES (2)	Gareth Eastham	NASUWT	Y
TRADE UNION REPRESENTATIVES (2)	Gary Woodhouse (Substitute Member)	GMB	N
TRADE UNION REPRESENTATIVES (2)	Jane Davenport	NAHT	Y
REPRESENTATIVES OF EARLY YEARS PVI SECTOR (2)	Gina Godwin	Whitesmore Neighbourhood Nursery (Wise Owls)	Y
REPRESENTATIVES OF EARLY YEARS PVI SECTOR (2)	Lisa Whitehouse	Tender Years	Apologies
REPRESENTATIVES OF POST-16 COLLEGES (2)	Susan Homer	Solihull College	Y
REPRESENTATIVES OF POST-16 COLLEGES (2)	Dr Martin Sullivan	Sixth Form College	N
OBSERVERS	Peter Davis	Diocesan Education Service (The Roman	N

		Catholic Archdiocese of Birmingham)	
OBSERVERS	Sarah Smith	Education for Birmingham, The Church of England	Apologies
OBSERVERS	Mark Firmstone	Light Hall School	Y
Officers (attend as required)			
Acting DCS	Tim Browne	SMBC	Y
Head of Commissioning for Learning	Bern Timings	SMBC	Y
SMBC Senior Accountant	Verity Dixon	SMBC	Y
Clerk	Jo Heys	SMBC	Y

Item	Minute	Action
1.	Welcome and apologies for absence	
1.1.	Antoinette Fisher welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for attending, particularly at such a busy time of the school year.	
1.2.	Apologies were received from Richard Marshall, Lisa Whitehouse, Louise Minter, Sarah Smith, Nicola Redhead, Andy Simms, Lynda Mackay, Mark Pratt and Holly Lynch.	
1.3.	AF explained this would be the last meeting for two Forum members and said thank you and goodbye to Eleanor Clarke who has been a very valued addition to Forum and wished her good luck in retirement. She said thank you and goodbye to David Lewis and added that Mark Firmstone had kindly agreed to become the new Chair of Finance Working Group. AF thanked David for all his hard work and this was echoed by Forum members.	
2.	Minutes of previous meeting on 23rd May 2024	
2.1.	The minutes from the previous meeting of Solihull Schools Forum which took place on Thursday 23 rd May were approved as an accurate record with one amendment: Jane Davenport's institution is NAHT not NASUWT.	JH
3.	Matters Arising	
3.1.	Jane Davenport confirmed she is willing to be the union representative on Solihull Schools Forum from September 2024.	
4.	Cabinet Member Update – Councillor Karen Grinsell	
4.1.	Councillor Grinsell provided an update, highlighting that the first small home has now opened, is fully registered and has two children there, the second is due to come online very soon and is just awaiting inspection, with the third expected to open later in the year. The Family Hubs programme officially launched earlier in the week with Elmwood Place open. The Family Hubs will work very closely with schools. By the end of the summer, the fourth hub at Elmdon will be open for families in the south. Councillor Grinsell explained that all ages were coming in, not just little ones but also teenagers. There is outreach work going on and an app and the aim is to work very closely with schools and make links locally. The Hubs offer a range of support including Citizens Advice, health colleagues such as midwives and health visitors.	

4.2.	Councillor Burrow added that there will be outreach versions so that every area of the borough will be covered.	
4.3.	Councillor Grinsell explained that the plans around the special schools are progressing. The window of opportunity for the SEND inspection had now passed. The improvement journey inspections are continuing with preparations for DfE next week.	
4.4.	In terms of the Council funding, we are now starting the process for the medium term financial strategy and it has identified a funding gap of approx. £4m.	
4.5.	Darren Gelder asked with regard to 16-25, if there had been any progress in trying to alleviate that financial pressure by looking at some of the other departments in the LA to contribute as they are not accessing schools and education beyond 16-25 but are accessing other services.	
4.6.	Councillor Grinsell replied that they are looking across every area and all the reserves are being depleted and being used.	
4.7.	DG added that other LAs are looking to Public Health to contribute as young people are accessing those services but it is still coming out of our pot and at some stage we will be coming back to the top-slice question.	
4.8.	Ruth Tennant explained that the medium term financial strategy is a three year planning cycle so we are looking at the key areas of cost pressures over the next three years including the £4m funding gap for 2024. The Council is looking at very significant change programmes across all areas of activity across all services and will be going through the routine budget processes, looking at what are statutory services and non-statutory services. It will be asking questions around whether other funding agencies are paying their contributions, such as continuing healthcare with the NHS. Everything is on the table but these are pretty significant funding gaps. Finance colleagues are undertaking a very systematic and thorough process at the moment and looking at what can be done in year one and what will take a couple of years to come through. A radical redesign of services doesn't happen overnight. There is a rigorous process of taking things through to Cabinet and full Council, which is all happening in the background but it takes a while before things come into the public domain. It is expected that we will come back to Forum with more information as it is worked through.	
4.9.	DG asked if it is possible to look at that as a breakdown of 16-25 as when the Task & Finish Group met with Steve Fenton, the 16-25 overspend is disproportionate and they are not educational services but we are being asked to meet those costs. Other LAs have had these difficult conversations.	
4.10.	RT replied that speaking for Public Health but similarly for social care, there are statutory responsibilities and we are right at the wire. Everything is funded where there is a very clear statutory responsibility to do so. There are very challenging conversations but there is very little room for manoeuvre without the sort of work we are talking about into how to deliver things differently. There isn't a route we can go that would not require substantial cuts in other service areas. All LAs are in a similar position. It needs an ongoing dialogue. The NAO are starting to conduct a big review around SEND recognising the big financial challenge as the system wasn't resourced for 16-25 year olds but is being expected to pay for it. Some of this we do need national solutions and to use some of the advocacy routes to pick up the baton.	
4.11.	AF commented that it is almost in panic mode now and while it is a small piece of the jigsaw, with more and more children having EHCPs it is making sure that NHS is contributing their part of it as schools have been picking that up wholesale.	
4.12.	Tim Browne said Darren was right that the proportion of post 16 is growing and will continue grow until 2032 and there is some detailed work going on to look at other funding streams and also pathways. There will be a 28% increase in EHCP post-16 numbers, which is very significant and the status quo is not sustainable. The LA has recruited a Post 16 Lead who will do some detailed work to look at sufficiency but also the offer as we need a range of different pathways and vocational areas from the age of 14 upwards and then to look at the contribution towards those costs.	
4.13.	TB said that we are also doing some work with the tribunal service as we are finding that tribunals are directing LAs to pay for full costs of a waking day	

4.14.	curriculum, which is clearly not all about education so it is about looking at what is reasonable and practical. We have had a number of rulings against us over the last year that have been very costly, despite defending them very robustly. Darren is right to point it out and please be reassured that we are following this through. Councillor Grinsell explained that she was starting to see more parents who are unhappy with the EHCP process prepared to publicly share their stories, at full Council, in the press and on Facebook.	
4.15.	DG commented that this was every day for headteachers. Headteachers agreed.	
4.16.	Jane Davenport explained she dealt with a lot of leaders who are dealing with that on a regular basis and one of the frustrations is that the LA doesn't always appear supportive and asked if there was some way to work together to move forward as she was concerned about wellbeing? Solihull have some really fantastic headteachers and many have broad shoulders but for those that haven't and are suffering in silence. There is concern from the NAHT perspective.	
4.17.	DG commented that a recent NAHT poll showed one of the main reasons for headteachers leaving was vexatious complaints. Complaints are often unsubstantiated or from keyboard warriors and some are downright nasty about headteachers. We have very little right to reply. Sadly, it takes away from our main job of education and there is a great deal of time, effort and cost taken to go through the complaints process. Any support from the LA to deal with this would help.	
4.18.	Lynn Clark gave a recent example. Gina Godwin commented it is vicious and even on holiday you can't ignore it. AF said that she is chair of governors at a special school in the north of the borough and while she does not walk a mile in those families' shoes every day, it is the vexatious parents that we have no right to reply to that is wearing.	
4.19.	Tim Browne said that if the LA can support you in any way please let us know, let the school advisor know because we will support you.	
4.20.	AF commented that as a school, they have felt very supported by the LA and thanked Tim for that.	
4.21.	Councillor Burrow said as politicians they do understand and recognise the situation. Facebook can be a very horrible and corrosive place.	
4.22.	AF said it is so poor for staff morale and drains people.	
4.23.	Councillor Burrow added that the majority of parents are positive but the good comments are often made in person.	
5.	Assistant Director for Children's Services update – Tim Browne	
5.1.	Tim Browne welcomed and introduced Bern Timings, the new Head of Commissioning for Learning.	
5.2.	TB explained that, as those who were at Headteachers' Partnership meeting will know, we are currently updating the DSG Management Plan again for submission in January, which we – and every LA in deficit – are required to do by the DfE.	
5.3.	We are also part of the F40 group and in March, the F40 set up a sub-group of all LAs in F40 who are part of the DBV programme to provide peer support and look at what is and what isn't working across the DBV programme. There is very little that is working. Every LA except two have an in-year, and cumulative, deficit that is increasing. All LAs are adopting very similar mitigations and responses to try to reduce the overspend. The two that are going in the right direction are very small LAs so not comparable.	
5.4.	The other programme is the Safety Valve programme with a number of LAs within that and what is being seen now nationally is they have very similar mitigations as we do in the DBV programme and they are all going in the wrong direction too and the DfE is withholding the grant funding from those LAs.	
5.5.	We have been looking with Verity and Finance colleagues across education services at a more detailed and sophisticated costing model which projects where we think the children in the system will go so we have a more accurate forecasting process. What it is showing is that we will exceed our in-year deficit by £2.8m compared to last year so there is extra pressure. That is driven on the whole by increases in EHCP demand. We have seen a little under 5% growth throughout	

	2023; nationally there was 10.7% growth. So we are increasing at a decreasing rate, but it is not saving any money, it is cost avoiding and does put additional pressure across the system.	
5.6.	Other critical cost avoidance measures include The Heights, which, when full in September 2028, will cost avoid around £4.1m annually. Once the new special school that has been announced for the Sans Souci site comes onstream that will cost avoid a similar amount.	
5.7.	Key areas in 2023-24 finance include a £4m increase in top-ups to mainstream schools, whilst only 11 more EHCPs in maintained schools and 30 more EHCP children in maintained special schools. We are directing the money to schools where it is needed but we know that the level of funding isn't enough.	
5.8.	The top-up to independent providers has risen to around £143 per capita, which is up significantly.	
5.9.	SEN support and support for inclusion is around £94 per capita, £32 per capita more than the national average.	
5.10.	The only area showing any respite is transport, around £90 per capita, which is 38% below the England average and 26% below our statistical neighbours, so positive in terms of transport strategies.	
5.11.	Gina Godwin asked when the Sans Souci special school would be open.	
5.12.	TB said it has been quiet as the DfE has not been able to progress during the pre-election period but realistically, we are looking at September 2028. It will be for secondary and post-16.	
5.13.	DG asked if there is a clear breakdown of costs of the LA facilitating inclusion and SISS? We have a lot of facilitators, advisors and consultants but most headteachers know what they need. Not a very clear understanding of the LA cost with regard to those strands. It would be helpful to have clarity and also to see if that spend is having an impact within schools. It would be really helpful to have a clear breakdown as currently there is not clarity.	
5.14.	AF said this has been asked for before and it is three things: the cost, matching the changing needs and what is on offer.	
5.15.	DG agreed and said it was also the transparency of it.	
5.16.	Clare Thorpe said that would be helpful as is it being implied that we are spending too much on schools?	
5.17.	TB replied not at all, it is just looking at comparisons of what is going on across the country and we are very mindful of our overspend and asking are we using the funding to best effect or can we use it differently.	
5.18.	CT asked for the timescale of the Task and Finish Group and will that come back to Forum?	
5.19.	TB said that Louise Minter was coordinating the Task & Finish Groups and he was expecting a final report from her in December, but would be able to give an update prior to that.	
5.20.	CT asked if no decisions around the DSG would be made until then?	
5.21.	TB replied that we have to have a discussion about considering a top-slice and we have had a very clear steer from Headteachers' Partnership and will be discussing that with councillors shortly.	
5.22.	CT said thinking about setting school three year budgets, we will need to know and those things don't marry up.	
5.23.	TB said that if we opt for a top-slice we have to make the disapplication request to the Secretary of State in November.	
5.24.	CT said that last year we got there in October and it felt horrible and we could do without the extra pressure.	
5.25.	TB said we are ahead of schedule from last year as we had the consultation with headteachers at Headteachers' Partnership.	
5.26.	AF said Louise would have likely given a brief update at this meeting but cannot attend due to recent surgery.	
5.27.	CT said it sounds like there is great work going on in the Task & Finish Groups but it is a pity we can't get the outcomes to those to inform the DSG decision.	
5.28.	Claire Smith agreed and added that she thought that part of the purpose of the Task & Finish Groups was to find ways to avoid the top-slice but if we are not going	

<p>5.29.</p> <p>5.30.</p> <p>5.31.</p> <p>5.32.</p> <p>5.33.</p> <p>5.34.</p> <p>5.35.</p> <p>5.36.</p>	<p>to have the results until December that would be too late. There is a lot of work, money and time going into those groups and we want them to be worthwhile. TB said he completely agreed and there were two tasks for the Task & Finish Groups, how to spend money more effectively and cost avoid and also to avoid the need to top-slice. At the moment we don't know what the new government policy arrangements will be. We don't know if we will be able to carry the deficit forward or not and we don't know what measures they will have for DBV or Safety Valve so we are operating within that vacuum.</p> <p>DG said the transparent breakdown of the LA side of inclusion costs would feed into that.</p> <p>TB said that would be fine and he had no problem with making that available.</p> <p>AF commented that she thought the thrust from schools was that the money did not just go into a black hole but is purposefully used so if there are projects coming out of the T&F Groups, then that is what it will be used for.</p> <p>Stuart Shelton added that the information had been asked for from the LA so many times and have not received it or it has not been clear or has been inaccurate which is disappointing. We can't come up with a plan without the information and we haven't had LA representatives from certain departments and when people have been there they have not been able to give us the information.</p> <p>Stuart Shelton added that the questions asked were what is the funding cost of Inclusion and clear defined roles and expectations of the Inclusion team? Is it effectively used and can we use it to stop big costs at Tier 3? We asked about the costs of Saturn provision and what are pupils getting for that? A breakdown of the funding costs and places at AP, which we were given but was inaccurate. A breakdown of costs for the various AP provisions was given. Then understanding the commission base from the LA and what then the top-up costs are for secondary schools as a global cost of AP provision. We were trying to put that together to see what the actual spend is but three meetings in we still can't and are no further forward.</p> <p>DG commented that the answers lie with the headteachers but they need to know what they are detailing with and what is the impact of the spend. Are we being cost-effective? There is some great work and some that we are not so sure of and we need the transparency that schools have to be reflected from the LA. If we don't know what we are working with we can't make informed decisions. Headteachers really want to make this work and appreciate the challenges the LA is under but we are using what we have to the best. We need access to specialist third party provisions that can support us in wave 1 and 2 to prevent massive spend later on. CT added that if we are being asked to have money taken away from us it is fair to have the challenge back to the LA as to how you are using the rest of the money.</p> <p>Langley has the highest number of EHCP plans and highest number of LAC students and stands to lose the most through what is being proposed so the LA needs to know the impact of taking the money from us. Proposing to take around £180k from us. I spend around £90k on AP a year which is avoiding permanent exclusions for about 8 students. If that money is taken away I will permanently exclude 8 students first and foremost. The other £90k I spend on an Inclusion programme that I am incredibly proud of and takes a lot of time and effort and that means we have made no permanent exclusions this year and have the lowest number of fixed term suspensions in the LA because of the success of that scheme. The money that is planning to be taken away is not being used to tarmac the playground. It is being used to prevent children from being permanently excluded and if that money is taken away, I will permanently exclude 10 children, which will break my heart, but I won't be able to afford to send them to AP so there are 10 children that are then on your books that are going to cost you a lot more than £90k. The other £90k I would have to pull my Inclusion programme and anecdotally, a child who was most at risk of being permanently excluded at the start of Year 10, yesterday got an apprenticeship at JLR because of the work we have done.</p> <p>Stephen Steinhaus commented that all of this is about human cost, the leaders, the young people we are working with. He is on the AP T&F Group and there was misinformation whether mistaken or anything else in terms of accurate number of</p>	<p>TB/VD</p>
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5.37.	places, accurate commissioning, accurate budget. My concern from the T&F Group is that mainstream colleagues who are our main commissioners are having those discussions that Clare is articulating so well. We are talking about the impact system-wide and the lack of clarity is exacerbating that impact and that is my concern.	
5.38.	<p>Claire Smith commented that they have asked in a couple of meetings in last two weeks where we have had this misinformation and we have asked how has this happened. Fair Access Panel – misinformation; Task & Finish Group – misinformation. Is it a lack of diligence or is it an attempt to mislead? The problem is we don't know because no-one is feeding back to us. We asked at Fair Access Panel how that misinformation has been provided to us as headteachers and we have not had an answer to that question. Who is checking this work because if we allowed mistakes like that to happen, we are held to very high account with our paperwork and our records but we are not seeing that same level of account. I have never been in a meeting where an explanation or answers have been given as to why the mistakes have happened. We don't know who is making the mistakes, how it is happening and who is responsible for checking that work. AF said both of the alternatives Claire suggested are uncomfortable, whether it is a mistake or a deliberate covering up.</p>	
5.39.	<p>Tim explained that was very helpful to hear as he wasn't aware and he would certainly follow that up and he will meet with Louise Minter to find out what information has been asked for that has not been forthcoming. He understood the last request had been dealt with but if that hasn't happened he will follow that through. He would also like to know which misinformation is being referred to as if we don't know we can't deal with that.</p>	
5.40.	<p>Claire Smith said there were LA officers at all the meetings she is referring to. Clare Thorpe said it was really terrifying for schools when you are threatening to take money away from us.</p>	TB
5.41.	<p>Ruth Tennant summarised the discussion. The Task & Finish Groups were really important to get the right solutions out. In order for those to function effectively we need the right intelligence, including the right intelligence from the LA. We need</p>	
5.42.	<p>transparency and to be able to critique and challenge if that is not right and to have honest conversations. We are not there yet, that is loud and clear. We need to get</p>	
5.43.	<p>that right as we are running into critical decision making that the T&F Groups need to inform. This is mission critical running into the autumn and Tim has already said but to reinforce there is a really important action point to ensure we have the right officers, the right level of seniority, the right escalation points in place as there is clearly something not working. You have heard Tim's and my commitment to get that right but if you feel that it is not working do drop me and Tim a line as we would rather hear sooner than later and are very happy to be contacted. We have got to get it right. We have had quite a lot of churn in staff but we have got to get it right in the next few months and we will also go back and have a look at what staff resource is going in to support this to make sure we have got it right.</p>	
5.44.	<p>Charlotte Shadbolt left meeting at 10:32am.</p>	
	<p>CT said that would be really helpful and we are very fortunate to sit around Forum and have a voice and have this platform. Funding is not the only issue facing schools, there are a plethora of issues and not all schools have that. In terms of the remit for Schools Forum going forward it would be really useful to be broader than finance and we need more openness and transparency.</p>	
	<p>AF commented that historically, when it has been brought to Forum in the autumn term it is the finances driving it and there is a mad panic to get your point across and that is the point of the Task and Finish Groups to unpick all that in advance. If you will have me, I have decided to stay as Chair because of this difficult time and you have my word that I will work with Tim and Lou to makes sure we get these answers as it is very important.</p>	
5.45.		

6.	Final DSG figures for 2023-24 – Verity Dixon	
6.1.	Verity Dixon presented the DSG outturn information for 2023-24. However, she acknowledged she was aware from the minutes of the last meeting that Tim already covered it at a high level. £4.83m in-year deficit last year of which £1.5m related to the growth of about 5% children with EHCPs. That is about £1.2m more than was indicated in the DSG Management Plan submitted in January and a lot of that is related to the unforeseen growth and obviously there are delays in children being placed in schools that has a financial impact when they receive an EHCP.	
6.2.	The Schools Block overspent by £401,000 and that is as a result of the DfE granting us a loan of future pupil growth funding into last year and this year, so the way it shows is as a overspend but actually the funding is in the reserve but then they give us less funding in the future. We are hoping we are reaching the peak of the growth and we have already got places in place in advance of the pupil growth. While it does look like an overspend, it is all to do with the loan from the DfE.	
6.3.	Central Block has a minor underspend of £30k.	
6.4.	High Needs Block has an overspend of £4.012m.	
7.	Final SEND budget figures for 2023-24 – Verity Dixon	
7.1.	Verity Dixon explained that the High Needs Block budget is the funding received from central Government. Normally for a Council the budget is the plan of what we are going to spend in the year but we are monitoring against the funding, which is obviously not what we think we are going to spend. Therefore, you can see variations in the report across the £4.012m overspend. We are doing a full fundamental model review which Tim referred to earlier - as part of our review of what we are spending and where, which absolutely ties into what you have just said about what are you spending and where that is available to schools. We are gradually moving towards reviewing where the funding is placed in the budgets in each category because what we have identified is there are some fixed costs that are agreed with Forum and schools in advance, there are some services we are providing which are at managers' discretion and there are some variable things that are based on the number of children with EHCPs at different placements and settings.	
7.2.	We are already trying to think of the DSG in different categories. To a certain extent this information is useful as you can see how much we are spending on travel training and those sorts of things but we are absolutely moving this on and will improve the reporting going forwards.	
7.3.	Claire Smith asked about the Inclusion service and commented that this was very helpful and asked for clarification on how much was spent on the Inclusion service.	
7.4.	Stuart Shelton replied £1.2m, which is 20% more than the budgeted amount.	
7.5.	VD explained that everything is about 20% more than the funding because the budget is the funding so when we split the funding between services, we have less than we need to provide every service so they are all adrift.	
7.6.	Stuart Shelton commented that the variance of the independent school fees was £2.5m, which is 50% more.	
7.7.	VD explained that that was where they put the balance.	
7.8.	CS commented that the cost of independent school fees was over £8m.	
7.9.	Stuart Shelton said that this report was good and was what they needed and had been asking for.	
7.10.	VD said that these reports had not changed but had always come to Finance Working Group but we are now bringing them to Forum as well. This isn't the level of detail we need in the service and so the team is working on improving this.	

7.11.	CS said this information was very helpful.	AF/JH
7.12.	Stuart Shelton asked about the Alternative Provision – Solihull Schools row.	
7.13.	VD explained that this was top-up funding as well as places. This is one example of where in our latest forecasting we are now breaking that down so we can start to understand what is driving the cost of what schools are paying for. There are so many income streams.	
7.14.	Mark Firmstone asked how does the LA know what schools are paying for.	
7.15.	VD replied from the ledger, the recorded information from the service.	
7.16.	MF queried as the invoices for AP providers come directly to academy schools. At Light Hall their costs for alternative provision this year were £114k that was paid directly to AP providers.	
7.17.	VD said that as this is a report on the DSG, it excludes spending by academy schools.	
7.18.	AF said we need that cumulative cost.	
7.19.	VD said that the LA would have to analyse the statement of accounts for every academy school in order to identify those costs.	
7.20.	Stuart Shelton said that as part of the Task & Finish Group, we had asked all the schools to provide how much they were spending on alternative provision, which they did and gave to Lou.	
7.21.	AF added that as Chair of Finance Working Group going forward, that is something that Mark could request and would probably be a useful piece of work.	
7.22.	VD confirmed that this was net of traded services for schools.	
7.23.	Claire Smith commented that in Inclusion there is mention of ex-EAL budget. We have a huge increase of EAL across all sectors but now no EAL service. That is something for people to be aware of, there is an increasing group of students with EAL and no services to support them.	
7.24.	Tim Browne said that across the country most LAs have devolved the EAL services to schools as the Education Service Grant has been cut and we could look at investing in that provision but at the expense of what else.	
7.25.	AF asked about the large amount of money for Travellers' Children.	
7.26.	VD replied that there is a special part of the Pupil Premium grant that is for Travellers' Children and schools apply for that funding.	
7.27.	AF said she would like to know what that looks like going forward and could ask Natasha to come to FWG to give some breakdown.	
7.28.	VD said the key thing is that we are moving things on as quickly as we can but you are asking questions that we are asking ourselves.	
7.29.	AF thanked VD.	
8.	Finance Working Group report – David Lewis	
8.1.	David Lewis said that he was pleased to say that half of his Finance Working Group report had already been talked about so he would concentrate on the independent school place payments. He explained that FWG received a spreadsheet that itemised each institution, showed trends and gave a breakdown of sectors, for example it showed that secondary is a big proportion of the students that go out-of-borough.	
8.2.	The latest figures for the end of May 2024 show a large rise in the number educated out of borough. In January there were 162, in May there are 204, another 42. This reflects the lack of in-borough provision. Looking at April and May, the average cost of placing a student out-of-borough is £58k. If we could educate those students in-borough, in special provision, if we had it, we know it would be roughly half that and we also know the education outcome for those students would be a lot better. So it is important that we work on trying to get more specialist provision and special schools in-borough. It is very difficult because the government wants more and more students to be in mainstream schools, including K students who are very expensive, and the schools are expected to finance it themselves. The government is saying that they are giving a record amount to schools but what they do not say is that with that comes more responsibilities, bigger bills, all the other costs schools have to face and quite rightly schools are	

	telling us that budgets are tight and going to get tighter. Something like 80% of schools nationally are reporting that they going to go into debt. When promises are made to parents in the Education Act 2014 then not funded, that is a problem and why we find ourselves in this position.	
8.3.	AF thanked David and he received a round of applause from Forum.	
8.4.	AF said that she and Councillor Grinsell were speaking before the meeting that this was an opportunity perhaps to make demands of what we would like to see not wait for them to tell us what we can have and that is a piece of work to be done.	
8.5.	DL said that he was very confident that Mark Firmstone, who has been on Finance Working Group for a long time and works as Finance Director at Light Hall, would do an excellent job as Chair.	
8.6.	AF thanked Mark for taking on the role.	
8.7.	John McDermott said that it might be very simplistic but if you save half the cost by keeping students in-borough, so that would be £6m per year and £30m over 5 years, a school could be built and the costs could be recouped within 5 years.	
8.8.	Tim Browne explained that it is quite a complicated picture as what we see nationally is that every time you build another special school, it just fills up. Then that will drain money from the maintained sector and mainstream schools. It is about getting the right balance between the number of specialist placements versus the number educated in mainstream settings. John is right and that is part of the business case for The Heights and the new special school, but the problem is the lead-in time to build those places. It is getting the right mix of independent placements, maintained specialist placements and mainstream schools having the appropriate children. What we know categorically is that the High Needs Block funding and the schools' funding is inadequate and the debate is all about how we can use money more effectively and push it to the right places – but the reality is that funding is inadequate. Darren pointed to the post-16 element and if you look back to the reforms, no funding materialised for 0-4 or 19-25. If it had, we would be in surplus now. We need to reduce our reliance on independent schools and there is a robust process in place to argue that point wherever we can but the tribunal numbers increase because parents want independent placements, not just specialist but mainstream as well.	
	Councillor Gethen left the meeting at 10:57am.	
8.9.	Gina Godwin asked about the DfE saying that they want more children in mainstream not in specialist provision. When you look at the children in specialist provision what is the thinking of the schools because children can go back into mainstream if they make sufficient progress?	
8.10.	AF replied that the difficulty is that the parental voice is so strong. Without a doubt we have children in our special provision that could have functioned in mainstream school with support but the parental voice is so strong.	
8.11.	GG asked what is the percentage of children in the LA?	
8.12.	TB said it was very tricky to measure but there are a number of MLD children that could have functioned and been supported in mainstream. We are currently doing a piece of work looking at a cohort review in special schools on that question. That report will be complete in November and we will share that with you as it comes through but Antoinette is right, once a parent has a specialist placement – very few, if any, children have gone back into mainstream once they have a specialist place. What we need to do is build parents' confidence earlier on so they can see mainstream schools can meet their children's needs.	
8.13.	AF added that it was right child, right place.	
8.14.	GG said getting children back into mainstream does happen in some authorities.	
8.15.	TB acknowledged that some do.	
	AF said that it is about getting the provision right to start with for that child. There is a will within schools but the parent voice is so strong and once you get it, you are not going to reverse that decision because you become ingrained in the culture of a small setting, that is not to say mainstream settings don't offer that but they are often much larger settings so it is a cultural shift as well.	

8.16.	Mark Firmstone commented that there are another two funding streams which don't form part of the DSG, the Covid recovery premium and the school-led tuition premium, that are paid directly to schools. At Light Hall that money is used for earlier interventions with students and that funding is ceasing so that will also feed into the pressure on budgets. At Light Hall, that is £111,000 that has come out of our budget for next year that we have been using for counselling services and tuition services. This will also increase the pressure on budgets next year.	
9.	Nomination of Chair / Vice-Chair for Solihull Schools Forum 2024-25	
9.1.	AF explained she would like to remain Chair for 2024-25 as she has the historical background needed and that Darren Gelder had also agreed to remain as Vice Chair for 2024-25. All agreed.	
9.2.	RESOLVED: Antoinette Fisher will be Chair and Darren Gelder will be Vice Chair of Solihull Schools Forum for the next academic year.	
10.	AOB	
10.1.	AF explained that Louise Minter was unable to attend to present the SSSAB update as she had an emergency appendectomy and is recovering but AF and Tim would pick up the questions with Lou.	
10.2.	The next Solihull Schools Forum meeting will take place on Thursday 17 th October, 9:30-11:30am in Room 1, Civic Suite.	
10.3.	AF concluded the meeting by stating it was very helpful to have conversations in such detail and wished everyone a lovely summer holiday.	
	Meeting ended 11:04.	