

Schools Forum agenda

Date: Thursday 4 December 2025

Time: 4.30pm

Location: Teams

Chair: Pippa Osborne

Members of the Committee

Pippa Osborne (Chair)

Julia Anwar

Dave Farr

Nicky Edwards

Paul Evry

Dave Farr

Kim Garlandr

Florence Hiatt

Aaron Jefferies

David Jenkins

Nicola Jones

Jonathan Keohane

Ruth Laing

Louise Leader

Tania Craig (Deputy Chair)

Ross Newman

Elly Owen

Will Roberts

Fr. Malcolm Strange

Andy Watson

Susie Weaver

David Williams

Sue Wright

Appropriate Officers attending:

Mustafa Salih

Hilary Smith

Caroline Warren

Jo Briscoombe

Michelle Palmer

Deb Luter

Councillors attending:

Ian Boulton

Chris Sivers, Executive Director for the Department for People, Badminton Road Offices, Yate, South Gloucestershire, BS37 5AF, Telephone: (01454) 863253

Enquiries to: Mustafa Salih, Service Director, Resources and Business; Telephone (01454) 862548 or E-mail mustafa.salih@southglos.gov.uk

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Agenda

1. Welcome and introductions
2. Apologies for absence (Pippa Osborne)
3. Declarations of interest (Pippa Osborne)
4. Any other items the Chair decides are urgent (Pippa Osborne)
5. Minutes from 6 November 2025 meeting (Pippa Osborne)
6. Schools funding update (Verbal) (Mustafa Salih)
7. Designated schools grant 2025-2026 quarter 1 (Caroline Warren)
8. Schools in financial difficulty update (Verbal) (Deb Luter)
9. Free breakfast clubs financial position (Report) (Jo Briscombe)
10. Children and education transformation programme update (Verbal) (Mustafa Salih)
11. HWNG update (briefing note) (Susie Weaver)
12. Schools Forum forward plan
13. Any other business – 15 January 2026 meeting now an in-person meeting

South Gloucestershire Schools Forum

Minutes of Meeting held on 6 November 2025

Location: Teams

Chair: Pippa Osborne

Forum Members

Pippa Osborne (Chair)	Headteacher Christ Church Junior School
Julia Anwar	Head of Business Operations, Olympus Academy Trust
Tania Craig	Executive Head Teacher, New Horizons Learning Centre
Nicky Edwards	Early Years representative
Paul Evry	Chief Finance Officer, Mosaic Partnership
Dave Farr	Finance Manager, Leaf Trust
Kim Garland	Headteacher, Brimsham Green Secondary School
Jonathan Keohane	Headteacher Callicroft Primary School/Olympus School
Ruth Laing	Early Years, Leaf Trust (King's Forest Primary)
Ross Newman	CEO of the Leaf Trust representing Academies
Elly Owen	District and Branch Secretary – South Gloucestershire NEU
Andy Watson	Chair of Governors, Hanham Primary Federation
Susie Weaver	Executive Director, Cabot Learning Federation
Sue Wright	Finance Director CSET

Executive Councillors:

Ian Boulton, Cabinet Member - Schools, Skills, Employment and Business

Officers:

Mustafa Salih, Service Director Resources and Business
 Deb Luter, Senior Accountant - People (Children)
 Mike Wheeler, Strategic Lead, Statutory Responsibilities (Item 6)
 Jo Briscoombe, Strategic Lead School Support & Early Years (Item 6)
 Claire Paines, Schools Finance Officer

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Florence Hiatt, David Williams, Will Roberts, David Jenkins, Hilary Smith, Louise Leader

1. **Declarations of interest** – None
2. **Any other items the chair decides are urgent** - None
3. **Minutes from last meeting – 25 September 2025**
 Minutes recorded as a true record.

4. Place planning (report) – Mike Wheeler / Jo Briscoombe

As part of this item, Jo Briscoombe presented Power Point slides on the sufficiency of place planning for Early Years.



Early Years
Sufficiency Update.pdf

Mike Wheeler gave an update on Place Planning via his report already submitted to the Forum.

PO – Are there plans to share the report with the wider public, especially for those schools and governors to know that it is publicly available. For example, through Headteachers' Briefing, governance, Newsletters.

MW – The report will be available on our website and is going through Cabinet in December and once published happy to share after.

PO – Thank you for a thorough and comprehensive report.

5. HNWG (Susie Weaver)

HNWG has not met since 16th September, and the next meeting is on 19th November.

Current focus areas include:

Partnership arrangements and governance, especially in light of the recent OFSTED inspection.

Early Years work under Theme 3.

Cluster 1 work on SEMH (Social, Emotional, and Mental Health) needs and data analysis.

Review of financial standing items and improving information accessibility via newsletters and communications.

PO noted that HNWG originated from the Schools Forum 6–7 years ago to address our approach to supporting SEND needs.

6. Election of Vice Chair

PO acknowledged Dave's longstanding contribution to the Schools Forum, particularly in his role as Vice Chair. This position, while not demanding additional meetings, involves close collaboration with the Chair and others to plan and facilitate meetings effectively and transparently.

A call for expressions of interest in the Vice Chair role was issued, and one response was received. To ensure fairness, all members were invited to express interest if willing.

Due to existing commitments, Susie Weaver was unable to take on the role permanently. However, Tania Craig has expressed interest via email in stepping into the position.

TC - "Dave set a high standard in this role. I've been part of the Forum for some time, took a brief break, and have returned with experience across primary, secondary, and special sectors. I've had the opportunity to engage with many colleagues and am happy to take on the Vice Chair role."

PO - "Tania brings valuable experience across sectors. Dave primarily represented the primary sector, and Tania's broad engagement will be an asset."

Minutes: Proposal and seconding were noted. No formal vote was required. The Forum expressed appreciation to Tania for her willingness to serve.

6. Budget update (Mustafa Salih)

We are currently awaiting information from the Department for Education (DfE). In the meantime, a provisional timetable has been developed, outlining the steps leading to the final determination of the Schools Budget share.

Previously, we received indicative funding formula data from the DfE in July, which allowed for early modelling and preparation. However, this practice appears to have ceased, continuing the change observed last year.

A key report will be presented at the January Schools Forum meeting, detailing the proposed funding for 2026/27. This includes a formal consultation on a block transfer of £2.2 million. This will include analysis demonstrating the impact and importance of this investment in Special Educational Needs (SEN). The report will be available for review, and all schools will be encouraged to share feedback through their Forum representatives as part of the consultation process.

The meeting on 15 January will also address early years funding rates. All dates remain provisional, pending receipt of DfE data expected in mid to late December.

The decision regarding the disapplication request for a block transfer will be presented to Cabinet on 2nd February. Cabinet must consider the Schools Forum's views in arriving at its final decision. Following this, further collaboration with the DfE will be required to complete the APT formula submission. The final deadline involves notifying all schools of their budget shares for the upcoming year. Regarding special school rates, we do not intend to make any changes at this stage and will just follow the requirements set out by the DfE in their High Needs Operational Guides. These guides are not always released concurrently with the general schools settlement in January.

2026/27 DSG TIMELINE

Return to DfE

	Date	Comment
School Census day	02 October 2025	
Final deadline to submit the disapplication request to ensure approval prior to the APT submissions deadline	17 November 2025	Subject to SV team input. Small Schools rent approved at Schools forum 25/09/25
NFF & APT to be released by DfE	Mid November	DfE to confirm dates - last years release date 18/12/24.
DSG allocations to be released	Mid December	DfE to confirm dates - last years release date 18/12/24
School consultation letter to schools	05 January 2026	Mustafa to send a letter to Schools confirming they need to give their views to schools forum representative regarding the school block transfer
Schools Forum Report due	05 January 2026	
Draft Schools budget report for Cabinet	08 January 2026	
Schools Forum	15 January 2026	Final approval for APT submission
High needs place return amendment notice period	Mid Jan26	no date released but usually mid Jan for 2 weeks
Final Schools budget report for Cabinet	22 January 2026	
Prudential Borrowing and termination of employment costs	31 January 2026	Deadline for local authorities to provide evidence of the total value of their ongoing prudential borrowing and termination of employment costs, for this funding to be protected in 2025 to 2026 - CW completes (Central Schools Services Block)
APT Return to DfE	End of Jan 2026	Date not yet confirmed by DfE
Cabinet	02 February 2026	
Confirmation of School funding to be sent out to mainstream maintained schools	28 February 2026	

7. Scheme for Financing Schools Update Report (Deb Luter)

Deb Luter presented an information report covering any directed changes from the DfE.

8. Forward plan

Dec 2025	4	Microsoft Teams	
		Schools Funding Update (Verbal)	Mustafa Salih
		Designated Schools Grant 2025-2026 Quarter 1	Caroline Warren
		Schools in Financial Difficulty update (verbal)	Deb Luter
		Free Breakfast Clubs Financial Position	Jo Briscoombe
		Children and Education Transformation Programme Update (Verbal)	Mustafa Salih
		HNWG Update	Susie Weaver
		AOB	

7. Any other business

Schools Forum will meet in person on Thursday 15 January 2026, from 4:30 to 6:00 PM in Room 0012, Badminton Road Offices, Yate.

Fr. Malcolm: I will continue my role within the Bristol Diocese, having been appointed by the Senior Advisor for Education to support church-school relations. I'll also be contributing to the Mosaic initiative, which will complement my work on the Forum.

PO: That will certainly broaden your perspective in a helpful way to your role on the Forum.

Meeting closed

South Gloucestershire Council

Schools Forum

4 December 2025

Schools Funding Update (Verbal)

South Gloucestershire Council

Schools Forum

4 December 2025

Dedicated Schools Grant 2025/26 Quarter 1

Purpose of Report

1. To update Schools Forum on the Dedicated Schools Grant and Safety Valve position as at Quarter 1 2025/26.

Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Funded budgets

2. The net DSG budget excluding academies and High Needs recoupment, is £174,863k. The DSG is forecasting an outturn overspend position of £57,461k. This arises from a forecast in-year overspend of £20,546k, a forecast Safety Valve payment relating to the DSG recovery plan (£2,000k) and a brought forward deficit balance of £38,915k.
3. Details of the original DSG funding announcement (December 2024) including adjustments for recoupment and Business Rates are provided in table 1 below.

Table 1 – DSG Funding Announcement

DSG Budget	Net £'000
Original Budget Allocation (December 2024)	337,368
Adjustments and Recoupment	
• High needs Block Direct Funding By EFA	-8,568
• Academy Recoupment	-151,230
• Deduction for ESFA Payments relating to Business Rates	-3,078
• Central Block protection Prudential Borrowing and Pensions	371
Total Revised DSG (March 2025)	174,863

4. The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) is divided into four funding blocks: Schools Block, Central Schools Services Block, High Needs Block, and Early Years Block.
5. The forecast under / overspend position for each funding block is provided in table 2 below (see column highlighted green) and the key changes and risks in the subsequent paragraphs.

Table 2 – Funding position by Blocks

Funding by Blocks	Gross Budget	EFA / Other Income Budget	Budget Reserve (Usable Approved Outturn)	Net Budget (DSG)	Gross Exp	EFA / Other Income	Q1 Unusable Reserve (In Year DSG)	Net Exp	Over / (Under)
	£'000s	£'000s	£'000s	£'000s	£'000s	£'000s	£'000s	£'000s	£'000s
Schools Block:									
Total Schools Block - Primary & Secondary Schools (excluding Academies)	79,354	-8,020	0	71,334	79,354	-8,020	0	71,334	0
Central Schools Services Block:									
Total Central Schools Services Block	3,677	-155	0	3,522	3,656	-145	11	3,522	0
High Needs Block:									
Schools & Independent Providers (including Academies)	56,352	-2,263	-6,438	47,651	68,639	-483	-20,505	47,651	0
Central Items	2,126	-307	0	1,819	2,190	-319	-52	1,819	0
Total High Needs Block	58,478	-2,570	-6,438	49,470	70,829	-802	-20,557	49,470	0
Early Years Block:									
Private, Voluntary & Independent Providers	48,882	0	0	48,882	48,910	-28	0	48,882	0
Central Items	1,879	-224	0	1,655	1,872	-217	0	1,655	0
Total Early Years Block	50,761	-224	0	50,537	50,782	-245	0	50,537	0
Total In-Year DSG & EFA Funding	192,270	-10,969	-6,438	174,863	204,621	-9,212	-20,546	174,863	0
Total DSG In Year Overspend									-20,546
DSG Deficit Reserve B/F									-38,915
DSG Safety Valve Agreement 2024-2025 (DfE Contribution £2,000k)									2,000
Total DSG Deficit Reserve									-57,461
DSG Reserve:									
DSG Deficit Reserve B/F from previous years (Unusable Reserve)									£'000s
Approved Budget 2025/26									-38,915
DSG Safety Valve Agreement 2024-2025 - Forecast									-6,438
Request increase draw on DSG Reserve at Quarter 1									2,000
Total DSG Deficit Reserve (Unusable Reserve)									-14,108
									-57,461

Schools Block

6. The Schools Block is forecasting a breakeven position for Quarter 1.

Central Schools Services Block

7. The Central Schools Services Block is forecasting an underspend of £11k for Quarter 1. This is due to the actual charges for copyright licences 2025/26 being less than previously estimated.

Early Years Block

8. The Early Years Block is forecasting a breakeven position for Quarter 1.

High Needs Block vs Safety Valve

9. The High Needs Block is forecasting a £20,557k overspend position for Quarter 1 before applying the £2,000k DSG safety valve payment and the underspend within the

Central Block (£11k). This represents an increase of £12,108k above the latest submitted safety valve target for 2025/2026.

10. The latest safety valve model for 2025/26 was developed using November 2023 assumptions, with an inflationary uplift for 2025/26 prices. It is currently being updated to reflect the rising demand and pressures on the council. Previous forecasts anticipated a reduction in EHCPs within Early Years and Primary settings due to the introduction of the Early Years Inclusion Fund, as well as fewer placements in Independent and Non-Maintained schools, OLA Special Schools, and Resource Bases because of increased local provision. However, actual figures show significant variances, as both demand and costs remain challenging for the Local Authority.

11. The main pressure areas compared to the latest Safety Valve submission to DfE relate to High Needs Support in Primary and Secondary schools (£2,054k), South Gloucestershire Special School Placements (£594k), OLA Special Schools and Resource Base placements (£1,701k), Independent Placements (£4,126k) and Post 16 (£3,716k) these pressures have been partially offset against improvements across South Gloucestershire Resource Bases (£284k) and high needs related areas (£26k). In addition, there is further pressure of £227k arising from adjustments for recoupment and differences between actual funding and the estimates used in the safety valve model. The pressures relate to demand and/or price changes as illustrated in Table 3 and detailed below.

12. High Needs Support in Primary and Secondary schools is showing an additional pressure of £2,054k due to an increase in demand of 336 Education, Health and Care Plans. This has been partially offset by the average weekly price being £14 per week less than the safety valve target.

13. South Gloucestershire Special Schools is showing an additional pressure of £594k due to an increase in demand of 55 places which has been partially mitigated due to a reduction in the average price of £29 per week compared to the safety valve target. The rise in demand is largely due to the opening of Two Bridges and the fact that the phasing assumptions in the safety valve model projected growth over a longer period than the actual numbers now being seen.

14. OLA Special Schools and Resource Bases is showing an additional pressure of £1,701k, due to an increase in demand of 44 additional placements and an increase in the average price of £106 per week compared to the safety valve target.

15. Independent and Non-Maintained Placements is showing an additional pressure of £4,126k, due to an increase in demand of 48 additional placements and an increase in the average price of £97 per week compared to the safety valve target. Whilst local provision has increased there continues to be a lack of placements verse the need, as well as Tribunal cases where parents are requesting independent placements.

16. Post 16 Education (Including post 16 alternative provision) is showing an additional pressure of £3,716k, due to an increase in demand of 67 additional placements and an increase in the average price of £124 per week compared to the safety valve target (see paragraph 22).

17. It should be noted that the Quarter 1 figures include a contingency provision for new placements based on named and unknown placements as well as a provision for possible leavers. When the September transfers and leavers are confirmed, an update on the financial forecast based on the actual changes will be reported to Schools Forum.

Table 3 – High Needs Demand and Price

High Needs Pressure areas	Outturn 2022/23	Outturn 2023/24	Outturn 2024/25	Quarter 1 2025/26
Independent and Non-Maintained Special Schools - Placements No.s	122	130	144	167
Average Weekly Price (38 wks)	£1,614	£1,809	£1,747	£2,022
Statemented Support Provision including SG Pupils in OLA Schools No.	963	1,201	1,431	1,587
Average Weekly Price (38 wks)	£269	£236	£228	£213
Post 16 - FE Independent Specialist Placements	28	37	43	50
Average Weekly Price (38 wks)	£1,302	£1,037	£1,257	£1,431
Post 16 - FE Colleges	295	298	315	311
Average Weekly Price (38 wks)	£184	£198	£163	£220
Post 16 Alternative Provision	57	143	164	215
Average Weekly Price (38 wks)	£558	£433	£615	£706
Post 16 - Total Placements	380	478	522	576
Average Weekly Price (38 wks)	£322	£358	£395	£505
Education other than at School SENHN No.s	13	19	24	20
Average Weekly Price (38 wks)	£515	£521	£580	£866
Other Alternative Provision SENAP No.s	50	33	26	30
Average Weekly Price (38 wks)	£366	£630	£1,207	£1,291
OLA Special Schools No.s	104	109	138	150
Average Weekly Price (38 wks)	£606	£611	£637	£762
Early Years High Needs Support No.s (EHCPs only)	23	30	43	30
Average Weekly Price (38 wks)	£201	£170	£174	£274
Special Schools No.s	517	557	624	684
Average Weekly Price (38 wks)	£577	£616	£618	£615
Resource Bases No.s	145	154	142	138
Average Weekly Price (38 wks)	£583	£471	£497	£408
PLC No.s	170	170	170	138
Average Weekly Price (38 wks)	£622	£603	£597	£601

Safety Valve Message - Quarter 1 Cabinet Report

18. The council has a Safety Valve agreement with the Department for Education (DfE), which at the time of agreement had the aim of achieving an in-year balance between the level of funding received each year for High Needs related activity and expenditure on that activity. Since first agreement, it has become clear that the Safety Valve programme is not delivering on that aim for any local authority, as expenditure continues to increase with increasing demand for support and provision for SEND and control of that demand is beyond what can reasonably be expected of a local authority. In 2024 the Local Government Association and County Councils Network commissioned Isos Partnership to review the SEN system and key findings which support the challenges local authorities in England are currently facing include:

- Since the 2014 reform of the SEND system, EHCPs has risen from 240,183 in 2015 to 575,973 in 2024, an increase of 140%.
- A further 1.2 million children in schools are identified as requiring SEN support, up from 990,000 in 2015.
- Rising costs on SEND outweighs the funding increases.
- Demand is growing faster than capacity can be added.

19. Consequently, local authorities have called for implementation of Reforms to SEND, and it is anticipated that central government will take initial steps toward a Reform programme, which will become clear as part the Education White Paper. In the meantime, the council requires assurance that action is being taken to address inefficiencies within the system and that controls on expenditure are being implemented by officers as much as is reasonably possible. Further for officers to be able to demonstrate that the position on expenditure on any area of activity is at least in line or better than in other local authority areas.

20. As, is the experience nationally, there continues to be an increase in demand for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and with this, an increase in expenditure associated with delivering the support identified in the increased number of plans. Whilst the growth in EHC Plans within South Gloucestershire has increased, we are in line with other Local authorities within the South West. Also worth noting there has been a shift in the timing of requests for EHC needs assessment, which has been influenced by the introduction of the Early Years Inclusion Support Fund. This means that support is available for a child in early years without a plan and therefore requests for assessments are more likely to be when the child is older, with the majority of requests coming forward for children in Years 4 to 7.

21. A key priority is to expand specialist provision within the state-funded maintained special school sector to reduce reliance on costly placements in independent special schools. Plans are already in progress, including the completed expansion of Warmley Park, the expansion of Pegasus, and the opening of Two Bridges Special Free School. Remaining plans include the expansion of New Horizons Special School and the creation

of new Resource Bases in mainstream schools, which are scheduled for completion during the 2026/27 academic year.

22. Another significant increase in expenditure relates to provision for young people with SEND post-16. Given the lack of suitable mainstream specialist provision, there has been greater reliance on high-cost Alternative Provision, which also includes a limited offer for some very complex children and young people. This is also reflecting a wider national challenge.

23. Key to the mitigation locally has been the work undertaken between officers and local education system representative as members of the High Needs Working Group, a sub-group of Schools Forum which includes a comprehensive programme of workstreams designed to improve efficiency and effectiveness of local arrangements for SEND and is delivering financial benefits wherever possible.

Author

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SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE COUNCIL

SCHOOLS FORUM

4 December 2025

Schools in Financial Difficulty Update (Verbal)

SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE COUNCIL

SCHOOLS FORUM

4 December 2025

Free Breakfast Clubs Financial Position (to follow/tabled)

SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE COUNCIL

SCHOOLS FORUM

4 December 2025

Children and Education Transformation Programme Update (Verbal)

South Gloucestershire Council

Schools Forum

4 December 2025

HNWG Update

SCHOOLS FORUM FORWARD PLAN

Dec 2025	4	Microsoft Teams	
		Schools Funding Update (Verbal)	Mustafa Salih
		Designated Schools Grant 2025-2026 Quarter 1	Caroline Warren
		Schools in Financial Difficulty update (verbal)	Deb Luter
		Free Breakfast Clubs Financial Position	Jo Briscoombe
		Children and Education Transformation Programme Update (Verbal)	Mustafa Salih
		HNWG Update	Susie Weaver
		AOB	

Jan 2026	15	In person meeting – Rooms 0012 and 0013 Badminton Road Offices	
		Early Years Funding 2026-2027 (report)	Jo Briscoombe
		Q2 Financial Monitoring report 2025 – 2026 (report)	Caroline Warren
		Setting the Schools Budget 2026 – 2027 (including proposal for £2.2m block transfer) (report)	Mustafa Salih
		Current LA plans for commissioned specialist places 2025 -2026 and future years (update)	Hilary Smith
		Schools in Financial Difficulty Update (report) (yearly update)	Deb Luter

March 2026	12	Microsoft Teams	
		F40 update	Mustafa Salih
		Safety Valve update	Mustafa Salih
		Q3 DSG Report 2024-2025	Caroline Warren
		Growth Funding Policy (update)	Caroline Warren
		Falling Rolls Policy 2024 – 2025 (update)	Caroline Warren
		Place Pressures	Hilary Smith

		High Needs Working Group Update	Susie Weaver
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May 2026	07	Microsoft Teams	
		Safety Valve update	Mustafa Salih
		High Needs Working Group Update (HNWG)	Susie Weaver
		Mainstream Place Numbers update (Verbal)	Hilary Smith
		EHCP Breakdown	Caroline Warren
		Scrutiny report	?

July 2026	2	Microsoft Teams	
		Schools in Financial Difficulty Update (Report) (Maintained Schools & Academies update)	Mustafa Salih
		Funding Update (including School's supplementary grant)	Mustafa Salih
		Outturn Report 2024-2025 verbal update outturn report)	Mustafa Salih
		Financial Regulations for Schools	Justine Poulton
		Scheme for Financing Schools – DfE Directed Changes	Caroline Warren
		High Needs Working Group Update	Susie Weaver

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

15 January 2026 meeting now an in-person meeting. Rooms 0012 and 0013 have been booked.