

Wiltshire Council
Department for Children and Education

Early Years Reference Group

Minutes of a meeting held on 18 November 2011 at Wiltshire Council, Bradley Road Offices in Trowbridge.

Present: Jackie Bedford (Wilts C), Simon Burke (Chair, Wilts C), Alan Butler (Learning Curve Day Nursery, Wootton Bassett) Sarah Clover (Wilts C), Rosemary Collard (Snapdragons Nurseries), Phil Cooch (Wilts C), Lorraine Cope (Accredited Childminder, Bradford-on-Avon), Gill Hanlan (Wilts C), Jenny Harvey (Wilts C), Ted Hatala (St Josephs), John Proctor (South Hills Independent School, Salisbury),

1.0 Welcome and Introductions

SB welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2.0 Apologies for Absence

Mark Cawley (New Road Nursery), Mike Fairbeard (Little Fir Tree Nursery, YMCA), Lucy Waterman (Rub a Dub Pre-school, Derry Hill)

3.0 Minutes of last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 September 2011 were agreed as an accurate record of discussion.

4.0 Matters arising from minutes of meeting held on 16 September 2011

4.0-5.3 Code of Practice – calculation of funding rates

PC & JH had been carrying out extensive testing to this on-line application and reported that it was now just about ready to go-live. Apologies were given that the end of September target date had been missed but testing had revealed a number of unanticipated complication. Both were confident that it would now be on-line by end November.

4.0-6.3 Grant payments & headcount reconciliation

The council is continuing to work with its software supplier on a number of issues relating to its free entitlement database in the hope of enhancing the information it is able to send out to providers.

5.3 Code of Practice/Local Agreement - Non compliance

Following the EYRG affirmation of support for the council to deal robustly with non-compliant providers, the council were pursuing a very small number of individual cases.

6.2 Mid-term arrivals/starters

JH advised that claims covering 30 children had been received for the Summer 2011 term relating to this new procedures and that these were fairly evenly split across leaver and starters.

The procedures had not been altered to cater for those children who started and left a provider before the headcount week and it was confirmed that this would be looked at as part of a review once the new procedures had bedded down.

11.1 Healthy setting award

SC was following up issues relating to the healthy settings award which is due to be re-launched to coincide with the release of the revised EYFS.

5.0 Code of Practice/Local Agreement

5.1 New National Code of Practice

JB circulated to members the following papers

- Draft Statutory Guidance for LA on the delivery of Free Entitlement for (two), three and four year olds and Securing sufficient Childcare
- DfE Consultation – Supporting Families in the Foundation Years: Proposed Changes to the Entitlement to Free Early Education and Childcare Sufficiency

SC presented a summary of the issues being highlighted in both documents and encouraged members to respond direct to the consultation before the deadline of 3 February. She also asked members to encourage their representative providers to participate in the consultation.

A DfE briefing on this is taking place at the Thistle Hotel, Bristol on 2 December which anyone can attend

Actions:

SC/JB to circulate further details of this event to members when available.

5.2 Local agreement – 2011/12

JH advised that printed copies of the 2011/12 local provider agreement would be distributed to providers shortly

6.0 Single Funding Formula

6.1 Annual review of formula

JH presented a paper detailing analysis of the SFF review consultation. The consultation had been restricted to just a single question seeking the sectors views on proposals to alter the free entitlement base rate.

A 50% response rate from providers to the SNAP survey had been received and providers had been prompted several times both electronically and in a letter to respond to the consultation by the deadline of 11 November.

Results indicated no overwhelming steer from the sector but many comments highlighted the complexity of the current formula and the need for simplicity. This was supported by just a 30% vote for retaining the status quo and a 70% vote for a change of some kind. It was felt that this was strongly linked to the desire for the formula to be made simpler.

JP considered that with hindsight maybe some of the cost analysis assumptions made about economies of scale regarding larger settings when developing the formula had not proved to be realistic operationally. For example, he believed larger providers employed paid administrators whereas smaller voluntary settings used the Council to obtain 'free' advice on such issues.

The group then went on to explore the impact on different provider types if base rates were altered. TH had worked through a number of scenarios which were shared with members.

PC circulated a paper showing the overall picture on different provider types if the hourly rate was altered and also the number of providers within the different categories that would be affected. The impact of introducing a single hourly rate to all would be felt most strongly by smaller PVI settings, maintained nurseries and childminders. However, it was agreed that the impact could be reduced by establishing a single rate for each provider type. Although the rate to smaller PVI setting would decrease it was thought that the impact of this loss might be counterbalanced by the fact that some attract the additional supplement for rurality. Others were now receiving funding for a full three hours whereas previously they had been operating 3 hour sessions on the 2 ½ hr session rate and not charging parents for the additional ½ hour. These settings were now finding themselves better off under the SFF hourly funded procedures.

All childminders are currently receiving £8.56 per hour and it was recognised that this was considerably higher than the standard childminder market hourly rate. It was acknowledged that the additional work carried out by accredited childminders was significant but once costs associated with 'setting-up' had been incurred it was believed that the higher rate could be relaxed. The impact of a proposed revised rate of £6.50 was explored and was not considered to be particularly significant because of the low number of accredited childminders and three and four year old children registered with them. However, it was agreed that a childminder market costs analysis should be carried out.

Action:

SC to send a cost analysis survey to all accredited childminders

Final proposal to be recommended to Schools Forum (unanimous vote by members in favour of proposal) –

- Single hourly rate for each provider type
- Reduce childminder hourly rate to £6.50 per hour
- Saving to be used to enhance PVI hourly rate

Action:

SRB to take forward EYRG recommendation to Schools Forum for approval.

7.0 Two Year Old Funding – Update

SC circulated a briefing paper to up-date member on both the current and strategic vision relating to two year old funding.

Much of the DfE consultation relates to the expansion of this initiative with the expectation that the number of funded places will increase during 2012/13 until it becomes statutory provision in September 2013.

Members were again encouraged to respond to the DfE consultation on the issues surrounding this funding.

8.0 Membership

It was agreed to keep the children's centre representative as vacant for the time being as there were a number of existing members of the group who were strongly associated with children's centre nurseries who were able to represent children's centre interests. Now that Wiltshire's children's centres are run by four contracts it would also be difficult to ensure 'fairness' across all four organisations if only one representative was elected.

9.0 Dates for Future meetings

Date	Day	Time	Venue
24 February 2012	Friday	10:00 – 12:00	Trowbridge, Bradley Rd Offices – Committee Room 1
25 May 2012	Friday	10:00 – 12:00	Trowbridge, Bradley Rd Offices – Committee Room 1

10.0 Any Other Business

None