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Surrey schools energy hikes

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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.

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