

**WIRRAL COUNCIL
SCHOOLS FORUM – 16th January 2019
REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR FOR CHILDREN SERVICES
EARLY YEARS UPDATE**

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the School Forum of discussions at the recent Early Years working group meeting, 10th December 2018 on the following; current EYs position, charging policy, Early Help and Prevention consultation and proposals on staff structure and Inclusive Practice Fund.

2.0 CURRENT POSITION

2.1 Wirral's take up of Early Years free entitlements is currently in a very healthy position. Not only is there a high take up of places but also an increase in the standards of childcare and early education across the sector as outlined below;

- 93% of children eligible for 2year funding entitlement are accessing it.
90% of parents who receive a 30-hour code take up this entitlement.
- Children taking up 30 hours entitlement are settling quicker and are progressing at a greater pace.
- 96% of early years providers are judged good or better by Ofsted;
- of which 93% of children access funding entitlement from good or above providers.
- Children who access all entitlements (Children Centre access, 2yr, Early Years Pupil Premium) are more likely to achieve Good Level of Development (GLD), 73%.

2.2 However, there does still seem to be a reluctance by parents to acknowledge and seek support where their child may have an additional need. Therefore, this continues to be a key priority and as a result there will be roll out of an accredited SENCO training programme from January 2019 to better enable early identification and initiate support.

3.0 CHARGING POLICY CONSULTATION;

3.1 A recent consultation with early year childcare providers sought to gain a view on the proposals for the Early Childhood Service to apply charges to certain activities. Specifically, the consultation focused on these key topics within a charging policy; **Principles, Training, Cancellation Fees, Administration Charges**. Distribution of the Charging Policy was to all providers (inclusive of PVI day nurseries and childminders) with a return of 26 completed forms, of which 1 was from an organisation.

To note; Whilst the tracking data submission was not included in the consultation there were several responses on this matter.

3.2 Principle; generally, it was felt that early years providers should not be charged for services as Wirral Local Authority retains 5% of the early years funding entitlement (EYFE) budget, from the Department for Education (DfE). However, only half of all early years providers offer funded places and the proposed charges would apply across the board, dependent of the nature of activity.

3.3 Training; training charges would be based on a sustainability principle, in terms of covering costs incurred rather than a for profit exercise. All training programmes provided would have very clear aims and objectives, with target audiences identified so providers would know who the training is aimed at. The programme would also detail if the training is new or has been delivered before. Therefore, providers would not incur undue costs.

3.4 Cancellations fees; due to the number of none attendees and cancellations on training events it was suggested to apply costs for these instances. It is hoped that this would obtain a commitment to attendance and thereafter recoup any costs incurred for example; a booked speaker. Feedback on cancellations specifically was varied, with suggestions of reselling places, that it should be reciprocal and there should be consideration to timeframes and ratios.

3.5 Administration charges; a proposal was to apply costs across several administration tasks but specifically for any discrepancies in the return of headcount data or that of data submissions through Capita portals. Feedback challenged that the Local authority retains 5% EYFE funding block for administration of the funding and that should cover correcting any mistakes. However, due to the technicality of these functions any late submissions/discrepancies/corrections create additional administration tasks, through a re-running of the system. Subsequently, it seems appropriate to continue at least with the proposal to apply administration costs to **'late/failure of headcount submissions - after close of task – due to costs of re-run'**.

To note; All other proposed administration charges, particularly for anomalies/mistakes etc; to be put on hold for further review of the impact on capacity. Plus, tracking data submissions will be included at this time.

3.6 Estimated administration charges for re-running tasks;

Reissuing Headcount / Estimate task:

Number of children on final	Charge
1 - 10	£9.00
11- 30	£18.00
31 – 60	£27.00
61+	£36.00

Adding children once task has closed:

Number of children	Charge
1	£9.00
2-10	£18.00
11-25	£36.00
26-40	£55.00
41-60	£91.00

4.0 EARLY HELP AND PREVENTION STAFF CONSULTATION;

4.1 Following a corporate review, the Senior Leadership Team for Children's Services was established in June 2018. As part of this process an Assistant Director for Early Help & Prevention was appointed, and functional areas of responsibility re-defined to create a more joined-up approach across Children's Services. Within the portfolio of Early Help & Prevention are 4 functional areas: Integrated Front Door, Early Years, Prevention and Youth. Where in previous years there has been a divide between social care and non-social care services, the new Senior Leadership arrangements seek to promote improved integration, placing the needs of the child are at the centre.

4.2 Within the recent consultation the proposals were that Early Years will be led by a Head of Service (HoS), directly managing teams for: Children's Centres, Early Years Business & Performance; Early Years Quality Improvement & Training; and Early Years SEND. It is acknowledged that the Head of Service for Early Years will be the strategic lead on the "***Children Are Ready for School***" pledge.

4.3 Furthermore, the consultation proposals outlined changes to the current x4 FTE Foundation Consultant posts, of which x2 have been within early years school improvement and x2 have been in early years SEND teams. The funding for all posts is through the early years block, which is to be managed by the Early Years HoS and therefore the proposal is to re-position all posts as below;

X3 FTE Early Years Send Officers (this gives an additional x1 FTE to this role)

X1 FTE Early Years Quality Improvement and Training Manager

5.0 INCLUSIVE PRACTICE FUND (IPF)

5.1 Whilst referrals for this funding is increasing term on term, seeing 85 applications Sept-Dec 2018, there remains an underspend of approximately 200k to this budget. In the main this is still in association of the new processes to take hold and with the addition of access for F1 provisions in schools to be fully mobilised.

5.2 Anecdotal feedback from providers informs a reluctance to applying for this funding due to the funding rate being of equal proportion to the universal 3+4 rate, against the volume of work in completing the application. Therefore, it is suggested that the IPF 15-hour rate of £4.30 be increased to that of the same of the 2-year rate £5.12, given the very nature of the child's needs is that their development is recognised as being below that of their chronological age.

5.3 Furthermore, it is known that the funding does not necessarily support in the transition of a child from F1 into F2, as the funding would stop at the end of the summer term awarded. Again, creating further reluctance for the application whereby some children who may not have their full need identified until a term before

entry to school. It is suggested that where a child is in receipt of IPF and where recognised would benefit from continual funding into F2 then for the period of the first half term (approx. 6 weeks) it would still apply.

5.4 In addition, it is recognised that to fully embed inclusivity across Early Years in both identification and access to funding support and transition into F2 provision a dedicated role would be of benefit. Specifically given the key issue for children is delayed communication and language skills, the criteria for this role would be a specialism in early language development. It is suggested this role be funded for a potential 2-year fixed term period through the IPF, to further enhance and maximise the opportunities.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Forum to agree with the Charging Policy Principles to apply costs to training, cancellation and administration discrepancies of headcount submissions.

6.2 Forum to approve the proposals for the Inclusive Practice funding functions; increase the base rate, transition support into F2 for 1st half term, appoint a dedicated fixed term post to embed these new initiatives with a key focus on communication and language.

Paul Boyce
Director of Children's Service