

SCHOOLS FORUM

MONDAY, 23RD SEPTEMBER, 2024

Present: Geoff Cherrill (Maintained Special) – **Chairman**
Patrick Earnshaw (Academies - Secondary) – **Vice-Chairman**

Esther Curry, Coastal Learning Partnership, Academies - Primary
Kate Curtis, Talbot Primary School, Academies - Primary
Heather Spring, Twynham Priamry, Academies - Primary
Mark Avoth, Bourne Academy - Principal, Academies - Secondary
Michelle Dyer, Avonbourne Academies - Principal, Academies - Secondary
Ben Doyle, Principal - St Peter's School, All Through Academies
Jon Webb, Special Academies
Russell Arnold, The Quay School - Headteacher, Alternative Provision Academy
Chris Barnett, Deputy Head - St Edward's School, Maintained Secondary
Phillip Gavin, Christchurch Learning Centre - Headteacher, Mainstream PRU
Vicky Peters, Priory View Preschool, Early Years
Linda Duly, Cuddles Day Nursery, Early Years
Richard Wharton, C of E Diocese Representative

Also in Attendance: Cllr R Burton and Cllr S Carr-Brown

Officers in attendance: Jo Collis-Heavens, Finance Manager Children's Services
Steve Ellis, Management Accountant Education Services
Cathi Hadley, Corporate Director of Children's Services
Sharon Muldoon, Interim Director of Education
Tanya Smith, Head of School Planning and Admissions
Nicola Webb, Assistant Chief Financial Officer

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from James Sankey and Kate Carter. The following had also resigned from the Forum, Dr Dorian Lewis, Bridgid Hinks and Natasha Ulla.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were none received

3 Election of Chair

Geoff Cherril was elected Chair of the Forum until September 2026.

4 Election of Vice-Chair

Patrick Earnshaw was elected Vice-Chair of the Forum until September 2026.

5 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 6 February 2024.

6 DSG 23-24 Outturn

The Management Accountant Education presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'A' to these Minutes in the Minute Book. The Forum was informed that the report considered the end of year position for the DSG budget 2023-24 at a net in-year deficit of £27.7 million. This was against a budgeted deficit of £27.1 million. The £0.6 million overspend was largely due to the increasing high needs budget, £1.3 million, offset by savings in the school block and early years block. The accumulated deficit had grown as a result, from £35.8 million to £63.5 million at March 2024, with this required to be carried forward and recovered from future DSG allocations.

In relation to early years funding, it was asked what the reasons were for the underspend in this area. It related to finalisation of funding from the previous year. It was noted that the position was laid out within a table in the report. Overall, there was a £90k surplus and it was noted that 99 percent of the money funding had been passed onto providers.

RESOLVED: That the Forum noted the DSG financial position.

It was requested that it be considered at a future meeting if the £90k underspend could it be ringfenced to go back to early years. This was noted and it was confirmed that any discussions around this would normally take place in January.

7 Quarter 1 Budget Monitoring and High Needs Update 2024-25

The Management Accountant for Education Finance and the Interim Director for Education and Skills presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'B' to these Minutes in the Minute Book. A supplementary paper detailing BCP School Reserves was also circulated. The Forum was informed that the BCP Local Area SEND system had significantly changed for the better over the last academic year. This followed the creation of a new SEND Improvement Plan developed to meet the Local Authority's DfE Statutory Direction Notice to Improve. The improvement work which had taken place over the last 10 months had now addressed all historic backlogs and improved the servicing of new assessments and Education Health and Care Plans into the system.

BCP's timeliness in servicing new assessments at 20 weeks was at 97 percent, close to the statutory expectation of 100 percent. A significant improvement from the previous year's activity which stood at 0 percent in August 23 and August 2022 at just 5.6%. It was reported to Cabinet in September, that an unexpected further increase in new EHCP requests since January 2024 had led to a £15.9 million further increase in the annual funding gap budgeted of £28 million (£43.9 million annual funding gap in total). The cumulative deficit on 31 March 2025 was projected to be £107.4 million.

It was noted that point 34 in the supplementary papers – that the local deficit continued to grow. It was also noted that School and Academy balances overall had continued to increase over last 3 years. A matter was raised that this information was published alongside the High Needs deficit paper without any context provided around the figures. There were some comments made regarding the trust totals not showing all of the issues around school and academy balances, for example requiring funds for capital works, requiring funds for unfunded increases in staffing costs and that the impact of the SEND issue was also reflected in the circumstances that schools were facing with their budgets.

The Forum was requesting a dialogue with BCP around data sharing as some schools were not as inclusive for SEND provision as others. It was noted that following discussions at the Education Conference it was proposed that a template would be circulated to schools later in the week with a request for agreement to share information. It was noted that this would be acted on and at this point information was being shared to the extent which it could be. It was suggested that the Forum should consider information sharing as an item at the next meeting. It was expected that this would be resolved but the Forum may send a request to assist in relevant conversations.

The Director for Education and Skills advised that as the paper outlined the progress on the SEND improvement journey had gone well. However, a very large number of needs assessments were received in July, 152, this was unprecedented and would undoubtedly lead to a decrease in overall performance. There had been a significant increase with regards to needs assessment aligned to the safety valve proposals in the public domain.

A change in assessment types had also been seen coming from early years and early-stage primary in greater numbers. The 152 requests received in July had been reviewed to assess the types coming and there had also been reports from SENCOs and Heads of children with high levels of need that they hadn't expected. School Forum was encouraged to look at the innovations proposal around this to gather views. It was also noted that there were higher numbers of young people in specialist post-16 provision.

Issues around the demand for special school responses to consultations was raised and it was noted that it had increased significantly over a number of years.

Early Years struggled to get EHCPs through and were struggling to give them the support they need as do not have the staff available. It was suggested that this may have led to nurseries and pre-schools just turning these children away. Conversely it was noted that intervention was not always necessary so young and was just early development needs.

The Forum had approved a methodology for original school block transfer, which was challenged but the methodology and reasons for this would come back to Forum on an annual basis.

In relation to the conversations which had taken place it was noted that the High Needs system was incredibly complex and there was concern that there was not equity across the system.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

8 Forward Plan

The Forward Plan for the Forum was noted

9 Dates of Future Meetings

Dates for future meetings were noted as follows:

- 18 November 2024
- 13 January 2025
- 23 June 2025

10 Any Other Business

The Chair had not been notified of any other business

Duration of the meeting: 10.00 - 10.45 am

**Chairman at the meeting on
Monday, 23 September 2024**