Oldham Council

Summer Term 2025

Minutes

Meeting of the Oldham Schools Forum

Wednesday 25 June 2025
via Microsoft Teams
at 4.00pm

PRESENT:		
Liz Travis (Chair)	Holy Trinity CE Primary School (Headteacher)	Primary Maintained Representative
Stewart Ash	Pinnacle Trust (CFO)	Primary Academy Representative
Karl Newall	Crompton House Trust (CEO)	Secondary Academy Representative
Tracey Cavanagh	Holy Rosary RC Primary School (Headteacher)	Primary Maintained Representative
Kate Anais Hoggard	Channings	Early Years Representative- PVI
Paul McGrath	St Thomas CE Primary School, Werneth	Primary Academy Representative
Joe Brownridge	E-ACT (CFO)	Secondary Academy Representative
Rob Higgins	Cranmer Trust	Secondary Academy Representative
Nigel Woodworth- attending for Claire John	Newbridge Group	Special Sector Representative
Nigel Yeo in place of Ian Windeatt	Trade Union Representative	Trade Union Representative

IN ATTENDANCE:	
Matthew Bulmer	Director of Education, Oldham Council
Andy Cooper	Senior Finance Manager, Oldham Council
Victoria Hayes	Senior Accountant, Oldham Council
Clare Roper	Senior Accountant, Oldham Council
Vicky Gibbons	Senior Accountant, Oldham Council
Jennifer Wright	Early Years Funding and Sufficiency Manager

ABSENT:		
Gary Needle	St Joseph's Primary	Primary Maintained Representative
Leon Ashton	Crompton House School (Governor)	Secondary Academy Representative
Sharon Costello	Harmony Trust (CFO)	Primary Academy Representative
Anthony Leighton (to be replaced by James Bell at future meetings)	The Cranmer Trust (CFO)	Secondary Academy Representative
Emmett Patel	Kingsland School (PRU) (Headteacher)	Special School Representative
Jeremy Sutcliffe	Kingfisher Special School (Governor)	Special School Representative

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

1.1 Welcome

The Chair welcomed everyone present and opened the meeting at 4.00pm.

1.2 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Gary Needle.

1.3 Business, Pecuniary and Personal Interests

No declarations of interests were shared.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING

2.1 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 26 March 2025 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair, subject to the following amendment:

- Nigel Yeo was in attendance as Trade Union Representative

2.2 Matters Arising from the Previous Minutes

There were no matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting that were not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

3. DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT (DSG) UPDATE

3.1 The Dedicated Schools Grant 2024/2025 and 2025/2026 joint report, from the Director of Finance and the Director of Education, Early Years and Skills, had been shared in advance of the meeting.

3.2 The Senior Finance Manager highlighted Table 1 - DSG Update 2024/25 to 2025/26

He advised that the local authority's Financial Statements for 2024/2025 would be approved by the Audit Committee in the Autumn Term. Subject to Audit approval, the outturn for 2024/25 was confirmed as a net surplus of £1.182m.

The March 2025 Schools Forum was advised that there would be an estimated in-year deficit for 2024/25 of £5.967m for 2025/26. Based on revised funding allocations and updated expenditure projections, the forecast in-year deficit has now increased by £2.667m from £5.967m to £8.634m for 2025/26 resulting in a revised cumulative deficit of £7.452m.

3.3 The Senior Finance Manager presented Table 2 – **Analysis of Movements since March 25 Schools Forum** which highlights movements in income and expenditure which attributed to the increased deficit. This included additional pressures within the High Needs Block relating to a reduction in anticipated funding (£0.253m) Special Schools (£1.807m) Resourced Provision (£0.212m), Post 16 (£0.064m) and Central High Needs (£0.057m). In addition, there was a slight increase in estimated Early Years funding offset by recommitting the underspend from 2024/25 (£0.322m) and an increase to the anticipated growth balance brought forward of £0.048m.

3.4 The Senior Finance Manager Table 3 - **DSG Summary by Funding Block** which summarised the movement by the 4 funding blocks that comprise the DSG. It showed the in-year surplus or deficit for each of the four blocks for 2024/25 and 2025/26 and the total cumulative impact on the DSG, arriving at a forecast deficit of £7.452m at the end of 2025/26. He highlighted that the surplus of £1.182m from 2024/25 was due to an underspend in relation to growth funding within the schools block and also within Early Years, both of which are committed in 2025/26 and without which there would have been a closing deficit of £0.520m across the four blocks of the DSG.

Q. Is there is any indication of changes in funding going forward to address the DSG High Needs Block deficits projected to be held by LA's?

The LA are unclear of when indicative allocations for 2026/27 will be received. In previous years these had been received in July, however for 2025/26, these weren't published until November 2024 due to the timing of the general election, so publishing in July was not possible. On 11 June 2025, as part of the Spending Review, the government confirmed that its intended approach to SEND reform would be set out in a Schools White Paper in Autumn 2025. This could mean that indicative allocations are not published until after the White Paper is published.

Mr Bulmer confirmed that there had been a deterioration in the position on the High Needs Block over the last 12 months. However, this is due to the increased costs in pupils requirements for SEND support and that it is imperative that children's needs are met.

It was pointed out the majority of both GM and Northwest Authorities are in a comparable position, some with significantly larger actual and projected deficits.

RESOLVED: i) that the Forum noted the draft 2024/25 outturn for the Dedicated Schools Grant ; and

ii) that the Forum note the current DSG budget for 2025/26 and the consolidated forecast position as at 31 March 2026

4. SCHOOL BALANCES

4.1 The Senior Finance Manager presented the paper to update members on the level of balances for 2024/25 for maintained schools within Oldham. He confirmed that balances held had decreased by £1.418 in 2024/25 when compared to 2023/24, Some of this reduction was due to in year academy conversions were balances are no longer held by the LA.

Final balances were showing an in year surplus of £7.160m.

There were 7 schools at the end of the 2024/25 financial year that were carrying forward deficit balances and the Local Authority is working with these schools to produce a recovery plan to demonstrate these balances coming back into surplus.

There were also 7 schools carrying surplus balances at the end of 2024/25. Of these 7 schools with surplus balances, 2 have submitted an official plan to the LA to carry the balances forward. The deadline for submittal of Utilisation of Balances to the LA is 30th June so at the time of writing the report, we await submissions from the remaining 5 school

RESOLVED: That the Forum noted the contents of the report

5. DATES AND TIMES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

RESOLVED:

- Wednesday 22 October 2025 at 4.00pm
- 14 January 2026 at 4.00pm
- 25th March at 4.00pm

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There were no urgent items to consider.

The Chair thanked the Senior Finance Manager for preparing all the papers for the meeting.

(There being no further business, attendees were thanked for their attendance and the meeting was declared closed at 4.30pm).

SIGNED as approved: _____ (Chair)

DATE: _____

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