

**Early Years Reference Group Meeting
Friday 29 September 2023**

1. Welcome and introductions.

Emma Osmund – Cygnets Preschool, Bratton/Westbury (Chair)
Emma Egan – Ramsbury Preschool
Kirsty Merrifield – Puddleducks, Salisbury
Karen Venner – ABC Melksham
Charlotte Forrester – Look out Monkton Farleigh
Lucy-Anne Bryant – Commissioning Manager (Wiltshire Council)
Jane Boulton – Springboard, Chippenham
Debbie Muir – Warminster Prep
Jacqui Day – Bright Stars, Westbury
Lyssy Bolton - The Mead Community Primary, Trowbridge
Marie Taylor – Head of Finance Children’s and Education (Wiltshire Council)
Emma Cooke – Early Years Service Manager (Wiltshire Council)
Emily Wood – Senior Commissioner (Wiltshire Council) - Notes

2. Apologies Jenny Harvey – EYE Team (Wiltshire Council), Sarah Hawkins – TNB Garrison

3. Minutes of last meeting (31 March 2023) – agreed as true record

4. Matters arising

EY Conference – Emma has down Tamsin Grimmer as a suggested speaker.

ACTION: No action

5. Budget monitoring position August 2023 (Marie Taylor)

Marie’s presentation was shared ahead of next week’s Schools Forum.

Inclusion Support Funding – Emma Cooke reported how her team now has better data to budget. Central expenditure is under because of vacancies.

Update on the DSG Reserve – (held in the council’s balance sheet and cashflowed by the Council) In Wiltshire we’re in deficit (prediction is a 54M deficient by March 24). At SF on Dec 5th – large presentation will be given on how we, alongside two thirds of all Local Authorities, are in deficit. DfE – Safety Value project hopes to eliminate High Needs overspend.

ACTION: No action

6. Early Years Supplementary Grant 2023/2024 and the 2 year old hourly rate (Marie Taylor)

Indicative EY funding rates for 2024/25 have been received from the DfE. The 2-year-old rate is 26p lower than the combined base rate plus Supplementary Grant amount now awarded for the remainder of 2023/24. 42 LA’s are in this concerning position of potentially seeing a drop in funding rates. Communications have been given to all providers to alert them to this. Our response to the DfE’s consultation (held over the summer) included our concerns of this potential drop in funding.

Our funding allocation is normally finalised by the DfE in last week of the Autumn term – MT calculates proposed rate over Christmas and shares this with EYRG in new year (2nd week in January).

Charlotte: normally charges £8/hr for extra hours.

Karen: asked “are we presuming no U-turns will be made on the intention to roll out the expansion to entitlements?”

No. The Local Authority meets monthly with the DfE, no U-turns are expected in policy. We've also raised staff recruitment and retention as large problems facing the county – apparently a national campaign is to be launched in January.

Charlotte: asked “is there sufficient capacity to take on these additional children?” We're aware that many spaces not being offered because there are insufficient staff to operate them. New places will be for younger children, this is challenge as the facilities will be different to offering places for 3 & 4-year-olds. We're hoping for capital funding to assist with developing new places.

Jackie: Settings want to provide high quality provision, but they are not getting the calibre of staff required. Skilled and knowledgeable practitioners are missing. Could Health Visitors be encouraged to prompt parents to apply for childcare early?

Kirsty: She's experienced that Health Visitors in her patch are at a crisis point, they are just firefighting and using bank staff. Puddleduck staff are aging and are considering retiring.

Emma Egan: Early Years providers can't compete with retail recruitment offers, people coming forward are not suitably qualified or not childcare qualified at all.

Lyssy: vulnerable families don't understand the importance of applying for places early. More promotion is needed.

ACTION: Lucy-Anne to contact commissioner responsible for the Health Visitor service to request that HVs prompt parents to apply for childcare as soon as possible.

7. Early Years Funding – expansion to Early Years Entitlements and DfE consultation (Emily Wood)

First expansion of entitlements starts April 2024, whereby all working parents of 2-year-olds will qualify for 15 hrs/week. Parents should be able to start creating their code for this in January. Some single parents on low income may already benefit from 2-year-old funding because of their earnings. The expansion of entitlements may affect our take-up of funding for 'vulnerable families'. We will encourage parents in this category to continue to apply through the vulnerable route as the code will last a year as opposed to 3 months.

What's not clear is whether the EYPP and DAF will be extended for the new cohorts of eligible children coming on stream.

Charlotte: concerned about added paperwork when an increase of children come on stream. Additional work to support those parents where English as an additional language.

Lyssy: in parallel to Charlotte's point, there is a concern as the offer is accessed purely digitally.

Kirsty: Having to have two parent declaration forms per child for one financial year is a nuisance.

Karen: Converts parental dec to Word so it's editable and therefore saveable for each year.

Emma Egan: Why is the 30-hr consent form needed when we have the parental dec? Could we have one form per child that stays with the child for the entire time there are the provider?

ACTION: Emily to look at 30 hr consent form/parent dec

8. Wraparound childcare offer (Lucy-Anne Bryant)

Colleagues from Wiltshire Council have been working with the DfE in codesigning documentation in connection to the expansion of wraparound provision. A handbook is to be published later this term – will we have sufficient staff to offer this? We will be asking PVI settings to find out who would like to offer.

Some funding will become available. This can be used to pump-prime new provision where there is insufficient parental demand to make an immediately sustainable provision. Tax Free Childcare funding will be promoted to parents alongside this expansion.

Charlotte: will providers be forced to offer wraparound? No. We will only fund provision where it is needed – we will not jeopardise existing provision.

Lyssy: if a school runs a new provision, how will quality be managed? Significant safeguarding risk for schools, including resource base providers. SEND children and meeting their complex needs will require equality impact assessments. Meeting their needs will be a huge challenge. The Handbook should help answer these questions/concerns.

ACTION: Emma to check with Judith Tinsley regarding the termly Safeguarding report and risk assessments – could wraparound provision be included in this?

9. FACT Operational Board representation (Lucy-Anne Bryant/All)

LAB explained the purpose for FACT. The board is asking for an EY representative, would anyone like to opportunity to join this? The System of Excellence board is also looking at changing our approach to working with children with SEND, they are also keen to have EY mainstream representative – Charlotte volunteers.

ACTION: Emily to inform Helean Hughes that Charlotte would like to participate in the Systems of Excellence working group.

10. Chairperson role moving forwards

Emma Osmund voiced concerns around having the capacity to effectively chair this group and to attend associated meetings. With volunteers now found for the Schools Forum (below) and System of Excellence Board, Emma is happy to continue for the time being.

ACTION: None

11. Schools Forum – Early Years representative (Marie Taylor)

Karen Venner – happy to take on School's Forum as she has had previous experience attending this. Lyssy to also attend.

ACTION: Marie to send Karen details to join next week's meeting

12. Any other business

Tax Free Childcare (TFC) – we will be surveying providers to find out what income streams they have. 15% of Wiltshire parents have an account to make use of TFC, which is higher than the 9% national take-up. What we don't know is how many parents with an account actually make payments from it. We will be using social media to promote the scheme – please look out for posts on our [EY Facebook page](#) and share these.

ACTION: All to look out for Facebook posts on TFC and share.

13. Date of next meeting

Friday 24 November 2023 at 2pm-3:50pm
Monday 15 January 2024 1pm – 2:30pm