

Croydon Schools' Forum

Minutes of Meeting held on Monday 2nd October

Members Present:

Jolyon Roberts	Keran Currie
Cllr Amy Foster	Gillian Larocque
Dave Harvey	Kate Lanning
Sue Lenihan	Tyrone Myton
Markie Hayden	Theresa Staunton
Dan Bowden	Cllr Joseph Lee
Clare Cranham	Chris Andrews
Fiona Robinson	Patrick Shields

Observers Present:

Shelley Davies	Jenny Aarons
Kathy Roberts	Debbie Jones
Charles Quaye	Shelley Prince
Cllr Maria Gatland	

Apologies: Soumick Dey, Julie Evans

Chair: Jolyon Roberts
Vice Chair: Theresa Staunton

Clerk(s): Darran Money
Mori Bates

Item	Detail	Lead/Action
1.	Minutes and actions from last meeting 10th July 2023.	JR
	<p>Declarations of interest – none.</p> <p>Minutes, actions, and matters arising from last meeting 10th July 2023</p> <p>Summary of comments made in reference to the previous minutes, including a review of the actions:</p> <p>1.1 Southwark Diocesan representative – Vicky Mitchell tentatively named to fill vacancy, PS to confirm agreement with the Diocese. ACTION (amended to SD who will follow up with Diocese)</p> <p>1.2 As Croydon has five MNS, whereas neighboring localities have only one or zero (Lambeth and Sutton respectively, where in the latter, they have federated nursery schools), it is vital to make sure that there are sufficient places available, especially when 65% of MNS sit with a deficit budget and this percentage is increasing. Such deficits can result in school closures, like the cases of St Andrew's or Virgo Fidelis where the resulting shortfall of funding had to be made up by the Council.</p>	SD

	<p>1.3 JR wanted to draw attention to the clauses marked 6.4 and 6.5 in the report that indicated the cumulative deficit to be £560,750. This stems from the decision being made elsewhere that Croydon are having to go through the consequences of. Prior to 2019, the funding would have been around £700,000 in total, allowing for £140,000 per MNS, which backs up the decrease in funding shown in table 2. (See 6.5. on the MNS report – Table 2.) The cumulative deficit is connected to the reported figures at the end of the academic year and a predicted figure.</p> <p>1.4 KR confirmed that we can lift this data from the record, of which it was agreed that this data would be beneficial. KR to compile data on the EHCP numbers in MNS and across the board, comparing details on the dashboard. ACTION – Carried forwards as agenda item for November SF of ‘SEN Figure Information’</p> <p>1.5 An update is required for an update on SEND in general and an update on the Locality SEND Support – scheduled for September Schools’ Forum. ACTION – Discharged in connection with 2.12</p> <p>1.6 The clerk also amended other errors with formatting and SPAG. The clerk also updated the membership in minutes for future reference.</p>	KR
2.	Election of Chair & Vice Chair	SD
	<p>2.1 JR and TS agreed to stand again for chair and vice chair.</p> <p>2.2 DB seconded JR’s nomination and MH seconded TS’ nomination.</p> <p>2.3 The forum agreed to elect JR and TS as chair and vice chair, respectively.</p>	
3.	Membership – Schools’ Forum & Working Groups	JR
	<p>3.1 The following amendments were made by the clerk or queried with members in relation to the membership of Schools’ Forum</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) SDey – resignation. b) Members of SF should appoint an alternate who will attend the forum in their place if they are unable to attend. c) PS – will continue to be on SF as the representative for a maintained secondary school but has stepped down from the Schools’ Block Working Group. d) SL – The Trade Union should read as ‘NEU’ not ‘NUT.’ 	

4.	Key Decision Report – Therapies Commissioning	SP
	<p>4.1 SP presented a paper on the Key Decision Report, summarising it as a request for a contract uplift for the SALT and Therapies contract to support the children and young people of the locality.</p> <p>4.2 Since 2018, the value of the contract and staffing levels have not increased but the need has. In those years, the number of children applying for an EHCP has increased – with projected increases going forwards. The service has had to adapt with what it has been offering to schools as, for example, OTs were being provided to some extent, but are not a current part of the therapies contract.</p> <p>4.3 There are a range of stakeholders that have been involved in the process, for which the feedback received has been built back into the contract to improve it.</p> <p>4.4 The next focus is how we can mitigate challenges arising such as staffing issues. SP informed SF that the current contract has been extended post-July '23 because we need to support mobilisation. This means that the contract timeline will go ahead October '24 with a named provider or providers.</p> <p>4.5 Market engagement brought eighteen different providers forward to express interest in the therapies provision. Some have queried our intentions and how we are moving forwards. Specifically, revolving around any potential delays in the contract such as the recruitment situation. This level of interest is good and helps to facilitate dialogue with the providers during the procurement process.</p> <p>4.6 Information has been circulated to schools and in most cases, this information has gone to the SEND office rather than the headteacher. Therefore, we will have to review or adapt the communication methods and distribution of this information. Many Forum members present questioned this distribution.</p> <p>4.7 In terms of the challenges encountered with the Therapies report, which have been well documented in Forum, there have also been significant cuts in the health sector (e.g., OTs), so it is important to consider how better to support the key parties.</p> <p>4.8 The initial 38 SALT therapists will aid the increased numbers, but it will not cover the children in need of support within the area. KPIs and the projected outcomes are a focus of the new contract because of the need to maximise the reach of the support and ensure past failings do not occur</p> <p>4.9 Table 2 of the paper showed the budgets for 2018, the current budget for 2023/2024 and the predicted contract value from April 2024. SP reiterated that the proposed contract value has not been agreed, they are projected figures with the 25% uplift. It was noted</p>	

	<p>that the ICB referenced in the table is the Integrated Care Board, a health service contribution to the contract.</p> <p>4.10 SLCN has increased 25%, with an increase of a further 25% projected over the next five years. These increases are displayed within the proposed contract and the original contract value. Previously, the age range was 0-18 years old which has increased to 0-25 in line with national policy.</p> <p>4.11 JR reminded the Forum that this is the fourth version of the paper/contract they have seen. The last update is in September's minutes, under 5.3, where the extension was needed and a lot has clearly happened since then.</p> <p>4.12 JR queried who the mini contract provider is. SP informed the Forum that it is Allen Speech & Language who are operating as a sub-contractor.</p> <p>Q1: JR: In Table 1, is the baseline 2021-2022?</p> <p>A1: KR: The baseline goes back to 2018 with 2,693 children with an EHCP as stated in 1.3. The current figure of 4,406 is a real time figure that is monitored monthly. There is also a review run by the DfE over the last 21 months to record the number of assessment requests. In July '23, 121 requests for assessment were recorded, which is a high number for one month.</p> <p>Q2: JR: Under 2.5, are there approximately thirty-eight therapists' posts or FTE?</p> <p>A2: SP: We must be mindful of this currently being an NHS contract and there was a mass redeployment of staff before the pandemic. Additionally, there has been a decrease in employment in the therapies area post-pandemic. SALTs are available to <i>some</i> after a significant shift in the market as the demand is high. Within this context, there is a finite challenge with varying contextual factors relating to the employment of therapists in particular:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A) Depending on the providers that come forwards, the terms and conditions may vary or change - B) Providers could front-load the scheme to assist the service - C) Clarity to providers about what we need and they will then revert to us on how they will achieve that ACTION: SP to inform Forum whether the figure given is 38 FTE speech therapists. <p>Q3: JR: Under Table 2, Where has the HNB additional spend figure come from (£213K)?</p> <p>A3: KR: The figure is still from the High Needs Budget. More money is needed for this group.</p> <p>4.13 SD added that there is a risk of not delivering for the needs of children. The need is clearly there as the data says – we need to</p>	<p>SP</p>
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ensure the needs are being met, meaning we must be mindful of how we move forwards.

4.14 The contract must go out with a contract value and be clear about it so that the potential providers can achieve the criteria being set out in the KPI's

4.15 SP stated that the need for us to be proactive allows us to combat the increasing numbers of children that require support, therefore, the contract has the potential to make a difference in the future.

Q4: MH: Do we think a seven-year contract is the right thing to do?

A4: SP: As a three-year contract, it would take a year for the contract to be mobilized. The tender would last another year, meaning three years would not be a viable option. A longer-term contract can offer certainty and a more cost-effective approach. We can use break clauses where possible and to our advantage. Seven years allows us to put in review points and see how the providers are performing throughout the duration of the contract.

Q4a) MH: A twelve-month notice period is a long time for the contract to be active and not delivering.

A4a) SP: It takes time for information to be shared and distributed. It is about the complexity of the external factors. Looking at the Information Governance, we need to understand how the contract looks going forwards. A six-month notice period is an option, but we must look at the worst-case scenario.

Q5: DB: How long will the mini contract be here for?

A5: SP: The mini contract is smaller, so it will last for around three to four months, although there is an element of sharing and reviewing data to factor into the duration.

Q6: CC: There is also a two-way communication where the contract is concerned – a school can recommend SALT, but what about when appointments are not made or even attended? How are we ensuring that we can provide for families in need?

A6: SP: The main aim would be to look at how we are articulating it to the parents and how we can encourage parents to use the provisions being offered.

4.16 DJ said that the report is much cleaner for such a complex contract. Croydon is not the only locality with this problem, but it is imperative that we have a solution. We are dealing with ways to improve the contract and meet the supply and demand. There is an option for a five-year contract to be investigated, rather than seven.

	<p>Q7: CllrAF: If we are not meeting the need, is there a timeline and clarity relating to the risk stemming from the increase? Are we clear enough in the risk and overall process?</p> <p>A7: SP: The therapies contract is a complex situation to contend with. The paper is required an uplift and the performance problems with the <i>current</i> contract are being reviewed whilst simultaneously stripping the contract to see where it can be further broken down.</p> <p>4.17 DH commented that when we look at where we are in detail, we are giving an inadequate response. The success of the contract depends on who is being employed or brought in to assist with the therapies provision.</p> <p>4.18 A discussion followed centred around the Early Years and how the Therapies are utilised there. KL explained that Chatterbox is being brought up in discussions and is only being used to aid the therapies in Croydon. TS added that with many families, English is a second language and so parents cannot always support the children through Chatterbox when they themselves do not understand what is being said.</p> <p>Q8: TS: When will we be able to see the response in the contract regarding the KPIs?</p> <p>A8: SP: In the future, there will be monthly updates and quarterly reviews with feedback. The hope is that we will be able to focus on what is being delivered much more clearly.</p> <p>4.19 CllrMG believed that an informed structure with regular meetings and updates on the status of the therapies would be a good response to the situation. Progress has clearly been made and Schools' Forum should be kept informed and involved to an extent.</p> <p>4.20 The Vote: Members of the Forum voted on a motion to give the Therapies contract a 25% uplift. Eight members voted in favour, four voted against and one abstained from voting. As the majority voted for the 25% uplift, the motion has been carried.</p> <p>4.21 As a final comment, members of the Forum would be interested in more information relating to KPIs, break clauses and the contract length.</p>	
<p>5.</p>	<p>DSG Schools' Block – Disapplication Request 24/25</p>	<p>CQ</p>
	<p>5.1 SD gave a breakdown summary of the disapplication process. The motion was to transfer funds from one Block into another. In the past, we would do a disapplication request to ensure that the HNB remained in budget, this has not taken place for many years as the view of Forum has been that money allocated to mainstream</p>	

schools and academies should be 'passported' to them with change.

5.2 There are two options for the value of the transfer - 0.5% of the school's Block or £1.2million. The request is today for £1.2million, which is slightly less than 0.5% of the Schools' Block.

5.3 The DfE advice says that a request must be presented to SF and its members must decide on whether to transfer funds from the Schools' Block into the High Needs Block. This is the only exception to the rule of transferring funds between Blocks.

5.4 Croydon is not the only locality to complete a disapplication request. Other localities have vast deficits meaning they are asking for more money than Croydon is.

5.5 CQ explained that, under 4.2 of the paper, the DfE are aware of the request and subsequent steps must be followed with a deadline of the 17th of November.

5.6 By agreeing to the disapplication process, it could be considered value for money from a financial perspective. When we look at the way in which the funding will be used, it will go into High needs and then filter through to mainstream schools. This will allow us to meet the KPIs with the Safety Valve and continue to meet the needs of the children.

Q1: JR: Is the recommendation a one-off transfer or is a roll-on?

A1: CQ: There may be a need to apply for the transfer again in the future.

5.7 JR asked Forum to think about the impact on the individual schools in Schools' Block and whether those schools could afford such a cut at the present time. He read excerpts from a letter which he had received from **Howard Primary School** relating to how much the cost supporting a SEND child in mainstream provision entails and the current strain on that school's finances. Given this context it was his view that the proposed Block transfer of money has the potential to do more harm than good.

5.8 When queried about the next step should the Forum choose to deny the motion, it was said that the locality would have to take the application to the Secretary of State who had the option as to whether to overturn Schools' Forum's decision.

Q2: SL: Should the request be approved, where the money goes will have to be considered, such as maintained nurseries. What MNS provides needs to be preserved and the opportunity is there to use the money.

A2: SD: We will have to review it once we are out of the consultation period for the MNS.

	<p>5.9 The Early Years Intervention was highlighted because of the expansion of High Needs. KL ensured that the first meeting of this went ahead and was well received with lots of additional support in place.</p> <p>Q3: JR: The original SEND recovery plan did not have a Block transfer in it, but now it does – is that the case and why has a funding gap opened that now requires a Block transfer?</p> <p>A3: CQ: We do need a robust plan, and this will allow us to help reduce the High Needs overspend. The DfE promises us 3% over the next five years and this is one way in which we can further close the gap.</p> <p>SD: The disapplication process is something that we have been requested to do despite the fact we do not normally do it.</p> <p>5.10 The members of the Forum asked TM as chair of the Schools’ Block for his opinion. TM said that we may need to look at the bigger picture for Croydon in that this transfer will allow us to decrease the deficit by getting a larger sum of money through the safety valve mechanism. When you look at the individual cost for each school, it is approximately the total of one child for a small primary school and two children for a secondary school.</p> <p>5.11 JR reminded Forum that Croydon is not like other boroughs in that it already has the 32nd worst funding in London. This removes funding from school Block where it is desperately needed</p> <p>5.12 The Vote: Members of the Forum voted on a motion to transfer £1.2million from the Schools’ Block into the High Needs Block. Eight members voted in favour and five voted against. As the majority voted for the Block transfer, the motion has been carried.</p>	
<p>6.</p>	<p>Update from Schools’ Forum Working Groups</p> <p>a) Early Years b) Schools’ Block c) High Needs</p>	<p>TS TM FR</p>
	<p>a) Early Years Block – No meeting occurred this month.</p> <p>b) Schools’ Block – Minutes supplied from meeting on 19th Sept.</p> <p>6.1 The meeting for Schools’ Block centred around the Disapplication Request, which has been covered in detail in the Forum meeting.</p> <p>c) High Needs Block – Minutes supplied from meeting 14th Sept.</p> <p>6.2 The meeting for High Needs covered the therapies paper and a presentation on the CLSS.</p>	

7.	Any Other Business	All
	None.	

Meeting Adjourned: 12:15pm
Date of next meeting: Monday 6th November at 9:30am
Whitehorse Manor Junior School, CR7 8SB