

**Meeting held on Tuesday 5th November 2024 at 8.00am
via TEAMS**

MINUTES

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| | Attendees |
| | Nina Siddle (NS) (Chair) Alex Allenby (AA), Jane Aukett (JA), Sarah Bate (SB), Liz Brummer (LB) Kate Cowdroy (KC), Ann Hardy (AH), Jo Indian (JI), Wendy Jackson (WJ), Steve Kernan (SK), Emily Powell (EP), Carianne Robson (CR), Rebecca Taylor (RT), Neville Wilkinson (NW), Ann Marie Wilson (AW), Rebecca Wilson (RW) |
| 53/24 | Welcome, introductions and apologies. Apologies had been received from: Cllr Margaret Cracknell and Jenni Steel |
| 54/24 | Chair's Welcome NS thanked everyone for attending and a round of introductions took place. |
| 55/24 | Minutes of Previous Meeting/Matters Arising of the meeting held on 19th of June 2024 The Minutes of the meeting held on 19 th June 2024 were agreed as a true record. There were no matters arising from the minutes. NS stated that she had been unable to access the slide presentation as part of Karen Linton's presentation. The Clerk offered to recirculate to all members. Action: Clerk |
| 56/24 | High Needs Block Update NS stated there had been a High Needs Working Group Meeting the previous week and RT had provided some very helpful information around specific elements of the High Needs Block expenditure and challenges. NS had requested that part of this information be shared with members. RT shared her screen and copies of her slides are attached to the Minutes. RT stated that she wished to highlight key threads to support understanding together with additional analysis around the capital project in terms of the impact this had. In terms of regional and national benchmarking, NEL was broadly in line with pupil population and could compare with neighbouring authorities. Growth had been slightly higher than regional and national in terms of EHCPs but the infrastructure did not grow as quickly which generated pressures and challenges in terms of the educational settings to meet needs. Over the last six years, the number of EHCPs had increased. In January 2024 there were 1,600 plans which had increased to 1,800 over six months. The primary need was Speech & Language, Autism and SEMH. In terms of the DSG management plan, NEL was in a deficit position for the High Needs Block. This was being updated and RT advised that |

she would share the information after Christmas. The plan had been reviewed in August and there had been some significant growth:

- A 11% growth in EHCPs since January
- A 19% growth between 2023 and 2024
- A 63% growth overall since 2020

RT stated that neighbouring authorities had similar trends. In terms of the High Needs Financial Block, there was an in-year deficit and a £10m deficit was predicted by this financial year which was predicted to double by 2025-26. There were ongoing discussions with the DfE in terms of the deficit budget. RT emphasised that it was a needs-led system.

LB stated that the current arrangement where the DSG deficit was ring fenced from the LA finances was in place until 2026. It was unknown at this time whether this would be extended and the impact this would have on the Council. This would be subject to further scrutiny moving forward. This mirrored the pattern as other LAs in terms of financial pressures but it was clear that the deficit was growing significantly which was challenging.

RT referred to the expenditure plans for 2025/26 and that Special Needs continued to be the most significant expenditure line because there were insufficient places in the Borough.

NS referred to the Independent Schools and asked how it was known what the implications would be on the budget. LB confirmed that the figures were an estimate based on the best information. A lift was built in for future years. NS stated that there was the extension at Cromwell to bring children back into the County. RT referred to EOTAS and stated there had been a significant increase in the number of packages since 2018. There was an impact and risk because children were not in school every day and were therefore, not being seen. As children were not accessing education, there were elements they were missing out on around social communication and there was a cost for buying individual bespoke packages for children. The cumulative number of plans had increased to over 60. It was still work in progress for this cohort of children and it was recognised that there were gaps in the system. Transport costs were reflected in the figures and there would be an increase which was Council funded.

RT stated that the budget for Hearing and Vision had increased to £876,000 and there had been discussions at senior level in terms of funding available from NHSE but, unfortunately, there was nothing. The recruitment of teachers of the deaf as well as TAs was a priority.

RT advised that the driving factors were to deliver better value in SEND to improve the overall outcomes for children. The deficit was in line, broadly speaking, with the predictions based on available information of £10m increasing to £20m over the 12 month period. RT referred to the strategies which had been tried to ensure the right support and discussions would take place on how this would be funded moving forwards in terms of sustainability. The figures did not take account of workforce development which was an additional £150,000 as an ongoing investment. All this information had been given to the DfE. In terms of capital projects, the SEMH Free School was on target to open by 2027, the Cambridge Park provision by September 2025 and the two new Primary Schools. Approval had been received to move forward with 12 places at Healing Academy. There was significant financial investment in these projects from the High Needs Capital Grant. The Cambridge Park extension provided up to 12 places with an investment of just under £1.5m.

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| | <p>The education cost for out of area children for 2024-25 was £1,570,718 and this would reduce significantly if there was more local support. The desire was for the children to remain in the Borough. Every effort was being made to reduce the deficit as much as possible by managing the children in a different way and utilising different provisions. NS referred to the information on children's hearing picked up by the LA which was a positive and improving picture.</p> |
| <p>57/24</p> | <p>School Funding Formula 2025-26 Update</p> <p>A copy of LB's slides were shared on screen. LB advised there had been some delays in receiving the Schools Block funding due to the change in Government. Normally, the NFF was received in July but was still awaited and the DSG allocation was due this term. The expectation was that the total Schools Block would be allocated. The DfE had confirmed some of the grants would be rolled into the core funding from September 2025. The NFF values had been fully adopted in 2024-25 and the LA had aligned to this guidance. The Schools Block Working Group would be discussing the options and in January 2025, the financial position would require reviewing by forum in advance of submission to the ESFA. Headline information that had been released confirmed the core budget would increase by £2.3m, £1bn for SEND, some funding expected towards the Employers' NI increase and £30m for free Breakfast Clubs. NS stated there was a question mark on the grants which were to be rolled into the main formula.</p> |
| <p>58/24</p> <p>(i)</p> <p>(ii)</p> | <p>Any other business</p> <p><u>Early Years</u></p> <p>WJ advised there were no further details on Wrap Around Care, Breakfast Club or Holiday Activities and would provide an update at the next meeting.</p> <p><u>Early Years Places</u></p> <p>CW confirmed that the roll out for 30 hours was going ahead for next September and illustrative budgets should be received towards the end of November. Hourly rates must be published by 28 February 2025. In the autumn term:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 3,230 children accessed a funded place in NEL, 1,000 more than the previous autumn term. ➤ For Universal 3 and 4 year olds, 1,584 had accessed a place and 49% claimed up to 30 hours. ➤ 2 year olds - 1,086 had accessed a funded place locally and 45% claimed the low or no income funding with 55% claiming via the working offer. There was a cohort locally who were eligible for both. ➤ Under 2's - 564 accessed a funded place, 34% of all children within the age group. ➤ There had been a really good take up and almost 3,500 children accessed funded places locally. The LA was working with existing providers to build additional capacity within it existing provision. <p>RT referred to the EY entitlement and advised that this had not been factored into high needs and any additional under 5s in settings. It was likely there would be an increase in Under 5s receiving EHCPs which must be considered. and factored in.</p> |

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| (iii) | <p><u>Wrap Around Care</u></p> <p>RW advised that 250 places had been created from September 2024 to offer full wraparound in schools or with private providers. 12 applications had been received for the first round of funding and 10 had been accepted with 2 deferred. The second round of applications would be reviewed in November to potentially increase a further 200 additional places from January 2025. Funding had been confirmed to continue up to March 2026 for those places that started before April 2025.</p> <p>In terms of funding for the two year programme, the LA had received notification that initially, they will only fund existing provision for the next financial year 2025/26. This was now being reviewed and LA's would be notified shortly.</p> <p>In terms of Breakfast Clubs, £30m would be allocated to schools for the financial year 2025/26 for free Breakfast Clubs and would not be LA led projects. It was planned to be responsibility of the DfE, schools and National Breakfast Club.</p> |
| 43/24 | <p>Date and time of next meeting</p> <p>The date of the next meeting had been agreed as Monday 10 March 2024 at 8.00am.</p> <p>NS brought the meeting to a close</p> |

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