

Item 8

Recommendations from the Early Years Block Working Group

Contact for further information:
Schools Forum Clerk
schoolsforum@lancashire.gov.uk

Brief Summary

On 6 March 2025, the High Needs Block Working Group considered several reports, including:

- **Schools Forum membership**
- **Early Years Block Budget 2025/26 (attached)**
- **Early Years Rates 2025/26**
- **DfE Statutory Guidance Update – Charging**

A summary of the information presented, and the Working Group's recommendations are provided in this report.

Recommendations

The Forum is asked to:

- a) Note the report from the High Needs Block Working Group held on 6 March 2025
- b) Ratify the Working Group's recommendations.

Detail

On 6 March 2025, the High Needs Working Group considered several reports. A summary of the information presented, and the Working Group's recommendations are provided below

8.1 Schools Forum membership
Forum Membership Numbers

The Schools Forum regulations require that the balance of Forum membership for maintained primary schools, maintained secondary schools and academies is reviewed to ensure that the number of Forum representatives in these groups is proportionate to the pupil populations across the schools.

Now that the final October 2024 census numbers are available, the Forum membership has been reviewed against the latest pupil data, academy conversions post census date and conversions anticipated up until 31st March 2025. An analysis is provided below:



<i>Phase</i>	<i>Current Membership</i>	<i>NOR January</i>	<i>% of NOR January 2025</i>	<i>Membership</i>	<i>Membership September 2025 (rounded)</i>	<i>Variance</i>
Maintained Primary schools	22	86,244	50%	20.14	20	0.14
Maintained Secondary schools	10	32,490	19%	7.59	8	-0.41
Academies	8	52,527	31%	12.27	12	0.27
Total	40	171,260	100%	40	40	0

Members will recall that the Forum membership for maintained primary schools, maintained secondary schools and academies is rounded to the nearest even number, so that an equal number of Headteacher/Principal and Governorship representatives can be appointed.

Due to the number of academy conversions in 2024/25, the data shows that a reduction in the number of maintained representatives and an increase of academy representatives is required from September 2025. It is envisioned this will be achieved naturally during the annual review process. If the reduction does not occur through the annual review, then schools members wish to continue, appointment date and term of office will be taken into account, and if necessary, lots will be drawn to identify which members are no longer able to serve on the Forum.

The county council is aware that there are a number of academy conversions planned during 2025 and will keep the membership balance under review ahead of the annual membership refresh for September 2025.

Annual Forum Membership Review

The annual membership review was distributed to members on 5th March 2025, this gives members the opportunity to continue or leave their Forum post from September 2025.

As part of the membership review, members requested the geographic membership distribution across the authority to be reviewed. This showed each district within the county is represented by a maintained voting member on the Forum. The review will be shared to members at the Working group.

In addition, please note voting members who failed to attend three consecutive meetings, without good reason or apologies, the Forum have the power to disqualify that member from continuing to hold office on the Forum. This will be reviewed following the March 2025 cycle of meetings, in line with the Operational Arrangements.

Please use the link below to let us know if you wish to continue as a forum member from September 2025, the deadline for submissions is 28th March 2025.



The outcome of the review will be communicated to the Schools Forum in the Summer Term.

The Working Group.

a) Noted the report

8.2 Early Years Block Budget 2025/26

At the Schools Forum on 10th January 2025, decisions, and recommendations about the 2025/26 Schools Budget were agreed.

In connection with the Early Years Block, the Forum unanimously supported the 2025/26 Early Years Block proposals, including:

3 and 4-year-old entitlements

Due the increased funding Lancashire has received, the Lancashire base rate for 3 and 4-year-old entitlements is £5.70 per hour in 2025/26, an increase of £0.29 per hour from 2024/25.

The 2025/26 funding rate is therefore as follows:

<i>2024/25 Base rate</i>	<i>£5.41 per hour</i>
<i>2025/26 DfE uplift</i>	<i>£0.24 per hour</i>
<i>2025/26 Additional funding from within the Early Years Block</i>	<i>£0.05 per hour</i>
<i>2025/26 Base rate</i>	<i>£5.70 per hour</i>

3- and 4-year-old Supplementary funding hourly rate for maintained nursery schools
Lancashire will receive a £0.65 increase in the supplementary funding hourly rate for maintained nursery schools in 2025/26, which will be passed to the maintained nursery schools, providing a revised hourly supplement rate of £5.83 per hour.

2-year-old entitlement

Lancashire has adopted one single funding rate for 2-year-old entitlements. Due the increased funding Lancashire has received, the Lancashire base rate 2-year-old entitlements is £7.46 per hour in 2025/26, an increase of £0.36 per hour from 2024/25. Please note the extended entitlements to 30 hours for working parents from September 2025

The 2025/26 funding rate is therefore as follows:

<i>2024/25 Base rate</i>	<i>£7.10 per hour</i>
<i>2025/26 DfE uplift</i>	<i>£0.29 per hour</i>
<i>2025/26 Additional funding from within the Early Years Block</i>	<i>£0.07 per hour</i>
<i>2025/26 Base rate</i>	<i>£7.46 per hour</i>

Under 2-year-old entitlement

Due the increased funding Lancashire has received, the Lancashire base rate for Under 2-year-old entitlement is £10.21 per hour in 2025/26, an increase of £0.70 per hour from 2024/25. Please note the extended entitlements to 30 hours for working parents from September 2025

The 2025/26 funding rate is therefore as follows:



2024/25 Base rate	£9.51 per hour
2025/26 DfE uplift	£0.36 per hour
2025/26 Additional funding from within the Early Years Block	£0.34 per hour
2025/26 Base rate	£10.21 per hour

Early Years Pupil Premium

Lancashire will increase our early years pupil premium rate, up to £570 per eligible child per year, for 2025/26, in line with national announcements. This is an increase of £182 from 2024/25.

Disability Access Fund

Lancashire will increase the disability access fund, up to £938 per eligible child per year for 2025/26, in line with national announcements. This is an increase of £28 from 2024/25.

Special Educational Needs Inclusion Fund

Local authorities are now required to have a Special Educational Needs Inclusion Fund for all eligible 3 and 4-year-olds, 2-year-olds and under 2s who are taking up the free entitlements, regardless of the number of hours taken. For 2025/26 the Lancashire fund will total £1.65m due to the increased demands and extended entitlements.

On 16th January 2025, the County Council's Cabinet formally approved the Schools Budget for 2025/26.

Some elements of the Schools Budget require compliance checking by the ESFA and approval was received on 25 February 2025.

Early Years budget statements for 2025/26 were prepared and issued on 27 February 2025.

The Working Group.

- a) **Noted the report**
- b) **Members discussed the impact of the wage and NI uplift and possibilities of settings closing.**
- c) **No update or guidance for National Insurance at this stage.**

8.3 Early Years Rates 2025/26

Presentation given by Matt Dexter.

Gave overview of Funding Rates for Under 2's, 2 year old's and 3-4 year old's.

The Working Group.

- a) **Noted the Presentation.**
- b) **Members discussed the concern of outdated Market data, questioned if this could be raised with councillors or politicians.**

8.4 DfE Statutory Guidance Update – Charging

Verbal Update from Mel Foster about the update to Charging guidance.



The New Guidance comes into effect on 1st April 2025, shared *The Early Education and Childcare Entitlements Statutory Guidance - Frequently Asked Questions about charging* as Appendix A.

An email was sent to the sector also as Appendix B.

The team will be looking to share FAQ and more defined information once they have completed their research and checks.

The Working Group.

- a) **Noted the report.**

Any Other Business

Matt Dexter brought up about the Early Years Expansion Grant, which is a standalone grant. The DfE guidance for the 1.8m states it is up to the LA to distribute, £958k to under 2 year old's and £842k to 2 year olds.

The Working Group.

- a) **Noted the information.**

