A

Minutes of the Suffolk Schools' Forum held at 9.30am on Thursday 14 May 2026 via Microsoft Teams (and live streamed through YouTube)

Present:

Non-School Members	Colin Shaw, 16-19 Provider Amanda Havers, PVI
Academy Members	Allison Coleman, Mainstream (Chair) Andrew Berry, Mainstream Steven Dewing, Mainstream Ros Somerville, Mainstream *(on behalf of* Emma Wilson-Downes*)* Angela Ransby, AP Provision Mark Chapman, Mainstream
Maintained School Members	Robert Lenko, Secondary Rowena Mackie, Secondary

Observers and Local Authority

Observers	There were observers present at the meeting
Local Authority	Sarah-Jane Smedmor Julia Grainger Mike Quinton Christopher Lee Gemma Morgan Christina Lewis Teresa Spilling Jacqueline Dyer

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1.	Welcome – Virtual Meeting Etiquette	The Chair welcomed members to this meeting. This meeting is a public meeting being live streamed via YouTube.
2.	Apologies for absence	Apologies for absence were received from: • Hayley Griffin, Harriet Wakeling, Maria Kemble, Jennifer Smith, James Clark, Paul Fykin, Ros Somerville in attendance *(on behalf of Emma Wilson-Downes)*
3.	Minutes of the previous meeting & issues arising	Chair confirmed that the action on Page 4 has been completed: MQ to update the growth and falling rolls fund policy on Suffolk Learning to remove reference to Ofsted good and outstanding ratings and ensure alignment with current operational guidance. The minutes of the previous meeting held on 22 January were agreed as an accurate reflection of the meeting and signed off by the Chair.
4.	High Needs Funding	Chris Lee, Interim Assistant Director for SEND & Inclusion introduced this item to give an update on five key areas: • the number of children receiving high needs funding, and the continuing increase in spending on alternative provision and independent placements • the current financial position at Quarter 3 • the recently published SEND Sufficiency Strategy and its links to SEND reforms • the DSG Deficit Management Template • progress on SEND reforms The system is experiencing sustained pressure, driven by increasing numbers of children and young people requiring support. Reported a 17% increase in the number of children and young people with EHC plans, rising from 10,292 in April 2025 to 12,018 in April 2026 part of this increase reflected the completion of recovery work on the backlog and said that numbers were expected to continue to rise. SCC provides high needs funding without requiring

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		an EHC plan, with 65% of funding allocated to children with EHC plans and the remainder to those on SEND support, aiming to meet needs earlier and avoid escalation; effectiveness of this funding is under review. Placements in independent special schools had increased by 34% over two academic years, and non-school alternative provision had risen by 70% over the past year, reflecting sufficiency pressures and the fact that local special schools were operating at full capacity. The sufficiency strategy covers both special school placements and mainstream settings, with additional places created since April 2025 and plans for new inclusion bases in mainstream schools, including two approved free school bids to expand specialist provision. The ongoing commitment to maintain associate Educational Psychologists (EPs) to support timely EHC assessments, with resource mapping and restructuring underway to create age-phased pods and improve communication and service delivery. Members heard that central government intends to write off up to 90% of historic high needs deficits by the end of 2025-26, subject to the submission and approval of local SEND reform plans. Suffolk's deficit currently stands at £160m. Suffolk's SEND reform plan must be submitted to the DfE by 19 June. A draft was due to be reviewed by the DfE adviser by 19 May, with final amendments to be made before submission. Approval may be confirmed in the autumn or, depending on the outcome of the review, in the spring. The reform plan has been developed through significant co-production with schools, settings, and partners. Engagement sessions held and feedback incorporated to support robust planning and a system-wide support. Schools Forum will continue to play a key governance role and will receive further updates and recommendations as work progresses.

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		Although up to 90% of the deficit may be cleared, the remaining 10% and the funding arrangements for the following two years are still subject to further government announcements, with plans in place to ensure sustainability. Questions were raised by Forum Members: <u>Allison Coleman, Chair</u>: Are we getting a picture of how other authorities are feeling about the direction of travel that we've got now or isn't it clear enough yet? *CL said that Suffolk had engaged with colleagues across the eastern region and had also drawn on advice and support from its DfE lead. Other authorities were following a similar direction of travel and facing comparable deficit pressures.* Do you feel confident that a mechanism would be in place to address the 10% of the deficit that would remain with Suffolk.? *CL said that further announcements from the DfE were awaited, as the proposed 90% deficit clearance only covered the position to the end of the current financial year.* <u>Robert Lenko, Governor Thurston Community College</u> Queried the selection process for specialist unit placements and the need for additional places? *CL said that young people were assessed individually according to need, and that further expansion was planned through approved free school bids and capital planning.* <u>Amanda Havers, Early Years PVI</u> Are Early Years children in PVI settings who receive SEN support, have EHCPs and/or HNF also included in these figures? *CL confirmed that all EHCP and SEND support data covered ages 0 to 25, including children in early years settings.* <u>Ros Somerville, Director of SEND, USP</u> Is there is a long-term commitment to maintaining additional EP capacity, particularly as demand remains high even after backlog clearance. *CL said that he had recently met with finance and EP colleagues and that work was under way on clear*

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		forecasts and projections for the likely number of assessments required in the coming year, with resources being mapped accordingly. Is there a projection of how quickly the statutory services and other associated of which EPs are some would need to be increased as well to maintain the level of service that's required? *CL said that the service was currently working through a restructure, including the development of age-phased pods, with staff grouped across primary, secondary and post-16 phases.* Sarah-Jane Smedmor, Executive Director CYP commented that Suffolk is now in a much stronger position, having cleared historical backlogs and improved compliance, including meeting statutory EHCP timelines within 20 weeks. SEND reforms provide an opportunity to strengthen joint working and support more strategic collaboration with schools and partners. However, approval of the reform plan is not assured and may not be confirmed until the spring. Sarah-Jane thanked Chris Lee, Julia Grainger, the wider teams and schools for their strong engagement, noting that collaboration had been a key factor in the progress made.
5.	DSG Outturn – Verbal Update	Mike Quinton, Senior Accountant, CYP provided a verbal update on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) outturn, noting that final figures were not yet available due to timing. Suffolk's financial position remains challenging, with a projected overall deficit of around £160-165m. Suffolk is among the lowest-funded local authorities (around 140 out of 151), which contributes significantly to the sustained overspend. The required next steps, including statutory returns such as the Section 251 report and council-wide accounts. Consistency across these reports is essential for government to analyse and scrutinise figures. If the SEND reform plan is approved in the first

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		review window, funding relief could be received in the autumn; otherwise, it may be delayed until the spring. A detailed breakdown of the 2025-2026 DSG outturn position, including block funding, early years adjustment and budget allocations for 2026-2027 will be presented at the July meeting. No questions were raised by members.
6.	Forward Agenda	• SEND Provision Update (Standing item) • DSG Outturn School Budgets • Schools Infrastructure Update
7.	Date of the next meeting	The next meeting is confirmed as Thursday 16 July 2026, 9.30am Microsoft Teams (and live streamed through YouTube).
		Meeting closed at 10am.