



Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council Children's Services Directorate

BARNSLEY SCHOOLS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE FORUM HELD ON TUESDAY 16th July 2026

Meeting Attendance

Name	Role	Present?
Primary School (LA)		
Claire Throssell (CT)	Governor	Apologies
Jackie Milliner (JM)	Governor	
Simon Tabbner (ST)	Headteacher	
Primary Academy		
Joe Woffinden (JW)	Headteacher	✓
Katie Adamski (KA)	Headteacher	✓
Michael Sanderson (CHAIR)	Governor	✓
Victoria Gorton (VG)	Headteacher	
Secondary School (LA)		
Paul Crook (PC)	Headteacher	✓
Secondary Academy		
Nigel Leeder (NL)	Governor	✓
Victoria Harrison (VH)	HCAT CFO	✓
Special & Alternative Provision		
George Wild (GW)	Governor	Apologies
Josh Greaves (JG) (VICE CHAIR)	Headteacher	✓
Nursery Provision		
Simon Sykes (SS)	Leader	Apologies
Early Years Provision		
Connor Halstead (CH) (Delegate for Melanie Szoke)	Early Years Entitlements Funding Manager	
Melanie Szoke (MS)	Childcare Quality & Sufficiency Manager	
Education for Young People aged 16-19 Years		
Tom Smith (TS)	Head of Service	✓

Councillors		
Cllr David Goodard (DG)	Councillor	Apologies

Diocesan		
Nevine Towers (NT)	The Diocese of Sheffield	✓

BMBC Officers		
Anna Turner (AT)	Head of Education and Partnerships	✓
Eleanor Cooper (EC)	Clerk	✓
Helen Perrin (HP)	Principal Accountant	✓
Katharine Knowles (KK)	Strategic Finance Business Partner	Apologies
Lauren Firth (LF)	Clerk	✓
Nina Sleight (NS)	Service Director	Apologies
Peter Bell (PB)	Governor Services Adviser	✓
Susan Day (SD)	Head of SEND	Apologies

1. Welcome and apologies

- The meeting was opened by Josh Greaves, who chaired proceedings until the election of the Chair had been concluded under Agenda Item 4. Members were welcomed to the meeting and apologies were received as recorded.
- Formal apologies were noted from Claire Throssell, George Wild, Simon Sykes, Cllr David Goodard, Katharine Knowles, Nina Sleight and Susan Day.

2. Declarations of interest

- No declarations of interests were raised.

3. Minutes and action log of the previous meeting of the Schools Forum

- The minutes from the previous meeting held on 17th March 2026 were agreed and approved as a correct record of the meeting. No other matters arose during consideration of the minutes.
- Actions were reviewed on the action log.
- **Action 15: To contact Astrea Academy to review their representation on the Schools Forum following Amir Arezoo leaving post.**
Update: The SEND Academy was contacted and a replacement representative has been identified. Emma Glover, a new principal, will join from the October meeting. Action Complete.
- **Action 16: To upload the updated Local Guide to the Barnsley Schools Forum to the Schools Forum website.**
Update: The website has been updated. Further updates will be required following today's changes to Forum representation and will be completed after the meeting. Action Complete.
- **Action 17: To agree communication that will be sent to parents and schools to reduce confusion and reassure families during the transition.**

Update: It was reported that a significant communication programme is already being undertaken through the SEND and AP Board. Clarification will be sought on how this will be rolled out, with a proposal to bring an update to a future Schools Forum meeting. Action closed for the Schools Forum.

4. Election of the Chair

- The Forum considered the election of Chair for the forthcoming term. Members were invited to submit nominations, either through self-nomination or nomination by another Forum member.
- A nomination was received for Michael Sanderson, which was supported by Forum members. No further nominations were submitted. Members eligible to vote indicated their support for the nomination, and Michael Sanderson was duly elected as Chair of the Barnsley Schools Forum for a further two-year term.
- The newly elected Chair thanked members for their support.

Action: Eleanor Cooper to send Michael Sanderson a reappointment letter to confirm his election as the Chair of the Barnsley Schools Forum for a two-year term.

Resolved: Michael Sanderson was elected Chair of the Barnsley Schools Forum for a further two-year term.

5. Schools Budget – 2025-26 Outturn position

- Helen Perrin presented the Schools Budget Outturn Position for 2025/26. Members noted that the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) budget totalled £124.2m, with maintained schools ending the year with a collective surplus balance of £2.7m. The report highlighted continuing financial sustainability concerns for schools arising from increasing cost pressures and declining pupil numbers.
- Members were advised that the centrally retained DSG budget closed the year with an £8.1m deficit, mainly relating to pressures within the High Needs Block, including increased specialist placements, EHCP activity, tuition and alternative provision, and post-16 provision. This resulted in a cumulative DSG deficit of £19.3m.
- Helen Perrin reported that the Safety Valve Programme ended on 1 April 2026 and has been replaced by the High Needs Stability Grant. Members noted that a Local SEND Reform Plan has been submitted to the Department for Education and is awaiting approval, with future funding dependent upon approval of the plan.
- During discussion, members highlighted the relationship between increasing SEND demand, specialist place sufficiency and ongoing pressures within the High Needs Block. It was suggested that a future update on sufficiency arrangements be brought to the Forum to provide assurance regarding the actions being taken to address demand and reduce future pressures on the DSG.

Action: Helen Perrin to provide a future update on the Local SEND Reform Plan and any associated High Needs Stability Grant funding arrangements.

Action: Present the developing Sufficiency Strategy at a future Schools Forum meeting, owner TBC.

Resolved: The Schools Forum noted the 2025/26 outturn position, the current DSG deficit position, and the ongoing work being undertaken through the Local SEND Reform Plan and wider sufficiency activity to address financial pressures.

6. Schools Budgets 2026-27 – Latest Position

- Helen Perrin presented an update on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) funding position and the financial outlook for schools and high needs services. Members were advised that the confirmed DSG allocation for 2026/27 was £130.1m following academy recoupment adjustments. The Schools Block budget stood at £44.0m following a £1.8m transfer to the High Needs Block, while Early Years funding remained stable at £42.6m.
- The Forum heard that maintained schools continue to face significant financial pressures arising from rising costs and falling pupil numbers. While a small overall surplus position remains across maintained schools, projections indicate increasing financial challenges over the medium term. Members noted that support has been provided through the DfE School Resource Management Adviser programme, particularly within the Penistone cluster, with findings due to be reported to a future meeting.
- Attention was drawn to the increasing pressures within the High Needs Block. The original planned deficit of £11.2m had increased to a forecast deficit of £13.4m due to growth in Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), specialist placements, alternative provision and tuition costs. Members were advised that delays in increasing local specialist provision and ongoing demand for out-of-borough placements continued to present significant financial risks.
- A detailed discussion took place regarding the long-term sustainability of school finances. School representatives highlighted that some schools are only maintaining positive budget positions through significant reductions in expenditure and expressed concern that opportunities to make further savings are becoming increasingly limited without impacting educational provision. Officers acknowledged these concerns and confirmed that work is underway to review demographic trends, pupil numbers and future provision requirements as part of wider strategic planning.
- Members also discussed the wider SEND funding position and the impact of the end of the Safety Valve Programme. It was noted that Barnsley has submitted a Local SEND Reform Plan to the Department for Education and is awaiting confirmation of High Needs Stability Grant funding. Whilst this funding may provide some support towards the cumulative DSG deficit, uncertainty remains regarding future national funding arrangements and the longer-term management of deficits. Members emphasised the importance of monitoring the impact of the SEND Reform Plan and strengthening local sufficiency arrangements to reduce reliance on costly out-of-borough placements.
- The Forum recognised the severity of the financial challenges facing both schools and the High Needs Block and supported continued work

through the DSG Management Plan, SEND Reform Plan and local sufficiency initiatives.

Action: Helen Perrin to report back on the outcomes and recommendations arising from the School Resource Management Adviser reviews.

Resolved: The Schools Forum noted the latest DSG funding position, the forecast High Needs deficit, the financial pressures facing maintained schools, and the ongoing work to address these challenges through the SEND Reform Plan, DSG Management Plan and local sufficiency strategy.

7. Record number of children receiving their first-choice school preference

- Anna Turner provided a verbal update on school admissions and school place planning across the borough. Members noted that Barnsley had achieved a strong outcome for school admissions, with 96% of primary pupils and 91% of secondary pupils receiving their first-choice school place. She highlighted this as a positive position for the local authority and schools.
- The Forum heard that the Admissions Service continues to manage significant demand, having processed 206 school admission appeals and 1,990 in-year transfer applications, with a small number of cases remaining in progress. Members were advised that the service had successfully introduced an online in-year transfer system, which has received positive feedback from families and is expected to improve the efficiency of admissions processes moving forward.
- Members discussed the increasing complexity of placing some children who move into the borough or require support through Fair Access arrangements. Anna Turner noted that challenges continue in securing suitable placements for some children with additional needs and that the service is working closely with schools to address these pressures. The Forum also noted the continued growth in Elective Home Education registrations and the ongoing work required to support children who seek to return to mainstream education.
- During discussion, a question was raised regarding children moving between Elective Home Education and school placements. Anna Turner explained that the Council has strengthened its early intervention approach through a range of panels and support arrangements designed to identify issues early, support families and schools, and reduce the likelihood of relationships breaking down to the point where families choose Elective Home Education. Members heard that this preventative approach aligns with the direction of travel of the SEND reforms and aims to provide earlier support around schools and families.

Resolved: The Schools Forum noted the positive admissions outcomes for 2026, including the record proportion of children receiving their first-choice school preference, and welcomed the continued work to improve admissions processes and support children requiring school placements.

8. Any other urgent business

- No urgent business was raised.

9. Future Agenda Items

- The Forum noted the following agenda items that are scheduled for discussion at the forthcoming meeting on 22nd October 2026:
 - Schools Budget: Latest Forecast Position (Quarter 1: 2025/26)
 - Schools Funding Settlement and Arrangements for 2026/27
 - Long-term demographic projections, including the declining birth rate and its impact on school place planning and resource allocation
 - Annual Report of the Barnsley Schools Forum (2024/25) and Local Guide
 - Presentation of Proposals for In-Borough Provision Funding Reallocation

10. Schedule of future meetings (2026)

- The following meeting dates were noted:
 - Thursday 22nd October 2026 - 2:00pm - Boardroom, Westgate Plaza
 - Thursday 17th December 2026 - 2:00pm - Boardroom, Westgate Plaza

Action: Eleanor Cooper to arrange for the July 2027 meeting to be brought forward by one week to improve attendance levels.

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(Signed by the Chair of the Barnsley Schools Forum)