

BOURNEMOUTH, CHRISTCHURCH AND POOLE COUNCIL
SCHOOLS FORUM

Minutes of the Meeting held on 19 January 2026 at 10.00 am

Present: Geoff Cherrill (Maintained Special) – Chairman
Patrick Earnshaw (Academies - Secondary) – Vice-Chairman
Kate Carter, TEACH Academies Trust, Academies – Primary
Chris Jackson, Avonwood Primary, Academies - Primary
Chris Moody, CFO - Delta Education Trust, Academies – Primary
Heather Spring, Twynham Primary, Academies – Primary
Sean Preston, Hamwic Multi-Academy Trust - Chief Financial Officer, Academies – Primary
Mark Avoth, Bourne Academy, Academies - Secondary
Sian Phillips, Poole High School, Academies - Secondary
Matthew Woodville, Twynham School, Academies - Secondary
Phil Midworth, Aspirations Academies, Academies - Secondary
Ben Doyle, Principal, St Peter's School, All Through Academies
Russell Arnold, The Quay School - Headteacher, Alternative Provision Academy
Phillip Gavin, Christchurch Learning Centre - Headteacher, Mainstream PRU
Vicky Peters, Priory View Preschool, Early Years

Also in attendance: Cllr R Burton, Portfolio Holder for Children's and Young People
Cllr Carr-Brown, Chair, Children's Services O&S Committee

Officers in attendance: Cathi Hadley, Corporate Director Children's Services
Lisa Linscott, Director of Education and Skills
Tanya Smith, Head of School Planning and Admissions
Nicola Webb, Assistant Chief Finance Officer
Steve Wade, Management Accountant

34. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Chris Barnett (substitute in attendance), Michelle Dyer and Esther Curry.

It was noted that there was a spelling error on the agenda sheet for one of the Schools Forum Members, and the Clerk agreed to update this. **ACTION**

35. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made on this occasion.

36. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 November 2025 were approved as a correct record.

The Chair confirmed that membership updates and Early Years scheduling actions had been completed.

37. Financial Settlement and Draft Budget 2026-27

The Assistant Chief Finance Officer presented the settlement update for 2026–27, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and appears as Appendix 'A' to these Minutes in the Minute Book.

The Schools Forum was advised that the DSG Settlement for 2026–27 had been received on 17 December 2025 and included the following:

- Indicative allocations for the Early Years Block, with an 18% increase (from £9.7m to £62.2m) reflecting higher hourly funding rates across the free entitlements and full-year funding for the expansion of the childcare entitlement for working parents from September 2025.
- Final allocations for the Schools Block based on the October 2025 schools census, with a 1% funding increase (£2.3m to £290m) through the National Funding Formula, reflecting an average 2% rise in factor values and a 1.4% reduction in pupil numbers. The Growth Fund had more than halved to below £1m.
- Final allocations for the ongoing functions within the Central School Services Block of £1.9m (a 1% increase), alongside indicative funding for unavoidable historic commitments.
- Indicative allocations for the High Needs Block, with the NFF suspended for 2026–27 and no increase in funding.

Members were advised that a draft DSG budget for 2026–27 had been provided in the Appendix to support decision-making, with the funding gap for High Needs pupils projected to be £95.7m.

The report also included quarter three budget monitoring for 2025–26, which showed the accumulated DSG deficit was projected at £183.6m by March 2026, rising to £279.3m by March 2027.

During discussion, Members asked about recent Government indications regarding the future treatment of DSG deficits. The Forum noted that the statutory override would continue to March 2028, and that while Government had signalled an intention to assume responsibility for SEND expenditure from 2028–29, Local Authorities would remain responsible for deficits incurred to that point. No further operational detail had been made available.

The Chair confirmed that there was no surplus within the DSG system available for redistribution, and that any previous Early Years surplus had already been allocated in prior years.

RESOLVED that:

- **The Financial Settlement for 2026–27 be noted; and**
- **The budgets were agreed for the central schools services block (CSSB) as detailed in paragraph 27 of the report.**

It was noted that officers had provided the additional information requested previously on average costs of provision.

38. Mainstream School Funding 2026-27

The Assistant Chief Finance Officer 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.

The Schools Forum was advised that the report set out the outcome of applying the 2026–27 National Funding Formula (NFF) to the October 2025 schools census data, together with the options available for the local mainstream school formula arising from the £0.15m shortfall in the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Schools Block funding.

Members were informed of the following:

- Three options had been modelled to address the affordability gap, along with the ability for the Forum to recommend a combination of the available levers.
- A consultation had been undertaken with all schools, including trust-level responses, and the exercise had achieved a high overall response rate.
- The affordability gap had arisen due to reductions in the Growth Fund, increases in pupil characteristic data since the pandemic, and the constraints within the DSG Schools Block.
- The National Per-Pupil Funding Level (NPPFL) could not be reduced, as previous applications to the DfE had not been approved.
- The relative impact of adjustments to the Basic Entitlement, Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) and capping mechanisms was discussed, with Members acknowledging that whilst absolute fairness was not achievable, all schools able to contribute should do so.

The Forum considered the options set out in the report and voted as follows:

- Option 1: 0 votes
- Option 2: 3 votes
- Option 3: 0 votes
- Option D (Combination): 10 votes

There were two abstentions.

Following the vote, Members agreed that officers should model an MFG of –0.25%, with any remaining adjustments applied to the Basic Entitlement to

meet affordability requirements. This approach was considered a reasonable and proportionate way to distribute the shortfall across a wider group of schools. **ACTION**

It was further agreed that one primary and one secondary representative would be selected to work alongside the Chair and the officers to review the modelling outputs prior to wider circulation. **ACTION**

RESOLVED that:

- The Forum recommended a combined approach commencing with an MFG of –0.25%, with consequential adjustments to the Basic Entitlement as required.
- Feedback to Forum Members on the outcome of the modelling would be managed through the Chair in line with the required DfE submission timescales.

It was agreed that the Clerk would circulate the Q&A document summarising Member questions and officer responses and Members also noted that the consultation summary paper could be shared with headteachers. **ACTION**

Post meeting note

Following the Schools Forum on Monday 19th January 2026, Option D, an alternative option, had been requested. This was subsequently modelled, reducing the minimum funding guarantee (MFG) from the NFF 0% to minus 0.25% in per-pupil funding. The impact was on only five schools, so the balance of the shortfall was made up by reducing the basic entitlements equally by 0.06%. The group of Forum members who had volunteered to look at this option agreed that this option showed a more balanced contribution between schools.

This option was now the one that Schools Forum had approved for BCP to submit.

39. **Forward Plan**

The Forward Plan was noted. Members were reminded that the next meeting would take place on 16 February 2026, when the Committee would consider the Early Years Single Funding Formula, Maintained School Services and Central Retention, and any required update on the mainstream funding model, alongside the routine Finance Update.

The Clerk would ensure that the meeting invitation for **16 February 2026** was confirmed for all Members. **ACTION**

40. **Dates of Future Meetings**

The Forum noted the future meeting dates as follows:

- 16 February 2026
- 22 June 2026
- 21 September 2026
- 16 November 2026

There were no further comments on the schedule

41. Any Other Business

There was no further business on this occasion. The Chair thanked Members and officers for their contributions.

The meeting ended at 11.09 am

CHAIRMAN