

## Westmorland and Furness Schools Forum

10th June 2026, Microsoft Teams Meeting, 9.30am

### Agenda

#### Part 1: Items likely to be considered in the presence of the press and public

Item	Item name	Papers	Responsible Member
1.	<b>Membership Update - Consideration of Forum Member vacancies</b>	Attachment 1	All
2.	<b>Apologies for Absence</b>	Verbal	Clerk
3.	<b>Exclusion of Press and Public</b> To consider whether the press and public should be excluded from the meeting during consideration of any item on the agenda.	Verbal	All
4.	<b>Declarations of Interest</b>	Verbal	All
5.	<b>Minutes of Previous Meeting (21st January 2026) and Matters Arising (Action Log)</b>	Attachments 2 & 3	Chair/Clerk
6.	<b>Minutes of the last HNB Working Group (6<sup>th</sup> March 2026)</b>	Attachment 4	Dan Hinton
7.	<b>High Needs Budget Monitoring Q3 2025/26</b> (verbal update on outturn)	Attachment 5	Amanda Chew
8.	<b>De-Delegated Budgets Monitoring Q3 2025/26</b>	Attachment 6	Amanda Chew
9.	<b>Maintained School Balances 2025/26</b>	Verbal	Amanda Chew
8.	<b>SEND Reform Plan Briefing</b>	Verbal	Gemma Parkes
14.	<b>Dates of Future Meetings</b>  The next meeting of the Schools Forum will be held on 23 <sup>rd</sup> September 2026. The meeting will begin at 9.30am and will be via Microsoft Teams.	Verbal	Chair/Clerk

**Part 2: Items likely to be considered in the absence of the press and public**

## Membership of Westmorland and Furness Schools Forum

<b>Membership Category – Schools and Academies</b>	<b>Number of positions</b>	<b>Members</b>
Maintained Primary Schools	5	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. David Spruce, Appleby Primary School</li> <li>2. Vacancy</li> <li>3. Ian Nicol, Leven Valley Primary</li> <li>4. Vacancy</li> <li>5. Michelle Hughes, Dalton St Mary's CofE Primary School</li> </ol>
Maintained Secondary Schools	2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Stephen Gilby, UCC</li> <li>2. Mathew Hardwick, UVHS/Emma Aubrey, Dowdales School</li> </ol>
Academy - Primary	1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Huw Davies, Ghyllside School</li> </ol>
Academy - Secondary	4	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Jon Hayes, Queen Katherine School</li> <li>2. Simon Laheney, Furness Academy</li> <li>3. Mark Harris, Kirby Kendal School</li> <li>4. Nicola Carruthers, Queen Elizabeth School</li> </ol>
Academy - Special	1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Vacancy</li> </ol>
Maintained Nursery	1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Alyssa Dobbs, Kendal Nursery (proposed)</li> </ol>
Special Schools	1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Dan Hinton, Sandgate School</li> </ol>
PRUs	1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Lisa Balderstone, Newbridge House</li> </ol>
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>Members for Schools and Academies</b>

<b>Membership Category – Non-school Members</b>	<b>Number of positions</b>	<b>Expression of interest</b>
CE Diocese	1	1. Charlotte Tudway / Laura Watson
RC Diocese	1	1. Michael Merrick
16-19 Providers	2	1. Scott Cubitt, Furness College 2. Vacant
EY/PVIs	1	1. Peter Graveson, Sunny Brow Day Care
Teaching Associations	1	1. Andy Brewerton, NEU
Non-Teaching Associations	1	1. Diane Clorley, Unison (proposed)
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>Expressions of interest</b>

<b>Membership Category</b>	<b>Number of positions</b>	<b>Members or expressions of interest</b>
Schools and Academies	16	Members
Non-School members	7	Expressions of interest
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>Forum members</b>

## Westmorland and Furness Schools Forum

21st January 2026, Microsoft Teams Meeting, 9.30am

### Minutes

**Schools Forum Members in attendance:** Stephen Gilby (Chair), Dan Hinton, Huw Davies, Ros de Fraine, Lisa Balderstone, Andy Brewerton, Nicola Carruthers, Mark Harris, Michelle Hughes.

**Local Authority Elected Members and Officers in attendance:** Katherine Dalgliesh (Clerk), Isobel Booler, Cllr Janet Battye, Claire Diggle, Amanda Chew, Gemma Parkes, Marie Barnes.

**Guests:** Allan Harty, Assistant Director for Corporate Assets, Fleet and Capital Programme (item 7) and Kate McLaughlin-Flynn, Senior Manager Cumbria Pension Fund (item 8)

#### 1. Membership Update - Consideration of Forum Member vacancies

There are now 2 vacancies for members from a Maintained Primary.

**Action:** Raise vacancies with PHA Exec (Huw Davies)

The vacancy for a member from a Maintained Special School can only be filled by George Hastwell School.

**Action:** Chair to contact George Hastwell School to ask for representative (Stephen Gilby)

There is a vacancy for a member from a Maintained Nursery.

**Action:** Contact managers at Brantwood and Hindpool, copying the Chair of Schools Forum to ask for a representative (Marie Barnes).

Discussions are ongoing with Diane Clorley from Unison to represent the non-teaching association.

Due to the retirement of David Nattress, there is also a vacancy for Schools Forum Vice Chair. Anyone who is interested in taking on this role should email the Chair and Clerk to discuss the role and succession planning.

#### 2. Apologies for Absence

Ian Nicol, Jon Hayes, Matt Hardwick (Ros de Fraine), Sharyn Duffey and Emma Aubrey

#### 3. Exclusion of Press and Public

There were no items on the agenda which the press and public should be excluded from.

#### 4. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

## **5. Minutes of Previous Meeting (5th November 2026) and Matters Arising (Action Log)**

The minutes of the last meeting were approved.

Actions 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6 were all closed.

In relation to action 2, the following information was shared with Forum members from Martin Harrison:

“In terms of internal claims handling, I see no reason why the Council’s legal team cannot be involved in order to support the school and the Council’s children services department. However, it is important to note that under the RPA, the Council won’t have a financial stake in the liability claims submitted to the RPA so the RPA will have more of a say on how claims are settled.”

## **6. Minutes of the last HNB Working Group (24<sup>th</sup> October 2025)**

DH summarised the discussions that had taken place at the last meeting of the HNB Working Group. He reiterated the significance of this issue for the county due to the £8.061M in year deficit in 2024/25. There were interesting comparisons to statistical neighbours, which do not take into account, for example, the quality of provision. It was highlighted that our expenditure in 2024/25 was 129% of budget, whereas our statistical neighbours averaged 133%.

The working group had also discussed significant challenges that the HNB deficit presents and what services are affordable from the local authority and considered the DSG Management Plan and the increasing impact on the reserves. There was a detailed discussion on SEN targeted funding and members ultimately agreed that it would not be best value to give that money to individual schools but aggregate it to use in a more strategic view.

The government’s White Paper on SEND later this month will drive future discussion.

## **7. School Landlord Function**

AH reported to the Schools Forum that the Council’s Assets Team is working to ensure that everything is in place ahead of a new inspection schedule testing frameworks, policies and approaches. This will be carried out in conjunction with the Education & Inclusion service under Isobel Booter. Points of contact from schools into the AssetsTeam will be established.

In response to questions, AH confirmed that the usual notice period for an HSE visit is 24 hours but they also have the right to arrive without notice. Schools should immediately inform the Assets Team. They may choose to inspect on a thematic basis, but will include a range of issues eg. Legionnaires, asbestos, carbon monoxide, radon, decaying trees and more.

Following a presentation, and in response to comments from Forum members, AH acknowledged concern about capacity of schools staff to do this work within 2026/27, and assured members that the Local Authority would be providing support. Policies and procedures are being drafted and these will be made available to schools (including academies) outlining actions required, frequency and standards etc.

An established cloud-based monitoring tool is available and will be rolled out, alongside training, in 2026/27. This will require wider communication to schools, and it was agreed that AH should be invited to attend PHA and CASH to raise awareness.

**Action:** Arrange invitation to PHA in summer 2026 (Huw Davies)

**Action:** Arrange invitation to CASH (Stephen Gilby)

Ros de Fraine offered to support the council team with the roll-out to schools.

**Action:** Develop a short guide on what to do if HSE gives notice of a visit to provide immediate assurance for school leaders (IB and AH)

## **8. 2025 LGPS Pension Fund Valuation Results**

KMcF presented slides to accompany her report on the triennial valuation of the Cumbria Local Government Pension Scheme ("the Fund") and the resultant implication for employer contributions for the period 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2029 for non-teaching school staff based in Westmorland & Furness maintained schools (i.e. excluding Academies) who are members of the Local Government Pension Scheme.

As the Administering Authority for the Fund, Westmorland & Furness Council is responsible for obtaining an actuarial valuation of the assets and liabilities of the Fund on a triennial basis by a recognised qualified professional.

The report notes that the provisional employer contributions rate for maintained schools for the period 2026 to 2029 will be 9.3% for schools within Westmorland & Furness Council. This compares to an employer contribution rate for all maintained schools in the Council of 17.3% in 2025/26. Academies have been advised separately of their provisional employer contribution rates.

The 2025 Actuarial Valuation of the Cumbria Local Government Pension Scheme has progressed well and all employers within the Fund have been advised of their provision contribution rates for the period 2026-29.

In response to Forum member questions, KMcF confirmed that while Westmorland and Furness Council is the administering authority, there is a Pensions Committee which ensures the Fund meets its statutory requirements, made up of elected members from both Westmorland and Furness Council and Cumberland Council as well as Trades Union representatives. Cllr Batty confirmed that the annual report is taken to Council but all decisions are delegated to the Pension Committee. The assumptions used have been agreed by the Committee, and the Actuary will approve the rates by the end of March 2026.

AC confirmed that this will be factored in the three-year budget pack, with schools looking to save £1500 per Teaching Assistant on average which is a significant positive difference.

## **9. DSG - School Funding Formula 2026-27**

Amanda Chew presented the report on the 2026/27 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Schools Block allocation for Westmorland & Furness which is £180.079m.

The report and appendices provide more detail on the impact of this.

The DfE have approved the continued use of the optional exceptional circumstances factor in the 2026/27 school funding formula for rent costs. Four schools meet the criteria to receive funding through this factor totally £174,647. A technical adjustment has been made to Kirkoswald CofE School's 2026/27 school budget share to correct overfunding of £32,655 in 2025/26.

After calculating the school budget shares using the national funding formula and before taking into account any growth fund budget, there is a shortfall in funding of £0.095m. To minimise the negative impact on school budget shares, the local authority is not proposing to have a growth fund budget in 2026/27. As agreed by Cabinet on 16 December 2025, the shortfall in funding will be managed by reducing the basic per pupil factor values. The impact of this reduction is minimal on school budget shares with the most significant reduction being 0.08% of school budget share.

The 2026/27 school funding formula impacts maintained schools from 1 April 2026 and academies from 1 September 2026. The deadline for submitting the Authority Proforma Tool (APT), which is subject to validation by the DfE, is 22 January 2026.

AC also confirmed the maintained schools per primary and secondary pupil rates for the 2026/27 de-delegated services budgets which were approved by Schools Forum at the last meeting.

**DECISION:** Forum members approved the technical adjustment being made to Kirkoswald CofE School's 2026/27 school budget share to correct overfunding of £32,655 in 2025/26.

Cllr Battye reported that the Council is currently in the process of budget-setting, and it is one of the lowest funded councils in the country. Years two and three of the budget will be challenging, although many aspects of Children's Services will be protected because they are statutory, but discretionary services may be impacted. Particular attention is being paid to the Home to School Transport service and where there may be a need to adjust policy to remove non-statutory provision. Work carried out to strengthen Family Help and safeguarding is supporting outcomes for children and young people, and this is an area where schools play an important role.

In response to Forum member questions regarding rural schools with reducing rolls, Cllr Battye reported that detailed work is progressing to review education sufficiency, starting with a focus on the Windermere area. She stressed the importance of local schools. IB added that proposals are being developed in relation to the Windermere review, although

there is one school not within this area which is likely to trigger consultation for closure in 2027 and that the school itself is engaged in this process. Work will continue with thematic reviews but the nuances of a school system with so much rural and small provision make this challenging.

## **10. DSG – Other Blocks 2026-27**

Amanda Chew presented the report on the 2026/27 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for Central School Services (CSSB), Early Years (EYB) and High Needs Blocks (HNB). The total DSG to be allocated through these blocks in 2026/27 for Westmorland & Furness is £70.606m. The funding for the HNB and EYB is provisional and will be updated to reflect changes in places numbers and early years headcounts during the year.

The Schools Forum was asked to note the DSG Central School Services, Early Years and High Needs Block allocations for 2026/27.

**Decision:** Forum members approved the proposed centrally retained expenditure budgets for the Central School Services

**Decision:** Forum members approved the proposed centrally retained Early Years Blocks.

## **11. Maintained Schools Projected Balances 2025-26**

Amanda Chew presented the update report on projected balances for maintained schools as at 31 March 2026. Based on October budget submissions received to date the net deficit balance is predicted to be £3.911m.

Whilst this represents a slightly improved projection compared to the May budget submissions, this is still a cause for concern.

Thirty-seven schools are forecasting deficit balances totalling £7.732m and 66 schools are forecasting surplus balances totalling (£3.822m).

Finance review meetings have taken place with schools in deficit during the Autumn 2025 term and further meetings are planned for Spring 2026.

The Chair remarked that it is reassuring that the Local Authority are working closely with schools.

**Action:** Share breakdown of deficit between primary and secondary schools (Amanda Chew)

## **12. Maintained Schools Deficit Budget Policy Review Outcome**

Amanda Chrew presented the report informing the Schools Forum of the outcome of the consultation with governing bodies and Head Teachers on the proposed changes to the Challenge and Support Process for Schools/PRU with deficit budgets policy and the LA Scheme for Financing Schools.

**Decision:** Forum members (maintained schools' representatives) approved the proposed changes to the policy which will be implemented from 1 April 2026.

## **13. High Needs Block Budget Monitoring Q2 2025-26**

Amanda Chew presented the report on the HN Block deficit position as at 30 September 2025 which is forecast to be £39.068m as at 31 March 2026, an increase of £12.648m compared to the closing deficit at the end of financial year 2024/25 of £26.420m.

IB reported that the application for Wave Four Free Special School funding was rejected in the autumn statement and instead a comparatively small amount was allocated to increase Resourced Provision. We are reliant on the independent sector due to a lack of in-house special school provision around SEMH and in the Eden area.

As previously reported, the increase in spend and increasing deficit is of huge concern and the service are reviewing all mitigations in place and looking to extend these mitigations further. The mechanisms to track expenditure and volume of need are being revised and a delivery plan has been developed.

It is important to note that the Council's Annual Audit Report for 2024/25 states that the High Needs Block deficit is placing a significant strain on the financial resilience of the Council and when the statutory override ends on 31 March 2028, this will have a significant impact on the Council's useable reserve and its financial sustainability.

## **14. De-delegated Budget Monitoring Q2 2025-26**

Amanda Chew presented the forecast outturn position on the maintained schools de-delegated budgets for the 2025/26 financial year as at 30 September 2025 which are predicted to underspend by (£0.122m).

In accordance with the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) conditions of grant, the underspend on delegated services will transfer into the DSG earmarked reserve.

## **15. Dates of Future Meetings**

The next meeting of the Schools Forum will be held on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2026. The meeting will begin at 9.30am and will be via Microsoft Teams.

## Schools Forum – Action Log 2025/26

Meeting date	Agenda item	Ongoing Actions	Owner	Due date	Update for next meeting
21/1/26	9	Share breakdown of deficit between primary and secondary schools	Amanda Chew	June 2026	In progress
21/1/26	7	Develop a short guide on what to do if HSE gives notice of a visit to provide immediate assurance for school leaders	Isobel Booter and Allan Harty	June 2026	In progress
21/1/26	7	Arrange invitation to CASH re School Landlord	Stephen Gilby	June 2026	In progress
21/1/26	7	Arrange invitation to PHA re School Landlord in summer 2026	Huw Davies	June 2026	In progress
21/1/26	1	Contact managers at Brantwood and Hindpool, copying the Chair of Schools Forum to ask for a Forum representative from maintained nurseries	Marie Barnes	June 2026	Completed
21/1/26	1	Chair to contact George Hastwell School to ask for representative from maintained special school	Stephen Gilby	June 2026	In progress
21/1/26	1	Raise Forum member vacancies in maintained primary schools with PHA Exec	Huw Davies	June 2026	In progress
17/9/25	1	Chair/ Scott Cubit to follow up with new Principal at Kendal College	Stephen Gilby	Nov 2025	In progress

## Completed items

Meeting date	Agenda item	Completed Action	Owner	Due date	Update for next meeting
5/11/25	14	Clerk to arrange a date in early December 2025 for the next meeting of the High Needs Block Working Group.	Clerk	Jan 2026	Complete
5/11/25	7	Confirm where legal support would come from in event of litigation where insurance provided via RPA	Martin Harrison and Chris Butler	Jan 2026	Complete
01/11/23	2	Carried forward from 2024/25: Vacancy for Non-Teaching Associations: Andy Brewerton to approach unions for potential members	Andy Brewerton	Ongoing	21/1/26 proposed new member
17/9/25	10	Seek clarity on potential reduction to employer contributions to the LGPS from April 2026 for next meeting	Clerk	Nov 2025	Update provided at 5/11/25 meeting
17/9/25	6	Invite s.151 Officer (DH) to attend Schools Forum meeting	Clerk	Nov 2025	Invite has been sent. He is unable to attend any meetings in 2025/26 due to calendar clashes
11/06/25	11	Carried forward from 2024/25: Refer Targeted SEN Funding back to the HNB Working Group for further discussion how this funding could be spent and then propose to Schools Forum.	Clerk	Sept 2025	Complete
11/06/25	6	Carried forward from 2024/25: Confirm date for next meeting of the HNB Working Group	Clerk	Sept 2025	Complete



**WESTMORLAND AND FURNESS SCHOOLS FORUM  
High Needs Block Working Group**

**6th March 2026, Microsoft Teams Meeting, 1.30-3.30pm**

## **Minutes**

### **Attendees**

Isobel Booler, Gemma Parkes, Claire Diggle, Amanda Chew, Katherine Dalgliesh (minutes), Fran Crackles, Stephen Gilby, Dan Hinton (Chair), Lisa Balderstone, Cllr Janet Battye, Michelle Hughes, Emma Aubrey

### **1. Apologies**

Laura Watson, Andy Brewerton, Lesley Nixon

### **2. Notes and actions of last meeting**

In response to a question, GP reported an increase in requests to assess which may be related to the publication of the White Paper, commenting that a spike was predicted which is likely to be reflected nationally.

In relation to a question on moderation of bandings, IB reported that last time they were reviewed they were considered broadly in line with national. On average, our Special Schools benchmark as 'high'. It would be helpful to work with school leaders to discuss what the bandings should be, and to possibly obtain some independent advice. The work to create a 'Matching Provision to Need' tool is ongoing.

IB updated members on the government proposals on how to address the national HNB deficit which was initially reported in the media to be a write-off or around 90%. The actual amount of deficit write-off is likely to be based on our return in June 2026. A SEND Advisor and DfE Financial Advisor have been allocated to us, with the initial meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> March. We will need to demonstrate what actions we are taking to mitigate the deficit. It is unlikely to be the initial 90% as indicated in the media. Little has been said about the accumulating deficit. We should expect a high level of scrutiny around plans and impact made so far. In preparation for the meeting several pieces of information have been sent, including details of the impact of LGR which continues to be relevant to our area.

The national SEND consultation is open until May 2026.

## **ACTION:**

Information to go out to school system on current situation and next steps on HNB deficit (Isobel Booler).

Partnership SEF to be developed. The challenges with engaging with Health colleagues is a national problem.

### **3. Every Child Achieving and Thriving (White Paper)**

GP updated the group on what is currently known, given that this is an ongoing consultation.

- This is a 10-year system reform.
- Annual Reviews will be only at transition points, with more frequent reviews in schools.
- Moving away from diagnosis, to a needs-led model.
- A shift in funding from the Local Authority into mainstream schools, with an emphasis on SEND support shifting into schools as statutory duties
- Three layers: ISP, targeted support and then EHCPs.
- Funding at lowest two levels will go directly into schools.
- In short term the funding will not change because the legislation will not change until 2030.
- Suggestion that government will invest money to create additional places in mainstream schools and reduce reliance on specialist placements. There is a potential benefit in reduction of placement and transport costs, but not clear on resource implications for schools.
- Regulation of independent special schools is included as part of bill, with a broadening of providers, more regulation of cost, but this could mean that some providers are not financially viable which could reduce supply and have implications for transport.
- The notional spend will be removed, replaced by additional SEN funding going into schools and indicated on their core budget.

IB reported that our baseline is high with 73% of EHCPs in mainstream currently which is what other school systems will be aiming to achieve as part of these reforms. It is unclear, but there have been indications that they will link the new SEND funding with the recent local government settlement. We may need to be prepared to raise this as a negative impact for our area.

GP highlighted that the two layers below EHCPs, they should have access to 'Experts At Hand' which sounds positive in principle, but it will be a responsibility of the Local Authority to ensure that this resource is available and recruitment of Educational Psychologists (for example) has been a challenge.

IB reported that the Bill indicates groups of schools should come together, but no timescales are provided, and for the first time Local Authorities will be able

to establish multi academy trusts. It is not yet clear what the wider role of the Local Authority would be.

Members raised concerns about the availability of 'Experts At Hand' with recruitment and training requirements presenting a challenge.

#### **4. Financial Oversight**

CD provided an update. The deficit is forecast to increase by over £1m compared to Q2. The cumulative deficit is now forecast to be in the region of £39m on the High Needs Block.

The areas where there are significant increases in pressure include EHCP top-ups (£330k increase since Q2), average cost of top-ups is £8202. There has been an increase of 24 places in Post-16 provision since March 2025, totalling £280k.

EOTAS costs have increased by £166k since Q2 due to backdated provision. There has been a decrease in the underspend on ISP residential provision which has worsened by £180k due to three new placements with backdated costs. We are also aware of a further £280k of expenditure not included in this forecast. The potential in-year deficit will be around £14m on the HNB.

In relation for 2026/27 allocations for the DSG, no allocation has been made for inflation, so we are not able to pass on any additional inflationary funding. We will be starting next financial year with pressure from the outset. Next week we are meeting with representatives from DfE about the High Needs Stability Grant and how we will meet any conditions placed upon us. The possible 90% write-off has not been confirmed and we must demonstrate that we are doing everything we can to address this challenge. It is not yet clear when the grant decision will be made.

There is an expectation that despite the White Paper becoming law, more funding going into schools there will be a delay in seeing any resulting reduction in spending by the Local Authority. Expenditure may increase for around three years before decreasing but this is a national problem exaggerated by the complexities in Westmorland and Furness.

GP reported that if the reforms come into force there will be increased standardisation nationally around EHCP support packages and associated funding so more consistency between local authorities. The EHCP will be a standard document with a supporting individual plan for the child which the school will decide and control. There is some concern that the two systems will need to run in parallel for a period of time which could be a significant cost for the government.

There has been a promise of significant investment for staff in schools because they will be required to be more closely involved in the process. We will need

to lobby to ensure that Westmorland and Furness receive the same level of funding as our statistical neighbours.

JB suggested that there may be an increased demand for EHCPs in the short term because current proposals suggest that any child currently receiving this support will be entitled to that continuing under the new system. This challenge should be considered in the context of the wider council budgetary pressures including pressures in the Home to School Transport service which is currently undertaking a policy consultation.

It was clarified that the majority of Home to School Transport savings from the proposals being consulted on are not to be generated from SEND, but from mainstream, and will not have a big impact on the overall HNB deficit.

IB reported that schools need to be aware of the focus on 'early' (which includes schools as well as Family Help), but also 'local' and 'shared' accountability which would also be the responsibility of school leaders. Consideration must be given to the capacity of smaller schools to manage this.

IB will report to Council the recommendation for Westmorland and Furness to join the F40 group of councils with low funding, to support the lobbying of government.

## **5. Update from SEN Taskforce Workstreams**

EA reported that work has been undertaken on the Ordinarily Available Provision alongside GP and the SEND team. This will provide support for SENDCos to ensure that everything that can be done within schools is offered before asking for additional funding and reducing the need to request an EHCP. This has been launched via CASH and PHA for feedback, and will be deployed in September 2026. There is ongoing work to digitise the OAP work.

We next need to think about reinforcing the message that the class teacher has a role in supporting SEND needs in mainstream schools and to consider what training might be required.

The Taskforce have also looked at the Graduated Approach, with the reforms placing emphasis on all children in schools having an ISP.

The Taskforce has also been integral to the Matching Provision to Need Group which will work to replace the SEND Handbook which is now out of date. It will be a more precise and standardised tool linking levels of need with provision, led by EPs with multiagency input, linked to a funding matrix.



<b>WESTMORLAND &amp; FURNESS COUNCIL SCHOOLS FORUM</b>
<b>Report Title:</b> High Needs Budget Monitoring Q3 2025-26
<b>Meeting date:</b> 10 June 2026
<b>Report of:</b> Isobel Booter, Assistant Director Education & Inclusion

## 1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report presents the HNB deficit position at Q3 (December 2025) which is forecast to be £40.143m as at 31 March 2026, an increase of £13.723m compared to the closing deficit at the end of financial year 2024/25 of £26.420m.
- 1.2 As previously reported, the increase in spend and increasing deficit is of huge concern. The government announced in February that it will address long standing SEND financial pressures by covering up to 90% of local authorities' DSG deficits accrued up to the end of 2025/26 through the High Needs Stability Grant. This grant will be paid subject to each local authority securing the Secretary of State for Education's approval of their local area's Local SEND Reform Plan. The deadline for submitting the final plan is 19 June 2026.
- 1.3 It is important to note that the HNB deficit has been subject to a statutory override for many years meaning that it does not impact on the Council's useable reserve, however this is due to end on 31 March 2028 and therefore the accumulating deficit on the HNB remains a significant risk to the Council's financial sustainability.

## 2.0 Link to Council Plan Priorities

- 2.1 The utilisation of the HNB within the DSG is supportive of the Council Plan priorities that "People in Westmorland and Furness are healthy, happy, active and able to lead fulfilling independent lives, thriving in their communities" and the commitment to reduce inequality and "ensure that young people have enough opportunities to access the best education".

## 3.0 Recommendation

- 3.1 The Schools Forum is recommended to note the projection on the HNB budget as at Q3 and asked to consider what options are available to help manage the forecast rising deficit through the High Needs Working Group.

#### 4.0 Rationale and Evidence for the Recommendation

- 4.1 A balanced HNB budget was set for 2025/26 with no planned transfer to or from reserves. The initial budget available for the HNB, after academy recoupment, was £28.966m of which £28.859m was based on the provisional HNB allocation from central government as confirmed in December 2024 and £0.106m was transferred in from the Schools Block.

##### Budget Revisions

- 4.2 Since the initial budget was set the HNB allocation has been updated by the DFE to reflect changes in recoupment for high needs places in mainstream academies with resourced provision units, special academies and further education colleges. The HNB budget at Q3 is £29.029m as shown in the table below:

<b>High Needs Budget</b>	<b>2025/26 £m</b>
High Needs allocation before recoupment for place funding in academies and FE institutions	30.712
Less recoupment for high needs places in academies and FE institutions	(1.852)
Transfer from Schools Block	0.106
<b>Initial Budget</b>	<b>28.966</b>
DFE Recoupment adjustment for HN places AY 2025/26	(0.069)
Import/Export and other inter-authority adjustments	0.132
<b>Total High Needs Budget Q3</b>	<b>29.029</b>

##### Projected Outturn

- 4.3 Performance against the HNB budget is monitored monthly with reports presented to senior management and to Cabinet on a quarterly basis, as well as to each Schools Forum meeting.
- 4.4 The HNB budget has a forecast in-year pressure of £13.723m, resulting in a forecast cumulative deficit of £40.143m:

<b>Description</b>	<b>High Needs Block</b>
<b>DSG Balance as at 31 March 2025</b>	<b>£26.420m</b>
Forecast pressure / (underspend) on DSG in 2025-26	£13.723m
<b>Forecast DSG Balance as at 31 March 2026</b>	<b>£40.143m</b>

- 4.5 The table below shows a breakdown of the forecast pressure, which has increased by £1.075m compared to Q2, by each budget line:

Description	Budget £m	Forecast £m	Variance £m	Previous Qtr Variance £m	Change in Variance £m
High Needs - Top Ups	8.622	12.866	4.244	3.909	0.335
Independent Special Placements - Post-16	1.034	4.233	3.199	2.916	0.283
Independent Special Placements - Day	3.707	6.618	2.911	2.936	(0.026)
Post-16 Further Education	0.707	2.146	1.439	1.367	0.072
Education Otherwise Placements	0.554	1.519	0.965	0.799	0.166
Special Schools	8.964	9.551	0.587	0.552	0.035
High Needs - Invest to Save	0.000	0.282	0.282	0.280	0.002
Central SEN (Equipment, 6th Day Provision)	0.032	0.161	0.129	0.157	(0.027)
Resourced Provision Places	0.653	0.695	0.042	0.036	0.006
Pupil Referral Unit	2.128	2.128	0.000	0.000	0.000
Mobility and Independence Contract	0.018	0.018	0.000	0.000	0.000
Share of de-delegated (special schools)	0.032	0.032	0.000	0.000	0.000
Independent Special Placements - Residential	1.341	1.300	(0.041)	(0.220)	0.180
Inclusion Teams	1.237	1.202	(0.034)	(0.085)	0.051
<b>Total DSG to transfer to DSG HNB reserve</b>	<b>29.029</b>	<b>42.752</b>	<b>13.723</b>	<b>12.648</b>	<b>1.075</b>

#### 4.6 The key variances are:

- EHCP top-ups for pupils in mainstream schools and Early Years Providers £4.244m. The forecast, which represents an increase of £0.335m compared to Q2, is based on current EHCP costs and predicted number of new and amended EHCPs in-year. The average top-up paid to a Westmorland & Furness mainstream school at Q3 is £8,202 per EHCP student, a reduction of £101 compared to Q2 and £312 compared to 31 March 2025. The average top-up for resourced provision units is £9,559 a reduction of £5 per EHCP student compared to Q2 and £22 compared to 31 March 2025. Also included within this budget line is forecast EHCP top-ups for students placed in Cumberland schools of £0.524m and students placed in other local authorities of £0.290m.
- ISPs Post-16 £3.199m. The forecast expenditure, which represents an increase of £0.283m compared to Q2, is based on current placements, known new placements coming through the system and estimated forecast new placements in-year. The overall number of Post-16 ISPs at Q3 is 84, an increase of 24 compared to 31 March 2025. Since Q2 there have been 6 new, 1 ended, 1 transfer and 3 placements which were previously forecast to end in August 2025 that have been extended for a further academic year, this accounts for £0.158m of the increase in forecast costs compared to Q2. The forecast also includes costs for a further 3 estimated new placements

to the end of the year, representing an increase of £0.023m compared to Q2. The remaining variance compared to Q2 of £0.102m relates to amended forecast costs for pre-existing placements. The average cost of placements that ended in August was £40,048 however the average cost of new placements starting from September onwards is £51,116 as at Q3.

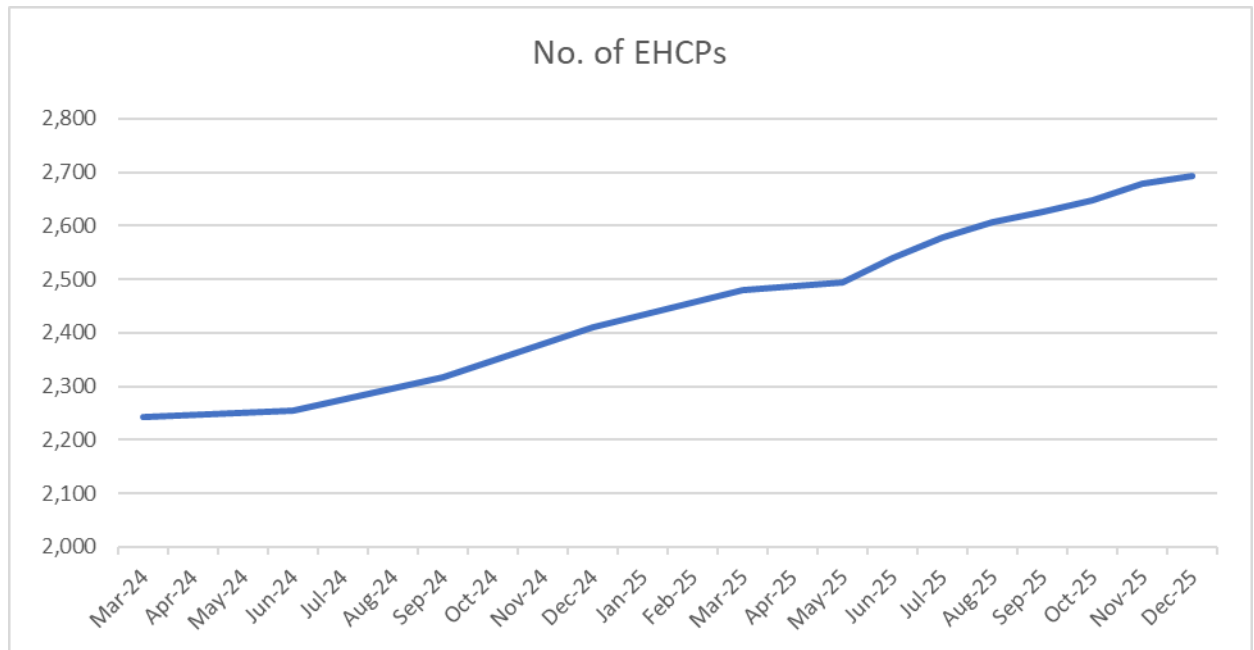
- ISPs Day £2.911m. The forecast expenditure, which represents a decrease of (£0.026m) compared to Q2, is based on current placements, known new placements coming through the system and estimated forecast new placements in-year. There are 111 pupils in ISP day placements as at Q3, an increase of 7 compared to the position as at 31 March 2025. The forecast includes an additional 3 placements expected to start in January and a further 4 estimated new placements to the end of the year. The average cost of placements that ended in August was £49,579 however the average cost of new placements from September onwards is £66,908 as at Q3.
- ISPs Residential (£0.041m). The forecast underspend, which represents a reduction of £0.180m compared to Q2, is based on current, known new placements coming through the system and forecast new placements in-year. The overall number of placements at Q3 is 18, an increase of 4 compared to Q2. The costs associated with 3 of the new placements includes backdated costs to April and August 2025 accounting for £0.183m of movement compared to Q2 with the remaining variance of (£0.003m) relating to amended forecast costs for pre-existing placements. The forecast also includes estimated costs for a further 1 new placement to the end of the year.

The below table summarises the number of pupils in ISPs by provider type:

Placement Type	2024/25 Outturn	2025/26 Q1	2025/26 Q2	New	Ended	Placement Changes: In	Placement Changes: Out	Total Change	2025/26 Q3	2025/26 Forecast Outturn Q3 £m	2024/25 Outturn £m	Average Annual Cost of Placements 2025/26 £	Average Annual Cost of Placements 2024/25 £
ISP - Day	104	103	105	6	0	0	0	6	111	6.618	6.109	64,916	61,419
ISP - Residential	16	16	14	4	0	0	0	4	18	1.300	1.327	77,271	78,302
ISP - FE Colleges	60	68	75	6	-1	4	0	9	84	4.233	2.445	52,917	45,368
<b>Total</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>194</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>-1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>12.151</b>	<b>9.881</b>	Not applicable	Not applicable

- Post-16 Further Education £1.439m. The forecast expenditure, which is an increase of £0.072m compared to Q2, reflects estimated top-up payments to FE Colleges totalling £1.103m and other FE education providers of £1.043m. The forecast includes costs for 48 internships at Q3 in both further education colleges and private providers.
- Education Otherwise £0.965m. The forecast expenditure, which represents an increase of £0.166m compared to Q2, reflects estimated costs associated with children being educated other than at a school (EOTAS) totalling £1.519m. The number of EOTAS children as at Q3 is 53. There have been 13 new, 5 extended placements and 2 ended placements since Q2. The forecast also includes backdated alternative provision costs associated with 22 children of £0.109m.
- Special Schools £0.587m. The pressure, which represents an increase of £0.035m compared to Q2, relates to new, amended and forecast new EHCPs in-year. The forecast includes £0.108m relating to backdated amendments to EHCP top-ups. The average EHCP top-up per student paid to a Westmorland & Furness maintained or academy special school is £15,442 as at Q3, a reduction of £16 compared to Q2 and an increase of £976 compared to 2024/25.
- High Needs Invest to Save Initiatives £0.282m. The forecast expenditure here relates to the Sandgate School Early Intervention and Greengate Junior School Alternative Provision programmes.
- The remaining balance relates to individually non-material variances totalling a net pressure of £0.137m.

4.7 The pressure against the HNB continues to be due to pressures relating to the growth in demand for EHCPs for CYP with SEN. The number of CYP with an EHCP as at December 2025 was 2,692. The number of EHCPs has increased by 211 since March 2025 and 66 since Q2:



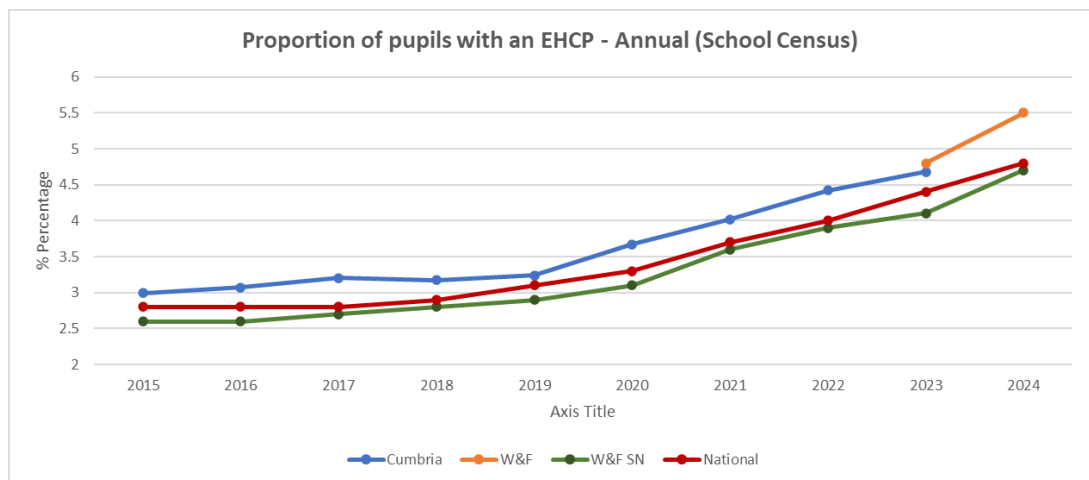
4.8 The majority of CYP with an EHCP have Speech & Language (30%), Social Emotional & Mental Health (27%) and Autistic Spectrum Disorder (21%) recorded as their primary need:

Primary Need	No of EHCPs	% of Total
Speech, Language & Comm Needs	795	29.5%
Social, Emotional and Mental Health	713	26.5%
Autistic Spectrum Disorder	568	21.1%
Severe Learning Difficulty	217	8.1%
Physical and Medical Difficulty	138	5.1%
Specific Learning Difficulty	104	3.9%
Moderate Learning Difficulty	70	2.6%
Hearing Impairment	21	0.8%
Vision Impairment	19	0.7%
Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulty	18	0.7%
Physical Disability	13	0.5%
Not recorded	8	0.3%
Multi-Sensory Impairment	4	0.1%
Down Syndrome	2	0.1%
Under Assessment	2	0.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,692</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

4.9 Westmorland & Furness has high levels of inclusivity, as shown in the table below the majority of CYP (66% as at December 2025) are being educated in mainstream schools and colleges:

Placement	No of EHCPs	% of Total
Mainstream LA School	768	28.5%
Mainstream Academy	655	24.3%
Gen FE and Tertiary College/HE	274	10.2%
Special LA School	244	9.1%
Special Independent School	124	4.6%
Special School: Academy/Free	118	4.4%
Specialist P16 Institutions	83	3.1%
Not recorded	76	2.8%
YP with EHCP that are NEET	73	2.7%
Other - Parent Arranged	70	2.6%
Mainstream Free Schools	54	2.0%
Elective home education	47	1.7%
Other - LA Arranged	27	1.0%
Early Years Setting	20	0.7%
AP/PRU: LA Maintained	18	0.7%
Not in education - Other	15	0.6%
Mainstream Independent School	9	0.3%
Other FE	7	0.3%
Apprenticeships	5	0.2%
Sixth Form College	2	0.1%
Special College	2	0.1%
Special School: Non-maintained	1	0.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,692</b>	<b>100%</b>

4.10 The benchmarking chart below shows that Westmorland & Furness' percentage of pupils with EHCPs is higher compared to the national and its statistical neighbours although the rate of increase for Westmorland & Furness is matched by the rate of increase against its statistical neighbours:



4.11 Figures in the above table are as at the January census date for each year.

- 4.12 In 2025/26 local authorities have seen an increase in their HNB funding of at least 7% per head of population compared to their 2024/25 baseline resulting in total funding of £28.923m at Q3 after deductions for directed funding of high needs places by the DfE and before £0.106m transfer from Schools Block, an increase of £1.985m compared to 2024/25. However, 26% of the total allocation is still based on historic 2017/18 actual spend and Westmorland & Furness is the 13th lowest funded out of 151 local authorities receiving £807 per head of 2-18 year old of population in 2025/26. The National mean per head funding is £988 and if Westmorland & Furness was funded at the mean level it would receive an extra £6.880m. The HNB budget included a transfer from the Schools Block of 0.106m to support the budget pressures. A £1m grant was received in 2023/24 to support improvement plans under the DfE's Delivering Better Value for SEND programme, the impact of which has been incorporated into a DSG management plan.
- 4.13 The government announced in February that they will address long standing SEND financial pressures by covering up to 90% of local authorities' DSG deficits accrued up to the end of 2025–26 through the High Needs Stability Grant. This grant will be paid subject to each local authority securing the Secretary of State for Education's approval of their local area's Local SEND Reform Plan. Payments will be made in Autumn 2026 for local authorities whose plans are approved. Local authorities whose plans do not meet the threshold for approval will be required to revise their plans to ensure they meet the required threshold, with appropriate support. Local authorities whose plans are subsequently approved will receive the grant payment in Spring 2027. Local authorities will not receive any payments until successful approval of their local area's Local SEND Reform Plan. If successful in applying for a 90% contribution this would leave a £3.7m cumulative deficit and a significant accumulating deficit.
- 4.14 The HNB Deficit has been subject to a statutory override for many years. The override is due to end in 2028. The MHCLG has stated that SEND Reform will take time to embed and has issued the following statement: "For deficits that arise in 2026/27 and 2027/8-28, local authorities can expect that we will continue to take an appropriate and proportionate approach, although not unlimited. Whilst recognising the challenges of the current system, it remains vital that every authority provides appropriate high-quality support for children and young people's education whilst ensuring robust controls as we work together to reform the SEND system."
- 4.15 The Council is fully engaging with the DfE in the development of its SEND Reform Plan which is due to be submitted on 19 June 2026 and there will be ongoing work to further mitigate the spend on the HNB as the accumulating deficit position for 2026 to 2028 is a risk to the council when the statutory override ceases.

## **5.0 Options**

- 5.1 Schools Forum is recommended to note the projection against the HNB budget. Work is ongoing to consider options for managing down the forecast rising deficit through the HN Working Group.

## 6.0 Financial and Other Relevant Implications

6.1 Resource and value for money implications are considered throughout this report. No equality/legal/ implications have been identified.

1 June 2026

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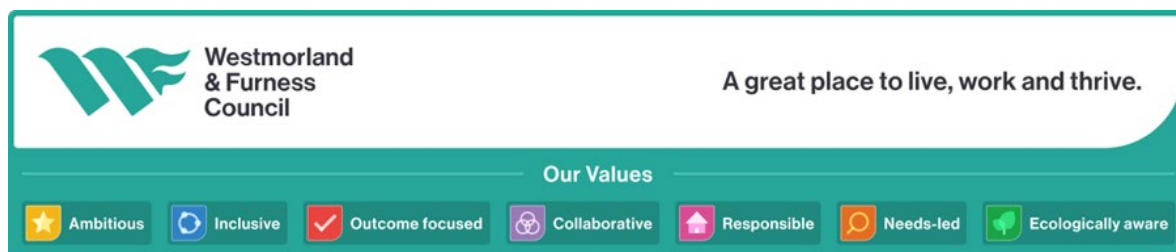
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### **Acronyms:**

CYP	Children & Young People
DFE	Department for Education
DSG	Dedicated Schools Grant
EHCP	Education Health Care Plan
EOTAS	Educated Other Than At a School
FE	Further Education
HNB	High Needs Block
HE	Higher Education
ISP	Independent Specialist Provider
MHCLG	Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
PAN	Pupil Admission Numbers
PRU	Pupil Referral Unit
RP	Resourced Provision
SEND	Special Educational Needs & Disabilities
YP	Young People

<b>WESTMORLAND &amp; FURNESS COUNCIL SCHOOLS FORUM</b>
<b>Report Title:</b> De-delegated Budget Monitoring Q3 2025-26
<b>Meeting date:</b> 10 June 2026
<b>Report of:</b> Isobel Booter, Assistant Director - Education & Inclusion

## **1.0 Executive Summary**

- 1.1 This report presents the forecast outturn position on the maintained schools de-delegated budgets for the 2025/26 financial year as at 30 December 2025 which are predicted to underspend by (£0.102m).
- 1.2 In accordance with the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) conditions of grant, the underspend on delegated services will transfer into the DSG earmarked reserve.

## **2.0 Link to Council Plan Priorities**

- 2.1 Ensuring that schools are funded appropriately is supportive of the Council Plan priorities that “People in Westmorland & Furness are healthy, happy, active and able to lead fulfilling independent lives, thriving in their communities” and the commitment to reduce inequality and “ensure that young people have enough opportunities to access the best education”.

## **3.0 Recommendation**

- 3.1 The maintained schools’ Schools Forum members are asked to note the de-delegated budgets forecast outturn position as at Q3.

## **4.0 Background**

- 4.1 The 2025/26 de-delegated budgets for services provided to maintained schools were agreed by Schools Forum in January 2025. These budgets are deducted from mainstream school budget shares and de-delegated back to the local authority. Delegation also applies to maintained special and nursery schools and therefore an element is centrally retained from the Early Years and High Needs Block for these services, although there is no de-delegation process for these two areas.
- 4.2 The de-delegated budgets are forecast to underspend by (£0.102m) as at Q3:

Budget Line	2025/26 Budget £m	2025/26 Forecast Outturn £m	Variance £m	Previous Quarter Variance £m	Change in Variance £m
Contingencies	0.286	0.160	(0.125)	(0.139)	0.014
Insurance	0.377	0.377	0.000	0.000	0.000
Staff Costs	0.430	0.453	0.023	0.017	0.006
Library and Museum Services	0.197	0.197	0.000	0.000	0.000
School Improvement	0.245	0.245	0.000	0.000	0.000
<b>Total De-Delegated Budgets</b>	<b>1.535</b>	<b>1.433</b>	<b>(0.102)</b>	<b>(0.122)</b>	<b>0.020</b>

#### 4.3 The key variances are:

- Contingency Fund (£0.125m). The main expenditure relates to the North Walney site closure and Channelside pre-opening costs totalling £0.071m and schools in financial difficulty £0.062m comprising split site funding for Cartmel Primary of £0.054m and support for Calthwaite school £0.008m. The table below shows a breakdown of the forecast expenditure against the fund as at Q3:

De-delegated Contingency Fund Budget	2025/26 Forecast Outturn £m
<b>Budget 2025/26</b>	<b>0.286</b>
Ill health retirements	0.000
Settlement Agreements and Staff Termination costs	0.000
Administration costs Teachers Annual Pension Return	0.029
Other miscellaneous costs	0.000
<b>Total Unforeseen Circumstances</b>	<b>0.028</b>
Schools in Financial Difficulty	0.062
Additional Costs relating to New, Closing or Amalgamated Schools	0.071
<b>Total Net Expenditure 2025/26</b>	<b>0.160</b>
<b>Forecast Underspend 2025/26</b>	<b>(0.125)</b>

- Staff Costs £0.023m. This relates to a forecast pressure against teacher maternity absence cover of £0.020m and trade union duties pressure of £0.003m.

## 5.0 Options

5.1 The Schools Forum is asked to note the de-delegated budgets forecast outturn position as at Q3.

## 6.0 Financial & Other Relevant Implications

6.1 Financial implications are considered throughout this report. No equality/legal/implications have been identified.

3 June 2026

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Council

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