Early Years Subgroup

10/11/2026 via Microsoft Teams

In attendance

Denise Bushay (DB) Acting Chair	Head of Service - Schools Places & Admissions
Jeni Murphy (JM)	Early Years Strategic Lead
Maria Reeve (MR)	Head of Purley Nursery School
Kim Berham (KB)	Head of Sparkles and Millie's Pre-schools
Jenette Indarsingh (JI)	Head of Thornton Heath Nursery School
Kate Lanning (KL)	Head of School, Tunstall Nursery School
Melanie Farris (MF)	SEND Lead - Early Intervention and Improvement
Abioye Asimolowo (AA)	Finance Manager
Andy Moore (AM)	Principal Accountant

Agenda

No.	Item	Lead
1	**Apologies and Welcome / Introductions**	**DB**
	DB welcomed the group and noted the agenda for the session. **Apologies received:** Shelley Davies (SD), Yetty Osonaike (YO), Lisa Clements (LC), Sophoya Davis (SopD). **Membership & Staff Introductions:** Theresa Staunton (TS) has retired, leaving a vacancy for Working Group Chair and PVI representation on the Schools Forum. AM introduced himself as a new member from Croydon Finance team. **Quorum & Governance Structure:** DB noted the meeting was slightly under-attended due to a gap in recent meetings and calendar invites needing refreshing. AA clarified that to be appointed Chair of the Working Group, an individual must first be a member of the Schools Forum. KL confirmed she is currently the only Working Group member on the Schools Forum.	
2	**Early Years Sufficiency & Grants Update**	**JM**
	JM presented the Sufficiency Paper. **Early Years Teachers' Pay and Pension Grant (EYTPG):** In July 2026, the DfE announced Croydon's 2026/27 EYTPG allocation of £116,825 (received October 2026) to fund the September 2026 teachers' pay award across maintained nursery schools, governor-run maintained nursery classes, and academies. DfE part-time equivalent (PTE) rates are £115 (Under 2s), £85 (2-year-olds), and £65 (3- and 4-year-olds). With no under-2s recorded on roll in Croydon's maintained settings, funds apply solely to 2, 3, and 4-year-olds and will be distributed in the December 2026 payment cycle. **Early Years Free School Meals (FSM) Grant:** Following the June 2026 FSM expansion to all children in households receiving Universal Credit, Croydon was allocated £132,714 (£76.00 per PTE child from September 2026 to April 2027) for maintained nursery schools, maintained nursery classes, and academies, to be paid in December 2026 ahead of the March deadline. JM noted that DfE FSM eligibility checks now apply year-	JM

	on-year rather than permanently. PVI settings are excluded from this grant and are not required to provide free meals (though parents opting not to purchase meals may bring packed lunches); PVI members raised concern over this disparity. **Proposed Changes to Headcount & Payment Methods (April 2027):** Following the January 2026 DfE requirement to offer monthly payments from October 2026, operating dual monthly and termly systems has created significant administrative complexity. The LA proposes consulting providers this term on moving all funded providers to a single monthly payment model from April 2027, alongside shifting the actual headcount from the second month to the end of each term to align with the DfE termly census. This removes the adjustment headcount (while retaining late-starter arrangements) and eliminates end-of-term clawbacks. Interim termly payments up to April 2027 will be split 85% in month one and 15% in the final month of term. **Early Learning 2-Year-Old (EL2YO) Take-Up & EYFSP Results:** Following the reintroduction of DfE 2-year-old scorecards, Croydon's Autumn 2025 take-up fell to 67% (below the 74% DfE target) because providers were claiming dual-eligible children solely under the Working Parent (WP2YO) entitlement. Following data audits and provider guidance to record both EL2YO and WP2YO on Synergy, take-up recovered to 75% (and 78% in summer data), exceeding Croydon's target and progressing toward the 84% stretch target. Under the DfE's Best Start in Life Strategy, Croydon achieved a 4-percentage point increase in Good Level of Development (GLD) outcomes in 2026 (against a historical ~1% annual trend), keeping the borough well ahead of trajectory toward its 2028 target of 78.3% overall (and 66.6% for FSM-eligible children).	
3	**Outturn and Forecast (High Needs Block & DSG Deficit)**	**AA**
	AA presented a finance update based on the 2026/27 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Forecast Outturn, scheduled for Schools Forum on 16 November 2026. **Key Financial Points:** Gross overall DSG allocation for Croydon (as of July 2026): £550,413,709. Net allocation after academy recoupment: £259,262,283 (£258,472,105 net monitoring budget after a £1.2m transfer to the High Needs Block and £790,178 Growth Fund). Total 2026/27 forecast outturn: £303,600,890, leaving an in-year forecast deficit of £45,128,785 (£44,982,010 High Needs Block deficit and £146,775 Central School Services Block deficit). Cumulative DSG deficit forecast at the end of 2026/27: £52,971,090. **Early Years Block (EYB) Position:** The 2026/27 Early Years Block allocation of £88,601,859 is forecasting a fully balanced outturn (zero variance), confirming that the Early Years Block is not contributing to the DSG deficit. The £88.60m allocation comprises £26,226,808 (Under 2YO working parents), £23,746,233 (2-year-old funding), £36,022,750 (3- and 4-year-old funding), and £2,606,068 (Early Years top-slice). **High Needs Stability Grant & Local SEND Reform Plan (LSRP):** Following the closure of the Safety Valve Programme at the end of March 2026 (where Croydon's cumulative deficit stood at £57,593,061), the DfE formally approved Croydon's Local SEND Reform Plan on 2 October 2026. This triggers a Section 31 High Needs Stability Grant (HNSG) payment of £49,750,756 covering 90% of the 2025/26 closing deficit, reducing the opening 2026/27 deficit to £7,842,305. **LGA Peer Review Findings & Mitigations:** AA noted that High Needs overspends are driven by London's highest rate of EHCP assessment requests (September 2026 LGA review), high tribunal rates, mainstream inclusion gaps, independent special school fee uplifts, and fragmented health funding. Mitigations under the LSRP include expanding in-	AA

	borough Enhanced Learning Provisions (ELPs), developing special school annexes, introducing a provider brokerage model, and rolling out the 'Expert at Hand' specialist support approach.	
4	**AOB & Clarifications**	**ALL**
	Q1. PVI Representation & Chair Sequencing: Members asked whether the Working Group could appoint a permanent Chair immediately or accept self-nominations during the meeting. **A1.** AA and DB clarified that governance rules require two sequential steps: first, filling the PVI representative gap on the Schools Forum (nominations closing end of November 2026), and second, electing a Working Group Chair (and optional rotating Vice-Chair) from members who sit on the Schools Forum. **Q2. Unused Under-2s EYTPG Funding & PVI FSM Exclusion:** Members asked whether the unused Under-2s EYTPG rate (£115) would be redistributed to PVI providers and questioned why PVI settings were excluded from the Early Years FSM grant. **A2.** JM clarified that DfE grant allocations are calculated strictly on recorded headcount data per setting type; because Croydon maintained settings had zero under-2s on roll, no under-2s funding was issued by the DfE, and PVI settings are excluded from both grants under national DfE criteria.	

AGREED ACTIONS:

Action Item	Owner	Target Date
Send targeted email to all Croydon PVI providers calling for Schools Forum nominations/self-nominations	JM	November 2026
Circulate the updated Sufficiency Paper and launch formal sector-wide consultation on April 2027 monthly payments and end-of-term headcounts	JM	November 2026
Continue working with providers to ensure dual-eligible 2-year-olds are recorded under both EL2YO and WP2YO entitlements on Synergy	Early Years Team	Ongoing
Share quarterly DSG Forecast Outturn updates with the Early Years Working Group and Schools Forum	AA	Quarterly