

Early Years Reference Group Extraordinary Meeting

Wednesday 10 June 2020

1. Welcome and introductions

Jane Boulton, Lucy-Anne Bryant, Mark Cawley, Rosemary Collard, Jenny Harvey (notes), Sarah Hawkins, John Proctor.

2. Apologies

Russell Martin, Trudy Surman, Debbie Muir, Natalia Reyner

3. Minutes and actions

The issue around space in single room settings has been raised with Risk Board. Following group discussion about schools not reopening to all year groups from 1 June 2020, it was decided that LAB should take the overall issue of capacity through June and July back to the board as an ongoing issue.

ACTION: LAB to take overall capacity issue back to board as ongoing issue

4. Current situation

LAB stated that Wiltshire Council have fed back to the DfE on the unequal playing field between schools and EY providers. The DfE have allowed EY providers to operate and this has been done successfully within the new Covid-19 restrictions and guidance. Schools need to be more creative as to how they can operate.

LAB confirmed that the DfE have to agree and approve the Local Authority's proposal of either a one off payment of £1000/£150 or £10 per child per week to assist with PPE costs, and that we are currently awaiting their response.

LAB confirmed that a second Covid-19 spike is expected July/August time and this will have an impact on hospitals and their staff and childcare requirements.

Holiday provision - can operate under current guidance, as the bubbles are larger and children are attending all day with the same staff. LAB confirmed a questionnaire (childcare through summer holidays) is being sent out to schools for distribution to parents which will be followed up by a survey to EY providers. The Local Authority will then map need against demand to ensure sufficient childcare.

ASC provision - currently cannot operate unless they are on a school site, but there is an expectation by schools that EY providers will operate this provision. It was felt that schools should be providing and running ASC's as the children are school aged and current guidance stipulates that younger and older children bubbles cannot mix.

The group felt that a phased approach for September start children would be helpful to get them back into a routine and to readjust to the nursery/learning environment. However, deferring school places and/or keeping reception cohort back will cause significant issues across the board and have a knock-on effect with younger children coming through. JB stated this would be a nightmare for Springboard and specialist places. EY providers need information and guidance now so they can give parents advance notice of plans.

5. Budget 2020/2021

JP reported to the group - Schools Forum – £9 million overspend, over £2 million carried forward from last year, overall £11.37 million deficit. EY is currently overspent by £1 million. New DfE rules state that local authorities cannot hold deficit going forward and need to clear within 2 years. JP queried whether EY would get a budget adjustment in Autumn 2020 as would normally be the case. EY had a £300k underspend in 2019/2020 which was taken back by Schools Forum but we won't know if this money will be returned to the budget until January 2021.

There was general discussion regarding the overall EY budget and the difference between how schools and early years are dealt with at Schools Forum. Schools have received a budget increase for all on-costs whilst early years providers haven't. LAB stated that its important to get children back into early years provision/schools but central government isn't paying for quality to manage this.

The next Schools Forum meeting is being held on Thursday 11 June and will be attended by JP and MC. All EY representatives and MT attending will do everything they can to maximise the EY budget and keep reductions/overspend to an absolute minimum.

6. Autumn 2020 headcount exercise and EYES update

JH and LAB confirmed that currently the Early Years Entitlement team can only advise on funding activities up to 31 August, but were hopeful that an Autumn headcount would take place albeit in a different format as a result of Covid-19 and current working from home arrangements.

The Early Years Entitlement team are attending EYES training on Friday 12 June with a view to going live with the system in July/August (local authority staff only), and possibly some test providers working on the system in Autumn 2020. JH confirmed that her new line manager, Emily Wood will now be taking over the lead from Nicola McCann on the rollout of the programme to the sector.

ACTION: None

7. PPE

JP said there was conflicting information and advice from the government on PPE, and asked would Wiltshire Council be providing PPE for EY providers. (Refer to PPE funding proposal comment made in Section 4).

LAB informed the group that the free hand gel bottled had now confirmed as 88.7ml bottles only. LAB was very disappointed as had been led to believe they would be bigger bottles. All providers will be eligible for 2 bottles, with larger providers eligible for 4 bottles. Pickup details will be issued in next EY newsletter.

ACTION: None

8. AOB

The group discussed the issue of children who haven't and won't return to EY provision which is of great concern.

Care over summer holidays – JB confirmed characteristics of effective learning/ transitions booklet being developed. There is a presumption that EY provider staff are in situ and have time to complete these transition forms. Schools don't know the children or what they have/haven't learnt and cannot advocate for them.

Wiltshire funding campaign - The group discussed a growing need for a Wiltshire funding campaign for EY providers to approach their MPs who in turn could put pressure on central government. Commitment would be needed from all EY providers in all areas for this to succeed, but some felt that as the sector is quite fragmented, provider inertia would be the greatest barrier.

JP again raised the issue of using EY provider email addresses that are held by the Early Years Entitlement team for the campaign, but JH confirmed that she had forwarded his initial request to her line manager at the time (Nicola McCann) and permission had not been granted under GDPR regulations. LAB confirmed that generic early years providers emails are available on individual provider webpages and the online Childcare Directory so could be collected that way.

Summer 2020 EYPP claims/payments - LAB confirmed that an EYPP SNAP survey will be sent out to all EY providers requesting data and a separate payment for Summer 2020 EYPP will be made to providers alongside the main July payment.

Summer 2020 DAP claims/payments - LAB confirmed that a decision was still yet to be made on DAF funding and that applications should be deferred to the October 2020 headcount. JB and JP both raised the issue of children who would have been eligible in Summer 2020 but are due to leave and start school in September 2020.

LAB confirmed that there would be a funding update to EY providers by the end of this week.

The date of the next meeting was agreed as 24 June 2020, 12.30pm-2.00pm. LAB will send out a Teams meeting request to the group.

ACTION: LAB to follow up the DAF funding issue.

ACTION: LAB to follow up and organise Summer 2020 EYPP funding.