

Croydon Schools Forum

Minutes of Meeting held on Monday 22nd September 2025

Members Present:	Jolyon Roberts	Julie Evans
	Theresa Staunton	Fiona Robinson
	Clare Cranham	Dan Bowden
	Dave Harvey	Keran Currie
	Sarah Hunter	Gill Larocque
	Tyrone Myton	Maryssa Dako
	Chris Andrew	Dermot Mooney
	Kate Lanning	Debbie Ryle
Observers Present:	Abioye Asimolowo	Priya Pereira
	Susanna Roe	Cllr Maria Gatland
	Shelley Davies	Jenny Bartlett
	Alfred Donkor	Bianca Byrne

Apologies: Cllr Joseph Lee, Cllr Amy Foster, Jenny Aarons and Sue Lenihan

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 CllrJL, CllrAF, JA and SL	
2.	Membership	JR
	2.1 On review of the membership for Schools' Forum, following a resignation from Alaina Packer-Searle, there are vacancies for a nursery school governor and a secondary school governor. Nominations will be sought to fill these vacancies. 2.2 Debbie Ryle (DR) is now attending as the representative for 14-16 as he is the senior leader at John Ruskin and they are the only setting in that representative category. 2.3 It was noted that there should be two maintained primary school headteachers serving on the Forum, rather than a member and alternate member as it currently shows on the membership. Therefore, Karen Steele (KS) will be invited to all future Schools' Forum meetings as the second representative for maintained primary schools. ACTION: CLERK	Clerk

3.	Election of Chair & Vice Chair	SD
	3.1 A self nomination for the role of chair was received from JR and a nomination for JR by DH prior to the meeting 3.2 GL verbally agreed to stand for vice chair prior the meeting. 3.3 The forum voted on both and the result was unanimous. JR and GL were formally announced by SD as chair and vice chair respectively.	
4.	Minutes & Actions – Meeting 10th March ‘25	JR
	Minutes, actions, and matters arising from last meeting 10th March 2025 Summary of comments made in reference to the previous minutes: 4.1 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 4.1.1 SD confirmed that the Virtual Schools Report will include a section on Inclusion and Home Education. 4.2 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. 4.2.1 SD confirmed that the admissions were no longer being paused and the setting involved had been reminded of their SEND obligations; 4.2.2 Clerk also amended any errors with phrasing and SPAG. 4.3 March minutes were taken as read and to be uploaded to the website post meeting 4.4 <u>Growth Fund:</u> There should be an update for the Growth Fund provided either at the November or December Forum meeting at the latest and preferably before the APT information is released. 4.5 <u>CLSS:</u> Forum was reassured that the CLSS is still in operation. SD confirmed that money for this term has been allocated. It was also highlighted that the SEND service is currently undergoing a restructuring. Following the implementation of the restructure, there will be an assessment team and additional CLSS team members that can work directly in schools. SD reiterated that a focus on Early Intervention is the part of the SEND strategy, given the increasing number of 750 EHCPs last year it is important that we have early support for children and young people. There will be communications going out to school SENCOs in due course to provide an update.	

5.	DSG Outturn paper	AA
	5.1 AA presented a paper with an update on the DSG Outturn, which related to the year ending April '25. The recommendations were noted by members of Forum. 5.2 Members were directed to Table 3 which showed the Overall DSG Reserve Position. This section has to be displayed separately under guidelines. It was also noted that the DSG deficit before the Safety Valve agreement is always treated as an unusable reserve and must now be disclosed separately in all reports. 5.3 SD added that they have met with other LAs under Safety Valve agreements, and it was understood that Croydon appeared to be in a fairly good position by comparison. 5.4 The Safety Valve agreement is designed to shrink the High Needs structural deficit. However, this relies on no increase in the current 'in year' deficit and, unfortunately, this is now growing again. As shown in Table 2, the High Needs block net allocation for 24/25 is £80,977,457 against a Provisional Outturn for 24/25 of £84,476,437 – an 'in year' overspend. 5.5 Appendix A displayed the variance in the Provisional High Needs Block Spend for 24/25, whereby the negative numbers shown should be noted as overspends. The data showed how much was allocated and how much was spent. For example, Line 17, Inclusion Support had £450K allocated and £1,290,598 was spent. 5.6 It is important to note that the problem is not with budgeting oversight, but with the finances available being insufficient and also required to meet the need and demand in the borough. 5.7 The Chair stated that at the Pre-Meet, a High Needs paper was requested to be presented at the October meeting to emphasise certain areas noted in Appendix A. SD added that they are working with the DfE in regards to surplus places to see if these can be utilised more efficiently whilst also looking at the possibility of expanding special schools. Q1: CA: Is the VAT payable to independent special schools included in the table? A1: AA: Special schools are mandated to charge VAT, but it is not incorporated into the figures in this paper. 5.8 DB queried charges for out of borough places. SD explained that discussions are being had about regulating the costs, but it does depend on the needs of the child on an individual basis, the parental preference and the cost. This means that each case requires a number of factors to be taken into consideration. 5.9 GL queried the figures for Croydon Pupil Referral Units (Line 9 of Appendix A), it should a 23/24 Outturn of £4,275,410 and a 24/25	

	allocation of £1,979,000 with a 24/25 Outturn of £1,027,734. Given the difference in figures, JB agreed to carry out further investigation into the breakdown of these figures shown in Appendix A and the cost centres for each on. ACTION JB – Provide a breakdown of figures of Appendix A giving a commentary on why there is such a variance on line 9 of appendix ‘A’. 5.10 It was noted that 2.1 and 2.2 of the paper show a High Needs ‘in year’ deficit. The Central Block, Schools Block and Early Years Block are all running within their budget.	JB
6.	Disapplication Request	AA
	6.1 AA presented a paper on the disapplication request for £1.2M from schools’ block to be moved to the High Needs block. Should Schools Forum decide to decline the transfer, the LA has to report this to the DfE who have the ability to overrule the decision of Schools Forum. 6.2 The Chair stated that he was against the disapplication request. Finances are tight across the board and mainstream schools are experiencing issues around chronic underfunding causing job cuts and budget tightening. Moving money that is allocated for one group of children to another block was just a ‘sticking plaster’ solution. 6.3 TM reminded Forum that if they did vote against the block transfer, the fact that the decision can be overruled makes such a decision some futile. 6.4 SD added that the total number of children, within schools, as a whole is declining, the number of children with EHCPs within the borough are rising. Children supported under the high needs block attend both special and maintained schools, and they should be kept at the heart of the decisions being voted on. 6.5 It was stated that there will be uncertainty once the Safety Valve agreement comes to an end. Prior to the vote, the Forum expressed appreciation for the work so far being done in reducing the DSG High Needs deficit. 6.6 The vote: 12 members voted in favour of the transfer, with two members voting against. Forum agreed on the disapplication request to transfer £1.2m from the Schools’ Block to the High Needs Block.	
7.	SALT Update	AD
	7.1 AD provided the working group with an update on the therapies contract. Following the tender that went out in May and closed in June, 7 bids were received, where a multi-agency panel evaluated each bid. Thanks were expressed by Forum to the members of that panel	

	including the chair of the high needs working party. 7.2 Croydon will now take two bids forwards, with the highest scoring bid of after the evaluation being asked to manage the North and South of the borough and the second highest scoring bid covering the Central area. The hope was that that this will help to manage the demand in the three zones and provide a 'fall back' option if one provider should fail. It was noted that the providers will still not be able to meet the demand and needs of the LA. But that it is far better than the arrangements that preceded it. 7.3 Croydon had concluded negotiations with CHS over the current arrangement. The CHS will continue to provide SALT in the special schools and ELPs currently receiving the provision but they will withdraw the OT services from education settings and will cease providing non-statutory initial assessments for school aged children. AD said that a revised spec has been developed with CHS to align the service delivery with available funding	
8.	Working Group Updates	TS/TM/ FR
	8.1 Updates were received from the working groups as followed: a) Early Years – A sufficiency update was reviewed and it was noted that ongoing work is being done on SENIF. b) Schools Block – No meeting took place. c) High Needs – An issue occurred with the mailing this, which MB has resolved. The meeting focused on AD's SALT update and a verbal Finance update, with a report due on CLSS and SENIF next month.	
6.	AOB	ALL
	It was noted that the next meeting should focus on Formula Factors, a SEND paper, Scheme for Financing Schools paper and maybe a Growth Fund Update.	

Meeting Adjourned: 11:45am
Date of next meeting: Monday 10th November 2025
F10, Croydon Town Hall