

DIAMOND SERVICE – FINANCIAL SERVICES SPECIFICATION FOR 2026-27

This document has been prepared and should be read in conjunction with our Service Level Agreement for 2026-27 and the Glossary of Terms.

The Diamond Service includes:	
Bookkeeping General Account and Bank Reconciliation	NB: Starts with P12 from previous financial year recorded in April 2026 to assist with year-end calculations and ends with P11 in March 2027
** BACS files ready for import into Arbor Finance**	**Can be added with no additional hours, please call to discuss**
Accruals generation and maintenance of list	
Payroll entry to Salary Monitor and Accounting package	
Salary Monitor variance analysis	
Comprehensive System Reconciliation and submission of VAT	
Bank Forecast for cashflow	
Year End 2025/26 completion, submission /monitor and 7 further monitors per year, incl. P5 and P9 termly forecasts (<i>dates specified in performance targets below</i>)	NB: This financial contract starts with the completion of the previous year's financial year end for 2025/26. <i>(2026-27 year end completion is in 2027-28 financial year's contract)</i>
Submission of HCC Returns, incl. revised forecasts for Oct 2026 and Feb 2027	To be submitted on Solero
Interim and Final Capital Returns (if applicable)	To be submitted on Solero
Arbor/FMS Alerts and Guidance completion (formerly bulletins)	Housekeeping, coding, funding etc.
Budget Finalisation – May 26	
Budget Submission to Solero - May 26	
Budget Loading and Profiling to Arbor/FMS – May 26	
Budget Support - Preparation - March 27	
Budget updates in Access including mid-year, staffing updates, Alerts and Technical Guide completion (formerly bulletins)	

The following Fund Account services are also available under our Diamond options offer:
Fund Account Bookkeeping (for Arbor accounting package schools only)
Fund Account Audit
The following services can be removed if not required/applicable:
Budget Support - Finalisation May 2026
Budget Support - Preparation March 2027
Interim and Final Capital Returns (including submission via Solero) November 2026 and March 2027

Software and support required (please see the information on the Bronze Contract):
Arbor Finance - main licence – via DMS01 Finance and MIS Framework
Arbor Finance - additional licence (optional) – via DMS01 Finance and MIS Framework
Access Education Budgeting Software
Financial Services Systems Helpdesk Arbor/FMS and Access including CPD Training
NB: Arbor Finance software is available to complete year end in the following financial year only until the end of May. Notice of cancellation for both Arbor Finance and Access Education Budget software for the following year 2027-28 should be received no later than Friday 11th December 2026.

DIAMOND SERVICE – SCHOOL RESPONSIBILITIES

To minimise additional costs to the school/setting and to enable us to support you in meeting stakeholders' requirements, schools/settings must ensure:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All paperwork is stamped, coded to the relevant budget accounts, filed in cheque number or order/payment date order
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All bank statements provided for the relevant period, ensuring that these are sequential. These must include the whole calendar month i.e. from the first to the last date of the month.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Payroll reports authorised in accordance with the delegated authority of the school/setting. The person with relevant responsibility in the school/setting must check the monthly payroll report to ensure that the correct staff are being paid.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central Payments (also known as Biscuit and Central Billing) reports, coded to relevant budget accounts and authorised in accordance with the delegated authority of the school/setting.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HFL Education invoice, coded to relevant budget accounts and authorised in accordance with the delegated authority of the school/setting.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other Direct Debit statements, coded to relevant budget accounts and authorised in accordance with the delegated authority of the school/setting.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VAT receipts/invoices to support expenditure in respect of expenses, purchases via school/setting commercial card and any other purchases, coded to relevant budget accounts and authorised in accordance with the delegated authority of the school/setting.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Details and supporting documents provided for any electronic bank payments made, including future dated payments.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summary reports from electronic income collection, for example for parent payments, coded to relevant budget accounts.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goods and services covered by any invoice must be checked for compliance in the areas of quality, quantity, and price. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school/setting must provide information on commitments made i.e. orders authorised. This may be a list on an Excel spreadsheet of orders raised using your purchase orders. However, we encourage the use of purchase orders generated within the accounting software, to enable more detailed financial monitoring. CPD training is available to ensure accurate purchase order entry to Arbor. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OneDrive is used to submit your documents to the Bookkeeping Service electronically. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BACS – We can also support schools with BACS payments, just upload your invoices before payment, and we'll create a BACS file that's ready to import directly into your online banking system. This process ensures the planned spend is shown against your budget straight away, giving you real-time visibility of your school's finances. |

Compliance

Financial Services provides advice on compliance with HCC's specifications and appropriate finance regulations, for example, VAT procedures. Any technical VAT queries must be referred to HCC.

NB: *Our services do not remove the responsibility of the school/setting for setting a balanced budget, maintaining and storing its own financial records on site and for the school/setting's compliance with all reporting standards and regulations. A pre-requisite of this service is that schools and settings are compliant with the Schools Financial Value Standard (SFVS) and HCC's Scheme for Financing Schools. If preparatory work is not done before our Finance Business Partner appointment, we cannot guarantee that work can be completed within the timescale and costs agreed.*

Following our appointment, all system reports, the budget monitor and submissions for HCC must be signed by the Headteacher and appropriately filed. Reports should be shared with your governors in accordance with the terms of the SFVS and your Schedule of Financial Delegation.

Financial Advice to Headteacher or nominated officer

- Provide advice on Budget and financial issues affecting schools/settings.
- Provide Headteacher/nominated officer briefing (as part of the scheduled appointment), including an update on any financial developments affecting schools/settings.
- Provide a summary work report that sets out key aspects about the appointment, the plan for the next appointment and any key issues that you should be aware of.

Performance targets

Our service aim is to provide a monitoring report to the following schedule:

Month for monitoring	Report deadline
Period 11/12 - Feb/March Year End for 2025/2026	Year-end completed to agreed HCC April deadline
Period 1/2 - April and May	June 30 th
Period 3 - June	July 31 st
Period 4/5 - July and August revised forecast	October 15 th
Period 6 - September	November 10 th
Period 7 - October	December 10 th
Period 8/9 - November and December revised forecast	February 15 th
Period 10 - January	March 10 th

NB: Year End work for 2026/2027 is the start of the new Financial Contract as the work takes place in April 2027 of the next financial year (2027/2028).

Revised forecast

The preparation and review, in accordance with HCC deadlines, of the termly forecast to HCC. Our termly forecast appointment provides an in-depth review of your budget position and a revised outturn of the expected budget position of your school/setting at the end of the financial year.

Forecast for period to	HCC deadline
P5 – 31 st August 2026	15 th October 2026
P9 – 31 st December 2026	15 th February 2027

Submission of Financial Returns to HCC

Submission of all HCC returns remains the responsibility of the school/setting, and Finance Business Partners must receive authorisation from the school/setting of final figures prior to submission.

Capital Returns

A Mid-Year submission and Final submission (just before Year End) is required to be provided to HCC to detail the capital spent or committed for that year. The dates are published on Herts Grid and detailed in Alerts and Technical Guides (formerly bulletins) and reminders sent by the Financial Services Team.

Service Delivery Method

- The Bookkeeping Service is a digital only service supported by OneDrive with schools.
- The Monitoring Service is delivered digitally (with a few exceptions for face to face delivery for specific schools at a higher hourly rate).
- The Budgeting Service is delivered digitally with some allowance for a half day face to face meeting on occasion for more complex situations.

Service Delivery Method	Hourly Rate	PAYU rate
Bookkeeping digital	£59 – price held	£73
Monitoring and budgeting digital	£62.50	£76
Face-to-Face (includes budget preparation)	£78	£85

NB: All schools are now working to the published standard rate as detailed above for the Diamond Service. Where Financial Services has delivered unscheduled hours in addition to the annual plan, Financial Services reserves the right to charge these additional hours at the PAYU rate, to reflect the impact on Financial Services' schedules and the knock-on impact to other schools/settings.

Unused planned hours are not refundable.

If Financial Services needs to change your Finance Business Partner (FBP), your new FBP will be introduced to you prior to starting with your school/setting. A new Finance Business Partner receives in-depth training over many months with a mentor coaching them. Additional free hours will be allocated to the school/setting to reflect the additional time that may be required.

- Where a school/setting is using FMS6 and requires a full Bursary Service, we will assign an additional Finance Business Partner to complete transactional work. All hours for the contract will be charged at £78 per hour for Face to Face delivery.

We strongly recommend that schools/settings using FMS6 carry out their own transactional processes.

Access to services

Financial Services seeks to book all Finance Business Partner appointments for the autumn term by 31st July, for the spring term by 31st December and 31st March for the summer term. Your summer term's appointments will be subject to any changes to your contract renewal in the spring.

Contracts run annually from 1st April to 31st March.

NB: Financial Services work one month in arrears and therefore work on your P12 year-end accounts falls into the new financial year's contract as does finalisation of your budget software. Should you wish to change contract, please discuss any timing implications with your Service Delivery Manager via fs.contracts@hfleducation.org.

Licences

Licences for Arbor Finance are purchased via DMS01 MIS and the HFL Education Finance Framework. The software provider requires orders and full payment for the period 1st April to 31st March to be received in advance of the start of the financial year, therefore, schools/settings are unable to terminate licences part-way through the year. If you wish to terminate any of your Arbor Finance licences for the 2027/28 financial year, you must notify Financial Services no later than Friday 11th December 2026. For FMS users, please liaise with the ParentPay Group (previously ESS) re: their terms and conditions.

For schools who are converting to academy or federating, there is still a requirement to close down the old finance systems, have them checked and be able to download the information contained in them for the school to retain for 7 years. There needs to be at least 5 months left on a licence after conversion/federation to enable the final accounts to be produced, checked and updated if necessary.

Charges for this service

We charge for our services based on hours taken to deliver the service. We will send you a draft contract in the spring term, based on the planned hours for your service. We will have estimated these hours based on experience of your contract, adjusted for any known changes. There will be a separate amount for bookkeeping, monitoring and budgeting.

Schools/settings can and should take this opportunity to discuss and review these hours, or change their contract, with their Service Delivery Manager at fs.contracts@hfleducation.org.

You will receive an options form alongside your draft HFL contract. Please return this form **ASAP** to confirm you wish to remain on the same contract - there is a 'no change' tick box or alternatively notify us should you wish to add to or change your contract. Please use fs.contracts@hfleducation.org. **The final date for notification is Monday 2nd March 2026.**