

**Early Years Reference Group Meeting
Friday 27 September 2024**

1. Welcome and introductions

Janer Boulton (JB), Lucy-Anne Bryant (LAB) (Chair), Emma Cooke (EC), Emma Egan (EE), Charlotte Forester (CF), Jenny Harvey (JH) (notes), Julia Honeywell (JHo), Holly Meek (HM), Marie Taylor (MT), Karen Venner (KV)

2. Apologies

Lyssy Bolton (LB), Lucy Bracher (replacement Holly Meek HM), Jackie Day, (JD), Lisa Fryer (LF), Sarah Hawkins (SH), Kirsty Merrifield (KM), Debbie Muir (DM), Kai Muxlow (KM), Emily Wood (EW)

Introductions done

3. Minutes of last meeting (7 June 2024)

The minutes were agreed as a true record.

4. Matters arising

3 – Article still outstanding. EC still to invite Ben Stevens to next Early Years Managers meeting

5 – This will be discussed later in the meeting under agenda item 6.

6 – Still awaiting.

7 – This has been completed but with no real success. The person dealt with post 18 courses only, so a further meeting is needed with the person who deals with post 16 courses. KV recently had a meeting with Louise at Wiltshire College Chippenham who confirmed they were seeing an increase in the number of people registering for courses, especially in Melksham and Trowbridge. KV will forward Louise's email address to LAB and EC. LAB/EC confirmed there is an article in this week's EY newsletter promoting EY as a career along with a national campaign invite.

9 – Completed. It was confirmed at the last meeting that the use of red books was limited; the same experiences were echoed again. CF raised the issue of reduced take-up of immunisations which would have been recorded in the red book, and asked if there could there be a link with reduced health visitor services. LAB/EC confirmed this was a broader issue for discussion with Sally Johnson. EC confirmed her team is currently working on the integrated 2yo check. A survey for working with health visitors will also be sent out to providers shortly, with feedback wanted on what is/isn't working well, and how the offer can be improved. The survey will also be sent to health visitors. KV has been told by health visitors that they aren't allowed to come into settings. All agreed this was a big problem. Several of the group discussed their experiences and possible improvement suggestions, and LAB/EC asked for all this feedback to be recorded in their survey responses.

11 – There is an article in this week's newsletter. JH will send email to the group before the next meeting.

**ACTION: LAB to add Safety Value Arrangement article in EY Newsletter
EC to invite Ben Stevens to the next Early Years Managers meeting
KV to share Wiltshire College contact email address with LAB and EC.
JH to send email to group ahead of next meeting about Chair position and election**

5. Budget Monitoring (MT)

MT shared an extract of her Schools Forum paper with the group. The overall EY budget now takes account of the under 2's and universal 2 YO funding and is a total of £54.223 million.

Current forecasts show a £4.487 million underspend with most of this reflected in the 3&4yo area (both universal and working parent entitlement). The largest variance is in the 3&4 year old grant; 10,880 FTE had been budgeted for based on the January census data, and the forecasted take-up is approximately

15% less than planned. There will be post and in year adjustments next year by the DfE, so not possible to redistribute back into the EY sector.

	DSG Allocation from the £m	Wiltshire Transfers £m	Current Annual Budget £m	Forecast Outturn £m	Forecast Outturn Variance £m	% Variance
Early Years Block	54.043	0.180	54.223	49.736	(4.487)	-8%

There is a small underspend in the disadvantaged 2yos area which has done very well with take-up, although LAB confirmed there has recently been a slight drop. Group members commented that there didn't appear to be any drop in demand across any age cohort.

MT reported a higher take-up in 2yos working parent entitlement than forecasted by the DfE.

It is still early days for the under 2's, so no variance is being reported yet. MT hopes to have a better picture for the next meeting in November.

Table 2 - Early Years Learners

	Budgeted PTE	Actual PTE	Forecast PTE Variance PTE	Budgeted Spend £M	Forecast Spend £M	Forecast Spend Variance £M
3- & 4-year olds	10,880	9,261	-1,619	32.312	27.744	(4.568)
2-year-olds	727	643	-84	3.101	2.743	(0.359)
2-year-olds with working parents	2,171	2,311	140	8.872	9.445	0.572
Under 2-year-olds	1,311	1,311	0	7.194	7.194	0.000
ISF	374	374	0	1.143	1.143	0.000
	<i>hours</i>	<i>hours</i>	<i>hours</i>			

A variance is currently not being forecast for ISF.

MT reported an 8% underspend across the whole EY block for quarter 1. With the funding expansions this year, it is certainly a year of flux, so MT is not surprised at the significant variances at the moment.

ACTION: None

6. Childcare Expansion (LAB/NH)

LAB reported that 7 settings offering a total of 48 spaces have received capital funding so far, with 3 already operational and 1 due to open on 30th September 2024. 2 further expansion projects are due to open in October and another in January 2025. Expansion is happening and planned in the areas around the county where need is greatest. There hasn't been a huge demand on the budget, with half of the budget spent to date. Interested parties can contact Nicola Harris or any member of the Childcare Sufficiency team, and plans would need to be up and running by September 2025.

LAB and NH confirmed the funding is purely for EY with separate wraparound development plans happening around the county alongside EY. SS reported that £300,000 has already been spent on wraparound plans. LAB confirmed that Wiltshire is doing very well encouraging demand, supply and take-up. LAB also confirmed that whilst Pewsey and Devizes are the main areas of need, other areas will be considered if there is a need.

ACTION: None

7. Inclusion Support Fund (ISF) (EC)

Since taking on ISF two years ago and making the funding process fit for purpose, EC and her team have been monitoring to check how it is all working.

The overwhelming response from the sector has been that the 2-band system isn't working. Options are currently being explored.

ACTION: None

8. AOB

LAB raised the issue of the group's Chair position. JHo offered to speak to with MT to find out what would be involved in the role. LAB encouraged other representatives to consider the role and to contact MT to find out more. An election will take place at the next meeting.

JB raised the issue of parent declaration forms and needing them completed in order to submit the Autumn 2024 estimate. This proved incredibly difficult when the provision had just returned from the summer break and the provision generally only see some parents once a week. JB had to drive to houses to get the forms completed. JH commented what whilst it's not detailed in the Provider Agreement, the Council has always advised that providers should not be claiming estimated hours for children for whom they have not got completed Parent Declaration forms in place. JH advised that there had been a few instances where providers had incorrectly claimed estimated funded hours for children when they weren't delivering them resulting in overpayment. JH suggested that due to the specialist nature of DSC's, flexibility could be applied if the DSC was in receipt of a parent email requesting the hours.

KV and EE have noticed a significant increase in work with the entitlement for the under 2's. CF echoed these thoughts and suggested that it would be easier if they could just use the one parent declaration form per child for the whole time they are accessing EYE rather than having different forms for each financial year. LAB and JH said they would investigate parent declarations and how their use could be improved

HM reminded the group about Family Hubs and asked people to reach out if they wanted to find out more or link in with their local hub. Navigators are working with families but are currently not accepting applications for outreach support. This situation will be reviewed. LAB asked for Family Hubs to an agenda item at the next meeting.

MT informed the group about a new grant called Early Years Budget Grant (EYBG) for the period September 2024 – March 2025 to support early years providers with their costs following confirmation of the 2024 teacher pay award. Last year, the funding was paid out equally between the number of teachers in settings. MT enquired whether the same approach was to be used again this year; all agreed. The funding is due to be received in November and paid out in December. JB queried what the definition of a teacher was, and EC confirmed it would be QTS only.

LAB raised the issue about schools setting up nurseries that has been in the news very recently, and stated the team will be looking to ensure existing provision is not affected.

**ACTION: JH to add Family Hubs as an agenda item for the next meeting
LAB/JH to look at the use of parent declaration forms**

9. Date of next meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday 26th November at 2pm.