

Early Years Reference Group Meeting

Tuesday 21 September 2021

1. Welcome and introductions

Lucy-Anne Bryant (LAB), Jo Clarke (JC), Rosemary Collard (RC), Emma Cooke (EC), Grant Davis (GD), Jenny Harvey (JH)(notes), Sarah Hawkins (SH), Deborah Muir (DM), Emma Osmund (EO), John Proctor (JProctor), Jane Provis(JProvis)

2. Apologies

Gary Binstead, Lyssy Bolton, Jane Boulton, Angela Everett, Russ Martin, Claire Shipley, Marie Taylor, Emily Wood

3. Introduction of new members

Jackie Day (Bright Stars Nursery)

4. Minutes of last meeting (19 May 2021)

The group approved the minutes as a true and accurate record.

5. Matters arising

Item 5 - Business rates for nurseries. GD advised he had no update.

Item 5 – COMF bid. LAB confirmed that there is still unspent COMF, discussions are underway about how to use this funding across the county, any updates will come to the group and then out via the newsletter.

Providers are currently to inform Wiltshire Council of positive cases via the Right Choice survey. EO couldn't recall seeing the link to this recently and suggested that perhaps it needed to be given higher priority within the EY Newsletter. EC confirmed it was further down the Newsletter but would ensure it was moved nearer the top. Jackie Day queried whether a room closure rather than a full setting closure would be eligible for COMF, LAB confirmed that it would be if the funding is agreed.

Item 5 – Garrison welfare contacts. SH confirmed that this is still outstanding.

Item 5 – New Schools Forum representative. JProctor and LAB confirmed no offers had been received as yet. This will be discussed later in the meeting.

Item 8 – Local Outbreak Management Plan (LOMP) – EC confirmed this had been done at the time of the last meeting and a new version was sent out with the last EY Newsletter.

ACTION: **MT to liaise with Director of Resources on nursery business rate guidance.**
 SH to liaise with Helen Edwards-Matheou regarding garrison welfare officer contacts.

6. Finance and the role of Schools Forum (MT)

GD gave a presentation to the group about Schools Forum, a copy of the presentation is attached to the minutes.

Who? – comprised of members from all areas of education including primary, secondary, Early Years, headteacher unions, FE sector, Diocese, Wiltshire Governors Association. There are 20 members with voting powers. Early Years Reference Group is a sub-group of Schools Forum and is primarily finance focused.

What? - their role is to look at how all funding is allocated and acting upon the best information available to fund children. In general, High Needs is the main area of discussion where currently demand is far exceeding the budget.

Why? – to ensure funding is allocated and spent properly whilst meeting the needs of the children

When? – there are 4 public meetings per annum, with December and January being the busiest meetings as key funding decisions are on the agenda based on DfE budget notifications that have been received.

Where? – Currently, meetings are held virtually. Hybrid meetings are being looked into which would enable both actual and virtual attendance.

All papers are public and are held on the Wiltshire Council website. It is critical that Early Years is represented at the group ensuring a sector voice and perspective is heard.

GD stated that Schools Forum is a public meeting and is open to all to attend as observers. DM offered to volunteer, with JD and EO acting as reserves if JP and DM are unable to attend. JP confirmed the next meeting is scheduled for 7th October. GD and JH to liaise re: new member representative contact details.

ACTION: JH to forward Schools Forum meeting link to group members

JH to forward new EYRG representative contact information to relevant Democratic Officer for the next meeting.

7. Inclusion Support Funding (AE)

On behalf of AE, Jane Provis (JProvis) gave the group an update on ISF. Payments for successful applications have moved from 3 times a year to once a year (for academic year). There will still be monthly meetings for the 2 halves of the county. There are 2 bandings - band 1 being the lowest rate, and band 2 being the highest rate and more in line with a District Specialist Centre. Payment can only be made for up to a maximum of 15 hours per week, term time only.

EO queried if there was any way the ISF maximum hours cap could be looked at. Some children will initially start accessing 15 hours and then become eligible for the 30 hours, and early years providers only get funding for up to 15 hours. Both JProvis and GD confirmed that the cost for EY High Needs used to come from High Needs budget. Approximately 3 years ago, Schools Forum agreed that any EY surplus funds should be transferred to the High Needs budget for EY High Needs. JProctor asked how surplus funds could now be ringfenced by EY instead of being transferred to High Needs. GD confirmed that this would be a Schools Forum decision, but would take the issue up with MT. *Since the meeting, MT has confirmed that she included this in her last Schools Forum budget monitoring report and had proposed a separate ringfence from 01/04/2021. This was accepted and the reserve will now be shown in two sections as shown in the excerpt below.*

DSG Reserve	Early Years Ringfence (effective 01-04-21)	Schools Block, HNB & Central	Total 20/21 FY
Balance Brought Forward from 20/21		18.474	18.474
Early Years Adjustment 20/21 prior year			
Forecast variance 21/22	-0.083	8.310	
Estimated balance CFWD 2022	-0.083	26.784	18.474

EW asked if payments would be made in arrears or upfront. JProvis confirmed that the payment changes would be happening with immediate effect, and that for those providers who applied over summer (deadline of end of July) will be paid in September

SH queried missing ISF payments which have been chased, but without success. The missing payments have had a knock on effect with staffing and income. JProvis apologised for the delay and is aware of such issues but assured the group that the team is working to resolve them as swiftly as possible. The new system will be used to predict placement need because of increasing placements outside of catchment areas and no localised places in specialist schools.

JD asked if there could be a separate banding for children that are unable to attend without additional adult. These situations cause sustainability issues and have a huge financial impact for early years providers. Early years providers are taking a higher number of children with higher needs as the DSCs are unable to accept more children. JProvis suggested that early years providers write to their local MPs to make them aware of this issue.

JC commented that she had received money for children not in her setting. It has been raised as an issue but is still awaiting resolution. JProvis is aware of this issue.

GD commented that lobbying local MPs is a good idea. He confirmed that we are coming to the end of the current spending review period, and discussions will be taking place on the next 3 years. It would be considered beneficial to get the early years voice heard on funding with a view to increasing the funding pot.

ACTION: GD to raise EY High Needs budget transfer issue with MT for raising at Schools Forum

8. Local Provider Agreement (JH/All)

The draft Local Provider Agreement had been emailed to all group members prior to the meeting. As well as general feedback, group members were asked to consider 2 specific points:

- a) Would they be happy if the annual indicative funding estimate document was reinstated, and would they be happy to receive this document solely in an electronic format?

Group members agreed that it would be beneficial to start receiving this document again, and an electronic copy would be acceptable.

- b) Would they like Wiltshire Council to offer more flexibility to parents enabling mid-term moves for any reason, instead of the current list of 6 only?

Group members agreed that more flexibility should not be given to parents for mid-term moves. However, the current list of 6 valid reasons will be expanded to include change of employment as different childcare might be required, i.e., military postings.

It was also felt that it needed to be made explicitly clear that if a parent's mid-term move did meet one of the valid reasons, then the notice period in line with the contract signed with the individual early years provider must still be adhered to.

Another point to be made clearer is that of late starters with no prior attendance at another provider, and that they can be accepted for funding.

It was suggested the wording in Section 4, point i) - non submission of all data collections, should be amended to 'Failure to do so may result in delayed or suspended funding'.

ACTION: JH to make agreed changes to Provider Agreement document and forward copy to members just before main sector distribution

9. AOB

JH confirmed that a resignation had been received from Bid Lilywhite (school representative). Another representative will need to be sought. LAB has some possible replacements in mind. There is also a childminder representative position still outstanding.

JProctor queried if any communication had been received Trudi Surman, no apologies had been received for this meeting.

ACTION: LAB to make contact with possible representative replacements

JH to contact Trudi Surman regarding continuing group membership

10. Date of next meeting

The next meetings are scheduled as follows:

Wednesday 17th November 2021 at 1pm

Wednesday 5th January 2022 at 1pm.