

Julia Katherine (JK)	Director Education and Lifelong Learning
Carol Savedra (CS)	Assistant Director-SEND, Education, Early Years
Carrie Traill (CT)	Head of Education
Mike Singleton (MS)	Service manager: place planning /commissioning
Kay Goodacre (KG)	Strategic Finance Business Partner (CFLL)
David Green (DG)	Senior Finance Business Partner (Schools Funding)

1 Welcome, Introductions and Apologies for Absence

Apologies had been received from:

Sarah Kober	Lumen Learning Trust	Academy member
David Euridge	Inclusive Education Trust	AP academy member
James Kibble	Arundel and Brighton Diocese	

The LA had made a new pay offer to support staff, with increases at grades PS3-6 exceeding those previously proposed.

Members commented that the 1% transfer of school funds to high needs under the safety valve remained a challenge to schools and one which would continue for several years and which was causing tremendous hardship. One member described the 2024/25 settlement as probably the toughest he could remember; although the ceiling was 6.5% many schools were seeing funding increases of 0.5% (NB this is for schools on minimum funding guarantee or MPPL) compared to cost increases of around 5%. This was a cause of considerable tension.

The Chair saw the challenges as probably the worst he had known, affecting provision, jobs and staff stress. Officers would take the message away.

JK recognised the impact of the increased support staff pay offer. The issue had been discussed with special school headteachers. Further work was being done to assess the impact, and an update would be provided at the July meeting.

The Chair noted that support staff deserved the pay increase, but that afforded and was likely to mean redundancies. Members recognised the essential role of support staff in schools and that support staff reductions would hit the quality of education, both locally and nationally. The Chair summarised that all recognised the challenges.

5 Update on DFE funding announcements if any

There were no updates.

6 DSG outturn 2023/24

a) Context

Julia Katherine summarised recent EHCP trends in Surrey: EHCP numbers had been rising year on year since 2015 nationally, and in Surrey until the latest year, when there had been a slight fall. Much effort had been made to improve early intervention and provide timely advice and support for parents, guidance for schools on ordinarily available provision, and the Team Around the School approach of multidisciplinary support for early intervention. Further work was planned to scale up the Team Around the School intervention and there had been additional funding from the council to strengthen the early intervention and support offer. EHCP requests were not expected to revert to earlier levels, as schools could access more support without seeking EHCPs. However, there had been a recent increase in EHCPs being finalised due to the success of the EHCP recovery work, which was expected to restore EHCP timeliness to above national levels (Around 60% meeting target) by the end of May. She recognised that the recovery work had temporarily put extra pressure both on schools and the high needs block.

Central schools services block

Central schools services block had been underspent by £0.282m, of which £100,000 was due to the allocation for Inclusion Innovation working group initiatives not being spent (funded indirectly by DSG). Carol Savedra proposed that this sum should be carried forward. These were school driven inclusion projects, partners had self funded the work done so far, but it was now necessary to look externally to deliver the remainder of the projects.

The Chair recalled previous Schools Forum discussions of, and support for, the inclusion innovation working group priorities of neurodiversity, autism and phase transition. It was noted that many schools had engaged with the work of the group.

The Forum supported the proposed carry forward.

High needs block

This block showed an overspend of £1.031m against budget, but the overspend was in line with the safety valve agreement taking both 2022/23 and 2023/24 together.

8 Falling rolls funding 2025/26

Mike Singleton presented this item. The majority of primary schools with falling rolls would not be eligible for support, because their pupil numbers were not expected to rise within the next 3-5 years. The report set out possible options for supporting eligible schools; a formula, specific costs, or a mixture. An example was shared of a planning area where one school had seen a drop in numbers which might be reversed over the next few years due to growth in the area.

It was noted that funding allocated for falling rolls was funding which could not be allocated through the main funding formula.

The Forum supported continuation of the existing special case of falling rolls funding (specific school relocated to new housing development).

The Forum supported preparation of proposals for more general use of falling rolls funding for the July meeting.

9

The Forum supported the proposal, on the basis that it was a temporary measure.

10 Surrey schools and early years consultation

DG summarised various routine items to be included in the autumn schools funding consultation paper. The purpose of the item was to allow the Forum to suggest proposals which they wanted officers to develop for consideration at the July meeting.

The proposals would include how to release 1% of school funding for the high needs block transfer, levels of minimum funding guarantee and ceiling, and whether to continue to maintain lump sums in excess of the NFF. DG also drew attention to possible anomalies with sparsity funding where very small schools saw an increase

