Minutes of: BURY SCHOOLS' FORUM

Date of Meeting: 9 July 2026

Attendance

Early Years
None in Attendance

Maintained Primary
Simon Waddington, Headteacher – Hollins Grundy Primary
Rachel O'Neil Headteacher - Hoyle Nursery School

Maintained Secondary
None in Attendance

Maintained Special
None in attendance

Academy Primary
Kelly Macadam - MAT CEO

Academy Secondary
None in Attendance

Special
None in Attendance

Pupil Referral Unit
None in Attendance

Non-Schools Sector
Helena Thom -NEU
Catherine Ainsley - NASUWT

16 – 19 Education Representative
None in attendance

Children's Services Department
Ben Dunne - Director of Education and Skills
Craig Povey - Strategic Finance Lead (CYP & Schools)

Observer(s)
None in attendance

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

James Gabrielides Head Teacher – Unsworth Primary

Katie Neild	Assistant Headteacher- Millwood School
Carinna Vitti	Principal – Holy Cross College

2 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

It was agreed:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 12 January 2026 be approved as a correct record of the meeting.

3 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT(DSG) POSITION 2025 - 2026

Craig Povey presented a report setting out the DSG position 2025 - 2026.

It was explained that the Council had a deficit position of £19.041 at the beginning of the 2025-26 financial year. During the financial year, the service has worked on making savings where possible, whilst facing increased demand.

Due to the ongoing significant demand for high needs funding, the Council has agreed a revised DSG deficit recovery plan with the Department for Education (DfE), which extends the period for deficit recovery until 2028-29.

The Council's financial accounts have now been prepared with the DSG deficit position at the end of the 2024-25 financial year (pre audit) standing at £20.285m, an increased deficit position of £1.244m.

During 2025-26, the DfE announced the introduction of the High Needs Stability Grant for Autumn 2026, which will fund 90% of the DSG Unusable Reserve at the end of 2025-26. The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) statutory override is a temporary accounting rule in England that allows local authorities to separate DSG deficits (particularly from High Needs/SEND blocks) from their main revenue budgets. This protection prevents councils from breaching their legal duty to set a balanced budget. In accordance with the Statutory override, the unusable reserve is taken from the 2021-22 deficit position of £21.473m

2025-26 Closing School Balances

Nursery 114,016
Primary 78,820
Secondary 1,167,823
Special 929,193
Total 2,289,852

The update included at Appendix 1 is the School Balances detail per Bury School and explained that it should be noted that the number of schools which are in a deficit position has reduced from 12 at the end of 2024 - 25, to 9 at the end of the 2025-26 financial year.

There are 7 schools with a surplus above the recommended maximum percentage of 8% for Nursery, Primary and Special Schools and 5% for High Schools. These schools are shaded blue.

9 schools ended the year with a deficit, and these schools are shaded red. Schools are required to adhere to their budget limits but, in the event of an unplanned deficit occurring, this will be deducted from the following year's budget share. Schools that aren't able to produce a balanced budget for 2026-27 can request approval to set a deficit budget by submitting a

deficit recovery management plan to the Executive Director of Children and Young People. The deficit should normally be recovered within two years. Of the 12 schools that ended 2024-25 with a deficit: 3 recovered the deficit in 2025-26;

7 have an approved deficit recovery plan;
1 has yet to agree a deficit recovery plan;
1 planned to balance in 2025-26, but still ended the year with a deficit. Of the 9 schools ending 2025-26 with a deficit: 7 already have an approved deficit recovery plan, 2 of which are subject to review;

1 plan is currently being prepared before submission for approval;
1 is converting to academy status during the summer term. The Director of Education has introduced Finance Improvement Group meetings with schools facing challenges in setting a balanced budget.

It was agreed:

That the contents of the report be noted

4 BURY'S SCHOOL FORUM REPRESENTATION

Craig Povey presented a report explaining the schools forum member representation in relation to the proportion of maintained schools and academies in the borough.

It was explained that the January 2026 census showed that Bury has 80% of its Primary and Secondary pupils in Academies and 20% in Maintained Schools.

Forum representation also reflects the proportion of Secondary and Primary age children within each category, which confirms Academies with 47% Secondary and 53% Primary, and Maintained Schools with 24% Secondary and 76% Primary.

The report set out the membership from both Maintained and Academy schools in both primary and high schools, PRU, Early Years, 16 – 19 and teachers professional associations.

Due to recent and forthcoming academy conversions, the current representation of Forum needs to be adjusted so that it continues to be representative. The current representation is summarised below. Academies have 11 representatives; 5 Secondary (of which 5 are currently vacant), 5 Primary (of which 1 is currently vacant) and 1 Special.

Maintained Schools have 5 representatives; 1 Secondary (which is currently vacant), 3 Primary (of which 1 is currently vacant) and 1 Special.

Ben Dunne explained that representation would be requested through various different groups, meetings and newsletters to request nominations to the vacant seats on the Forum.

It was agreed:

That the contents of the report be noted.

5 SCHEME FOR FINANCING SCHOOLS

Craig Povey presented a report setting out any proposed revisions to the scheme for financing schools.

It was reported that there are no new directed revisions to the Scheme for 2026-27 and no local amendments.

6 BURY LOCAL AREA SEND MONITORING INSPECTION (Pages 7 - 20)

Ben Dunne provided Schools Forum members with an overview of the Local Area SEND Monitoring Inspection undertaken between 9 and 11 March 2026.

The inspection involved two Ofsted inspectors and one CQC inspector, supported by extensive pre-inspection activity.

Inspectors reviewed over 75 documents, held 17 meetings, engaged with more than 80 professionals, young people and parents/carers, and focused on progress against the six priority areas identified following the February 2024 SEND inspection.

Members were advised that inspectors found the local area had taken effective action across all six priority areas. Positive outcomes highlighted included earlier identification and support for children and young people with SEND, reduced waiting times in some services, the introduction of a "support while waiting" offer, stronger preparation for adulthood planning, improved inclusion of young people's voices in Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), and increased community-based support.

It was acknowledged, however, that improvements were not yet being experienced consistently by all families.

The presentation outlined progress and remaining challenges across each of the six priority areas:

SEND Strategy and Governance

- Stronger governance arrangements had been established, supported by independent oversight through the SEND Improvement and Assurance Board.
- Performance information was being used more effectively to inform decision-making.
- The SEND Strategy was being co-produced and regularly monitored.
- Challenges remained around communication with parents and carers, consistency of co-production arrangements, and gaps in some specialist provision.

Early Identification

- Improvements included the redesign and expansion of the Educational Psychology Service, stronger multi-agency working, enhanced health visiting services and greater use of evidence-based screening tools.
- Challenges continued around long waiting times within neurodevelopmental pathways and access to specialist expertise in some settings.

Support While Waiting

- A range of new support services had been introduced, including the Neurodevelopmental Hub, parent programmes and targeted health interventions.
- Whilst support had improved, waiting times for ADHD and autism assessments remained significant and some families continued to report feeling unsupported during extended waiting periods.

Preparation for Adulthood

- Members heard that clearer transition pathways, stronger planning from Year 9 onwards, and improved tracking arrangements had been implemented.

- Areas requiring further development included improving the quality of preparation for adulthood within older EHCPs, increasing focus on younger children, and addressing limitations in local post-19 provision.

Transitions (0-25)

- Progress had been made in strengthening transition arrangements across education, health and care services, including improved information sharing and guidance for parents and carers.
- However, experiences remained inconsistent for some families, and placement pressures continued pending completion of the SEND Sufficiency Strategy.

Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)

- The overall quality of EHCPs had improved, supported by increased staffing capacity, revised templates and strengthened quality assurance processes.
- Nevertheless, annual review backlogs remained significant, timeliness continued to be inconsistent, and some older plans required updating to improve clarity and preparation for adulthood outcomes.

Looking ahead, Ben advised that the local area would continue its improvement journey through the SEND Reforms Plan and a new three-year strategic delivery plan. Key priorities would include early intervention, inclusive mainstream education, financial sustainability, strong governance and partnership working. Members were informed that a further monitoring inspection was expected in approximately 18 months.

It was agreed:

1. That the Schools Forum note the positive outcome of the SEND Monitoring Inspection and the ongoing programme of improvement across the local area SEND system.

2. That Ben be thanked for the presentation

7 THANKS TO SIMON WADDINGTON

It was reported that this would be the last meeting of Schools' Forum that Simon would attend due to the fact that he was retiring from the post of Head teacher at Hollins Grundy Primary School.

Members expressed their appreciation for Simon's longstanding contribution to the work of the Forum and acknowledged the valuable insight, commitment and support he had provided over many years.

It was agreed:

That Simon be thanked for his enthusiastic support to Schools' Forum over the years and that he be wished a long, happy and well deserved retirement.

COUNCILLOR
Chair

(Note: The meeting started at 4.00 pm and ended at 4.50 pm)