BOURNEMOUTH, CHRISTCHURCH AND POOLE COUNCIL

SCHOOLS FORUM

Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 June 2026 at 10.00 am

Present:	Geoff Cherrill (Maintained Special) – Chair Kate Carter, TEACH Academies Trust (Academies – Primary) Chris Moody, CFO – Delta Education Trust (Academies – Primary) Chris Jackson, Avonwood Primary (Academies – Primary) Mark Avoth, Bourne Academy (Academies – Secondary) Michelle Dyer, Avonbourne Academies – Principal (Academies – Secondary) Sian Phillips, Poole High School (Academies – Secondary) Russell Arnold, The Quay School – Headteacher (Alternative Provision Academy) Damon Parker, Woodleahouse Day Nursery (Day Nurseries Representative) Phil Midworth, (Academies – Secondary) Chris Barnett, (Maintained – Secondary) Phillip Gavin, (Mainstream PRU) Vicky Peters, (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:	Lisa Linscott, Director of Education and Skills Nicola Webb, Assistant Chief Finance Officer Jeanette York, Head of SEND Assessment and Review

51. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Sean Preston.

52. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

53. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting were reviewed and subject to one clarification, were approved as an accurate record.

It was noted that the recommendations relating to the Early Years Single Funding Formula and the central retention of 3% had been agreed.

It was confirmed that Schools Forum had collectively agreed the retention rates and de-delegation of funding; however, the de-delegation decision could not be formally approved at the meeting due to the absence of maintained primary school representatives.

It was noted that the Scheme for Financing Maintained Schools for the current financial year had been approved by the relevant school representatives.

With consensus of the Forum, the Chair requested that Agenda Item 8 - SEND Service – Exceptional Funding, be considered as the first substantive item of the Forum meeting.

54. SEND Service – Exceptional Funding

The Head of Service for SEND 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 report provided an update on Exceptional Circumstances Funding arrangements for mainstream schools in Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole for 2026/27. It reviewed the 2025/26 funding model, set out the financial and strategic context, and presented revised model options intended to ensure funding was transparent, sustainable and targeted to schools with the highest proportion of pupils with Education, Health and Care Plans. Schools Forum was asked to note the revised models, select the preferred option for 2026/27, and support ongoing review to ensure the approach remains fair, affordable and aligned with SEND reform priorities.

The Forum discussed the Report, including:

- It was clarified that the proposed model, if agreed, could be applied using the summer term census data, with spring term payments having already been made.
- Members supported the proposed percentage thresholds but queried the rationale for retaining the £600,000 exceptional funding envelope and sought assurance that schools exceeding notional SEND budgets would continue to receive appropriate support through existing funding arrangements and inclusion initiatives. It was confirmed that individual circumstances would continue to be considered on a case-by-case basis.
- It was noted that the £600,000 exceptional funding allocation was funded from the High Needs Block and was considered comparable with arrangements used nationally.
- Members emphasised the need for a formal exceptional funding policy to provide clarity and consistency for schools and requested information on historical expenditure against the exceptional funding budget.
- It was confirmed that eligibility calculations would continue to be based on termly census data.
- Concerns were raised about implementing revised arrangements for the summer term, with a preference expressed for implementation from September to allow schools adequate notice and budget certainty. It was agreed that the implementation date would be considered separately.

- Frustration was expressed regarding previous exceptional funding arrangements and the application of national guidance. It was noted that national guidance had existed for some time but had not previously been applied in full to allow schools to retain expected levels of funding while a revised policy was developed.
- An update was provided on the timeliness of Education, Health and Care Needs Assessments, noting a recent decline in performance. Additional investment in locum Educational Psychologists had been made to address delays. Concerns were raised regarding the impact of assessment delays on schools' eligibility for exceptional funding.

The Chair requested Forum Members vote on whether the revised exceptional funding model should be implemented from September 2026 for the 2026/27 academic year, with the existing arrangements remaining in place for the summer term census period

This proposal was supported by the Forum.

The Chair then requested Forum Members to vote on the three proposed funding models. The results of the initial vote were as follows:

• Model One: 1 vote
• Model Two: 3 votes
• Model Three: 3 votes

As Models Two and Three received equal support, a further vote was undertaken between the two options. Model Two received the majority support and was selected as the Forum's preferred option.

The Forum continued to discuss the item and requested the following be undertaken:

- It was requested that the impact of the chosen model be reviewed by the Forum later in the academic year to assess its effectiveness.
- The Forum requested that a formal exceptional funding policy be presented by the September meeting to provide clarity and consistency for schools.
- It was recommended that the policy include guidance on the impact of EHCNA delays and any potential implications for funding eligibility.
- It was confirmed that the exceptional funding allocation had been fully distributed and there was no unallocated funding available from the existing budget envelope.
- Discussion took place regarding historic funding arrangements and the application of previous policies. It was agreed that further discussions would take place outside the meeting to review the issues raised and report back as appropriate.

RESOLVED that Schools Forum:

(a) note the revised Exceptional Circumstances Funding models;
(b) agree the preferred option of model two be implemented for the start of the Autumn 2026/27 term and the 2025/26 funding model be extended for the 2026 summer term; and
(c) support ongoing review to ensure sustainability, fairness and alignment with SEND reform priorities.

Voting: For - Unanimous

55. Schools Forum Future Meeting Arrangements

The Senior Democratic and Overview and Scrutiny 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 a statutory body established by the local authority in accordance with the School Forums (England) Regulations 2012. It advised 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).

The Forum had, in recent years, operated successfully using virtual meeting arrangements in a hybrid environment.

To reflect this established practice and ensure clarity and compliance with governance requirements, it was proposed that the Terms of Reference were updated to formalise meetings as being held remotely. The revised Terms of Reference ensured that arrangements continue to meet statutory expectations, including openness, transparency and public access.

There was no discussion on this item.

RESOLVED that:

(a) Future meetings of the Schools Forum are held remotely; and
(b) the revised Terms of Reference at Appendix 1 be approved with regards to remote meetings and arrangements for public attendance

Voting – For - Unanimous

56. Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Financial Outturn 2025/26

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

The report considered the end of year position for the DSG budget 2025-26. The outturn was an in-year funding gap of £66.6m. This was £9.1m

more than the budget, but an improvement compared with the quarter three forecast.

The budget was set with the expectation that the innovation fund would start to have impact in reducing the demand for education health and care plans (EHCPs) alongside the creation of new SEND places in mainstream schools through capital investment to limit the use of higher cost independent provision. There was delay in both initiatives and the SEND reforms announced by government during the year have further fuelled demand. The result had been greater use than budgeted of high-cost independent school places, alternative provision and bespoke arrangements for children and young people unable to attend any school setting.

The trajectory of the accumulated deficit had therefore continued a significant upward path from £113.3m for March 2025, to almost £180m for March 2026. This deficit was carried forward by the Council in a specific negative reserve by a statutory override that suspends the normal accounting practice.

There was no discussion on this item.

RESOLVED that school's forum note the update on the DSG financial position.

Voting: Nem. Con.

57. Local SEND Reform Plan

The Director of Education and Skills provided a verbal update, including:

- An update was provided on the SEND Reform Plan, which was submitted to the Department for Education (DfE) on 19 June and was progressing through the approval process. Given the scale of the High Needs Block deficit, it was anticipated that the plan would receive scrutiny at the highest levels of the DfE. A decision was expected between September and November, with a revised submission required in February if unsuccessful at the first stage.
- It was noted that the SEND Reform Plan would also be considered through local governance processes, including Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet during September.
- Members were advised that a three-tier capital programme formed part of the SEND Reform Plan and was funded through the High Needs Capital Allocation Grant. Work was underway to develop a longer-term pupil place planning strategy, incorporating annual reviews and strengthened governance arrangements for capital investment.
- It was reported that DfE funding of £2.401 million had been allocated for the Experts at Hand programme for 2026/27. The funding was subject to specific grant conditions, including

requirements on how the majority of funding must be utilised and restrictions on its use within statutory services.

- An update was provided on proposals for a targeted funding model, which would utilise High Needs Block funding to support clusters of schools. Subject to DfE approval of the SEND Reform Plan, the proposal would be presented through the Council's governance process for consideration and approval.
- It was noted that these proposals formed key financial elements of the wider SEND Reform Programme and were intended to support the delivery of sustainable SEND provision across the area.

The Forum discussed the update including:

- It was confirmed that the proposed targeted funding model would provide additional funding and would not replace or reduce any existing funding arrangements.
- Members were advised that implementation of the targeted funding model would require Cabinet approval and would involve an estimated additional High Needs Block investment of approximately £1.5 million per annum.
- It was noted that evidence from other local authorities, including financial and operational impacts, would be presented as part of the business case to support the proposal, with the intention of mitigating future pressures within the High Needs system.
- It was confirmed that the targeted funding model would be included on the Schools Forum forward plan and brought back for further consideration at the September meeting.
- Members were reminded that further information on the SEND Reform Programme had been shared through Headteacher Briefings and other sector communications.

58. BCP Experts at Hand Model

The Director of Education and Skills presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'D' to these Minutes in the Minute Book.

The report provided Schools Forum with an overview of the proposed BCP Experts at Hand partnership model, developed to strengthen early, inclusive and needs-led support for children and young people with SEND across schools and settings. The model was rooted in co-production with children, young people, families, practitioners and partners, and was designed to build confidence and capability within mainstream settings through timely access to specialist expertise, coaching, training, consultation and practical support. It aligned with the Graduated Approach to Inclusion and the emerging cluster-based targeted funding model, creating a coherent locality-based system focused on prevention, early intervention, reduced escalation and improved outcomes.

There was no discussion on this item.

RESOLVED that that Schools Forum notes the development of the BCP Experts at Hand partnership model and its intended alignment with the wider SEND reform programme, the Graduated Approach to Inclusion and the targeted funding cluster model and provides feedback from the perspective / remit of a Schools Forum.

Voting: Nem. Con.

59. Any Other Business

In response to a query, the Chair clarified that a decision on primary school de-delegation had not been taken at the previous meeting due to the absence of maintained primary school representatives. It was subsequently reported that confirmation had been received from maintained primary schools supporting de-delegation, and arrangements would be progressed accordingly.

It was agreed that the de-delegation matter would be recorded as an item of Any Other Business and reflected in the minutes as a follow-up to the previous meeting.

No other items of business had been received.

60. Forward Plan

The Forum considered the forward plan and noted that the SEND Reform Plan would be included on the September agenda, alongside the usual governance and budget monitoring reports.

It was agreed that exceptional circumstances funding would be added to the January agenda to enable a review of the impact of the revised arrangements following the first full term of implementation.

It was noted that the forward plan would continue to be reviewed and updated as required during the year.

The Chair thanked Forum members and officers for their contributions and support throughout the year and noted that the next meeting would take place in September.

61. Dates of Future Meetings

The dates of future meetings were noted.

The meeting ended at 11.03 am

CHAIR