

Early Years Reference Group Meeting

Thursday 31 March 2022

1-2.50pm

1. Welcome and introductions

Lucy-Anne Bryant (LAB), Lyssy Bolton (LB), Jane Boulton (JB), Rosemary Collard (RC), Emma Cooke (EC), Jackie Day (JD), Sarah Hawkins (SH), John Proctor (JProctor) - CHAIR, Maggs Ritson & Karen Pollard (MR&KP - childminders), Marie Taylor (MT) (Left at 2pm), Emily Wood (EW) – NOTES

2. Apologies

Jo Clark – Rainbow Early Years, Clare Shipley and Jo Provis – SEND LWs, Russ Martin – Children Centres (Spurgeon's), Deborah Muir – Warminster School

3. Minutes of last meeting (5 January 2022)

Agreed as true record.

4. Matters arising

List of private nurseries – still to happen.

Action: EW to provide list of private nurseries

Cate Mullen as agreed to top-up the ISF to cover those families eligible for 30 hours

Recruitment issues – see item 8.

EYRG – new chair sought. EW to action – urgently as JP wishes to step down from this position in September.

Action: EW to send out invitation to the sector for a new EYRG chair

Schools Forum representation – LB suggested that her school business manager could attend in her absence. All agreed that this would be acceptable.

5. Budget update 21-22 (MT)

MT shared budget and year's forecast showing an underspend in 3–4-year-old funding (note as per the usual DfE funding arrangements this will be recouped by the DfE). But a small overspend in 2 year old disadvantaged children payments.

Also noted was an underspend in DAF funding, which may be because children have not been assessed for DLA during the pandemic.

6. DfE Support for hyper inflation and National Insurance changes in Schools Block and High Needs Block 22-23 (MT)

Additional supplementary grant has been awarded to Wiltshire to support Schools funding and SEND provision, 3% uplift to has been allocated to special schools funding and 2% to support pupils with SEND in mainstream schools. Early Years have not received an increase. When the DfE were challenged as to why early years were excluded, the answer was that our recent funding rate increase included the uplift. Disappointment expressed by the group.

JP encourages that members lobby their MP and professional groups to promote the needs of the EY sector.

7. Financial situation for nurseries (JProctor)

JP asked for general examples of financial strain experienced by providers. It was unanimously agreed that the situation is very challenging.

EC commented that settings are reporting weekly that they are having to close, if not rooms the whole provision. Springboard have reviewed their personnel policy to look at T&Cs to attempt to lower costs. JP asked what evidence providers are asking if colleagues are off sick with Covid? Answer – it's down to trust, staff are allowed to self-certify for first 5 days. RC reported that 2 local independent schools to her provision are asking their staff who test positive but are asymptomatic to continue to work but to wear masks. Newsletter guidance around managing the next phase of 'living with Covid' will be included in tomorrow's newsletter. DfE sent out update at 10:45am this morning ahead of changes to regulations tomorrow.

8. Staff recruitment (JProctor)

Recruitment issues:

EC reported that conversations are starting to happen around supporting care leavers to enter Early Years. LB reported that Kickstart hasn't proved popular to recruit and is now closed. MT asked if social media is being exploited, not yet but work is in progress. SH and LB are considering withdrawing places (especially 2-year-old places) as recruitment situation is dire. LAB reported that the council are about to issue a county-wide survey to assess the overall situation and will share our findings with the DfE. In the meantime, it's expected that one solution the DfE may offer is a relaxation with the ratios, but this will be counterproductive as existing staff may feel less prepared to continue under increased responsibility and burden. RC contributed that she felt apprenticeships were too long and too hard, to combine work and study leads to burn-out. Snapdragons have closed their children's waiting list until Sept 23 because of staff shortages. Staff leave and can't be replaced. JD – new qualification list has caused upset where staff have found that their qualification is now no longer relevant and cannot be used in ratios – examples are sought and to be sent to EC to forward to the DfE.

Action: EC to send list of queried qualifications to DfE

SH query – could the £3k graduate leadership fund be reinstated? Unlikely.

LB - Suite of professional qualifications that her school trust uses are introducing two new qualifications in September, one being a Leaders of Early Years. These NPQs are free, LB asked how are these were going to be delivered and when? The timings of introducing would ideally fit into teaching staff appraisals cycles and ideally start in October to fit into academic year.

Action: EC to send out information on NPQEYL

9. Service from Ofsted (JProctor)

South Hills have recently battled with Ofsted with registering a new lead person for one of their provisions. The process took 12 weeks and South Hills were not filled with confidence into the abilities of Ofsted personnel dealing with the request. JP asked if this has been a problem for anyone else. No other experience was shared.

Action: LB to report South Hills' experience back to the regulatory team that she sits on.

10. Homes for Ukraine scheme (LAB)

Wiltshire currently is aware of 8 Ukrainian children about to join EY provision – dispersed across the county. The 'Homes for Ukraine' scheme comes with additional funding on top of EYE funding to support the needs of these children. Providers need to email earlyyears@wiltshire.gov.uk so we can provide the necessary support. Children who come as part of Ukraine Family Scheme do not attract additional funding and it is not known when these families are arriving or where to. Case workers will be supporting each case.

EC updated the group with information on some of the cultural differences to be experienced between Ukrainian and Afghan refugee children. In the Ukraine, formal education doesn't start until 7 years old. The environment for 5,6 and 7 year olds coming to the UK may be very different to what they are used to. However, most Ukrainian children do access formal early years so will expect to take up a place.

We still have some Afghan families living in a remote hotel in the north of the county. They are placed here by the Home Office and are often larger families with extended family members which lack transport. They have been reluctant to take-up the free childcare on offer as they do not use formal childcare in Afghanistan.

11. Review of Terms of Reference (LAB/All)

Remove the term 'free' and replace with EYE where appropriate.

Remove LA Primary schools and to just state 'Primary Schools' to allow for Multi-Academy Trust representation.

"Task and finish" to be added to purpose for ad hoc situations as they arise eg covid, refugee support etc.

Under membership: replace School's Forum Chair with EYRG Chair.

We need to check if representatives are proportionate for the number of categories listed.

Action: EW to assess numbers of representatives required for each category against the number of children accessing that provision.

Include the principle that membership could be renewed for a second term.

Final draft to be emailed to members for sign-off before the summer term break.

Action: LAB to make amendments and send to EYRG by end of April for the group to review.

12. Any other business

New Qualification List – Training Provider name needs to be included in info to EC.

8 February

COVID is still have a huge impact upon settings in the following ways:

- stress of staff numbers
- sick pay
- constant relation
- long Covid
- impact on sickness management

Integrated Two Year Old Check

EC reported that she's been working with health to revisit the process of 2 year old checks. A flow-chart and a 9-page guidance document created in collaboration with health visitors were shared with members. It's acknowledged that there is a mix of experience and depth of relationships

between providers and health workers across the county – some areas are stronger than others. The documentation will be checked and modified by the council's branding team to ensure that the material meets accessibility rules and is grammatically correct etc.

Action: EC will share this next version with members for their ratification before it's circulated to all providers.

High Needs Places

LB raised the concern around the shortfall in Resource Base and special school places, especially in the west. The finance and admission processes need to be fully considered as there appears to be a lack of long-term strategic oversight. JP reported that Christ the King in the south of the county have lots of room and could be used to develop additional Resources Bases. Matt Look in developing new resource base places in readiness for this September.

13. **Date and time of next meeting** (19 September 2022, 1-2.50pm) [Click here to join the meeting](#)