

**Early Years Reference Group Meeting**  
**Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2022**

**1. Welcome and introductions**

Lyssy Bolton (LB), Jane Boulton (JB), Lucy-Anne Bryant (LAB), Rosemary Collard (RC), Emma Cooke arrived 1.40pm (EC), Jenny Harvey (JH) (notes), Sarah Hawkins (SH), Deborah Muir – arrived 1.25pm (DM), Emma Osmund (EO) (Chair), Emily Wood (EW)

**2. Apologies**

Gary Binstead (GB), Marie Taylor (MT), Russ Martin (RM) and resignation, Claire Shipley (CS)

**3. Minutes of last meeting (3 October 2022)**

All agreed as true and accurate.

**4. Matters arising**

LAB has heard that John Proctor is well and recovering. LAB asked if the group would like her to send some flowers on the group's behalf. All agreed. *Update 29.11.2022 – Flowers were delivered today.*

LAB thanked Russ Martin for his involvement in the group and wished him well.

Item 5 – Conversation took place.

Item 6 – No email text received from JP, and JH is yet to identify EYRG representative gaps

Item 7 – Terms of Reference amended

Item 8 – HNB Recovery group action will be covered in MT's Finance Briefing later in the meeting. MAT task to be carried forward, and LB and EC to meet up.

Item 9 – MT briefing done. EW confirmed she needs to double check when the next occupancy survey is due to issued and adjust accordingly.

Item 11 – Response has not been received to date.

Item 12 – LAB expressed thanks to all those who had accepted/ were sending a representative.

JB expressed confusion at the date for the meeting. LAB confirmed it was Monday 28<sup>th</sup>/29 November afternoon, 3.30-5.20pm. LB echoed JB's confusion. LAB to resend message to invitees.

Item 8 - SH wanted to know what was happening about the 72 children who ought to have been in school, but are still in EY provision. Affected families appear to be getting very little support from SEND team. The EYIA's are doing a great job, but it's an ongoing problem. LAB confirmed that Kai Muxlow is aware of the issues and is looking into them.

**ACTION:**            **JH to remind LAB re: sending flowers to John Proctor**  
                         **JH to identify sector gaps on EYRG representation**  
                         **LAB/EC to raise school aged children in EY provision issue with Kai Muxlow**

**5. Budget Monitoring 2022-2023 and brief timetable and plan of budget setting (MT)**

LAB shared MT's Finance Briefing with the group (attached).

JB queried what the £2.190m underspend for 3-4yos equated to; LAB confirmed it was 959 PTE as shown in the table.

EW confirmed that the figures are all based on the previous year's census, so this is only a forecast. The Local Authority only gets paid for what is delivered.

EW highlighted that the pertinent line was the EY adjustment line and is to be put towards 'Invest to Save' uses. JH will seek clarification from MT and send out with the minutes. *Clarification from MT 29.11.22 - MT confirmed that this older part of the surplus variance (£1.692 (21/22 balance b/f) plus £0.564 (EY adjustment*

21/22)) is being used to fund some early help/ preventative programmes. Feedback from the group was that their preference was a central resource. EC was going to explore ideas.

LAB reported that she, EC and GB have had a strong conversation with the DfE about EY being completely missed out on the Autumn Statement. What does this say to a sector already feeling underfunded and undervalued? There is nothing to encourage anyone to join the EY sector, and the cost of living crisis is making EY even more unappealing. She will be taking the issues to Michelle Donelan and John Glen along with a breakdown of funding, the number of settings within the county as well as sufficiency data. EW stated that the Local Authority will capture sufficiency data from settings, and share with DfE as hard evidence that we are not meeting sufficiency demands.

There was wide discussion by the group about:

- significant recruitment and retention issues
- occupancy rates and sufficiency
- lack of value afforded the sector and the professionals working within it
- changing of ratios
- increasing numbers of children with significant behaviour issues
- increasing numbers of children with development issues.

LAB and EC confirmed that senior directors within Wiltshire Council are actively involved with the development of a new EY Strategy which will underpin all activities. LAB said that all views and experiences are being passed onto the DfE and confirmed the local authority is doing everything it can. She suggested inviting the DfE to meet with EYRG members as perhaps a face to face meeting might have more impact.

LB reported that problems being faced by schools are no less significant than those being experienced by EY providers. The issues are universal and painful. In one of her school settings, she has had to redeploy a deputy HT out of school to manage the quality in EY provision; this just cannot be sustained long term.

EC reported that she went to a DfE regional event yesterday and all local authorities are saying the same about recruitment and retention and experiencing the same issues as here in Wiltshire. The topic of local authorities meeting sufficiency duties through hubs was raised.

**ACTION:** JH to seek clarification from MT on EY Adjustment line in DSG Reserves table and add to minutes. *(Minutes updated with MT clarification)*

## 6. COMF monies 2022-2023 (MT)

This item was deferred to the next meeting scheduled for Friday 6<sup>th</sup> January 2023.

**ACTION:** None

## 7. ISF – financial challenges and sustainability (EO)

EO reported that they are finding more and more children are attending their provision but are unable to attend without 1:1 support. They are applying for ISF, but that won't meet the needs of these children. More children are becoming increasingly more challenging with significant behaviour issues. They are worried about the safety of their staff and children. EO has been told that their reports are being rejected as EY provider staff are not considered as professionals.

EC confirmed that all Spring 2023 applications have been managed by the EY team since 1 September 2022, with a new process in place. EC is having to monitor spend, and is not sure if it has been as carefully monitored in the past. The budget is currently £70k overspent with more children coming through. Children appear to have been set on the wrong bandings. There is discussion about what the local authority could offer. Are different bandings needed with more funding going to higher needs children and less going to lower needs children? With the extension of funding covering the 30 hours now, do we need to focus on funding for 3&4yos only and remove funding from 0-3yos? EC confirmed they are also looking at what other local authorities offer.

Spring 2023 applications had to be submitted by 31 October 2022, and funding will be paid by 16 December 2022 in advance of the term starting. Late applications are not being processed.

SH has a child attending one of their settings who didn't have a 2yo check, and has significant needs. She is concerned she won't be able to get anything in place for the child in September 2023. There are EYIA observations and setting professional s involved. EC advised SH to liaise with Gemma Paice on how to submit an application.

**ACTION: SH to liaise with Gemma Paice**

#### **8. Ukrainian support for 2-4 year olds (EC)**

EC confirmed we have got children living around the county and accessing EY provision, and we are being updated as families come into the county. It's been identified that Ukrainian families are tending to go to more affluent areas of the county where host families live in larger properties with annexes. However, there tends to be less childcare in these areas as a lot of them are more rural and don't have good transport links; this is causing some challenges. In addition, we are now getting towards the end of the initial 6 month period, we are seeing that relationships are breaking down. The Ukrainian families need to move out independently or to a new host family, but they are wanting their children to continue attending their current childcare provision which is not always possible in the more rural areas. We are seeing lots of transitions between settings for children.

EC reported that the number of families in Wiltshire has been reasonably steady, although we are expecting more families to come through.

There is a bridging hotel in the north of the county which has housed Afghan families, and it is likely that that this will start to get refilled with more families. Unfortunately, there are no transport links near hotel, and an added issue is that there is no EY education/childcare sector in Afghanistan so potentially we will have children starting school who have had no early years education. It is an evolving picture with rurality being the principal issue and the infrastructure not being there to support everyone.

LAB confirmed that clear guidance has been sent out to the sector on who can claim EYE.

**ACTION: None**

#### **9. LPA Update (LAB)**

The LPA was updated in March 2022 with updated funding amounts for 2022/2023 EYPP and DAF. LAB reiterated that DAF is paid as a lump sum to one nominated EY provider. Whilst uptake of DAF has increased, we still wish to encourage providers to keep applying for the funding if they have eligible children who need it and aren't accessing it at another provider. All entitlements will be promoted by health visitors in their letter to parents.

EW confirmed that the 'updated' line on the title page of the LPA needs to be amended to reflect March 2022, not September 2021.

EW reported that the issue of artificial breaks/charging for the lunch hours has been brought to her attention by a parent. This guidance, whilst not in the LPA, is included in the DfE statutory guidance, and EW asked the group for their permission to add to the LPA and upload the new version onto the Wiltshire Council website. There were no objections from the group.

LB stated that the guidance says where practical, artificial breaks are to be avoided, and therefore the local authority cannot enforce. It would not be fair to enforce it. All agreed that further clarification was needed from the DfE.

**ACTION: EW to contact DfE for further clarification on artificial breaks  
JH to amend 'updated' line on title page of LPA**

## **10. Any Other Business**

LAB reported that there is an ongoing COMF piece of work to improve outcomes for children who are slightly delayed due to covid.

LAB informed the group about a recent challenge and ruling against Nottinghamshire County Council on funding from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. Local authorities understand why providers need to charge additional fees, however all fees must be clear and transparent to parents. We have to ensure our providers are adhering to the LPA and statutory guidance. Where providers aren't adhering to the guidance, the local authority does receive parental comments and complaints. Every query is answered. EW deals with all complaints directly, and we always ask if the parent has spoken with their provider first about their concerns. We are increasingly receiving more of these complaints as providers are trying to find more ways of funding their businesses. The issue of fees and charges is being raised at regional and national events, and the local authority needs to consider how it is going to manage this going forward.

SH confirmed that they are now having to look at introducing additional charges across all 7 of their military settings. This will be a new experience and shift in culture for their parents, as they have never had to pay for meals before. There will potentially be lots of complaints. LAB/EW confirmed that whilst providers can charge for meals, they cannot force parents to buy a meal.

DM informed the group that they introduced an optional charge for meals two years ago. Now, all 40 of their children have meals with no packed lunches at all.

**ACTION: LAB to follow up with EC on COMF piece of work**

## **11. Date of next meeting**

The next meeting is scheduled for Friday 6 January 2023 at 3pm.