

Croydon Schools Forum

Minutes of Meeting held on Monday 10th March 2025

Members Present:

Jolyon Roberts	Dave Harvey
Gill Larocque	Sue Lenihan
Sarah Hunter	Chris Andrew
Clare Cranham	Kate Lanning
Theresa Staunton	Dean Brewer
Fiona Robinson	Dan Bowden
Julie Evans	Stephen Hehir
Keran Currie	Maryssa Dako
Tyrone Myton	

Observers Present:

Shelley Davies	Jenny Bartlett
Cllr Amy Foster	Cllr Maria Gatland
Brian Smith	Cllr Joseph Lee
Abioye Asimolowo	

Apologies: Markieu Hayden, Alaina Packer-Searle, Sharon Hemley and Jenny Aarons

Elected Chair: Jolyon Roberts
Elected Vice Chair: Gill Larocque

Clerk: Mori Bates

Item	Detail	Lead/Action
1.	Welcome & Apologies	JR
	Apologies received by MB from MH, APS, SHem and JA	
2.	Minutes & Actions – Meeting 27th January ‘25	JR
	<p>Minutes, actions, and matters arising from last meeting 27th January 2025</p> <p>Summary of comments made in reference to the previous minutes:</p> <p>2.1 Feb’24 minutes: Under Q3/A3, relating to children under the category of Support for Inclusion/Home Education, further information was requested. SD agreed to take over this action – ACTION SD</p> <p>2.2 It was queried in January’s meeting under 4.3 that some nurseries had paused admissions due to an increase in SEND cases, which SD was to clarify the details of this situation. SD confirmed that there were two nurseries that had paused intake according to the review, but we do not think that this has continued. (ACTION – More information needed)</p>	<p>SD</p> <p>SD</p>

	<p>a) Clerk also amended any errors with phrasing and SPAG.</p> <p>2.3 January minutes taken as read and to be uploaded to the website</p> <p>2.4 <u>Therapies Update</u>: Forum was reassured that work is being done on the therapies contracts with conversations taking place with health colleagues. Chair expressed the frustration of Croydon school leaders with the time this was taking – with the start date for the contract now having been delayed three times.</p> <p>2.5 <u>Budgets for Schools</u>: Budgets have been received by schools late and we have not received the outcomes of the APT in order to know whether there was any variance.</p> <p>ACTION: Next Pre-Meet – Look at a comparison of the budget/statements against the outcomes of the APT in relation to school allocation</p>	PRE MEET ATTENDEES
3.	Growth Fund Update	AA
	<p>3.1 AA presented a paper with an update on the growth fund. The allocation for growth fund 24/25 was £1.718m. It was agreed that money would be spent with the following distributions:</p> <p>3.1.1 £304k to cover the shortfall in schools budget allocation (actual used is £229k)</p> <p>3.1.2 £250k for purchase, repair and refurbishment of equipment for schools with additional educational needs (AEN).</p> <p>3.1.3 £850k for KS4 pupils in Alternative Provision</p> <p>3.2 Section 4 of the paper details the proposal for next year's growth fund allocation. In December 2024, the DfE advised that the Croydon growth fund for 25/26 would be £1.22m. Of this amount, £415k was used to supplement the allocation to all schools, leaving a balance of £805k.</p> <p>Q1: JR: Looking at Table 2, the amount allocated to balance the shortfall is £229k – would it not be better to adjust the AWPU in future?</p> <p>A1: AA: We have to ensure that the growth fund is being utilised under the correct guidelines and criteria for distribution. There are restrictions in place as to how we can spend the money and the amount for growth fund is reducing for next year.</p> <p>3.3 SD noted that some schools haven't taken the funding which has been allocated to them and there is a statute of limitation for growth funding.</p> <p>3.4 In connection to the legacy therapy bids, 38 bids were submitted and a set of transparent criteria had ensured that all who submitted a bid would get something.</p> <p>3.5 Equipment requests saw 79 bids of which we are aiming to pay for in full, but more bids are expected to come in. This will help to use the</p>	

	<p>fund in the current financial year and ensure there isn't further underspend.</p> <p>3.6 TS noted that a similar decision was made for the 24/25 budget, where a potential overspend seemed likely, and funds were allocated from the Growth Fund following the presentation of the final outturn paper at the Forum meeting that took place in June '24. The paper indicated that the transfer from the Growth Fund was discussed, but there does not appear to be any reference of this in any of the Schools' Block Working Group minutes.</p> <p>3.7 The decision to use the Growth Fund was voted on by the Schools Forum, which would explain why the Finance Manager has referred back to this action to propose a transfer of £415,000 for the 25/26 budget.</p> <p>3.8 TS added that this year, when the formula factors were discussed, there was no access to the usual comparisons of the impacts of setting these factors, nor could we compare them to the previous year. This was due to the delay in receiving the Schools Budget from the DfE to the LA. JB agreed that for next year, it would be possible to go through the impacts of the decisions that were previously made. SD reminded members of Forum that the delay of the budgets is no fault of the council.</p> <p>3.9 Early Years settings are also funded based on census data collected around April and so the pupils expecting to join in September of the same year are not counted, but they would be recorded in future census data.</p> <p>3.10 At the next Schools' Block Working Group meeting, there should be a discussion on the methodology behind the distribution and allocation of the growth fund with an emphasis on balancing the budget using AWPU.</p> <p>3.11 A suggestion was made to continue with the A.P taskforce using funding from the KS4 alternate provision. GL explained the A.P taskforce consists of an 18 week programme – 12 weeks onsite and 6 weeks of check ins. It is a significantly bigger taskforce and a project that works successfully for the children. The government are happy for this provision to continue, but the funding has to be match funded by the council. The programme focuses on ensuring that pupils are placed in appropriate settings for the individual – whether that is back into mainstream schools or in alternative provisions.</p> <p>3.12 AA directed Forum's attention to 4.2 of the paper which illustrates how the underspend from the previous year's growth fund budget might be transferred into KS4 alternative provisions.</p> <p>3.13 The recommendations of the paper were noted and further discussion surrounding the distribution methodology will follow in the next Schools' Block Working Group</p>	
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4.	PFI Update	AA
	<p>4.1 JR explained that he had received a letter from the section 151 officer, Jane West (JW), in connection to the decision Forum made about the funding for the PFI.</p> <p>4.2 JW wrote to explain that decreasing the amount being giving to the PFI was not an appropriate decision. Reducing the amount from £560k to £500k meant that JW had to act within the overall interest of all the schools in the borough and she had taken the decision to override this decision of Forum. Therefore, the officers have been instructed not to decrease the amount distributed to the PFI.</p> <p>4.3 Funding for the PFI will no longer need to be discussed going forwards as this figure is now set for future years. It was emphasised that if there was £500k given to the PFI and there was a shortfall whereby they required additional money, then it would be down to the LA to source this funding and the section 151 officer could not tolerate this risk.</p> <p>4.4 Members of Schools Forum who had served for a number of years recalled the figure being reduced historically and their decision was never queried or changed. It was again reiterated that if there were clarity on what the money is being spent on, then members would have had a clearer picture on how much funding the PFI may have needed.</p>	
5.	Working Group Updates	TS/TM/ FR
	<p>6.1 Updates were received from the working groups as followed:</p> <p>a) Early Years – TS indicated that the minutes reflect that of the budget, the SENIF queries were reviewed and then raised the following issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A) There has also been a change to how funding for additional hours which has affected the nursery classes. It would be helpful for all setting to voice their concerns about the unworkable nature of the process. B) With this change, if a nursery has a lunch provision, this is normally chargeable to the parents. However, the DfE has said that settings are no longer allowed to charge for this. C) KL added that the ratio is normally 1:13 during the day and 1:8 over the lunch. The impact of not charging the lunch hour makes it difficult on the nursery as they need to incorporate a teacher’s lunch break into the system. <p>b) Schools Block – Discussion was focused on the growth fund budget and the PFI</p> <p>c) High Needs – There will be a SENIF & Early Years paper to help show the distribution of the funds. It was noted that special schools are still waiting for their budgets.</p>	

	A) The CLSS is currently being reviewed. SD stated that discussions are ongoing in regards to how the CLSS is working and whether any changes need to be made. Schools will be contacted in regards to feedback. SD clarified that the CLSS is not stopping and work is being done to be clear about the budget set for CLSS.	
6.	AOB	ALL
	No AOB	

Meeting Adjourned: 10:50am
Date of next meeting: TBD Jun 2025
Venue TBD