

**Early Years Reference Group Meeting  
Tuesday 26 November 2024**

**1. Welcome and introductions**

Lyssy Bolton (LB), Jane Boulton (JB), Lucy Bracher (LB) Lucy-Anne Bryant (LAB) (Chair until item 3), Emma Cooke (EC), Jackie Day (JD), Emma Egan (EE), Charlotte Forester (CF), Lisa Fryer (LF), Jenny Harvey (JH) (notes), Sarah Hawkins (SH), Julia Honeywell (JHo), Kirsty Merrifield (KM), Debbie Muir (DM), Kai Muxlow (KM), Marie Taylor (MT), Karen Venner (KV) (Chair from item 4), Kerry Yeates (KY), Hannah Yeates (HY), Emily Wood (EW), Naomi Wright (NW)

**2. Apologies**

None. Introductions done

**3. Chair position (LAB)**

This agenda was brought forward to the start of the meeting.

LAB reported that both KV and KM had volunteered to be Chair, so the roles of Chair and Vice Chair could be appointed to. KM proposed KV for the role of Chair which was seconded by JD.

LAB handed over to KV who then chaired the rest of the meeting.

**ACTION: None**

**4. Minutes of last meeting (27 September 2024)**

The minutes were agreed as a true record.

**5. Matters arising**

Item 4 - EC informed the group that Ben Stevens will be attending next EY manager meeting scheduled for 11.02.2025.

Item 7 - LAB reported that she will be meeting with Wiltshire College later today.

Item 9 – LAB/EC have both been incredibly busy with the recent SEND inspection so have not had an opportunity to move this forward. EC will organise a meeting before EYRG is next scheduled to meet in January 2025. KY commented that the problems are continuing and needs addressing.

**ACTION: EC to organise HV meeting**

**6. Budget Monitoring (MT)**

MT shared a Powerpoint presentation which is an extract from the report being tabled at the next Schools Forum meeting on 12.12.2024. There are significant and ongoing pressures in the high needs area. For early years there is a large underspend which follows the pattern of previous years as the funding is based on census data and the forecast on actual spend to date. The DfE prepare an in-year adjustment and post year adjustment each taking into account revised EY census data.

The quarter 2 forecast shows 3- & 4-year-old entitlement with the largest underspend. MT stated that local authorities do not know how the DfE calculate their in and post year figures so it's impossible for us to work out. Also reported is a small underspend on 2-year-olds.

The Working Parent Entitlement's for 2-year-olds and 9–23-month-olds are both new areas. The Working Parent Entitlement for 2-year-olds is currently forecast with a slight overspend and there is no accurate forecast for the 9-23 months olds to share yet.

EYPP and DAF are both showing as underspent hence why the forecast is displaying 0.00.

EY central expenditure is showing as underspent due to team vacancies.

LAB queried whether there would be an opportunity to move any potential underspend from 9–23-month-olds to Working Parent 2-year-olds to cover that slight overspend. MT confirmed the budget is given to EY to spend as we wish. The DfE will not recover funding because of an underspend; however, they will recover funding linked to activities.

**ACTION: None**

## 7. Early Years expansion (LAB)

LAB expressed thanks to everyone who had expanded their settings to date and confirmed only half the budget has been spent to date. Bradford-on-Avon is the biggest area of concern. The new setting at Limpley Stoke is due to open in the New Year 2025. Other areas of focus are Tidworth, Bulford and Devizes.

The group discussed several issues:

- challenges being faced as a setting on a military base and the way the military operates; military families unable to plan too far ahead, lack of premise space despite having quota for staff.
- difficulties faced where school a setting is based is becoming an academy. The local authority is unable to be involved during the transition phase.
- impact of budget changes on setting expansion and sustainability

JD raised the issue of increased NI costs and business rates on behalf of John Proctor, owner of South Hills nursery group. He has sent a letter to local MPs about business rates and the national Living Wage and their impact on settings. KV agreed all private providers were in the same situation and it's a real concern moving forward. LAB asked for this topic to be on the next agenda and asked for EYRG to raise the issue with individual MPs, but early years providers do need to take this on themselves. JH will send a letter to all EYRG members to sign, and KV will then organise with the sector/MPs.

MT suggested KV write a piece for EY newsletter encouraging providers to lobby their MPs including links to look at.

**ACTION: Business rates to be added as agenda item at next meeting  
JH to organise a letter for EYRG signature  
KV to write a lobbying article for EY Newsletter**

## 8. Wraparound expansion (LAB)

LAB reported this is progressing well with new expanded provision set up across the county and encouraged members to get schools in their areas to make contact. NH has a team of 3 working hard to help roll this out, who are happy to have conversations with any interested parties.

**ACTION: None**

## 9. AOB

DfE are planning to tighten up on the charging policy – there is a desire to make charges clear and specific. LA has met with DfE – Providers will be consulted on the proposed changes to the wording in the guidance (timescale for this is not known).

EC reported EY is currently not represented on the Education Safeguarding Group. EYRG members get first refusal to participate. Sarah Hawkins and Jane Boulton would both like to learn more. (Emma to share info with them).

LAB reported Children's Select approved our Early Years Strategy this morning. This is a very positive outcome; we now have got councillors backing on the importance of EY.

KM agreed to be vice-chair – draft minutes will be shared with both Karen and Kirsty to agree before final circulation, and both will have opportunities to create the agenda.

KM raised the issue of mid-term starters and their payment dates and their financial impact on settings. JH and LAB will look to see if any changes can be made to this area.

JD gave positive feedback to Spurgeons for their thorough and good communication, especially around the temporary closures of their 1:1 support offer. This is helped enormously to manage both the setting and family's expectations.

A brief discussion on recruitment activity was had. A recruitment fair is planned for May to be held in the Atrium at County Hall – everyone is invited to get involved. LAB is meeting with Wiltshire College after this meeting to discuss this. KM campaigned to the group to get providers to share their experience/passion for working in the EY sector at their local college, this input could help inspire and keep motivated those training to enter the profession. KV has links to Bath College should anyone wish to make contact. JB shared that she speaks to Year 10 students at local Secondary Schools when they are deciding working experience options. Important to also inspire students who are taking decisions on future career/training paths.

**ACTION: EC to forward information on Education Safeguarding Group to SH and JB**  
**LAB to contact KV for Bath College contact**  
**JH/LAB to look into mid-term starters and payment dates**

## 10. Date of next meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> January 2025 at 2pm.