

## **WIRRAL COUNCIL**

**SCHOOLS FORUM 6<sup>th</sup> October 2023**

### **REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION SERVICES**

#### **EARLY YEARS WORKING GROUP UPDATE**

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##### **1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**1.1** The purpose of this report is to update Wirral's School Forum of discussions at the recent subgroup, Early Years working group, dated 14<sup>th</sup> September 2023, inclusive of service updates.

##### **2.0 Working group discussions.**

**2.1** The National Day Nursery Association (NDNA) representative requested the Local Authority review the discretionary business rate relief policy to include the childcare sector. This is to support the increased financial pressures being experienced by the sector. It was agreed a meeting would be set up to discuss this with relevant Local Authority representatives.

**2.2** Budget discussions focused on Disability Access Fund (DAF) potential underspend. It was agreed terms and conditions would be reviewed with potential ideas for spend on an inclusion grant for providers to apply for, granting DAF for two-year-olds in receipt of Disability Living Allowance and support the cost of first aid training.

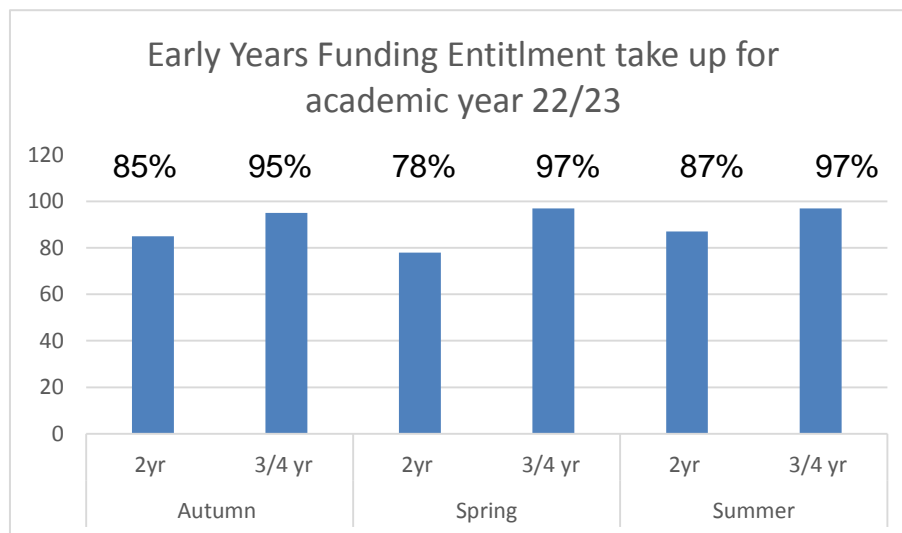
**2.3** Providers shared a recent issue of schools taking children the term they are three. This is causing difficulty for other settings who are unable to offer the same to parents. It was agreed the Local Authority would review this issue and determine a suitable approach that supports all providers.

**2.4** Providers discussed the potential impact of Department of Education changing guidance to enable children to take up funding when they turn the eligible age e.g. to start funding on their third birthday for three-year funding. The group discussed the positives and negatives but ultimately needed more information as to how this would work in practice.

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

**3.1** The take up of early years free funding entitlements remains slightly below pre-pandemic percentage's, which in the main were above 90%, however is steadily improving.

### 3.2



The graph above highlights take up across 3 and 4 year olds has been quite consistent with 2 year old take up dipping slightly in Spring term which is consistent with previous year's. There are a number of reasons for this probably the Christmas lead up and short term.

**3.3** A project group has been set up to implement the government's expansion to early years entitlement funding. The project group has four workstreams, data and intelligence, communication with sector, digital upgrades and marketing. There will be a further workstream for wrap around provision in schools starting this term.

**3.4** In the last academic year 84 Disability Access Fund (DAF) payments were made for children with 294 children supported through Inclusive Practice Fund (IPF) renamed as Special Educational Needs Inclusion Fund (SENIF). Both DAF and SENIF have increased the number of children supported from the previous year.

**3.5** Over the past academic year we have seen an increase in Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP), from 573 children in autumn term to 819 children in summer term. The system enables all eligible children to receive EYPP however there is no population figure to determine if all eligible children do receive it.

**3.6** In the last academic year there has been 5 funding panels for providers who have received an inadequate or requires improvement judgement. Each decision is made individually and based on the judgement, sufficiency of provision in the surrounding area and continuity of care for children.

## 4.0 Childcare Sufficiency

### 4.1 Childcare Provider Statistics

	Mar-22	Jun-22	Sept 23
Academies	3	3	3
Childminders	152	147	141
Day Nurseries	66	65	62
Extended Care	32	30	28
Independent Schools	3	3	3
Maintained Nursery Schools	3	3	3
Pre-Schools	30	30	29
Schools	55	55	57
Special Schools	2	2	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>346</b>	<b>338</b>	<b>328</b>

4.2 There appears to be sufficient places available across the Borough, although not necessarily to meet requests of parents for specific days/sessions in the settings of their choice straight away. However, we continue to struggle to find childcare provision for children with SEND especially if they attend special school. With the government expectation that all schools offer wrap around provision by Sept 2026, the operational manager is attending a briefing on 28<sup>th</sup> September 2023 to find out how schools will be supported to meet this offer.

4.3 Since the January 23 we have had 17 childminders close with 9 opening. Which is consistent with previous years. No group based settings have closed or opened in this time period.

4.4 As part of the extension to early years entitlement funding a survey is currently underway to understand demand for the two-year funding for working parents for April 24. Feedback of this survey and sufficiency work for two-year places will be included in a future report.

## 5.0 Workforce Development Working Group

5.1 The Local Authority is in the process of commissioning a service to support recruitment and retention across the early years and childcare workforce. Service specification has been focused on supporting the relationship between training providers and early years provision to enable students to complete workplace training, giving valuable experience in the workplace.

5.2 The Operational Manager for Early Years is also linking into the Liverpool City Region (LCR) to discuss recruitment and retention across early years. In August a round table meeting was organised between LCR and the Department for Education

(DfE) to discuss recruitment and retention. This included separate meeting with early years providers and training providers. Wirral sent representatives to all meetings to discuss solutions and ways forward. Further discussions will be taking place.

## **6.0 Early Years Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND)**

**6.1** The Special Educational Needs Inclusion Fund (SENIF) previously Inclusive Practice Fund (IPF) guidance has been reviewed through a stakeholder task and finish group. The task and finish group included representatives from the sector, SENIF panel members and local authority representatives. The new guidance and application forms were launched through July, August and September.

**6.2** The main changes included a change of name to SENIF to support common language and aid understanding. One form that covered application, any changes and impact review to reduce number of forms to compete and have a 'tell it once' approach. Greater eligibility based on need rather than age, funding is now available for 2,3- and 4-year-olds. Greater flexibility in how the SENIF can be used, so is now available for training costs and resources as well as enhancing the staff ratio.

**6.3** SENIF is now banded so that providers can apply for a "settling inclusion payment" to support new children who need support over and above what is usually offered during the settling period. Band 3A supports children to have Enhanced Ratio during specific interventions and 3B supports children to have Enhanced Ratio for the majority of their time in the setting and support gathering evidence.

**6.4** The SENIF panel will now meet monthly to provide more opportunities for providers to apply. Payments will also now be in line with audit processes, paying providers the term after they have applied. A transition process has been set up to support children to move from the old process to the new one. Feedback from the sector so far has been very positive.

**6.5** Due to the increased identification of children with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) with early years, the Portage team and SEND officers have struggled to meet the rise in demand. Both teams have been identifying interim measures to support capacity. This will inform and support a comprehensive review of the Portage Service and collaboratively devise a service delivery framework with parents and carers that effectively caters to the requirements of children with SEND and their families.

## **7.0 Quality, Training and Practice Improvement**

**7.1** A high majority of providers (97.16%) are judged to be good or above. In the last 6 months we have had 1 childminder judged to be inadequate and 1 childminder

judged to be requires improvement. Both childminders are receiving support from a quality improvement officer to develop their practice to a good or above standard.

**7.2** The Effective Practice Quality Mark (EPQM) has 91 providers signed up to complete this equates to 345 practitioners completing training. This is also generating income for the Local Authority. There is specific training for childminders and setting based provision, focused on the needs of providers. The training platform has 917 practitioners signed up to access online training.

**7.3** Providers have been accessing the expert and mentor programme and we have consistently had on average three providers gaining support. With 13 in total accessing the programme. 17 providers have engaged in the Professional Development Programme (speech and language training) which is lower than year down to the changes within the programme. Other Liverpool City Region's are struggling to recruit to the programme and have seen much lower numbers participate.

## **8.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

**8.1 School Forum to note the report.**

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