

# Bristol Schools Forum

**Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday, 28th March, 2023**  
**at 5.00 pm at Virtual Meeting via Zoom**

**Present:**

Melanie Bunce	St Barnabas
Mandy Cheshire	St Bede's Catholic College
Simon Eakins	Cathedral Primary
Tonya Hill	New Fosseyway School
Simon Holmes	St Phillips Marsh Nursery
Sarah Lovell	Bristol Brunel Academy
Kate Matheson	St Barnabas Primary School
Aileen Morrison	St Matthias Park
Chris Pring	Whitehall Primary School
Cameron Shaw	Bristol Metropolitan Academy
Stephanie Williams	Bannerman Road Community Academy
Jo Willis	Bristol Diocese Board of Education

**In attendance from Bristol City Council:**

Abi Gbago	Executive Director: Children and Education
Reena Bhogal-Welsh	Director of Education and Skills
Angel Lai (AL)	Finance Manager (Children and Education)
Samantha Wilcock (SW)	Clerk to Schools Forum

	Action
<b>1. Welcome</b>	
SL welcomed everyone to the meeting.	
<b>2. Forum Standing Business</b>	
<p><b>a. Apologies for absence</b>            Apologies for absence were received from:                Cedric Sanguinol, Primary Governor                Rebecca Watkin, LearnMAT                Jo Willis, Bristol Diocese Board of Education                Aderyn Zajicova, Nursery Governor</p> <p><b>b. Quorate</b>            The Clerk confirmed the meeting was quorate.</p> <p><b>c. Resignations</b>            It was noted that Mick O'Neil Duff and Richard Penska had resigned from the forum.</p> <p><b>d. Appointment of New Members</b>            It was noted that Steve Hornsby joins the Forum as the new PRU Governor Rep and Tonya Hill joins as Special Maintained Representative.</p> <p><b>e. Notification of Vacancies</b>            The following vacancies were noted:</p>	



<p>7. It was unclear how the Government announcement regarding increased nursery places for 2 year olds would impact on current workstreams. Under the proposals, by 2025/26 there would need to be double the number of places being offered at a time where settings were at risk of closing. Strategic direction was requested around funding and support for the strategic role of nurseries in Bristol in terms of early intervention and also as part of Family Hubs.</p> <p>8. With primary schools sliding into deficit this year, it was requested that the carried forward resource for 'schools in financial difficulty' be accessed. Officers were asked to revisit the reasons for the original agreement to ensure consideration of the remit before any alternative use for the money was considered. <b>Action: Officers to confirm back to the BSF.</b></p> <p><b>It was AGREED that the in-year 2022/23 position for the overall DSG was noted.</b></p>	AL
<p><b>6. Maintained Nursery Schools Transformation Programme</b></p>	
<p>RBW introduced the report which provided the Forum with an update on the progress of the maintained Nursery School transformation programme following the de-delegation of £90k from the 2021-22 Early Years underspend in July 2022. The report outlined the spend to date, an overview of progress with the programme and its impact.</p> <p>In response to the report the following themes were discussed:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To date, £123,000 (out of £340,000) of the Early Year's SEND / Nursery Improvement funding is forecast to be spent at the end of the financial year. The remaining balance should continue to be ring-fenced for this purpose to allow the continuation of work with nursery schools and Early Years SEND improvement. Information within the report which was indicative would be further updated at a future meeting.</li> <li>1. With reference to SEND, colleagues and partners endeavoured to work cross directorate and disciplines of education, health and children's social care work holistically in order to ensure the biggest impact.</li> <li>2. AL confirmed that the submitted schools recovery plans would be finalised by the end of March. Officers planned to establish a high level financial impact assessment evaluated in light of changing government announcements. It was noted that following the year-end for schools in mid April a formal response would be released by the end of April.</li> <li>3. Officers confirmed that support given by way of advice and officer support during the process would continue to be given as far as possible.</li> <li>4. Through the evaluation of the schools recovery plans, the team were looking to identify operating models and examples of best practice that could be cascaded more widely. Examples of effective financial improvements had been noted to share for training purposes.</li> <li>5. It was agreed that the item would remain on the agenda for the next meeting including an update of clarity around the remainder of the £250k spend. <b>ACTION: Officers to add to the work programme and note for report planning</b></li> </ol> <p><b>It was AGREED that Schools Forum:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) <b>Noted the spend, activity and progress to date</b></li> <li>b) <b>Noted planned next steps</b></li> <li>c) <b>Noted that the funding of £340k includes £90k for Maintained Nursery Transformation</b></li> </ol>	Clerk RBW

## 7. High Needs Recovery Plan - Delivering Best Value

RBW updated the forum on Bristol's participation in the Department for Education (DfE)'s Delivering Better Value in SEND programme; the High Needs Block Deficit Recovery Plan and overarching governance of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit management approaches.

In response to the report the following themes were discussed:

1. The Chair noted the helpful summary of the four different workstreams summarised in section 5 of the report. The report included helpful information (particularly the diagram on page 9) illustrating the different work streams and timeline. Officers were asked to consider building on that to ensure the information presented to the forum continued to use consistent language, format and accessibility. Alongside this, consideration would be given to provide the Forum with leading indicators to identify and track benefits.

**ACTION: Officers to consider consistent information presentation and leading indicators within reports going forward.**

2. It was highlighted that it would be important to improve recruitment and retention within the sector in order to implement the planned progress of SEND within mainstream settings. RBW confirmed that the local authority was actively looking at ways to improve recruitment and retention within schools in Bristol and in the context of the national picture. Mention in the report regarding limitations of inclusive practice resulting in a lower number of children with an EHCP within mainstream settings was not a comment about the quality of the existing workforce within schools.
3. The Workstream 1 pilot would involve a range of schools from across the City and draw upon directorate roles to establish best practice to roll out. The selection method would utilise the diagnostic work of the chosen organisation. More detail would be provided when scoping work had completed.
4. It was highlighted that schools were already under a lot of pressure due to the deficit forecast, pressures in terms of resources and also negotiations for pay increases the government propose are funded by schools. There was concern that proposals within the report appear to call for more work when resources were already stretched. AL confirmed that with the cost of living crisis and inflationary pressures being addressed by Government grants from 2023-24 intended to ease the financial pressure, the Local Authority needed to ensure a robust financial plan and associated due diligence work to ensure schools spend was sustainable. Rather than approaching the issue as reducing spending on the HN budget, it was a case of 'reframing' spend to consider whether placements could be offered locally for less cost resulting in more benefit for the same spend and a better experience for the children. The Schools Forum recognised the challenging financial times and that development was needed to ensure the sector could better support each other to meet the need for the children of Bristol.
5. There remained concern about the amount of time parents were waiting to see speech and language specialists or a paediatrician during a time where more children were coming to nursery and school with more need than in the past. It was of high concern the referrals system for children with autism had been suspended by Sirona meaning no route for evidence for access to top up funding and less support for staff on the front line. It would remain difficult to address the relationship BCC had with parents and children with SEND with the system not serving the parents and children entering the system. Officers reassured forum members that they would continue those conversations with the providers involved in those decisions.
6. Information was requested regarding the number of extra independent school places, where they were identified and what provision was possible. The need for additional Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) provision was also highlighted. **ACTION:**

RBW

RBW

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Officers to provide information for the next meeting.</b></p> <p><b>It was AGREED that the Schools Forum:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Noted the convergence of work and programmes concerned with mitigation of DSG High Needs Block deficit and these programmes co-exist and support the ongoing maintenance of DSG Management Plan<sub>1</sub>.</b></li> <li>• <b>Noted the feedback from the High Needs Block Recovery Plan indicative mitigation proposals engagement and survey conducted during October and November 2022</b></li> <li>• <b>Noted the consultation approach for progressing new proposals contained within the High Needs Block Deficit Recovery Plan (being delivered through workstream 2 of the Delivering Better Value in SEND programme)</b></li> <li>• <b>Noted that the outcome of the consultation will be presented to Schools Forum in September 2023 seeking endorsement prior to Cabinet decision</b></li> </ul>	
<p><b>8. Any Other Business (as agreed with the Chair)</b></p>	
<p>A query had been received from a Forum member that had not been able to attend. It asked about the financial pathway for top up funding where the pupils no longer on roll and how that funding was repaid. The query would be sent to officers for reply. <b>ACTION: AL to be sent the specific query for consideration and reply.</b></p>	<p>AL</p>

The meeting closed at 6.40pm