

Bristol Schools Forum

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday, 8th June, 2021
at 5.00 pm at Virtual Meeting via Zoom

Present:

Melanie Bunce	Maintained Primary Headteacher Rep, St Barnabas
Josh Connor	Non School Member, UNISON
Rob Davies	Nursery Governor Rep, Speedwell and Little Hayes Nursery Federation
Trish Dodds	Academy Primary Governor Rep, Fishponds Academy
Simon Eakins	Academy Primary Head Rep, Cathedral Primary
Rob Endley	Recognised Teaching Professional Association (NASUWT)
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 Metropolitan Academy
Garry Maher	Non School Member, Diocese of Clifton Rep
Kate Matheson	Maintained Primary Governor Rep, St Barnabas
Aileen Morrison	Pupil Referral Unit Rep, St Matthias Park
Ruth Pickersgill	Academy Secondary Governor Rep, City Academy
Chris Pring	Maintained Primary Headteacher Rep, Cabot Primary
Emma Richards	Maintained Special School Headteacher Rep, Clarendon
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
Rebecca Watkin	Academy Special School Headteacher Rep, LearnMAT
Stephanie Williams	Academy Primary Head Rep, Bannerman Road Community Academy
David Yorath	Academy Secondary Governor Rep, Cotham School

In attendance from Bristol City Council:

Abioye Asimolowo (AA)	Finance Manager (Children's and Education)
Councillor Helen Godwin	Cabinet Member for Families, Education and Women
Richard Hanks (RH)	Head of Learning City
Corrina Haskins (Clerk)	Clerk to Schools Forum
Alison Hurley (AH)	Director of Education and Skills
Denise Murray (DM)	Director of Finance
Rachael Pryor (RP)	Head of Hope Virtual School

	Action
1. Welcome	
<p>The Vice-Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and confirmed that she would be chairing the meeting following Christine Townsend's election as a Bristol City Councillor which meant that she would no longer be able to chair Schools Forum.</p> <p>Members congratulated CT on her election to the Council.</p> <p>Councillor Helen Godwin was welcomed to the meeting as the new Cabinet member for Families, Education and Women.</p>	

2. Election of Chair	
<p>It was agreed that, as no one had come forward to take on the role of Chair, this would be revisited at the next meeting in September.</p>	Clerk to include on agenda
3. Forum Standing Business	
<p>a. Apologies for absence Apologies for absence were received from Karen Brown and Liz Townend.</p> <p>b. Quorate The Clerk confirmed the meeting was quorate.</p> <p>c. Resignations It was noted that this would be the last meeting of Garry Maher, Diocese of Clifton, as he would be retiring at the end of the summer term. Members thanked GM for his contribution to Schools Forum.</p> <p>d. Appointment of New Members The appointment of the following new members was noted: Liz Townend – Bristol Diocese Rebecca Watkin - Academy Special School Headteacher Rep</p> <p>e. Notification of Vacancies Academy Secondary Head Rep Academy Primary Governor Rep PRU Governor Rep</p> <p>f. Declarations of Interest There were no declarations of interest.</p>	
4. Minutes of the Previous Meeting	
<p>RESOLVED - that the minutes be confirmed as a correct record</p> <p>Matters Arising In response to the question raised at the previous meeting about returning to physical meetings, DM confirmed that there were only 2 meeting spaces in City Hall, the Council Chamber and the Conference Hall, that could accommodate Schools Forum under the current social distancing requirements. She confirmed that under the latest regulations, Schools Forum meetings could be held virtually and so it was for members to decide whether future meetings should be virtual or physical.</p> <p>It was agreed that a decision on returning to physical meetings would be held in abeyance pending national guidance.</p>	
5. Working Groups Update	
<p>Members noted the current arrangements for Schools Forum Working Groups:</p> <p>a) Finance Sub-Group – ongoing (approximately 2 times per year)</p>	

- b) Constitution Working Group – ongoing (annual if required)
- c) High Needs Task and Finish Group – May 2021- May 2022#
- d) Early Years Task and Finish Group – May 2021- May 2022

6. Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Management Plan

AH introduced the report and drew attention to the following:

- The DSG Management Plan was required by the Department for Education (DfE) to address the overall deficit in the DSG account, however, the Council was not required to submit the plan to DfE.
- This was the first iteration showing the baseline position.
- The forecast was for the “do nothing” position which predicted that if the current spend continued with no interventions, the deficit would be £70m by 2024.
- It was important to stress that this was not a savings plan but was looking at improvements and initiatives to deliver best value and this was interrelated with the work already taking place such as the Written Statement of Action, the wider education transformation programme and the capital investment programme.
- The aim was for the plan to be dynamic and further information would be added, such as benchmarking and financial data, to ensure an understanding of how the pressures were being managed and the financial impact of a range of interventions such as specialist provision; top up funding; working with early years sector and the Alternative Learning Provision (ALP) review.
- The ownership and termly review of the plan would be held with Schools Forum in partnership with the local authority and would be led by the Task and Finish Groups that had been established for High Needs and Early Years.

AM, as Chair of the High Needs Task and Finish Group, reported:

- The first meeting of the Task and Finish Group had taken place in May.
- Although it was a worrying deficit situation, a lot of the data would quickly change, and the forecast was unlikely to remain as high as £70m.
- The group would be looking at High Needs spend and in particular ALP and using the tool to benchmark against other local authorities.
- The plan was not seeking to make savings but to improve efficiency and make things more transparent and equitable across the city.
- The number of pupils with ECHPs was increasing and there would continue to be an increase in spend.
- There were some anomalies in the data this was something for the Task and Finish Groups to monitor as the role of the group was to ask questions and support the Local Authority (LA) in making the information accessible for Schools Forum.

RD, as Chair of the Early Years Group, reported:

- The first meeting of the group considered the terms of reference and what it could achieve, and future meetings would start to review the data and modelling.
- There was a need to consider the position in relation to high needs and the core funding model.
- The current funding model for Early Years was not sustainable either for private, voluntary, and/or independent (PVI) settings or LA maintained nurseries. The LA had set up working groups with maintained nurseries to look at sustainable models of provision and this had the support of Heads and Governors in Early Years settings. This work had common financial and educational goals with the Task and Finish Group and so the

groups would need to work closely together.

- The Early Years strategies developed by officers were set out on page 19 of the agenda pack and the Task and Finish Group would be inputting into these strategies and be involved in reviewing and monitoring them.
- The next Task and Finish Group would look at interventions and impact going forward.

Forum members were invited to feedback any comments/questions to the Clerk who would feed into the Task and Finish Groups.

The following questions were raised:

Although not a savings plan, at what point would savings be made to address the projected deficit?

AH responded that the plan would look at the data and drivers for the expenditure and whether best value was being delivered. She confirmed that by undertaking this work, there would be an impact on cost which would alter where and how money was spent.

In terms of benchmarking, how does Bristol City Council compare with other local authorities?

AH responded that benchmarking was an important part of the process and this information would start to be fed into the plan. She reported that one of the key pieces of information which would soon be available was the SEN2 data.

Forum Members also asked if future iterations of the plan could be presented in a way that was easy for Schools Forum to access and include milestones and timelines and ways that Forum could support the process.

In considering the recommendations, it was;

RESOLVED:

- 1) the baseline position stated in the first iteration of the Plan be noted.
- 2) the initial consultation with Schools Forum regarding the Plan following review by High Needs and Early Years Task & Finish Groups be noted.
- 3) the intention for the Plan to be a dynamic document that would continue to evolve in future iterations be noted.
- 4) the fact that additional stakeholder engagement, coproduction and engagement was required as the Plan evolved, and must include Schools Forum, education institutions, parents and carers, children and young people, elected members and health partners be noted.
- 5) the next version of the Plan be brought to Schools Forum in September 2021.

7. Outcome of Review of Alternative Learning Provision (ALP)

AH introduced the reports as follows:

- The report was comprehensive and clear about what was going well; what the issues were and what should be done to address issues.
- Going forward, the finance issues would come under the DSG Management Plan and cross referenced as part of the ALP Review.
- The action plan was draft and would be developed more fully.
- Co-production proposals were set out in the report.
- In terms of the role of Schools Forum, the key areas were sufficiency and finance.

- The summary paper outlined recommendations from the report and a summary of suggested responses.
- The key elements related to placements, packages of support and commissioning arrangements. Wider strategic place planning would be included as part of sufficiency planning.
- The ALP sector had been impacted by the pandemic and there was uncertainty around the demand for the future.
- In terms of sufficiency, there was a move towards early intervention and reducing escalation in the system and how AL providers could work within mainstream schools. This intervention would need to be captured by DSG management plan.
- The use of provision for SEND including undiagnosed need was a key piece of work.
- In terms of finance, there was a mixed picture in how and what was funded and a need for transparency and consistency.

The following comments/questions were raised:

There is a lack of specialist places and ALP is sometimes used when specialist places would be more appropriate. There is a need to be mindful of where spend sits and where it should sit.

In terms of timelines and milestones, does the local authority have any idea how long it will take before children with SEN are having their needs accessed and met in the right setting?

AH confirmed that there was no specific date, but in terms of getting the right provisions, it would probably be 1 to 2 years before there was an impact on placements. It was agreed that this should be one of the areas tracked by Schools Forum.

Co-production was an important part of the process, in particular communicating with the groups that were overrepresented in ALP as well as adults who had lived experience of the service.

In considering the recommendations, it was;

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the content and recommendations of the ALP Review be noted.
- 2) That the approach Bristol City Council intends to take in response to the ALP Review be noted.

8. DSG Budget Monitor

AA introduced the report and drew attention to the following:

- The report showed the provisional DSG outturn for the last financial year as well as some of the schools' balances for 20-21.

Provisional outturn:

- The overall deficit was slightly lower than reported at the previous monitor, but still significant at £7.1m and when added to the deficit from last year this would be approximately £10m which represented 3%-4% of the overall DSG budget. This was the driver for the DSG Management Plan discussed earlier in the meeting.
- The High Needs Block was the main area where there was an overspend, and this was nearly £12.5m.
- Most of the other blocks were underspending.
- Schools Block: underspending by £400k due to Growth Fund underspend refund of

recoupment made in respect of Avanti Gardens.

- De-delegation: underspend of £89k mainly due to TU facility time.
- Early Years Block: underspend of £0.6m due to a number of factors the most significant being the fact that the number of hours funded in 20/21 had decreased when compared to the previous year, due to the impact of Covid-19 and the late announcement by DfE that 2021 spring term funding for early year's providers should be based on participation
- Due to the pandemic, a lot of the initiatives set out in the Education Transformation Programme were not started and so out of £1.4m only 560k was spent and this money had been carried over into this year.
- The overspend in the High Needs Block was not unique to Bristol, a lot of Local Authorities were are grappling with this issue.
- The major area of increased spend was in top ups as there had been both an increase in pupils and a movement in the banding with an increase in the more expensive banding and decrease in the least expensive bands.

Individual School Balances:

- At end of last financial year individual school balances reduced to £5.8m due to several factors.
- 11 nursery schools were in deficit and 1 in surplus with an in-year deficit. The nursery sector was also in deficit.
- Two special schools converted to Academy status during the year and both schools had surpluses that transferred with these schools amounting to £0.975m.

Why is the £0.85m surplus in four nursery school family support hubs not included in the figures?

AA confirmed that this was funded from Council resources as part of the general fund and not as part of the Early Years Block.

One of the strategies for dealing with the funding pressures in the High Needs Block, is lobbying central government for more, what is the process for doing this and what progress has been made?

AH/DM confirmed that lobbying was ongoing through a variety of different ways both through Education and Finance and a key anchor would be the forthcoming spending review in September which would give the Council the opportunity to submit further evidence and case studies. DM also confirmed that the Council's external auditors were concerned about the deficit and that this would add weight to the representations being made to DfE.

Is there any indication where Bristol City Council sits in comparison with other LAs?

DM confirmed that the comparative data was not yet available until all LAs had published outturn information, but she was aware that many LAs had increased spending pressures due to Covid. She also reported that there were some LAs with deficits of £20-30m and 4 LAs had deficits totalling over £100m written off by the DfE but Bristol City Council's DSG deficit was not sustainable and was of concern to the Council.

Should there be a limit on surpluses that schools can carry over and therefore take with them when they convert to an academy?

AA confirmed that there was guidance that LAs could claw back surpluses if more than 8% for primary schools and 5% for secondary schools and anything in excess of this amount would require a school to have a spending plan agreed by the LA. DM confirmed that Bristol did not claw back surpluses, but the Council was due to be consulted on a revision to the

scheme of financing schools and could put this forward as an option although it could not be applied retrospectively.

If a school chooses to join an academy rather than be forced does the deficit still stay with the LA?

AA confirmed that if a school was forced to become an academy, the LA would take the deficit but if it chose to become an academy, the deficit would go with them, but in either case a surplus would always to a school converting to become an academy.

In considering the recommendations, it was:

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the provisional 2020/21 DSG outturn position set out in Table 1, which includes a net in-year deficit of £7.1m, which is a favourable movement of £1.48m from the forecast position at Period 9 be noted.
- 2) that majority of the pressure is in High Needs Block and the drivers for this cost pressure be noted.
- 3) that the total DSG deficit carried forward of £10.0m be noted.
- 4) That the number of maintained schools with surplus and deficit balances and the overall position by sector be noted.

9. Review of Constitution

SL reported back from the Constitution Working Group and outlined the recommended changes:

7(b) To include reference to Alternative Learning Provision.

16. To limit terms of office to 3 consecutive terms to ensure a steady flow of new members.

19. To provide for an induction session once or twice a year for new members.

38. To include reference to remote meetings in line with the latest guidance.

41&42. To include reference to current practice.

RESOLVED that the changes to the Schools Forum constitution be approved.

10. Any Other Business

1) De-delegated accounts

AA reported that the details of the delegated accounts were included as requested at the previous meeting.

In response to a question about maternity cover being a zero balance, AA confirmed that supply cover was financed by an insurance scheme and therefore the cost was a premium payment and didn't involve any trading costs.

A member expressed concern that the figures relating to Trade Union costs was not accurate and the expenditure of £25k was not correct and should be £80k and therefore Forum was being asked to make decisions about de-delegation on inaccurate information.

AA responded that there was a problem in collecting the contribution from academies and the amount shown as income included the amount that has been

AA to report

<p>delegated from mainstream schools as well as the amount that academies are expected to contribute. He confirmed that there was approximately £140k outstanding which could explain the difference but undertook to look into this further and report back.</p>	back
<p>2) Teachers' Pay and Pension Grants In response to a question about when special schools would be consulted on Teachers' Pay and Pension Grants, AA undertook to respond with the detailed information.</p>	AA to report back

The meeting closed at 6.24 pm.