

LANCASHIRE SCHOOLS FORUM

Date of meeting 2 July 2020

Item No 10

Title: Recommendations of the Early Years Block Working Group

Executive Summary

In June 2020, the Early Years Block Working Group considered a number of reports using the Urgent Business Procedure, including:

- Schools Budget Outturn, School Balances and Clawback 2019/20;
- Schools Forum Annual Report 2019/20;
- Schools Forum Urgent Business Process - Alternative arrangements following the cancellation of the May 2020 school census;
- Funding Agreement for the Provision of Early Education Funding 2020/21;
- Early Years Block Autumn Term 2020 Payments;
- Funding for PVI and Childminders with additional Costs associated with COVID-19;
- Local Authority Discretionary Fund.

Recommendations

The Forum is asked to:

- a) Note the report from the June 2020 Early Years Block Working Group;
- b) Ratify the Group's recommendations.

Background

In June 2020, the Early Years Block Working Group considered a number of reports using the Urgent Business Procedure. 9 responses were received, which have been collated to form the Working Group's recommendations. A summary of the key issues and recommendations are provided in this report.

1. Future of Maintained Nursery Schools

During the current COVID-19 pandemic, it was decided that the review of Maintained Nursery Schools (MNS) financial stability should put on hold and the focus of the county council has been to help nursery schools, and other early years providers, in providing the care for children in accordance with government guidance.

A letter has been sent to each MNS in connection with this decision.

The Working Group noted the information.

2. Schools Budget Outturn, School Balances and Clawback 2019/20

Information and recommendations are incorporated in the report at item 6 Schools Budget Outturn, School Balances and Clawback 2019/20.

3. Schools Forum Annual Report 2019/20

Information and recommendations are incorporated in the report at item 7 Schools Forum Annual Report 2019/20.

4. Schools Forum Urgent Business Process - Alternative arrangements following the cancellation of the May 2020 school census

On 4 May 2020, a request was distributed to members of the Schools Forum and Early Years Working Group, using the Forum's Urgent Business Procedure. This request sought urgent views on proposals for alternative arrangements to calculate funding allocations/redeterminations for maintained early years settings that would originally have used May 2020 school census data,

A copy of the paper distributed with this request was included in the papers and provided further background information.

Members were asked to respond by 12 noon on 6 May 2020 and by the closing date and time, 22 responses had been received.

20 of the responses supported the proposals without amendment and 2 supported the proposals but included comments. One comment was from a school asking if there was any opportunity for schools to be given a longer time period in which to respond to the proposed count process. The LA responded to say that there was unfortunately no flexibility to extend the deadline. The second comment suggested an additional sentence be added to the communication to schools, which was accepted and included in the final version.

The process was also supported by Director for Education and Skills.

Arrangements have now been made to implement the alternative data sources agreed in the proposal.

The Working Group:

- a) **Noted the report.**

5. Funding Agreement for the Provision of Early Education Funding 2020/21

A report is normally presented to the Working Group at this time seeking views on any proposed amendments to the Funding Agreement for the next academic year. For 2020/21, the LA is not proposing to make any changes to the agreement beyond updating the dates to reflect the 2020/21 year.

The Working Group:

- a) **Noted the report.**

6. Early Years Block Autumn Term 2020 Payments

A letter from the Chair of the Working Group was provided for members which set out the key issues in connection to the Early Years Block Autumn Term Payments. Whilst no information is yet available from the DfE, the LA is preparing a paper around possible options. Once this paper has been finalised it will be circulated to members and a skype meeting arranged to allow further discussion of the available options.

The Working Group:

- a) **Noted the report**
- b) **Supported the proposal to hold a virtual meeting on this issue.**

7. Funding for PVI and Childminders with additional Costs associated with COVID-19

Schools may be able to request support directly from the DfE to assist with additional COVID-19 costs including increased premises related costs and additional cleaning costs, subject to certain conditions.

The County Council has asked the DfE if this scheme can also be made available to EY PVI providers and Childminders.

The Working Group:

- a) **Noted the information;**
- b) **Noted that any responses from the DfE will be shared at the skype meeting if it has been received.**

8. Local Authority Discretionary Fund

The following statement from NDNA can be shared with the group. (In Lancashire, it is district councils that deal with business rates)

ENGLAND ONLY

NDNA calls on local authorities to support childcare providers

Since business grants were announced of £10,000 for small businesses and £25,000 for retail, hospitality and leisure businesses, NDNA has been lobbying for wider access to these grants. This is because we know that most nurseries have a rateable value that's too high to qualify for the £10,000 grant and were expressly excluded from the £25,000 grant.

NDNA is aware that local authorities now have access to [discretionary funding](#) to support businesses who are struggling to survive due to the Coronavirus shutdown but are unable to access other grant funding.

The grants available under this fund will be for £25,000, £10,000 or any amount up to £10,000 and each local authority will be responsible for their own scheme and have [discretion in determining which businesses](#) they will prioritise.

NDNA has already written to all Chief Executives of billing authorities to make them aware of the needs of the early years sector. And the body which represents local authorities have themselves highlighted [the need to support childcare providers](#) during this crisis.

To identify whether you are eligible for this grant, please check your council's website and search for 'Local Authority Discretionary Grants Fund'. This fund is being managed by the council which handles your business rates so in some areas, this may be different to where your early years team is located. We understand that many have already opened their application process and there are limited funds available so you must act quickly. If you cannot find anything on this fund, please do let us know and we will check our files to see if they have responded to our letter with any further details.

As councils will need to make decisions about how the fund would help your business, you may be asked to provide details about the loss of income you've suffered and why you need to access the grant. Each local authority area might handle this differently but you may be asked for financial information to support your application.

The Working Group:

- a) Noted the information;**
- b) Noted that this information could be discussed as part of the Skype meeting.**