

**WIRRAL COUNCIL  
SCHOOLS FORUM 29<sup>th</sup> June 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 7<sup>th</sup> June, inclusive of service updates.

**2.0 Early Years Funding rates.**

**2.1** Earlier this year the Early Years Working Group requested information and an analysis as to the level 'headroom' in the previous year's budget that had been generated and whether this could have been applied to provider rates.

**2.2** As background; the expenditure incurred is driven by both the provider rates, plus the level of activity (hours paid). It is difficult to accurately predict the level of financial resource available for provider rates at the beginning of each financial year as...

- The funding for Early Years is based on the January census across two calendar years e.g., for 2019-20, the grant allocation was based on 5/12 of the January 2019 census and 7/12 of the January 2020 census. However, activity is spread across all three terms thus there is an underlying assumption that January activity is representative of accumulation of all three terms.
- The take-up of the offer is still being established, particularly the extended 3-4-year-olds hours where take-up has been increasing.

Establishing some 'headroom' within the budget allows some capacity to fund these fluctuations in funding and financial commitment.

**2.3** The following table compares the level of grant income received with expenditure incurred. An assessment has then been made as to what the impact would be on current and future years if provider rates had been increased to 'use' the underspends.

Table below shows what the impact would be on current and future years if provider rates had been increased.

Financial Year	Base Rate (3/4 Yr Olds)	Actual	Alternative		The analysis
		Variance Over/ (Under) spend £	Base Rate (3/4 Yr Olds)	Variance Over/ (Under) spend £	
2017-18	£3.60	(520,399)	£3.75	(21,413)	
2018-19	£3.68	(369,970)	£3.78	12,487	
2019-20	£3.68	(315,150)	£3.78	71,672	
2020-21 (Planned)	£3.76	0	£3.78	78,003	

identifies that there has been some capacity in prior years to pass over more of the grant income to providers. However, in setting hourly rates careful consideration needs to be given to the expected take-up of the hours in current and future years to ensure affordability in the current year and sustainability going forward.

**2.5** The analysis also identifies that had an increase been made in the earlier years where % take up of funded places was lower and where the 30 hours extended offer had only just come online and the increase had been a year-on-year pass over, then the budget would have moved into a pressured position.

**2.6** The Early Years working group had questioned whether moving forward, any in year underspends could be applied to the following years base rate, however this is not in line with Operational Guidance as it could create a fluctuation of rates depending upon take-up and thus would not be a guaranteed income.

**2.7** To mitigate for this it is proposed for transparency of any potential underspends there is regular analysis with opportunity to identify and secure early any underspends, through the Schools Forum, to devolve out to the sector as “one offs” for the purpose of providing bespoke packages of interventions to meet the increased need of, specifically post Covid19 pandemic.

### **3.0. Take up of Universal 2, 3 + 4 early years free entitlements & 30 hours extended (EYFE).**

**3.1** The Local Authority is currently waiting for headcount submission to close for schools before we can finalise the actual take up figures, however it is felt that there will be a small increase and should continue to be above the national take up figures. The current rise in covid cases may have a detrimental effect on take up in the Autumn term, however there is planning underway to target and deliver outreach promotion to areas with the highest eligibility and lowest take up.

### **4.0 EYFE Funding Arrangements 2021/22**

**4.1** Wirral’s suggested school term dates for 21/22 do not coincide with early years funding weeks. Early years providers and schools are paid, 11 weeks in spring and 13 weeks in summer. The school term dates for 21/22 have 13 weeks in spring (1 weeks to cover the 5 teacher training days) and 12 weeks in summer. Early years providers and schools will need to determine their funding weeks to ensure children receive the correct entitlement of funding. Full guidance has been issued to early years providers and schools and frequently asked questions are being collated to send out in Autumn term. The business support manager is liaising with schools on future school year dates to discuss any further issues.

### **5.0. Project Plans for Potential Underspend of 2021/22.**

**5.1** The Quality Improvement & Training team are due to launch, 15<sup>th</sup> July 2021, **“Wirral’s Invitation to Play”** project. A community project to enhance parent /child attachment and promote communication and language (along with other areas of development). The first phase is in the Wallasey locality (Central Park) and will be a targeted intervention. In addition to funds being identified through the early years underspend, it has been funded by Children Centre Advisory Boards and Foundation Years Trust. The project consists of boards with activity prompts and information, positioned in areas, such as towns, parks, beaches to enhance children and family’s experiences.

**5.2** A key focus of the early years underspend, should it be retained, will be on a programme of **“Recruitment and Retention”** for the early years workforce. What we know Nationally and Locally is, settings are struggling to fill vacancies due to shortage of interest and high numbers leaving the sector citing, **low pay, long hours, lack of progression and too many demands**, as a reason for career changes. This seems to be from managers through to newly qualified practitioners. Subsequently, the Early Years working group is keen to develop a long-term **Workforce Development Strategy** to “grow Wirral’s own”, that will ideally realise growth and sustainability for the sector.

## **6.0. Early Years SEND Updates**

**6.1** There continues to be an increasing pressure on the early years SEND team as the volume of requests for both funding, resources and support is relentless. The 3.5 FTE officers are currently supporting 300+ children in settings, inclusive of 172 children on transitions to schools, this has been their focus of work at present.

**6.2** The May panel of Inclusive Practice Fund allocations was needed to be split across 3 dates with around 78 children presenting for that panel date, which is significantly higher than this time in previous years. There are currently 258 children in receipt of IPF, of which around a third will be moving into school in September, which is already pressuring the 21/22 budget. Should the rate of referrals continue as now, there will be a greater overspend on this fund in 21/22 as was in 20/21.

## **7.0 Service Updates;**

**7.1** Wirral’s Early Years Quality Improvement & Training team have now launched the Early Years On-line Platform **‘wirralequality.co.uk’** A one stop webpage for all information related to Wirral Early Years providers (local / national updates, CPD opportunities – e-learning and training sessions, downloadable resources etc). By the end of the second week of launching there were 100 registrations and 50 practitioners booked onto the first information sharing cluster. This new digital world of reaching out has proved invaluable throughout the Covid19 pandemic and no doubt will do beyond.

**7.2** There is a new training programme set out on the Digital platform – targeting those areas of CPD most current to increase practitioners knowledge and skills. Recently this has included sessions focused on the new EYFS 2021 (200+ attendees), Curriculum, Assessment, Child Development, Outdoor Learning. Wellcomm training is every month with high numbers of attendees. The key focus of this term has been on transitions, working with settings and providing advice and resources to enhance the transition process to support children and families.

**7.3** The Department for Education (DfE) Professional Development Programme Fund (PDPF) is now in phase 2 on Wirral. Tutor champions are in the process of training early years practitioners and completing their **Communication Friendly** setting accreditation. The mentor champions will start to deliver their training to enable all early years practitioners to become accredited communication friendly settings. Whilst face to face training has been halted to the COVID pandemic, virtual training is being delivered and is going well. Practitioners can put their learning into practice and have shared the impact this is having both on children in their setting, their practice, and the practice of their colleagues as they share hints and tips. Any remaining budget for the programme will be spent on increasing the number of early years practitioners receiving the training and the number of accredited settings with communication friendly status.

## **8.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **8.3 Forum to note the report.**

**Simone White – Director of Children, Families and Education**