

Wiltshire Council

Early Years Reference Group

Minutes of a meeting held on 15 May 2015 at the Melksham Professional Development Centre.

1.0 Welcome and Introductions

Jane Boulton (Springboard DSC), Lucy-Anne Bryant (Wiltshire Council), Mark Cawley (New Road Day Nursery), Grant Davis (Wiltshire Council), Nicki Jones (Snapdragons Nurseries representative), Russell Martin (Wiltshire Council), John Proctor (South Hills Nursery) – Chair, Lucy Waterman (LW) (Rub A Dub Pre School), Fiona Webb (Sunny Days Nursery), Jennifer Harvey (Wiltshire Council) – minutes

2.0 Apologies

Elizabeth Williams (EW) (Wiltshire Council), Rosemary Collard (Snapdragons Nurseries)

3.0 Minutes of last meeting held on 6 February 2015

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 February 2015 were agreed as an accurate record of discussion.

4.0 Matters arising

9.0 Safeguarding audit – AB confirmed that this will be resolved in readiness for the next audit.

5.0 Single funding formula

5.1 2yo update

LAB confirmed that Wiltshire Council now have nearly 100% applications for funding. However, there is only 84% take up. The reasons why places aren't being taken up are being looked into by Children's Centres, and they will feedback to LAB. Is it a sufficiency issue or do parents feel their child isn't old enough? Most issues are similar across a range of providers.

2yo Free Entitlement - JP had recently met with a group of nurseries in the South of the county, and was bringing a complaint from them regarding the 'sudden' change in the hourly rate for 2 year old Free Entitlement. LAB confirmed that early years providers at forums had been informed that the rate wouldn't be staying the same. Providers were officially informed on 27 March 2015 in a letter from Julia Cramp, Associate Director about the drop in the 2yo hourly rate.

ACTION: None

5.2 3&4yo hourly rates update

JH reported that all early years providers had been informed of the new hourly rates in a letter from Julia Cramp, Associate Director. The Early Years & Childcare team have received a number of phone calls and emails expressing concern at the drop in hourly rates for childminders. Some childminders have since stated that they will stop delivering Free Entitlement when the rate goes down 1 April 2016.

GD stated that the EYRG consultation recommendations had been thoroughly discussed at Schools Forum before a final decision was made.

ACTION: None

5.3 EYPP update

JH reported that EYPP started on 1 April 2015. There is now a dedicated webpage on the Wiltshire Council website for childcare professional and parents to obtain information. The Local Provider Agreement has also been updated to include EYPP.

Approximately 1200 parents of previously funded 2yo have been contacted for the purpose of EYPP. The majority of parents have been happy for Wiltshire Council to use their details for the purpose of EYPP. These details were checked on 1 May and we now have approximately 550 children who are already eligible for EYPP. JH discussed a few teething issues experienced to date. JH confirmed that the process will be re-evaluated at the end of summer and any necessary improvements will be made. We will continue to be flexible with providers where possible.

There was discussion about issues getting information from families in non deprived areas. NJ queried how other providers were getting their parents to complete the forms. It's dependant on the provider and their families. Providers know their families and what will/won't work with them, and will adjust their marketing accordingly.

MC suggested that perhaps the signature strip on the Parent Declaration form needs to be moved in order to reduce confusion for parents.

LAB raised an issue regarding the looked after criteria - is it that a child has ever been looked after or that they are currently are and have been for at least one day. LAB stated that the DfE confirmed they are clarifying but we are to take it as currently.

ACTION: JH to look at the Provider Declaration form.

6.0 Childcare Team update

AB circulated report. The team now comprises of 8 Childcare officers and 2 new members of staff (ex Bright Horizons) who manage the training courses. There have previously been a high number of vacancies advertised across the county, which has now dropped. JP mentioned that Swindon College have reduced their apprenticeship costs from £500 to £50, but applicants need to apply by 30 June.

AB confirmed that there will be sufficient childcare in the army rebasing area in Wiltshire.

AB also stated that the potential impact of the 30 hours of Free Entitlement will be interesting and will be a focus for the future in terms of stimulating expansion.

NJ queried the turnaround of safeguarding audit information and the challenge of early years providers if an inadequate return is received by the Local Authority. AB stated that this depends on the workload of the individual Childcare Officer, the nature of challenge required, Ofsted inspection dates and grade of the provider.

ACTION: None

7.0 Feedback from Salisbury nursery managers meeting

JP confirmed that this wasn't a Salisbury meeting but an Amesbury meeting that he'd been invited to. JP confirmed that finance was the main issue raised by providers. Other issues raised were a range of concerns linked with building leases from Wiltshire Council. Providers were chasing the Local Authority but weren't getting resolution to their problems. Also, the removal of the GLF, reductions in the Free Entitlement hourly rates, training costs and loss of Local Authority support are all adding extra burdens onto early years providers.

There was discussion regarding the structure of a charitable business being potentially unstable due to the heavy reliance on volunteers, and the possible issues this could cause for the future. AB stated that the Childcare Officer team do work with these providers to try and get them to address these issues. AB said the Childcare Officers are more than happy to meet with a provider and go through their finance and make suggestions. JP queried that money raised by an early years provider cannot be used to pay salaries, AB confirmed this as correct. The group thought it would be a good idea to have a brief note in the next newsletter regarding financial support being available to such providers if they have concerns. LAB also mentioned the removal of GLF; some providers don't plan for the future in the event that funding is

reduced/removed. AB confirmed that there is a course available for committee members which covers sustainability. LAB asked JP what he wanted the Local Authority/Early Years Reference Group to do.

The group stated that where possible, early years providers who have charitable status must fully utilise this to maximise any other sources of income. GD brought up the issue of benchmarking with other settings that aren't experiencing financial issues.

ACTION: AB to liaise with EW re: article for next newsletter

8.0 General election – future changes for Early Years & Childcare

AB and LAB confirmed that the 30 hours for 3&4yo will only be available to parents if they are both working. The Local Authority is still awaiting more detail about this change and how the DfE expect it to be rolled out. JP mentioned that one of his nurseries has received a very detailed survey. It looks as though it is from the DfE but it could possibly be from an outsourced organisation.

ACTION: None

9.0 Update on DCLG recommendation for business rates

MC went to appeal the decision on his application. Their stand across the whole application was that MC's nursery didn't meet the criteria. They are for profit making organisation. The reduction in rates is only available for charitable organisations. MC involved his local MP, Duncan Hames who did contact DCLG on MC's behalf. The decision still stood, but MC said that his appeal had increased awareness of local councillors to some of the issues faced by private settings. It might be worth some early years providers who have charitable status looking into this.

ACTION: None

10.0 Dates for Future meetings

Date	Day	Time	Venue
18 September 2015	Friday	10:00 – 12:00	To be confirmed
20 November 2015	Friday	10.00 – 12.00	To be confirmed

11.0 Any Other Business

JP reported that one of his nurseries had received a phone call from Ofsted announcing an inspection. It appears that unannounced inspections could be disappearing.

LAB raised an issue that was identified in the Local Authority's recent Ofsted review. Why is Wiltshire's level only 59% in good level of development? LAB asked the group if they thought it would be worthwhile adding a section to the Local Provider Agreement about improving outcomes for EY/school age children, and the expectation for all early years providers to attend a local forum run by advisory teachers in their area. It would be more an expectation rather than the threat of funding being removed. There was general discussion about how efforts could be focused on increasing attendance at forums. Overall, the group didn't feel this would make much difference, and that it would be better to examine the barriers that providers feel they face which prevent them from attending. RM stated that the Local Authority needed to ask those that aren't attending, why not, and those that are attending, why.

LAB mentioned a big change in focus in how Early Years can improve outcomes in schools. All agreed that there needs to be stronger links between schools and early years providers in order to improve school data.

ACTION: Further work to be carried out by LAB