

Croydon Schools Forum

Minutes of Meeting held on Monday 27th January

Members Present:

Jolyon Roberts	Fiona Robinson
Sarah Hunter	Stephen Hehir
Dave Harvey	Jenny Aarons
Dan Bowden	Maryssa Dako
Clare Cranham	Theresa Staunton
Markie Hayden	Keran Currie
Kate Lanning	Jane Day
Tyrone Myton	Dermot Mooney
Alaina Packer-Searle	Gill Larocque

Observers Present:

Shelley Davies	Cllr Amy Foster
Julie Ralphs	Abioye Asimolowo
Sharon Hemley	Des Ogg
Sue Lenihan	Cllr Maria Gatland
Jenny Barlett	Brian Smith
Jeni Murphy	Denise Bushay
Cllr Joseph Lee	

Apologies: Dean Brewer, Julie Evans, Chris Andrew

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 DBr, JE and CA Jane Day (JD) attended as an alternate for CA and Stephen Hehir (SHeh) attended as an alternate for JE.	
2.	Minutes & Actions – Meeting 2nd December '24	JR
	Minutes, actions, and matters arising from last meeting 2 nd December 2024 Summary of comments made in reference to the previous minutes: 2.1 Feb'24 minutes: Under Q3/A3, relating to children under the category of Support for Inclusion/Home Education, PP will circulate information requested around this – ACTION PP	PP

	<p>2.2 Jun'24 minutes: Under 4.18, SP will circulate the questionnaire feedback on SALT within authority – ACTION SHem</p> <p>2.3 Oct'24 minutes: Regarding an updated on the Maintained Nursery School Balances & Deficit Recovery, the paper has been deferred until January. When questioned about the current status of the MNSs, SD confirmed that the Executive Mayor in Cabinet approved the MNS model in order to sustain the MNS ACTION – MNS Paper added to Jan'25 agenda (COMPLETED)</p> <p>a) Clerk also amended other errors with formatting, phrasing and SPAG.</p> <p>2.4 December minutes taken as read and to be uploaded to the website</p>	SHem
3.	Schools Support Paper	JRa
	<p>3.1 JRa presented a paper on the Schools Support package as the current agreement expires at the end of this financial year.</p> <p>3.2 The proposal being submitted for Forum's consideration is to continue put in place an arrangement to provide continuity for a further two years. If those two years are agreed this will allow the LA to review the service being provided as there could be scope for a sliding scale of support in the future</p> <p>3.3 The lowest priced option for Forum to consider would only be provided to LA maintained schools at a cost of £86,816. As shown in Table 1 under 1.2, there is an option to reduce, maintain or enhance the current offer. Reducing the package would allow support to be offered to all schools, but would exclude access to training, forums and the whistleblowing services. Enhancing the package would add one day of bespoke consultancy tailored to meet the school's needs on top of the core offer.</p> <p>3.4 JRa confirmed that the second and third of these three options would provide support for all schools, both LA maintained schools and academies.</p> <p>3.5 Members of Forum questioned the reason for the increase in cost, in particularly with the option to 'maintain' the package which is more expensive than last time.</p> <p>3.6 MD noted that, under option 1 of Annex D, the day rates are priced at £699 whereas going directly to Ofsted would quote £500 showing that services appear cheaper at times compared to other providers. JRa explained that a 10% discount could be applied.</p> <p>Q1: MD: On page 10, it looks like the secondary schools are not engaging with the training or the offered forums – is there a reason for this? A1a: JRa: The primary schools do use the services more than the secondary, and the offer is always there. Another four advisers are</p>	

	<p>being brought in to assist, using funding from elsewhere in order to support this.</p> <p>A1b: SD: In the future, there will be scope to alter the package to focus on curriculum.</p> <p>Q2: DM: How much is the cost of the whistleblowing services?</p> <p>A2: JRa: It does not cost a lot. Previously, it was charged at £200 but now, we no longer charge for it in the package. The Whistleblowing service is something that schools have to have, so it is something that needs to be offered.</p> <p>Q3: SHeh: Looking online, the costs appear cheaper than the cost that it is being offered to us at – why is this?</p> <p>A3: JRa: There are no profit margins for what is offered and we are not making make a profit from this. What is being charged is the total cost for offering it, including on costs.</p> <p>Q4: MD: Could there be a more tailored training service – one which may be useful to a wider range of schools? For example, health and safety?</p> <p>A4a: JR: Option 2 does include 2 memberships to forums of the school’s choice. The Croydon Education Partnership board may also be able to look into this alongside or after finishing with the current projects they are working on.</p> <p>A4b: JRa: The offered training is driven by demand for a forum and their membership, which does show a higher take-up in primary than secondary.</p> <p>3.7 Members of Schools Forum agreed for the provision to last for two years and that the school support service is reviewed after this. The Schools Block working group made a recommendation for Option 2.</p> <p>3.8 Voting members of the Schools Forum voted on which of the three options they want to proceed with for the Schools Support scheme. There were 17 votes in favour of option 2. Option 2 is carried.</p>	
4.	MNS Balanced & Deficit Recovery Report	SD
	<p>4.1 The paper presented by SD was written at the request of the Forum.</p> <p>4.2 Table 1 showed that there have been financial improvements in four of the five MNS and work has been done by officers of the LA to support them. Table 2 showed historic benchmarking data from 2022. Cllr AF queried whether there was more recent data for benchmarking but DB responded that the data for 2023 has only just recently been released and this the data contained in the paper was the latest available.</p> <p>4.3 JR asked two questions about MNS review paper - which is in the public domain). Firstly, there was a table relating to pupil numbers where it stated two nurseries had paused admissions due to an increase of SEND cases. Was this still the case? Secondly, he asked if there was a moratorium on staffing at the MNS still in deficit? SD agreed to seek further clarification surrounding this information. ACTION SD – to</p>	

	<p>obtain clarity around the nurseries that are pausing intake of children.</p> <p>Q5: MD: What is the standard pupil-teacher ratio in a nursery? A5: KL: For 2YOs, it is 1:5 and was previously 1:4. Nursery classes with a qualified teacher is 1:13. The actual pupil numbers also look to be from the Autumn term where numbers are naturally lower as there is little distinction between 2, 3 and 4YOs.</p> <p>Q6: JA: The federation that is linking to a school – is there a financial benefit to them for doing this? A6a: JR: From the viewpoint of the Pegasus trust, there is no financial benefit to be made from being an MNS sponsor. A6b: SD: They are still continuing to operate as separate entities and they are not allowed to academise MNS</p> <p>Q7: CC: There are changes planned to be made around the children's centre – will any future decisions impact this? A7: SD: We are not currently in a position to comment on this, but an update will be provided once we are able to.</p>	SD
5.	Early Years Budget	JM
	<p>5.1 DBu and JM presented a paper on the Early Years Budget for which there were recommendations to note the methodology to be applied in regard to the distribution of the Early Years Grant and a vote for the distribution of the MNS grant.</p> <p>5.2 D2YOs is now referred to as RAS2YO, standing for Receiving Additional Support.</p> <p>5.3 The indicative EY block DSG allocation for the financial year of 25/26 is £72,459,812, which is a significant increase as, in previous years, this amount has been around £30million. For 25/26, the ESFA changed the minimum pass through to EY providers from the LA from 95% to 96%. The proposal presented has a pass through of 97%, with 1.2% for deprivation in 3&4YOs, 1.2% for RAS2YO, 1.3% for SENIF and 0.5% for contingency.</p> <p>5.4 JM explained the options available for consideration, noting Table 2A shows the rates for each of the funding types (3YOs, RAS2YOs, W2YOs and 9MOs. Indicative budgets were also referenced for DAF and EYPP under Table 4 and 5.</p> <p>5.5 It was added that 2YO data is not always captured accurately by the census data based on when their birthday sits which is where the contingency fund comes into place.</p> <p>5.6 The MNS funding received for 25/26 is £1,051,365, which includes £100,947 of TPPG. There were three options presented as to how this money can be distributed.</p>	

	<p>5.6.1 Option #1: The TPPG money is split evenly between the five and then the remaining MNS grant is distributed based on child numbers;</p> <p>5.6.2 Option #2: Both the TPPG and MNS funding will be split based on pupil numbers;</p> <p>5.6.3 Option #3: The total amount will be divided equally between the five MNS.</p> <p>5.7 The Forum noted the recommendations listed on page one of this paper. In relation to recommendation F, previously only Option 1 was used. The LA was asked by one of the nurseries to review the distribution, which has led to the three options being presented to members. The money being referenced is indicative and based on both the hourly rates and child numbers. The MNS grant last year was for approximately £600K, showing there has been a significant increase to the amount referenced at [5.6]. Therefore, whatever is agreed upon, each MNS will receive an increase on last year.</p> <p>5.8 The Early Years Working Group was consulted for recommendations on the distribution of the Early Years Grant, recommending Option 1. Six members voted for Option 1 and one member abstained from voting.</p> <p>5.9 As the nursery headteacher representative on Schools Forum, KL added that there is a divide between the MNS. Two nurseries preferred option 1, two preferred option 3 and one abstained from giving a preference. KL expressed the view that Option 1 would allow a MNS to budget better because they would know the numbers that they're working with.</p> <p>5.10 APS said that supplementary funding to be considered a lump sum that should be reviewed on a yearly basis, as is the case with primary schools. The Chair noted the comment, suggesting a vote be taken as to whether this be changed, or to remain with the 3 years. KL assured Forum that with census data, it is possible to predict the numbers that they will have in the coming years in order to budget within the 3 years.</p> <p>Q8: APS: If Option 1 is selected and maintained for 3 years, how can you mitigate any issues or risks that will arise?</p> <p>A8a: JR: The number on role would ultimately affect the amount of money going out/being spent.</p> <p>A8b: JM: It will vary on the number of children. The figures given are based on the numbers we have from headcount. Where the census data differs from the headcount data, recalculations have been carried out for the hourly rate in order to avoid triggering a clawback from the DfE.</p> <p>A8c: AA: The voting due to take place is for the methodology and not the specific amounts. Tables 6-8 are all indicative budgets.</p> <p>5.11 Some members of Forum noted that there has normally been a feeling that the money should follow the children in the borough, focusing on the numbers.</p> <p>Q9: APS: How would we ensure that the smaller nurseries with a smaller capacity are not being disadvantaged</p> <p>A9a: TS: The money being offered should support the settings where they</p>	
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	<p>need support.</p> <p>A9b: JR: Looking at Table 6, N3 would receive £150,532. Comparatively, as agreed in the Lump Sum of the Formula Factors in December, a primary school would only receive £145,000</p> <p>5.12 Vote for reviewing the MNS grant in 3 years (as opposed to either 1 or 2 years). 15 votes in favour of a 3 year review and 2 votes against.</p> <p>a) Schools Forum AGREED to review this in 3 years.</p> <p>5.13 Vote for the distributions of the MNS & TPPG Grant. 10 votes in favour of Option 1, 5 votes in favour of Option 2 and 2 votes in favour of Option 3.</p> <p>b) Schools Forum AGREED the methodology in Option 1.</p>	
6.	Working Group Updates	TS/TM/ FR
	<p>6.1 Updates were received from the working groups as followed:</p> <p>a) Early Years – TS expressed thanks to JM and DBu on behalf of the EYWG for the quick turnaround of the Early Years Budget in a short space of time. The working group focused on items 3 & 4 of the Forum meeting and will hold further discussions into the distribution of the SENIF fund.</p> <p>b) Schools Block – Focused on item 2, indicating it would need to review the support being offered to secondary schools.</p> <p>c) High Needs – No papers were ready so no meeting went forwards</p>	
7.	AOB	ALL
	<p>1. Therapies update – SHem confirmed that market engagement was recently carried out with 25 providers to go out to tender and ready to go live in September (pushed back from April)</p> <p>a) Therapies update to be added as an item on the Feb/Mar agenda ACTION - MB</p> <p>2. Push through of the therapies refund from Growth Fund</p> <p>a) It was mentioned that there is still money that needs to be claimed before the end of the financial year and to submit applications for this funding;</p> <p>b) AA added that they are trying to get to the bottom line of 23/24 and reconcile it accordingly, indicating there will be a definitive figure available in due course;</p> <p>c) CC confirmed that they are being declined/rejected for the refund, as has Lanfranc;</p> <p>d) Further investigations are needed here</p> <p>3. PFI Update</p>	MB

	<p>a) JB said that following the Formula Factors vote in December, there was a vote to reduce the amount given to the PFI with a caveat imposed so as not to disadvantage the PFI. The DfE has cautioned the decision that they may reject the change, requiring an affordability model to be completed to ensure that the PFI is supported</p> <p>b) TM added that there is a need for clarity as to what the money is being spent on – if they can back up the request for more money, then we can give them the money</p> <p>c) If there are any changes to be made, there will need to be a paper presented at the next Schools Forum meeting on the PFI</p> <p>4. School Allocation</p> <p>a) Due to delays, it was queried as to whether we have time to put the figures into the APT and get the budget spreadsheets out in time for schools to undertake sensible budgeting for the next financial year? AA confirmed that as the overall settlement was announced late, the expectation is that distribution will take place at the end of February.</p>	
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Meeting Adjourned: 11:47am
Date of next meeting: TBD Feb, Mar
TBD, Town Hall