



Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council Children's Services Directorate

BARNSLEY SCHOOLS FORUM

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE FORUM HELD ON THURSDAY
22nd January 2026**

Meeting Attendance

Name	Role	Present?
Primary School (LA)		
Simon Tabbner (ST)	Primary Headteacher	✓
Jackie Milliner (JM)	Primary Governor	✓
Primary Academy		
Joe Woffinden (JW)	Primary Headteacher	✓
Victoria Gorton (VG)	Primary Headteacher	
Katie Adamski (KA)	Primary Headteacher	✓
Michael Sanderson (CHAIR)	Primary Academy Governor	✓
Peter Bell (PB)	Primary Academy Governor	✓
Secondary School (LA)		
Paul Crook (PC)	Secondary Headteacher	✓
Visseh Pejhan Sykes (VPS)	Secondary Maintained Governor	✓
Secondary Academy		
Amir Arezoo (AA)	Associate Principal	✓
Victoria Harrison (VH)	HCAT CFO	✓
Nigel Leeder (NL)	Governor	✓
Special & Alternative Provision		
Josh Greaves (JG) (VICE CHAIR)	Special Schools Headteacher/Board Representative	✓
George Wild (GW)	Special Education Provision Governor	✓
Nursery Provision		
Simon Sykes (SS)	Teacher	✓
Early Years Provision		
Melanie Szoke (MS)	Childcare Quality & Sufficiency Manager	
Education for Young People aged 16-19 Years		
Tom Smith (TS)	Head of Service	Apologies

Councillors		
Cllr Deborah Pearson (DP)	Councillor (BMBC)	Apologies
Cllr Ken Richardson (KR)	Councillor (BMBC)	Apologies

Diocesan		
Nevine Towers (NT)	The Diocese of Sheffield Academies	✓

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

1. Welcome and apologies

- The Chair extended a warm welcome to everyone at the meeting.
- Formal apologies were noted from Helen Perrin, Sue Day, Tom Smith, Nina Sleight, Ken Richardson and Cllr Deborah Pearson.

2. Declarations of interest

- Visseh Pejhan Sykes declared an interest as a Trustee for Wellspring Academy but confirmed is attending the meeting solely as the representative for Penistone Grammar School.
- Kat Knowles declared an interest as Chair of Governors of Silkstone Primary School.
- Nevine Towers declared interests in relation to three academies within DSAT: The Ellis Church of England School, All Saints Academy Darfield, and Elsecar Holy Trinity Church of England School.

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

- The Chair explained that the draft minutes of the meeting of the Forum held on the 18th December had been updated to more fully record the voting details on the issue of the transfer, as the original version lacked details of this information. This change was made after feedback and further reflection. It was confirmed that, aside from the expanded voting record, the minutes remained as originally circulated.
- The minutes were agreed and approved as a correct record of the meeting. Actions were reviewed on the action log. No other matters arose during consideration of the minutes.

4. Schools Budget Out turn Report (Quarter 3: 2025/26)

- Kat Knowles presented the Schools Budget Outturn Report (Quarter 3: 2025/26) on behalf of Helen Perrin (BMBC Principal Accountant).
- The revised Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) budget (excluding academies) is £121.4 million, comprising £62.5 million delegated to schools and £58.9 million centrally retained/managed.
- The latest overall financial risk for 2025/26 is £19.5 million, reflecting the cumulative position plus the forecast 2025/26 central DSG deficit

and the £2.75 million Safety Valve payment; the primary driver is growth in independent and other local authority specialist placements.

- Maintained school surplus balances have reduced compared with 2024/25 (from £3.014 million to a £1.043 million forecast for 2025/26).
- Several primary schools in the Penistone cluster are forecasting 2025/26 deficits, linked to falling pupil numbers and low deprivation funding under the NFF.
- The High Needs Block continues to experience significant cost pressures, including increased INMSS/Other LA placements, higher EHCP numbers and top-up costs, increased tuition/AP demand, and post-16 pressures. A 1% transfer (£1.7 million) from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block is in place as a mitigation.
- The main risk remains growth in specialist placements, including tribunal-directed placements. The SEND deficits statutory override has been extended to 2027/28, with further guidance anticipated in a White Paper expected spring 2026.
- George Wild requested clarification regarding the £4.636 million over-commitment within the High Needs Block. It was confirmed this represents a known budget over-commitment in the 2025/26 plan.
- No further comments or questions were raised.

Resolved: The Schools Budget Outturn Report (Quarter 3: 2025/26) was received and noted by the Forum.

5. Schools Funding: Budget Allocations (2026/27)

- Kat Knowles presented the Schools Funding Budget Allocations for 2026/27.
- The total allocation to Barnsley for 2026/27 is £319.5 million, representing an increase of £18.4 million, split across the schools block, high needs block, early years, and central services.
- The schools block is up £9.0 million, mainly due to the rolling in of grants and national funding formula increases, despite a fall in pupil numbers for the first time.
- Early years funding increases by £7.3 million, the high needs block increases by £1.9 million, and central services by £0.132 million. Pupil premium rates will rise by 2.3%.
- Free school meals (FSM6) funding is set at £1,550 for primary and £1,100 for secondary pupils. Funding for looked-after children is £2,690.
- No major structural changes to the funding system for 2026/27; the local formula must continue to align more closely with the National Funding Formula.
- No comments or questions were raised following the presentation of the report.

Resolved: The Schools Funding: Budget Allocations (2026/27) report was received and noted by the Forum.

6. Schools Block Dedicated Budget (2026/27)

- Kat Knowles presented the Schools Block Dedicated Budget for 2026/27. She explained that a vote was required from the forum on the proposed budget, including the transfer to high needs and the de-

delegation arrangements as part of the Schools Block Dedicated Budget paper.

- Kat Knowles highlighted a typographical error in the paper, which the Chair had noted; references to paragraphs 22 and 24 should have been to paragraphs 23 and 27, but confirmed the content remained unchanged.
- The local funding formula will move at least 10% closer to National Funding Formula (NFF) values, as per guidance. Minimum per pupil funding is set at £5,115 for primary and £6,640 for secondary schools. AWPU rates increase to £4,064 for primary and to £5,686 (KS3) and £6,410 (KS4) for secondary.
- A transfer of 1% (approximately £1.817 million) from the schools block to the high needs block is proposed, subject to DfE approval. This aligns with the DSG management approach and consultation outcomes.
- The actual transfer is being modelled at 0.8% to ensure no individual schools are adversely impacted, pending DfE's decision.
- The de-delegation for teaching staff cover (maternity, etc.) is £104,000. The education functions deduction for school improvement is £96,000. Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) is set at +0%, and growth funding top-slice remains £100,000.
- George Wild requested clarification on the teaching staff cover de-delegation (£104,000), specifically whether this money eventually returns to schools. Kat Knowles explained this covers costs such as maternity cover.
- Peter Bell clarified that only local authority maintained school representatives from their respective sector (primary or secondary) could vote on the Schools Block Dedicated Budget (2026/27) item, and if no agreement was reached, the matter would be referred to the DfE for adjudication.

Outcome of the Vote: Schools Block Dedicated Budget (2026/27)

- The Forum considered the proposals relating to the Schools Block Dedicated Budget for 2026/27, including the de-delegation funding items and the formula budget deduction for education functions.
- For the secondary maintained school representatives, unanimous approval (100% in favour, 0% against) was recorded for all de-delegation items: contingency, free school meals eligibility checks, and teaching staff cover. Secondary representatives also unanimously approved the proposed formula budget deduction for education functions.
- It was noted that the only primary maintained school representatives present for the relevant de-delegation votes were Jackie Milliner and Simon Tabbner. As their votes could not be confirmed during the meeting, it was agreed that these would be formally recorded retrospectively.

Action: Eleanor Cooper to contact Jackie Milliner and Simon Tabbner to confirm their votes on the de-delegation items and the education functions budget deduction, and to record their responses in writing.

Resolved: The Forum received the report and approved the proposed Schools Block Dedicated Budget for 2026/27, including the de-delegation

funding and the formula budget deductions for education functions, as presented.

7. Early Years Block Dedicated Budget (2026/27)

- Kat Knowles presented the Early Years Block Dedicated Budget for 2026/27.
- Funding rates for 3- and 4-year-olds are £6.01 per hour (without termly adjustment) and rates for 2-year-olds is set at £8.40 per hour. There is an adjusted rate for 3- and 4-year-olds of £6.20 applied for 2026/27 to compensate for reduced funded hours under the new census method.
- The DfE is moving to a termly census basis for funding from 2026/27. Adjusted national rates have been introduced for one year to mitigate reductions from lower annual counts and to provide more accurate and responsive funding, protecting local authorities from volatility in pupil numbers.
- The pass-through requirement remains at 97% for all early years entitlements, with 3% retained for central functions.
- Risks identified include participation hours and the impact of census changes, with contingency funding built into the budget modelling to manage these.
- Following discussion noted the complexity of the new census arrangements and asked whether the termly census would help or create volatility. Kat Knowles advised it should improve accuracy and ensure providers are funded for children joining mid-term, with adjustments managed by the local authority.
- Assurance was provided that administrative burden will fall on the local authority, not on providers, and that the aim is to smooth out funding adjustments across the year.

Resolved: The Forum received and noted the Early Years Block Dedicated Budget report for information.

8. Central School Services Budget Block (2026/27)

- Kat Knowles presented the Central School Services Budget Block for 2026/27.
- The block allocation is £1.806 million, an increase of £132,429, mainly due to the rolling in of NIC and SBSG grants into the base allocation, offset slightly by a reduction in pupil numbers.
- Ongoing responsibilities covered include asset management, education welfare, statutory and regulatory duties, schools admissions, Schools Forum administration, and DfE copyright licences.
- Historic commitments for Barnsley Alliance (school improvement) and looked-after children remain at current levels (£395k and £200k respectively).
- The contingency budget will be finalised once the DfE copyright licence fee is confirmed, with £214k to be allocated following a review of spend within the CSSB.
- Josh Greaves asked if the Barnsley Alliance contribution and school improvement/brokerage funding are combined or separate; it was clarified that they relate to different purposes and remain separate budget lines.

- It was clarified that these are for different purposes and are separate budget lines; the Alliance pot is mainly for CPD and targeted school intervention support.

Outcome of the Vote: Central School Services Budget Block (2026/27)

- The Forum unanimously approved the Central School Services Budget Block allocation for 2026/27.

Resolved: The Forum received and noted the Central School Services Budget Block (2026/27) report and approved the Central School Services Budget Block as set out in paragraph 16 of the report.

9. Special Educational Needs Performance and Finance Report (Quarter 2: 2025/26)

- Anna Turner presented the Quarter 2 SEND Performance and Finance Report on behalf of Sue Day.
- The number of children supported with EHCPs was 3,236, with 145 new plans issued and 138 requests for assessment received; although Q2 saw only a net increase of 2 plans, this reflects the period in which many plans are ceased. Demand continues to rise, broadly aligning with national trends.
- 78% of plans were issued within 20 weeks, down from 88% in Quarter 1, but still above the latest national average of 46%.
- Efforts are ongoing to increase local specialist provision: 14 primary resourced provision places are now operational, work is underway to develop 20 additional secondary specialist places by Spring 2026, and proposals for up to 45 new primary specialist places from September 2026 have been submitted.
- There has been a 100% increase in parental requests for specialist settings compared to the previous year, and 53 new out-of-borough independent placements so far in 2025/26, driven by local sufficiency challenges and delays in the national Free School Programme.
- Attendance for SEND Support pupils is 94.2% (primary) and 87.5% (secondary); for pupils with EHCPs, 91.1% (primary) and 80.6% (secondary).
- Welfare Call has been implemented to improve oversight of attendance, especially for out-of-borough placements.
- The Safety Valve agreement provides £22.9 million over five years; however, the current forecast shows an in-year SEND deficit of £6.572 million, an increase of £1.6 million from Quarter 1 and £2.0 million above plan, largely due to increased independent placements and delays in creating local places.
- Josh Greaves raised a question on the average cost of independent placements; it was noted this cost varies significantly and full figures would be shared later.
- Josh Greaves also commended the documentation for the 45-place local provision project and declared an interest as Wellspring had expressed interest in phase one.
- A question was asked about the use of Welfare Call for absence reporting; Anna Turner confirmed that it supports both safeguarding and financial oversight for high-cost placements.

Resolved: The Forum received and noted the Special Educational Needs Performance and Finance Report (Quarter 2: 2025/26).

10. Provisional Education Outcomes in the Borough (2025)

- Anna Turner presented the provisional educational outcomes for 2025.
- Barnsley ranked 3rd nationally for Key Stage 1 Phonics outcomes in 2025, continuing its strong performance in early reading. This follows three consecutive years of being in the national top 10, supported by strong literacy CPD and sector-wide collaboration.
- Barnsley achieved second nationally for the Year 4 Multiplication Tables Check average score, with pupils achieving 50% full marks, significantly above national and regional averages.
- Key Stage 2 combined reading, writing and maths (RWM) outcomes were above the national average, with improvements particularly notable for SEND Support pupils, who saw strong gains across all subjects. However, KS2 EHCP pupil outcomes slightly declined in Maths, Writing and RWM.
- At Key Stage 4, outcomes improved across all key measures. Barnsley's Basics measure (grades 4–9 in English and Maths) was 63.4% and 44.5% for grades 5–9, with the gap to national outcomes continuing to narrow.
- Anna Turner highlighted strong results across several secondary schools and the continued upward trend in attainment across the borough.

Resolved: The Forum received and noted the Provisional Education Outcomes in the Borough (2025) report.

11. Position statement for EHE

- Anna Turner presented the current position and status of the EHE register in Barnsley.
- The local authority continues to go beyond statutory duties, supported by the Every Child in School Everyday plan, which aims for a 30% reduction in EHE over two academic years (15% per year). The four strategic priorities were confirmed as: reducing EHE numbers, improving attendance, reducing suspensions/exclusions and embedding inclusive SEND practice.
- Barnsley's EHE register stood at 822 children as of 24 October 2025, with a breakdown provided showing 70 EHCP, 44 SEN (non-EHCP), 708 non-SEN, 9 Children in Need, and 3 Children on Child Protection Plans.
- Additional funding has been secured through the Great Childhood Ambition initiative, enabling recruitment of three additional Education Welfare Service (EWS) staff (one manager and two EWOs) dedicated to EHE, with a focus on Years 9–11.
- Anna Turner noted the challenge posed by children on Child Protection Plans (CPP) being electively home educated, and referenced anticipated national legislative changes that may restrict this in future.
- The Education Welfare Service visits families at the point of notification to ensure that suitable education is in place, revisits within 10 days if plans are unclear, and issues School Attendance Orders when education is deemed unsuitable.

- Nigel Leeder asked about the authority’s ability to challenge parents of children on CPP and the issue of families “dipping in and out” of EHE. Anna Turner confirmed that each case is reviewed individually, and outlined mechanisms for early intelligence sharing between phases and services.
- Amir Arezoo highlighted the link between EHE and socioeconomic deprivation, and the need to monitor emerging trends. This was acknowledged, reinforcing the seriousness of the issue.
- Anna Turner provided reassurance that the EWS tracks, visits, and challenges cases as appropriate, including escalation through the Integrated Front Door where concerns arise.

Resolved: The Forum received and noted the Position Statement for Elective Home Education (EHE) report

12. Any other urgent business

No urgent business was raised.

13. Future Agenda Items

The Forum noted the following agenda items that are scheduled for discussion at the forthcoming meeting on 17 March 2026.

- SEND & AP sufficiency strategy and the new Mill Special School build
- Presentation of Proposals for In-Borough Provision Funding Reallocation
- Special Educational Needs Performance and Finance Report (Quarter 3: 2025/26)

Anna Turner requested that the newly co-produced Education Improvement Strategy for the Barnsley Schools Alliance be added to the list of future agenda items for information.

Action: Lauren Firth to add the newly co-produced Education Improvement Strategy for the Barnsley Schools Alliance to the forward plan.

14. Schedule of future meetings (2026)

The following meeting dates were noted:

- Tuesday 17th March 2026 – 2.00pm - Boardroom, Westgate Plaza
- Thursday 16th July 2026 - 2:00pm - Boardroom, Westgate Plaza
- Thursday 22nd October 2026 - 2:00pm - Boardroom, Westgate Plaza
- Thursday 17th December 2026 - 2:00pm - Boardroom, Westgate Plaza

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(Signed by the Chair of the Barnsley Schools Forum)