

Wiltshire Council
Children's Services

Early Years Reference Group

Minutes of a meeting held on 20 September 2013 at the Melksham Professional Development Centre.

Present: Chris Ashton (Wilts C), Jackie Bedford (Wilts C), Jane Boulton (Springboard DSC, Chippenham), Lucy-Anne Bryant (Wilts C), Alan Butler (Learning Curve Day Nursery, Wootton Bassett), Mark Cawley (New Road Nursery), Sarah Clover (Wilts C), Rosemary Collard (Snapdragons Nurseries), Mike Fairbeard (Little Fir Tree Nursery, YMCA), Jenny Harvey (Wilts C), Jo Murray (CM representative), John Proctor (South Hills Independent School, Salisbury), Fiona Webb (Sunny Days Nursery), Liz Williams (Wilts C)

1.0 Welcome and Introductions

GH welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.

2.0 Apologies for Absence

Sarah Ward (H/T – Bulford St Leonards Primary School), Lucy Waterman (Rub a Dub Pre-school, Derry Hill), Caroline Wells (Smiley Faces Nursery, Amesbury)

3.0 Minutes of last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 May 2013 were agreed as an accurate record of discussion.

4.0 Matters arising from minutes of meeting held on 16 November 2012

None

5.0 Update on National Consultations

SC & EW provided an update on current national consultations -

Great flexibility for Change of Use – Current consultation surrounding greater flexibility of use of premises for childcare and encouraging planning authorities to approve this alternative use of buildings

Childcare regulations – Current consultation incorporating a number of significant proposals (responses deadline 30 September). Includes relaxation on childcare for over 5s, leisure centres, minimum age of unsupervised staff, staff qualification, removal of training courses to be approved by LA. It is expected regulatory changes will come into effect in November 2013.

Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities – formerly national code of practise – this incorporates guidance for all 2, 3 & 4 year old free entitlement funding.

Ofsted framework – feedback to consultation now published. Emphasis on peer support. Expected to be introduced November 2013

More Great Childcare – no proposals to make changes to single funding formula immediately but expecting changes possibly in coming year with introduction of national funding rates.

6.0 Single Funding Formula

6.1 Two year old funding – integration into a single free entitlement administration system

JH updated members on this work. Currently working on integrating and streamlining processes for all 2, 3 & 4 year old free entitlement funding and will be processing first integrated headcount this autumn term. 127 providers will be accessing two year old funding of which two are out of county. Two year old funding estimate will now be incorporated with the 3 & 4 year old funding estimates. The team have been receiving a large number of phone calls from providers about two year old funding change of hours.

Following consultation with internal audit it has now been agreed that parent signatures will no longer required on provider headcount returns and it is hoped that this will also be the case for the census. However, appropriate paperwork must be completed and retained at settings. Ultimately, still aiming to implement an on-line headcount process.

6.2 In year funding adjustments – phased verses lump sum payments

Single Funding Formula adjustment payments – currently offer two options; funding adjustment spread over remaining months of the financial year or as an immediate lump sum payment/debit. This is causing a big administrative burden and requires a significant amount of manual data manipulation opening up greater risk to errors in payments which would be reduced considerable by moving to only the spread method with effect from the start of the next financial year. Approximately a third of providers are currently using the lump sum method.

The lump sum option had been introduced as it permitted providers to more easily reconcile accounts throughout the year impacting more significantly on the larger setting whi would otherwise have to wait until year end. Members agreed they were all for simplifying processes but were concerned about the impact on being able to maintain accurate accounts.

ACTION: JH to investigate with finance colleagues the possibility of producing more data to providers to ease their accounting/reconciliation burden which would permit the introduction of the single phased payment adjustment process.

6.3 Rapidly expanding settings

It has been recognised that the current free entitlement funding processes do not accommodate for where a setting might rapidly expand.

Although to 20% significant change process does allow for this it is recognised that where rapid expansion has occurred in a setting this may cause them significant hardship due to delayed payment. Members approved a process be developed to deal with such scenarios.

RECOMMENDATION TO SCHOOLS FORUM: That approval be sought to develop a scheme to assist rapidly expanding providers (EW/JH).

6.4 Proposal to fund new children for actual weeks in attendance & children who start & leave prior to a headcount

In developing the funding scheme further to pay for 'actual attendance' officers would like to implement the following two new processes –

- Funding new children for actual weeks in attendance during their first term of registration – currently the scheme assumes all new children commence at the start of a new funding period
- Funding children who start and leave a setting prior to a headcount – currently these children are not funded.

It is hoped that both issues could be address using existing paperwork/returns and will create minimal additional administrative burden. Members agreed that proposals be develop to implement these changes with effect from the start of the new financial year..

RECOMMENDATION TO SCHOOLS FORUM: That approval be sought to develop the free entitlement processes to –

1. Pay free entitlement funding to settings for the weeks newly registered children for actual in attendance.
2. Pay settings for those children who start & leave a setting before the headcount.

7.0 Code of Practice/Local Agreement

7.1 Local Provider agreement

Local provider agreement now needs revising to –

- Incorporate two year old funding
- Strengthen section on additional charges
- update administration processes
- Add two year old eligibility criteria
- Remove 'Quality' section
- Add need for newly registered settings to attend briefings
- Clarify shared stretched provision
- Logging of complaints
- Update withdrawal of funding
- Update appeals section

ACTION: JH/SC to review contents over next few weeks and circulate suggested changes to EYRG member for comments.

8.0 Two year old funding – Update

LAB circulated a paper detailing current position on two year old funding.

There are approximately now 705 children being funded with further application being considered at panel taking Wiltshire up to target. The LA has been running a big advertising campaign using a diverse number of methods, including data provided by the Government on eligible families. The number of providers now participating and taking two year olds has increased.

Funding remains available to create new childcare places and, in line with central government thinking, planning is being encouraged to approve nursery use of alternative premises. Rural grants for childcare provision are also available.

9.0 Membership

9.1 Terms of Reference

Current terms of reference were circulated with the agenda. These were reviewed and no major amendments are proposed. It was recognised that the role of the group might change if a national formula is introduced but the value and work of the group has been acknowledged by Schools Forum.

An additional member from the group is required to sit at Schools Forum. RC agreed to attend as an observer initially.

9.2 Future Chair arrangements

With the departure of Gill Hanlan and imminent departure of Sarah Clover the chair of the group was discussed. It was agreed that, assuming Schools Forum approval was obtained to the chair no longer having to be a council officer, John Proctor would chair future meetings. This would ensure the continuation of the wider remit of the group beyond being purely financial.

RECOMMENDATION TO SCHOOLS FORUM: Schools Forum is requested to agree an amendment to the Early Years Reference Group's terms of reference by deleting the requirement for the chair of the group to be a serving council officer.

10.0 Dates for Future meetings

Date	Day	Time	Venue
22 November 2013	Friday	10:00 – 12:00	Melksham PDC, Falcon
14 February 2014	Friday	10:00 – 12:00	TBC
23 May 2014	Friday	10:00 – 12:00	TBC
19 September 2014	Friday	10:00 – 12:00	TBC
21 November 2014	Friday	10:00 – 12:00	TBC

11.0 Any Other Business

11.1 Three year old take up of free entitlement

SC advised members that take-up of the free entitlement within three year olds had reduced to 90% but the reason for this was uncertain. Overall 3&4 year old take-up was 93% compared to 98% over the whole of the southwest. The need for a publicity campaign was recognised. EW advised that reduced take-up would affect overall funding from central government.

11.2 Sarah Clover

Sarah was leaving the authority at the end of October. JP thanked Sarah for her valued contribution to the work of the childcare sector over the years and wished her well in the future.