

Schools Forum

Date: 13 November 2025

Time: 09.00 to 11.00

Venue: Face to Face

Paper

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Public

MINUTES OF SCHOOLS FORUM HELD ON 11 NOVEMBER 2025 – HELD VIA MS TEAMS

NOTES WERE PRODUCED USING AI VIA COPILOT AS AGREED BY FORUM AT THE BEGINNING OF THE MEETING

1	Apologies	
	Apologies received from Sian Lines, Mark Cooper, Reuben Thorley, Shelley Hurdley, Sarah North, James Pearson, John Boken, Lisa Henshall, Cllr Neil Bentley, Rachel Williams, Cllr David Vasmer, Mark Rogers	
2	Minutes and Matters Arising	
	The minutes from 11 September 2025 were accepted as a true reflection of the meeting with exception of voting for Vice Chair where information was duplicated and incorrect.	
3	Opening to Meeting	BD/DS
	<p>Minutes and Matters Arising:</p> <p>Broader communication to all schools and colleges to be circulated in relation to Shropshire Council financial position. John Rowe confirmed this had been circulated.</p> <p>Draft letter to be shared with Andy and Neil for their input and review before sending. John Rowe confirmed letter had not yet been issued following departure of Collins Elechi and this would be reviewed imminently.</p> <p>Expression of interest in joining Schools Forum to fill vacancies confirmed to be sent out. Will add on weekly Schools update email. Sam Bradley confirmed that EOI had been sent to all schools but no response had been received. Agreed by Schools Forum that this would be re-circulated following Education Partnership meeting by John Rowe w/c 17 November 2025.</p> <p>HNB Monitoring Group interest to be shared at next Forum meeting for meeting to be scheduled. John Rowe provided an update of the initial meeting and how important this will be going forward to assist with understanding of the pressures the services are under and DSG</p>	



	Management Plan. John Rowe to raise for additional members at Education Partnership Board w/c 17 November 2025.	
4	<p>Shropshire Council Financial Position</p> <p>Council Financial Emergency and Exceptional Support: John, David, and Stephen Waters provided a comprehensive update on Shropshire Council's financial emergency, including the request for exceptional financial support from central government, the current use of reserves, and the establishment of new financial controls and oversight boards.</p> <p>Declaration of Financial Emergency: John explained that Shropshire Council declared a financial emergency after projections showed that the Council's £34 million in reserves would be exhausted by the end of the financial year, driven by reduced funding and increased costs, particularly in adult and children's social care.</p> <p>Request for Exceptional Support: The Council has formally requested between £50 and £100 million in exceptional financial support from the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government, which would be a loan rather than a grant, intended to provide budget stability and avoid a Section 114 notice.</p> <p>Implementation of Financial Controls: David described the introduction of additional financial controls, including delays in payments and enhanced checks, as well as the formation of an agreement board with independent oversight to ensure robust internal and external scrutiny of the Council's financial management.</p> <p>Stakeholder Engagement: The team highlighted ongoing engagement with local MPs and opposition councillors to ensure transparency and collective understanding of the financial position, with the aim of fostering a unified approach to addressing the crisis.</p>	JR
5	<p>Schools Forum Membership and Representation</p> <p>Schools Forum Membership and Representation: Sam Bradley, John Hitchings, and other members discussed current vacancies in the Schools Forum, the importance of broad sector representation, and strategies to improve attendance and engagement from all nominated groups.</p> <p>Current Vacancies: Sam Bradley reported three academy vacancies and one diocese vacancy, with additional notice of Sian Lines representing</p>	



	<p>Diocese of Hereford and Councillor David Vasmer stepping down as an observer, and plans to resubmit expressions of interest to fill these roles.</p> <p>Concerns About Representation: David and other participants expressed concern about underrepresentation of certain sectors and the impact of non-attendance by nominated members, emphasising the need for a collective effort to ensure all voices are present in crucial decision-making.</p> <p>Strategies for Engagement: Suggestions included proactive outreach to groups, sharing work plans with the Education Partnership Board, and improving communication about the forum's purpose and the direct impact of its decisions on schools.</p>	
6	<p>Central Retention of Dedicated Schools Grant from April 2026</p> <p>Consultation on Central Retention and Delegation of School Funding: Stephen Waters and John led a detailed discussion on the upcoming consultation with maintained schools regarding the central retention and delegation of Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) funds for 2026–27, including explanations of key funding streams, options, and the rationale for each.</p> <p>Overview of Funding Streams: Stephen Waters outlined the distinction between de-delegation (central retention for services like maternity cover and trade union duties) and top-slicing (statutory functions such as redundancy funds, school finance, HR, and health and safety), explaining the historical context and statutory requirements.</p> <p>Consultation Process: The consultation will launch the week following the meeting, closing on 2 December, with decisions to be made at the Schools Forum on 11 December; John emphasised the importance of clear communication and providing working models to help schools understand the financial implications of their choices.</p> <p>Key Issues Raised: Participants discussed the impact of recent changes to maternity legislation, the need for more precise definitions of statutory functions, and the importance of ensuring that consultation documents are accessible and informative for all school leaders.</p> <p>Actions and Next Steps: The group agreed to strengthen consultation materials, include practical examples, and encourage maximum engagement from maintained schools to ensure informed decision-making.</p>	SW/JR



7	<p>Dedicated Schools Grant Monitoring 2025-26</p> <p>High Needs Block Funding Pressures and Strategic Response: Stephen Waters, John, and colleagues presented a detailed analysis of the high needs block deficit, drivers of increased expenditure, and the Council's multi-faceted strategy to manage demand, reduce reliance on independent placements, and improve local provision.</p> <p>Deficit Overview: The high needs block is forecast to have a £23.5 million in-year deficit for 2025–26, contributing to a cumulative DSG deficit of £41 million, with the main pressures arising from increased numbers of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), higher banding levels, and rising costs in independent special schools.</p> <p>Strategic Interventions: The Council is investing in local special schools, reviewing banding structures, and expanding capacity to reduce the flow of pupils into costly independent placements, with a focus on early intervention and co-production with schools.</p> <p>Tribunal Mitigation: Officers described efforts to modify school environments and invest in local provision to strengthen the Council's position in tribunals, aiming to prevent placements in independent settings and achieve long-term cost savings</p>	SW
8	<p>Update High Needs Monitoring Group</p> <p>Monitoring and Governance: A high needs monitoring group has been established to oversee the DSG management plan, ensure transparency, and coordinate with other strategic boards, with invitations extended for broader forum participation.</p>	JR
9	<p>Update Severndale Funding Arrangements</p> <p>Review and Reform of Special School Funding (Sevendale Case Study): John, Ali, and colleagues explained the recent review of Severndale's funding arrangements, the introduction of a new banding system, and the implementation of a memorandum of understanding to ensure transparency, accountability, and alignment with pupil needs.</p> <p>Banding Review and Implementation: A comprehensive review of Severndale's banding levels was conducted, resulting in the removal of</p>	JR



	<p>obsolete bands and the introduction of three new levels, with retrospective funding adjustments to address implementation delays.</p> <p>Quality Assurance Process: Education quality advisors and school leaders undertook a forensic analysis of individual pupil needs, aligning funding to actual provision and ensuring that each child's placement and support matched the agreed criteria.</p> <p>Memorandum of Understanding: A new memorandum of understanding was developed with Severndale, including provisions for annual banding reviews, performance monitoring, and ongoing dialogue to maintain fairness and cost-effectiveness.</p> <p>Extension to Other Schools: Plans are in place to extend similar banding reviews and quality assurance processes to other state-funded special schools, aiming for consistency and transparency across the sector.</p>	
8	<p>Update Capital Allocation Works</p> <p>Capital Investment in Mainstream and Special School Provision: Andy and colleagues provided an update on significant capital investments, including a £20 million mainstream expansion and £8.265 million for special school and hub places, with plans to add 358 new special school places over three years to meet rising demand.</p> <p>Mainstream and Special School Expansion: A fully funded £20 million mainstream expansion and an additional £8.265 million for special school and hub places were announced, targeting both secondary and primary school growth where needed.</p> <p>Increase in Special School Capacity: The investment will create 358 new special school places, increasing total capacity to over 1,190 places and mirroring a projected 39% increase in demand for specialist provision.</p> <p>Strategic Site Development: Plans include relocating and converting existing school sites to special schools, reducing travel distances for pupils and supporting inclusive practice through collaboration with mainstream schools.</p> <p>The Council is working closely with schools to co-produce solutions, build trust, and ensure that capital investments align with long-term strategic goals for inclusive education.</p>	AN



10	Communication	
11	Follow Up Tasks Diocese vacancies to be raised at Diocese board meeting All School Forum vacancies to be raised at Education Partnership Board If there are any remaining vacancies for School Forum, EOI will be distributed again to all schools Broader communication to all schools and colleges to be circulated in relation to Shropshire Council financial position Draft letter to be reviewed and updated then shared with Andy and Neil for their input and review before sending De-delegation and Top Slicing Consultation to be updated with working models and clear explanations to help schools understand the financial implications of maternity cover and other statutory functions and reiterate to head teachers the importance of engaging with the consultation and ensure timescales and expectations are clearly communicated Add additional information to Consultation regarding a request to automatically allocated 0.5% of DSG funding to HNB to give some assistance on recovery of the forecasted deficit Additional request for members to join HN Monitoring Group will be raised at Education Partnership Board and relevant information circulated	SM DS/JR SB JR JR JR/SW JR/SW JR
13	Future Meeting Dates Thursday 11 December 2025 (tbc) MS Teams Thursday 22 January 2026 (tbc) MS Teams Thursday 19 March 2026 (tbc) MS Teams Thursday 18 June 2026 (tbc) MS Teams Thursday 10 September 2026 (tbc) MS Teams Thursday 12 November 2026 (tbc) Face to Face	

