

# Early Years Reference Group Extraordinary Meeting

Thursday 2 April 2020

## 1. Welcome and introductions

Jane Boulton, Lucy-Anne Bryant, Mark Cawley, Rosemary Collard, Jenny Harvey (notes), Sarah Hawkins, Debbie Muir, John Proctor, Natalia Reyner, Trudy Surman

## 2. How is it so far?

- LAB confirmed that initial thinking was that Wiltshire Council would use hubs and look at ways of moving staff between provision. We are now asking the EY sector representatives through this group for their ideas on how we can move forward and what additional support might be required by the sector.
- Discussion took place around the individual provisions and their experiences/ situations:
  - A mix of closed and open early years provision, with staff being furloughed.
  - Where children are moving to 'sister' settings within a group i.e. setting hub, their key worker is going with them to help the child settle.
  - Large number of requests for childcare were initially received, but the number hasn't quite materialised. Possibly informal and illegal childcare arrangements being used. Local Authority needs to ensure sufficient childcare across the county in line with statutory guidance.
  - Open provision is starting to become increasingly expensive to remain open – low child numbers with duty staff in line with ratios and statutory responsibilities.
  - Positive and negative experiences with parents and their perceived right to childcare in the current crisis.
  - Daily and weekly arrangements in place for parents and providers to communicate about childcare requirements.
  - A number of providers are open over the bank holiday weekend to assist key worker parents and also over the Easter school break. Where no provision is required on a day, providers are closing for that day.
  - Are enhanced pay rates being offered to staff for working bank holidays as well in the current crisis? LAB confirmed we are approaching DfE for confirmation on costs recovery.
  - Some providers using the Tapestry system for uploading and downloading children's work and photos being carried out at home.
  - Out of school provision requests for school aged children when schools are closed.
  - Contradiction in DfE guidance on furloughing of staff and accessing Free Entitlement Funding in Summer 2020 to which we are currently awaiting a response. Want to give accurate information to the sector. Lissie Bolton has a conference call with the DfE later today, so clarification will be sought again.
  - Coronavirus Small Business Grant Fund - £10K. LAB to confirm who would be able to apply for this grant.
  - All agreed FE funding needs to continue being paid to providers until they are able to build child numbers back up again.
  - An idea mooted was for later school starts for children due to move up to school 1 September 2020 with a revised start date of end of September. LAB asked

group to think about the proposal for discussion next time we reconvene. Providers would be able to put in claims for the 1 month FE for these children.

- The group thought that deferring a school term would be more beneficial to all parties allowing school/EY provider staff and children to get themselves sorted and settled after potentially 6 months out. Mental health and emotional needs of children to be considered. LAB to take forward with internal team as a viable option. MC raised concern about the impact this could have on a potential log jam with the younger years coming through. Would this be workable for providers?
- Staff leave before Covid-19 and accrued leave throughout furlough period could cause staggered opening and increased pressure on settings to resolve this as well as adhering to ratios. NR suggested that this could be discussed in the DfE conference call

**ACTION: LAB to continue approaching DfE for confirmation on costs recovery.**

**LAB to confirm who would be able to apply for Coronavirus Small Business Grant Fund**

**LAB to take idea of October half term deferred school entry to internal team for discussion.**

**Group to think about the staggered school entry ideas discussed ready for the next meeting.**

### **3. Funding additional hours**

- No-one has experienced any issues with payment of hours outside of FE.

### **4. Shopping and PPE**

- LAB asked if everyone was able to access supplies of food and PPE. Some providers were experiencing issues. LAB told the group to let us know and we would take the issue to the Economy cell group and try to resolve the issue through other ways.
- JP didn't think EY providers would see increases in the number of children needed childcare. There are now more cases of children being affected and this could stimulate more children being kept at home.

### **5. AOB**

- Providers would like information on which schools are currently open. Some are receiving holiday club requests – RC confirmed they had had 23 requests so far. LAB confirmed schools have been asked to open over the bank holidays and whole Easter break. If a local club isn't open (and it should be) then email [SchoolEffectiveness@wiltshire.gov.uk](mailto:SchoolEffectiveness@wiltshire.gov.uk) and the query can be taken up from there.
- NR suggested that the provision maps should be shared with EY providers, need to take this higher up to get set up.
- Cost issues of school run and external holiday clubs – free if school run, cost involved if external.
- Business rates – some providers have already had their April payments debited from their accounts. Everyone thought payment holidays had started immediately. LAB to confirm this with Revs and Bens.

- LAB confirmed Wiltshire Council is looking at incentivising those providers who have remained open, and budget remodelling is currently taking place. LAB will confirm arrangements once they are finalised.
- Some providers said it is quite lonely and scary for them, they are putting themselves in vulnerable positions by working with the KW families and it's difficult maintaining staff morale.
- *System?? – providers need to access their details and update for the Easter bank holiday/break. LAB – what system was this – gov.uk?*
- Providers stated that Wiltshire's communications with the sector have been good compared to other local authorities. LAB confirmed that working with EY sector representatives is and will continue to help Wiltshire Council tailor our response to the current situation. NR confirmed that the council appreciate the working relationship it has with the group and the sector.
- Jane Boulton thanked the EY Funding team for helping Springboard DSC resolve an issue with their Summer 2020 estimated hours.

**ACTION:**      **LAB/NR to organise for provision maps to be shared with EY providers**  
                      **LAB to confirm situation regarding business rates with Revs and Bens**  
                      **LAB to confirm incentivisation scheme once finalised**