

# SCHOOLS FORUM



Report subject	<b>Schools Forum Future Meeting Arrangements</b>
Meeting date	22 June 2026
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	<p>The Schools Forum is a statutory body established by the local authority in accordance with the School Forums (England) Regulations 2012. It advises the authority on matters relating to the funding of schools and must operate in line with statutory guidance issued by the Department for Education (DfE).</p> <p>The Forum has, in recent years, operated successfully using virtual meeting arrangements in a hybrid environment.</p> <p>To reflect this established practice and ensure clarity and compliance with governance requirements, it is proposed that the Terms of Reference are updated to formalise meetings as being held remotely. The revised Terms of Reference ensure that arrangements continue to meet statutory expectations, including openness, transparency and public access.</p>
Recommendations	<p><b>It is RECOMMENDED that:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>(a) Future meetings of the Schools Forum are held remotely</b></li><li><b>(b) The revised Terms of Reference at Appendix 1 be approved with regards to remote meetings and arrangements for public attendance</b></li></ul>
Reason for recommendations	<p>To ensure that the Schools Forum continues to operate in accordance with the School Forums (England) Regulations 2012 and associated DfE guidance, whilst reflecting current practice in how meetings are conducted.</p> <p>The proposed updates provide clarity and ensure that governance arrangements remain compliant, transparent and fit for purpose.</p>

Portfolio Holder(s):	Councillor Richard Burton – Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People, Education and Skills
Report Authors	Sarah Culwick – Deputy Head of Democratic Services
Wards	Not applicable
Classification	For Decision

## Background

1. The Schools Forum is a statutory consultative body required to be established and maintained by the local authority under the School Forums (England) Regulations 2012.
2. The Forum must operate in accordance with:
  - The School Forums (England) Regulations 2012; and
  - The Department for Education’s Schools Forums Operational and Good Practice Guide.
3. This framework sets out requirements relating to membership, decision-making, transparency and the conduct of business.
4. While the legislation does not prescribe the format of meetings (i.e. physical or virtual), it requires that the Forum operates openly and transparently, with appropriate arrangements for public access.
5. In recent years, the Forum has successfully operated using virtual meeting arrangements. Feedback has indicated that this approach supports member participation and improves attendance.

## Department for Education Statutory Guidance

6. The Schools Forum Operational and Good Practice Guide (March 2021) states:

*“ The School and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations 2021 amended the Schools Forums (England) (Coronavirus)(Amendment) Regulations 2020 to make permanent provisions to enable schools forum meetings to be held remotely. This includes (but is not limited to) telephone conferencing, video conferencing, live webcast, and live interactive streaming”*

## Public Attendance

7. There has been limited public attendance of the Schools Forum since the formation of BCP Council in 2019, with public attending on a couple of occasions.
8. Should members of the public wish to attend a meeting of the Schools Forum the current provisions within the Terms of Reference require that Democratic Services or the Chair are notified a week in advance in order for appropriate arrangements to be made.

9. The current arrangements for public attendance would be maintained and it is proposed that should a member of the public advise that they wish to attend a meeting in accordance with the Terms of Reference (as set out in Appendix 1) then the meeting would be held in a hybrid environment whereby arrangements would be made for the public to be able to attend in person.

### **Summary of financial implications**

10. There are no financial implications associated with this report.

### **Summary of legal implications**

11. The Schools Forum must be constituted and operated in accordance with the School Forums (England) Regulations 2012 and associated statutory guidance issued by the Department for Education.
12. The legislation does not mandate a specific format for meetings; however, it requires that the Forum conducts its business in an open and transparent manner.
13. The proposed revisions to the Terms of Reference ensure that:
  - Meetings remain accessible to the public;
  - Appropriate notice and publication requirements are maintained; and
  - The Forum continues to operate in a legally compliant manner.

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

14. Holding meetings virtually can support equality and accessibility by reducing barriers to participation for members. Virtual meetings may assist individuals with disabilities or health conditions, caring responsibilities, or mobility challenges, and can reduce the need for travel, associated costs, and time commitments. Online meetings may also support greater flexibility and improve attendance, particularly for those who may otherwise find it difficult to attend in person. Appropriate arrangements will continue to be made to ensure meetings remain accessible, transparent, and inclusive for both members and members of the public.

### **Summary of sustainability impact**

15. Holding meetings virtually supports sustainability by reducing travel and the associated environmental impact, including carbon emissions. It also reduces the need for physical meeting spaces and related resource use, contributing to more efficient and sustainable working practices.

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

16. There are no significant public health implications arising from the proposal. Virtual meetings may support wellbeing by enabling flexible participation and reducing barriers associated with travel or health-related constraints.

### **Summary of equality implications**

17. Holding meetings virtually can support equality and accessibility by reducing barriers to participation for members. Virtual meetings may assist individuals with disabilities or health conditions, caring responsibilities, or mobility challenges, and can reduce

the need for travel, associated costs, and time commitments. Online meetings may also support greater flexibility and improve attendance, particularly for those who may otherwise find it difficult to attend in person. Appropriate arrangements will continue to be made to ensure meetings remain accessible, transparent, and inclusive for both members and members of the public.

### **Summary of risk assessment**

18. The risks associated with the proposal are low. Any potential risks relating to technology or engagement can be mitigated through established procedures and support arrangements. The proposal formalises existing practice and does not affect the statutory role or functions of the Schools Forum.

### **Background papers**

Schools Forum (England) Regulations 2012

Department for Education – Schools Forum Operational and Good Practice Guide (March 2021)

BCP Schools Forum Terms of Reference

### **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Schools Forum Terms of Reference