

## Item 10

### **Recommendations of the Early Years Block Working Group**

Contact for further information:  
Schools Forum Clerk  
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#### **Brief Summary**

On 28 November 2023, the Early Years Block Working Group considered several reports, including:

- **School Budget 2024/25**
- **Lancashire Schools Forum Operational Arrangements**
- **Family Hubs**
- **Early Years Block Forecast 2024/25**
- **Early Years SEN Inclusion Group**
- **Transitional Funding**

A summary of the information presented, and the Working Group's recommendations are provided in this report.

#### **Recommendations**

The Forum is asked to:

- a) Note the report from the Early Years Block Working Group held on 28 November 2023.
- b) Ratify the Working Group's recommendations.

#### **Detail**

On 28 November 2023, the Early Years Working Group considered several reports. A summary of the information presented, and the Working Group's recommendations are provided below:

##### **10.1 School Budget 2024/25**

Following the Autumn statement on 22nd November 2023, no further funding was announced for the education sector. Therefore, the additional high needs funding allocated to support transitions and the creation of the IEST teams in 2023/24 will not be available for the 2024/25 financial year due to anticipated pressures within the funding blocks.

#### **The Working Group.**

- a) **Noted the information.**



## **10.2 Lancashire Schools Forum Operational Arrangements**

The working group reviewed the proposed amendment in section 2.6 around conflicts of interest. The amendment requests members complete an annual form to declare any potential conflicts. In addition, if there is a possible conflict arising on an agenda, members will be required to inform the Schools Forum Clerk and the appropriate working group chair in advance.

If the proposed change is agreed by the three working groups, declaration forms will be sent to all members.

### **The Working Group.**

- a) **Noted the amendment to the Operations Arrangement subject to the amendment of PVI providers moved under the school settings in the membership section.**
- b) **Supported the completion of annual declaration forms for forum members.**

## **10.3 Family Hubs**

Ellie Waide-Mayfield attended the Working Group to provide an overview of the Family Hubs network. Family hubs provide access to services, create connections to build relationships. Joined up support, bringing services together, build upon children's centres and building wider networks.

### **The Working Group.**

- a) **Noted the information.**
- b) **Thanked Ellie for attending.**

## **10.4 Early Years Block Forecast 2024/25**

Forecasted hourly rates were shared with the working group to provide an indicative hourly rate whilst the authority is awaiting the Early Years Block Budget information.

Members raised that settings should be made aware of the indicative hourly rates to allow settings to budget. Officers suggested to wait until the LA received notification to communicate anticipated rates to the sector.

### **The Working Group.**

- a) **Noted the information.**
- b) **Agreed send communication of anticipated rates when the LA had received the Early Years Block budget from the ESFA.**

**Since the Working Group, the Authority has received the Dedicated Schools Grant for 2024/25. The Early Years Block allocations and funding rates will be covered in Item 6.**



## 10.5 Early Years SEN Inclusion Group

Following concerns raised by members around SEN in the Early Years Sector at the Schools Forum on 17 October 2023, Sally Ricardson agreed to meet with the Early Years SEN Inclusion Group. The group met on the 1 and 22 November 2023.

Key Discussions from these meetings were presented at the working group meeting. At the Early Years Block meeting on 10 October 2023, members raised concerns around the extension to the Inclusion Fund to include two years old from September 2023, as part of a pilot scheme. It was noted that this was not agreed by the Schools Forum and Finance colleagues were not aware of the change. Settings were notified of the extended entitlement at the beginning of the Autumn Term. Members were concerned around the strain on the Inclusion Fund, which was noted to be fully utilised and over spent in 2023/24 to date.

It was noted that the fund is proposed to be increased in 2024/25 in light of the current demand and the extension of entitlement.

The group:

- Noted the increase in eligibility of the Inclusion Fund
- Recommended that any future extensions should be notified to the Schools Forum Clerk.
- Also recommended that future financial letters to the sector are notified to the Schools Finance and Forum colleges.
- Welcomed the proposal for increasing the budget for 2024/25.

### Inclusion Fund Funding

The topic of accessing the Inclusion Fund was discussed as the paperwork around it negatively impacts work capacity which causes delays in meeting the needs of children.

It was also reported at the meeting that settings struggle to identify what the funding they receive is from on their remittance statements. Members also raised concerns around not receiving the funding in a timely manner or receiving confirmation that the funding has been allocated.

Members also raised the concern that the current funding for Fund B is £74 per week, which was set a couple of years ago and has not been updated in light of increased recruitment costs, inflation, and living expenses.

The group:

- Welcomed a review of the Inclusion Fund and increasing the budget for the fund for the next financial year
- Recommended that any future extensions should be notified to the Schools Forum Clerk.
- Also recommended that future financial letters to the sector are notified to the Schools Finance and Forum colleges.
- Requested a written document outlining the process of Inclusion and EHCP funding.



Since the meeting, Schools Finance officers have met with the Inclusion Team area managers around early years Inclusion and ECHP funding. The team were not aware of any issues and recommended that setting contact the relevant area manager to resolve any issues. Contact details are provided below.

James Lambert – North - James.Lambert@lancashire.gov.uk 01524 581189

Jill Jones – East - Jill.Jones@lancashire.gov.uk 01254 220561

Alison Calderbank – South - Alison.Calderbank@lancashire.gov.uk 01772 531592

Joanna Powel – South - Joanna.Power@lancashire.gov.uk 01772 533231

A written document outlining the funding process has also been requested from the service.

#### Increasing Demand in the Sector

Members expressed concerns around the increasing demand in the sector for complex needs. A lengthy discussion at which it was debated how to focus the funding available to support the increasing needs in early years.

To summarise, it was suggested by members that rather than training etc for the sector, funding should be focused on adapting settings to be able to meet needs.

A member has recently adapted their setting to be able to meet the needs of the children attending. Members agreed to arranged a further meeting of the working group to look into this further.

The group:

- Welcomed a new approach.

#### Level 3 SENco funding

Currently, this training course has bene funded form the Early Years Block and agreed annually by the Schools Forum. Officers requested this funding to be allocated for another year.

Members raised concerns around funding the course from the Early Years Block when alternative free courses are available to settings provided by DfE.

#### Inclusion representatives at the Early Years Block meetings

Lizz Tatlé, is currently covering Sapphire Murray maternity leave and will attend Early Years Schools Forum meetings going forward.

The SEN Inclusion Group also met on the 22nd November which Lizz Tatlé attended to follow up from the meeting above.

- Lizz Requested members and settings to raise individual issues with SEN funding directly to her.



- A PVI setting looking to create an SEN provision also attended the meeting. The setting were looking to fund this through a charity and will pass information to Lizz
- Settings reported applying for Inclusion Funding takes too long – this was also raised with Lizz whom will review this with the area managers.
- Members also welcomed a review into the weekly funded amount as this has not changed for some time.
- Future meetings will be scheduled in line with the Forum schedule

Additional SEN items were raised within the working group

- Early Years EHCP will continue to be funded from the Early Years Inclusion Fund as per the ESFA guidance
- Early years settings can be included in the SEND Inspections as children will be chosen as part of the inspection. The inspection will follow the chronology of the child, looking at the LA roles in supporting the child with SEN.
- EY's and Inclusion regular meetings to discuss specific issues which are not relevant for the forum or the Inclusion group.

#### **The Working Group.**

- a) Noted the minutes from the meetings.**
- b) Welcomed a meeting with the Inclusion Team to discuss Inclusion related issues within the sector. Lizz Tatle agreed to arrange meetings going forward with the sector.**

