

**Early Years Reference Group Meeting  
Friday 31 March 2023**

**1. Welcome and introductions**

Jane Boulton (JB), Jackie Day (JD), Lucy-Anne Bryant (LAB), Emma Cooke (EC), Charlotte Forester (CF), Jenny Harvey (JH) (notes), Kirsty Merrifield (KM), Debbie Muir (DM), Emma Osmund (EO) (Chair), Marie Taylor (MT), Emily Wood (EW)

**2. Apologies**

Gary Binstead (GB), Lyssy Bolton (LB), Sarah Hawkins (SH), Naomi Wright (NW)

**3. Minutes of last meeting (6 January 2023)**

All agreed as true and accurate.

**4. Matters arising**

All actions from the last meeting were confirmed as being completed.

Agenda Item 9 – EC confirmed that a library of film clips can be recorded, timings just need to be confirmed. The work has not been commissioned as yet.

Agenda Item 10 – EC confirmed that the Autumn conference will be focused on Inclusion for Early Years, possibly October/November although date is to be confirmed. Ideas for keynote speakers are being sought, so group members were encouraged to send through suggestions to EC who will try to organise. The EY Inclusion team would really like EY settings to be directly involved speaking about their experiences and highlighting what the inspirational work being done on the ground. Ideas and keynote speaker suggestions offered were Steven Donohue, speech and language therapists, Portage representative, occupational therapy, family and parent confidence with Juno Sullivan as a possible speaker.

Agenda Item 12 - EW confirmed that this was found not to be an issue across the board with the majority of providers accessing the maximum number of weeks available for Summer.

**ACTION: All members to send any keynote speaker ideas to EC**

**5. Budget announcement (LAB/All)**

LAB shared the headline statements from the budget with the group for discussion again.

LAB advised that national funding rates mentioned in the budget would not be the same for all local authorities.

All agreed that the term 'childcare' should be dropped and replaced with 'EY Education'.

There was concern that there was no mention of recruitment and retention within the Early Years sector which was echoed by all local authorities who attended a DfE webinar last week.

It was felt that clarity was needed on capital funding.

There was concern that support and funding appears to be aimed at the most advantaged which is widening the gap with the most disadvantaged.

The 'golden handshakes' for childminder agencies and childminders who register with them were queried. These payments were deemed to be unfair.

The extension of early years entitlement to include children from the age of nine months was also queried in terms of when it would start. EC and LAB agreed that it would depend on when a child was born, but guidance is awaited.

It was felt clarity was needed on the extension of EYPP and whether it would include 2 year olds now or it remained available for 3&4 year olds only.

There was the suggestion of a baby boom as a result of these new incentives. EC/LAB confirmed they have spoken with midwifery who are keeping an eye on appointment bookings. If there is a spike in these appointments, the local authority will know there will be a future issue.

JD commented that several early years providers received parent queries as soon as the budget announcements were made and raised the issue of where these children are going to attend. EC echoed these thoughts as there is a lack of spaces across the county and stated that new parents possibly think they can just get childcare when they need it. This could force unemployment.

DM asked about Wiltshire's current occupancy rates. LAB informed the group that there are some pockets around the county which have some gaps. However, we are reaching limits in certain parts of the county, i.e. Melksham. Wiltshire Council Early Years have engaged with Hempsalls to attempt to unpick the county picture as we are very concerned. There is a meeting with the DfE every 4 weeks to discuss and go over findings.

There was discussion about sufficiency of places linked with recruitment. EC advised that they will be going into schools to talk about childcare and early years education and trying to raise the profile of the profession.

LAB confirmed that the new staff ratios detailed in the budget are voluntary, and early years provider don't have to adopt them if they don't wish to.

LAB commented that the timescales around wrap around care were concerning.

EO commented that she felt that the voices of early years providers are heard by EYRG council officers. Whilst she recognised that the situation won't change overnight, she thanked Wiltshire Early Years for taking Wiltshire provider issues and concerns to the DfE.

EC and LAB also confirmed that development of the Early Years strategy is ongoing; this will be coming to the EYRG and the sector for further development.

MT raised the topic of lobbying stating that there would be nothing to stop EYRG from pulling together thoughts from the meeting into a letter to share with councillors, the F40 group and Wiltshire Council CLT in order to raise awareness of the pressures facing the sector. There is a need to be increasingly proactive, so it was felt a letter coming from Chair of EYRG might hold more prominence.

**ACTION: Budget thoughts and comments to be sent to JH who will forward to LAB/EC etc.  
EC and LAB to start off letter for councillors (then to be passed to MT and finally EO)**

## **6. Finance update 2022/2023 and 2023/2024 (MT)**

MT reported an overall spend of £29 million against an overall budget of £31m for EY in 2022/2023 with a relatively small and previously forecast underspend of £2 million. As per funding guidance, this will be clawed back by the DfE in June/July as their annual "post year adjustment" although unlikely to reflect exactly the actual variance.

A copy of the MT's funding report was submitted to Schools Forum along with the minutes of the January 2023 meeting. Schools Forum considered and approved the proposals set out in the report.

The government's Spring budget 2023 has impacted figures, but MT will inform the group in due course as and when more detail is received.

LAB informed the group that take-up for 2 year olds currently stands at 96%, and Wiltshire settings have done incredibly well to achieve this rate. Universal Entitlement for 3&4 year olds is at 98% whilst Extended Entitlement is at 55%. We need to investigate the reasons why Extended Entitlement take-up is not as high as it could be.

KM reported that her setting is seeing an increase in parents accessing their full 30 hours entitlement rather than just a proportion of it or none at all. This could be due to increased awareness of the funding with parents as some parents previously didn't realise they were eligible.

EO thinks this could also be due to parents recognising the impact of covid. They are now increasing the hours their children spend in early years provision, as they appear to place more value on the work of early years providers. EC commented that they have noticed that whilst parents might only work for 16 hours, they are using the full 30 hours. In addition, due to the shortage of spaces in some areas, once a parent finds a baby space they are prepared to travel even in if they move out of that area.

EO is progressing the temporary staff funded from the reserve.

**ACTION: LAB and EW to look at Extended Entitlement take up**

## **7. Family Hubs (LAB)**

LAB reported on Family Hubs to the group. Family hubs will be a front gate for family services signposting parents to services they need. They will be a commissioned part of the service for families. Currently, Children's Centres offer a 0-5 service; hubs will offer a 0-19 service. There is a consultation out at the moment and LAB asked all group members to encourage their parents to complete it. There have been consultation events at 24 different venues across the county to inform families about the hubs and find out what services they would like to see as part of the offer. Minority groups such as EAL, EMTAS and traveller/boater families are also being approached to find out what they would want. The contract will start in 2024.

A report based on the outcomes of the consultation and the plans for the development of family hubs will go to cabinet in June 2023.

**ACTION: None**

## **8. Family Help pilot for Westbury and Warminster (Simon Thomas)**

Simon Thomas, FACT Lead (Families and Children's Transformation) joined the meeting and delivered a presentation on Family Help and the Westbury and Warminster pilot. A copy of the presentation is attached to these minutes.

**ACTION: None**

## **9. HELM (EC)**

HELM has been running for a few meetings and it has now been taken over by EC's team. However the Summer term funding has been organised by the SEND team. EC confirmed that a partial service redesign is being looked into, identifying what has worked well, what hasn't worked well and what have been the barriers.

The Terms of Reference draft is near to completion. Feedback is needed from the sector so another SNAP survey will be sent out after Easter. Details will be included in the EY newsletter and on social media. It will be brought to the next meeting.

DM commented that they have recently received more efficient communication around ISF, it is so much easier and has made such a difference.

EC reported that they have received feedback from settings about the ISF funding they have been paid, in that it is too much for the needs of the individual child for reasonable adjustments. EC shared that the banding system could be changed to 3 bands with a basic outline set out below:

- Band 1 – minor adjustment for child to attend setting  
Low level emerging need, settings tend to manage without EYIA involvement.
- Band 2 – moderate need children  
A moderate level of need with possible EYIA involvement
- Band 3 – most complex children (this would be more money than is currently received by Band 2 children)  
Complex need(s) with more specialist provision needed. Usually more than 1 agency involved.

However, this is currently on hold as a result of the Spring budget. The local authority will need to reassess whether it can continue to fund under 3s under 'Invest to Save' if funding is not increased. There is a possibility it might have to return to the statutory duty of funding 3&4 year olds only. MT questioned if ISF now covered 30 hours which was confirmed if parents were claiming the Extended Entitlement.

DM commented that ISF is a lifeline for some children as some children are having to wait 30-50 weeks for an EHCP.

EC confirmed that 7 other LA offers were checked, and they are also offering similar banding systems. ISF has never been designed to cover 1:1 support. It will definitely need to be revisited in the run up to April 2024.

MT asked if the LA could model the 2 schemes and assess the cost difference? Case examples could benefit providers to comment on. EC will look at a possible pilot for 1, maybe 2 towns.

JB commented that some children are not being seen by some professionals due to the length of waiting lists, i.e. speech and language. However the settings are still supporting the child as there is a need there.

EC stated that a mid-term adjustment can be done on what funding is needed as there does need to be a cut off at some point. The number of children coming through has increased dramatically. A more robust system is required which will reduce the number of inconsistencies. This will mean some children will need to be rebanded.

**ACTION: None**

#### **10. 30 hour parent consent form (EO)**

EO raised the difficulty of the current location of the 30 hour parent consent form and said that some settings cannot find the form, and others are not aware of its existence.

JH agreed to promote the form in the EY Newsletter and move the form to a more prominent location 3&4yo page in download section.

**ACTION: JH to add article to EY Newsletter about the 30 hour parent consent form  
JH to move the 30 hour parent consent form's location**

#### **11. Any Other Business**

JB informed the group that she has received an invitation to the coronation of King Charles III. The group congratulated Jane on this deserved recognition.

**ACTION: None**

#### **12. Date of next meeting**

The next meeting is scheduled for Friday 29 September 2023 at 2pm-3:50pm, with the possibility of an extraordinary meeting approximately June.