High Needs Subgroup

05/11/2026 via Microsoft Teams

In attendance

Fiona Robinson (FR) ***Chair***	Headteacher – Bensham Manor
Abioye Asimolowo (AA)	Finance Manager
Andy Moore (AM)	Principal Accountant
Karen Steele (KS)	Headteacher – Gresham Primary School
Katie Goodwin (KG)	Headteacher – St Nicholas' School (Purley)
Priya Perera (PP)	Head of Service, SEND T&D

Agenda

No.	Item	Lead
1	**Apologies and Welcome / Introductions**	FR
	FR welcomed the group and noted the agenda for the session. **Apologies received:** Shelley Davies (SD), Melanie Farris (MF), Julie Evans (JE), Jenny Bartlett (JB), Yetsie Adeboye (YA). AM introduced himself as a new member from Croydon Finance who will be stepping into the Finance Manager role soon, bringing extensive Schools Forum experience from five other local authorities. PP welcomed AM and noted they had previously worked together in Hillingdon.	
2	**Therapies Update**	PP / FR
	Deferred to the next High Needs Working Group or the wider Schools Forum meeting. PP noted that she is organising a meeting next week with special school headteachers to gather updates, as a conflict with a Stuart Collins webinar limited attendance for a fuller update today.	**PP**
3	**Outturn and Forecast (High Needs Block & DSG Deficit)**	AA
	AA presented a finance update based on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Forecast Outturn (Period 8). **Key Financial Points:** Gross overall DSG allocation for Croydon: £310,419,531 Net allocation after academy/other recoupments: £91,564,021. High Needs Block budget: £71,795,024. High Needs Block forecast outturn: £117,123,212, leaving an in-year forecast deficit of £45,328,188. Cumulative DSG deficit forecast at the end of 2026/27: £53,821,846. **High Needs Stability Grant:** Croydon's local SEND Reform Plan (LSRP) has been officially approved by the DfE. This triggers a High Needs Stability Grant funding contribution of £48.9 million from the government, promised to be paid in November 2026. This grant funds 90% of the historical cumulative deficit as of March 2025 (approx. £57 million), leaving a remaining 10% deficit of £8.6 million to be managed locally. **LGA Peer Review Findings & Croydon Outlier Context:** AA and PP detailed several structural factors unique to Croydon causing the persistent High Needs deficit. High EHCP Demand: Croydon has the highest rate of requests for EHCP assessments in London and ranks 4th highest for actual plans issued. Tribunal Rates: Croydon experiences exceptionally high rates of SEND tribunals. Lack of Mainstream Inclusion: The LGA review highlighted that a disproportionately high number of children in Croydon are placed in special schools or independent provisions	

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	rather than mainstream education, running counter to national inclusion targets. Top-Up Pressures: Special schools are increasingly requesting significant top-up fees and 1-to-1 funding uplifts, sometimes up to 20% higher than prior years. Health Funding Gaps: Gaps were highlighted regarding a highly fragmented health system where health authorities are slow to pick up statutory health packages, shifting financial burdens onto local education services. **Mitigations:** The Council is addressing these challenges through the Local SEND Reform Plan. The main strategy revolves around establishing Enhanced Learning Provisions (ELPs) within mainstream schools to foster a more inclusive environment and reduce reliance on expensive independent placements. Work is also ongoing to establish special school annexes inside mainstream frameworks.	
4	**High Needs Places for Sept '27**	
	PP highlighted that the work reviewing these places has only just started. It was stated that this item will require a dedicated meeting at a later date once more capacity tracking information is available. PP will continue leading the strategic coordination of places alongside the rollout of mainstream inclusive provisions.	**PP**
4	**AOB & Clarifications**	ALL
	Q1. Inclusion Data Scope: KS requested clarification on whether the lack of mainstream inclusion noted in the report applied evenly to primary, secondary, or both levels, noting that her own mainstream school is already highly inclusive with a quarter of its pupils on the SEN register. **A1.** *PP clarified* that the report did not split the findings explicitly by primary or secondary. She noted that the pushback against mainstream schools in the report applies only to a "handful of schools" that are not pulling their weight, whereas the vast majority of Croydon's mainstream schools are already inclusive.	

AGREED ACTIONS:

Action Item	Owner	Target Date
Share the finance/monitoring paper with working group members confidentially post-meeting	Clerk	November 2026
Convene next week's meeting with special school headteachers re SALT	PP	November 2026
Convene dedicated HN school places Sept 27 with special school headteachers	PP	January 2027
Provide formal update on SALT at the next meeting	PP	January 2027