

Bristol Schools Forum

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday, 22nd September, 2020

at 5.00 pm at Virtual Meeting - Zoom Committee Meeting with Public Access via YouTube

Present:

Karen Brown	Maintained Secondary Governor Rep, St Mary Redcliffe & Temple
William Brown	Non School Member, NASUWT and NEU
Trish Dodds	Academy Primary Governor Rep, Fishponds Academy
Simon Eakins	Academy Primary Head Rep, Cathedral Primary
Simon Holmes	Nursery Head Rep, St Phillips Marsh Nursery
Sarah Lovell	Academy Secondary Headteacher Rep, Cabot Learning Federation
Kate Matheson	Maintained Primary Governor Rep, St Barnabas Primary
Garry Maher	Non School Member, Diocese of Clifton Rep
Aileen Morrison	Pupil Referral Unit Rep, St Matthias Park
Steve Mills	Non School Member, UNISON
Sam Packer	Private Voluntary Independent (PVI) Early Years Rep
Ruth Pickersgill	Academy Secondary Governor Rep, City Academy
Chris Pring	Maintained Primary Headteacher Rep, Cabot Primary
Cedric Sanguignol	Maintained Primary Governor Rep, Bishop Road Primary
Simon Shaw	Maintained Secondary Head Rep, St Mary Redcliffe & Temple
Christine Townsend	Maintained Primary Governor Rep, Whitehall Primary
Stephanie Williams	Academy Primary Head Rep, Bannerman Road Community Academy

In attendance from Bristol City Council:

Graham Booth	Finance Manager
Corrina Haskins	Clerk to Schools Forum
Alison Hurley	Director of Education & Skills
Denise Murray	Director of Finance
Travis Young	Corporate Finance

	Action
1. Welcome In the absence of the current Chair, Carew Reynell, Sarah Lovell welcomed everyone to the meeting and advised that Carew's term of office was due to expire next month and this would have been his last meeting. On behalf of members and officers, she thanked Carew for his work in chairing and supporting Bristol Schools Forum.	
2. Election of Chair Members were asked to elect a new Chair and the Clerk advised that there had been two nominations, Simon Eakins and Christine Townsend. Following a ballot, the Clerk announced Christine Townsend had been elected. RESOLVED that Christine Townsend be elected Chair of Bristol Schools Forum for 2020/21-2021/22. Christine Townsend took the Chair for the remainder of the meeting.	

3. Election of Vice-Chair

The Clerk asked for nominations for Vice-Chair and Sarah Lovell put her name forward. There were no other nominations and it was;

RESOLVED that Sarah Lovell be elected as Vice-Chair for 2020/21-2021/22.

4. Forum Standing Business

a. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from:

Carew Reynell (Secondary Academy Governor); Rob Davies (Nursery Governor Rep, Speedwell and Little Hayes Nursery Federation) and Emma Richards (Special School Head Rep, Claremont School), Cllr Anna Keen (Cabinet Member: Education and Skills, Bristol City Council).

b. Quorate

The Clerk confirmed the meeting was quorate.

c. Resignations

The Clerk confirmed that Carew Reynell's term of office was due to expire in October and he would not be seeking re-election.

d. Appointment of New Members

There were no new members appointed.

e. Notification of Vacancies

The Clerk advised of the following Schools Forum Vacancies:

- Two Primary Academy Heads
- Two Primary Maintained Heads
- Two Primary Academy Governors
- Two Secondary Academy Heads

f. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED - that the minutes be confirmed as a correct record subject to the following amendment:

Page 3 – ITrent:

"moved to the new system" to be changed to "moved to a new external payroll provider"

Matters Arising

In reference to the delegated year end balances, CP questioned whether maternity was spent to budget and was advised that a reserve was used to balance the budget. It was agreed that further information be provided in future to show where there was a shortfall to give an overall picture of the budget position.

6. Update from Finance Sub-Group

GB reported back from the Finance Sub-Group of 25th August as follows:

- The group discussed the latest budget monitor;
- At the time of the meeting the information relating to funding formula was not available but indicative figures had now been received;
- The Group agreed that it did not want to move away from the National Funding Formula;
- The Group discussed the growth fund; de-delegation and the High Needs Transformation Programme.

7. Verbal update from Director of Education and Skills

AH gave a verbal update as follows:

- Acknowledged the current pressure in schools as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic and thanked everyone for attending the meeting;
- Bristol was beginning to see positive cases of Covid 19 in schools and there would be an impact on school budgets in terms of supply cover where teachers were self-isolating;
- Early Years settings/post-16 providers had been particularly affected by the financial implications of Covid 19 as they did not qualify for the additional funding being provided by government;

Alternative Learning Provision Review:

- Work had begun and an independent person had been appointed to run the review which would take place over the next two months;
- A key ambition was to gain a full understanding of how alternative learning and early intervention bases were being used across the city;
- The Forum would be kept updated on the review.

Y7 Sufficiency:

- The bulge in school numbers would peak in Year 7 in September 2021;
- The opening of the new free school, Oasis Temple Quarter, would be delayed as the planning application approved by the Council in August could be called in by the Secretary of State;
- Alternative plans were being worked on for places for Year 7 students in September 2021 and Schools Forum would be updated at future meetings.

Composition of the Schools Forum

- This had been delayed due to other priorities and a report would be brought back in January 2021.

Members expressed concern about the ongoing costs associated with the Covid pandemic, which were continuing to escalate to meet demands e.g. for cleaning and supply cover. DM acknowledged the challenges being faced by schools and undertook to make representations about the ongoing pressures and the lack of additional funding for early years/post 16 providers to the Department for Education/Treasury.

SH undertook to liaise with Nursery Heads with a view to providing information to DM about the financial impact for early years' providers.

Members also raised a concern that the figures in the census may be affected by lower than usual attendance and limited meal options and that this would have an impact on the grant for next year. DM asked for further information to be provided so she could include this in her representations to government.

In response to a question about what type of virtual learning platform/portals would be used by schools in the event of partial closures, AH confirmed that this was for individual schools to

determine, however she acknowledged that more work was required to address the issue of digital poverty across the city and ensure that all children could access virtual learning.

Members questioned how the government “catch up” funding was allocated and AH confirmed that this was allocated directly to schools and it was a formula funding based on the size of the school. In terms of timing, GB undertook to advise when the funding would be processed to schools.

In response to a question about attendance, AH confirmed that this continued to be a high priority and the local authority was working with schools and families to ensure that students were attending school.

RESOLVED that the verbal update be noted.

8. DSG Budget Monitor 2020/21 P4

GB introduced the report and drew attention to the following:

- This was the first budget monitor of the year, and showed the position as at the end of July (period 4);
- There was a £2.8m deficit at the start of the year carried forward from last year;
- Schools block, central block and de-delegation were forecast in a balance position;
- There was a small pressure in the early years’ block most of which was from emerging SEN;
- The biggest pressure was the high needs block which showed an in year variance of over £3m. Most of the pressure was due to top ups, the SEN Team had made good progress in processing the backlog of Education and Health Care Plans but this had a knock on effect on finances.

Members questioned whether schools could get more top up allocation than they applied for and AH responded that, during lockdown, top up was allocated on a formula basis which meant that a small proportion ended up with either slightly more or less. It was suggested that, in future allocations, no school should be given more than they apply for in light of the pressure on the High Needs budget.

In response to a question about why Commissioned Services had an overspend, GB confirmed that it was often necessary to commission extra services throughout the year in terms of alternative provision, however this would be addressed as part of the ongoing review.

Members questioned whether, in view of the current unprecedented crisis, the local authority had any power to use reserves to help the most vulnerable children. DM responded that the local authority was not able to use reserves for the High Needs deficit and although a case could be made to the government for additional funding arising from Covid expenditure, the deficit was not related to the current pandemic.

In response to a question about a figure of £12m in a recent Cabinet report, GB clarified that this represented all the balances of all maintained schools and was not the reserves of the council.

Further clarification was sought on the position in relation to High Needs funding and in particular why the position had changed since the final outturn report for 2019/20 and whether the deficit was likely to increase further. GB responded that the outturn figures did not include

the £2.4m advanced funding, and that the figure was likely to increase as more EHCPs were processed. DM confirmed that further analysis was required to look at the trends and forecast what the final deficit would be and although additional government funding would be available for the High Needs block, it was likely that this would be enough to meet demand.

RESOLVED that the in-year 2020/21 position for the overall DSG be noted.

9. Education Transformation Programme - update on progress and spend

AH gave an update on the Education Transformation Programme as follows:

- Progress had been made against the milestones as detailed in the report;
- The report outlined how the money transferred to the High Needs block was being spent to ensure there was a transparency;
- There was clear governance in place and a lot of scrutiny and challenge including the Children's Improvement Board which was chaired by a Local Government Association member and formal visits from DfE and NHS England against the Written Statement of Action;
- In relation to the specialist provision project, schools had been asked how this could be provided to meet the shortfall and there were 78 expressions of interest from 30 schools which were now being considered through a feasibility perspective;
- The "First Call" – front door service for families accessing information about SEND had been re-badged as "local offer live" to avoid confusion with other services;
- There would be a review of how top up funding was allocated and this would incorporate early years' top up funding;
- A Belonging and Attendance Task Group had been set up to ensure a joined up approach with children's services to make sure children were safe and back in schools whenever possible;
- Some co-production projects had been delayed due to the Covid pandemic and consideration was being given to how this could work in the virtual world;
- Focus was now on the November milestones and whether resources needed to be redirected from areas where it was not possible to deliver to those where progress could be made.

In response to concerns raised about the work experience and careers advice opportunities missed by Key Stage 4 students during lockdown, AH confirmed that the Skills Team were looking at how much support could be offered online, as well as supporting the roll out of the government's Kickstart scheme. She reassured Members that a lot of thought and planning was going into supporting students into employment in the context of the pandemic.

The Forum welcomed the work going on to support post-16 students especially the focus on young people with special educational needs and disabilities. It was also noted that it was important that information about the work of groups such as the Belonging and Attendance Group should be disseminated to schools and other settings.

In response to a question about the timescales and process for decisions being made about alternative learning provision, AH confirmed that there were a number of issues to consider in making a decision including the location of school/setting and identifying where the need was and also the existing staffing capability. In terms of decision making, she also advised that academies had their own governance route and this had to be built into the timeframe.

<p>In response to a question about early years, AH clarified that there was no specific piece of work but that it was included as part of the wider pieces of work.</p>	
<p>In response to a question about the impact on next year's DSG in progressing the programme, it was confirmed that the programme was always intended to be medium term rather than one year, but decisions would need to be taken in relation to funding for future years.</p>	
<p>RESOLVED that the report be noted.</p>	
<p>10. Update on DSG 2021-22 with potential funding levels</p>	
<p>TY reported that the Education and Skills Funding Agency had published indicative information on next year's allocations and updates to formula regulations at the end of July as follows:</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The information was incomplete and did not include early years; • The information and numbers were calculated on current pupil cohorts (from October 2019 census) which would be updated following the October 2020 census; • The Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) data set would change from 2015 to 2019 and indicative values were based on the 2019 data; • Local Authorities still retained discretion and there was no proposal to move to a hard national funding formula although National Funding Formulas had been published; • Schools block: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Nationally there was a 4% increase with a funding floor to ensure that no Local Authority would get less than 2%, Bristol was estimated as 2.7% increase; ○ Increase per pupil funding levels incorporated some of teachers pay and pensions grant; • High Needs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ £730m in the national funding pot, each Local Authority was not likely to receive less than 8% increase (8.5% for Bristol); ○ Pay and pension grants for special schools were incorporated into this allocation; • CSS block: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ This had reduced over the last few years as SFA looked to unwind historic commitment funding (prudential borrowing for Bristol) and this element would be further reduced but there would be a small increase for the inclusion of pay and pension grants for centrally employed teaching staff (-2.6% for Bristol); • DSG overall 3.6% increase for Bristol; • Minimum funding guarantee would be between +0.5-2%; • The next step was for schools to be consulted on the minimum funding level guarantee; any block movements; de-delegation and formula factors prior to Schools Forum taking a decision in November. 	
<p>It was agreed that a meeting of the Finance Sub-Group be held in advance of the next meeting to discuss the details of consultation.</p>	
<p>In response to a question about whether any schools were still being funded on the prediction of a cohort rather than an actual cohort, TY confirmed that last year there had been 2 schools, Trinity and the former Steiner Academy that had transformed from an all through school to a primary school and an adjustment would be made in the case of the former Steiner School to reflect its new position as a primary while Trinity would have real statistics for this year which would supersede previous data.</p>	

Members questioned if feedback from primary schools was that it was harder to put forward a balanced budget as the National Funding Formula in Bristol favoured secondary schools and larger primaries. TF confirmed that smaller schools were protected under the minimum funding guarantee and a bigger challenge for them were static and falling rolls combined with increasing costs. It was suggested that the issue of falling roles and place projections could be a topic of discussion for the Finance Sub Group.

In relation to a question about maternity supply cover, GB confirmed that the two maintained secondary schools were contributing enough to cover their side of the de delegation, but he would look at coding the secondary and primary money separately in the future.

RESOLVED

- that the potential 2021/22 indicative funding levels be noted;
- that the proposed restrictions relating to the DSG be noted;
- that the proposed LA consultation with schools on items in the local formula, particularly MFG, transfers between blocks, and formula factors be noted;
- that the proposed LA consultation with schools on their views on dedelegation be noted, and the results of the consultation be reported to Forum for decision at the meeting in November.

11. Any Other Business

In response to a question about whether Q2 Outturn figures could be submitted late, DM advised that any schools facing a particular challenge should approach Trading with Schools in the first instance to ask for an extension.

The meeting closed at 6.57pm.