

## Early Years Sub Group Meeting

### Minutes

15<sup>th</sup> December 2020

Microsoft Teams Meeting

#### Present:

Jasmine Sanders  
Helen Shearer  
Julie Robinson  
Anthony Slack  
Julie Edwards  
Vinny Merritt  
Kevan Hamer  
Laura Wright

Sue Pounds

Private Provider  
Head of Start Well Service  
Private Provider  
Primary Governor  
Manager Schools Finance Unit  
Private Provider  
School Finance Unit  
Start Well Early Years and Childcare  
Adviser  
Nursery school Head Teacher

Apologies- Rob Dean, Sarah Bagshaw

#### 1. Minutes 20th October 2020

The minutes were agreed

#### 2. Impact of Covid – Start Well

The EY PVI Provider data collection week had been well populated, and take-up had increased across the 75% of Providers who had returned their information. The exercise would be repeated for take-up of school places in January.

The financial impact of Covid-19 was hitting in settings who were experiencing higher isolation periods as parental income was reducing, and Providers were reporting higher vacancy levels. Support for this lost income was being sought from the DFE, but no new communication had been returned to date other than parents should not be charged for fees during isolation periods and that there was no additional planned support in this area.

Any roll-out of mass-testing may result in an increase in children and staff needing to isolate in the Spring term.

Clarity around the current furlough guidance was needed as it was unclear if funding could be applied for as staff need to isolate. Start-well reported they would help to address this issue.

2yo- although not confirmed at time of meeting the projection for take up of 2yo was expected to be around the 60% level only. Support was being commissioned by the DFE until the end of March to help any LA's who were experiencing low attendance of funded 2yo places.

A scheme by the Council to support low income families with a £20 winter food voucher was being rolled out, parents would be invited to collect the voucher from Childrens Centres' where a check for the child's 2yo eligibility would also be confirmed.

A DFE communication had been received regarding future funding rates for Providers for 2021-22. The increase of £44m to the national Early Years Block was expected to see a rise of around 8p for 2yo and 6p for 3yo from April 21

Meetings of the Childcare co-ordination Group will resume from January 21 and would include a summary of all support made available to Providers during the pandemic to date.

### **3. Impact of Covid – Finance**

All Provider payments reflecting the decision to protect sector sufficiency in the Autumn term and fund providers on the greater hours of autumn 20 or the previous autumn 19 were now completed.

The previous budget position of an overspend of £250k for the Early Years block was based on the sept/oct returns, additional claims since had seen an increase in funding above the protected floor for several Providers. The group was advised that the Q3 estimate would now increase to £300k overspend for 20-21

For the Spring 21 term funding will return to actual hours for the Providers as the LA funding will be based on the census January 21 uptake.

Although the number of children has increased throughout the autumn term, it is still anticipated that the levels of uptake will be lower this January due to Covid-19. A lower census return could put financial pressure on both the 21-22, inclusion and centrally funded budgets which are currently based on previous uptake levels.

To add to this, there was uncertainty given a scenario that 21-22 would be based on a lower census level in January but by summer the vaccine programme may result in significantly more uptake than other years which would leave a further potential gap in the funding. Providers had been advised to plan for a return to actual funding in the Spring term and formal notice would be posted once the DFE had confirmed the position, which was expected before the term end.

The revised autumn monthly payment cycle to include protected funding for 2yo and 3yo had been a challenge but had been processed successfully. Despite a number of Providers who were unable to make the initial headcount submission deadline due to staffing issues, the Finance dept had ensured that all possible cash-flow pressures would be supported by funding these Providers on the protected basis until the actuals were received.

The Finance dept reported that the number of complaints received from either Provider or parent during this initial term following lockdown was very few and have been resolved or are in the process of.

In early January, a comparative data review of Provider uptake between autumn 19 and autumn 20 will be completed. This is intended to demonstrate the full impact of Covid-19 on occupancy at Provider, age-group, ward, and area levels and will feed into the child sufficiency information.

### **4. Ofsted inspections : implications for RI Providers**

As per previous sub-group minutes, there are 2 RI Providers who had received an Ofsted visit to address previous safeguarding issues but were advised that they would not receive a full inspection re-judgement in Autumn.

Ofsted have re-enforced that no Spring re-inspection will be undertaken and therefore appeals to re-instate the funding for this term will be at the discretion of the LA for a second time.

The group was informed that further financial pressures would be put on these Providers, as no re-inspection resulted in the RI judgement remaining in place and no 2yo funding could be awarded. The RI judgement was also resulting in recruitment difficulties for the settings.

However, Ofsted were to publish guidance on Provider assurance which would state if the settings had met or not met the scope of the EYFS framework.

This would be considered by the LA, along with area sufficiency levels in the planned process to review their new appeals.

## **5. Childcare Sufficiency**

The picture was that, due to the lower autumn take-up, sufficiency was not a current issue borough wide, but more data was needed to investigate if any hot-spots existed.

The comparative data exercise with individual headcount returns would be the initial starting point for the LA to contact Providers in areas which resulted in capacity issues.

It was expected that continuing covid-19 restrictions in the new year would see parental income remain at a lower level due to higher unemployment , and parents working from home may require less childcare provision also. Consequently, more support for revised business plans would be necessary.

## **6. Date of Next Meeting**

Tuesday 9th February 2021  
Microsoft Teams 1.00pm -2.00 pm