



Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council Children's Services Directorate

A

BARNSLEY SCHOOLS FORUM

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE FORUM HELD ON THURSDAY
17th JULY 2025**

MEETING ATTENDANCE

Name	Role	Present?
Officers /Non schools		
Katharine Knowles (KK)	Strategic Finance Business Partner (BMBC)	
Helen Perrin (HP)	Principal Accountant (BMBC)	✓
Nina Sleight (NS)	Service Director (BMBC)	✓
Anna Turner (AT)	Head of Education and Partnerships (BMBC)	✓
Sue Day (SD)	Head of SEND (BMBC)	✓
Eleanor Cooper (EC)	Governor Services adviser (BMBC)	✓
Lauren firth (LF)	Project Officer (BMBC)	✓

Councillors		
Cllr Ashley Peace (AP)	Councillor (BMBC)	
Cllr Janine Moyes (JM)	Councillor (BMBC)	
Cllr Ken Richardson (KR)	Councillor (BMBC)	✓

Primary Schools (LA)		
Simon Tabbner (ST)	Primary Headteacher	
Jackie Milliner (JM)	Primary Governor	✓

Primary Academy Officers		
Joe Woffinden (JW)	Primary Headteacher	✓
Katie Adamski (KA)	Principal	✓
Victoria Gorton (VG)	Primary Headteacher	

Primary Academy Governors		
Michael Sanderson (CHAIR)	Primary Academy Governor	✓
Peter Bell (PB)	School Governor	✓

Nursery Provision		
Simon Sykes (SS)	Teacher	✓

Early Years Provision		
Mel Szoke (MS)	Childcare Quality & Sufficiency Manager	✓
Secondary School (LA)		
Paul Crook (PC)	Secondary Headteacher	✓
Visseh Pejhan Sykes (VPS)	Secondary Maintained Governor	✓
Secondary Academy Officers		
Victoria Harrison (VH)	HCAT CFO	
Nigel Leeder (NL)	Governor	✓
Amir Arezoo (AA)	Associate Principal	✓
Education for Young People aged 16-19 Years		
Tom Smith (TS)	Head of Service	✓
Special & Alternative Provision		
Josh Greaves (JG) (VICE CHAIR)	Special Schools Headteacher /Board Representative	✓
George Wild (GW)	Springwell Learning Community & Greenacre Special school	✓

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Formal apologies were submitted from Margaret Gostelow, who has now resigned and Katharine Knowles.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

As a serving Chair of a school governing body, Cllr Richardson declared an interest in the content of today's meeting.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM

The minutes of the meeting of the Forum held on the 18th March 2025 were agreed and approved as a correct record.

No other matters arose during consideration of these minutes.

AGENDA ITEMS FOR DECISION:

4. Review of Membership of the Barnsley Schools Forum

Several Schools Forum members' terms of office end in July, and following outreach, many expressed interest in continuing, with additional vacancies advertised. This led to a number of new appointments, which were welcomed as a positive development. Members were asked to note these updates and the fact that some vacancies remain, which will continue to be advertised throughout the academic year. It was also noted that long-standing member Margaret Gostelow has resigned, and the Forum expressed gratitude for her

service, with a suggestion to send a formal letter of thanks. An induction session for new members is planned for the autumn term to support their understanding of the Forum's operations.

Action: To send a formal letter of thanks to Margaret Gostelow for her services to the Schools Forum.

RESOLVED 1: That the outcomes of the recent review of membership be noted and further nominations be sought with a view to filling current vacancies.

5. Nomination of the Vice-Chair

A nomination was received for the position of Vice Chair, with Josh Greaves indicating his willingness to continue in the role. No other nominations were submitted, and the Forum unanimously agreed to appoint Josh as Vice Chair for a two year period. Members noted that his previous experience stepping in as Chair made the appointment a logical and appropriate choice.

Action: To send a formal letter of appointment to Josh Greaves for the position of Vice Chair.

RESOLVED 2: That Mr Josh Greaves be appointed as Vice-Chair of the Barnsley Schools Forum for a period of two years.

AGENDA ITEMS FOR INFORMATION:

6. The group considered the following reports by the Service Director (Finance).

a. Schools Budget (2024/25) Year-end Outturn

The Forum received the outturn report for the 2024/25 schools budget. Members noted the improved financial position compared to earlier forecasts, largely due to additional early years funding received late in the year. Concerns were raised about the number of maintained schools ending the year in deficit, and the need for recovery plans was emphasised. The central retained DSG budget also showed a deficit, primarily driven by pressures in the high needs block and SEND funding. The cumulative DSG deficit remains significant, though partially offset by safety valve payments. The report was noted without further questions.

RESOLVED 3: That the Schools Forum notes the final outturn position for the schools' delegated budget, particularly the carry forward of balances for maintained schools and the reported deficit on the centrally retained DSG budgets.

b. Schools Budget (2025/26) Latest Position and Evaluation of Risks

An update was provided on the current financial year's budget. Members discussed emerging financial risks, including declining surplus balances and a growing number of schools forecasting deficits. The projected increase in

EHCPs and demand for specialist placements was highlighted as a key driver of the rising high needs deficit. Concerns were expressed about the long-term financial sustainability of maintained schools, with projections showing many may face deficits by 2027/28. Additional discussion focused on the impact of out-of-borough placements, reduced birth rates, and limited pupil premium funding, with schools adapting through creative staffing models. It was noted that these challenges are being faced nationally and is not unique to Barnsley. The Forum acknowledged the challenges and agreed to continue monitoring the situation closely.

RESOLVED 4: That the Schools Forum notes the latest DSG funding for schools during 2025-26, including the projected increase in EHCPs and demand for specialist placements, together with long-term financial sustainability positions of Barnsley's maintained schools and the identified financial risks against the schools DSG budgets for the year. The Schools Forum further notes that these challenges are being faced nationally and are not unique to Barnsley.

CONFIDENTIAL AGENDA ITEMS:

7. Special Educational Needs Performance and Finance Report (Quarter 4: 2024/25)

The Forum received an update on SEN performance and financial pressures. It was noted that the number of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) has exceeded 3,000 and continues to rise, contributing significantly to high needs budget pressures. Members discussed the impact of delayed free school and AP school projects, and the mitigation measures taken, including primary schools stepping forward to offer additional resource provision. Fifteen new places are expected in September, with further secondary provision anticipated in the spring term. The statutory override for DSG deficits has been extended to 2027/28, allowing more time for reforms, including a potential White Paper in the Autumn.

Forum members expressed concern about national uncertainty and emphasised the importance of local action. SD confirmed that engagement with providers remains active and that efforts to expand provision are ongoing. The Forum discussed the possibility of writing to the DfE to highlight local challenges, but it was confirmed that the Department is already well informed of Barnsley's situation. The item was noted with appreciation for the continued work and collaboration across the system.

RESOLVED 5:

- **That the Schools Forum notes the progress to date and the actions taken to ensure system-wide improvements to support children and young people with special educational needs, including a disability (SEND);**
- **That the Schools Forum notes the ongoing work to secure children's, young people's and parent/carers voice at all levels of the system;**
- **That the Schools Forum notes the latest financial forecast in respect of the SEND/high needs block, and specifically performance against the Safety Valve Programme action plan and conditions.**

8. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

No urgent business was raised.

9. SCHEDULE OF FUTURE MEETINGS (2025/2026)

The following meeting dates were noted (venue: Boardroom, Westgate Plaza):

- Thursday 23rd October 2025 2.00pm
- Tuesday 9th December 2025 2.00pm
- Thursday 22nd January 2026 2.00pm
- Tuesday 17th March 2026 2.00pm

The Chair commended the strong attendance at the meeting, both in person and online, and encouraged members to attend the January 2026 meeting in person due to the significance of the decisions expected at that time. Members were thanked for their contributions and wished a pleasant summer break.

Action: To book a larger venue for the meeting due to be held on the 22nd January 2026 at 2.00pm.

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(Signed by the Chair of the Barnsley Schools Forum)