

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
SCHOOLS FORUM
HELD ON 21 SEPTEMBER 2016 FROM 9.35 AM TO 11.00 AM**

Schools Representatives

Ali Brown	Primary Head - Nine Mile Ride Primary
Brian Prebble	Primary Head - Rivermead Primary
Elaine Stewart	Primary Head - Aldryngton Primary
Sylvia Allen	School Business Manager - Hawkedon Primary
Julia Mead	School Business Manager - St Sebastian's CE Primary
Carol Simpson	School Business Manager - Colleton Primary
Liz Meek	Special School Head - Addington School
Derren Gray	Academy Headteacher - The Piggott School
Kerrie Clifford	Maintained Nursery Acting Headteacher
John Bayes	Governor - Foundry College - Chairman

Non School Representatives

Anne Andrews	Oxford Diocese
Richard Dolinski	Wokingham Borough Council Representative
Gail Prewett	Poperinghe Pre-School
Mary Parker	St Pauls Playgroup

Also Present

Yoke O'Brien, Schools Finance Manager
Luciane Bowker, Senior Democratic Services Officer
Alan Stubbersfield, Interim Head of Learning and Achievement
Alison Pugh, Early Years Team Manager
Stuart Milne, Early Years Funding Adviser

1 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

Paul Miller was appointed Chairman of the Schools Forum for the 2016/2017 academic year in his absence.

2 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

John Bayes was appointed Vice-Chairman for the 2016/2017 academic year.

In the absence of the Chairman the Vice-Chairman took the chair.

3 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Linda Orr, Mary Davies, Helen Ball, Paul Miller, James Taylor, Janet Perry, Ginny Rhodes, Ian Head, Maggie Seagrove and John Ogden.

4 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest submitted.

5 WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL'S PROPOSED RESPONSE TO THE EARLY YEARS FUNDING CONSULTATION

Alan Stubbersfield, Interim Head of Learning and Achievement presented the report which contained Wokingham Borough Council's proposed response to the Early Years

Government consultation on funding. Alan went through the report highlighting the following points:

- Most questions in the consultation required 'yes' or 'no' answers, however Alan felt that some issues were too complex for a simple 'yes' or 'no' answer;
- The way that Early Years was funded was changing and the Government was seeking responses to the consultation by 22 September 2016;
- More clarity was needed as to how the future free entitlement to 30 hours for working families was going to be administered. The provision for Early Years would have to expand to meet demand. There would be changes to the local funding formulae; each local authority would have to distribute the funding to their providers. Alan predicted financial pressures in the system as a whole;
- Alan stated that it was not yet known how the new Early Years funding would impact Wokingham, therefore he advised caution;
- Alan pointed out that the Government consultation proposed to limit the size of supplements to 10% as well as limiting the type of supplement that could be used. The current supplements made up 18% of the total amount providers received so this was a significant reduction;
- Alan stated that it was important to incentivise providers to expand to meet the predicted demand of free 30 hours for working families. However, Wokingham was a high cost area and there may be a cost issue for providers considering increasing places;
- Alan reminded Members that Wokingham was historically low funded and urged caution with regards to expectations of increased funding. It was difficult to know what every Early Years providers would actually receive;
- Alison Pugh, Early Years Team Manager explained that a briefing with providers regarding this consultation and its proposals had already taken place.

Alan went through Appendix 1 which was a summary of the Early Years consultations and the challenges faced by Wokingham. The main points of discussion are listed below:

- Alan stated that in the past, when a universal base rate was first introduced, it had initially been thought to be advantageous for Wokingham; however this had proved not to be the case in practice;
- Wokingham had only one maintained nursery school;
- The numbers of new eligible families in September 2017 were not yet known;
- The Disability Living Allowance (DLA) did not equal Special Educational Needs (SEN); a child could have a low cost high incidence special educational need which required support but did not attract DLA;
- WBC did not currently passport monies from its High Needs Block (HNB) to 3 and 4 year olds unless the setting requested the money via the moderation panel.

Alan suggested the Forum analysed appendix 2 in detail, this contained the draft response to the consultation. The Forum went through each question, with some question being discussed in more details as listed below:

Question 9 – Should there be an early years national funding formula (to distribute money from Government to each local authority)?

- It was proposed to say 'yes' as it was understood that there would be a national formula in any case scenario.

Question 10 – Should a universal base rate be included in the early years national funding formula?

- Officers explained that this was a question of balance, a base rate would give predictability and supplements would give some flexibility;
- Alison was of the opinion that Wokingham would benefit from a high base rate due to the fact that deprivation in the Borough was very low;
- The figures in Wokingham were based on KS1 and KS2 eligibility to free school meals; however at this point the figures were illustrative;
- There would be less flexibility with the proposal to reduce supplements from 18% to 10%;
- Yoke O'Brien, Schools Finance Manager was of the opinion that an early years national funding formula was not necessarily going to benefit Wokingham. There was no indication that Wokingham would receive more money with an early years national funding formula as the proposed national deprivation rate was 8% whilst Wokingham only attracted 5.4% for deprivation also, it was not known how many three and four year olds would be entitled to the 1.5% EAL or qualify for the 1%DLA;
- John Bayes pointed out that the deprivation fund worked against Wokingham because Wokingham had the lowest take up of free school meals in the country;
- Councillor Dolinski asked that a robust explanation be included with this answer if possible;
- There was uncertainty around this question, but it was agreed to keep to the proposed answer of 'yes'.

Question 11 – Should an additional needs factor be included in the early years national funding formula?

- The proposed answer was 'yes' due to costs to support children with additional needs being higher per funded hour than for children without additional needs.

Question 18 – Do you think that 95% is the correct minimum proportion of the money that should be passed from local authorities to providers?

- It was agreed to keep to the proposed answer 'yes';
- In response to a question Stuart Milne, Early Years Funding Adviser stated that if the full amount was paid, as a rough calculation this equated to £450K maximum. The £450K stated was based on an illustrative figure provided by the Government and referred to the top slice of 5%;
- Alan pointed out that there would be funding top slicing next year and decisions would have to be made in relation to funding.

Question 20 – Should local authorities be required to give the same universal hourly base rate to all childcare providers in their area?

- Carol Simpson pointed out that some settings employed a qualified teacher which incurred in a significantly higher cost;
- Stuart asked Members to bear in mind the potential reduced flexibility with supplements;
- Stuart stated that the Government's cost review indicated there were no significant differences in costs between schools and nurseries, however costs related to schools and nurseries were different, for example teacher costs were high but rent/ premises costs were far lower;
- Officers reminded Members that there was a requirement to offer 30 hours of childcare for working parents so providers had to be encouraged to expand;

- Kerry Clifford stated that it would be unjust to pay the same amount to all providers due to the fact that some settings employed a teacher and others did not;
- Yoke stated that at the moment there were six different supplements, but going forward there would be only one compulsory supplement of deprivation;
- After much discussion it was agreed to change the proposed answer to 'no' with a strong explanatory comment.

Question 25 – if you agree that efficiency (efficient business practices that provide excellent value for money) should be included in the set of supplements, do you have a suggestion of how should be designed.

- There was no overall consensus as to whether this should be 'yes' or 'no'
- John Bayes suggested that inefficient providers perhaps should be given more funding in order to help them to improve;
- It was agreed to keep to the proposed answer of 'do not agree' with a comment attached to it.

Question 26 – if you agree the delivery of the additional 15 hours of free childcare should be included in the set of supplements, do you have a suggestion of how should it be designed.

- Members were informed that providers often sold more than 15 hours a week at a higher rate, it was necessary to find a way to compensate them in some way;
- Stuart stated that the market rate for wrap around care cost more than what was currently paid for 15 hours;
- Stuart suggested that if providers were able to offer 30 hours a week they should be paid more per hour as a way of compensation;
- Yoke stated that financial advice had always been not to stretch the offer as it led to confusion and loss of funding as data collection was not robust and reliable when the termly census was collected for stretch offers, which in turn affected the funding for three and four year olds;
- Kerry questioned the sufficiency of places and stated that providers would have to be encouraged to provide the 30 hours the Government had asked for;
- Stuart stated that it was not yet known how the 30 hours would be delivered, these could for example extend to all year care;
- Alan stated that further discussions on this issue would be necessary to decide the best way forward.

Question 29 – Should there be a Disability Access Fund to support disabled children to access their free entitlement?

- The proposed answer of 'yes' was agreed as this would possibly take the pressure off of the inclusion fund.

Question 33 – What extent do you agree that a lack of clarity on how parents / childcare providers can access financial support results in children with special educational needs not receiving appropriate support?

- All Members representing the Early Years Forum were in agreement that this was not an issue in Wokingham at the moment.

Question 39 – To what extent do you agree with the transition approach proposed for the Early Years National Funding Formula (money distributed from Government to local authorities)?

- Members agreed with the proposed answer, with a view to receive any potential increased funding as soon as possible.

Question 41 – To what extent do you agree that our proposals on the high pass-through of funding from local authorities to childcare providers makes the existing Minimum Funding Guarantee for the early years unnecessary?

- Alan pointed out that Wokingham only had one maintained nursery and this protection only affected maintained nurseries;
- The proposed answer to ‘agree’ was accepted by the Forum.

Question 42 – To what extent do you agree with the transition approach proposed for introducing the universal base rate for all providers in a local authority area?

- Forum decided to change the proposed answer to ‘no’ as it wished to protect nursery schools.

The Forum asked that Officers include explanations and comments to all answers as much as possible. Alison and Stuart would meet and go through the changes resulting from this meeting and the response would be submitted on 22 September 2016.

John Bayes reminded Members that they could also submit responses individually.

John Bayes wished to thank Donna Munday for her contribution to Schools Forum over the years. Donna had now moved into a new role and Yoke O’Brien was the new Schools Finance Manager.

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