

# Supplementary Papers for Schools Forum

Date: Monday, 29 September 2025



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## SCHOOLS FORUM



Report subject	<b>Reconstitution of Schools Forum</b>
Meeting date	29 September 2025
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	<p>The Schools Forum operational and good practice guidance was updated in March 2021, and the terms of reference for the Schools Forum were agreed to be updated to reflect these changes in September 2023. The terms include that membership is for two years.</p> <p>There have been no further updates to the published guidance and there are no proposals to change current arrangements other than to refresh the membership to meet the proportional representation across primary and secondary schools and academies, by phase and type of school. There must also be representation from other sectors including early years, post-16 providers, and Diocesan.</p> <p>The terms of reference are to be agreed by current Schools Forum members prior to the fresh elections now due.</p>
Recommendations	<p><b>It is RECOMMENDED that:</b></p> <p><b>The Schools Forum to consider the report and agree the terms of reference.</b></p>
Reason for recommendations	It is a statutory requirement for a Local Authority to establish and operate a Schools Forum. This Forum should provide proportional representation from the various school groups discussed within this report.
Portfolio Holder(s):	Cllr Richard Burton, Children and Young People
Corporate Director	Cathi Hadley, Children's Services
Report Authors	Nicola Webb, Assistant Chief Finance Officer <a href="mailto:nicola.webb@bcpcouncil.gov.uk">nicola.webb@bcpcouncil.gov.uk</a>
Wards	Council-wide
Classification	For Decision

## **Draft Terms of Reference**

### **Background and Statutory Authority**

1. A Schools Forum is the formal consultation and decision-making body on matters relating to the funding of schools and plays a role in the discussions on the overall funding contained within the Dedicated Schools Grant. The framework was established to give schools greater involvement in the distribution of funding within the Local Authority.
2. The Forum is governed by Statutory Instrument 2012 No 2261: The Schools Forums (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012. The Department for Education issued guidance on Schools Forums: Operational and Good Practice Guidance in March 2021.

### **Purpose**

3. The purpose of the Schools Forum is to advise the Local Authority and in certain specific areas decide on the operation of the Schools' Budget and its distribution among schools and other bodies. The overarching areas on which schools forum make decisions on local authority proposals are:
  - de-delegation from mainstream schools budgets (separate approval will be required by the primary and secondary phase members of schools forum), for prescribed services to be provided centrally.
  - to create a fund for significant pupil growth to support the local authority's duty for place planning (basic need), including pre-opening and diseconomy of scale costs, and agree the criteria for maintained schools and academies to access this fund.
  - to create an optional fund for falling rolls for good or outstanding schools if the schools' surplus capacity is likely to be needed within the next three years to meet rising pupil numbers and agree the criteria for maintained schools and academies to access this fund.
  - agreeing other centrally retained budgets, including for local authority statutory responsibilities (where these relate to maintained schools only, voting is by primary, secondary, special and PRU members of the schools forum).
  - funding for central early years expenditure, which may include funding for checking eligibility of pupils for an early years place, the early years pupil premium and/or free school meals.
  - authorising a reduction in the schools budget to fund a deficit arising in central expenditure, or from de-delegated services, which is carried forward from a previous funding period. Local authorities require schools forum approval to move up to 0.5% from the schools block to other blocks.

## Membership

4. The membership of the Schools Forum is to consist of nineteen school members and five non-school members – the latter can be up to 1/3rd of the total membership. Observers can attend and participate in the meetings but will have no voting rights. The membership groups shall consist of the following representatives:

### Schools Members

Primary School – Maintained*	1
Secondary School – Maintained*	1
Special School – Maintained*	1
PRU – Maintained*	1
Primary - Academy	6
Secondary - Academy	6
All-through - Academy	1
Special - Academy	1
Alternative Provision - Academy	1
<b>Total Schools Members</b>	<b>19</b>

\*At least one of the four representatives of maintained schools must be a Governor. Academies have the option to choose a local Governor or Trustee. No school can have more than 1 representative.

### Non-Schools Members

Diocesan Representative	2
Early Years Provider Representatives (1 day-nursery, 1 pre-sch.)	2
16-19 provider	1
<b>Total Non-Schools Members</b>	<b>5</b>

### Invited Officers and Members

Executive Council Members	2
Children's Services Lead Officer	1
Finance Lead Officer	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>

The LA Children's Services Lead Officer will be either the Director of Children's Services or their representative. The Finance Lead Officer will be the LA Chief Finance Officer or their representative.

5. Schools forum members will need the skills and competencies to manage Forum business and to take a strategic view across the whole education estate whilst acting as representative of the group that elected them. Furthermore, they should be easily contactable and pro-active in raising the profile of issues and communicating decisions, and the reasons behind them, effectively. Good

practice for schools forum would be to offer training to new or existing members who may benefit from this.

### **Clerk to the Schools Forum**

6. The Clerk to the Schools Forum will be provided through the Local Authority.

### **Election and Nomination of Members**

7. The head teachers and school leadership, and governors will be elected by their respective associations.
8. Early years provider and 16-19 representatives will be elected by their respective peers.
9. The Diocesan members will be determined by the Catholic Diocese of Plymouth, the Salisbury Diocesan Board of Education, the Catholic Diocese of Portsmouth and the Winchester Diocesan Board of Education.
10. Nominations for membership should be sent to the Clerk, who will contact the appropriate association or body to undertake an election.
11. Nomination for membership when a term of office is due to end should be received 2-months prior to the date of cessation. For the reconstitution of the Schools Forum, nominations for membership should be sent to the Forum Clerk by the end of October 2025. Newly elected members will receive a welcome information pack and are able to access an induction meeting, and Forum training upon request.

### **Chair**

12. The Chair shall be elected by members of the Schools Forum. The election shall take place at the start of the first meeting or at the first meeting following a retirement or resignation of the Chair. The election shall be conducted by the Clerk, and each member shall have one vote. The Chair will represent the Schools Forum at other meetings as and when required.

### **Period of Office**

13. The period of office for all members will commence no later than October 2025. The period of office will last for 2 years, after which the Forum will be reconstituted.
14. The period of office for the Chair will commence when elected by the membership. The period of office will last for 2 years, after which the post will be re-elected; the same representative can stand for re-election.
15. A member shall remain in office until:
  - They cease to hold the office by virtue of which he or she became eligible for appointment to the Forum
  - The term of office as a member comes to an end
  - They resign as a member
16. Members of the existing Schools Forum are allowed to seek re-election should they still be eligible. When a vacancy occurs, there shall be a new appointment to fill the unexpired term of office. In the event of no member of a group standing for nomination, the Chair may obtain agreement from the Schools Forum members to co-opt an appropriate person.

## **Non-Attendance**

17. If a member is not in attendance for 3 consecutive meetings, the Chair shall ascertain the reasons and take Chair's action to consult with the relevant group regarding a replacement.

## **Substitutes**

18. Where a member is unable to attend the meeting he or she may draw to the attention of the Clerk or the Chair 48 hours in advance, a substitute who is attending from their group.
19. In the event of a matter being put to a vote, the substitute will have a vote. Where possible, formal substitutes should be elected and be able to represent the group of schools/providers of the member they are being substituting. The Clerk should be informed of any formal substitutes elected by the various groups.

## **Observers**

20. The meetings of the Schools Forum are open meetings and members of the public may attend as observers. Observers are requested to notify the Clerk or the Chair of their intention to attend one week before a meeting to ensure a suitably sized room is arranged for the meeting.
21. Observers may take part in the meeting with the permission of the Chair. The Chair's decision will be final.
22. Members of the Schools Forum may request the Chair to exclude observers from discussion of confidential items. Such items shall be clearly indicated in advance on the agenda for the meeting. Papers relating to such items shall be labelled confidential.
23. In the event of a matter being put to a vote, observers will not have a vote.

## **Meetings**

24. Normally a Schools Forum meets four times a year. Meetings of the Schools Forum will aim to follow this routine, but the exact number of meetings required will be determined by the membership and the business to be discussed.
25. Dates of the Schools Forum meetings shall be agreed with the membership, normally before the start of a new academic year.
26. Extra ordinary meetings of the Schools Forum may be called by the Chair or by 40% of its membership.
27. The quorum of a meeting will be 40% of the Schools Forum membership (ten members).
28. Members must declare any interest associated with any item under discussion related directly to the organisation they represent.
29. Notes of the meetings will be available to the public and distributed to members within 5 working days of each meeting. They will be agreed at the next Schools' Forum meeting.
30. With regard, to sub-committees or working groups, any advice formally passed to the Local Authority must be approved by the Schools Forum as, a whole.
31. Costs of the Schools Forum will be charged to the Schools' Budget.

## **Voting**

32. Only members of the Schools Forum or their nominated substitutes shall have a vote. The Chair will have a second and casting vote if required. Observers are not eligible to vote.

## **Urgent Business**

33. Should urgent business requiring action be required between meetings the Chair shall contact all members by e-mail. The Chair shall then give the Local Authority a decision based upon the responses received. This shall be fully reported to the next Schools Forum meeting.

## **Remit**

34. The Local Authority has a duty to consult with the Schools Forum on:
- Schools' Funding Formula: Any proposed changes to the Schools' Funding Formula in relation to factors and criteria that have been taken, into account or methods, principles and rules that have been adopted, together with the financial effect of any such change. The consultation will take place in sufficient time to allow any views expressed to be considered in determining the formula and schools' budget shares before the beginning of the financial year.
  - Contracts: At least one month prior to the issue of invitations to tender, if applicable the Local Authority will consult the Forum on the terms of any proposed contract for supplies or services to be paid out of the Schools' Budget where the estimated value of the contract is considered material
  - Financial Issues: The Schools Forum will also be consulted on the Schools' Budget in relation to the following:
    - The arrangements to be made for the education of pupils with Special Educational Needs
    - Arrangements for the use of the Pupil Referral Unit and the education of children otherwise than at school
    - Arrangements for Early Years education
    - Prospective revisions to the Scheme for Financing Maintained Schools
    - Allocation of the Individual Schools' Budget to schools
    - Administrative arrangements for the allocation of central Government grants paid to schools via the Local Authority
    - Any other appropriate financial issue
35. The Forum will monitor and assess the quality and value-for-money of services purchased for schools. It may also be provided with or request reports on other items deemed a priority to its remit.

## **Sub-Groups**

36. An Early Years sub-group will meet as and when required to develop the Early Years Formula. The membership will consist of Early Years providers and officers. The subgroup will make recommendations to the Schools Forum.



37. Other sub-groups can be formed to investigate or develop further issues as and when required by the Schools Forum.
38. The membership of any sub-group does not have to consist solely of Schools Forum Members, e.g., the Early Years subgroup.

### **Establishing School Representation**

39. The table below provides a representation of how the proportional split of Primary/ Secondary, Maintained/ Academy has been determined.

<b>Maintained Mainstream</b>		<b>Academy Mainstream</b>			<b>Special Schools and PRU</b>		<b>Total</b>
<b>Primary</b>	<b>Secondary</b>	<b>Primary</b>	<b>Secondary</b>	<b>AT</b>	<b>Maintained</b>	<b>Academy</b>	
<b>3165</b>	<b>1057</b>	<b>22,696</b>	<b>21,518</b>	<b>2,812</b>	<b>681</b>	<b>425</b>	<b>52,354</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1 Special 1 AP</b>	<b>1 Special 1 PRU</b>	<b>19</b>

The pupil count includes years R – 14 from the summer census 2025.  
Representation for nursery classes is via the early year's representatives.

Maintained schools must have representation for each phase and type of provision regardless of the proportion of pupils relative to academies.

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## SCHOOLS FORUM



Report subject	<b>Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) - Budget Monitoring and High Needs Update at Quarter One 2025-26</b>
Meeting date	29 September 2025
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	<p>The quarter one budget monitoring for the DSG being reported to the council's Cabinet on 1 October is a projected increase in the high needs funding gap for 2025-26 of £11.6m from the budgeted gap of £57.5m. This is a total forecast funding gap of £69.1m. This reflects higher than expected growth in demand in the later months of the last financial year with this higher demand continuing in 2025-26, primarily due to the numbers of education, health and care plans (EHCPs) and increasing costs of provision.</p> <p>Other DSG budgets for 2025-26 are forecast to be balanced.</p> <p>The cumulative deficit on 31 March 2026 is projected to be £180.5m</p>
Recommendations	<p><b>It is RECOMMENDED that:</b></p> <p><b>Schools Forum note the contents of the report.</b></p>
Reason for recommendations	Schools Forum must be updated on the financial position for the DSG, and budget monitoring is an important element of current year financial management and budget planning for future years.
Portfolio Holder(s):	Councillor Richard Burton – Children and Young People
Corporate Director	Cathi Hadley – Director of Children's Services
Report Author	Nicola Webb, Assistant Chief Finance Officer email: <a href="mailto:nicola.webb@bcpcouncil.gov.uk">nicola.webb@bcpcouncil.gov.uk</a>
Wards	All
Classification	For Information

## Background

1. The DSG budget for 2025-26 was set with a funding gap of £57.5m relating to the high needs block. This budget was set after work was undertaken over autumn 2024 to update the 5-year projections to reflect the latest trends in demand and planned new service activity. A summary of these plans was reported to the Schools Forum meeting in June and the council's Cabinet in July. Other funding blocks were planned to be balanced.
2. Demand in the system from pupils with high needs continued to rise beyond expectations over the end of the last year with the 2024-25 outturn a further £5m overspent compared with the estimate at quarter three last year, with some of this increase expected to be ongoing.
3. The government is being urged to find a solution to the national DSG deficits as a priority and conversations are on-going with representatives of the DfE and Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) in seeking an immediate solution to the drain on the council's cash flow and cash balances in funding the DSG shortfall. The only response so far is that the statutory accounting override (which keeps the accumulated DSG deficit out of the council's general fund) has been extended for a further two years to March 2028 for all councils.

## DSG Funding adjustments in summer 2025

4. The early years block funding was finalised in August for 2024-25 to reflect the January 2025 schools and early years census data. Clawback of funding was anticipated in finalising the accounts for last year as the updated DfE estimate of take up of the free entitlements from the autumn 2024 data for under 2-year-olds had led to a significant increase in funding being paid by the DfE. The final clawback was £1.9m less than expected.
5. The funding for 2025-26 has been adjusted since the DSG budget was set in January as set out in the table below:

**Table 1: DSG Funding Adjustments 2025-26**

<b>DSG 2025/26</b>	<b>Jan-25 Forum £000's</b>	<b>DfE Updates £000's</b>	<b>September 2025/26 £000's</b>
Under 2-year-olds	16,389		16,389
2-year-olds	14,021	(914)	13,107
3- & 4-year-olds	22,525	127	22,652
Pupil Premium	384	78	462
Disability Access Fund	229		229
<b>Total Early Years</b>	<b>53,549</b>	<b>(710)</b>	<b>52,840</b>
Schools National Funding Formula	280,709		280,709
Premises	1,930		1,930
Growth Fund National Formula	2,133		2,133
<b>Total Schools</b>	<b>284,772</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>284,772</b>
<b>High Needs Block</b>	<b>64,472</b>	<b>(534)</b>	<b>63,938</b>
<b>Central School Services Block</b>	<b>2,176</b>	<b>(2)</b>	<b>2,174</b>
<b>Total Funding</b>	<b>404,969</b>	<b>(1,246)</b>	<b>403,724</b>

6. The early years budget for 2025-26 was set using the DfE estimates in December 2024. These have been updated by the DfE to reflect the January 2025 census for children aged 2, 3 and 4 but not those under 2. The estimated funding has reduced by £0.7m. Funding allocations are being updated based on termly counts in 2025-26 with the next adjustment in the autumn to reflect the summer term 2025 census. Final funding for the year will be determined in summer 2026.
7. Funding for children under 2 will remain more uncertain than other age groups as there are no trends to rely on for the expansion to 30 hours for working parents from September 2025.
8. The high needs funding has been reduced by £0.5m in-year to reflect the growth in the number of placements in other council provisions and those hosted by the DfE from the January 2025 census. This import/export adjustment is unusually high for 2025-26, reflecting the significant growth over 2024-25 in the number of children and adults up to age 25 in these provisions, with the number in specialist post-16 institutions doubling since January 2024.
9. The £2,000 reduction for the central school services block reflects that funding for historic commitments was not fully restored to previous levels following the annual application process.

#### High needs forecast 2025-26 at quarter one

10. The year end projection for 2025-26 at quarter one is for a funding gap of £69.1m, compared with a budget of £57.5 as set out in the table below:

**Table 2: High Needs Block Budget 2026-26**

Expenditure Area	2024/25 Actual £000's	2025-26 Quarter One Forecast			Annual Increase £000's
		Budget £000's	Forecast £000's	Variance £000's	
Independent & Non-Maintained (INMSS)	30,248	31,237	36,004	4,767	19%
Post 16 only providers	8,063	11,982	8,080	(3,902)	0%
Special Schools	19,020	18,306	21,185	2,879	11%
Mainstream & Units	15,570	15,522	18,154	2,632	17%
Other provision (below)	13,494	16,612	20,235	3,623	50%
<b>Funding for EHCPs</b>	<b>86,395</b>	<b>93,659</b>	<b>103,659</b>	<b>10,000</b>	<b>20%</b>
Centrally commissioned (including place funding)	17,640	21,226	20,755	(471)	18%
<b>SEND Expenditure</b>	<b>104,036</b>	<b>114,885</b>	<b>124,414</b>	<b>9,529</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Medical and Exclusion</b>	<b>7,870</b>	<b>8,326</b>	<b>9,852</b>	<b>1,526</b>	<b>25%</b>
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>111,906</b>	<b>123,211</b>	<b>134,266</b>	<b>11,055</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>FUNDING</b>	<b>(62,232)</b>	<b>(65,709)</b>	<b>(65,175)</b>	<b>534</b>	<b>5%</b>
<b>FUNDING GAP</b>	<b>49,674</b>	<b>57,502</b>	<b>69,091</b>	<b>11,589</b>	<b>39%</b>

11. There are many assumptions in the projection this early in the financial year with a significant data lag in the system for new cases and changes in provision. An allowance for future cases has been allocated across provider types according to recent trends so individual categories may be less reliable than the overall total.
12. Other EHCP provision includes therapies, bespoke packages, additional special school payments, central SEND budgets for children in pre-schools and the

inclusion fund. The main area contributing to the projected 50% expenditure growth compared with 2024-25 actual expenditure is bespoke packages for children unable to attend school. This has risen in recent years from only £3.7m in 2021-22 to £11.3m last year. The budget was set with an increase of 25% to £14.1m reflecting recent trends with the forecast now ahead of this at £18m. BCP has been identified as an outlier in all benchmarking groups for the number of children educated in this type of provision (all England, South West and Statistical Neighbours) which is significantly impacting on the budget. This has been attributed to insufficient local provision.

13. The number of EHCPs and average placement costs are both increasing ahead of budget with a 12.4% increase in plans seen over 2024-25. The impact of the special education needs improvement strategy and plan is yet to change the trajectory of demand or reduce the average cost of provision.
14. The initiatives underway for early intervention and the establishment of new mainstream bases are costing more in the short term before longer term savings can be realised. Meanwhile, the expectation of future changes in the SEND system may be bringing forward demand from parents concerned their children might lose the right to support if they wait.
15. A comprehensive SEND update report was presented to the council's Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 15 September 2025. A link to the paper is at the end of the report.

### Summary of financial implications

16. The impact of the in-year funding adjustments and high needs expenditure overspend provides a projected deficit of £180.5 by 31 March 2026.

**Table 3: Summary position for Dedicated Schools Grant**

Dedicated Schools Grant	£m
<b>Accumulated deficit 1 April 2025</b>	<b>113.3</b>
Prior year additional funding – early years	(1.9)
Budgeted high needs funding shortfall 2025/26	57.5
High needs funding reduction 2025/26	0.5
High needs overspend 2025/26	11.1
<b>Projected accumulated deficit 31 March 2026</b>	<b>180.5</b>

17. The council's DSG deficit management plan is in the process of being updated for 2026-27 onwards to reflect the most recent position and future service plans.
18. The latest indications from government announcements are that any changes to the system will take many years to unwind the current level of costs for local authorities.

### Summary of legal implications

19. The DSG grant conditions for 2025-26 require that any local authority that has an overall deficit on its DSG account at the end of the 2024-25 financial year must keep the schools forum regularly updated about the authority's DSG account and plans for handling it, including high needs pressures and potential savings.
20. The Secretary of State reserves the right to impose more specific conditions of grant on individual local authorities that have an overall deficit on

their DSG account, where she believes that they are not taking sufficient action to address the situation.

#### **Summary of human resources implications**

21. None

#### **Summary of sustainability impact**

22. None

#### **Summary of public health implications**

23. None

#### **Summary of equality implications**

24. None – there are no decisions from this report.

#### **Summary of risk assessment**

25. The main risk is the growing scale of the accumulated DSG deficit.

#### **Background Papers**

26. Children's Overview and Scrutiny Report - September 2025

[SEND Improvement Update.pdf](#)

27. An appendix in the above report provides a copy of the 16 July 2025 report to Cabinet on the DSG budget pressures and planned actions underway in the service. The content of this appendix to the report is similar to that reported to Schools Forum in June 2025.

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#### **Appendices**

There are no appendices to this report.

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