Bury Schools Forum

Tuesday 13 October 2026

Microsoft Teams

Attendance

Early Years (Maintained)
None in Attendance

Maintained Primary

Richard Ainsworth,	Governor (Plus Governors Forum) (S) Chair

Maintained Secondary
None in Attendance

Maintained Special

Farzana Shah	Headteacher - Millwood Primary Special School

Academy Primary
None in attendance

Academy Secondary
None in attendance

Academy Special
None in attendance

Pupil Referral Unit (Academy)

None in attendance

Non-Schools Sector

Helena Thom	NEU
Karen Hopwood	NASUWT
Ben Connor	

16 – 19 Education Representative

None in attendance

Children's Services Department

Matt Dexter	Senior Finance Business – CYP & Schools)
Craig Povey	Strategic Finance Lead – (CYP & Schools)
Damian Kay	Schools Assurance Officer

Observer(s)

None in attendance

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

James Gabrielides	Executive Head – Sunnybank Primary (Vision)
Carina Vitti	Holy Cross College
Rachel O'Neil	Headteacher - Hoyle Nursery School
Kelly Macadam	MAT CEO
Ben Dunne	Director of Education and Skills
Rachael Stirk	Head of Service

2 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

It was agreed:

That, subject to the following adjustments:-

- Record of attendance - that James Gabriellide be recorded as Executive Head at Sunnybank Primary not Unsworth,
- That Minute 3, the deficit position stated as £19.041 was confirmed as £19.043m.

the Minutes of the meeting held on 9 July 2026 be approved as a correct record.

3 MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

Members were provided with an up-to-date membership list for the Forum, which highlighted the current vacancies. It was explained that a number of vacancies remained to be filled, and any support in helping to recruit new members would be greatly appreciated.

It was explained that the BASCL which brought together education leaders including colleges was due to meet the following week.

It was explained that the guidance states that at least one Academy Member must be a representative of mainstream academies, including free schools, University Technical Colleges (UTCs) and Studio Schools. In addition, there must be one representative for each of the following categories, where they exist within the local authority area:

- Special academies, including free schools; and
- Alternative provision academies, including free schools.

Members noted that the current appointment category for Academy Members was recorded as "Any" so could be a head teacher, member of the SLT or Governor. Ideally SLT or governor.

4 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT (DSG) QUARTER 2 DEFICIT POSITION 2026-27, AND LONGER-TERM FORECAST - DRAFT

Matt Dexter presented a report giving an update on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) financial position following the reported DSG deficit of £20.285m as at 31 March 2026. Members were advised that the revised forecast projects an in-year DSG overspend of £13.09m by 31 March 2027, primarily due to ongoing pressures within the High Needs Block (HNB).

This comprises the previously forecast budget gap of £6.81m and additional in-year pressures of £6.28m, resulting in a projected cumulative DSG deficit of £33.375m at 31 March 2027, excluding the HNB Stability Grant.

Members noted that an Early Years funding deduction of £0.88m had been applied by the Department for Education in July 2026, reflecting the underspend reported in the 2025/26 outturn position and balancing funding across financial years.

It was reported that the remaining DSG funding blocks are currently forecast to remain broadly in line with budget. However, significant financial pressures continue within the High Needs Block due to increasing demand for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and rising associated costs, with Department for Education funding not keeping pace with growth in demand.

Members were advised that, during 2025/26, the Department for Education (DfE) announced the introduction of the High Needs Stability Grant (HNSG), which will be payable from Autumn 2026 and is expected to fund 90% of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) unusable reserve balance as at 31 March 2026.

It was explained that the DSG statutory override is a temporary accounting arrangement that allows local authorities to separate DSG deficits from their main revenue budgets, helping councils to meet their statutory requirement to set a balanced budget.

Whilst the grant funding was welcomed, Members were advised that financial pressures relating to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and the High Needs Block (HNB) remain a significant national issue. It was highlighted that the HNB continues to experience a substantial in-year overspend as demand for services continues to increase. A draft DSG forecast was therefore presented, illustrating the projected impact of demand continuing to exceed available resources, even after taking account of the anticipated HNSG funding.

Those present were given the opportunity to ask questions and make comments and the following points were raised:

- Richard Ainsworth referred to the increase in the deficit and asked how it had got to the level that it had so quickly.

It was explained that it was due to the demand led pressures within high needs and the scale of demand increasing, with funding not increasing in line. The HNSG would cover 90% of the deficit but would not affect the in-year position which would continue to rise.

It was reported that the DFE had signed off Bury’s 90% grant and it was anticipated that it would continue for the next two years.

- Farzana Shah referred to the EHCP numbers in Bury being high and asked if there was a longer term plan in place in relation to the numbers.

It was explained that there would most likely be some specialist provision required as not all could be provided in house. Craig also reported that the DfE had signed off the SEND reform plan up to 2030.

Damian explained that a large number of EHCPs were processed very quickly which had created issues, this had reduced since the new Head of Service had been in place. It was also explained that it was expected that the numbers of EHCPs should plateau after a few years.

Matt explained that the DfE wouldn't have provided the HNSG as a national grant if there wasn't an issue across many local authorities.

It was agreed:

1. That the update be noted.

2. That the DSG position is monitored on a monthly basis and that further updates would be provided at the next meeting should there be any significant changes to the forecast position.

5 SCHOOLS AND ACADEMIES FUNDING 2027-28

Teachers' pension employer contributions funding adjustment (Information)

The Forum received a report on school funding arrangements for 2027/28. Members were advised that details of the National Funding Formula (NFF) and associated operational guidance were expected later in the autumn term. The Department for Education had, however, published a summary document outlining the key elements of the 2027/28 mainstream NFF.

Members noted that employer contributions to the Teachers' Pension Scheme would reduce from April 2027 and that corresponding adjustments would be made to school funding through the NFF and local funding formula. It was reported that the changes were intended to be cost-neutral overall, although the impact on individual schools would vary depending on staffing costs.

- Richard Ainsworth asked whether the academies were getting less of a hit than the maintained schools?

It was explained that this was in relation to the financial year timings and the academies would catch up.

- Farzana Shas asked what the position was with special schools.

It was explained that this may become part of the School's Budget Support Grant and would be left to the Local authority to pick up.

Rolling the School Budget Support Grant (SBSG) 26 into the 2027-2028 schools NFF (Information)

The Forum was also informed that the School Budget Support Grant (SBSG) 2026 would be incorporated into the 2027/28 Schools NFF, ensuring that this funding formed part of schools' ongoing core budgets.

Members considered the continuing financial pressures within the High Needs Block (HNB) and were reminded that Schools Forum had previously supported the transfer of Schools Block funding to help mitigate these pressures. It was reported that the Local Authority anticipated the need to utilise the full allowable transfer of up to 0.50% of the Schools Block allocation in 2027/28. Available Schools Block headroom would be utilised first, with any

remaining transfer requirement achieved through adjustments to funding factors within the flexibility allowed by the NFF.

The Forum noted that, based on 2026/27 data, the average impact of a full 0.50% transfer would be approximately £14,738 per school or academy, although the actual impact would vary between settings and would be mitigated in part by NFF protection mechanisms.

Decision:

That the Schools Forum approve the transfer of 0.50% of the Schools Block allocation to the High Needs Block for 2027/28.

Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) 2027/28

The Forum received a report on the proposed Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) for the 2027/28 financial year. Members were advised that the MFG is a mechanism within the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) which protects schools from excessive reductions in per-pupil funding between financial years.

It was reported that, for 2026/27, the MFG had been set at **-0.50%** and that indications from the Department for Education suggested the allowable range for 2027/28 would remain between **-0.50% and 0.00%**. The Local Authority therefore proposed retaining the MFG at **-0.50%**, consistent with the previous year.

Members noted that the proposed level would provide funding protection for schools while maintaining flexibility within the local funding formula. It was also noted that the Local Authority would update Schools Forum should the Department for Education issue guidance that resulted in any significant changes to the anticipated MFG arrangements.

Decision:

That the Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) for 2027/28 be set at -0.50%, subject to any subsequent changes in Department for Education guidance.

Members of the Forum asked that the decisions made be shared with all schools and relevant bodies by correspondence and be shared in the leadership bulletin that all schools received.

6 SEND UPDATE

It was agreed that the update be deferred to a future meeting of the Forum

7 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The dates of the next two meetings of the Schools Forum were reported as:

Thursday 3 December 2026 – 4pm Teams Meeting

Monday 11 January 2027 – 4pm Teams meeting

Note: The meeting started at 4pm and ended at 5.10pm