

## **1: Welcome and Introductions**

The Chair, Jenny Sims, welcomed those present:

1. James Fisher
2. Jenny Sims
3. Alison Day - for Philip Hedger
4. Sue Smith
5. Sharon Roberts
6. Robert Claxton
7. Emma Bradshaw
8. Andrew Theobald
9. James Kearns
10. Jamie Bean
11. Peter Naudi
12. Bec Allott

### Observer

13. Councillor Rob Beck

## **2: Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Vicki Bell, Ben Cloves, Emma Walford, Bev Williamson, and Philip Hedger, for whom Alison Day attended as a substitute.

Apologies for lateness were received from Bec Allott and Peter Naudi.

## **3: Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

Sue Smith declared that she had recently joined the governing body of Sherwood Park School. Jenny Sims noted that she and Bec Allott were non-executive directors of Cognus Limited, along with Sutton Council officers Kieran Holliday.

## **4: Minutes of the previous meeting**

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 13 June 2023 be agreed as an accurate record.

## **5: Revenue Report**

The Strategic Finance Business Partner introduced the report.

In discussion of the per pupil funding through the National Funding Formula, officers confirmed that the per pupil rate for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities school pupils remained set at £10,000 per place by HM Government, with local areas setting their own top-up rates and that the rate for such places in the London Borough of Sutton had previously mirrored increases applied to primary and secondary places where possible.

The Forum discussed the increase for non-maintained independent provision, with officers confirming that the local authority had put in place ample specialist provision and that this remains a viable strategy at the current time. The Forum discussed the growth in Education, Health and Care Plans and lack of specialist provision in the borough, noting an expected need for 30 places in the coming year. The Forum noted that the authority would struggle to set a balanced budget for the 2024-25 financial year, as many authorities would, but that the authority's Dedicated Schools Grant budget was not yet in the territory of the Department for Education's Delivering Best Value or Safety Valve programmes. The Forum noted the increase in Education, Health and Care Plans entailed an increased spend of £4m for the authority and that HM Government had confirmed there would be no increased funding for plans in coming years. The Forum noted plans for a national system for managing Education, Health and Care Plans to be implemented in 2026.

The Forum reflected on its role in scrutinising the funding arrangements for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities schools and bases, noting the moderation process undertaken since summer 2023.

Officers agreed to report back to the next meeting of the Forum on the prioritisation of schools for future moderation.

The Forum discussed the recommendations and, following debate, agreed to note rather than indicate its agreement of the 2024/25 Minimum Funding Guarantee.

**RESOLVED:**

1. To note the latest position on the DSG for 202/23, as at September (month 6).
2. To note the 2024/25 National Funding Formula changes.
3. To note the 2024/25 Minimum Funding Guarantee level.
4. To note the exceptional funding decisions for SEND schools/ bases taken in the 2022/23 academic year, and developments with regard to the moderation of special schools and bases.

**6: Therapies Review**

The Acting Strategic Lead for Education introduced the report.

The Forum noted that trading by Cognus Limited had allowed it to ameliorate the effects of its budget deficit but that the company and local authority anticipated an increase in the Education, Health and Care Plans caseload. The Forum discussed measures Cognus had taken to improve its staffing situation, including an apprenticeship scheme and the recruitment of permanent staff to reduce the need for more expensive temporary staff.

The Forum commended the news that only one parent complaint had been received regarding the changes to therapies provision, noting the efforts undertaken to engage with parents, develop staff, and the long-term objective to embed support in both class and at home. The Forum further supported the prospect that the programme may lead to a reduction in Education, Health and Care Plans where some pupils' needs could be better

met through therapies. Officers agreed to report back to the Forum in autumn 2024 on the performance of the programme.

**RESOLVED:** To note the report.

## **7: Development of Sutton Self Evaluation SEND and Alternative Provision Strategy**

The Acting Strategic Lead for Education introduced the report.

The Forum discussed the five emerging priorities for the Sutton Council Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP) Strategy.

The Forum discussed the possibility of the authority accessing additional funding streams for programmes and projects in order to reduce the pressures on budgets. Officers confirmed that, whilst this would be possible, the scope for such funding was limited.

The Forum discussed the support offered to vulnerable young girls who attended schools in the borough, noting that any bespoke support was currently met through the Alternative Provision budget, and discussed how Sutton's financial picture compared to other authorities, noting that there were a range of approaches in place across London boroughs to meet budgetary challenges. Officers confirmed that, whilst a great deal of improvement had been made to Sutton's SEND provision in recent years, the key challenge to such provision in future was the unprecedented demand on services and that this was a challenge faced by authorities across London and the country. The Forum noted that two-thirds of local authorities were pursuing transfers from Schools to High Needs Blocks to address SEND funding challenges. The Forum recognised the approach proposed was to spend now in order to save money in the longer term, and that the approach retained control for the local authority of SEND provision in the borough.

**RESOLVED:** To note the report.

## **8: Capital Report**

The Acting Head of Pupil Based Commissioning introduced the report.

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

## **9: Schools in Financial Deficit**

The Acting Strategic Lead for Education introduced the report.

The Forum considered the paper in exempt session by virtue of paragraph(s) 3 and 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

**RESOLVED:** To note the report.

The meeting ended at 19:16.