

Early Years Reference Group Meeting

Tuesday 27 April 2021

1. Welcome and introductions

Gary Binstead, Jane Boulton, Lucy-Anne Bryant, Rosemary Collard, Emma Cooke, Helen Edwards-Matheou, Jenny Harvey (notes), Sarah Hawkins, Russ Martin, John Proctor, Jane Provis, Marie Taylor, Emily Wood

2. Apologies

Bid Lilywhite, Debbie Muir, Trudy Surman

3. Introduction of new members

Jo Clarke from Rainbow Early Years, Trowbridge and Emma Osmund from Cygnets Pre-School, Westbury and Bratton were introduced and welcomed to the group.

4. Minutes of last meeting (23 February 2021)

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

5. Matters arising

Item 4 - Business rates for nurseries – JP asked what MT had to report back after challenging the Director of Resources on nursery business rates guidance given. MT queried this as no action was logged in minutes. MT will discuss issue with Director after meeting.

Item 7 – DAF funding. JB confirmed that she hadn't received a phone call to discuss DAF funding, but that the situation had moved on now. LAB confirmed she had checked the school aged children, and needed to follow up with JB as action was required.

Item 9 – Job Centre sector based programme. LAB added an article to the EY Newsletter, and confirmed there are some nurseries who have expressed an interest in taking part in the programme.

ACTION: MT to liaise with Director of Resources on nursery business rate guidance
LAB to liaise with JB regarding DAF funding and school aged children

6. Impact of COVID on settings (All)

Overall, group representatives said their settings were doing well, however there were some sustainability issues along with an increase in SEN children. Recruitment of general and specialist qualified staff is an ongoing issue, but even more so with the increase in SEN children and 1:1 support required. SH said her settings were experiencing ISF issues in terms of not hearing back on application progress. CS confirmed that flexibility is being applied as many settings have missed ISF application deadlines, and she will liaise with SH after meeting.

LAB spoke about the sector based programme in collaboration with Job Centre Plus. Job Centre Plus is able to mandate people to attend training, and this programme links up with settings in the area offering participants with a guaranteed interview at the end of the training. It's a good opportunity to open the EY sector up to people with an aim to recruit more staff.

JB mentioned that in planning for September 2021, the biggest impact for District Specialist Centres will be returning children to dual placements. There is also the mammoth task of meeting needs and expectations across the board.

LAB confirmed there have been no virus outbreaks in settings for the last 3 weeks and thanked all early years providers for their hard work.

ACTION: CS to liaise with SH re: ISF application issues

7. Containing Outbreak Management Fund (COMF)

MT informed the group that this additional funding was given by central government to break the spread of virus transmission. Wiltshire Council has been granted informal approval to roll forward any COMF underspend from 2020/2021 to 2021/2022. MT has also submitted a further bid for £600k of 2021/2022 monies to add to 20/21 underspend monies in order to extend the current scheme of support into the Summer term and possibly beyond. MT will update the group when she receives a response. The group thanked MT for her efforts in trying to secure additional funding for the sector as it has made a huge difference to date.

ACTION: MT to update the group when bid response received.

8. HELM (Health and Education Liaison Meetings)

CS shared a presentation document with the group (copy attached). HELM started in September 2020 with bi-monthly meetings where providers brought a range of cases needing advice from a variety of attending professionals such as DSCs, Inclusion Officers, Advisory Teachers, SALT and EP Service.

After some administration difficulties at the start, there is now a weekly admin meeting to identify priority children for the HELMs. All HELMs are currently held on Microsoft Teams and the group discuss a child and their needs with actions being agreed. All meetings are minuted and sent to all involved parties. There will be a new administrator in post for the next HELM

EO said she had attended 3 HELMs to date and found them very helpful (has been able to access ISF for one child). However, she felt that it was just another layer of admin/procedure to get through. Also, by HELM prioritising children due to go to school, younger children are left struggling and requiring intervention. CS confirmed that HELM isn't blocking spaces for such children and that if a child requires early intervention, then a space will be allocated. JC confirmed she has received good support from her adviser.

JB had previously raised the issue of seeing child cases just to get EHCP agreed. She would like to see more 2 year olds from a Pathways and strategy planning perspective, as the earlier the intervention takes place, the better. She reported that it has been a joy and privilege to see what colleagues in North Wiltshire have been doing.

ACTION: None

9. Family and Community Learning

Helen Edwards-Matheou, Training Advisor from Family and Community Learning was introduced to the group. She shared the outline of a proposed online course (copy attached) for EY providers which Family and Community Learning would like feedback on before it is advertised to the sector and parents/guardians. It is based around Early Years Communication and will comprise of 5 sessions – Attention and Listening, Play, Understanding, Interaction and Talking, and Speech Sounds.

Funding criteria will be in place which could lead to the course being free to qualifying participants. The course can be done on 1:1 basis. The course will be advertised on the Wiltshire Council website, newsletter to Children's Centres and schools, Facebook and Twitter.

Other content suggestions from the group included behaviour, expression and understanding, what is good communication and what does it look like.

Helen commented that their research shows that a lot of parents are asking for face to face toddler groups. LAB confirmed that parents definitely wanted face to face groups but this is all currently dependent on ability and capacity in community groups. Helen asked if the group felt there was a need for this course in the children's centres and could a blended model be

offered. RM confirmed that the course would be a duplication of the Five to Thrive sessions, but that was not to say it wouldn't compliment what was already on offer. RM said that it's not something that children's centres would be able to deal with currently from a capacity perspective. Ruth Brookes-Martin would be the best contact who knows where all the toddler groups are set up and she works with specific groups and organisations assisting in group set-up.

JC commented that behaviour should be considered as part of language difficulties/development.

SH suggested that the course would be a good resource for service families, and that garrison welfare officers would be useful contacts.

ACTION: SH to liaise with Helen Edwards-Matheou regarding garrison welfare officer contacts

10. AOB

Schools Forum – EYRG representative vacancy. JP informed the group that Mark Cawley has resigned from EYRG, so there is now a vacancy on Schools Forum alongside JP. It is essential that EY representation is at these meetings. There are approximately 5-6 meetings each year, which are currently held online. Regular attendance is required in order to understand the content of the meeting. JP would like EYRG members to consider joining, and if anyone is interested please contact either JP, LAB or JH before the next EYRG meeting.

EYRG meeting non-attendance - JP raised the issue of regular representative non-attendance at EYRG meetings, and that a procedure was needed. LAB confirmed that due to Covid-19, the group has been meeting on a more frequent basis (approximately fortnightly), so flexibility has been applied. The number of meetings will be reducing in due course and reverting back to 3-4 times each year.

MT shared a 2020/2021 Provisional Outturn report with the group (copy attached to minutes). There is a £229k underspend in the 3 and 4 year olds funding stream which will be going into reserve. There will be a post financial year adjustment by DfE, and there will be a limit to what will be recovered. There is a £162k underspend in the 2 year olds funding stream. JP asked MT if she could assure the group that if the underspend is left to the January adjustment that it will be ringfenced to EY and not transferred to High Needs. MT replied that from a protective point of view, each funding block is brought together and treated as one overall group; this was agreed by Schools Forum. MT will check the legislation on the number of reserves and the guidance which suggests the funding blocks can be separate.

ACTION: JH to add section in email accompanying minutes about meeting attendance

MT to check legislation and guidance on Schools Forum reserves and funding blocks

11. Next meeting

LAB informed the group that there is currently a focus on 'Systems of Excellence' within the local authority. Some of the council's senior leaders would like to speak to EYRG representatives to share the scope and focus of this scheme and its benefits.

The next meeting is scheduled for 19th May at 1pm with the majority of the meeting assigned to discussing Systems of Excellence. Helean Hughes, Director of Education and Skills will be in attendance.