Croydon Schools Forum

Minutes of Meeting held on Monday 8th December 2025

Members Present:	Gill Larocque	Dan Bowden
	Theresa Staunton	Karen Steele
	Chris Andrew	Dave Harvey
	Sue Lenihan	Markie Hayden
	Kate Lanning	Tyron Myton
	Fiona Robinson	Cllr Joseph Lee
	Julie Evans	Keran Currie
Observers Present:	Shelley Davies	Abioye Asimolowo
	Brian Smith	Cllr Maria Gatland
	Susanne Roe	

Apologies: Jolyon Roberts, Clare Cranham, Debbie Ryle, Dermot Mooney, Jenny Bartlett and Sharon Hemley

Elected Chair: Jolyon Roberts
Elected Vice Chair: Gill Larocque

Clerk: Mori Bates

Item	Detail	Lead/ Action
1.	**Welcome & Apologies**	GL
	Apologies received by MB from JR, CC, DR, DM, JB and SHem GL acting as Chair in JR's absence	
2.	**Minutes & Actions – Meeting 10th November '25**	GL
	Minutes, actions, and matters arising from last meeting 10th November 2025 Summary of comments made in reference to the previous minutes: 2.1 Under 5.8: GL queried the figures for Croydon Pupil Referral Units (Line 9 of Appendix A), of which it was agreed a meeting would take place outside of Forum with SD and JB. **ACTION: IN PROGRESS** 2.2 Under Agenda Item 6 (Proposal from Archbishop Tenison's) An update was requested in regards to the meeting that took place between JR and Archbishop Tenison's of which can be provided at the next Forum meeting in January. **ACTION: JR**	JB & SD JR

3.	**Scheme for Financing Schools**	**AA**
	3.1 AA presented a paper on the proposed scheme for financing maintained schools, noting the last time the scheme was changed was 2022. The proposed amendments were noted in Appendix A, with highlighted areas indicating sections that are mandated and others that are voluntary. 3.2 Under 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3.1 of the paper, there were numerous comments about the interest on late budget share payments. AA explained that the LA is working towards paying these funds in advance of when they think the school requires payment so that they can remain on top of their finances and then be able to cover the term as per the dates outlined in the paper. It was noted that the dates these funds are meant to distributed are quite tight for the start of term **Q1:** SL: Is there a rationale behind the dates under 3.1? **A1:** AA: These dates are from an inherited system of which would require a period of consultations if Forum would like for these to be changed. **Q2:** MD: For schools that are in deficit, the school leaders need to know when the money is coming in so that they can plan ahead with their budgets. How can the LA be held to account for the dates that are specified in the paper? We need to be aware of the pinch points in the year that can rely heavily upon these funds. **A2:** AA: Since coming into post, we have been making sure to get the money out on the day it should go out for. A school that is in deficit will have a reason for being in this situation and each case is unique. We are committed to making payment on or before the payment dates. Under specific guidelines, we are only allowed to pay schools once a month, so if a school submits a cash advanced request at the beginning of the month, money should be received in that month's payment. 3.3 MH queried how SEN funding is still not being received in advance, with KL confirming that EHCP funding is paid the term after and there has been a delay in receiving the EHCP funding. 3.4 SD explained that two workshops have taken place around the SEND funding, looking at how the current system can be improved. In the discussions that took place, it highlighted some faults that would help to ensure a smoother running system. There are short term and long term changes that are planned 3.5 BS added that core funding, especially for special schools, the High Needs Block funding is paid out for based on the information that is held at that time. When information is received from the schools and LA officers, the money is distributed as accordingly. 3.6 The recommendations were noted by the Forum and 8 out of 8 of the maintained schools representatives voted in agreement of the proposal.	

4.	**P6 DSG Budget Monitoring**	**AA**
	4.1 AA presented Forum with a paper on the DSG budget monitoring, indicating that the DSG allocation received as at the end of July 2025 was £516.6m gross and £234.9m net. As a result of the audit, the finance team have found some historical payments that have to be honoured, meaning the forecasted deficit as of 25/26 is now £34m, which has been reported back to the Safety Valve team. **Q3:** TS: Where are the figures to reference this? Ordinarily, a line by line breakdown would be given so that we can see issues clearly. Summaries do not show how we are overspent, making it appear vague. Early Years has not seen a report detailing where money has been spent for over eight quarters now. Forum is meant to have oversight, but the paper does not show the evidence relating to these figures. **A3:** AA: Unfortunately, we are trying to get to the bottom of various arising issues but based on how far back some of these issues go, we are carrying out investigations at the same time. Due to this, it was our preference to present a summary rather than nothing at all, but a more detailed report will follow 4.2 SD suggested that the High Needs budget be presented on a line by line basis to show how the final outturn compared to budget set. It is important to note that when a budget is set, it needs to be balanced, so a line by line illustrated will emphasise the current standing financially. GL added that there would then be clarity in the data and budgeting that would give Forum the background information to accompany the narrative. **Q4:** TM: There is concern for an overspend, especially given that we spent £14m of money we did not have, so will the government give additional money? **A4:** SD: The money is partly based on historic information and there is a clear issue, so there will be many LAs who will have a nationally High Needs Budget deficit. The strategy was originally designed to create more places for children within the borough, but we are struggling to meet the rising demand and need. Croydon as an LA has been implementing projects to help with SEND support, such as CLSS and Early Intervention. 4.3 Some members of Forum queried that if a lack of spaces and the existing available provisions, what can be done to stop the overspend. TM explained that opening an ELP in their schools could help with the current situation, but there is a staffing cost issue. MH added that there are a number of primary schools with ELPs, but not the same amount in secondary schools which will generate an issue in the future when children transition form primary to secondary. SD stated that the LA is unable to use the High Needs Budget for staffing costs, but is happy to have discussions outside of Forum about establishing an ELP.	

	Q5: CA: Do we have a sense of how much of the £13.9m is legacy and how much of it is new outgoings? If we are aware of our legacy costs, then it should be possible to investigate how these payments can be managed. **A5a:** AA: We need to be aware that the figure is constantly moving. As time goes on, the financial data will be clearer, allowing for a more in-depth analysis. **A5b:** SD: Some pushback has been received from mainstream schools to take children with EHCPs when these needs can be met in these provisions. We have meetings planned with the DfE and the LA has requested the SEND advisor attend the meeting too. 4.3 When it was suggested that investigations take place into opening another special school, SD informed Forum that the processes do not allow for the LA to open a special school. At present, the LA is focusing on increasing ELPs and expanding the current provisions. In order to open a special school, the LA would need to submit an application with an academy or trust. 4.4 There was expressions of interest and a willingness for various members of Forum to have discussions with the LA to help work out a solution that can work towards improving the situation. **Q6:** FR: It would be good to see the figures of the amount of children within the SEND division, in particular, the number of children with additional needs and how many out of borough children there are? **A4:** SD: We have a spreadsheet where we can anonymise schools and show uplifts etc. 4.5 The recommendations of the paper were noted by members of Forum.	
5.	**SENIF Update**	**MB**
	5.1 In absence of an LA officer from the SEND team to provide an update on SENIF, MB obtained a written update from Mel Farris, who confirmed that despite delays in processing and awarding SENIF funding, all outstanding cases have been processed. 5.2 From September '25 onwards, all SENIF applications from MNS and school-based nurseries are submitted to Mel directly and are now being reviewed on a monthly cycle to ensure consistency. 5.3 Work is also being done to establish a methodology for the distribution of SENIF.	
6.	**Working Group Updates**	**TS/TM/ FR**
	6.1 Updates were received from the working groups as followed – minutes to be marked as read: **a) Early Years –** Working group met and reviewed a sufficiency paper	

	b) **Schools Block** – Working group reviewed the papers that were discussed at length in the Forum meetin **c)** **High Needs** – Updates received on the therapies contract and the High Needs Budget	
8.	**AOB**	**ALL**
	The next meeting will take place on 19th January with a view to having an update on the Growth Fund and the Mid Point Adjustment.	

Meeting Adjourned: 11:25am
Date of next meeting: Monday 19th January 2026
F10, Croydon Town Hall