MINUTES OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM
Held as an online meeting on Wednesday 17 June 2026 at 6:00pm

Membership	Representing
PRESENT (all in remote attendance):	
Governors	Mike Heiser (Chair) Martin Beard Jo Jhally Michael Odumosu
Headteachers	Siobhan Ali Jude Enright Jayne Jardine Michelle Ginty Ranjna Shiyani Nick Cooper
Non School Members	Wioletta Bura
Trade Union	Lucy Cox
Officers	Nigel Chapman, Corporate Director Children, Young People and Community Development Shirley Parks, Director Education, Partnerships and Strategy Ravinder Jassar, Deputy Director Corporate and Financial Planning Folake Olufeko, Head of Finance Roxanna Glennon, Head of Inclusion Abby Shinhmar, Governance Team

1. **Apologies for Absence and Membership**

Apologies for absence were received from Nisha Lingam and Raphael Moss.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

None.

3. **Deputations (if Any)**

None.

4. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the previous meeting held on Thursday 26 February 2026 as a correct record.

5. **Actions arising**

Minutes 26 February 2026 – DSG High Needs Block Budgets 2026-27

Confirmation was provided that in response to the action agreed at the previous meeting, details of the latest forecast and place numbers on which individual school allocations had been based had been provided for members of the Forum.

6. **Appointment of Vice-Chair**

Nominations were sought were sought for the position of Vice-Chair on the Forum.

As no nominations were received, it was **AGREED** that the appointment be included for consideration as an item on the next meeting Forum agenda in November 2026, with officers and the chair advising they would be willing to provide further detail on the nature of the role following the meeting for any interested members of the Forum.

7. **Dedicated Schools Grant Financial Outturn 2025/26**

Folake Olufeko (Head of Finance, Brent Council) introduced a report that set out the final Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) outturn against the budget set for 2025/26. The Forum noted the following key points as part of the update provided:

- The financial year had closed with an in-year DSG deficit of £6.6m in addition to the brought forward deficit of £13.6m from 2024/25, resulting in a cumulative DSG deficit of £20.2m as of 31 March 2026.
- The in-year deficit had mainly been driven by an £8.2m overspend within the High Needs Block, which had been partially offset by an underspend of £1.0m within the Early Years Block, an underspend of just under £0.4m within the Schools Block and an underspend of £0.2m within the Central School Services Block.
- The High Needs Block overspend reflected ongoing pressures relating to independent and residential placements, top-up funding for pupils attending non-maintained special schools and academies and a £3.5m overspend relating to out-of-borough placements. Members were advised that these pressures had been partially mitigated by underspends within top-up funding for pupils attending Brent maintained schools and Additionally Resourced Provisions alongside underspends within SEND services and support services.
- The continuing increase in Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) remained a significant cost driver, with the number of EHCPs increasing from 3,892 in March 2025 to 4,306 in March 2026, representing growth of 10.6%.
- The current year deficit was expected to place further pressure on the 2026/27 financial position, where a deficit of approximately £20m was already forecast.
- The Government had announced proposals to support Local Authorities by funding up to 90% of accumulated DSG deficits of March 2026, with similar arrangements expected to apply for future years.
- Maintained school reserves had increased overall by £1.6m during 2025/26, representing the first increase following previous years of declining balances.

- Of the 54 maintained schools, 31 had increased their reserves whilst 23 had seen reserves decrease.
- Four schools had cleared their deficits during the year, although four additional schools had entered deficit positions, leaving eight schools in deficit as at 31 March 2026.
- Schools in deficit would be required to enter into licensed deficit agreements and recovery plans, with support provided through the Finance and School Effectiveness Teams.
- Members also noted the outline provided in relation to forthcoming developments relating to the expansion of Free School Meal eligibility from September 2026 and the awaited announcement on teachers' pay awards.

The Chair thanked Folake Olufeko for the report and welcomed any questions or comments from the Forum with Nigel Chapman (Corporate Director Children, Young People & Community Development) advised that wider comment and discussions regarding the impact of SEND pressures and the actions being undertaken to address the DSG position would be covered under the SEND Reform Update item.

As no further specific questions or comments were raised, the Forum **RESOLVED** to note the report.

8. **SEND Reform Update**

Roxanna Glennon (Head of Inclusion, Brent Council) supported by Shirley Parks (Director Education, Partnerships and Strategy, Brent Council) provided a verbal update on the development of Brent's SEND Reform Plan and preparations for submission to the Department for Education. The Forum noted the following key points as part of the update provided:

- All top-tier Local Authorities had been required to submit SEND Reform Plans by 19 June 2026 outlining how additional transformation funding and the Experts at Hand programme would be utilised. The plans were intended to support the development of a more inclusive mainstream education system, improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND and create a more financially sustainable system.
- Brent's proposals had been developed through extensive collaboration across education, health, social care and other partner agencies, including housing services with approximately £11m due to be received through the Experts at Hand programme over three years to expand SEND support services. Members were reminded, however, that this funding could not be used to support children and young people already holding an EHCP
- Delivery of the new support model would be based around five geographical clusters aligned with Integrated Neighbourhood Teams within the health service.
- Recruitment was underway for 34 additional specialist posts, with a particular focus on speech, language and communication needs and emotional development and regulation support. Significant work had also been undertaken in partnership with the Integrated Care Board and Imperial College Healthcare partners to develop new approaches to understanding and assessing child development.
- Extensive modelling had been undertaken in seeking to develop the SEND Reform Plan proposals. Whilst improvements in financial sustainability were

expected, officers advised it would not be possible to fully eliminate SEND financial pressures without additional growth in High Needs Block funding.

- Brent continued to experience a distinctive pattern of SEND demand, with a particularly high concentration of EHCPs in the early years age group compared with many neighbouring authorities.
- Draft plans had been submitted to the Department for Education (DfE) on 15 May 2026 and positive feedback had been received on 1 June 2026 with the DfE having welcomed the ambition, design principles and integrated approach contained within the plan whilst also requesting clearer key performance indicators and monitoring arrangements.
- Final plans were scheduled for submission on 18 June 2026 with funding allocated for delivery available from June 2027 and confirmation as to whether Brent's plans had been approved expected in Autumn 2026.
- Approval of the plans remained linked to the Government's proposal to fund up to 90% of historic DSG deficits.
- Members were reminded that the Children and Families Act framework would remain in place until at least 2029, requiring current statutory systems to operate alongside emerging reforms.

The Chair thanked Roxanna Glennon and Shirley Parks for the update with comments then invited from the Forum and the following issues highlighted:

- Reassurance was sought regarding engagement with the DfE during development of the plans. In response, Roxanna Glennon advised that Brent had worked closely with both SEND and financial advisers appointed by the DfE with feedback received on the draft submission having been positive and officers confident that the plans were progressing in a positive way.

- Clarification was sought regarding the future role of Schools Forum and the reporting arrangements linked to the wider reforms. Roxanna Glennon advised that no further guidance had yet been issued regarding the future role of Schools Forum within the national reform programme. Whilst approval of the plans rested with the Local Authority and Integrated Care Board, Brent had also sought involvement from its Parent Carer Forum.

As a further update, Shirley Parks highlighted the significance of the reform programme in relation to the DSG deficit and future funding arrangements. Members were advised that the reforms had been co-designed with schools and would influence the support provided to children and young people in mainstream settings before requests for statutory assessment were made. The proposals would also involve the provision of additional funding to school who would, by December 2026, also be expected to submit their own inclusion plans to the DfE demonstrating how they would use resources to support SEND and inclusive practice.

In relation to future monitoring, it was suggested that a further update be provided to the Forum detailing key milestones, funding arrangements and areas where Schools Forum may need to consider decisions as reforms progressed, which it was suggested could also be aligned with the updates on the DSG Deficit Management Plan.

Nigel Chapman also took the opportunity to thank schools and partners for their contribution to development of the plans, noting that the proposals represented a

genuine partnership approach. He also highlighted the very positive nature of the feedback received from the DfE to date.

Members of the Forum also welcomed the work undertaken to engage schools through cluster discussions and thanked officers for the collaborative approach adopted. In terms of ongoing monitoring of the deficit position and provision of funding support linked to delivery of the agreed plans Folake Olufeko confirmed that Government funding would be contingent upon approval and delivery of the plans and advised that, whilst Brent was forecasting receipt of the full 90% contribution, the DfE retained discretion regarding the final level of support awarded.

With no further comments raised, the Chair thanked all those involved for their efforts in producing the plans and the Forum **RESOLVED**:

(1) To note the SEND Reform update.

(2) That regular monitoring updates continue to be provided for the Forum on the wider national reform programme and delivery of the SEND Reform Plan.

9. **Updated Scheme for Financing Schools & Schools Financial Regulations 2026/27**

Folake Olufeko (Head of Finance, Brent Council) introduced a report which detailed proposed updates to the Scheme for Financing Schools and Schools Financial Regulations for 2026/27. The Forum noted the following key points as part of the update provided:

- Both documents had been updated to reflect the Department for Education's Scheme for Financing Schools guidance published in March 2026.
- The Scheme for Financing Schools for 2026/27 attached in Appendix A had been updated, with the summary of changes itemised in Appendix B. The changes would be immediately effective following Schools Forum approval.
- The Schools Financial Regulations for 2026/27, attached as Appendix C, had been updated, with the summary of changes itemised in Appendix D. The changes would be immediately effective after consultation with Schools Forum.
- One of the key changes identified related to licensed deficit arrangements. Whilst existing arrangements required licensed deficit agreements where schools set unbalanced budgets, the revised scheme would also require schools closing the financial year in deficit to submit a licensed deficit agreement together with a recovery plan. The Forum was advised these plans would be required to demonstrate how schools intended to return to a balanced budget position within an agreed timeframe.

The Chair thanked Folake Olufeko for the report and asked the Forum if they had any questions in relation to the information provided. In noting that approval of the proposed changes to the Scheme for Financing Schools and consultation on the 2026-27 Schools Financial Regulations would only be open to maintained school members on the Schools Forum it was **RESOLVED**, with no further comments having been raised, that the maintained schools' representatives on the Forum:

(1) To approve the amendments to the Scheme for Financing Schools 2026/27.

(2) To note (having been invited to formally comment) the Schools Financial Regulations 2026/27.

9. **Any Other Urgent Business**

None.

10. **Dates of Future Meetings**

Members are asked to note the schedule of dates for meetings of the Schools Forum during the 2025-26 Municipal Year as follows:

- Tuesday 10 November 2026
- Monday 7 December 2026 (additional meeting if required)
- Monday 25 January 2027
- Monday 22 February 2027

These meetings had all been scheduled to be held online starting at 6pm.

The meeting closed at 6:45pm.

Mike Heiser
Chair