

WIRRAL COUNCIL

WIRRAL SCHOOLS' FORUM 10th April 2013

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Early Years Consultation

Executive Summary

A Consultation Paper has been launched by the DfE which examines and proposes changes to the current role of the local authority in early education. The consultation ends on 6th May 2013.

Consultation:

The Government is proposing the following changes, either by introducing legislation or through statutory guidance to:

a) Guarantee an offer of funding to Early Years providers of a quality assessed by Ofsted, or an inspection body approved by the Secretary of State, as "satisfactory", "good" or "outstanding" where there is an eligible child wanting to take up an early education place.

Note: In Wirral, this is the approach that is already in operation.

b) Guarantee an offer of funding for new early education providers, which have been registered with Ofsted, prior to their first full Ofsted inspection.

Note: In Wirral, this decision is currently based on an internal checking process and a quality assurance visit made by a Foundation Consultant.

c) Limit the extra conditions that local authorities can place on private, voluntary and independent (PVI) early education providers in order for them to qualify for funding to deliver places.

Note: In Wirral, the current Provider Agreement requires providers to engage with a quality improvement process and to meet financial management requirements. A review of this process is currently under way.

d) Remove the existing duty on local authorities to secure information, advice and training for childcare providers, but give local authorities power to offer it.

Note: In Wirral the existing duty is fully met however, as part of the Council's re-structure, a full review is under way and plans to deliver a slimmer service are being formulated. The Family Information Service is largely web based and will continue to provide information on key topics (eg safeguarding)

e) Reform the early education funding system, by encouraging local authorities to simplify

their funding formulae and to limit the amount of centrally retained spend.

Note: In Wirral, the Early Years funding formula is already very simple with only limited spend retained centrally. There is a formula review underway by the Schools Forum Working Party and these proposals will be taken into account.

Recommendations

The Forum notes the report

Julia Hassall
Director of Children's Services

Question	Wirral current position	Notes
1. What would the impact of requiring local authorities to offer to fund all providers, excepted those judged “inadequate” to deliver funded places for three and four year olds?	No impact – already in place	
2. When is the earliest point (after full implementation in Sept 2014) that we should require that funded places for two year olds can only be delivered by providers judged “good” or “outstanding” by Ofsted?	Wirral currently only use providers judged “satisfactory” if there is a shortage of places in the area and these providers are actively working with us to improve standards. They are subject to continuous scrutiny and monitoring. Their OFSTED reports need to indicate that the quality of care is good and a decision is made on a setting’s capacity to improve.	<p>May still need to actively engage with settings over issues relating to quality for places for 2 year olds, but this could be incorporated into plans currently in development.</p> <p>Risk of future lack of sufficiency in some areas, needs consideration.</p>
3. What would be the impact of offering to fund new providers to deliver early education places prior to their first Ofsted inspection judgement?	Already in operation on the basis of a visit from the quality assurance team	
4. What would be the impact of limiting the conditions local authorities can set on providers solely to those outlined in paragraph 4.4 (only conditions allowed are related to financial regulations, fraud etc.)	Current statutory duties fully met – quality assurance and training support under review.	This will mean a reduction on the burden of local authorities. In the light of developments concerning staff re-structure and proposals to continue to offer a support service to settings, this proposal would support Wirral in meeting its duties. It may be helpful to seek the views of settings.
5. What other conditions, if any, should local authorities be able to place on early education providers to deliver funded places?		Need to seek views from stakeholders, PVI's and Early Years Working Group
6. Do you agree with the proposed list of reduced training requirements set out in Appendix 1?		<p>In the light of developments concerning staff re-structure and proposals to continue to offer a support service to settings, this proposal would support Wirral in meeting its duties.</p> <p>It may be helpful to seek the views of settings.</p>

7. What would be the impact of reducing the prescribed training requirements on providers/local authorities as set out in Appendix 1?		This will mean a reduction on the burden of local authorities. In the light of developments concerning staff re-structure and proposals to continue to offer a support service to settings, this proposal would support Wirral in meeting its duties. It may be helpful to seek the views of settings.
8. Would these changes have a greater impact on some areas of information, advice and training provision over others? If so, which?		Need to seek views from stakeholders, PVI's and Early Years Working Group.
9. Do you support the proposal for a single flat rate within a local authority for two year old education?	Already in place in Wirral	
10. Do you support the proposal to limit the number of base rates and bands for three and four year old early education?	Already in place in Wirral	
11. What are your views on the limits proposed for three and four year olds early education (a maximum of three bands and no more than two bands)?	Already in place in Wirral	
12. What are your views on removing, for three and four year olds, all supplements (and factors) other than for deprivation?	The current supplements for flexibility and for quality have encouraged growth, particularly in flexibility amongst PVI providers. This makes them better able to support the needs of working families	Need to seek views from stakeholders, PVI's and Early Years Working Group.
13. Do you support the changes proposed for early years centrally retained DSG spending? Can the definition be improved?		It's always useful to have precise definitions however, this can restrict local decision making.
14. Do you think that a 10% limit on early years DSG central spend is appropriate? If not, please explain why and include any comments on the impact that this would have in comparison to a 15% or 20% limit.		Need to seek views from stakeholders, PVI's and Early Years Working Group.