

**Early Years Reference Group Meeting  
Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2022**

**1. Welcome and introductions**

Gary Binstead (GB), Lyssy Bolton (LB), Jane Boulton (JB), Rosemary Collard (RC), Emma Cooke (EC), Jackie Day (JD), Jenny Harvey (JH) (notes), Russ Martin (RM), Deborah Muir – arrived 3.40pm, left at 4.40pm (DM), Emma Osmund (EO), John Proctor (JProctor), Marie Taylor – left at 4.30pm (MT), Emily Wood (EW)

**2. Apologies**

Lucy-Anne Bryant (LAB), Sarah Hawkins (SH), Claire Shipley (CS)

**3. Minutes of last meeting (31 March 2022)**

All agreed as true and accurate.

**4. Matters arising**

Item 4 – EYRG chair. EW confirmed no nominations had been received.

Item 8 – qualification list. EC contacted the DfE who confirmed the list has only been updated by the removal of courses which shouldn't have been on the list in the first place due to them having no practical element. Only 1 setting was affected by this, and staff have now enrolled on approved courses.

Item 8 – NPQEYL information. EC confirmed this had been sent out.

Item 9 – LB confirmed that the impact of Ofsted service on EY settings is definitely on their radar, and that they are doing a number of things to try and improve. They have recently separated out their blogs – one for schools and EY settings, and one for other settings. There is also separate guidance for childminders. However, JP still feels the service level hasn't improved.

Item 11 – Assessment of EYRG representative numbers. EW confirmed the current numbers as detailed in the Terms of Reference reflects the quantity of providers in Wiltshire.

Item 12 – Integrated Two Year Old Check. EC confirmed this was shared just after the last meeting. She is just waiting for it to go live on Right Choice, and then EY providers will receive an email.

**ACTION:       None**

**5. Capital Schemes Update (GB)**

GB reported a cabinet paper had been recently submitted requesting a commitment of £4 million for buildings at 23 settings which it recognises the condition of the buildings and the need for replacement at some point in the near future. Cabinet has approved the plan. Whilst Wiltshire Council cannot afford to replace the buildings, the plan will contribute 25% towards the cost of a new building (like for like replacement only), with the remaining balance to be paid by the setting through fund raising and grant funding. The new buildings will belong to the settings, not Wiltshire Council, and they will just need to pay ground rent. Wiltshire Council has been in contact with the affected settings. In some cases it might not mean a new building; the council will be looking at whether there are any other alternatives that could be considered.

JP stated that South Hills, Calne is currently in negotiation with the nearby local school, and there are some land issues.

**ACTION:       GB and JP to discuss South Hills Calne outside the meeting**

**6. Nomination and agreement of new chair**

JP confirmed he is stepping down as Chair after today's meeting. EW confirmed no nominations had been received to date.

All agreed that EYRG was a valuable group and a chair was definitely needed. EW suggested a rolling rota for the chair position, but JP felt this wouldn't work from a continuity perspective for Schools Forum attendance and understanding some of the more complex areas. LB is currently a representative on Schools Forum, with the EYRG chair being the second representative.

EO offered to act as chair but said she would need support as not experienced. All agreed that she could chair the next meeting to see how she felt about it. Various members of the group offered EO their support. JP, as the outgoing chair, agreed to compose some text to be emailed to the wider sector to stimulate interest to be his replacement on the group and consider taking up the group's helm.

**ACTION: JP to compose sector email text as outgoing EYRG chair and forward to JH.  
JH to identify sector gaps on EYRG representation and include in sector email.**

## **7. Terms of Reference**

LB asked if the Terms of Reference could be amended to state 'primary schools which have nursery classes' rather than 'LA primary schools which have nursery classes', as her attendance as an academy school would not be captured. This was agreed. (The Schools Forum has representation from both LA and academies because of voting rights over finance allocation, this is not the case for the EYRG and therefore not deemed necessary to have both school types separately represented).

**ACTION: JH to amend ToR as requested.**

## **8. Budget update (MT)**

MT confirmed another bid for COMF funding had been submitted, with the outcome being received shortly.

MT shared her Schools Forum report with the group. The overall Early Years 2022-23 budget is £31 million with a projected £2.366 million underspend:

- 2yos are experiencing good take-up due to increased PR/marketing which EW confirmed is ongoing. Take-up should continue to increase as the council now receive the email addresses and telephone numbers of eligible families from the DWP so it will be easier to target them.
- 3&4yos are experiencing a significant drop in takeup compared to last year which is what the funding is based on. Possible reasons could be economic factors and covid-related. Any underspend will be recouped by the DfE in the next financial year.
- ISF is forecasted to overspend as a result of the increase to 30 hours and children who are not transferring to reception class

GB asked if the underspend could be offset against the overspend; MT confirmed that whilst DAF and Early Years Pupil Premium funding are ringfenced, the rest can be considered for offsetting.

EC confirmed that 72 children are currently staying in EY settings when they ought to be in school, up from 32 last year. This is putting tremendous strain on the ISF budget. Providers need to look at their business models for backfilling spaces with 2yos and rising 3's. When these children do turn 5, are of statutory school age and remain in an EY setting, along with no DAF/Early Years Entitlement, there is no extra funding available for these children. Both MT and EC stated that settings would need to have conversations with statutory SEND.

LB asked what thoughts were there on these 72 children. EC stated that these children are currently open to an EY Inclusion Adviser and are a mix of delayed and deferred entries. A piece of work is required with schools to ensure they adapt their provision in readiness to accept these children. There are more issues with behaviour, poor diet, low regulation than ever before. There is a 'Five to Thrive' rollout for all settings/schools in Wiltshire. There has been an increase in schools pushing back wanting a full school year delay for some children as well as an increase in children starting schools and then being pushed back to EY settings before the headcount week. Briefings will take place with schools, with the aim to get them thinking about transition/EHCP requests/ place planning earlier. GB mentioned that Kai Muxlow is currently working closely with SEND team and the DSCs to try and move these children back into their correct settings.

JB queried whether the 2yo budget underspend could be used to support summer born children who are entering DSCs as 3yos, displaying additional needs and don't have EHCP/DLA in place. EHCP processing is lengthy, so a possibility could be to implement the 1 day of DSC funding per week when it is clear there is a need, but no DLA has yet been awarded. This was found to be very helpful with 2yos. JD echoed JB's comments on EHCP timeliness with a child being left without provision for the whole of September. LB suggested joining up with central SEND for 2yos missing the 2yo check and their needs not being identified early. EC confirmed these conversations are already happening with solutions being sought such as a formal referral system, health visitor bundles and additional support for settings.

EY Underspend:

MT reported that the High Needs block overspend is pushing the budget to a huge deficit. EY currently have an underspend of £2.366 million which will be recouped by the DfE next financial year. MT asked if the group would like to ringfence some of this underspend for a project to help the sector and reduce the need for EHCP assessments. MT would like to collect ideas on expenditure thoughts. Ideas would have to be one-off, 'assistance without a plan', but could be a 1/2/3 year programme e.g. post-pandemic support for children unable to manage their feelings.

After lots of discussion around the main ideas of sensory occupational therapy, behaviour support, additional support from council teams, play therapy, JP concluded that there was a clear desire from the group that some of this ringfenced underspend should be used to fund a behaviour support and training package for providers. It should be behaviour (not specialist need) that ought to be the focus of the project; those children who wouldn't normally meet specialist thresholds for support. All agreed that one plan/policy would not suit all children in EY and schools, so a range would need to be offered so that they could be age appropriate.

MT asked the group if it would be useful for Wiltshire Council to commission something on behalf of all EY providers, so using a central approach rather than just giving providers the money to organise themselves. All agreed a central approach would be best.

Need to look at whether Wiltshire specialist schools and/or Behaviour Support team have any capacity to support EY settings. Also look at the Harbour model (LB mention) which supports casework and capacity building. Whilst it's focus is currently school-based early intervention, this could be successfully linked with Inclusion Officers and pre-school children.

JP concluded that there was a clear desire from the group that some of this ringfenced underspend should be used to fund a behaviour support and training package for providers.

**ACTION:** MT to take forward to the HNB recovery group to look at what this resource might look like  
EC to meet with LB to learn more about the pilot at their MAT

## 9. Cost of living crisis

RC commented that fuel was a real issue, and that they have seen a determined move towards employees joining a union to fight for more pay in EY sector. This is the first time they have experienced this strength of feeling, and feels it is worrying if strikes were to become part of EY world. A number of the group reported that staff were moving to alternative employment which paid more than EY and offered other incentives such as working from home.

GB confirmed that despite a larger than usual number of setting/childminder closures occurring in Wiltshire, data as at August 2022 showed that only 27 places have been lost as new providers have been opening. Wiltshire is now starting to struggle with some sufficiency issues. EC confirmed that since January 2022, a few settings have received an Inadequate Ofsted judgement due to significant safeguarding concerns which, has in some cases resulted in closure. The council is trying to bring on new provision, but recruitment issues are being faced as new staff cannot be found to fill the new provision.

GB informed the group that a Sufficiency paper is being drawn up for Children Select Committee in January 2023, and EYRG input will be needed; we need to look at what we can do differently. The report will be shared shortly.

LB commented that her provision is currently working below registered numbers because of recruitment challenges and queried whether council sufficiency figures took these nuances into account. EW stated that termly occupancy figures are sought for settings, but these focus on the numbers of children in attendance against registered numbers not the numbers which the provider is able to offer based on available staff. The next occupancy survey will be altered to capture this information.

JD commented that settings need to support the wellbeing of the team they have; this was echoed by other members of the group.

**ACTION:** EC/GB to brief MT on staff recruitment and retention project discussed in her absence  
MT to look at funding a project supporting settings in staff recruitment and retention  
EW to work with Nicola Harris to adjust next Occupancy Survey to capture number of places on offer best on staff availability (not just registered places)

#### 10. Staff Recruitment DfE Plans (EC)

JB reported that she had seen sight of the DfE report [The early years workforce: recruitment, retention, and business planning - April 2022 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk) but disappointingly it included no recommendations on how recruitment and retention in the EY sector could be improved.

**ACTION:** None

#### 11. EYNFF Consultation Response

EYRG members had sight of the Wiltshire Council response and asked if we had had any feedback from the submission. It is thought unlikely that we'll get a personalised response back, should we do, then this will be shared with the group.

**ACTION:** MT to inform group of DfE consultation response if received.

#### 12. Early Years Strategy (EC)

EC confirmed Wiltshire currently has no Early Years strategy. The team will be focusing on producing a pre-birth to 5 strategy. Work will be carried out looking at gaps and challenges across education, sufficiency, and health. Internal conversations are scheduled to start in the next month with provider and stakeholder groups to follow. Details will be included in forthcoming EY newsletters.

LB asked if the strategy would finish at nursery/transition into school stage or go right up to end of reception year. EC confirmed that this would be a topic for discussion at the provider stakeholder groups.

**ACTION:** EYRG members to contact EC directly if wish to be involved in development of Early Years strategy

#### 13. Any Other Business

EC informed the group that the Wiltshire Learning Alliance is looking for an EY representative. As no interest from EYRG members, EC will put an article in the EY Newsletter to the wider sector. EO offered if there were no other volunteers.

The group thanked JP for his commitment and dedication to the Early Years Reference Group and to the children of Wiltshire and wished him well for the future.

**ACTION:** None

#### 14. Date of next meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday 23 November 2022 at 1pm.