

Surrey's school transport £12M overspend

6 June 2023



Surrey County Council officers say the authority must tackle a £12million overspend on school transport “to avoid adversely impacting services”.

The situation is made all the more difficult as “pressures anticipated for 2023/24 are significantly higher than in recent financial years”.

Surrey County Council has a duty to ensure 160,000 school children can get to school each day.

Of those, about 9,600 qualify for home to school travel assistance.

In 2021/22, 4,185 children used the travel scheme, up from 3,452 the year before. Between 2017 and 2020 the figure never topped 3,000.

The experience of families applying for travel assistance in the lead up to the 2022/23 academic year were so bad, and the service so overrun, the council set up a review that came back with 50 recommendations.

One parent interviewed as part of the process said “I felt incredibly sorry for them because they must have had every parent in Surrey with children screaming at them”.

The review found that during the peak of 2022, travel assistance teams became “stretched and overwhelmed”, with key staff absent for “reasons including stress”.

The £12m overspend is particularly bad news for parents, many of whom were forced to wait months after the academic year began to get travel provision organised by the council, as the gap between funding and demand is only set to grow, council papers showed.

According to scrutiny papers, the “overall outlook for 2023/24 is one of significant challenge, with budget envelopes remaining relatively static in the face of substantial increases in the cost of maintaining current service provision and increased demand. Despite a small increase in the projected levels of funding, pressures anticipated for 2023/24 are significantly higher than in recent financial years.”

The main driver behind the massive budget overspend, officers said, was “significant inflation, policy changes and the need to maintain the delivery of priority services experiencing significant demand pressures”. Closing the gap, they said, would “require further actions” that would be “extremely challenging, given the level of pressure forecast, and may require the council to adopt measures that postpone the achievement of [its] ambitions”.

An update on the council’s finances, discussed on Tuesday, May 30, showed that biggest cause for the the Children, Families and Lifelong Learning directorate’s £17.8m total overspend was the result of “rapid increases in demand following the COVID pandemic” for the travel service, and the re-opening of schools “after the 22/23 budget setting process” which was “further compounded by high fuel costs and driver shortages.”

Officers have said that “tackling this gap will require a fundamentally different approach, given the level of efficiencies required, to avoid adversely impacting services”.

Related reports:

[School transport failings lead to foodbanks...](#)

[Families ‘in limbo’ as SCC fails on school transport](#)

[It’s Walk to School Week in Surrey](#)

Epsom's university to go from millions to zero

6 June 2023



UCA Epsom has secured a multi-million-pound fund to meet a Net Zero target. The University for the Creative Arts (UCA) in Epsom has been awarded £4.5m in Government funding to decarbonise heating at its campus.

By harnessing new technologies and increasing onsite power generation, the University aims to deliver more than a 90% reduction in carbon emissions from energy consumption across a ten-year period and meet its commitment to Net Zero carbon emissions by 2030.

Professor Mark Ellul, Chief Operating Officer at UCA, said: “Since 2007, our investment in energy efficiency and onsite renewables, have halved our carbon emissions despite growing as a university. We are now building on this work to create a step-change in our efforts to reach Net Zero.

“We are committed to being one of the greenest universities in the UK and this funding is an endorsement of the work we have already undertaken to deliver greener campuses.”

Scott Keiller, UCA Sustainability Manager said: “In the coming months we will be developing our plans, aiming to replace our gas-powered heating with ground source and air source heat pumps by spring 2025. We will also be significantly increasing our solar power generation to reduce our demand on grid electricity and adding sophisticated energy control systems and grid connected energy storage.”

The project will be funded by the Government’s Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS) with the University committing a similar amount of funding. The Public Sector scheme was initiated by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero and it is delivered by Salix Finance.

Director of Programmes Ian Rodger from Salix Finance said: “The projects at the University of Creative Arts are ambitious and our teams at Salix are looking forward to being part of the University’s journey to reach its Net Zero targets.

“The University has made substantial progress in the last few years in reducing its carbon emissions and this PSDS grant will enable significant further carbon reductions.

“As well as creating greener campuses, the buildings will also be more comfortable for the students, staff and other visitors to use.”

Surrey sleep specialists supported

6 June 2023



The **University of Surrey** has been awarded £1.7 million to further research into the sleep and circadian rhythms of people living with dementia.

Disturbed sleep is a common symptom for people living with dementia, but it is not known how and to what extent sleep disturbance exacerbates the disease.

Led by **Professor Derk-Jan Dijk**, the team at Surrey will expand their innovative programme of research that is using new technologies to non-invasively monitor and improve the sleep of dementia sufferers. The research is conducted in close collaboration with **Imperial College London** and the **Surrey and Borders Partnership Trust**, as part of the UK Dementia Research Institute (UK DRI).

Professor Derk-Jan Dijk, Director of **Surrey Sleep Research Centre** (SSRC), said:

“People living with dementia often have issues with sleep and, often, their memory is seemingly worse after a bad night. Good quality sleep is integral to our cognitive health, and now we need to test whether improving the sleep of those living with dementia will slow down the progression of the condition and preserve an individual’s memory for longer. To assist with this, we have the opportunity to use new technologies to both monitor and potentially improve the sleep of dementia sufferers over an extended period, in a way that is non-intrusive and supportive to people living with dementia and their carers.

“This award is invaluable in helping us to continue our work and I am grateful to the UK DRI, the Medical Research Council, Alzheimer’s Research UK and Alzheimer’s Society for making this possible.”

To learn more and ultimately improve the sleep of those living with dementia, researchers are applying digital health technologies that can sense movements and physiological signals of individuals whilst they sleep. This combined with mathematical modelling, machine learning, video analysis of sleep behaviour and molecular biomarker approaches, will yield a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between sleep, circadian rhythms, symptoms and disease progression in people living with dementia.

Professor Dijk added:

“A major advantage of the novel digital technologies we’re working with, many of which are contactless, is that they pose very little burden on the participant and can be used to monitor sleep and circadian rhythms in the home environment for weeks, months and years.”

The Surrey team will also continue to test new interventions to improve sleep. Interventions to be tested include changing brain oscillations through delivery of precisely targeted auditory stimulation during REM sleep (a sleep stage thought to be particularly important for brain function) or improving the light environment to boost circadian rhythms.

Professor Paul Townsend, Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Executive Dean of the Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences at the University of Surrey, said:

“Congratulations to Professor Dijk and the team of researchers from across the University in securing this fantastic award. This is testament to their hard work and dedication in this field.

“This year marks 20 years of the Surrey Sleep Research Centre which continues to go from strength to strength and cements our position as a global leader of sleep research.”

Fiona Carragher, Director of Research and Influencing at Alzheimer’s Society and a Surrey alumni, said:

“As a founding partner and funder of the UK DRI, we are very proud of what the Institute has achieved since its launch in 2017. We congratulate everyone involved in placing it on the map as a global leader in dementia research and for the great impact it has had so far. This has included critical research into developing new diagnostic tools to ensure people living with dementia receive an early and accurate diagnosis, potentially giving them access to one of the disease-modifying treatments we hope to see emerging from the clinical trials pipeline in the coming years.”

Surrey University Press Office

How to cut the County’s cake?

6 June 2023



A Surrey MP challenges the cuts the County makes to supporting children with special educational and disability needs (SEND), in a classic how to cut the County Council’s cake dilemma. Chris Caulfield LDRS reports.

Surrey County Council “may be in breach” of statutory duties over its decision to cut respite breaks for parents of children with special educational needs. The county council redesigned its short breaks services and has been able to maintain its provision of overnight care but, with the budget frozen at 2017 levels, cuts had to be made elsewhere.

It wrote to care providers saying it was freezing payments from April this year and issued a statement saying it was only “able to fund two-thirds of the current capacity in community-based play and youth schemes for children with disabilities”.

Parents left furious and on the brink as they struggled to find ways to balance full-time care needs and work have been given a glimmer of hope by Runnymede and Weybridge MP Ben Spencer.

Dr Ben Spencer, MP for Runnymede and Weybridge, has written to Surrey County Council. Credit SurreyLive/Grahame Larter.

In a letter to a constituent, he said: “I have now written to Surrey County Council regarding their new policy on short breaks. I share your concerns about the impact the new policy will have on families. I understand the importance of short breaks and am grateful for you taking the time to raise these issues with me.

“Since receiving the response from Surrey CC and doing some research I am concerned that Surrey CC’s new policy may be in breach of their statutory duties. “These duties are set out in the Children Act of 1989 include specific references to breaks for carers.”

A spokesperson for Surrey County Council said the decision to freeze – rather than cut – funding was an “important decision” given the “real challenge for public

finances” and that the authority understood the importance of these services for children, young people and their families.

They said: “We have a statutory duty to deliver a balanced budget and this means we have not been able to increase the budget for short breaks services at this time, in line with inflation.

“We understand the concern this may cause families and we are pleased to announce that we have been successful in securing £907k of Short Breaks Innovation funding for 2023/24 from the Department for Education.

“This will enable us to deliver some enhanced short breaks services for children and families with more complex needs in 2023/24, which we believe will make a real difference. Whilst there will still be changes to services, we hope this additional funding will be welcome news to families.

“This funding will be allocated to services that meet the highest level of need. In particular, we are committed to maintaining current capacity of overnight respite services for children who have been assessed as needing them, so that we fulfil statutory commitments in children’s care plans.”

Education assessment delays making parents sick

6 June 2023



A mother claims Surrey County Council “makes her sick” as she says delays to assessing her son’s special educational needs are causing “a lot of stress”.

At a protest held outside the authority’s Reigate headquarters, the mother, along with others, called for change at the council in how Surrey’s children with additional needs are treated.

Image: Parents protesting outside Surrey County Council headquarters in Woodhatch Place, Reigate. Credit: Emily Coady-Stemp

Anna Sutherland, protesting for the fifth time outside the Woodhatch Place building, said parents being sent down the tribunal route, as they are if they want to appeal against a council’s assessment of their children, “put a lot on families”.

She claimed the education, health and care plan (EHCP) issued to her 11-year-old son by the county council was “unlawful” but that because she knew the law, and knew what he was entitled to, she would “get there in the end”. Ms Sutherland told the LD RS: “This makes me ill. Surrey council make me sick.”

With her 9-year-old daughter’s EHCP also up for an annual review soon, Ms Sutherland feared she may have two tribunals on her hands. On previous protests, cabinet members on Surrey County Council have come out to talk to the parents present, but did not on Tuesday (March 21).

When the group of parents decided to attend the council meeting taking place that morning, they were told they could only do so if they left their placards in the building’s reception downstairs.

Ms Sutherland said many families with children with additional needs had “a lot to deal with in the first place” and additional chasing of EHCPs, tribunals and school places was “a lot to put on families”. Saying many families also had to work, may also have neuro-diverse conditions themselves and the “huge impact” on a parent’s mental health of going through a child’s diagnoses she said the parents at the protest were representing a “much huger group”. She added: “On top of the stress they put on you, then having the additional strength or the additional drive to protest, a lot of families just can’t do that.”

Clare Powdrill said delays to the EHCP process for her son had led to her spending more than £30,000 in two tribunals, both conceded by the council the day before the hearing. She said: “I am protesting because Surrey County Council have seriously let my son down.” Another parent, **Charlotte Lewis**, also said EHCP processes had been delayed “at every step” and timelines not been met by Surrey County Council. She said: “Many parents are being forced into a lengthy and expensive appeals process which is usually won but can delay children’s access to an education by years in some cases. ”

A council spokesperson said: “We are not able to comment on the details of any individual children, but we can confirm that all current EHCPs were updated in line with statutory timescales to enable children’s transition to the next phase of their education. If a parent is unhappy with the content of their child’s updated plan, we would urge them to contact their case officer as soon as possible, so that any issues can be resolved.

“We always aim to resolve disagreements without families needing to go through a tribunal process, however, they do have the right to do so, and if it remains the view of the local authority that the latest education health and care plan accurately reflects a child’s needs and the provision required to meet their needs, then, in these rare cases the tribunal is the appropriate route to resolve the dispute.”

Surrey emotional and mental health crisis children’s home receives ‘Good’ Ofsted grading

6 June 2023



Extended Hope, a respite home for children in Surrey who are having an emotional and mental health crisis has been graded as ‘Good’ in all areas by Ofsted following an inspection in November 2022.

Ofsted noted that “children have positive experiences in this home”, “staff support children to make progress in all areas of their lives” and “are skilled and knowledgeable in the care they provide children”. Inspectors found that, “despite the short-term nature of the home, staff help children to prepare for their future” and “safeguarding arrangements are in place to protect children”.

The home is operated by Surrey County Council in partnership with a wider Surrey and Borders Partnership NHS Foundation Trust service providing care for young people facing emotional and mental health crisis. It offers children a respite or crisis bed for up to seven days and is staffed by residential workers and community psychiatric nurses who can provide mental health assessments and support for young people out of hours as well as supporting families, carers and professionals.

Sinead Mooney, Cabinet Member for Children and Families at Surrey County Council said: *“I am delighted that Ofsted recognises the positive experiences children have in this home. Extended Hope provides a safe and supportive environment for children to give them some respite, and also supports families with creating a plan of care. It is a crucial service because it offers children and young people support close to home and reduces the likelihood of them becoming an inpatient in hospital. Being close to home makes it easier for children to stay connected to their families, friends and their local communities, which is so important for their wellbeing, and ultimately their outcomes. This is why we are absolutely determined to ensure we have sufficient provision, in Surrey, and we will continue to provide the best possible support for the vulnerable children and young people we care for. I would like to congratulate and thank our staff and health partners for their determination and passion in ensuring these positive outcomes for our children and young people.”*

Read the full report on Ofsted’s website here.

This home is one of ten county council-run children’s homes across Surrey. In 2020 and 2021, the Council agreed to invest £34m on improving sufficiency for Looked After Children and £2.4m in increasing management capacity and upskilling our workforce, so young people in care get the best environment to thrive, within Surrey. We are building up to three new purpose-built children’s homes in Surrey, the first of which is due to be completed in Spring 2023 and will provide a more accessible and homely setting to support children with the highest and most complex mental health needs. The design is at the forefront of green technology with modern building efficiency and its location will mean children and young people can stay better connected to the local community.

About Surrey and Borders Partnership NHS Foundation Trust

Providers of mental health, learning disability and drug and alcohol services for people of all ages. They provide a broad range of community and hospital services, mostly in Surrey and North East Hampshire but also extending across Hampshire, Croydon and Sussex. Their high-quality care focuses on enabling people and their carers to live well.

You can read about their New Hospitals Program on the website.

www.sabp.nhs.uk

From Surrey County Council news service.

Related reports:

1000 Surrey children wait for special needs plans

Epsom to help meet children’s homes bed shortage?

County children home challenges

Surrey County failed SEND boy

Surrey County failed SEND boy

6 June 2023



Surrey County Council has been ordered to apologise and pay a family £7,400 after failing a young boy with special educational needs. The local government and social care ombudsman published its finding today. It found Surrey County Council failed to provide the boy his full entitlement of education and therapy for 18 months and fined the local authority due the frustration, distress. and lost education it caused.

The boy’s mother raised the complaint in June 2021. As part of his education, health, and care plan, the boy should receive 15 hours of tutoring a week, along with speech, language and occupational therapy. Between September 2020 and January 2021 “he received just four hours a week. This rose to six hours a week in February 2021.”

In April 2021 a special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) tribunal ordered the council to increase this to 25 hours a week, including weekly therapeutic provision, and animal therapy. Full speech and language therapy did not begin until September 2021. Animal therapy, despite the mother alerting the council that sessions had not started in May 2021, did not begin until March 2022 – as the council did not follow up her complaints, the ombudsman found.

In December 2021, the boy’s relationship with his occupational therapist was said to have broken down but Surrey County Council did not put in an alternative until March 2022.

Michael King, local government and social care ombudsman, said: “Councils cannot delegate their duties to ensure provision laid out in young people’s EHC Plans are delivered. After councils issue these plans we expect them to ensure all the provision included is in place – and if it is not, it should act to secure it without delay. In this case the boy missed out on a significant amount of tuition and therapies for a prolonged period, despite a previous investigation by us which found the son did not get education between 2018 and 2020. It is disappointing that the council did not learn from the issues raised in my first investigation.”

Mr King said he had further concerns over the way Surrey County Council dealt with the mother’s complaints, which at one stage took 11 months to handle. The council’s own policy states it should have taken a maximum of 30 days.

Following the investigation Surrey County Council must now write to the mother and apologise for its faults and the injustice it caused. It must also pay £5,400 for the boy’s his lost hours of education and therapy, £1,000 to the boy’s mother for the prolonged frustration and distress it caused which it compounded with poor complaint handling, and a further £1,000 to the boy in recognition of the distress caused to him.

It must also carry out a review of how it arranges and monitors its provisions and complaint handling for its children and young people services.

Mr King added: “The council has accepted my recommendations to improve its processes and I hope the better oversight this will bring will ensure other children and young people in Surrey do not miss out on the education and therapy they are entitled to in the same way.”

Surrey County Council now has three months to consider the report and confirm its actions. A spokesperson for the county council said: “The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman has issued a report following its investigation of a complaint about Surrey County Council. The complaint was about education and children’s services. The Ombudsman found that there had been fault on the part of the council, and this had caused injustice to the complainant. Surrey County Council takes the findings very seriously and apologises for any distress the family experienced, and has agreed to take action which the ombudsman regards as providing a satisfactory remedy for the complaint.”

The council must now consider the report and tell the ombudsman within three months (or such longer period as the ombudsman may agree) what it proposes to do.

School transport failings lead to foodbanks...

6 June 2023



Families were pushed to using food banks and suffered an impact on their mental health when Surrey County Council-funded school transport was not provided for their children.

Surrey County Council carried out a review into the school transport “failure” after nearly 150 families, many with children with additional needs, were left without a way to get their children to school at the start of term.

Alongside the authority’s internal review, Family Voice Surrey carried out its own, including a survey which heard from 290 families about the impacts of children not being provided with transport to and from school.

The survey showed that 71 per cent of those who responded had experienced challenges with home to school transport during the autumn term and that 19 per cent of children and young people were unable to attend school or college on the first day.

Leanne Henderson, the organisation’s participation manager, said they heard from “desperate” families every year about issues with school transport, often right at the end of August, when transport had not been confirmed for the start of the school term.

She also raised concerns about the communication that came from the authority, with many families waiting a long time for contact from the council.

The approach of the council had been “very inconsistent” she told a meeting of the authority’s children, families, lifelong learning and culture select committee on Thursday (December 15).

Ms Henderson said: “We had some families that told us they had to use food banks because they were so financially disadvantaged due to not being able to transport their child to school, and that was really quite worrying.”

She also told the meeting that the organisation was “shocked” that 86 per cent of respondents said the situation had adverse effects on their mental health and well being, and increased anxiety.

More than a third of respondents reported financial issues.

She said: “They were the two elements that really hit home and made us wonder: ‘Why has this happened? What is going on?’”

The meeting heard that at least six factors had led to a backlog of cases at the start of the school year, including an increase in applications, a policy change earlier in the year and a lack of resources.

Ms Henderson said she could see council staff were “totally overwhelmed”, saying she could see from both sides in talking to the families affected and those working at the council.

She said: “I could see the team and I really felt for them.

“They were doing the absolute best that they could do under really difficult circumstances.”

The council’s report listed 50 recommendations to ensure the issues would not be repeated next year, and there were recommendations in the Family Voice Surrey report.

Councillor Clare Curran (Conservative, Bookham and Fetcham West), the authority’s cabinet member for education and learning said she had also been “swamped” by emails on the matter.

She said the review that had been carried out was a “substantial piece of work” and not a “five-minute fix”.

The council spends more than £50m a year on helping children and families get to school, which Cllr Curran told the meeting is a fifth of the entire net budget for children and families.

Cllr Curran added: “I don’t underestimate the task at hand, I don’t underestimate the work that needs to be done.

“But I’m confident that we are going to get it done and next September families, children and young people won’t suffer the failure that there was in September this year.”

ENDS

1000 Surrey children wait for special needs plans

6 June 2023



A senior Surrey councillor admits it is “not good enough” that nearly 1,000 children with special educational needs in Surrey are waiting for an education plan. Nearly a third of those have been waiting more than the statutory 20-week limit for a Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP), with a shortage in educational psychologists among the reasons the council put forward for the backlog.

Surrey County Council’s cabinet member for education and learning said nationally for 60 per cent of children being assessed for an EHCP it was being done within the 20-week period. **Clare Curran** (Conservative, Bookham and Fetcham West) added: “Clearly it is not only a situation that prevails here in Surrey. Notwithstanding the national situation, I admit that it’s not good enough and not one that we would expect or want for our young people.”

An EHCP is put together by a council for children to outline what help they may need at school to support them with their special education needs and disabilities. There are 988 active EHCP requests at the council, of which 284 were known to be over the 20-week period, according to meeting documents.

Cllr Curran explained to a meeting of Surrey’s council on Tuesday (December 13) that a shortage of educational psychologists meant a mandatory part of the EHCPs could not be completed, which was contributing to delays. She said recruiting and training up caseworkers had been a focus, and the workforce was now around 80 per cent staffed across the county.

Her answers came in response to a question put forward by **Lance Spencer** (Liberal Democrat, Goldsworth East and Horsell Village) who said families were being “left behind” by the council and asked what was being done to reduce the “excessive delays”. Cllr Curran said that the council’s ambition was to achieve “better timeliness” by the end of the year in completing EHCP plans. She added: “I know the situation is not good. I know we are not achieving the level of service that we would want to for our children and young people. We are doing our very best to address that and make sure that things improve.”

In a written response, the council denied that parents threatening legal action sped up the time scales for getting an EHCP in place. Cllr Spencer’s written question read: “It would appear that where the parents threaten legal action that the EHCP timescales are reduced” and asked for the number of parents who had written threatening legal proceedings.

A written response said data was not collected at the council in that way, adding: “This process is not influenced by the threat of legal proceedings.”

The meeting heard that the issues impacting the outstanding EHCPs were also a factor in nearly a fifth of annual reviews not being carried out within six months of their due date.

A question put forward by **Catherine Baart** (Green, Earlswood and Reigate South) asked for an update on annual EHCP reviews at the authority. The response in

meeting documents showed that at the start of term, 59 per cent of plans had an up-to-date annual review in place or were due within the next month, being 6,445 of the 10,963 plans in place. There were also 4,517 plans that were overdue a review, of which 1,849 were more than six months overdue.

Documents said the availability of staff over the summer had played a part in fewer annual reviews being completed on time, and that an improvement should be seen by the end of the autumn term. Cllr Curran said she did not know if there was a target within the department for completing reviews on time, but that the service was prioritising reviews for children who were vulnerable, including those looked after by the county council or on child protection plans.

Councillors also raised the issue of home to school transport in Surrey, described as “the biggest concern of many of our residents” by the Green Party Group leader on the council.

The council’s leader, Cllr **Tim Oliver** (Conservative, Weybridge) apologised in October for a backlog in sorting school transport for some of the county’s most vulnerable children, when more than 150 families were left in limbo at the start of term.

Jonathan Essex (Redhill East) called on the council to look in its review at the views put forward Family Voice Surrey which had spoken to 290 families as part of its own review.

Cllr **Nick Darby** (Dittons and Weston Green Residents, The Dittons) told the meeting the internal review listed more than 50 recommendations for the council, which he described as “a terrible indictment of the situation”. He said the school transport was “best described as a shambles” and questioned the creation of a new board to oversee progress being made up of officers and cabinet members, many of them previously involved in the process.

On Thursday (December 15) a meeting of the council’s children, families, lifelong learning and culture select committee will consider the council’s review of what happened at the start of the school year.

Surrey schools energy hikes

6 June 2023



Surrey schools are being advised to plan for increases in gas prices of more than 129 per cent.

Along with this, council finance teams are telling schools to plan for a 73 per cent increase in electricity prices, according to a cabinet member on Surrey County Council.

Councillor Claire Curran (Conservative, Bookham and Fetcham West), the county council’s cabinet member for education and learning, described the rises as “very significant increases”.

At a meeting of the authority’s cabinet on Tuesday (November 29), Cllr Curran said the school finance team had been working with schools on budget planning and sharing recommendations.

She said utilities generally accounted for around two per cent of a school’s budget, while the largest part of their budget goes on staffing costs, adding: “Even though there’s enormous pressure, it is for a relatively small amount of their budget.”

Many schools are on annual fixed contracts, meaning they were likely protected from the immediate pressure of increasing prices, which Cllr Curran called “a comfort for some”.

She told the meeting: “I don’t think anybody or any organisation is immune from the pressures of gas and electricity costs.”

She said the council was “comfortable” that schools were “not in immediate danger of runaway electricity or energy prices”.

Cllr Curran also highlighted the pressures faced by the county’s smaller schools, which had fewer pupils and were seeing falling birth rates in their areas.

She said schools in rural areas in particular, mostly concentrated in the south of Surrey, were under “very significant pressure” because of the way school funding is allocated on a per pupil basis.

There are 29 schools across the county with fewer than 90 pupils and 73 schools with less than one form of entry.

Cllr Curran said: “That just goes to show that when schools are funded on a per pupil basis we can understand why they’re under pressure.”

The Department for Education is increasing schools funding nationally by £1.5billion in 2023/24 with minimum (average) per pupil funding levels being increased from £4,265 per primary pupil to £4,405 and from £5,525 per secondary pupil to £5,715.

ENDS