

Bristol Schools Forum

**Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday, 23rd May, 2023
at 5.00 pm at Virtual Meeting via Zoom**

Present:

Melanie Bunce	St Barnabas Primary
Mandy Cheshire	St Bede's Catholic Colleges
Trish Dodds	Fishponds Academy
Simon Eakins	Cathedral Primary
Tonya Hill	New Fosseway School
Simon Holmes	St Philips March Nursery
Steve Hornsby	North Star Academy
Jo Kingston	Diocese of Clifton
Aileen Morrison	St Matthias Park
Chris Pring	Whitehall Primary School
Cameron Shaw	Bristol Metropolitan Academy
Jo Willis	Bristol Diocese Board of Education

In attendance from Bristol City Council:

Reena Bhogal-Welsh	Director of Education and Skills
Denise Murray	Director, Finance and Section 151 Officer
Angel Lai	Finance Manager (Children and Education)
Ian Bell	Place Programming Managers
Jessica Taylor	Specialist Place Managers
Claudette Campbell	Clerk to Schools Forum

	Action
1. Welcome	
Simon Eakins Chaired the meeting as the Chair had sent her apologies.	
SE welcomed those present	
2. Forum Standing Business	
a. Apologies for absence	
Apologies were received from:	
Aderyn Zajicova – Nursery Governor	
Cedric Sanguignol – Primary Governor	
Cllr Asher Craig	
Kate Matheson - Primary Governor: Further advised that she would be leaving the role due to school closure	
Marian Curran – Post 16 Provider	
Rebecca Watkin - LearnMAT: Advised that she would be leaving her role and would not be able to attend future meetings	
Steph Williams	

b. Quorate

The Clerk confirmed that the meeting was quorate

c. Resignations

- It was noted that Rebecca Watkin had resigned from the forum.
- That Kate Matheson Primary Governor for St Barnabas Primary would be leaving the role due to the school closure at the end of the school year, but still remains interested in the role and the work of the Forum.
- Action: Asked RBW for the vacancy positions to be promoted via the Head Teachers Updated.

d. Appointment of New Members

- It was noted that Jo Kingston joins the Forum as the representative for the Diocese of Clifton, Department for Schools & Colleges.

e. Notifications of Vacancies

The following were noted.

As reported the following two vacancies are yet to be filled that of

- 1 x Secondary Academy Governor Representative
- 1 x Primary Academy Governor Representative

Additional

- 1 x Special Academy Representative

Pending at the conclusion of the school year due to the closure of St Barnabas Primary

- Primary Governor Maintained representative
- Primary Head Maintained School

f. Declaration of Interest

- There were no declarations of interest

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Resolved – that the minutes be confirmed as a correct record with the following amendments:

- That Jo Kingston was present and Jo Willis had given her apologies
- That Steve Hornsby was also present, he was mentioned in the minutes but not noted in the main list of attendees at the top of the document

I. The Chair noted that any actions would be covered within the items on the agenda.

II. The Chair noted that the announcement made by the DfE they had issued their response to the following the national consultation on funding. He noted that further reiterations were pending over the summer & Autumn that will provide a clearer picture on a number of issues. Noted that 24/25 may not be a hard national funding formula.

4. Update from Director of Education And Skills

Reena Bhogal-Welsh (RBW) spoke to her presentation providing an update Family Hubs(FH). The presentation is attached to these minutes.

The following was highlighted:

- The 3 family hubs will build on and extend the service provision previously provided by Children Centres.
- Funding of 4.8million secured for the next 3 years
- All were encouraged to take the opportunity to engage with the hubs and a special invitation was extended to the BSF Chair & Vice-Chair for an onsite visit.

The following was noted from the discussion:

- a) SH took the opportunity to visit a FH and reported back that this was a positive development allowing services to come together to support families. A discussion had been had about future strategy and how to sustain the FH at the end of the Funding period. He sought assurances that the planning for the future would start now. RBW confirmed that future plans for funding would be pursued.
- b) The Chair asked for an explanation as to how FH worked alongside nursery provision and to clarify whether FH was funded via a separate funding stream.
- c) RBW confirmed that the funding was separate. That all were aware of the additional support and service provision provided by nursery settings over and above the remit. FH formalise the process with the convergence of social care, health care and health visitors and related services in place to support families. Acknowledged that nursery settings had stepped up but were not provided with funding for wrap around care.
- d) SH referenced what was lost when children centres closed that there was no longer that earlier indication of need; that family services became remote and fragmented leaving families without support and that gap was filled by nursery services. With establishment of the FH this much need provision was restored.
- e) TH supported the FH provision and would take the opportunity to visit. Noting that there was a need for future proof planning in a form of a strategy to take the provision beyond 2025.

5. DSG Budget Monitor and Financial Outturn for Year 2022/23

Angel Lai (Finance Manager, Children and Education) spoke to the report. The report provided information on the 2022/23 DSG end of year outturn position as at Period 12 (P12) to end of March 2023.

The BSF were asked to note the 2022/23 position.

In response to the presentation the following was noted from the discussion that arose:

- a) Questions were put on the DSG overspend. The cumulative deficit sum of £39.681m includes sums carried forward from previous years. Further explanation was given on the legislation that determined how this was managed. The LA is legally obligated to deliver a balanced budget and to find a solution before March 2026.
- b) Local Authorities are unable to run a deficit budget they are obligated to spend within their means. To enable a DSG deficit that exceeds reserves the Secretary of State laid down in a Statutory Instrument a process for all local authorities; an accounting treatment for the deficit which is time limited; following conversations it was extended for a further 3 years.
- c) Officers outlined the work programmes and funding streams identified and the actions that will be taken to reach a 25/26 in year balance position.

- d) RBW outlined the two workstreams for Delivering Better Value:
- e) Workstream 1: The programme to develop relationship with schools and families, to include the voice of all young persons around provisions. A review of services available for families; to consider what services can be triangulated to enable partnership working. This will include absorbing the changes to the demographic in several communities.
- f) Workstream 2: The second programme is concerned with procuring a partner to work on the delivery of High Needs services that is independent of the LA. The report details the current deficit and going forward this area will continue to require non-statutory funding.
- g) The work programmes are being overseen by a programme board with a 6-weekly reporting process to drive the project forward.
- h) As part of Workstream 1 SENDCos will be contacted regarding piloting opportunities. Workstream 2 is currently procuring an independent partner to delivery the work.
- i) The Forum asked for a definition of the characteristics of the partner agency being sought; the partnership organisation should have the ability to be forensic, granular, and willing to hear the voices of the family.
- j) The Forum was invited to hold Officers to account should this work fail to progress. Officers would be assisted by the newly created family board and will receive input from colleagues from health and social care.
- k) The Finance Director further summarised: that these pressures were not just being faced by Bristol but is a national issue and one that must be resolved; the expectation is for Bristol and the BSF to take ownership of this issue; the two workstreams must result in a solution for annual financial sustainability to meet current service needs. The next step is to deliver the long-term plan to reduce the deficit. Conversations with the DfE and Auditors continue to ensure that the strategic plan is realistic and deliverable. The service is tasked to implement continual monitoring and to provide the right level of overview.
- l) The extension of the deadline on the carry-forward deficit was extended to all LAs but there is no data on the number of LAs with a deficit. The report summary details the funds secured to support our work programme.
- m) The DfE have provided £1 million to deliver on the work needed for Delivering Better Value in SEND. This sum although welcomed does not reflect the greater need that Bristol has over and above other LAs.
- n) An explanation was given on the term used in the finance report at section (3.7 last paragraph) 'stretched confidence benefit materialise'. This is to say not worst-case scenario but a term for the middle ground; based on a forecast and the application of a bias on whether there is 100% certainty of delivery.
- o) A further ask was put to Officers that the programmes incorporate 'Health and Social' care needs.
- p) Board members looked to officers to acknowledge the inconsistency in BCC Leadership team due to changes in senior officers and interims over the last 5 years. That the current strategic plan must be agreed and implemented so the direction of travel is consistent and not interrupted by the change of personnel. RBW reassured the Board that the intention is to bring stability and cement progress so that the direction of travel is clear and agreed upon.
- q) Clarity was given on the letters being issued to school settings on the action needed to bring budgets in line. That the detail in the letter would be based on those settings

reported quarterly returns. All settings will be offered an opportunity to meet and work through a budget recovery plan.

- r) The Fund for Schools in Financial difficulties; it was suggested that sums should be returned to Local Maintained schools on a pro-rata basis to assist with budget challenges; that the forum should consult on this to identify options and make a final decision.
- s) Action: The Chair asked Officers to consider and set out what actions were needed to enable this to happen with a report to the next meeting. RBS and AL

It was AGREED that the Schools Forum:

- i. Noted the update on the DSG

6. School Sufficiency

Reena Bhogal-Welsh (Director of Education & Skills) introduced the report that provided the forum with an update on the school place planning across Bristol. The actions taken to mitigate the rising demand in secondary school places. Ian Bell and Jessica Taylor were in attendance to address questions.

The following was highlighted from the report:

- That two free schools are to open in September 2023 on temporary sites to ease the rising demand in secondary school places.
- A number of secondary schools have agreed to breach over the Published Admission Number to assist the LA meet local demand for places at Bristol schools.
- That there are a number of surplus primary school places and this trend in lower pupil numbers seeking reception places continues on a downward trajectory.
- The increased in secondary school demand has now filtered through to the post 16 sector and will impact demand.
- A review of the need across the Bristol area will commence in May 2023. The outcome of the review will feed into a consultation before any changes to Admission Policy criteria.

The following was noted from the debate and discussion that followed.

- a) Bristol City is set to establish a Free School; the process includes an engagement event for all Trusts; Timeline: 16th June pre-application and final application 31st August; that final bids would be submit; the decision maker is the DfE with input from the LA.
- b) The review on needs should include early years sufficiency because of the variation of birth rates across Bristol. Where is the data on birth rate and who is feeding this into sufficiency for early years?
- c) IB outlined the issues within the Early Years team and childcare sufficiency survey work; that had become disjointed, but assurance was given that the factors that impact provision are monitored to support sufficiency.
- d) Head of St Barnabas School shared the work undertaken by the setting to work towards closure; that this was a steep learning curve the outcomes of which will be shared with the LA decision makers; the school was left unsupported in a number of areas; the decision to close was with the LA but the process on who was responsible for which action/steps was not clearly defined between the LA, the School and the Dioceses. Examples were given of the areas that the school had to navigate unaided; the school site is jointly owned; who was responsible for disposing of what, it was

complex issues. The school's surplus resources was offered to other settings; thanked the forum and all primary settings that had support the integration of current children into their settings.

- e) Concerns were shared about the speed at which Officers were dealing with the primary setting sufficiency issue; that those settings with single form entry will be disproportionately impacted than those settings that expanded to 3 or 4 form entry when demand was high. The ask was about the scaling down conversations; to know what was proposed with these settings; what is the strategic plan to mitigate the crisis.
- f) RBW advised that the review was proceeding at pace; that conversation will include Heads of primary settings. The review will consider a formula to address the issue with clear objectives. The intention is to avoid closing schools with single form entry to spread the burden; all school settings will be updated on progress of this review.
- g) Published Admission Numbers(PAN) must be adhered to and any adjustments must follow a formal process and consulted on before implementation. The ask was for those conducting the review to include in the final outturn a timeline for change that allows settings to adhere to the legal timeline; that requires consultation on any change in the PAN the year before implementation.
- h) Officers were asked to work into all reviews a succession plan that would future proof the sufficiency plan.
- i) A discussion followed in which forum members expressed their disappointment in the break in sufficiency planning because of the inconsistency in senior managers in the LA. The ask was for a sufficiency plan that stood regardless of the interim managers that were in role. The issues have been well rehearsed for 4-5 years and yet there is a lack of consistent direction. The ask was for a written plan that all would adhere to no matter who leads the service to avoid any future waste of time.

It was AGREED that Schools Forum

- I. Noted the planned next steps

7. Any Other Business (As agreed by the Chair)

AL advised that training was delivered in April 2023 to Forum Members and that she was happy to arrange future sessions.

The Chair thanked all for being in attendance and for their contribution. A special thank you to Sam Wilcock, former Clerk, for her support and contribution to the work of the Forum.

The meeting closed at 6.45pm