

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

**SCHOOLS FORUM
22 JUNE 2023**

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM HELD ON THURSDAY, 22 JUNE 2023 AT 1400 HOURS ONLINE VIA MS TEAMS

PRESENT:-

James Hill – Chair
Les Lawrence - Mainstream academies representative
Catherine Griffiths - The Oaks Primary School
Mashuq Ally - Bordesley Green Girls' School
Pam Garrington - Moor Hall Primary School
Mike Dunn - Swanshurst School
Steve Howell - City of Birmingham School
Sean Delaney - Birmingham Federation of Nursery Schools
David Worledge - Washwood Heath Multi Academy Trust (WHMAT)
Gill Gregory - St Dunstan's Catholic Primary School
Rebecca Nash - St Brigids and St Columbas
Claire Henebury - Garretts Green Nursery School
Jyoti Jaspal - Little Folks / Mishi Nurseries
David Room - National Education Union
Janet Dugmore - Unison

Councillor Karen McCarthy - Non-school representative (Cabinet member
Children, Young People and Families)

Surinder Dhillon
Kelly Dawes
Juliet Silverton
Pauline McKenna
Craig Buckley - Oracle Programme Director
Helen Ellis - Director for SEND And Inclusion
Fiona Chamberlain - Schools Support Manager
Paul Crossly – Head of Service – Schools
Simon Ansell - Finance Business Partner – Economy
Clare Sandland - Finance Business Partner – CYP
Biju Nair - Transactional Services Consultant
Husham Khan - Interim Head of Schools Financial Services
Terry Shaw – Schools Funding Manager

32 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The Chair welcomed all attendees to the meeting. Prior to the meeting starting, the Chair advised, and the members noted, that this meeting would

be uploaded onto the Council's website. With members agreement, the meeting was recorded.

Apologies were submitted on behalf of Maxine Charles, Denise Fountain, Chris Wilson, Chris Townsend and Chris Etheridge.

Karen Davis noted that her attendance would be intermittent due to another commitment.

33 MINUTES – BIRMINGHAM SCHOOLS FORUM 16 MARCH 2023

The minutes of 16 March were updated to show the attendance of Gill Gregory, St Dunstan's Catholic Primary School and Catherine Griffiths, The Oaks Primary School.

Subject to the above note, the public minutes of the last meeting of the 16 March, having been circulated these were agreed by the School's Forum.

The business of the meeting and all discussions in relation to individual reports was available for public inspection via the web-stream.

34 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

Action (19/01/23): Page 15: Noted a further report to be considered on the use of the former Teachers Pay & Pensions Grant funding following a task and finish co-design workgroup as set out in 5.2 of the report.

The Committee Officer would follow up to check on progress.

All actions regarding the SEND Update at the previous meeting had been fulfilled.

BCC Internal Audit would be invited to the next meeting of the Forum on 26 October 2023

Discussions were ongoing with the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) and a meeting had been arranged with a representative from the ESFA for 3rd July to discuss his further.

35 LOCAL AUTHORITY UPDATE

A presentation was made using slides by the Director for SEND And Inclusion and the Schools Support Manager.

In addition to the information on the slides it was noted that:

- The Forum was updated on new Cabinet Members and members of the Children and Families Senior Leadership Team.
- There were a number of interim and acting-up posts in the Children and Families Senior Leadership team. The Schools Support Manager was working with two other strategic leads on school improvement, one looking particularly at partnerships and another looking particularly at strategic development.
- Two people were acting up to give oversight on arrangements for 14-19 and post-16.
- In terms of safeguarding there was an Acting Head of Education – Safeguarding and an Acting Head of Education – Safeguarding Partnerships.
- Birmingham's children's services have been judged by Ofsted to be good in all areas, this was good for Birmingham children.
- The report was published in April and the Council's Cabinet formally noted Ofsted's report and the improvements that have been made by the Council and Birmingham Children's Trust.
- The team were preparing for the next local area SEND inspection.
- SEND were working on a Delivering Better Value (DBV) programme and there would be regular updates to the Schools Forum.
- Many local authorities had been part of this programme.
- Birmingham was in Tranche 3, which was due to start in August.
- This was an exciting opportunity for Birmingham. Whilst this would be an intense programme, from a SEND perspective, there would be a lot of learning.
- The programme was working to identify and implement local and national opportunities to improve the outcome for children and young people with SEND.
- The programme was also about listening to challenges across the system and to partners within the system and collaboration, and the team would be working with schools around the programme as it was important that schools, children and families had a voice.
- The programme was also about challenges and solutions regarding funding going forward.

- With regard to short-term help, partners would be worked with closely, including Newton, CIPFA and the DFE, to understand what the needs were.
- The team would be working closely with their partners and building an evidence base for a grant application so there would be investment to move the system forwards.
- The long-term reform was about informing future policy and feeding into the national arena.
- In terms of diagnostics, it was being considered as to what DBV was and how to get the system to where it needed to be.
- There had been a lot of collaboration and the team would be engaging with the local workforce, partners and stakeholders, and there were lots of opportunities for engagement.
- The DBV diagnostic was broken down into modules. An evaluation had been set up. Weekly meetings were being convened with Newton and DfE.
- Module 1 was the Baseline and Forecasts. A lot of data had needed to be submitted around SEND 2 data sets.
- Module 2 was about root-cause diagnostics, Module 3 was about implementation planning and from there the grant application would be made. The financial and operational performance was being linked in to this.
- The finance element of high-needs and the data connectivity was critical. There was a lot of in-person training to the people who needed to be involved were being identified.
- In terms of engagement objectives, it was hoped to drive forward so that key stakeholders had a voice.
- In terms of next steps, it was important to be mindful of engagement opportunities. Further information would be disseminated to the Primary and Secondary Special Heads Forum to ensure that opportunities were not missed. If particular cohorts of schools were thought to be missing, they would be targeted, and further surveys would also be conducted.
- It was being ensured that Schools had a voice throughout the programme.
- The Director for Send and Inclusion and the Send Improvement Programme Manager were the key contacts for DBV.
- The launch of the SEND and Inclusion Strategy was taking place on 10 July and invitations had been sent out. This would include the Inclusion Headteacher Conference.

- Regarding early years and childcare, there had been a government announcement on childcare expansion. There had been a significant expansion and an offer currently for parents and carers. These sessions were being promoted and information would be fed through as it was received.

In response to questions, the Forum were informed that:

- Not everything on the slides was relevant to the Forum. The APP had been shared at the Primary and Secondary Special Heads Forum.
- In terms of the leadership diagram, Early Years sat under the Director for Send and Inclusion.
- It was not yet certain what investment there would be for Birmingham. Information would be shared as it was received.
- High needs block funding was not being used for SENAR services. A redesign was being started and a permanent SENAR service was being built with Unions being consulted.
- There was a need to acknowledge that it was difficult to fill positions nationally and regionally.
- The Council had invested in the services to allow them to move into a permanent space and high-needs block money was not being used for this. The consultation on the high-needs block budget for 2023/24 had been brought to the previous meeting of the Forum and there would be regular monitoring and the finance review progressed.
- The staff structure for the Schools and Fair Funding Finance Team could be shared outside the meeting.

The Chair read out a message from the School Relationship Manager who had needed to leave the meeting:

The Director Children and Families had described the role of Relationships Manger - Oracle Challenge, in an Education Update 20/6/23. Both Schools Relationship Managers had already started having useful and positive conversations with HTs, SBMs and school governors about their current experience with Oracle. Their approach was solution focused and communication was a key focus at all times. They had dedicated BCC email addresses now and would have a shared inbox that would be shared very shortly.

RESOLVED:-

- That a staffing structure for the Schools and Fair Funding Finance Team be shared with the Forum.

The Finance Manager (Schools and Fair Funding Team) submitted a report to inform Schools' Forum of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Block reserves forecast over the financial medium term of three years.

Main points included:

- Reports had been prepared and forwarded to members.
- The Dedicated Schools grant was the main funding stream for schools and education services. It was split into four blocks:
 - Schools Block funding mainstream schools and academies that were not special schools.
 - Central Schools Services Block (CSSB) funding Local Authorities in administering their mandatory services.
 - High Needs Block funding special schools and any mainstream schools with resource bases and pupil referral units.
 - Early Years Block funding nurseries and early years providers.
- The School Block and CSSB were currently projected to spend to budget in 2022/2023 with the outturn position being awaited, with the High Needs Block and Early Years Block yet to be determined. At this point it was assumed that the budget would be spent to across the DSG.
- At the end of 2021/22 the Council's DSG carry-forward balance was £13.05m. This was less than 1% of the DSG allocation awarded that financial year.
- The Council was in a good financial position compared to a lot of other local authorities as many were in a deficit situation.
- The Council's DSG allocation announced in December 2022 was set at £1.457.6bn for 2023/2024. Calculations had been carried out across the Schools Block and CSSB to check that they were affordable and whether reserves would be retained or utilised across the next three years. The national funding formula allocations would be published in August of the 2024/25 financial year.
- It was calculated that if the Schools Block DSG was to increase by 4.4% or above in 24/25 onwards and the National Funding Formula (NFF) pupil-led factors remained in line with the percentage increase of previous years then it would be deemed to be affordable with the reserves remaining.
- However, if it was 4.1% or below then reserves would be needed. Therefore the additional 0.3% increase above what was received in 23/24 equated to £3.3m, this negated the need for reserves.

- If the Schools Block DSG increased by 4.1% (5.3% Total Increase minus 1.2% NNDR) in 2024/25 onwards and pupil led factors increased at a similar rate, then the reserves would be eradicated by 2025/26, with the requirement of £3.1 million being used in 2024/25 thus reducing reserves to £2.9 million and eliminating reserves in 2025/26 in total and creating a cumulative deficit of £0.2 million thus requiring trimming the pupil led factor rates below the NFF rates to break even in 2025/26.
- There were additional DSG grant allocations across the Schools Block. Birmingham would be awarded £37.6m. However, this was to deal with inflationary factors and as such it had been discounted as it would be utilised.
- With regard to the CSSB, there was currently a reserves position in 23/24 of £1.714m. This was expected to reduce to £1.439m at the end of 23/24.
- Previous years' allocations had suggested that the increase in CSSB ongoing responsibilities for 24/25 would remain below 5%. Assuming any increase would be passed on to the budget holders managing the ongoing responsibilities, CSSB Block reserves are projected to reduce to £1.4 million in 2023/2024 and are projected to remain in surplus over the medium term to the end of the financial year 2027/2028. In 2028/29 it was projected to go into deficit based on percentages being below 5% for ongoing responsibilities.
- Historical commitments were reducing at 20% per year and some of these were funded by the ongoing responsibility fund and were projected to do so going forward. Therefore, in 28/29 when the deficit was projected, historical commitments would need to reduce so that less funding was used from ongoing responsibilities, thus achieving a break-even budget.
- In the Early Years Block and High Needs Block, the outturn was still to be determined. This could be provided at future meetings.

In response to questions, the Forum were informed that:

- Information on when workbooks would be returned would be covered in the Oracle Briefing Note.
- The 22/23 outturn would be covered in the Oracle Briefing Note.
- Regarding the way that the surplus was being used, the Chair highlighted two guiding principles: Firstly, that money allocated to children's education should be spent within the financial year and secondly that any surplus should be used to mitigate any shortfalls in the future. In terms of how this would be addressed, it was first

necessary to obtain the outturn position for 2022/23. The NFF would be published in August and there would be a clearer figure on increases across the four blocks.

The Chair invited the Finance Manager (Schools and Fair Funding Team) to ask for the support of the Forum in the Task and Finish group if needed.

37 WORK PROGRAMME 2023/24

The Forum considered the Work Programme for 2023/24.

Key points included:

- The SEND Update would be part of the Local Authority Update going forward.
- There would be a discussion between the Chair and the School Support Manager to clarify the remit of the Forum and to ascertain whether DfE documentation should act as a Terms of Reference or whether a specific Terms of Reference was needed.
- The Schools Forum should be representative of the Schools served. As such it was suggested that a report be produced to consider how academies were represented and to ensure that the membership was a correct representation of the organisations served.

RESOLVED: -

- That the Chair, Director for Send and Inclusion, and the School Support Manager meet to clarify the remit of the Forum and to ascertain whether DfE documentation should act as a Terms of Reference or whether a specific Terms of Reference was needed.
- That a report be produced to ensure that the Forum represented the organisations served.

38 ANNUAL REVIEW OF MEMBERSHIP

The Membership of Birmingham Schools Forum was shared for information.

- Les Lawrence and Catherine Griffiths would be standing down as members of the Forum. They were thanked for their insights on the Schools Forum. The School Support Manager would lead on recruiting to the vacancies on the Forum.
- It was noted that attendance of the Forum should be a priority for members and that attendance should be tracked.

RESOLVED: -

- That an annual report on the attendance of members be produced for review.
 - That the School Support Manager lead on recruiting to the vacancies on the Forum.
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39 ORACLE BRIEFING NOTE

The Oracle Programme Director gave a verbal update with slides as follows:

- Whilst the Oracle system was now live, the transition had been challenging.
- Staff had been paid and invoices had been issued, however, some critical elements were not yet functioning adequately. From a schools perspective, this made budgeting, financial reconciliations, reports, closing of accounts and day-to-day HR activities difficult. The Council apologised for the negative impact on schools.
- There was a big team in place, working hand-in-hand with schools to resolve issues and a new governance structure had been implemented. This structure was based on the Gold (setting the strategy)/Silver (executing strategy)/Bronze (operations delivery) command and was carefully monitored with weekly oversight from the Chief Executive and the Leader.
- In terms of what the programme looked like and its impact on schools, work was divided into three phases: Safe and Compliant (urgent tasks), Further Stabilisation and Medium/Long term Optimisation solution.
- There were some fixes relevant to schools such as the data needed for returns, however, this was the first stage of the process in a longer-term plan.
- Regarding Schools backlog items, any feedback into the programme was given an ID name for the potential change which went through a design authority process to see which phase it should sit in, how big it was, and what the impact would be.
- There was a lot of work to complete, and the team were focussing on doing things in the correct order. Therefore, listening and prioritising were important.
- Two new Schools Relationship leads were being appointed, it was the aim to have a single point of contact across services to give a rapid

response. In some ways his was an enhancement of what was already done. Communication flowed on a weekly basis and the bulletin board was regularly updated. This would make the process easier and colleagues in the team were being worked with closely to make sure that schools were being listened to and responded to accordingly.

- With regards to accounts closedown, for Chequebook schools, all year-end returns expected had been received. It was taking slightly longer than usual to process them and as such two additional resources had been allocated to this. The target was to complete this by the end of the summer term. Any historic queries would be noted in that position to allow further work later. KPMG had completed an independent review of early years issues and queries and it was hoped that this would help resolve historic issues and queries. Things were being moved forward so that schools could know that balance as soon as possible.
- With regards to accounts closedown on non-Chequebook schools and EPA schools, 150 of the 162 expected year-end returns had been received. Reasons for the 12 not returned were known and these were being worked on. Nil returns were included. A key part of the solution, the interface linking Oracle to schools systems had not been working correctly, this was still being corrected. Key defects had been resolved, but not all defects had been resolved yet. There were important to resolve as whilst transactions could be provided via the interface, certain types of income were still not fully working. It was important to get these working so that when files could get through to schools there would be an accurate position.
- Once reconciliations on non-chequebook schools had been resolved and the files were circulated, schools would need time to work on them and have the opportunity to revise the year-end balances and check for accuracy before returning them. The team were working to get issues right and then give schools the time needed to do the work needed. Once the system was working and work caught up on, it was hoped to return to business as usual.
- The current estimate for completion was the beginning of the autumn term working on the basis that the defects would be fixed over August. Therefore, the closure of schools' accounts would take place up until autumn.
- The accounts team was being worked with on options on how to look at issues with returns in the meantime. Once it was working it would work on an ongoing basis.
- Closing down accounts for schools was a top priority.
- The two main options were to process the returns to date from schools to close, with any subsequent adjustments required by schools being made at a later date once known, or ZSIMS loads.
- The extent of additional resources needed was being ascertained.

- A regular progress update was being committed to allow the Forum to see where things were on the plan and to give visibility of the forward plan.

In response to questions, the Forum were informed that:

- With regards to non-Chequebook schools, there was a commitment for getting the technological solution sorted over the summer holidays by Council staff. It would be September when the processing the final reconciliations would be completed.
- Assurance that costs of putting the system right was not coming out of the money allocated to schools to improve outcomes for children and young people was difficult as the allocation of resources was under programme control that happened at a higher level. However, it was not the expectation that this would happen.
- It was not the intention to ask schools to conduct testing over August, if schools did conduct testing it would be voluntary. The timescale could be discussed outside the meeting.
- Regarding the issues with Oracle preventing the Forum from conducting its work due to a potential lack of financial information, more work needed to be done to understand what was needed and when. It was necessary if the option was taken to close by putting through the schools received from non-chequebook schools and EPA schools to date, to give the schools an opportunity when rep files were received to adjust where necessary. If that option was taken, a provisional outturn could be presented to the October Forum.
- Chequebook schools were not affected by the reconciliation file issue. Therefore, a close of the end of term was being worked with for chequebook schools to confirm balances.

RESOLVED: -

- That the Forum be informed if there was a situation where any difficulties with Oracle would impact on the decisions of Schools Forum.

40 DATES OF MEETINGS

RESOLVED: -

That the dates of the meetings of the 2023/24 academic year be noted

41 **OTHER URGENT BUSINESS**

Les Lawrence and Catherine Griffiths were thanked for their work on the Forum.

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