

**Bury Schools Forum
Monday 18 June 2024
Microsoft Teams**

Attendance

Early Years

None in Attendance

Maintained Primary

Richard Ainsworth	Governor (Plus Governors Forum)
Simon Waddington	Headteacher – Hollins Grundy Primary
Rachel O’Neil	Hoyle Nursery School

Maintained Secondary

None in Attendance

Academy

Claire Ferguson	Oak Partnership
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Academy Primary

None in attendance

Academy Secondary

Orienne Langley-Sadler	Oak Partnership - Elms Bank
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Special

Katherine Ashworth	Millwood Special School (S)
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Pupil Referral Unit

None in Attendance

Non-Schools Sector

Helena Thom	NEU
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16 – 19 Education Representative

None in attendance

Children’s Services Department

Paul Cooke	Head of Schools & Academies
Kiki Ackatia-Armah	Interim Finance Business Partner
Stephen Holden	Interim Director of Education and Skills
Alison Vidler	Principal Finance Officer (Schools & Systems Finance)

Observer(s)

None in Attendance

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Carina Vitti	Holy Cross College
Joanne Hurst	Millwood Special
NASUWT rep	

2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

It was agreed:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 15 January 2024 be approved as a correct record of the meeting.

3 MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising from the Minutes of the last meeting.

4 DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT (DSG) DEFECIT POSITION

DSG Deficit position

Alison Vidler presented a report explaining the DSG deficit position and the progress being made in relation to this.

It was also reported that the Council has agreed a revised DSG deficit recovery plan with the DfE which extends the period for deficit recovery until 2028-2029.

Schools balances Update

Alison Vidler presented a report setting out the schools balances at the end of 2023-24.

The number of schools in deficit had increased from 13 at the end of 22/23 to 17 at the end of the 23/24 financial year.

It was explained that schools are required to adhere to their budget limits but in the event of an unplanned deficit this would be deducted from the following year's budget share. Schools that aren't able to produce a balanced budget can request approval to set a deficit budget by submitting a deficit recovery management plan to the Executive Director of Children and Young People and that deficit should normally be recovered within two years.

The school balances 2023/24 was appended to the report. Schools with a surplus shaded in blue, schools with a deficit shaded in red.

5 BURY SCHOOLS' FORUM REPRESENTATION

Alison Vidler presented a report explaining the schools forum member representation in relation to the proportion of maintained schools and academies in the borough.

It was explained that the January 2024 census showed that Bury has 62% of its Primary and Secondary pupils in Academies and 38% in Maintained Schools.

The schools' forum membership is as closely proportionate in percentage terms as it can be.

The report set out the membership from both Maintained and Academy schools in both primary and high schools, PRU, Early Years, 16 – 19 and teachers professional associations.

It was explained that there were a number of vacancies within each of the different groups.

It was agreed that an updated membership list would be produced and circulated to all members.

6 PROJECT SAFETY VALVE UPDATE

Stephen Holden, Interim Director Education and Skills gave a presentation giving an update on Project Safety Valve (PSV)

Stephen explained that since 2020, Bury Council has participated in the Department for Education's (DfE's) Safety Valve programme (PSV).

The Safety Valve programme targets the Local Authorities with a high deficit in their Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), providing targeted support and challenge to ensure their budget is sustainable in the future. Local authorities also receive additional funding as part of their agreed plan with the DfE.

An original agreement was entered into with DfE and published in March 2021, at which point the cumulative DSG deficit in Bury was £25.5m.

In early 2023, regular monitoring undertaken with DfE found that despite significant progress being made to meet the agreements outlined in the 2021 PSV plan there continued to be an increase in EHCPs in mainstream schools, an increase in out of borough placements and an increase in per head costs.

Updated modelling forecast that a cumulative deficit of £12m would remain by the original timeline to eliminate the deficit at the end of 2024/25 and as a result the terms of the agreement with DfE would not be met.

An updated plan was submitted in October 2023 and is now with DfE awaiting final approval. In the meantime, Bury Council is fully committed to delivering against this updated plan which will see the DSG deficit eliminated in the 2028/29 financial year.

At present, the DSG deficit at the end of the current financial year (2023/24) is forecast to be £18.5m, which is on track against the updated management plan, but with significant pressures and risks in the system. To deliver on the plan we will need to be ambitious and make some tough decisions.

Ongoing projects were highlighted and included:-

- Ensuring that the decision-making process is effective and efficient, and supports the right care to be put in place in-line with our new strategy and offer.
- Work to reduce EHCP demand by delivering on the Early Help Strategy including increased capacity, increased reviews and strengthening of provision.
- Ensuring a timely effective review of EHCP cases to ensure provision of the right care and in a sustainable way
- Co-production of a Graduated Approach Toolkit and support to schools including an online comprehensive toolkit
- Publish an up to date Local Offer and establish networks and engagement to strengthen communication of the local offer – the soft launch of the offer was underway and would be unique and bespoke to Bury.
- Increase of Resourced Provision places, working with an estimated 13 schools to provide additional places, Brookhaven now open, Millwood expansion in 2025 online provision, 110 places available. Work being undertaken to review and reduce need.
- Reducing the number of children being Educated Other Than At School (EOTAS)

Stephen set out the key developments to highlight:

- Establishment of a Schools Inclusion team, including SEND and Inclusion Champions.

- Development of the Graduated Approach Toolkit and the comprehensive support to schools to implement the toolkit.
- Development of the Multi-agency inclusion panel, providing schools with one point for support
- Expansion of the EHCP team so each school has a named case worker and schools' involvement in the EHCP panel.
- Expansion of Special School provision and Resourced provision.
- Extension of the Autism in School project
- Further training and support for schools delivered through the SENCO network

It was agreed:

1. That Stephen be thanked for his presentation
2. That the contents of the presentation be noted.

7. PUPIL PLACE PLANNING STRATEGY

Paul Cooke, Strategic Lead (School System), presented the Forum with the Pupil Place Planning Strategy 2023/2024-2028/29 – Primary Schools.

It was explained that the document had been circulated widely to all stakeholders.

The guidance sets out the sufficiency framework with clear expectations and clarification of the roles and responsibilities of local authorities, academy trusts, diocesan boards and other partners in the context of strategic place planning. These expectations are centred around collaboration, transparency, and early engagement on pupil place planning. The framework seeks to systemise the place planning process whilst recognising there cannot be a strict 'one size fits all' approach.

The document set out the assessment of potential impact for Bury, the current and forecast demand for places, forecast position by planning areas, the draft sufficiency strategy, and the next steps.

Factors for consideration in the development of options were explained and included published admission numbers, faith provision, residential development and the Places for Everyone Strategy.

It was explained that changes to admission numbers may affect sustainability and the document included information on ways that schools and boards can respond and possible measures that would help such as staffing, surplus accommodation and other uses and early years' provision.

Paul reported that the current 5 year forecast shows demand slowing but a number of residential sites had been approved recently which would generate additional housing. The Places for Everyone strategy would also see several large development sites which would bring in new families.

Paul stated that schools and trusts will be considering the different options available to ensure that they were sustainable going forward.

It was agreed:

That Paul be thanked for the report.

8. PROPOSED REVISIONS TO THE SCHEME FOR FINANCING SCHOOLS

Alison Vidler Schools Finance Officer presented Council's updated scheme for financing schools.

Alison explained the updates that were in line with the guidance and asked that the Schools' Forum agree that the document be shared on the Council website in line with the statutory guidance s.48(4) and paragraph 2A (2) of Schedule 14 to the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, School Standards and Framework Act 1998

It was agreed:

That the updated guidance be published on the Council website in accordance with the Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998.

Note: The meeting started at 4pm and ended at 5.05pm