

Wiltshire Council

Early Years Reference Group

Minutes of a meeting held on Friday 16 November 2018 at County Hall, Trowbridge

1.0 Welcome and Introductions

Angela Brennan, Mark Cawley, Rosemary Collard, Jennifer Harvey (minutes), Sarah Hawkins, Clare MacKinnon, Russ Martin, John Proctor (chair), Trudi Surman, Fiona Webb

2.0 Apologies

Jane Boulton, Ashley Harris, Nicola McCann

3.0 Minutes of last meeting held on 4 May 2018

The minutes of the meeting were agreed as a true and accurate record.

4.0 Matters arising

Item 4 – Outstanding action, JP isn't sure if all providers have received a copy of the School Readiness document.

ACTION: JH to obtain copy from AB and send out to group with the minutes (attached), and AB to organise distribution to the sector

Item 4 – Outstanding action, has Emily Wood made the necessary changes to the 30 hours code checking consent form?

ACTION: AB to check with Emily Wood

Item 6 - Has Lucy-Anne Bryant investigated whether better use of social media can be made for Better 2gether funding

ACTION: AB to check with Emily Wood.

Item 7 – Has Emily Wood enquired if WCSB can email the EY sector with updates, new advice/procedures?

AB reported that the Childcare team will increasingly be using the new Right Choice website to disseminate information out the EY sector.

MC reported that he had recently called MASH as he couldn't contact the designated officer, only to be surprised to find his call was transferred to Customer Care. JH informed the group that this was a recent change.

ACTION: AB to check with Emily Wood

Item 11 - Buddying scheme. AB has not been able to address this as yet.

Item 14 – GDPR advice. AB has been advised that it isn't the Childcare team's role to provide advice on GDPR; this is available on a corporate level from Wiltshire Council.

5.0 2018/2019 budget monitoring and 2019/2020 budget

Unfortunately, the group received late apologies after the meeting had started from Marie Taylor. The group were very disappointed and concerned that MT wasn't able to attend. There hasn't been a Finance representative at the group since Liz Williams left Wiltshire Council earlier in 2018, and there is concern that financial issues aren't being addressed.

Whilst MC has recently had more positive conversations with the Wiltshire Council Business Rates section, he reported that business rates will be reduced by one third but for retail businesses only. MC has sent a letter to his local MP, James Gray requesting business rate relief for childcare businesses, but when forwarded on to Ministers, the response received has only been about encouraging local authorities to reduce rates. MC is aware of two, possibly three local authorities who have given a rate reduction to childcare businesses. Rates increased significantly last year, and with no possible change in the Free Entitlement funding rate until 2020, current funding levels are not enough (locally and nationally).

JP informed the group that Schools Forum has been very supportive of EY funding. Recently when it was proposed that SEND and admin costs were to be funded by the EY funding, JP argued against this and Schools Forum voted in favour of the extra SEND top up being taken from the High Needs budget. EY always has surplus budget and High Needs is always in deficit, so any surplus across the board is used to balance the overall Schools Forum accounts. Group members asked if there was any way EY could access this underspend and divide between providers, and/or increase hourly rate. JP informed the group that some budgets are ring fenced.

JP reported that we only received funding for actual take up now. The issue is that EY figures are submitted retrospectively with the funding being agreed on what they think take up will be.

AB reported that actual take up for Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) has declined, and everyone wanted to know what happens to the underspend, and could it be accessed for other activities such as Free Entitlement funding? The group also asked if any staff savings from the EY Childcare team could be accessed for training. AB wasn't sure if this would be possible.

A recent Nursery World article stated that a number of mainly London local authorities have made cut backs. Service delivery levels have now been cut back to statutory duties only.

Nurseries are experiencing income deficits due to reduced funding, and for some this is forcing closure. We need to be able to prove this is the case, so central government can be challenged. JP feels the biggest pressure is being felt by the voluntary nurseries, with a number being taken over by schools or larger voluntary organisations.

MC informed the group that NDNA and their champagne nurseries campaign are trying to organise a national walkout which will have a huge impact. All agreed that campaigning of MP's needs to continue. The next funding review is in 2020, so there is another financial year to get through with the current funding rates and ever mounting financial pressure from other areas such as living wage and 3% pension increases. Unless there is a national walkout, the situation will remain as it is. It was felt that some MP's do not want to deal with any negative issues, but hopefully with regular campaigning, interest in this issue might increase.

ACTION: January 2019 meeting – All agreed that the main focus should be finance. JH to liaise with MT.

6.0 Childcare team update

AB informed the group that some members of her teams are now on secondments to other work areas. Two people are working with Troubled Families and one person is acting up as part of the Commissioning Team. As a result, AB is having to refocus the remaining team members work to statutory duties only.

There are 2 new directors in Wiltshire Council – Helen Jones, Joint Commissioning where AB's team sits, and Helene Hughes, School Effectiveness where Natalia Reyner's team sits.

ACTION: None

7.0 Workforce Development Update

SENCO training – Wiltshire College is involved in the delivery of this.

The focus of the Workforce strategy will be less around qualifications, and more around general CPD.

The group discussed an overall ongoing struggle with recruitment. Some providers have experienced people wanting mainly term time, school hours only with a reluctance to do wrap around hours. Also, due to the inequality in funding levels at primary, secondary and Early Years, providers are not able to offer the wages that they would like to and need to. School leavers aren't wanting to go into Childcare as a career as there isn't enough money, and with their higher levels of qualifications they are going into other fields. AB stated that the team have gone to some careers fairs in the past but there is currently no capacity to do so.

Temporary and permanent solutions put in place by some members of the group are growing their own, helping people in the community get their English and Maths GCSE's and then Level 2 whilst working in the provision on a voluntary basis for 16 hours, and offering split shifts.

Due to the army rebasing programme, AB has visited Germany and Windsor recently with some army parents expressing an interest in taking up childminding as a career. Information has been distributed to Newcastle, Germany and Windsor.

The Early Years Conference took place recently after a hiatus of several years. So far, feedback about the event (venue and speakers) has been good.

ACTION: None

8.0 Childcare Sufficiency

The main areas of concern across the county are Malmesbury, Sherston (due to a nursery closure), and the ongoing Army rebasing. MC asked why the nursery had closed, and AB said that they had chosen to close. AB and her team are working with partners in the area to ensure families have been able to find alternative childcare. No parental complaints have been received to date. *Since the meeting, MC has discovered recorded in a local newspaper that the Malmesbury and Sherston closures while voluntary were due to financial pressures of funding levels and being unable to recruit staff. We would like to thank the staff for their dedication.*

JP and TS raised concerns over an after school club in their area that recently closed with very short notice, and if the new proposed person who has been approached to take over is correctly registered with Ofsted. AB asked JP to provide her name as a contact and she will talk with them.

AB raised concern over the decline in Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) take up. Initial indications for Autumn 2018 is that take up is at 5% when the authority's target has been 20%. AI reported a decline in the number of parents applying via the Parent Declaration form as most now say they don't meet any of the eligibility criteria. The decline has certainly been since the introduction of Universal Credit and 30 hours. The Better 2gether funding has enabled some parents to get a job, and whilst probably not a huge wage, they are eligible for the 30 hours which cancels out any eligibility for EYPP on economic grounds. The group felt that there does appear to be an issue with the income thresholds for these funding streams that perhaps central government need to look at.

ACTION: None

9.0 Confirmed dates for future meetings

Date	Day	Time	Venue
11 January 2019	Friday	10.00 – 12.00	Lacock Room, County Hall, Trowbridge, BA14 8JN
10 May 2019	Friday	10.00 – 12.00	Lacock Room, County Hall, Trowbridge, BA14 8JN

10.0 Any other business

SH is experiencing a blanket block on references for new staff. The only information she seems to be given are the dates of employment; there is no further information given for safeguarding. AB and the group said that DBS checks will cover the safeguarding element, and ensure there is evidence of what has been done/tried to be done, i.e. obtaining references. AB mentioned that they could show that the new person has been asked if there is anything they would like to share from a safeguarding perspective by enabling them to divulge any information themselves and get them to sign it.

ACTION: None