

Bristol Schools Forum

Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday, 13th January, 2022
at 5.00 pm at Virtual Meeting via Zoom

Present:

Melanie Bunce	Maintained Primary Headteacher Rep, St Barnabas
Simon Eakins	Academy Primary Head Rep, Cathedral Primary
Simon Holmes	Nursery Head Rep, St Phillips Marsh Nursery
Tracy Jones	Academy Primary Headteacher Rep, Merchants Academy
Sarah Lovell (Vice-Chair)	Academy Secondary Headteacher Rep, Bristol Brunel Academy
Kate Matheson	Maintained Primary Governor Rep, St Barnabas
Steve Mills	Non School Member, UNISON
Aileen Morrison	Pupil Referral Unit Rep, St Matthias Park
Chris Pring	Maintained Primary Headteacher Rep, Cabot Primary
Emma Richards	Maintained Special School Headteacher Rep, Claremont
Cedric Sanguignol	Maintained Primary Governor Rep, Bishop Road Primary
Cameron Shaw	Academy Secondary Head Rep, Bristol Metropolitan
Simon Shaw	Maintained Secondary Head Rep, St Mary Redcliffe & Temple
Liz Townend	Diocese of Bristol Board of Education
Stephanie Williams	Academy Primary Head Rep, Bannerman Road Community Academy

In attendance from Bristol City Council:

Abioye Asimolowo (AA)	Finance Manager
Councillor Asher Craig	Cabinet Member for Children Services, Education and Equalities
Paul Dury (PD)	Risk and Insurance Officer
Corrina Haskins (CH)	Clerk to Schools Forum
Alison Hurley (AH)	Director of Education and Skills
Denise Murray (DM)	Director of Finance
Angel Lai (AL)	Finance Manager (Children’s and Education)
Travis Young (TY)	Principal Accountant

	Action
1. Welcome	
SL (Vice-Chair) welcomed everyone to the meeting.	
2. Election of Chair and Vice-Chair	
The Clerk reported that 1 nomination had been received for the position of Chair, Sarah Lovell, and that, if appointed, the position would be for a two-year period, as set out in the constitution.	
AGREED – that Sarah Lovell be appointed as Chair of Bristol Schools Forum.	
SL took the chair and asked for nominations for Vice-Chair, preferably from the maintained	

<p>primary sector to balance her position as a secondary academy representative. There were no nominations, and it was agreed to defer this to the next meeting. Simon Eakins indicated that he would be willing to take on the role in the absence of any nominations from the maintained sector.</p>	
<p>3. Forum Standing Business</p>	
<p>a. Apologies for absence Apologies for absence were received from: Rob Davies, Nursery Governor Rep, Speedwell and Little Hayes Nursery Federation Trish Dodds, Academy Primary Governor Rep, Fishponds Academy David Otlet, Recognised Teaching Professional Association (NEU) Rebecca Watkin, Academy Special School Headteacher Rep, LearnMAT</p> <p>b. Quorate The Clerk confirmed the meeting was quorate.</p> <p>c. Resignations There were no resignations to report.</p> <p>d. Appointment of New Members There were no new Members to report.</p> <p>e. Notification of Vacancies The following vacancies were noted: 2 x Academy Secondary Governor Rep Academy Primary Governor Rep PRU Governor Rep Clifton Diocese Rep</p> <p>f. Declarations of Interest There were no declarations of interest.</p>	
<p>4. Minutes of the Previous Meeting</p>	
<p>RESOLVED - that the minutes be confirmed as a correct record</p> <p>Matters Arising</p> <p>Free School Meals Eligibility Checks In response to a query raised at the previous meeting, AH confirmed that Free School Meal eligibility was not collected on a weekly basis but 3 times a year as part of the census, and that the 2018 changes to Universal Credit had protected children who were eligible before and during the roll out of Universal Credit until the end of the roll out period.</p> <p>In response to further queries from CP about a software which enabled schools to check eligibility on a regular basis, AH undertook to look into this and provide CP with a response.</p> <p>Written Statement of Action RAG Rating</p>	<p>AH</p>

AH undertook to send Schools Forum Members a link to this information.	AH
5. Verbal update from the Director of Education and Skills	
<p>AH referred to the proposal for phase 3 of the Education Transformation Programme that was discussed at the previous meeting and updated as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Following the in-principle decision to transfer 0.5% from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block at the last meeting, further work was being undertaken to develop the school based element of the proposal. 2. This included scoping work to look at the wide range of school-based programmes and interventions across the education system in Bristol to identify how to improve the effectiveness of education for children with SEND and how best to meet needs. 3. There was a recognition that there was a lot of good work going on in mainstream schools, Alternative Provision and special schools and a wealth of knowledge and expertise in the sector. 4. School leaders were looking at ways to meet needs within a community/locality to work across schools in a collaborative way. 5. Bids would be invited from schools for projects that would reflect the priority themes: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) early intervention and support. b) emerging needs across the system e.g. social and emotional health and speech and language. c) building on workforce development and capability and how to expand on that and share expertise across the system. d) reducing exclusions and improving attendance of children with SEND. 6. The proposals would need to demonstrate value for money and be sustainable. 7. In terms of timelines: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Between now and April a panel would be set up with Local Authority officers, parents and carers, school leaders and Schools Forum members. b) A further update would be provided at the March meeting. c) The details would be circulated to Forum Members prior to the March meeting with a request for feedback. d) From April onwards there would be a move into the cycle of monitoring and quality assurance. <p>In response to questioning, AH confirmed:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The information would be circulated through the weekly Heads' Bulletin, and through networks such as Heads' briefing and the Excellence of Schools group. 2. In terms of whether nursery providers would be involved, there was a need to check parameters in terms of the funding requirements, but the preference would be that this sector should be involved, along with the Health sector due the key work on early identification and intervention. <p>AGREED – information be circulated to Schools Forum in advance of the next meeting for first comment prior to wider circulation.</p>	AH
6. Dedicated School Grant (DSG) 2022-23	
<p>TY introduced the report and drew attention to the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The allocations were announced by ESFA on 16 December as set out in table 1 of the 	

report.

2. Subsequent to this, the ESFA announced an additional £325m for High Needs including £2.651m for Bristol.
3. This changed the figures in tables set out in the report with £78.2m for High Needs (rather than £75.52m), an increase of 13% from the previous year.
4. Central School Services Block: This block was funded in two parts, for ongoing and
5. historic responsibilities. The funding for historic commitments had been reduced again by 20%.
6. Early years: The 3- and 4-year-olds funding rates were unchanged, 2-year-olds increased by 21p and this would be passed on directly to providers as requested during the consultation process.

In taking a decision, Forum Members noted the feedback from schools as part of consultation process. In relation to comments to Cabinet and Council, Forum noted the additional funding for High Needs and awaited proposals from the Council as to how this funding would be utilised going forward as part of the Education Transformation Programme or to support the cost pressures in the High Needs Block.

AGREED –

1. **That the 2022/23 funding levels be noted.**
2. **That the final transfers between blocks be approved.**
3. **That the EYNFF be approved.**
4. **That the Central School Services Block allocations be approved:**
 - a. **LA Core Functions £1.139m (as per Appendix 1).**
 - b. **School Admissions £0.557m.**
 - c. **Schools Forum £0.023m.**
 - d. **Combined Services £0.596m (as per Appendix 2).**
5. **That the following feedback be given to Cabinet and Council, for their consideration in making final decisions on the Schools Budget for 2022/23:**
The Bristol's Schools Forum noted the additional funding for High Needs and awaited proposals from the Council as to how this funding would be utilised going forward as part of the Education Transformation Programme or to support the cost pressures in the High Needs Block.

7. School Block Funding Formula

TY introduced the report which asked Forum to approve the funding formula for submission to the ESFA.

LA officers answered the following questions raised by Forum Members:

Is there any further information on whether there would be a hard NFF next year?

There was no further update, but the indications were that there would be a move towards a hard NFF

What would happen over the next few years in relation to the Growth Fund especially in view of the difficulty in finding places in Bristol, especially secondary places in the East/Central area?

The 70 places mentioned in the report was the current situation with 1 new and growing school and going forward, growth funding was also under review. The LA would look at how to apply growth funding under any new requirements of ESFA.

From a strategic perspective, it was challenging to find out about the Growth Fund on an annual basis, but the LA was creating a Place Planning Strategy to look at next 5-10 years (under the Belonging Strategy). In the short term, the LA was responding to a capacity issue with the delay in the building of a new free school in East Central. The new South Bristol secondary school was on track to open in September 2023 albeit in temporary accommodation. There was a report to Cabinet on 18 January to approve spend of a capital grant from DFE to deliver additional school capacity in order for the council to continue to meet its statutory obligations.

It was agreed that Place planning for Secondary/Primary places in the City was an important issue and a progress update in this regard would be brought to the Schools Forum meeting in March.

Why was there a delay in the opening of the school in East Bristol?

The school was part of the Silverthorne Lane development which had been called in by the Secretary of State following an objection on the planning application from the Environment Agency due to flood risk concerns about flood risk.

AGREED

- 1. That the proposed arrangements for the 2022/23 mainstream funding formula, including the amount set aside for the Growth Fund be approved.**
- 2. That the following feedback be given to Cabinet and Council, for their consideration in making final decisions on the Schools Budget for 2022/23:
Place planning for Secondary/Primary places in the City is an important issue to look at and a progress update in this regard needs to be brought to the Schools Forum meeting in March.**

8. De-delegation - outstanding items

The Chair asked Maintained Primary Representatives to consider the following outstanding items which had not been agreed at the previous meeting:

a) Employee and Premises Insurance

It was noted that there was a request for further information at the previous meeting about why joining a separate scheme such as the RPA was cheaper and how cover compared between that and the option proposed by Council. The Council's Risk and Insurance Officer confirmed that the RPA cover did not include engineering inspection services/motor insurance and would also mean an additional administrative burden of schools dealing directly with insurers rather than through the Council's Insurance and Risk Team. In response to a question about whether Bristol City Council had considered taking up RPA as an authority-wide scheme like some other LAs, he confirmed that this wasn't the recommended option at the current time.

It was agreed that if Forum was minded to support de-delegation, the Council would seek the most value for money option and explore RPA as part of that process before committing to a 3 year contract.

AGREED that Employee and Premises Insurance be de-delegated and that the Council would seek the most value for money option and explore RPA as part of that process before committing to a 3 year contract.

<p>b) Education Psychologist</p> <p>On voting on whether this service should be de-delegated, there were 2 in favour and 2 against. The Chair used her casting vote to support the proposal following feedback that the service was valued by SENCOs but asked that further information be provided on the details of the service provided to schools to ensure that the service was value for money.</p> <p>AGREED (3 in favour and 2 against) – that the Education Psychologist service be de-delegated.</p> <p>In response to a question from CP about how schools could access the TU fund, AH undertook to report back with details.</p>	<p>AH</p> <p>AH</p>
<p>9. Dedicated School Grant (DSG) Budget Monitor (P8)</p>	
<p>AL introduced the report and drew attention to the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The report summarised the DSG budget position as of November 2021. 2. There was a £10m deficit from previous year as of November, this had risen to £16.7m. 3. The reason for the increasing deficit was the demand in the High Needs Block, in particular top-up funding and placements and there was also some pressure on Early Years SEN. 4. A cumulative forecast of £26.7m was predicted by the end of the financial year. <p>It was noted that the deficit was an ongoing concern and the next iteration of the DSG Management Plan would be discussed at the next meeting. Councillor Craig confirmed that the growing deficit was an issue of urgency for the Council and asked Forum to have a robust discussion at the next meeting.</p> <p>AH confirmed that the High Needs and Early Years Task and Finish Groups would be meeting in advance of the next meeting to look at the DSG Management Plan in detail. She asked other members to consider joining these groups and further details would be circulated to all members.</p> <p>In response to a concern raised about information in the press relating to local authority powers to recoup money from maintained schools, it was noted that this may either refer to the recent consultation to withdraw funding to Local Authorities (Brokering Grant) for school improvement or the balance control mechanism to control surplus balances. SS undertook to forward the news articles to AH for clarification at the next meeting.</p> <p>In response to a question about the reason for the variance in relation to the closure of 3 schools and opening of a new school, TY confirmed that the 3 schools had been fully funded for 12 months but closed at the end of August and the new school was opened without any funding and so a new allocation was worked out using the unspent money from the closed schools and the variance was the net result.</p> <p>Further questions were asked in relation to the increase in top-up funding to Resource Bases, whether spaces were filled and also the reason for the difference in terms of funding and outturn for special schools. AH confirmed that in relation to both Resource Bases and Special Schools, the increase was needs led and the Council was not funding empty spaces as had happened previously. She advised that there had been a significant increase in requests and</p>	

the complexity of needs had also driven costs up.

In response to further questions about whether this increase would be built into next years' budget, AH responded that some of the forecasting had been worked into the budget and there was ongoing work about mitigations and the assumptions around the mitigations. She confirmed that the increase associated with the Covid pandemic and associated lockdowns would slow down as children returned to education settings.

AGREED

That the in-year 2021/22 position for the overall DSG be noted.

10. Financial Regulation for Schools with Delegated Budget

AA introduced the report containing the revised financial regulations for maintained schools and asked Forum Members to share the information and respond to the Clerk with any comments. It was agreed that the deadline for comments be extended to 3 February.

It was noted that the document would also be available on the Council's website and advertised through the Heads' Bulletin and circulated to business managers.

AGREED - that the draft regulations be noted, and comments from maintained schools be welcomed up to 3 February 2022 with the final regulations coming into effect from 01/04/2022.

The meeting closed at 6.23pm.