



LIVERPOOL GOVERNANCE FORUM

Committee Meeting: Tuesday 10 February 2026 at 10:00 am

Venue: St Margaret's Academy, Aigburth Road, L17 6AB

The meeting commenced at 10:13

Speaker: Joanne Lawson, LA Interim Head of SEND, delivered an outline of her new role, and the key aims of the LA. Please see Annexe 1.

1.0 STANDARD ITEMS:

1.1 Welcome, Apologies: MM welcomed committee members and Joanne Lawson. He commented that the meeting was well attended.

Present: Michael Morris, David Blythe, Dave Cadwallader, Dave Owens, Michelle Hayward, Maureen McDaid, Joyce Smith, Sharon Pearson, Marlene Taylor, Dominic Ion, Gill Donohoe.

Apologies: Avril O'Brien, Richard Lovegrove.

1.2 Declaration of Pecuniary Interest

No changes to previous information were declared.

1.3 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 2 December 2025 had already been agreed upon by email and posted on the LGF website.

1.4 Matters Arising

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS FROM MEETING

Letter to Andrew Lewis re LGF concerns to be drafted, approved, and sent	MMcD/MM
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MM confirmed a letter had been sent to Andrew Lewis. A meeting was held on 20.1.26, partly to discuss the response received from Andrew Lewis on 5.1.26. MM has sent a further letter but has not received a reply to date. Please see Annexe 2.

2.0 LGF Matters and Events

2.1 Finance

DO confirmed the LGF bank account balance currently stands at £8,532.25.

MM enquired how much of the balance will be used to subsidise the forthcoming LGF Conference. DB replied approximately £1,000.

A brief discussion took place regarding the appropriate use of the remaining balance. Suggestions included reducing subscriptions, currently £25 per school, or giving a subscription 'holiday' to schools.

It was noted that the maintenance of the LGF Website incurs an annual cost of £575. It is intended to revise the existing LGF website to make it more user-friendly; this will incur a cost.

DI agreed to 'road test' the current website as he is not conversant with the existing site. A meeting will be arranged to discuss the format of the new website.

Regular clerking fees and bank charges are also to be deducted from the balance.

2.2 Feedback from events (conferences, AGM, etc.)

There have been no events since the last LGF meeting.

2.3 Future events (Meetings, Venues, Conferences, AGM, topics for Governors Digest, Speakers for Committee meetings, etc.)

Governors Digest – it was noted that the termly Governors Digest has been issued by DC.

LGF Conference – Please see Annexe 2.

MM confirmed that James Backhouse has agreed to speak at the LGF Conference to be held in March 2026. DC commented that he is unable to advertise the conference unless details are confirmed regarding speakers/topics/venue, etc.

A discussion took place regarding potential additional speakers/topics. It was suggested James Backhouse was invited to address the conference on his vision for moving education forward in Liverpool and how he sees the role of governors in the current challenging circumstances. He would also be asked if he would be able to suggest someone from the Education Management Partnership who would be able to address the conference separately regarding the retention of statutory functions.

(NB: James Blackhouse later confirmed he was able to cover both sessions).

The following details were confirmed:

Date: Saturday 14 March 2026

Venue: Hope School, 251 Hartsbourne Avenue, Liverpool L25 2RY

Agenda:

09.00-09:30: Registration and Refreshments (breakfast bars/tea/coffee)

From 09:30: Introductions & welcome by MM, James Backhouse:

1. Moving education forward in challenging circumstances.
2. The return of statutory functions to LCC.
3. Q&A.

Further conference details and timing to be agreed.

DC is to advertise the conference on the Governor's Hub. Details are to be shared with GD, who will arrange for the conference to be advertised in the equivalent Archdiocese publication.

DI suggested an extraordinary conference to discuss the SEND White Paper once published.

Speakers for committee meetings –

It was suggested that Cabinet Member for Education, Joanne Kennedy, be asked to speak at either the May or June LGF meeting. GJ agreed to contact Joanne Kennedy.

Venues for future LGF Committee Meetings

- 5 May 2026: Corinthian Community Primary School, Inigo Road, L13 6SH
- 30 June 2026: St Julies Catholic High School. Speke Road, L25 7TN
- 14 March 2026: Spring Conference. Hope School, 251 Hartsbourne Avenue, L25 2RY

2.4 Website

DB reported that the website will be up to date once the venue for the June meeting is added.

2.5 Other (matters for raising)

None reported.

3.0 Feedback from Representatives

3.1 Liverpool School's Forum

There have been no meetings since the last LGF meeting. The next meeting is scheduled to be held on 18 March 2026.

3.2 LLP

There have been no meetings since the last LGF meeting. The next meeting is to be held in March 2026

3.3 LSCP (Liverpool Safeguarding Children Partnership)

MM said he had responded to Andrew Lewis' reply to the initial letter sent on behalf of LGF, but was still awaiting a reply to his second letter. The initial letter contained a request that GJ attend LSCP meetings to represent both LASH and LGF.

It was noted that there have been no LSCP meetings since the meeting held in the Autumn Term.

3.4 Other (other committees, matters for raising, etc)

SEND Partnership Board

GJ provided feedback on the recent SEND Partnership Board Meeting. He stated that Amanda Williams, Co-chair, had resigned, and Jenny Glenard is now chair of the board. At the meeting, James Backhouse provided an update regarding the SEND Sufficiency Plan. He now has live data that has been collated to provide information on the number of potential future ECHPs from early years onwards. It was noted that this data will also include information from secondary schools. This information is to be shared with schools and the SEND Partnership Board.

James Backhouse also said that a SEND Proficiency Policy should be in place in September 2026. A new Director of SEND is to be appointed. It was noted that SEND and Inclusion are to be treated as two separate roles and advertised as such.

A case study for future travel planning for SEND pupils was presented at the meeting and was well received.

LCC's response to support schools that have received threats from individuals has been prepared to detail what to do in such events and to enable schools to act in certain circumstances.

National Local Governors Association Network - GD stated that a meeting was held yesterday. The agenda from the meeting was distributed. Minutes from the meeting will be shared once they become available.

Request for LGF support – MM asked for a volunteer to sit on a panel for another Liverpool school on 11.2.26. The meeting will be held via Microsoft Teams. DO confirmed he would be available to attend.

DC suggested a format/form should be designed/agreed to allow schools to request LGF support and to detail the support LGF can offer. This is to be added to the agenda for the next LGF meeting. This is intended to manage the school's expectations when requesting LGF help.

Dates and Times of Future Meetings:

- 5 May 2026: Corinthian Community Primary School, Inigo Road, L13 6SH.
- 30 June 2026: St Julie's Catholic High School, Speke Road Liverpool L25 7TN.
- 14 March 2026: Confirmed date for the Spring LGF Conference. Hope School, Hartsbourne Avenue, Liverpool L25 2RY.

The meeting concluded at 11:45.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS FROM MEETING	
LGF Conference to be advertised in the Governor's Hub	DC
To promote the LGF Conference through the Archdiocese network	GD
Joanne Kennedy to be approached regarding speaking at a future LGF meeting	GJ
'Road-test' the current website and provide feedback	DI

Annexe 1

Joanne Lawson, LA Interim Head of SEND, delivered an overview of her new role, and the key aims of the LA for SEND.

JL introduced herself and informed the meeting that she knows the city quite well, having worked here before as SEND Improvement Partner, March 2024 – January 2025.

JL explained that she had only been in post for 3 weeks, but could talk about what is happening within SEND nationally. She noted that the White Paper on SEND should be published within the next few weeks, which will provide the direction of travel for SEND in the future. She stated that all schools in England are aware of some aspects that are included in the White paper but are not aware of the details.

Regarding the government's announcement on additional funding for SEND, JL advised that no details have been released yet.

JL stated that LA is looking for sufficiency for Liverpool schools, as there are currently not enough special school/mainstream placements. This results in Liverpool pupils being placed in independent schools at considerable cost. There is to be a 7-year plan with the aim of returning pupils to mainstream/academy placements in Liverpool schools.

JL stated there was a meeting held yesterday to discuss independent travel training for SEND pupils. This would be in the best interests of the pupil, increasing their independence and reducing costs to the LA as this would reduce the need for individual taxis for pupils.

JL invited questions from the meeting.

MM commented that he was shocked by the cost of private placements for Liverpool pupils and wondered if the LA intend to provide separate Centres of Excellence where pupils' needs could be met, even temporarily, or was the LA more inclined to concentrate on inclusion? JL replied that she did not know, but it was best for pupils to be educated in their own communities. MM said that the provision must meet the pupil's individual needs, e.g. appropriate provision for dysregulated pupils who become a barrier to their own education and that of other pupils.

MH asked if parents would receive advice regarding the provision that best met the needs of their child, as parents can request a named school as part of an ECHP, but this may not be the best placement for their child. JL replied that the LA are not allowed to steer parents to a particular provision as this can result in a conflict of interest. MH said that there is often a conflict between parent expectations and what a school can provide, especially when a pupil goes to secondary school. JL commented that it is not always in the pupil's interest to provide 1-2-1 support, as this can limit their independence. Schools need to communicate with other professionals, child psychologists, etc., to ensure the child's needs are met within the school of their choice.

JL said that SENDIASS is available in Liverpool, which is a service run by Barnardo's that provides independent advice for parents. Advice can also be sought by the LA. Other independent advice services are available.

Previously, schools could identify their own strengths with the intention of this information being available to parents to assist them in their decision-making. This was never put in place. JL said she did not know if it would form part of the new reforms.

MMcD said she felt it was unfair that pupils were excluded, with the primary reason for their exclusion being their SEND, as the school had not been able to meet their needs. JL said she fully agreed with MMcD's comments.

MT raised the issue of mainstream primary schools being unable to meet the needs of individual pupils due to a lack of funding and lack of support for the school, parents, and pupils. JL explained the process involved in an application for a special needs assessment, stating that an application takes 20 weeks. Decision-making panels within the LA meet to discuss applications and prioritise them. This is a graduated approach that is evidence-based. The assessment takes place at week 6, providing there is agreement that there is a SEND requirement. The remaining 14 weeks are used to draft a plan, decide if the plan needs to be issued, consult with schools and parents, and allow parents and schools the opportunity to suggest amendments. After 20 weeks, the ECHP is issued as 'final', and a school is named.

A Graduated Response Toolkit is available to schools to ensure that the evidence needed to support the application is provided. A Parental Guide is also available.

JL said the funding to implement the recommendations of the ECHP is provided by the High Needs block of funding, sometimes referred to as element 3. She also said that it is necessary to look at how a member of staff can support the pupil and not just provide 1-2-1 support, which could be impractical in the classroom setting. It is important to work with schools to provide an inclusive, collaborative support.

DI commented that funding of public services is always difficult, and the constraints of delivering appropriate support must be recognised. However, if pupils do not receive the support they need in school, then this stores up problems for the future. He noted that the media's approach to SEND is unhelpful and unsympathetic. He felt it was part of a governor's role to highlight this whilst being realistic.

SP enquired if Liverpool were on target to deal with ECHP applications. JL replied that the LA has a 98% record of completing ECHP applications on time. Nationally, the average for ECHP application completion is 54%.

It was noted that any person involved with a child can make an ECHP application, e.g. parent, school, doctor, etc.

JL was thanked for sharing her advice and expertise with the meeting. JL said she would be happy to address LGF meetings in the future. *(NB: It was noted that JL is currently on a rolling contract, and a permanent position will be advertised in the future.)*

**Notes from a meeting held at St Margaret's Academy, 20th January 2026
to discuss arrangements for the LGF Annual Conference in March**

Present: Michael Morris, David Blythe, Dave Cadwallader, Dave Owens, Gareth Jones, Joyce Smith, Sharon Pearson, Maureen McDaid.

1. MM asked those present to discuss the response received from Andrew Lewis, Liverpool Chief Executive, on 5th January to the letter sent to him on behalf of LGF.
 - The letter was optimistic about improved communication following the appointment of James Backhouse from Wirral as Director of Education. It was agreed that GJ would invite James Blackhouse to address the March LGF conference when he meets him later this week.
 - The letter said Jenny Turnross would pick up outstanding matters from our original letter to her. However, to date, no such response has been received.
 - Andrew Lewis accepted the invitation to attend a meeting of LGF and/or the conference, but neither of the dates offered was convenient. It was agreed to offer 5th May and 30th June as alternatives.
 - The letter sought to correct our understanding that the Safeguarding Partnership Board has not been meeting. It was agreed that LGF's concern is that it was not invited to join the reconstituted board. Gareth explained that he attends as LASH representative and would be happy to represent LGF also. It was agreed that in responding to the letter, MM would suggest this to Andrew Lewis.

2. It was agreed to invite James Backhouse (possibly with a colleague) to address the conference, offering 21 March, 25 April and 16 May as alternative dates to suit his diary. The venue would be decided once the date is confirmed – probably Hope School, Margaret Clitherow Centre or Partnership for Learning. If the invitation was turned down, Martin King (Staff member of Vicky Beer, Regional Director's team), Cllr Joanne Kennedy and Amanda Williams (SEND Partnership Board) were suggested as alternatives.

NB: It was subsequently agreed with James Backhouse that he would attend the LGF conference on Saturday, 14th March, 2026, at 09:30.

