Finance & Infrastructure Committee Meeting
Monday 2 February 2026 at 17:00 – 19:30
via Teams

Director's present		
Gill Askew	Director/Chair	GA
Tina Havenhand	Director	TH
Ray Palmer	Director	RP
Sue Shelley	Director	SS
Also present		
Warren Carratt	Chief Executive Officer	CEO
Joel Hardwick	Executive Director – Corporate Affairs	JH
Rebecca Horne	MAT Governance Clerk	RH
James Kelly	Advisor to the Committee	JK
Javid Mahdavi	Advisor to the Committee	JM
Karen Smith	Chief Finance Officer	CFO
Lana Stoyles	Executive Director - Business Transformation	LS
Apologies		
Mark Greenwood	Director	MG
Apologies not received		
None.		

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE	
1.1. To accept apologies for absence. Apologies were received from MG.	
2. ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS	
2.1. Chair to determine any items of urgent business to be considered. None to discuss.	
3. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS	
3.1. Individual Directors to declare any personal, business or other governance interests on any item on the agenda. None to discuss.	
4. APPROVAL OF COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES	
4.1. To approve the minutes of the following meeting: Finance & Infrastructure held on 6 October 2025 The minutes for the Finance & Infrastructure Committee Meeting which was held on 6 October 2025 were agreed as a true and proper record.	
4.2. REVIEW OF ACTION TRACKER	
The outstanding items on the Action Tracker were reviewed and updated. The Committee reviewed three actions, all marked complete. The breakdown of the £1.9m payroll creditor balance and the explanation of the £94k reconciliation difference had been provided to and accepted by TH. The Teaching Assistant (TA) paper had been circulated and considered by members.	
4.3. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES	
No matters arising for discussion.	
5. ITEMS TO BE CONSIDERED	
5.1 Trust Budget Monitoring Report The CFO gave a detailed summary of the Trust Budget Monitoring Report and reported a £372K improvement to the revenue surplus, resulting in a surplus that is £280K under the budgeted figure, with year end reserves forecasted at around 11%. These figures are prior to any changes from reserve spending which was discussed at the January Board Meeting.	

The CFO explained that reserves over £150K at school level are transferred to the Central Trust reserve, with about £1.5 million moved from some schools accounting for 80% of the transfer.

TH added this is a great report with a lot of detail included and thanked the CFO.

Questions were offered to Committee Members.

JM asked whether the transfer to reserves relates to school reserves or the Trust reserve.

The CFO confirmed that it relates to the Trust reserve.

GA asked why VAT recoverable balances had swung materially month to month.

The CFO clarified that HMRC's protracted audit of the Trust's VAT registration had delayed reimbursements, which inflated the balance in prior months. With normal cycles now restored, any remaining volatility primarily reflects timing differences, particularly when large capital invoices are paid and reclaimed in adjacent periods.

5.1a P4 Balance Sheet Report

This was discussed above.

5.1b P4 Cashflow Report

This was discussed above.

5.2 Aged Debtors and Creditors Report

The CFO gave a brief overview of the Aged Debtors and Creditors report and offered questions to the Committee Members.

GA asked what explains the sharp monthly movements in the in-year income and expenditure line.

The CFO explained that the figure represents a point-in-time snapshot of cash paid and received, rather than a forecast. For example, by December, Sheffield City Council owed Nexus MAT over £1m in back dated top-up funding, which temporarily depressed the month end position.

SS queried the apparent volatility at Bents Green.

The CFO reported stabilisation with a marginal improvement versus the anticipated in-year deficit; the Gleadless site is delivering a surplus. Central team staff are working with leaders on vacancy tracking, agency usage and medium-term workforce planning.

JM asked whether these levels of aged Local Authority debt are typical and how rigorously they are pursued.

The CFO confirmed that such delays are regrettably common due to Local Authority internal processes. The Trust meets monthly with City of Doncaster Council officers and nearly weekly with Sheffield City Council officers. From April, a trial of direct monthly payments bypassing purchase order bottlenecks will be implemented.

JM asked whether interest or stronger escalation could be applied to accelerate local authority settlements.

The CFO advised that, while applying interest is conceptually possible, it could risk damaging strategically important relationships and is complicated by delays in formal funding approvals. The CEO added that escalation to Section 151 officers has been effective for some trusts and may be considered where proportionate.

GA asked why some aged creditor lines show negative balances.

The CFO explained that these represent credit notes awaiting offset against future invoices, rather than overdue payments.

5.3 Pupil Numbers Update (High Needs Place Change/October Pupil Census)

The CFO provided an update on Pupil Numbers, highlighting ongoing growth, the complexities for funding pupils above planned places and the negotiation strategies with Local Authorities.

The CFO presented data that was showing approximately 20% year on year number growth over the last four years, with detailed breakdowns by schools and comparisons to budgeted forecasts.

The CEO explained the statutory guidance that Local Authorities are not required to pay place funding for pupils above planned numbers, leading to negotiation strategies where the Trust seeks increased top-up funding. He noted increasing resistance from Local Authorities to these requests.

GA asked, does the difference between 2,987 (DfE) and 2,814 (budget) create a funding gap?

The CEO explained that special schools cannot seek additional £10k place funding for any pupil placed above planned places; historically the Trust secured a £10k uplift in top-up for over numbers. LAs are increasingly resisting this approach. Strategy is shifting, unless space and funding are aligned, schools should decline mid-year placements. CFO noted most variance relates to Nottingham Hope, which was not in the original budget.

JM asked, do LAs claw back funding if rolls are below planned places?
The CEO confirmed DfE clawback ceased around 2014; no downward adjustment is applied if slightly under roll, but this is never the case in any schools and it is indeed quite the opposite.

5.4 Infrastructure Strategy Update

LS reported that multiple live capital and condition schemes remain on track, including the integration of health and safety audits into the capital plan and ongoing estate

surveys to inform planning. She also highlighted the continued rollout of IAM Compliant to consolidate premises procedures across schools. Ongoing suitability work, including at Kenwood Academy, is helping to inform longer term strategic options. JH outlined improvements to digital resilience, highlighting the robustness of systems and recent enhancements to resilience arrangements. He also noted a same morning restoration following a server failure at North Ridge Academy and confirmed that preparations are underway for an external cyber audit. JH explained that Subject Access Requests (SARs) are increasing and often correlate with parental complaints. The time required to redact SARs can be challenging. JH and AC, Corporate Governance Manager, have been reviewing systems to improve management and benchmarking against other organisations. This will continue to be monitored.	
The CEO added it would be useful for future reports to include which school has had what request of SARs and complaints to enable triangulation and identify emerging patterns. **Action: JH to add data which schools have had what SARS request to the report which will be helpful to Directors.**	**Action: JH 08/07/26**
JM offered support/insight from his DfE-commissioned school cyber audit work. JH welcomed follow up, post external review. **SS raised a question regarding the invitation to participate in the Data Maturity Study led by JISC, noting that it sounded very interesting and requesting more information.** JH explained that JISC is providing the external cyber security review, which was conducted through its own process, including a comparison of other bidders. Initially, the Trust was the only MAT invited to participate, though a second MAT has since been included. The study examines how data is handled, stored and analysed, assessing the maturity of data management practices. It also benchmarks these practices against other organisations and provides recommendations for tools and actions that may be considered for implementation. **GA asked, did the North Ridge server incident invoke Business Continuity arrangements?** JH confirmed activation at local level; due to improved architecture, the server was restored within hours before teaching time. **GA asked, in relation to item number 1, about the external audit's confirmation that robust arrangements remain in place for Health and Safety and compliance. She noted that the preceding paragraph mentions new schools continuing to receive further support to improve Health and Safety standards and asked whether these new schools were included within the scope of that support.**	

LS responded that the process involves both external and internal audits. An external audit is carried out by an independent company, while the Trust also conducts its own internal Health and Safety audit. Regardless of where a school is in the cycle of external audits, it will receive an internal audit from the Trust's Health and Safety competent person, Kevin Oxborough in the Central Team, both prior to and following conversion.

GA asked, regarding the self assessments on cyber security, about the residual risks mentioned and whether there were any examples of these findings.

JH responded that the residual risks referred back to the previous audit.

5.5 Statutory Returns Checklist

The CFO confirmed all required submissions had been made on time, including the annual accounts return filed on 28 January.

5.6 Record of Accounting Officer Expenditure Decisions for the Preceding 4 Months

The CEO invited Committee Members to ask questions regarding the report.

TH queried the £589k coded as "admin supplies" at Crags and requested further detail.

The CFO subsequently confirmed via chat that this related to the annual PFI payment. A short follow up was agreed to confirm the correct nominal coding, as expected. The CFO confirmed the PFI payment and nominal coding is correct.

The CEO added, the expenditure record is maintained for Director oversight and transparency.

SS highlighted the schedule's value in illustrating the Trust's operational scale.

5.7 Summary of Write-Offs

The CFO reported no write-offs were reported for this period.

5.8 TA Supply – Analysis Report

LS presented a detailed analysis of the contingent workforce and agency spend. Agency expenditure is influenced by factors such as sickness absence, pupil needs and workforce planning. The Trust's data shows that most contingent labour supports staff roles, reflecting both sector wide trends and the specific needs of the Trust's schools.

The Nexus Bank currently has around 100 staff, primarily in support roles, with plans to expand and reduce agency spend through the new Nexus Services Group (NSG) model. A digital system is being rolled out to track reasons for supply bookings and support more data driven decision making.

The Trust is supporting schools with high agency spend through the School Resource Business Partner team and its commercial agency partner, aiming to strengthen workforce planning and encourage permanent recruitment where possible.

Further discussion highlighted the challenges of recruiting and moving support staff between schools, the impact of local demographics and the need for more strategic use of permanent contracts. The CEO emphasised the Trust's responsibility to encourage Heads to consider broader approaches to resource allocation.

GA asked how many staff are Teaching Assistants rather than supply teachers?

LS replied that some of the staff are supply teachers. Bank is predominantly Support Staff.

GA asked, are they at different schools all the time?

LS responded that staff are typically placed in a local school. Many support staff prefer to work in their local school and tend to remain there, with many eventually moving into permanent roles within the same school.

JM raised questions regarding staff wellbeing and retention.

The CEO reminded Directors that the Standards Committee reviews HR data and the scorecard on a termly basis, and that these lines of enquiry are addressed through the Committee's work agenda.

The CEO also noted that the Trust conducts an employee opinion survey. While staff survey results are generally positive, higher absence rates are linked to challenging pupil cohorts and school environments. The Trust is reviewing reporting and support mechanisms to address these issues.

JM asked whether allowances could improve recruitment and retention.

The CEO noted the complexities of aligned pay scales and highlighted limited evidence of impact from historic local authority supplements. The Trust's focus remains on training, support and staff portability.

LS reported on support, training and readiness, explaining that bank staff training through the Enterprise Learning Institute is being expanded and tailored to specific contexts. She also noted that commercial terms, such as converting agency staff to permanent roles after 12 weeks, are being applied more consistently to reduce long term reliance on agency placements.

5.9 Capital Plan

LS presented in detail an overview of the Trust's first consolidated multiyear Capital Plan, which integrates condition, compliance, suitability, expansion and strategic priorities.

LS added that the Trust maintains the Nexus MAT Management Asset Overview, so each school has an individual asset plan currently being developed. LS noted that IAM Compliant is presently managed in a spreadsheet and is being migrated into a digital system. All data is consolidated into a master spreadsheet, enabling the Trust to track and adjust plans as survey results are received.

The plan is dynamic and will adapt to survey data and reactive issues, such as boiler repairs. Condition items without confirmed funding are being considered for School Condition Allocation (SCA) grant, combined with other projects or external funding bids. **GA asked, how will end-of-life items without confirmed funding be prioritised and delivered.** LS outlined sequencing via updated surveys, SCA headroom, strategic bundling with expansion works, and active pursuit of external funding (e.g., fire safety). **GA asked, when will the Committee be able to understand the carbon and broader (including financial) benefits of the sustainability focus in the capital plan. Action: LS to confirm a date by which this information, including carbon reporting and broader benefits, can be reported to the Committee.** **RPa asked for clarification on the condition grades, specifically Cs and Ds.** LS confirmed that a D grade indicates an asset is at the end of its life, while a C grade means it is expected to move toward the end of its life within 1–2 years. Committee Members praised the report, noting it was very useful and commended the clarity and level of detail provided. 5.10 Transformation Board Minutes/Action Points JH apologised that the minutes had not yet been uploaded. Members may raise queries by e-mail or at the next meeting. **Action: Clerking Services to upload Transformation Board minutes onto Governor Hub.** 5.11 Land and Buildings Condition Return The annual DfE return was completed and noted. The CEO advised it offers limited assurance compared to internal capital reporting and is largely an administrative requirement.	**Action: LS 08/07/26** **Action: Clerking Services 02/02/26 Completed**
6. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS	
6.1. To consider any other urgent business agreed by the Chair None raised.	
7. CONFIDENTIALITY & RISK	
7.1. To consider the confidentiality of any items discussed during the meeting. None. 7.2. To consider any areas of risk discussed during the meeting. None.	
8. DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS	

Wednesday 8 July 2026	17:00 –19:30	MS Teams	Finance & Infrastructure

Minutes approved

CHAIR	SIGNATURE	DATE
Gill Askew		