

CALDERDALE SCHOOLS FORUM
24 April 2025 – Virtual Meeting Via Teams

PRESENT:

Karen Morley (Academy) – Co Vice Chair
Mungo Sheppard (Primary Maintained)
John Eccleston (Academy Primary Governor)
Stuart Hillary (Academy Secondary)
Karl Veltman (Post 16 Representative)
Louise Downing (Primary Governors Maintained)
Rachel Harling (Academy Secondary)
Hamish Heald (Union Representative)
Stephen Baines (Academy Secondary)
Phil Hannah (Academy AP)
Debbie Sweet (Special School)
Brenda Monteith (Roman Catholic Diocese Rep)

IN ATTENDANCE:

Jemima Flintoff (AD Education and Inclusion)
Connie Beirne (Interim Service Manager for Early Years and School Strategy and Performance)
Emma Ingham (SEND & Inclusion Service Manager)
Jane Davy (Finance Manager)
Steve Drake (Finance Manager)
Amanda Farron (Senior Finance Officer - observing)

APOLOGIES

Dan Burns (Academy Primary)
Adam McNichol (Academy Bursar)
Corinne Kielty (Finance Officer)
Richard Horsfield (Academy Secondary) – tentative
Ian Hughes (Head of Legal and Democratic Services)
Richard Morse (School Organisation & Access Manager)
Gareth Morris (Primary Governors Maintained)
Kevin Rivett (Union Representative)
Ivan Kuzio (Academy Bursar)
Denise Gwizdak (Early Years Rep)
Andrea Dyson (Early Years Rep)

1. **Substitutes nominated for this meeting and apologies for absence. (To be notified in writing 24 hours in advance.)**

None

2. **Members Interests** – Members are reminded of the need to declare any interest they might have in relation to the items of business on this agenda.

John Eccleston is a member of the Calderdale Partnership Improvement Board and Calderdale Governor Association & Phil Hannah's setting is part of the High Needs funding arrangements.

Karen Morley is a trustee at Together Learning Trust, representing primary academies including Scout Road. She is a governor at Christ Church Pellon and trustee at Burnley Road Academy.

Rachel Harling is a trustee at Together Learning Trust and a governor at St Augustine's School which is part of Learning Accord Multi Academy Trust.

3. **Admission of the Public** - it is not recommended that the public be excluded from the meeting for the consideration of the items of business on this agenda.

Amanda Farron – Calderdale's Senior Finance Officer

4. **Minutes of the Schools Forum held on 24 February 2025**

Minutes accepted as an accurate representation

5. **Election of Chair and Vice Chair**

The Co Vice Chair will continue to chair these meetings.

6. **Schools Forum Membership, Principles and Terms of Reference**

The Co Vice Chair is proposing to keep 24 members, 18 from a school, 6 non-school members and 2 from a special school or alternative provision, leaving 16 places. The proposal would be more or less, the same structure implemented now. Schools Forum would ask academies to send a representative from any part of the school system for example School Bursars or any staff member who would be interested in attending Schools Forum. Karen asked Schools Forum if they agree to take the proposal forward.

John Q: How do you see academy representatives being elected given there are multiple academy trusts in Calderdale?

Debby Simpson currently asks maintained and academy schools for members. This would be for the academies to determine exactly what the process would be.

John Q: What happens if there are more Academy possibilities than places?
This would go to a vote.

Action: Jemima to write to academies CEOs with the proposal around Schools Forum to either represent jointly and to go through a process together on how to agree a representative.
The Co Vice Chair agreed this would be very beneficial.

Rachel agreed with proposal but felt there needs to be clarity as to who the representatives can be for example, ensuring there is a SAT representative

Members agreed for the Schools Forum Membership, Principles and Terms of Reference to be published on the Calderdale Schools Forum website.

The Co Vice Chair wanted to bring succession planning to the attention of members and to think about appointing a new Chair in September who can contribute a full term of office. The Co Vice Chair also asked members to think about enlisting more substitutes, asking Debby Simpson to focus on the maintained schools and Jemima to write to the MATS and SATS, which Schools Forum agreed.

The recommendations in the report are to comment and agree on amendments and proposals included in Appendix 1, approve the Schools Forum principles and Terms of Reference to publish on the website and consider the number of substitutes and note the Chair and Co Vice Chair requirements for the next academic year to which members agreed.

7. Impact of allocation of funding School Improvement School Clusters (24/25)

This is Connie's last meeting, and she has enjoyed the collaborative work taking place to support schools.

In March 2025 each cluster completed a progress report for September / October. There is a focus on SEND supporting the work Emma and her team are leading on. The Headteachers Well-Being Strategy is currently being developed for all Heads in Calderdale. John thanked Connie for her report and the work she has contributed to the clusters. Co Vice Chair also thanked Connie for her hard work on the cluster and Schools Improvement and wished her the best.

Rachel Q: The underspend from 2024-25 was highlighted in a report in the last meeting, will this be discussed today? because I think if the forum does agree to spend some of that underspend or dedicate some of it to cluster improvement, the sooner the better. She also commented that the cluster work is fantastic, the impact is very clear and there is a good focus on priorities.

Jemima and I took the action back and worked with cluster officers and School Effectiveness who created several proposals however, they were asking for more than the money available. I met with Jemima to look at how the proposals would work across other service areas as well with the action to revisit them to make the most of the money. This paper will be brought to the meeting in July and Steve has the final figure

Chair Q: Steve please can you tell us the final figure?

It is looking like £110,893 as I think everything has gone through. This is the final figure, but it may alter slightly.

Jemima reiterated members thanks to Connie and for leading the system for schools across the council and strengthening those relationships. Jemima highlighted that schools repeatedly ask for support around children who are dysregulated so there may be an opportunity to use some of the money for this.

Action: Jemima to have conversations with schools around the proposals and ask them to complete an email consultation by voting on which proposal they prefer.

The Co-Chair agreed to move to the recommendations that the money is awarded to Schools Forum, recognising that there is still a discussion to be had in the exact way the £248,000 will be allocated. To note that Jemima will bring the report on the £110,000 underspend to the next meeting after the consultation process.

8. School Rebuilding Programme, School Capital Funding and Free School Update

Jemima presented the report in Richard's absence.

The money that comes through Capital is not subject to Schools Forum decision making but the LA wanted to be transparent around how the money is spent. The report shows the four strands of funding that are sent to the LA which are the Capital Maintenance funding, the Basic Needs funding, High Needs Provision Capital Allocations and Local Authority Investment. There was an agreement at Cabinet to invest £14 million into school estate.

The School Rebuilding Programme in Calderdale has been effective at collating evidence to support the successful DFE rebuilding projects for 12 schools in the next round. There will be four schools starting this before December 2025 and a further eight in the next two years due to the LA being proactive in obtaining condition reports for schools demonstrating a strong practice.

There are two potential new free schools in the pipeline however, these projects are currently on hold. The agreed Delta project is currently under evaluation as value for money under the new government and an application for a new special free school isn't currently open due to the government focusing on inclusive placements however we feel we have strong evidence for this to go ahead. The Delta project would be funded by the department and the Free Special school would be funded by Basic Needs. Capital maintenance funding is consistent amount every year which is put towards replacements of crumbling architecture and unstable roofing.

The Co Vice Chair asked that her thanks be passed on to Richard for the report which has helped Schools Forum to understand the Capital picture, especially in relation to the High Needs Deficit group. The Co Vice Chair expressed her disappointed in hearing the Free School projects are currently both on hold and are urgently needed but is confident the LA will keep highlighting the need. The Co Vice Chair will follow up her specific questions with Richard.

Mungo Q: Is there any indication as to when the Free Schools programme will resume? In every strategy we have, it is underpinned by creating more spaces and we are not able to get started. The current government have been in for around 9 months, and it is becoming frustrating, do you have any ideas around timescales?

I have been told that some of those decisions are linked to the governments comprehensive expenditure review which is due to be announced soon. Richard, Emma, Connie and I meet with the department roughly every three weeks and we ask each time about the pre-school application process. In the proposed Wellbeing and Schools Bill the implication is that it may be possible in future for Local Authorities to open a school without the need of going through a Free School application. We also spoke to the department around the risks of the LA

building the school before the Free School application was approved and they advised that the local authority would be proceeding at risk and advised against this. We are working hard with our existing specialist schools to try and expand provision in imaginative ways by using empty spaces in some of our smaller schools and how we can use the cluster arrangements we already have. We keep pushing for answers for those big questions. I know that Robin Tuddenham and Julie Jenkins met with our MP Kate Dearden who is taking our concerns back to government regularly to move things forward.

John Q: On a separate note, chair, which I hope is ok for me to raise, on the primary needs of children with an EHCP in Calderdale the autistic spectrum disorder has risen dramatically over the last three years, are there any significant factors in this or is there just a massive increase which is all part of the problem we are trying to solve?

Emma replied potentially this is a national issue across the board. It is 54% nationally around autism which is significant and is not just Calderdale. We are feeling the pinch just as much as everyone.

Debbie Q: I am glad you mentioned we are trying to be innovative Jemima. I know there's a pause on the specialist school and the through school but regarding the £20 million that is allocated, whether the pause is lifted or not, is there any way you can use it for the falling rolls issue with there being lots of vacant schools increasingly moving towards possible amalgamating with small schools, can the DfE stop the LA from using that money to redesignate those schools?

We would have to go through a significant changes application and the LA would be the decision maker for maintained schools but the DfE would be decision maker for academies. If we use the money and then the school is agreed, it won't be made available to us again because this is money the LA has saved over the last number of allocations of Capital funding.

Debbie Q - Is there a Plan B piece of work in case they say no and is that a piece of work that is possible, planned or happening? If you look at the number of places that are going to be created using the £20 million to create one school and then you look at the number of places that potentially can be created, redesigning and redesignating current schools and I am just wondering whether there is a comparison there?

There is a lot of thought going on around this. If we wanted to redesignate a school, we would need to close it and then would be back completing a free school application and looking for a trust to take it. Closing a school is very complex. The LA are exploring the ARPS and satellite classrooms for schools with falling rolls.

The Co Vice Chair advised members that if they had any more detailed questions regarding the report, to speak to Richard outside of the meeting.

9. High Needs Block Funding and Expenditure - DSG Management plan review April 2025

This is challenging for not only Calderdale but also nationally. We are part of that ESFA monitoring and the LA are meeting with them on the 8th May. Recommendations can be brought back to the meeting in July. The overspend has increased every year and is projected to be significantly higher. The LA are trying to mitigate this as much as possible to try and slow the flow of the overspend. The LA continue to talk with the DfE around the special schools and continue to drive forward with the ARP programme with Calderdale

settings. Making sure there are specialist places in the borough. There are excellent Specialist Independent providers in Calderdale and will still need them.

Debbie Q – None of the data for the special schools are correct. Is this due to not including surrounding LA's including Bradford, Wakefield and Kirklees? It would be useful to include due to special schools being under pressure from the children of neighbouring authorities. Yes this is Calderdale only but I can include that.

Debbie Q - I think a big contributor to the overspend is the fact that education is propping up services in care and health. So when we talk about SEMH, how are you including that responsibility, particularly around the funding and what the costs are around those gaps in care and health that should form part of the provision that is contributing to and making these children's successful?

I meet monthly with the Tracy Biddle in Health and Muir at Open Minds, and I also attend the Joint Funding panel. I agree there is a gap, and it is something we need to be more focused on. I will pick this up with Health as we are currently working with Open Minds around EBSA

Debbie Q - So are those gaps contributing to the overspend?

Particularly around the EHCP, and whether it's a healthcare need specific to learning, or whether it's a healthcare need in general. How we work with our partners around funding is a large piece of work across the partnership. There are questions around the funding being for a young person in learning and whether elements are education funded via high needs or a medical need meaning, therefore health funded. It is not always straight forward, and we need to ensure a shared understanding around this.

Mungo reiterated that he knows colleagues at Primary who would love to help with this to bring in their knowledge. He has spoken to primary heads and members of parliament who are keen to help and support around falling rolls. There are empty rooms in buildings and the expertise of staff can help to accelerate this. He is seeking the support of two MPs on this. Emma and Jemima work with Mungo and the CPHA to formulate a meeting.

Jemima thanked Mungo and Debbie for championing the cause and their expertise working on the ground with the children.

The Co Vice Chair Q: Steve, on page 3 of the report, the table is not clear around the £3.8 million and the paper reads there will be a deficit of £38 million at the end of 2025/26? The £6 million is what we have already accrued. This was £860,000 in 2022/23 and a further £5.2 million in 2023/24. That's a cumulative overspend that we have put on the balance sheet. Then the next figure is the £14 million that we're expecting in 2024/25 on top of what we'd already got.

The Co Vice Chair proposed that the table be reproduced and circulated once the information is available to members due to being anxious around the overspend.

Action: When the stats are produced in future, Steve to produce an additional paper with the final figures and advise as to how government are proposing to deal with the cumulative overspend.

10. School Balances – Spring Monitoring for Maintained and Academy Schools

The report is mostly related to maintained schools, but the Appendix B shows academy balances from their websites as of 31st August 2024. There are currently 4 maintained schools causing concern, one is projecting a deficit, and three others are projecting balances of less than £20K which are discussed at the schools causing concern meetings. The current forecast for maintained schools is £9.2 million and the Academy balances at £14.4 million. 9 academies have pool budgets, and the accounts were not published on the website at the time for some of the academies that are shown in Appendix B. The recommendations are to note and a further report will be brought to Schools Forum in July for the final out turn for maintained schools.

Phil Q: Midgley school balances previously looked good but in the report it shows them as having no money?

This is because they school has now transferred to an academy meaning they are now in the academy balances, and I reported on their balances in October 2024.

Co Vice Chair Q: Can I ask about Savile Park Jane?

This is an anomaly as they didn't submit a budget which is not at the fault of the school therefore, we didn't receive any financial summaries for them during the year against their budget, although I have got an out turn position for them. I can't force them to complete a monitoring budget when we have not approved their budget.

Co Vice Chair Q: So for the July report, you'll be bringing the final balances and the budgets? I suspect when we see the budgets for 2025/26 the future budgets will be present as well?

Yes, we ask for 3 years but they do not look positive. We have had a small indication of the Staff Pay Award, which was 2.8% but this could increase. I am currently waiting for the Comprehensive Spending Review because when we sent our budgets out to our maintained schools, we didn't apply an increase for the next two years because when I went to the national funding conference, the indication was that education is not on the government's priorities for additional funding.

Rachel Q: There are a handful of schools that have quite excessive balances in excess of 20% and they're growing. So, what is the process for monitoring those schools and schools justifying those balances?

We did have the clawback mechanism, but Schools Forum agreed to pause this for the last few years. Therefore, some of the schools have big capital projects that they are saving the money for. Woodbank, for example, are having an expansion so we know some of that money is going to be used as their contribution towards that capital scheme.

It is very difficult when a school send in a budget, and it's reduced significantly when the money is not spent. We do challenge them on their budgets, if they have a large amount we send a letter explaining that their budgets are holding more money and should be spent on pupils currently in school.

Rachel Q: It is frustrating to see some schools have more money than others. When will Schools Forum be able to have another discussion around clawback?

This is normally brought to the July meeting.

Mungo Q: Ash Green, 90% of our budget spending is around staffing and support staff. A year ago primary heads asked those who were in excess to explain how they have this as there needs to be some accountability. I feel it would be positive for some communication to be sent, to ask if your balance is in excess of a certain amount. I do not want to go back down the clawback route. Some academies are not listed on appendix B, do they have to declare their budgets?

Yes, they are supposed to. We can't pull out what their element is because they have decided as a MAT to pool their budgets meaning all schools in the MAT share one budget. The ones that are not published should be reported as they have to publish their budgets on the website by 31st January. As they are academies, we have no power with their balances.

Phil Q: - Where is the data in appendix B from? I have looked at my budgets and this does not look correct.

I have been on every academy website and looked at their yearend accounts. The amount for yours is what has been provided by your accounts on the 31st August.

The Co Vice Chair commented that if the academy budgets are not published, then the MAT needs to be advised they are not complying with the Academy Trust Handbook. She doesn't think there is any reason why the Local Authority should not enforce that. It would be useful to add an additional column to show the MAT they are part of to tie up the central funds.

CO Vice Chair Q: Are you able to put the percentage against the total income?

This would be very time consuming, and I am not sure the data is there to be able to do this. I can add a column to say which MATS the schools are part of.

Jemima stated in her last authority, they worked with the ESFA who have advisors to work with schools if they have difficult budgets or very high reserves. This might be something we could explore with the DfE and ask if that support is still available however, this was some years ago. Jane said we did use SMRA's and school have taken advantage of this but there hasn't been much proactiveness with these.

The Co Vice Chair asked members to note balances for when Jane brings her report in July. Schools Forum can look at the issues of schools being over 20% and prepare something to make them accountable.

Rachel Q: For the meeting in July, would it be possible to have the previous years end of year budget balance to see how these schools are trending? The end of year balances in some schools are growing so it would be useful to understand which schools we are focusing on. It would be useful to have the data presented as a percentage.

The maintained schools in the report have last year's balances, it is the surplus brought forward. I agree on the data being presented as a percentage.

11. Any Other Business

Questions to be submitted a **minimum** 3 days prior to the meeting in writing to:

CalderdaleSchoolsForum@calderdale.gov.uk

Questions will only be permitted if relevant to the business of the Forum and at the discretion of the Forum Chair.

12. Future Dates

3 July 2025

23 October 2025
15 January 2026
30 April 2026
2 July 2026

All meetings will start at 4pm
Venue: virtual Teams Meeting