



**Meeting held on Monday 18 March 2026 at 8.00am
via TEAMS**

MINUTES

	<p align="center">Attendees</p> <p>Nina Siddle (NS) (Chair), Alex Allenby (AA), Jane Aukett (JA), Sarah Bate (SB), Liz Brummer (LB), Richard Gargon (RG), Jo Indian (JI), Wendy Jackson (WJ), Steve Kernan (SK), Karen Linton (KL), Emily Powell (EP), Rachel Revell (RR), Tracey Richman (TR), Jenni Steel (JS),</p>
10/26	<p>Apologies</p> <p>Apologies for absence had been received from Carianne Robson and Corinne Wilson.</p>
11/26	<p>Chair's Welcome</p> <p>The Chair welcomed everyone and thanked SK for chairing the previous meeting in her absence..</p>
12/26	<p>Minutes of Previous Meeting held on 26 June 2025/Matters Arising from the Minutes</p> <p>The Minutes of the previous meeting held on 16 January 2026 were agreed as a true record.</p> <p>Matters arising:</p> <p>All matters arising and action points were covered on the agenda.</p>
13/26	<p>High Needs</p> <p><u>Current position</u></p> <p>LB stated that NELC and other authorities were looking through the White Paper to determine the outcome and further updates would be brought back to Forum members. Currently in 2025/26, there was a forecasted deficit at the end of the financial year which was increasing to £28.2m at the end of March 2026. This was due to a demand in the system, increased prices and had been predicted at the start of the year. That deficit would continue to build.</p> <p><u>Local position</u></p> <p>LB referred to the information shown for local neighbouring authorities and stated that the surplus shown for Lincolnshire had declined and it would be in deficit for 2025/26. This was similar to North Lincolnshire. Most authorities were starting to see the impact on their DSG. Other authorities which were in deficit showed that this increased so NEL were not on their own.</p> <p>It was very difficult to obtain some comparison data which was consistent across all authorities. However, the net current expenditure for Special Schools and alternative provision per pupil for SEND for 2024/25 had been reviewed. NEL</p>

was showing an average of £6,000 per pupil. The figures were not in relation to EHCP pupils and, although at the top of the range, were similar to Hull and Doncaster. RR added that NELC had to submit a standardised data return by the middle of June. The DfE had acknowledged that previously, there had not been the cohesive data and the level of detail had not been widely shared. There was a national trend for the increase in EHCPs and since the reforms had been announced, there had been an increase in the demand for EHCPs which had put pressure on all elements of the SEND system. There had been a year on year increase which was adding to the deficit spread across the age range. NELC's figures were similar to neighbouring authorities and national.

Activity and Demand

RR advised there was comparative data with statistical neighbouring authorities and NEL had seen the highest increase in those pupils with an EHCP. This was partly due to the fact that the service had improved as in 2023, there had been a 20 week cycle of assessment. This accounted for the steep trajectory as the service had improved to cater for the needs of the young people.

RSP and SEND Unit Development

The RSP and SEN unit development showed the work which had taken place to increase local provision. This was in line with the areas of need and early identification and support which ensured that needs were met. Work in progress was Tollbar Secondary (SEMH), Welholme (Communication and Interaction) and Bursar (Specific Learning Difficulty) which would increase capacity. In terms of Specialist Provision Development, there was Cambridge Park (6th Form development) and the SEMH Free School had been confirmed. As this was a DfE project and in view of the Reforms, NELC was waiting on timescales. JS confirmed that NELC was in the hands of the DfE project team. RR stated there was also the exploration of further capacity to increase provision for children and young people with profound and multiple or severe learning difficulties. NS added there was a Free School opening in Hull. This had initially been planned for 2020 and was not opening until 2028 owing to delays by the DfE. JS confirmed that this local provision was required but, unfortunately, NELC was at the behest of the DfE in terms of timescales moving forward. She would ensure that SF members were updated.

Action: JS

High Needs 2026/27

The DfE Local Partnership Maturity Assessment identified the 7 pillars to assess the current position of the local authority in relation to SEND. The three criteria were Emerging, Developing or Maturing. NELC were required to look at their strengths, gaps and priority areas. This then fed into the SEND Reform Plan which had to be submitted in June. The DfE had provided very specific guidance of areas required in the plan. There was a SEND Adviser allocated as part of the reform who would work with NELC. JS stated that NELC had 2 days a month support and LB had 6 days of financial support. NELC were on the lowest tier of support as there was assurance on the plans. RR advised that the plans had to be with the adviser by the middle of May. NELC would be notified in September if the plan had been approved.

SEND Reforms – Finance

LB advised that SEND would be funded centrally from 2028-29 and full understanding of this was not yet known. There was the introduction of a High Needs Stability Grant from 2026-27 which would cover up to 90% of eligible high needs deficit at the end of March 2026. It was key to pass the Reform Plan process in order to be eligible for the High Needs Stability Grant. It would need to be checked whether the expenditure which had been incurred in the High Needs Block was covered by the grant. As NELC was in deficit of approximately £28m in March, this would be a significant contribution towards this. NELC was still required to consider options to cover the 10% as part of the corporate planning process. In terms of future years, the details were unknown. This would still leave a significant amount of deficit which would have to be addressed and would be included in discussions as part of the Reform. LB added that it was key not to jeopardise the High Needs Stability Grant and to maximise the amount received.

Funding 2026/27

The High Needs provisional allocation was £35.7m and there was no inflationary uplift this year due to SEND reforms. Some grants had also been included and would be passed on appropriately:

- Core Schools Budget Grant
- NIC Grant
- School Budget Support Grant
- Historical Teachers Pay and Pension Grant

The block allocation needed to cover these payments as well as price increases for providers and growth in the system. There would be discussions held with the finance adviser from the DfE. The increased demand and complexity had been discussed together with current spend commitments, the price/rate uplifts, the mix of places and the need to facilitate mainstream inclusion wherever possible. There was a forecasted in year deficit of £17.6m for 2026-27. This would increase the cumulative deficit to approximately £45.7m. This figure excluded the High Needs Stability Grant. This was a further substantial increase during the financial year. A breakdown of expenditure was shown which indicated how the £17.6m deficit was arrived at. A significant pressure was the out of area places at Special Schools.

EP stated that there was a pupil at her school who was being managed for whom consultations had taken place at various Secondary Schools. A place had not been offered for September and the pupil was going to a local Private School at a significant cost. She asked if anything could be done around this as no conversations had taken place with the Primary School and queried why a mainstream Secondary had not been offered bearing in mind the high cost of a Private School provision.. RR shared EP's concerns and stated that discussions would take place around some of the structures and processes in place around consultations. There were 5 EHCP Co-ordinators joining NELC in April. RR was also working in partnership with Rotherham to review panel structure and out of area placements. RR wished to create a panel before any placement was approved to ensure due diligence. RR requested that EP send her all supporting documentation for this pupil for her to review. Since being appointed, RR had investigated some of the procedures and processes in place for young people and agreed that work was necessary to make improvements. JS stated the case

	<p>studies were very important aligned to the wider reforms and the expectation that children should remain in mainstream.</p> <p>Action: EP/RR</p> <p>NS stated that in the White Paper there was reference to the cost of the independent places which was evident in the information shared. LB responded that there would be significant work taking place over the next few months by Officers to understand the detail and impact of this on the Higher Needs Block.</p> <p>JS advised that she would share a presentation at the HTs' meeting the following week about the key elements of the reforms and the impact. Schools Forum would also be reviewing the details. There would be considerable activity in respect of the broader working groups. A part time independent consultant had been appointed to work with various partners in respect of the delivery and planning of these working groups and transformation programme. He would be speaking to Headteachers and observing Schools Forum to help lead and shape some of the working groups. .</p> <p>JS requested that this was a standard agenda item.</p> <p>Action: Clerk</p>
14/26	<p>Early Years rates 25/26 and general update</p> <p>A copy of Corrinne Wilson's update had previously been circulated. NS stated that if any member had any queries to email these through and they would be taken up with Corrinne.</p> <p>Action: All</p>
15/26	<p>Any other business</p> <p>WJ advised that the LA had to put the Best Start in Life Local Plan in by 31 March 2026. A Government supported consultant had been appointed to assist with this and it was work in progress. NELC had been assured that their delivery plan was good and the Best Start in Life Local Plan sat alongside this. The transformation team had assisted with the plan which was nearing completion. Once finalised, it would be passed to JS and AMM for their sign off. It would then be published for any comments and would be adapted as it was a working document. JS added that with Purdah, this may be delayed.</p>
16/26	<p>Date of next meeting</p> <p>The date of the next meeting was 17 June 2026 at 8.00am via TEAMS.</p>

GS/DG