

PRESENT:

1. Jenny Sims (Chair)
 2. Sue Smith
 3. Emma Walford
 4. Emma Bradshaw
 5. Peter Naudi
 6. Craig Hudson
 7. Nathan Cole
 8. Bec Allott
 9. Ben Cloves
 10. James Kearns
 11. Bev Williamson
 12. Robert Claxton
13. Councillor Jane Pascoe (observer)

1: Welcome and Introductions

The Chair, Jenny Sims, welcomed those present.

The Chair advised the Forum that she would reorder the agenda to take item 7 - SEND Transformation / Education Operational Group Update - after item 5 - Revenue Report.

2: Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Philip Hedger, for whom Craig Hudson, headteacher of Cheam Park Farm Primary Academy (part of the Leo Academy Trust), attended as a substitute.

Apologies for absence were also received from Andrew Theobald, Sharon Roberts, Vicki Bell, Jamie Bell, and Councillor Rob Beck.

In response to a question, the Clerk clarified that the Forum's procedures did not allow for proxy voting nor for remote participation except where specifically provided for a meeting, which was not the case for this meeting.

3: Declarations of Interest

The Forum noted the standing declarations as set out on the agenda.

The Forum noted that Bec Allott's standing declarations included that she was a Trustee of Wilson's School and a Member of Cirrus Primary Academy Trust.

4: Minutes of the previous meeting

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 9 July 2024 be agreed as an accurate record.

5: Revenue Report

The Strategic Finance Business Partner introduced the report.

The Forum noted that the National Funding Formula factors would not change, but local factors will and that there would be a consideration of disapplication where the local area was minded to deviate from the National Funding Formula or transfer funding between blocks.

The Forum discussed the ongoing question regarding the rent of Nonsuch Primary School, which was located outside of the London Borough of Sutton, noting that Surrey County Council had not yet provided evidence of an agreement for rent and that the situation seemed to have been a practice rather than a formal agreement. The Forum noted that if the school completed the process of transitioning into an academy then the issue would be one for the school and its trust to resolve directly with Surrey County Council, albeit one that may still be reflected in the current financial year's records.

RESOLVED:

1. To note the latest position on the DSG for 2024/25, as at September - Month 6 (Appendix A).
2. To note and agree the special schools allocation of Core Schools Budget Grant 2024/25 (Appendix B).
3. To note the S251 Budget Statements - LA Budget Table, Early Years Funding and High Needs Places Table (Appendices C, D and E).

6: Free School Meals for pupils attending education otherwise than at school and Pupil Premium funding for independent provision

The Acting Head of Pupil Based Commissioning introduced the report.

The Forum noted that there was no legal requirement to provide a free school meal to pupils attending education other than at school.

In response to questions, officers confirmed that in the absence of a decision to allocate funding any unspent funds would return to the Department for Education but that the local area had scope to allocate this funding as it thought appropriate.

The Forum discussed whether further information on the options available for the allocation of funding could be explored, and noted that the approximate value of the funding was £80,000.

In debate, the Chair moved an additional resolution that options for possible uses for the funding and an outline of the proposed consultation be returned to the Forum. The amendment was seconded and, when put to the vote, carried.

RESOLVED:

1. To agree to the proposal that Sutton begins, from January, to establish FSM eligibility for children in an EOTAS setting, and to issue annual food vouchers to a value of £2.65 daily.

2. That a summary of the appropriate uses of Pupil Premium funding for independent provision be reported back to the next meeting of the Forum along with an outline of the proposed consultation, for the Forum to determine prior to consultation with the Independent Schools beginning.

7: SEND Transformation / Education Operational Group Update

The Acting Strategic Lead for Education introduced the report.

The Forum noted that the London Borough of Sutton's Dedicated Schools Grant budget was not an outlier, and that Sutton's Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) approval rate was in line with the average for the school population but higher than many other London boroughs when compared to its resident population, and that Sutton's rate of requests for assessment was very high.

The Forum noted the view of the Headteachers Forum was to follow up in writing to the Department for Education outlining the concern of the schools network and council regarding the funding for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) funding.

In debate, it was noted that Sutton Primary Heads Group did not support the recommendation to transfer funding between blocks. It was noted that some secondary heads did not disagree with the proposal in principle, and reluctantly agreed to it. However, it was noted that this was not because secondary schools felt they could afford the proposal but because the Department for Education was likely to approve the 0.5% disapplication. The Forum noted that both primary and secondary heads groups felt the council should write to the Department for Education to ensure the onus on resolving the issue remained with the government rather than the local area.

RESOLVED:

1. To note the update on the early work of the Education Operational Group (EOG) and the expected timescales to produce a draft DSG Management Plan.
2. To agree to the Local Authority's request to transfer 0.5% from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block in 2025/26.

8: Exclusions Financial Adjustments and Arrangements

The Acting Head of Pupil Based Commissioning introduced the report.

Peter Naudi declared that he was a Governor of Limes College

RESOLVED: To note the proposal and to agree to the changes.

9: Capital Report

The Acting Head of Pupil Based Commissioning introduced the report.

The Forum noted that reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) had been found in only one school following investigation and that one secondary school - Overton Grange - was approximately 30 places below its published admission number (PAN).

RESOLVED:To note the summary of developments against the primary, secondary and special expansion programmes.

The meeting ended at 20:14.