

**WIRRAL COUNCIL
SCHOOLS FORUM 19th March 2024
REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND
EDUCATION SERVICES
EARLY YEARS WORKING GROUP UPDATE**

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 1st March 2024, including service updates.

2.0 Financial Incentive Scheme

2.1 The Department for Education (DfE) selected 22 local authorities to take part in a randomised control trial for an early year's financial incentive scheme. The scheme will be delivered from 1st April 2024 till 31st March 2025. The scheme will enable newly appointed early years practitioners receive £1000 tax free.

2.2 The local authorities randomly selected for the treatment group, who would receive the funding to deliver the scheme and the control group who would not receive any funding.

2.3 Wirral has been selected for the treatment group, receiving a budget around £210,000. The grant has been calculated to include the payment to the practitioner, national insurance and tax contributions and funding for the local authority to deliver the scheme. This equates to about 135 candidates receiving the payment.

2.4 Wirral had to determine how to target the scheme. Feedback from the sector supported the following groups to target:

- Experienced level 3 staff who have left the sector.
- Staff with experience of working with children with SEND.
- Staff willing to work over 30 hours a week all year round.

2.5 From the sufficiency data supplied by the DfE the following areas below will be targeted. Within these wards there are 26 childminders who could recruit assistants, 13 day nurseries, 2 pre-schools, and 2 maintained nursery schools that will be targeted to support recruitment of staff.

- Seacombe ward
- Leasowe and Moreton East ward
- New Brighton ward
- Birkenhead and Tranmere ward
- Rock Ferry
- Bidston and St James ward.

2.6 A delivery has now been approved by the DfE that details how providers will be engaged and how evidence will be collated to show impact of the scheme.

3.0 Working Families Entitlement Expansion update

- 3.1** From September 25 all eligible working families with a child/ren aged 9-months + can receive up to 30 hours childcare provision. This will be a phased approach with eligible families with a two-year-old receiving 15 hours from April 2024 and eligible families with a child aged 9months + receiving 15 hours from September 2024. Both age groups will receive 15 hours from September 2025.
- 3.2** A project board has been set up with four key workstreams;
- Data and Intelligence: To determine supply and demand mapping.
 - Communications with sector: To share key updates with sector.
 - Digital transformation: To work on digital updates with Capita and Liquid Logic.
 - Marketing: To promote the offer to parents.
- 3.3** The Department for Education (DfE) recently informed Wirral that for two-year-old working families entitlement 1061 codes have been issued with 911 of those codes validated (86%) which is currently the highest validation rate across England. This also means that 86% of eligible families have a place for their child. Support from the business team to find places is being promoted across Wirral for any families experiencing any difficulties.
- 3.4** Sufficiency highlights that Wirral may have some deficit for the 30-hour places in particular areas. However, this is based on registered places and anecdotally we know providers are capping places due to recruitment and retention issues. Lots of work is being done to support this issue.
- 3.5** A readiness assessment is currently being completed that is submitted to the DfE to share progress on the implementation of the expansion. Currently Wirral is on track to implement the expansion.
- 3.6** The programme has also received capital funding to support sufficiency of places. The budget is £482,978.40, work is currently being completed to understand where supply will not meet demand. There will then be a process for providers and school to apply for funding to increase places within their existing provision.

4.0 Wrap around provision update

- 4.1** From September 2026 the government expects that every school will have an offer of wrap around childcare provision between 8am and 6pm term time only, either delivered by the school or an alternative provider. The Department for Education (DfE) have provided capacity funding for local authorities to deliver this plan and programme funding to support the creation and expansion of provision.
- 4.2** A project board has been set up with key stakeholders, from schools, Holiday and Activity Fund (HAF) co-ordinator and relevant council

services. The capacity funding has been used to appoint a project officer who has been recruited and should be starting mid-March.

- 4.3 Supply and demand information has been gathered and is currently being analysed to determine where provision is needed to be expanded or developed. A readiness assessment has been completed and is currently showing Wirral to be on track to implement this programme.
- 4.4 The wrap around project also has programme funding this is tapered to enable the provision to be self-sustaining by the end of the project. The total programme budget is £1,616,268.25, this is split over the two-year programme. In financial year 24/25 Wirral will receive £1,090,347.18 and £508,916.50 in 25/26.
- 4.5 Capital funding budget is £120,744.60. Following the development of the delivery plan a capital spend plan will be developed to support provision to develop the new offer.

5.0 Operation Encompass update

- 5.1 Operation Encompass is a partnership programme with the Police. The Police currently notify any school that a child attends that has experienced parental conflict outside of school hours.
- 5.2 From April onwards Early Years Providers will receive the same notification from the early years team. A majority (79%) of providers have signed the information sharing agreement and will complete training this month. The 50 providers that have not yet agreed will be encouraged to sign up so children can be supported.
- 5.3 Early years providers will be notified by the Wirral Council staff as many providers do not have secure email addresses. Alongside the Operation Encompass training, further 'Do you feel what I feel' training has been delivered to support the children experiencing parental conflict.

6.0 Working group discussions.

- 6.1 The group reviewed the budget allocations for all entitlements including the new working family's entitlements. The funding rates were also shared as the following:
 - Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP): £0.68 per hour
 - Disability Access Fund (DAF): £910.00 per year
 - Under two's working families: £10.32 per hour
 - Two-year-olds disadvantaged: £7.76 per hour
 - Two-year-olds working families: £7.72 per hour
 - Three-and-four-year-olds Universal: £4.77 per hour
 - Three-and-four-year-olds Extended: £4.77 per hour

The group requested justification on the different rates for two-year-olds. The enhanced rate for disadvantaged two-year-olds is to ensure that places remain available particularly when the working family's entitlement increases to 30 hours. The group felt providers felt positive about the rates.

6.2 The Disability Access Fund (DAF) is forecast to have an underspend by year end and the group felt that any underspend at year end should be applied to the Special Educational Needs Inclusion Fund (SENIF) budget.

6.3 The financial incentives project was shared and there was a feeling that whilst this was beneficial it has the potential to frustrate the current workforce who wouldn't be receiving the incentive.

6.4 There are currently 3 school forum representative vacancies, expressions of interest have been invited unfortunately no submissions have been received. Two of the current post holders are willing to continue for another term of office. The group identified a number of options to garner some expressions of interest.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 School Forum to note the report.

Simone White – Director of Children, Families and Education