

**WIRRAL COUNCIL
SCHOOLS FORUM 11th May 2021
REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND
EDUCATION SERVICES
EARLY YEARS WORKING GROUP UPDATE**

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to update Wirral's School Forum of discussions at the recent Early Years working group, dated 23rd April 2021, inclusive of service updates.

2.0 Early Years Budget Central Costs.

2.1 At the closure of 2020/21 there is an underspend of £290,400 in the Early Years budget, of which is being requested as a carry-forward into 2021/22 in these specific areas;

- Central Costs = £62,087 (**see 2.2**)
- Early Years funding element = £182,963 (**see 3.1**)
- Disability Access Fund = £45,350 (**see 5.5**)

2.2 The £62,087 in the central costs, in the main accumulated from vacant posts earlier in the year which are now filled. Therefore, it is requested the underspend be approved in **principle** to be carried forward for use in 2021/22, subject to the final DfE grant funding allocation in July 21. The spend plan is for activities which due to Covid disruptions were delayed in procuring by year end.

- **“Future Proofing Your Business”** - Business support training = £17,705
- **Disability Max Cards** – to raise awareness and increase take up of the Disability Access Fund (DAF) = £6,000
- **Wirral Invitation to Play (WITP)** outdoor play community project = £1,500
- **Total = £25,205**

2.2 It is further proposed the remainder, £36,882 will extend the contract of an existing additional Portage worker post for a further year, to maintain current *3.7FTE from 2.7FTE, given the high demand on this service area (**see table below**). It is known that where children's additional needs are identified earlier, generally under 2 years, and receive the Portage interventions in the home parents are more confident in their child's developing needs and thereafter it supports smoother transitions to settings/schools.

3.0. Universal 2, 3 + 4 early years free entitlements & 30 hours extended (EYFE).

3.1 In addition to the above proposed request the underspend of £182,963, is being requested to carry forward, again in *principle*, to be used in 2021/22 for the proposed activities.

- Promotional campaign for take of 2-year funding offer.
- School Ready Parents Campaign
- Build further capacity within EY's SEND, both in LA team and with partners
- Transition Pathway development
- Implementation of new Early Years Foundation Stage reforms
- Commission early communication/language interventions

3.2 Whilst there continues to be a positive upturn of take up of funded placements across most areas the 2-year take is still struggling to return to the 93% success of 2018/19. Like previous "lockdowns" the January 2021 "lockdown" once again saw parents of this age group hesitate in taking up their child's nursery places. Anecdotally parents' anxieties of contracting the Covid virus, feel they are too young to be exposed to the current situation and some preferring to wait until their child starts school to reduce number of settings their child will go to. It is suggested a "School Readiness Parent Campaign" be delivered across the Summer months to improve confidences of parents.

3.3 Promotions for the 2-year funding offer directly with parents is embedded through Children Centre activities. It is hoped that now small group delivery has resumed, in April 2021 in line with the Government's roadmap, this will support the take up across Wirral. It is well reported where children who are eligible to take up the 2YOF and do so benefit from this early intervention on their school readiness journey and school transition.

Table below highlights current 2 year take up on Wirral.

Take up of Wirral's 2-year free funding offer 2020/21				
No. of children	Wirral	Wallasey	Birkenhead	S&W
2-year funding (overall)	914 / 1293 = 70.69%	288 / 405 = 71.11%	385 / 549 = 70.13%	241 / 339 = 71.09%

2YOF take-up: Wirral Actual 70.69%

Drop of 2.71% vs Autumn Term 2020 (Nat. Ave 69% - Jan 2020)

3&4 YOF Universal: Wirral Actual 98.39%

increase of 9.19% vs Autumn Term 2020(Nat. Ave 93% - Jan 2020)

3&4 YOF Extended: Wirral (estimate) 87.98%

3.4 The Wirral 3&4 YOF extended is showing that of the children who currently have a code, 87.98% of them took up some extended funding. To add, the figure for the number of children with a code is run live so there is not a figure from headcount, hence it is an estimate rather than actual. Early Years settings inform on a steady rise in the take up of the extended offer however not all additional 15 hours are maximised, and the suggested Parent Campaign would also seek to consult with parents to further understand their childcare arrangements. This would also support the continued development of Wirral's Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA) processes.

4.0 EYFE Funding Arrangements.

4.1 The usual process for calculating early years funding is based on the census in Spring 21 and Spring 22.

DfE have decided that in addition to the Spring 21 census there should be a summer census in May 21. The intention is that the spring 21 and summer 21 census will be averaged, and this will be used to calculate the 21/22 early years funding. The May census will not result in any changes for early years providers because Wirral have a summer headcount in May already.

Summer 21 headcount census will be issued 6th May 2021.

Summer 21 headcount date is Thursday 20th May 2021.

5.0. Early Years SEND Updates

5.1 As anticipated there has been a significant rise in the numbers of children that on return to their nursery/early years setting during recent Covid19 months have been identified as needing additional support. In the main this has been due to delayed or regressed communication/language development, social emotional and physical development delay.

Table below outlines the current activity within the Early Years SEND team.

EARLY YEARS SEND TEAM				
No. of children	Wirral	Wallasey	Birkenhead	S&W
Supported by Portage worker (*3.7FTE)	63	11	32	20
Awaiting allocation to Portage worker	52	N/A	N/A	N/A
Supported by SEND Officer	259	70	84	105

Inclusive Practice Funding	183	92	56	35
Disability Access Fund	29	N/A	N/A	N/A
Requesting EHC assessment	44	14	19	11

5.2 In addition there are currently 23 children confirmed in a school entry deferral for September 2021, of which 4 children have SEND.

5.3 Transition planning for September is underway with a new LA process being introduced this year, with an EY's SEND, Education and 0-19 Community Health Trust panel to review both the resource and financial needs for each child as they move settings.

5.4 The Inclusive Practice Fund has been fully spent this year, 2020/21 and reported an overspend of £812 which was anticipated given the increased demand. As highlighted earlier in the report the carry forward of 2020/21 Early Years budget underspends would take the pressure of the IPF budget for 21/22 and enable transition funding to be applied where required.

5.5 There had been an accumulative underspend on the Disability Access Fund (DAF) over recent years, totalling £176k. In March 2021, an application process was deployed for early years settings to access this underspend where an additional reasonable adjustment to environment, resources or staff knowledge was demonstrated to meet the needs of SEN/D children in attendance. As a result, 59 settings have been awarded funds to enhance sensory areas both indoors/outdoors, improved ground surfaces for access to outdoor play, sensory processing resources and inclusive changing/care stations. It is requested to continue to ring-fence the DAF underspend of £45.350 for further discretionary application processes in 21/22.

6.0. Workforce Development

6.1 EYFS reforms: A series of training sessions for all Early Years providers have taken place over the last two weeks entitled 'EYFS reforms 'An Overview'. The new Statutory Framework comes into effect from September 2021 and the training provided information and advice around the aims of the reforms, the changes which will impact on early years practice, supportive documentation, and key messages. Approximately 200 practitioners attended the training and feedback has been good with many reporting feeling more informed and ready to face the changes. There are further CPD sessions to address specific areas within the new framework which have been identified as areas of need: Curriculum / Curriculum planning / Effective Outdoor provision / Child Development / Assessment.

6.2 Wirral Invitation to Play (WITP): Since March 2020 when the government announced lockdown, the children on Wirral have been living in a very different way. Some children have not had access to outdoor spaces, play parks have been closed, schools and early years settings were operating at a limited capacity for key worker and vulnerable children only, playing outdoors had to take a back seat to staying safe. For many children their wellbeing, speech and language development and their physical development have consequently been affected. The WITP project has been created to provide opportunities to play, communicate and move when out and about on Wirral. The prompt boards will be instantly recognisable through the 'Play Pack' logo, containing a range of simple prompts to enhance the parent/child time, through communication and play.

Funding the project has been through collaborations with the Foundation Years Trust, Children Centre advisory boards and a small administration amount, £1.500, being sought through the central early years budget.

6.3 Digital Training Platform: After an unavoidable delay the new digital online training platform, being developed by the Early Years Quality Improvement and Training Team, will now go live in the summer term. This web page is for all early years setting years on the Wirral. This will act as a single point of access for keeping up to date with the latest information both local and national, download templates, access resources, use of the interactive training calendar to see what is on and book and access e-learning.

Settings will have an account and that will enable managers to view and plan CPD according to their requirements. Log in details will be emailed to all providers before the launch of the platform.

6.4 Wirral's Communication and Language Pathway: The launch of the Wirral Communication and Language pathway is underway. This has been developed in partnership with the Wirral 0-19 Team and NHS Foundation Trust. The pathway is for anyone who has an interest in or works with our youngest children and their families. It is guidance and information on how to support a child's speech and language development and identify any concerns in a timely manner whilst also guiding parents to understand how to support their child. The pathway details a child's journey from pre-birth, 0-1 years, 1-2 years, and 2-3 years.

Pathway booklets and associated parent leaflet. for those with a child 17-19 months, is being distributed to all settings/schools currently.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 To carry forward the underspend, in principle, of £245,050 for purposes as outlined in sections 2.2 and 3.1.

7.2 To continue to protect and ring-fence any underspend within the Disability Access Fund as a carry forward, as outlined in section 5.5.

7.3 Forum to note the report.

Simone White – Director of Children, Families and Education