

Early Years Reference Group Extraordinary Meeting

Thursday 19 March 2020

1. Welcome and introductions

Jane Boulton, Lucy-Anne Bryant, Mark Cawley, Rosemary Collard, Jenny Harvey (notes), Sarah Hawkins, John Proctor, Trudy Surman

2. Outline of Wiltshire Plan in relation to schools, childcare settings and Covid-19

- LAB apologised to the group for the delayed response and lack of communication to the Early Years sector from Wiltshire Council.
- Guidance and plans are changing by the hour.

The plan yesterday was:

for all schools and nurseries to close at end of the day Friday 20th March 2020, and for there to be hubs in community areas across the county comprising of a school with childcare provision.

This has now changed to:

all schools and special schools expected to be re-open from Monday 23rd March 2020 solely for the following children - those with an EHCP, CIN, CP, Looked After children and key worker children (children attracting EYPP are not included in these categories).

- Keyworkers are currently defined as medical staff, police, social workers, delivery drivers and armed forces personnel. We are awaiting further information on what classifies as a 'key worker' as we believe there should be more professions included in the list.
- We are also awaiting further information from central government on the stance on the closure of settings and childminders.
- LAB has a meeting at 1.30pm today with legal representation about providers open for keyworker children as it appears many providers are experiencing problems with their insurance companies.
- Further information will be released at around 4pm this afternoon.

ACTION: LAB to report back to group on outcome of 1.30m meeting

3. Childcare setting commitments and offer

- RC said they had contacted their insurance company (Doctor Dot), and as they were staying open to provide services to emergency and key worker personnel, they were told there was no reason for them not to be insured. LAB advised all providers to check with their individual insurance companies.

- SH asked if settings could merge together to provide a service. LAB confirmed that this would be possible if operating under legal ratios and normal safeguarding measures were in place.
- LAB and group discussed the possible future need to centralise services. All agreed that the idea of central hubs would not work due to bring together a larger group of individuals and the risk of contagion would be greater for children and staff alike. It was felt virus suppression would be better managed and more successful in smaller groups.
- Possibility of 'loaning out' of staff to another provision was also discussed. Whilst possible, it was felt this could be problematic for a number of reasons and could be too disruptive and unsettling for children and staff. However, if it was agreed between providers, then it was felt that the simplest and most manageable method of payment would be for the 'provider loaning staff' to invoice the 'loaning provider' directly. A letter is due to go out to early years providers asking for staff skillsets in the event that we need to have a central pool of staff who could operate across a number of settings.
- JH confirmed that Free Entitlement funding for 2,3&4 year olds would continue to be paid to early years providers. Summer 2020 estimates are currently being collected from providers, and these would be used to calculate estimated monthly payments. In the event of no estimate being submitted, Wiltshire Council would look to use Summer 2019 actual data as the basis for a Summer 2020 estimate on which payments could be made.
- All agreed that clearer and more absolute clarification was required on what constitutes a vulnerable child. LAB confirmed this would be CP and CIN. In addition, the group asked who is policing who the keyworker children are? LAB acknowledged that we would all be relying on people's honesty.
- Some provisions are really struggling and could do with more council support. LAB confirmed there were 3 Assistant Commissioners as well as the Advisory Teachers available. They were currently fielding calls from the sector, but LAB confirmed they need to be more pro-active supporting such providers in these unprecedented circumstances

ACTION: Increased communication from Wiltshire Council to the EY sector over the next few days

ACTION: LAB will email the group if additional and/or further topic discussion is required.

4. Any other considerations

- Resource bases appear to be closing down completely across the county. LAB confirmed these are being contacted by Wiltshire Council requesting them to re-open and use Wiltshire Council trained/qualified staff who can work in these provisions.