

## Early Years Reference Group Meeting

Wednesday 4 November 2020

### 1. Welcome and introductions

Jane Boulton, Lucy-Anne Bryant, *Rosemary Collard (name missed off original set of minutes issued)*, Emma Cooke, Jenny Harvey (notes), Sarah Hawkins, Bid Lillywhite, Russ Martin, Debbie Muir, John Proctor, Jane Provis, Trudy Surman, Marie Taylor, Emily Wood.

Bid Lillywhite from Bellefield Primary School was welcomed as the new maintained school representative for the group.

### 2. Apologies

Mark Cawley, Debbie Muir, Claire Shipley,

### 3. Minutes of last meeting (30 September 2020)

The group approved the minutes as a true and accurate record.

### 4. Matters arising

Item 3 – LAB/EC confirmed Bid Lillywhite had been successfully appointed as the new maintained school representative for the group, whilst private providers representatives were still being sought.

Item 4 – EW confirmed the new Provider Establishment Portal was launched on Friday 31 October 2020. 389 providers have been sent their registration and login email with a further 74 providers being held back as a result of an issue with some of their children's 30 hour eligibility codes. These issues have now been rectified, and these 74 providers received their registration and login emails on Monday 2 November 2020. A small group of providers have so far been unable to log in to the portal, and these issues have been logged with Liquidlogic. However, 250+ providers have been able to successfully log in and start using the portal. EW also confirmed that if the login issue isn't resolved for this group of providers soon, then there is an alternative way that they will be able to submit a headcount for Autumn 2020. SH raised an issue about a parent's date of birth being required in the portal. EW confirmed that a parent date of birth is only required for an EYPP check, and there is already a section to capture this data on the reverse of the Parent Declaration form.

Item 4 – LAB confirmed that the sector have been contacted for feedback on the format of the new newsletter via this week's weekly attendance survey. Group feedback was positive. Some members of the group hadn't received their newsletter email so LAB will look into this.

Item 4 – JP thanked MT for forwarding him a copy of her summary report and DfE response. JP confirmed he had written to the DfE with all Wiltshire MPs copied in. Despite sending a chasing email, JP has received no acknowledgement from the DfE other than to say the person being contacted was on leave. JP also confirmed that he had received automatic acknowledgments from all MP's, with the exception of John Glen. Michelle Donelan sent a personal response and said she would help where possible. JP was very disappointed in the overall response and will write again shortly.

**ACTION: LAB to check the newsletter mailing list for those members who haven't received it.**

### 5. Impact of COVID on settings

LAB confirmed there are 2 providers with very low numbers who are planning to mothball provision and reconsider opening in September 2021. They are small village pre-schools who

are only able to offer funded hours on a term time only basis. JP asked about staff redeployment of these provisions, and LAB confirmed these routes are being considered. There are also some providers expanding as well as new provision opening in the county.

LAB confirmed that Wiltshire Council has an increasing list of newly eligible funded 2 year olds requiring places. The Communications team is due to run a campaign with a slightly different message than previous campaigns encouraging parents to recognise the importance of childcare as well as informing parents that Covid-19 transmission rates within settings are extremely low.

JB confirmed that they are experiencing increased referrals for children with approximately 75% falling in the 2 year old age range. JP queried those children who were held back from starting school in September 2020 and the impact. JB confirmed this is a significant issue as more places are required for the increased 2 year olds and the held back 4-5 year olds are accessing the full 15 hours per week so there is very little capacity. JB informed the group that the bigger issue to be considered is the fact that therapists and OT services/checks currently aren't available to children, and this is and will cause further delays for the children as well as being a barrier to inclusion. If the situation continues, this could cause a need for the potential development of centre staff to temporarily cover these services.

Following the Prime Minister's second lockdown announcement last Saturday, MT read that new guidance from the DfE is in development, and that other forms of support might become available, especially for closed/closing provision. MT also confirmed that other council discretionary funding might also become available, and she will try to ensure that the EY sector is considered as recipients.

**ACTION: LAB and EC to take capacity DSC capacity issue to EY cell.**

## **6. Funding Autumn 2020**

MT provided a brief synopsis of the current funding situation for Bid Lillywhite as a new member of the group

MT confirmed that directors do not want any significant underspend of the Early Years Entitlement grant at the end of the financial year as it is there to ensure sufficient childcare provision across the county. Current spending on the latest Autumn 2020 round of additional funding payments for providers currently stands at £46,710 (2 year olds) and £376,520 (3&4 year olds). The final round of additional funding applications are due in by 9<sup>th</sup> November, so these figures will increase.

MT confirmed that current guidance stipulates that from January 2021, providers can only be paid for actual children present, therefore any underspend needs to be actioned before the end of Autumn 2020 (31 December). LAB has submitted a question about this guidance to the DfE and is awaiting their response. Other guidance to be considered is that which states that providers cannot be double funded if they are in receipt of funding from other government schemes. This is especially important as the original furlough scheme has reopened until 1 December 2020, and CJRS has been extended until the end of December 2021. JP noted that if an existing or new staff member has never been furloughed, then they could be now.

JP raised the issue of waiving business rates for the EY sector. MT stated that she will see if she is able to progress this issue.

*In advance of the meeting, MC raised the issue of settings being paid broadly in line with 2019 figures and that Wiltshire Council had calculated a 1472 hours average deduction. He questioned how this figure had been calculated as he understood it to be an average loss over the last 3 years, but it appears to be a sector average.*

*MT confirmed that Wiltshire Council could not use a three year average on a setting by setting basis because there were a significant number of settings with very particular bases which could not provide reliable averages. When a few examples were modelled where the Council operational staff knew that a setting was growing, had contracted due to market forces or taken a decision to reduce in size or close and re-open for another reason, using the individual averages wasn't fair.*

*Instead, Wiltshire Council has opted for two overall average for a childminder and group settings with a further split of 2 year old and 3&4 year old funding averages. Settings continue to have the option to apply for hardship payments. This seemed the fairest way possible within the confines of the grant available, and the terms of the grant. The only children we are able to support under the terms and conditions of the grant are those entitled to 2, 3 & 4 year old grant and so reductions in private children could be supported at local level. MT confirmed that local authorities have been instructed not to "double fund" as a result of the various national self-employment and furlough schemes. Again, care was needed in limiting the rewarding of childminders and group settings where numbers were purposefully reduced. Where providers felt they were at a disadvantage, they could provide the relevant information in their hardship application so the local authority could reassure itself that double funding was not in place. Wiltshire Council has funded 100% of all children in settings. The "top up" funding which funds above average losses is paid for children who are not attending, and the hardship fund is there to support those who are in need of additional support for Autumn.*

*MC also questioned that whilst the government are paying local authorities on the January 2020 census figure and not September 2019 figures, he understood that Wiltshire's available funding calculation is based on September funding and not the increased January funds. MT confirmed that EY funding is always calculated on the January census data. If the January 2021 census is lower than the 2020 census then, the funding adjustment will have a detrimental impact on Wiltshire. Modelling work can be done but only once all Autumn hardship applications have been received and processed.*

**ACTION: MT to investigate possibility of waiving of business rates for EY sector.**

***MT to liaise with Fay Sissins on grant reduction modelling***

## **7. Sector Work Academy Programme for Early Years**

LAB welcomed Mandy Timbrell, Head of Employment and Skills at Wiltshire Council to the meeting. Employment and Skills have identified that the impact Covid-19 has and is having on the EY sector means limited opportunities and skill gaps in the immediate and longer term future. Mandy gave the group a presentation on the possible routes and funding available to the sector to increase opportunities for young people wanting to join the Early Years profession. A copy of her presentation is attached to these minutes.

**ACTION: Providers to consider if they would like to use these routes to employ staff**

## **8. AOB**

MT informed the group that the FACT board are looking for an Early Years representative. The setup of these meetings is changing so whilst the meetings are monthly, some representatives will only be invited to meetings when agenda business requires. The next meeting is scheduled for 10 December, 11.30am – 1pm, so please contact MT if you are interested.

JP thanked all EY providers and their employees, as well as the whole EY team at Wiltshire Council for all their efforts since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. LAB echoed these

sentiments and said that during the online public meeting held last night (Tuesday 3 November 2020) by Philip Whitehead, Leader of the Council, Terence Herbert, Chief Executive, and Kate Blackburn, Director of Public Health, the EY sector were thanked for remaining open and keeping children safe during this unprecedented time.

JP informed the group that Oxford University have cautiously stated that a vaccine could be released for Christmas. We await further confirmation

**ACTION: Any member to contact MT if interested in joining the FACT board**

**9. Next meeting.**

The next meeting will be scheduled for 1 December 2020, 1-2pm. A Microsoft Teams meeting request will be emailed out.