

Bristol Schools Forum

**Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday, 26th September, 2023
at 5.00 pm at Virtual Meeting via Zoom**

	Action
1. Welcome	
The Chair welcomed all those present to the meeting and led introductions.	
2. Forum Standing Business	
Present:	
Mandy Cheshire	St Bedes Catholic Colleges
Simon Easkins	Cathedral Primary
Lorraine Gaskell	GMB Union Rep
Jo Grayson	North Star Academy
Tonya Hill	New Fosseway School
Simon Holmes	St Philips Marsh Nursery
Steve Hornsby	North Star Academy
Jo Kingston	Diocese of Clifton
Ian Morris	St Mary Redcliffe & Temple Secondary
Aileen Morrision	St Matthias Park
Sarah Lovell (Chair)	Bristol Brunel Academy
Samantha Packer	PVI Early Years
Chris Pring	Whitehall Primary School
Cedric Sanguignol	Bishop Road Primary
Helen Thornton	Unison Education Co-ordinator
Jo Willis	Bristol Diocese Board of Education
Aderyn Zajicova	The Limes Nursery School
In attendance from Bristol City Council	
Reena Bhogal-Welsh	Director of Education and Skills
Denise Murray	Director of Finance and S.151 Officer
Angel Lai	Finance Manager
Funmi Olagbalye	Finance Officer
Claudette Campbell	Clerk to the School Forum
<p>Apologies for Absence were received from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cameron Shaw - Cllr Asher Craig <p>Quorate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Clerk confirmed that the meeting was quorate. <p>Resignation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Further to the email circulated to Forum members by the Director of Education and the 	

Chair an opportunity was provided for the Chair to address the forum.

- The Director of Education and Vice Chairs gave a vote of thanks for the Chairs leadership and participation.
- The Chair invited those interested in taking the role to make contact to enable a discussion and information sharing to support the transition into the role.

Appointments

- Simon Shaw has retired from St Mary Redcliffe and has been replaced by Ian Morris as the Head's rep.
- Specialist representative there are two seats and the vacant seat will be filled by Jo Grayson.

Vacancies

The remaining positions are vacant and have been advertised via the Heads newsletter and various contacts. The challenge is filling the Academy seats on the forum. The following are vacant.

- 1) Academy settings reps required for the following categories of membership
 - a) Secondary Head x 1
 - b) Secondary Governor x 1
 - c) Primary Head x 2
 - d) Primary Governor x 1
- 2) Maintained Settings
 - i) We have applicants for the following vacancies elections are pending:
 - ii) Primary Maintained head x 1 seat
 - (1) Two applicants
 - iii) Primary Maintained governor x 1 seat
 - (1) Three applicants
 - iv) Secondary Maintained Governor - 1 from 1
 - (1) Ian Morris is to address the current board of Governors at St Mary Redcliffe to see if there is interest in replacing the retired governor
 - (2) Contact has been made with the one other maintained secondary St Bernadette Secondary Catholic School

Elections will be arranged to fill the vacant positions in time of the November meeting.

Declaration of Interest

There were none and the register will be reviewed this year to ensure up it is up to date.

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on the 12th July was resolved as a correct record.

Matters Arising/Actions

1. Action points
 - a. RBW to look at the Sponsor Licence and whether this can be applied to education settings
 - b. RBW to share details of the school selection process to participate in Workstream 1
 - c. RBW to share with colleagues the pressure to complete consultations that school settings have in the Autumn Term and to find a way to avoid consultation fatigue

RBW reported on point

1(a) that the programme spearheading the work on sustainability & transformation of maintained nursery schools have been made aware of this ask and it will be considered in the work programme; the next event, a workshop, involving Heads will be held on the 11th & 12th October 2023

1(b) addressed in agenda item 7

1(c) Conversations have taken place with work groups and at the Headteachers breakfast

4. DSG Budget Monitor - Angel Lai

Angel Lai, Finance Manager, reported on the Dedicated School Grant position as of Period 05(P05) to end of July 2023 and to seek approval of redesignation of funding to facilitate temporary support for LA Maintained schools in financial difficulty.

Highlighted the following from the report:

- a. DSG forecast overspend remains at £18.7m; driven by high needs block top up and placements costs resulting from increasing EHCP costs and the complexity of children with SEN; advised that is a continuing trend.
- b. Reassurance was given that the team supports and encourages each block to meet their needs within allocated budget.
- c. The decision item for LA maintained schools, set out in 3.1.1 of the report; the redelegation is to enable those schools who can demonstrate they have drawn up a financial plan that is sustainable and enables them to reach in-year balance over a fixed period. Sums will be provided to support them on a temporary basis until their ambitions are realised.
- d. Table 3 in the report identifies where the surplus funds will be drawn; 3 pots of money; total approx. £1m pounds.
- e. The allocated sums will be repaid to the fund by the school after the agreed period to enable sums to be recycled to others in need.
- f. Officers recommendation is for the Forum to approve the redelegation of the funds identified, to support LA Maintained Schools in financial difficulty.

Points of Clarification:

- g. Table 1, the bottom line the mitigation figure; explanation provided that the full mitigation sum is not projected to be realised; the sum noted is the current projected saving.
- h. Discussion as to why the DSG assumption includes an overspend and what the historic narrative is to explain the position that accepts that the High Needs Block brings with it a deficit. The ongoing challenge was acknowledged, and all reminded that 'The Programme' (agenda item 7) is in place to find a resolution.
- i. A robust question and answer session followed on the redelegation of funds to meet the need of LA Maintained schools.
- j. In summary:
 - a. The funds would only be provided to those schools that have set out a plan that results in the loan being paid back; the schools would have a licenced deficit; identified a repayment period; schools are restricted in that they are unable to trade in an overdraft the funds provided would provide that buffer and provide necessary cashflow; the monies paid back will be recycled to assist other schools in the same position; the loan period would be anything from 3 – 5 years;
- k. The Director of Finance, assured the Forum the fund is only available to those who are

able to provide a viable plan that demonstrate repayment; that due diligence would be applied before the loan is agreed; the aim is to put schools on a sustainable setting; challenge is the number of schools that require assistance; the funds will come back in and it will be recycled for future use.

- l. **Action:** that a report can be provided to the Forum on the terms of loan and use of funds; at the same time being mindful & sensitive in the way data is shared on those involved.
- m. The wider transformation exists to address the deficit position that exist amongst LA maintained schools and nurseries; assurance given that officers will continue to report on the solution to the funding deficit challenges.
- n. An ask, that it is noted that some school settings, non-LA settings, have taken drastic steps to ensure they remain within budget, that has resulted in the reduction in provision and staffing; and that they have not had the advantage of this support.
- o. It was shared that maintained nursery schools continued to face challenges, at a time that they are required to absorb budget challenges and shrink provision but scale up to meet government future commitment to families.
- p. The Chair clarified for all following the discussion; that the £1.1 identified would be treated as a loan to maintained schools and nurseries; those to benefit would have produced plans that would be subject to due diligence; the funds would be loaned for a fixed period of 3 to 5 years;
- q. The Forum was asked if the establishment of this fund was supported.
- r. One objection was noted that of Simon Eakins

Resolved:

1. That the Forum would support the creation of the loan fund from the sums identified in Table 3 of the report.
2. That the Forum receive regularly updates on the operation of the loan fund

5. National Funding Formula and DSG Funding Update - Angel Lai

Angel Lai (Finance Manager, Children and Education) presented the report on the emerging DSG funding levels for 2024/25; updates on changes to the School Block with the implementation of the hard NFF. Asked to note that allocations have yet to be confirmed and the figures shared in the report are indicative and should be treated only as such.

The following was highlighted from the report:

- a. Attention was drawn to the information shared in table 1 that provided the 'Indicative 2024/25 DSG Funding; that a comparative allocations summary was provided in the table; noted that the link provided to enable all to further interrogate the data.
- b. Bristol is working closer to the NFF; drew attention to the comparative allocations for 24/25 and the link in the report that provided a helpful summary.
- c. **Action:** The de-delegation service areas; that a balance position is reported on for each service area showing spending and balances; this should be available in time for the next meeting in November.
- d. The Grant allocation to cover teaching staff is made separately.
- e. Bristol historical has had a better fund allocation to support disadvantaged children.
- f. High Needs Block; an ask that the when funds are identified to be moved and transferred to support the block, that (1) those sums are put in proper context. (2) Noting the actual deficit amount and (3) the impact the sum identified will make; (4) to

avoid the impression that the movement of 'the sum' will resolve the issue.

The Chair invited the representatives from maintained mainstream schools to agree the de-delegated services in scope for the consultation as listed at 8.4 in the report.

When put to the vote:

Resolved (2 for; 0 against; 0 abstain) by the maintained school representatives that the de-delegation list as listed to be shared in the consultation.

The Forum resolved to:

- i. Note the indicative 2024/25 funding levels.
- ii. Note the transition to a hard NFF will continue in 2024-25 and the proposed restrictions relating to the DSG School Block.
- iii. Note that the LA will consult with schools on items in the local formula, particularly MFG, transfers between blocks, and formula factors.
- iv. Note that the LA will consult with schools on their views on de-delegation, and then report the results of the consultation to Forum for their decision at the meeting in November.
- v. Agreed to re-establishment a Finance Sub-group to consider funding formula proposals for 2024-25
 - a. Working Group Members Ian Morris and Chris Pring and Simon Eakins to meet on the 31st October with the LA Finance representative

6. DSG Management Plan - Angel Lai

Angel Lai (Finance Manager, Children and Education) presented the report. The purpose of the report is to update the forum on the refreshed DSG Deficit Management Plan.

AL outlined the position so far.

- a. The report summarises the position with regards to the 127 million deficit; sets out the plan to restore the financial health; sets out the operation and interventions.
- b. Reminded that 0.5 % percent was transferred to support the working group to find a resolution. The plan projects half percentage will be applied yearly.
- c. The latest forecast mitigation proposals could improve the forecasted financial position by £2.1 million in 2023/24 and up to a cumulative £12.6 million by 2027/28
- d. The position remains the same as reported last September 2022.
- e. Mitigation will be covered by agenda item 7

The following comments were noted, with the understand that the report on the Transformation programme, the next agenda item, provides details on the mitigation steps underway.

- i. Noted that the figures had not varied since last reported. The sum remains large, and it is for the Forum to bring challenge and provide support to the delivery of the transformation plan.
- ii. What assumptions made about staff salary increases; the assumption applied included 5% uplift based on information provided by DfE; the national figures were considered and the revised assumptions applied.
- iii. Section 4.1 page 24 estimates a reduction in SEN; that is because the school years population is projected to fall; the OSN projected school age population applied to forecasts.

- iv. The plan includes a calculation to account for movement of children in and out of the Bristol region. The Forum resolved to note the report.

7. High Needs Recovery Plan Update - Delivering Better Value - Reena Bhogal-Welsh

The report provides the background information and the update is set out from section 5.

Reena Bhogal Welsh (Director of Education) presented the report that provided the forum with an update on the progress on the DBV in SEND Programme. The report sets out the historical narrative. A grant of £1m was awarded to support the programme from the DfE.

The DBV programme is part of a wider programme of work to address the DSG deficit. This Programme includes work set out in the High Needs Block Recovery Plan, which was approved by the School's Forum in September 2022.

Section 5 of the report provides the update; details of the team(5.1); sets out the Governance structure(5.2). Section 5.3 Workstream 1 Test and Learn methodology working with small groups of schools to improve relationships between schools and families. The pilots are to take place between September 2023 and March 2024; the focus to review and codesign the SEND Guidance Reports with staff and parents/carers in 4 participating schools.

Forum asked for information on the selection process, this is detailed in (5.4) of the report; it is expected that up to 20 schools to be involved (15 primary and 5 secondary) based on combined inclusion data.

Workstream 2 progress is reported in (5.5 – 5.7) of the report.

The Forum will be provided with a report on the outcome of the consultation in November 2023; details of the delivery partners will be provided on request, via Claudette Campbell, Schools Forum Clerk. All were encouraged to feed into the consultation process.

The following was noted from the decision that arose:

Chair thanked RBW for the report; for providing the update on The Programme and details of the progress made to date; and invited Forum members to comment.

- a. How should we measure value for money? How to ascertain whether the outturn meets this threshold? How do you account for the competing voices in Bristol and how is the line drawn? What does success look like?
- b. RBW: Success is the production of an option appraisal; that those options can be shared with all Bristol stakeholders; that the option shows how to utilise funding at the right time and right place; a sustainable model that addresses needs and that is financially viable.
- c. Unable to forecast the outcome and state how many options will be presented but support the concerns that the outturn must not be onerous and must be a finite workable number.
- d. The Director of Finance confirmed her involvement and supported the provision of a strong governance framework; to provide rigor to deliver on the ambition; consultants are a useful tool, but they must be targeted in their approach and pressed to produce define outcomes.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> e. Forum members were concerned that ‘success’ may involve pain to several settings and the option adopted would be detrimental to some. f. Unfortunately, no guarantees could be given but officers provided assurance that children with high needs will continue to be supported to have better life experiences. g. Chair commented that there will always be challenges and it was hard to ask for guarantees from the LA and Officers. h. Forum members were invited all to work together and to collaborate on the proposal. The Programme is not intended to put schools in a difficult position but to support the aspiration to put funding where it is needed. Forum members were invited to provide early indication, to flag immediately if they are aware of unintended consequence, so that it can be included in the conversation. i. Forum members were Invite to feed back any comments to the Clerk Claudette Campbell. j. Clarification was given on the schemes noted in the report that were established before the programme, to work on alternative mitigations. These schemes run in parallel with Workstreams 1 and 2. k. Action: A report to explain the original schemes; these schemes form part of the review process in the main programme. | |
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Resolved to note the report.

8. AOB

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. The Chair confirmed that the Directors briefing will be carried over to the next meeting. B. The Director of Finance led the thanks to Angel Lai for her contribution to the financial business of the forum, as she moves to a new role. C. The Chair asked for clarification on the special schools funding and whether a further discussion was required on the decision to be made; AL confirmed that 1.78m had already been allocated to special schools; no further action was needed. | |
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The meeting closed at 6.45 pm.