DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT (DSG) RECOVERY PLAN
A joint report from the Director of Finance and the Director of Education, Skills and Early Years outlining the proposals for inclusion in Oldham’s Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) recovery plan to be submitted to the DfE by 30 June 2019 was presented to members. As the LA has a cumulative deficit of more than one percent, they need to submit a three-year recovery plan to the DfE by 30 June 2019. There are 29 LAs in a similar position and the recovery plan needed to be discussed by the Schools Forum.

The deficit in the High Needs Block in 2018/19, after the transfers from the Schools Block, is reduced from £10.640m to £5.997m, but the estimated deficit for the end of 2019/20 is still £7.096m. Spending on the High Needs Block has risen from £26.254m in 2015/16 to £34.092m in 2018/19. The largest increases were seen in the spending on EHCPs and on Out of Borough (OOB) placements. The number of Educational Healthcare Plans (EHCPs) rose from 1,160 in January 2015 to 2,056 in January 2019, and the biggest changes were in the numbers for children aged 5 to 10 and aged 16 to 19.

The increased demand for EHCPs are for children with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH), Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) and Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD). There has also been a rise due to the 2014 reforms which includes young people aged 18+.

LA officers and school leaders continue to work with Social Finance to produce detailed proposals to address the challenges in the medium and long term. One objective is to provide preventative measures and improved support for SEN pupils to reduce the escalation to an EHCP, particularly for an SEMH diagnosis.

Future government spending for the High Needs Block is uncertain, and the National Funding Formula will not be introduced until after 2020/21. Implementing the strategies, proposed by Social Finance, would result in an estimated cumulative deficit of £3.524m for 2019/20, but reducing to £2.329m in 2020/21. Members challenged the suggestions made to reduce spending on High Needs pupils, but agreed to continue to work with the LA and Social Finance to fully work up the proposed options into a detailed three-year recovery plan.

SCHOOL BALANCES 2019-20 – LETTER FROM GOVERNING BODY
Ms Liz Caygill had received a letter from a Governing Body about school Balances 2019/20. She agreed that the current school balance mechanism may be out-dated and she would consider the approach of other LAs to address schools with excess balances in her review of the mechanism. A report would be made to the Schools Forum in September 2019.

FUNDING FOR SEND AND THOSE WHO NEED ALTERNATIVE PROVISION: CALL FOR EVIDENCE
The Secretary of State has called for evidence on the current funding arrangements for young people with special educational needs and disabilities in England. Members were asked to consider completing the on-line questionnaire.

FORWARD PLAN
The next meetings of the Schools Forum are on Wednesdays 11 September, 27 November 2019 and 15 January 2020.