

Slough Schools Forum – Minutes of Meeting held on 28 November 2024

DRAFT minutes for approval at meeting on 15 January 2025

Present: John Constable, Langley Grammar School (Chair)
Angela Mellish, St Bernard's Catholic Grammar School
Ben Bausor, Always Growing Ltd
Claire Fletcher, Penn Wood Primary School
Eddie Neighbour, Upton Court Grammar School
Gill Denham, Marish Primary School
Helen Abell, Godolphin
Jamie Rockman, Haybrook College
Jo Rockall, Herschel Grammar School
Jon Reekie, Phoenix Infants School
Neil Sykes, Arbour Vale School
Pamela O'Brien, St. Mary's
Peter Collins, Slough & Eton Church of England Business and Enterprise College
Rhodri Bryant, The Langley Academy
Valerie Harffey, Ryvers School

Officers: Cllr. Puja Bedi, Lead Member for Education & Children's Services
Luisa Hansen, Strategic Finance Manager, Children's Services
Neil Hoskinson, Director for Education and Inclusion
Dave McNamara, Director of Financial Management
Tony Madden, Development Manager

Apologies: Annabel Scholes, Interim Executive Director, Finance & Commercial (S151 Officer)
Sue Butcher, Director of Children's Services
Emma Lister, Chalvey Early Years Centre

JC welcomed everyone to the meeting and confirmed that there was no clerk available for this meeting. Instead, the meeting would be recorded and transcribed afterward.

Welcome and Introductions	
JC (Chair) formally welcomed everyone to the meeting, and particularly to two new members joining the Forum - Helen Abell (Godolphin Junior School) and Pamela O'Brien (St Marys CE Primary School).	
1039	Apologies Apologies were noted from Annabel Scholes, Sue Butcher and Emma Lister. Jamie Rockman and Peter Collins would be joining the meeting later.
1040	Notification of any other business JC noted one item of business requested from PC.
1041	Declarations of Interest None
1042	Minutes of the Previous Meeting held on 17 October 2024 The minutes of the previous meeting were confirmed as an accurate record. JC noted that Annabel Scholes was described as the Interim Executive Director at the time but had now been appointed permanently. DM confirmed the formal appointment would be ratified at that evening's council meeting. For future agendas, Annabel will be listed as the permanent Section 151 Officer. JC asked whether there was any update on the intention to provide an options paper on SEND, as referenced in minute 1035 (SEND Update). NH confirmed the goal remains to have the options paper ready by early in 2025. He deferred to a colleague, who is chairing the group, for further clarification and updates if needed..

	<p>JC asked for an update on LA communication with maintained school bursars, as raised under Any Other Business. DM confirmed that there had been a follow-up email exchange, but no date for a meeting has yet been agreed. He proposed asking LH to get in contact with the bursars and arrange a date before Christmas.</p>
<p>1043</p>	<p>Schools Forum Membership update</p> <p>The Chair drew members' attention to the updated Membership summary in the agenda pack.</p> <p>JC thanked the new Forum members for stepping forward to fill the vacancies, and asked Forum members to note their appointment. JC noted that Navroop Mehat has stepped back from Forum responsibilities after several years of service, and recorded thanks on behalf of all members for her contributions to the Forum.</p> <p>JC asked Forum members to note that there would be two vacancies for secondary academy members from January 2025. The first already known the Forum members, due to JC stepping down at the end of the Autumn term. The second is caused by the resignation of Eddie Neighbour, representing Upton Court Grammar School and a member of the Pioneer Education Trust, due to a change in his role. JC thanked EN for his contribution to the Forum over the past six or seven years. The vacancies would be referred back to the academies represented within the Slough Association of Secondary Headteachers to nominate new representatives. JC asked members to note that as Forum regulations require a minimum of one governor representative, it may be appropriate to consider governor representation in discussions about filling these vacancies</p> <p>In regards to the role of Chair from January 2025, JC noted that Neil Sykes had been nominated by Jamie Rockman. NS confirmed he was willing to stand and that, if elected, would take on the role for the remainder of the current academic year, with any extension subject to further discussion and a review of his commitments.</p> <p>With no objections raised, Forum members unanimously approved NS as Forum Chair from January onwards, covering the three scheduled meetings to the end of the current academic year. The position would then be reviewed, as the role is elected annually at the final meeting of the year, for September 2025.</p>
<p>1044</p>	<p>Local and national funding and other updates</p> <p>DM introduced himself as the interim Finance Director, supporting all departments, including Children's Services, and working closely with LH, the lead Strategic Finance Manager.</p> <p>DM referred to the presentation from the Department for Education (DfE) in the agenda pack, but which contained limited actionable information. He noted an increase in education funding following the October budget, although much of this is allocated to covering pay awards and increased national insurance contributions. There were no significant changes to the funding formula or requirements for local authorities. Draft provisional factor values for 2025/26 have been released, with minor clarifications since.</p> <p>DM highlighted that Slough is well-positioned relative to the National Funding Formula, with most factors aligned. Two minor factors remain slightly outside national values but the variations are considered insignificant.</p> <p>DM also discussed the additional funding designed to cover pay awards for teachers and support staff, explaining while the government asserts sufficient funding has been provided for pay increases, the national-level formula used for individual school allocations mean some schools are relatively underfunded and others overfunded. Details on allocations for special schools and early years settings were not yet available, making it challenging to finalize allocations for these settings. Funds were expected to be received shortly, with distributions to mainstream schools planned for the following week. For special schools, DM suggested considering an interim allocation to support schools with immediate pay awards, while withholding a portion to ensure accuracy once more details are available.</p> <p>DM invited views on how best to proceed with special school allocations to avoid misallocations that may require recovery. NS emphasised the financial management challenges schools faced and the importance of releasing funds as soon as possible while ensuring accuracy to avoid the need for corrections. NS confirmed his support for the suggested interim allocation method.</p> <p>JC invited questions regarding the presentation or funding updates. NS declared an interest regarding the National Funding Formula (NFF) and inquired about the potential impact of anticipated changes to the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) factor. DM indicated that the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) is likely to tighten the allocation distribution process through the PFI factor; he noted that initial discussions with ESFA had taken place, but detailed information about the changes is not yet available. DM further noted that JC had provided him with a thorough briefing on the history of PFI arrangements in Slough and assured the</p>

	<p>Forum that no actions would be taken to destabilise the current situation. Any potential implications of the changes will be fully discussed with all interested parties and brought back to the Forum for further conversation. NS thanked DM for his reassurance.</p> <p>DM provided a further update on Slough Borough Council's current situation and challenges. The intervention in Slough has been confirmed for a further two years, extending until 2026. The configuration of Commissioners has changed, with the interim Chief Executive, Will Tuckley, now also assuming the role of Managing Commissioner. DM noted this dual role is unique but could benefit Slough.</p> <p>Slough faces significant challenges in setting a balanced budget for 2025/26. The council currently has a £17.5 million budget gap, with £11 million in potential savings identified. The aim is to balance the budget by February 2024. The council is pursuing a new operating model over the next 18 months, focusing on creating a smaller, more efficient organisation. This includes prioritizing spending on frontline services while minimizing back-office, IT, and administrative costs. The council intends to consult widely with communities, including schools and the Schools Forum. DM proposed discussions on how best to engage schools in this process.</p> <p>JC thanked DM for his update and invited comments or questions from Forum members. No comments or questions were raised.</p>
<p>1045</p>	<p>The DSG 2024/25 Quarter 2 Monitoring Report and Update</p> <p>LH introduced herself to the Forum as the new interim Strategic Finance Manager, noting her experience in local government finance, predominantly in children's social care. She then provided an overview of the DSG Quarter 2 monitoring report, as recently presented to Cabinet.</p> <p>Three of the four DSG blocks are forecasting net neutrality. The Schools Block is reporting a £155k overspend due to growth; this would be offset by a £253,000 underspend from the previous year's Schools Block, also growth-related.</p> <p>The High Needs Block forecast is uncertain. However, Slough is predicted to shortly receive a £3.2 million safety valve payment to offset the overall DSG deficit, which currently forecasts a £3 million underspend for this financial year.</p> <p>DM continued explaining that Increased places have been created for 2023/24, with plans to expand further to meet rising demand. Backlogs in EHCPs are creating delays in payments and recognition of needs, with children progressing to higher support bands upon review. Historic issues in payments and allocations are being addressed, with a focus on transparency and regular updates to the Forum. Another submission to the DfE is underway. While currently on track with the safety valve agreement, challenges and pressures could destabilise the forecast and the ability to meet the agreement SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities). How funding is structured will significantly impact Slough's ability to address these needs effectively. Efforts are focused on ensuring sufficient local provision to reduce reliance on costly out-of-area placements. Collaboration with key stakeholders, including NS and other interested parties, will be crucial to ensure sufficient support and appropriate funding.</p> <p>DMcN noted that these pressures and related discussions on the DSG blocks and block transfers would be revisited in Items 9 and 10 of the agenda.</p> <p>JC thanked DMcN and LH for their updates and sought clarification regarding Section 3 of the DSG report. He noted the mention of a £155,000 overspend in the Schools Block being offset by a £253,000 underspend from the previous year and requested an explanation of how this relates to the variance figures presented in the report. LH clarified that the figures had been recently revised since presentation to Cabinet following updated information on the growth fund outturn. TM acknowledged the discrepancies in how figures were presented across different reports, specifically about the Growth Fund. He noted that while the Growth Fund report indicates a request for a top slice without using the carry-forward, this conflicts with earlier statements and would be clarified under the next agenda item which will provide greater clarity on the Growth Fund outturn for 2023/24 and projections for 2024/25.</p>
<p>1046</p>	<p>Growth Fund</p> <p>TM introduced himself as the Development Manager for Slough Borough Council within the asset team. He oversees forecasting for Slough, place planning for educational needs, and the capital program for education. In addition, his remit includes broader asset management responsibilities across the entire council.</p> <p>JC directed colleagues to TM's paper in the report pack. He noted that while appendices were meant to accompany the paper, they had not been received. TM advised that he had passed on the papers but they</p>

appear to have got lost enroute. He shared the papers on the screen and advised he would circulate after the meeting.

The annual Growth Fund paper seeks approval for a top slice of funding based on estimated commitments for the upcoming year and outlines criteria for allocating the Growth Fund. TM noted that while the paper is typically presented in January, it has been brought forward this year, meaning an outturn figure is not yet confirmed. However, this timing change is not expected to significantly impact its recommendations. TM provided an overview of key issues, explaining that Slough previously experienced significant birth rate growth from 2001 to 2010, driving permanent school expansions. There is current pressure in specific year groups, particularly in central and eastern areas, while the west has seen a decline in birth rates leading to reduced Published Admission Numbers (PANs) in several schools. TM highlighted challenges in managing academy class closures when enrolment drops below a full class, as these closures are difficult to reverse and may require bulge classes. For secondary schools, Year 7 demand has peaked, and overall capacity is sufficient, though some pressures are emerging in Year 8 due to Grove Academy reducing its PAN in upper year groups. Tony emphasized that the Growth Fund specifically addresses funding lags when schools provide additional places at the request of the local authority, rather than automatically funding every expansion or bulge class, and stressed the importance of targeting the fund appropriately.

TM highlighted four criteria under which the Growth Fund applies and noted the option to open a Falling Rolls Fund, which no longer requires schools to hold a "Good" rating. This change increases the fund's flexibility and applicability nationally. Tony explained that secondary growth funding is calculated using a flat-rate model based on the average per-pupil funding for Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. He detailed the criteria for Growth Fund allocations, which have remained consistent for several years. These include fully supporting bulge classes in their first year, providing additional support to academies in the second year of a bulge class and fully funding permanent expansions for seven years in primary schools and five years in secondary schools. Additionally, funding is available for schools exceeding their Planned Admission Numbers (PAN), with some schools admitting up to 32 pupils per class where necessary to meet demand. TM emphasized that larger class sizes are a cost-effective and localised alternative to fully funding bulge classes, which may not require the full 30 places initially; this offers a more efficient use of the Growth Fund while addressing localized needs.

TM then presented the Growth Fund report for the 2024/25 financial year, outlining current allocations, forecasts, and the requested top slice for 2025/26 of £750,000. He noted that the report was prepared earlier than usual, and final data from the October census would not be available until December, meaning the figures provided are provisional and may require adjustments. He detailed funding allocations for bulge classes, noting that two classes from last year are still entitled to funding for their first year (April–August 2024), while academies receive second-year support based on census data. A contingency line has been included to cover additional places that may need to open between January and March. TM reported a potential underspend of £106k and explained that the cautious approach aligns with the Forum's preference. He also highlighted a budget discrepancy, with the DfE website listing £800k growth fund for 2024/25 compared to the approved budget of £500k.

The requested higher top slice of £750k for 2025/26 is predicated on the increased number of bulge classes and anticipated future needs. TM emphasized the importance of flexibility in the contingency to ensure sufficient funding, with any adjustments based on finalized data.

JC asked for questions regarding the criteria for the Growth Fund, noting that Forum had historically approved the criteria and that there were no changes this year. With no questions or objections, JC confirmed Forum's approval of the criteria for 2025/26.

JC invited questions from colleagues regarding the proposed 2025/26 top slice of £750k top slice. TM clarified that the requested top slice of £750k is independent of any carry-forwards, which will remain separate. He emphasized that the £750k represented the Growth Fund requirement for the next financial year.

CF sought clarification regarding the plan for the Growth Fund underspend. She asked whether the underspend would be transferred back to the Schools Block or if the requested £750k top slice would be in addition to the carry-forward amount. TM acknowledged a potential confusion in the reports regarding the carry-forward of the Growth Fund underspend. DM clarified that the Growth Fund underspend will be handled separately, with any underspend returned to the Schools Block. He emphasized that the £750k allocation is based solely on next year's requirements, and any underspend funds from 2025/26 would be returned back to the Schools Block.

CF asked for confirmation of the figure for the 2024/25 underspend. DM clarified that the recorded carry-forward amount was projected to be £250k but emphasized the need for certainty on the numbers before making a final commitment to the top slice. He assured members that clarity would be provided as soon as

	<p>the figures are confirmed, and reiterated that Forum would be approving the £750k top slice on the understanding that any underspend from the previous year will be returned to the Schools Block.</p> <p>CF inquired about the consultation process between the School Place Planning Board and the headteacher phase associations as referenced in the report, noting that she had not observed this consultation. TM explained that the Place Planning board includes headteachers who are expected to feedback to their respective groups. He added that the process follows a consistent format and reiterated his willingness to engage with individual schools about their specific planning needs. TM acknowledged the concern about transparency and communication and agreed to raise the issue at the next board meeting.</p> <p>NS proposed delaying the decision on the block transfer until January to allow for firmer figures and further discussion. He acknowledged that the papers had been received only recently and that additional questions, such as those raised by CF, warranted further exploration. This would ensure that a more informed decision could be made in January with clearer data and responses. TM supported NS's proposal and noted that a short "outturn paper" could be prepared for the January meeting; this would provide final figures and allow Forum to confirm the top slice decision.</p> <p>DM expressed agreement with the proposal to delay the final decision on the top slice until January. He noted that the deadline for submitting the Authority Proforma Tool (APT) is 22nd January, and the timing of the Forum meeting for 15th January would provide time to incorporate any additional work needed.</p> <p>JC summarised the discussion, confirming that the criteria for the Growth Fund had been agreed, and that Forum had given provisional approval to the 2025/26 top slice on the working assumption of a £750k required. This provisional agreement would be subject to formal confirmation at the January meeting.</p>
1047	<p>DSG 2025/26 and 2025/2026 DSG Block Transfer Proposal</p> <p>For the benefit of new members, JC provided context for the discussion on the provisional DSG settlement, block transfers, and the local funding formula, noting the consultative role and decision-making powers of Schools Forum in relation to the DSG.</p> <p>DM apologised for the late submission of papers for this item, citing delays in receiving allocations from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) and the need to rework the report significantly to reflect current circumstances. He provided an overview of the DSG settlement for 2025/26, proposals for block transfers, and the local funding formula. DM outlined the proposed consultation process, which balances the need for timely feedback with the importance of clarity.</p> <p>DM noted that Slough would receive additional funding, with pay grants rolled into the 2025/26 settlement, and highlighted Slough's historical investment in education, which has resulted in funding levels above the National Funding Formula minimum. He proposed maintaining the current funding distribution method, allocating approximately 78% based on headcount and the deprivation and other factors. Adjustments would incorporate government increases in factor values while retaining proportional allocations.</p> <p>DM requested a 0.5% transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block to address ongoing pressures, emphasizing its importance in supporting high-needs services.</p> <p>JC thanked DM for his explanation and noted that Forum has worked over many years to move Slough progressively closer to the National Funding Formula (NFF), with the aim of cushioning the impact on schools with specific needs or those considered outliers. This approach was well-received and, over the past three to four years, the Forum has consistently edged closer to full alignment with NFF values. JC highlighted the understanding from last year was that Slough had effectively aligned with the NFF. By referencing the proportion of funding distributed through basic entitlement, JC explained that DMcN's proposal aligns with the Forum's established practice of maintaining allocations closely tied to NFF principles.</p> <p>DM confirmed that Slough's funding distribution aligns closely with the National Funding Formula (NFF), with one notable exception: the mobility factor. He explained that while this factor differs slightly in percentage terms, its impact on overall distribution is minimal due to the low amount allocated through this factor. DM noted that the ESFA is unlikely to compel Slough to align more closely with NFF values for this factor, as the current approach reflects the borough's tailored response to the NFF's development over the past decade. Given the absence of pressure to make changes and the effectiveness of the existing system, DMcN recommended maintaining the current approach.</p> <p>VH raised a concern regarding the secondary-to-primary funding ratio. She noted that while the Forum is discussing continuing with the existing approach due to the lack of external pressure to change, the secondary-primary ratio had been flagged for review last year. At that time, it was agreed that the 5-16 group would examine the ratio, but no meeting or review has taken place since then. VH emphasized the</p>

importance of revisiting the assumptions behind the current ratio, to ensure that any historical assumptions are still valid and reflect current circumstances. Valerie noted that the primary sector had specifically requested this review last year, and it remains unaddressed, urging the Forum to prioritize it.

JC noted VH's concerns about the secondary-to-primary funding ratio and confirmed that the issue had been raised last year; he clarified that the ratio is an output derived from decisions made around factor values and that variations in funding ratios across authorities stem from multiple factors, including allocations to funding elements and the diversity of school types within each authority. These considerations were documented during last year's discussions. JC noted that it had been agreed to revisit the ratio and for the Task Group to examine the figures in detail, but the process had been delayed due to changes in staffing, which impacted the necessary expertise to undertake the review. He expressed willingness to revisit the issue this year and initiate the process but emphasized that it would not be feasible to complete the review before the approval of this year's APT, given the extensive modelling required for significant changes. He proposed waiting until the APT has been submitted and finalized figures are available, after which the Task Group could meet during the spring or early summer term to assess the ratio's impact. JC suggested that this review could be integrated into broader preparations for the following year's funding cycle and align with DM's earlier point about the varying consultation approaches and timelines adopted by different local authorities. DM agreed with the proposal to prioritize a review of the secondary-to-primary funding ratio and noted that similar discussions occur in other local authorities. He will be starting the work in late January or early February, emphasizing the importance of completing it within the spring term to avoid delays extending into the summer term. He also highlighted the value of numerical analysis in understanding funding distribution and developing a strong, transparent model that stakeholders can appreciate.

JC introduced the discussion on the proposed 0.5% block transfer from the Schools Block, asking DM to elaborate on the purpose of the transfer and to clarify the two elements it encompasses.

DMcN explained that the maximum allowable block transfer from the Schools Block is 0.5%. He acknowledged past concerns raised by the Forum and the school community regarding the Admissions Service and noted that part of the transfer would address those concerns by allocating funds to that area.

The majority of the transfer, would be used to support high-needs pressures, helping to manage the financial challenges associated with educating children and young people with additional needs in locally maintained schools. JC provided further context for the proposed £100k allocation to support the Admissions Service, noting that this funding dates back approximately three years, when the LA requested additional staffing capacity within admissions. Although the position was intended to be permanent, the transfer requires annual approval, as the funds could not be allocated permanently to the Central Services Block. JC recommended continuing this approval, as it has been done in previous years.

In relation to the balance of the proposed 0.5% transfer, which would go to the High Needs Block. JC noted that this request has also been approved for the last two years, though in earlier years the Forum had valid reasons to decline similar requests. He acknowledged that the SEND strategy, DSG management plan, and Safety Valve program are heavily reliant on this transfer being approved. While recognizing that some colleagues may have reservations, John reiterated that in the last two years Forum has given provisional approval at this stage, subject to the confirmation of the final DSG settlement details.

DM added further context to the block transfer proposal, highlighting the council's recognition of its statutory duties in the area of SEND. He explained that the council is contributing £1.1 million from its general fund to support adequate resourcing for NH's teams, ensuring EHCPs are processed promptly. DM emphasized that this demonstrates the council's commitment to addressing shared challenges collaboratively for the benefit of children and their families. NH provided additional context, explaining that Educational Psychologists (EPs) and case officers are funded by the council's general fund. The £1.1 million council contribution is being used to cover costs for interim staff, a short-term intervention team, and additional case officers to manage the growing workload associated with EHCPs (Education, Health, and Care Plans).

JC sought clarification on the approximate amount of the proposed 0.5% block transfer. DM acknowledged that the exact figure was not yet available but estimated it to be £850k.

DM suggested that the consultation period should close by January 8, the week before the proposed Forum meeting on January 15, allowing time for responses to be reviewed. JC suggested a discussion with DM outside the meeting to finalize the consultation wording

PC (Slough and Eton) shared concerns regarding the proposed transfer to the High Needs Block. While acknowledging the necessity of the transfer due to the Safety Valve program and its broader systemic importance, PC highlighted dissatisfaction within the school community about the repeated need for transfers from the Schools Block. He noted ongoing frustrations about the transparency of how the

	<p>transferred funds are utilised in practice, questioning the efficiency of the SEND service and its interaction with schools. He emphasized that this dissatisfaction has persisted over time and contributes to headteachers' discomfort about allocating nearly £1 million to a service many schools feel is underperforming. PC noted NH's clarification that the transferred High Needs Block funding is directed toward top-up allocations and increased demands from EHCPs, which schools understand. However, he stressed that schools remain uneasy about the transfer.</p> <p>NH responded, acknowledging the dissatisfaction with the SEND service among schools. He agreed that while improvements have been made, and SEND is in a better position than in the past, the service is not yet where it needs to be. NH emphasized that the current efforts are taking place within the constraints of a broader, systemic issue that is widely recognized as flawed. He reassured Forum members that progress is being made, but he acknowledged the ongoing challenges and dissatisfaction as valid concerns.</p> <p>DM acknowledged Peter Collins' and NH's comments, noting the ongoing efforts to improve the quality of the SEND service. He clarified that the pressures necessitating the transfer are not solely linked to the Safety Valve program but are reflective of broader systemic demands. DM noted that many LAs not participating in Safety Valve agreements are also requesting transfers or 0.5% or more through dis-application processes due to increasing pressures in the SEND system. He emphasized that while the Safety Valve program targets the most financially challenged authorities, it is the overall strain on the system driving these requests.</p> <p>DM also noted that Slough's Safety Valve performance is currently a positive story, with outcomes better than initially anticipated due to the work undertaken. However, he cautioned that the pressures on the system are expected to intensify in the near future.</p> <p>CF expressed agreement with PC's remarks and shared her perspective based on previous experience with Schools Forum in another borough. She emphasized the importance of adopting a long-term approach to addressing financial pressures and achieving balance over time. While CF stated her support for the transfer to the High Needs Block, she raised concerns about the £100,000 transfer to centrally held services, for supporting improvements in admissions services. She requested greater clarity in a future meeting about centrally provided services and how the CSSB is allocated. JC noted that while a strong business case for the admissions service funding had been made in previous years, Claire's point about understanding its ongoing impact was valid and echoed previous discussions.</p> <p>JC invited NH to briefly contribute before moving forward. NH provided an update on the High Needs Block, noting that the latest Safety Valve report would be submitted that day and suggesting a report on its status be presented at the next meeting. He also highlighted that the Operations Group would begin discussions next week on improving messaging and communication with schools about SEND services.</p> <p>NH acknowledged schools' frustrations, sharing an anecdote about a school's scepticism regarding SEND improvements. He emphasized that while internal KPIs indicate clear progress within the SEND team, schools are not yet experiencing the benefits. NH stated that efforts would focus on better-communicating improvements and addressing the gap between operational enhancements and schools' perceptions.</p> <p>To summarise, JC proposed provisional approval for the block transfers and endorsement of the local authority's recommendation for the local formula structure, subject to consultation with schools taking place. Final approval for both items would be made at the January meeting. Forum members agreed unanimously with this approach.</p>
1048	<p>2025/26 DSG CSSB Budget</p> <p>JC proposed deferring the discussion of the Central School Services Block (CSSB) to the January meeting due to time constraints and the need for further clarification. He acknowledged CF's request for more detail on the use of funds allocated to the CSSB, particularly the £100,000 transfer for admissions services.</p> <p>DM supported the deferral, agreeing to provide a clearer explanation in January about how CSSB funds are utilized, including the impact of the transfer to support the admissions service. He noted the opportunity for Schools Forum to review this transfer as part of a broader evaluation of the CSSB.</p> <p>Forum members agreed to defer this item to the January meeting</p>
1049	<p>Forward Agenda Plan</p> <p>JC asked Forum members to note the forward agenda plan and the dates for future meetings in 2025</p>
1050	<p>Key Decisions Log</p> <p>JC asked Forum members to note the key decisions log.</p>

1051

Any other business

On behalf of all members PC thanked JC for his leadership as Chair of Forum, noting his consistent guidance, expertise, and dedication, which has greatly benefited Forum members and the broader school community. PC noted that JC's contributions have set a high standard for Forum leadership. JR reflected on her 14 years of Forum experience, acknowledging JC's significant role in ensuring Forum holds schools, academies, and the LA accountable for public funds. JR highlighted JC's guidance through numerous challenges and changes, including primary place expansions and contractions, secondary expansions, complex early years funding adjustments, the ever-challenging High Needs Block, and overseeing the funding transitions of five or six free schools. JC thanked PC and JR for their thoughtful remarks. He acknowledged the challenges and changes the Forum has faced over the years, but highlighted the collaborative nature of the evolving relationship with the local authority. He noted the significant changes in the Forum's remit over the past two decades and expressed his hope for its continued success.

DRAFT