

BOURNEMOUTH, CHRISTCHURCH AND POOLE COUNCIL
SCHOOLS FORUM

Minutes of the Meeting held on 24 November 2025 at 10.00 am

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

Esther Curry, Coastal Learning Partnership, Academies - Primary
Chris Jackson, Avonwood Primary, Academies - Primary
Chris Moody, CFO - Delta Education Trust, Academies – Primary
Sean Preston, Hamwic Multi-Academy Trust - Chief Financial Officer, Academies - Primary
Mark Avoth, Bourne Academy, Academies - Secondary
Michelle Dyer, Avonbourne Academies, Academies – Secondary
Sian Phillips, Poole High School, Academies - Secondary
Ben Doyle, Principal, St Peter's School, All Through 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
Linda Duly, Cuddles Day Nursery, Early Years
Vicky Peters, Priory View Preschool, Early Years

Also in attendance: Cllr Carr-Brown, Chair, Children's Services O&S Committee

Officers in attendance: Lisa Linscott, Director of Education and Skills
Nicola Webb, Assistant Chief Finance Officer
Tanya Smith, Head of Inclusion, Places and Capital
Alison Enever, SEND and Inclusion Consultant

23. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Heather Spring and Kate Carter.

24. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

25. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 September 2025 were confirmed as a correct record.

26. Schools Forum Reconstitution

The Chair gave an update regarding the reconstitution of the Schools Forum. Members were advised that an updated membership list has been prepared following recent changes. The Chair thanked the Clerk for supporting this process and noted that the revised list will be circulated to all members.

It was confirmed that the Clerk will review the email distribution list to ensure it reflects current membership and remove any previous members. The Forum acknowledged that there remain vacancies for a Maintained Primary representative, a 14–19 representative, a governor representative, and a diocesan representative.

The Chair welcomed new members to the Forum and invited any member requiring further guidance on Forum processes to contact him directly by email.

RESOLVED that:

- **The Forum noted the update on membership and supported the actions proposed to ensure accurate representation.**
- **The Clerk would circulate the updated membership list and review the email distribution list.**

27. Finance Update - Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) 2025-26 Budget Monitoring at Quarter Two

The Assistant Chief Finance Officer presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and appears as Appendix 'A' to these Minutes in the Minute Book.

The Forum was advised that the 2025–26 quarter two budget monitoring position for the DSG, which had been reported to the Council's Cabinet on 26 November, showed a projected increase in the high needs annual funding gap from the budgeted gap of £57.5m to a year-end projection of almost £72m. This reflected higher than expected growth in demand in the later months of the last financial year, which continued unabated, along with a significant increase in average costs of provision.

Other DSG budgets for 2025–26 were forecast to be balanced. The cumulative deficit on 31 March 2026 was projected to be £183m.

During discussion, Members noted the following key points:

- Independent and non-maintained placements have risen significantly, with forecast expenditure of £38.7m, an increase of 28% from budget.
- The Forum expressed concern regarding the sustainability of the current funding model and the continuing upward trajectory of costs.
- Members requested detailed information on the average cost per placement by type, including post-16 and post-19 provision, and a breakdown by need type. **ACTION**

The Assistant Chief Finance Officer confirmed that the statutory override remains in place until March 2028, allowing the deficit to be carried forward without impacting the Council's general fund.

RESOLVED that:

- **The Forum noted the contents of the report and the projected DSG position for 2025–26.**

28. Early Years Single Funding Formula 2026-27 - Set a date for February meeting

The Head of School Planning and Admissions provided a verbal update regarding the Early Years Single Funding Formula.

The Forum was advised that the government announcement on funding rates has not yet been received. As a result, the usual consultation process cannot commence before the Christmas period. The Early Years Subgroup has indicated a preference to consult on actual figures rather than indicative amounts, which will require the consultation to take place in January.

Members were informed that this timing will necessitate a short consultation window and may require an additional meeting of the Schools Forum in early February to consider the outcome and agree on the formula.

It was agreed that the Clerk will arrange a provisional date for an additional meeting in early February 2026. **ACTION**

RESOLVED that:

- **The Forum noted the update and agreed that an additional meeting should be scheduled in early February to consider the Early Years Single Funding Formula.**

29. Update on Resource Allocation

The Director of Education and Skills introduced the item and invited the SEND and Inclusion Consultant to provide an update on the proposed Resource Allocation System (RAS).

The Forum was reminded that the RAS aims to allocate top-up funding fairly and consistently by linking funding to the needs set out in Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). The proposed system offers a standardised approach, increased transparency, and improved consistency across mainstream and special schools.

Members were advised that the implementation process would include data collection, modelling, benchmarking, and consultation on proposed banding and funding levels before the system goes live. It was noted that while the tool determines banding based on need, the funding amounts attached to each band will be locally set during the implementation phase.

During discussion, Members raised the following points:

- The importance of ensuring EHCP quality before implementation.
- A request for feedback from other local authorities currently using the system to understand its impact and benefits.
- The need for clear communication with headteachers and stakeholders throughout the process.

Officers to gather feedback from other local authorities using the RAS and share findings with Forum members. Officers will also liaise with headteachers to ensure engagement and understanding of the proposed changes. **ACTION**

RESOLVED that:

- **The Forum noted the update on the Resource Allocation System and supported the proposed next steps, including consultation on banding and funding levels during implementation.**

30. Update on Place Sufficiency

The Head of Inclusion, Places and Capital presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and appeared as Appendix 'B' to these Minutes in the Minute Book.

This report provided an overview of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Sufficiency Strategy 2024–2026. The SEND Sufficiency Strategy was a key part of the Council's work to deliver a sustainable and stable system, working in partnership to ensure that the needs of children and young people were met, without escalating costs, and supporting delivery of the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Recovery Plan. The strategy was based on updated SEND projections presented in that year's annual school capacity return.

Given the scale of the immediate challenge, the SEND Sufficiency Strategy described the actions that had been taken to respond to pressures in the system over a 2-year period. Details of progress were contained in this report together with a summary of the key themes and strands of work that would be incorporated in an updated SEND and Alternative Provision Sufficiency Strategy that was being developed for publication in May 2026.

The Forum discussed the financial implications of post-16 and post-19 provision and requested detailed information on the average cost of placements, including independent and non-maintained settings, and the proportion of learners in each type of provision. **ACTION**

RESOLVED that the Forum noted the update on the SEND Sufficiency Strategy.

31. Any Other Business

The Forum considered whether future meetings should continue to be held virtually or return to face-to-face format. Members noted that virtual meetings had improved attendance but acknowledged that in-person meetings may allow for more detailed discussion.

The Clerk was asked to conduct a survey of members to determine their preference for meeting format and report back at the next meeting.

ACTION

32. Forward Plan

The Forward Plan was noted.

33. Dates of Future Meetings

Dates for future meetings were noted as follows:

- 19 January 2026
- 22 June 2026
- 21 September 2026
- 16 November 2026

The meeting ended at 10.56 am

CHAIRMAN