

Wokingham Borough Council

Schools Forum: July 2018

Overview of the Early Years and Childcare Service: role and responsibilities

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Background

September 2014 saw a revision to the Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities in England, in respect of how they engage with and support, Early Years provision. Signalling a move away from the 'universal' approach taken in recent years, a more targeted way of working was required – one that, in essence, removed the expectation of support for settings which were deemed to be 'Good' or 'Outstanding'¹. Instead, an explicit expectation that resources would be focussed only on those who were not yet 'Good' was stipulated². The requirement to ensure sufficiency of childcare for working parents was reinforced, as too was the requirement to provide information, advice and training to providers – albeit, again, with a focus on this being targeted to statutory need and/or at those providers that are not yet 'Good'.

The above changes were strengthened in the March 2017 iteration of the Statutory Guidance³, and included references to the need to provide sufficient and appropriate funded places for parents of eligible 2, 3 and 4 year olds, including funded 30hour places for eligible parents. Thus, the landscape of early years is markedly different now compared to pre-2014, resulting in an imperative to adjust and modify working practices that enable Wokingham Borough Council to meet its statutory obligations and expectations - within the budget afforded - whilst remaining an efficient support mechanism for setting and parents alike.

Evidently therefore, there has been a distinct shift away from LA Early Years services providing a universal, open-access support, to all settings. Instead, it is now required to focus its attention on those settings in greatest need and to be much more of an '**enabler**' to settings; creating an ethos that settings must be more self-sufficient and self-supporting, rather than fuelling a culture of dependency upon the Local Authority for all training, support and/or advice.

Staffing and Funding

The current Early Years team consists of four full-time Advisor posts, led by a full time Team Leader. The team's Leader post is currently vacant, with interim management cover in place. All posts within the team are funded by the central Early Years aspect of the DSG monies allocated to Wokingham Borough Council from central Government. Under the Early Years National Funding Formula, introduced in 2017, Wokingham Borough Council is permitted to retain up to 5% of the total early years amount allocated, to be used for centrally retained provision. Currently WBC retains 4%, in order to pay for the central Early Years & Childcare service and the support services within the Council in connection with meeting its statutory obligations e.g. services from Data & Performance, SEND, Admin, Finance, HR, Legal, etc.

Current context

Centrally, the WBC Early Years Team (supported by other central service referred to above, as appropriate) fulfils the following statutory duties under S.5,7&9 of the Childcare Act (2006):

- To secure sufficient childcare places, so far as is reasonably practicable, for working parents or parents who are studying or training for employment, for children aged 0-14 (or up to 18 for disabled children)
- To take into account what is 'reasonably practicable' when assessing what sufficient childcare means in their area
- To effectively administer processes for the 2,3 and 4 year old funded entitlements in line with published guidance and spend criteria

¹ As deemed by the Office for Standards in Education (OfSTED)

² Either by Ofsted inspection outcomes, or in the absence of a first inspection grading

³ Dfe (2017) Early education and childcare: Statutory guidance for local authorities

- The quality of the local childcare market, including the demand for specific types of providers in a particular locality and the amount and type of supply that currently exists
- The quality of the labour market
- To support schools in their area to offer out-of-hours childcare from 8.00am and 6.00pm
- To support providers to expand their provision and new providers to enter the local childcare market
- To report annually to elected council members on how they are meeting their duty to secure sufficient childcare, and make this report available and accessible to parents

They do this by:

- Working with existing and proposed childcare providers to secure sufficient childcare based on local evidenced needs of families
- Providing support to settings⁴ that achieve a RI or Inadequate Ofsted grading, or those not yet registered/inspected, with a view to improving quality. This is offered face-to-face, both in-setting (where appropriate) and through group forums (e.g. Childminder forum, Lead Safeguarding Practitioner Forum, SEND forum, Out of School Cub forum)
- Offering training for settings within the statutory areas of the EYFS, SEND or Safeguarding, or where there is an evidenced need within children’s learning and development outcomes locally
- Leading the overview, management and administration of the funding processes for 2, 3 and 4 year old funding, including the extended 30-hour entitlement
- Management of the moderation process for EYFSP data
- Supporting out of school / breakfast and holiday clubs
- Monitoring, reviewing and taking corrective action in respect of children’s learning and development outcomes – particularly of those children who face additional vulnerabilities (e.g. pupil premium, 2 year olds, those living in disadvantage, SEND)
- Providing Information, Advice and Support to families seeking childcare
- Leading on a strategy to ensure school readiness across the Borough

Wokingham Borough Council Early Years Service currently delivers an enhanced offer over and above its Statutory duties. The revised statutory guidance specifically states that LA Early Years’ services should focus their attention upon newly registering settings and those who are not graded ‘Good or Outstanding’:

“....for the following providers: those registered on the Ofsted Early Years Register who are judged less than ‘good’ in their most recent inspection report; newly registered providers on the Ofsted Early Years Register who have not yet had an inspection report published; those on Part A (the compulsory part) of the Ofsted General Childcare register who are assessed by Ofsted as not having met the requirements of registration or the requirements relating to their activities” Pg.32

However, in order to prevent a likely decline in quality if WBC support only those settings who attain a ‘Requires Improvement or ‘Inadequate’ grading, a termly risk assessing process has been implemented (commenced Jan 2018), which assesses each setting against a set of criteria (see Appendix A) that includes indicators of risk for judgements of quality.

The risk assessing process categorises settings accordingly to their likeliness of achieving an Ofsted grading less than Good, and a standardised package of support (see Appendix B) is offered based on this risk assessing outcome. WBC also facilitates termly group-based forums specifically for Childminders, Lead Safeguarding Practitioners, SENCOs and Out of School Clubs. A Managers Forum has also recently been re-established.

⁴ Childminders, Settings, Pre-schools, Nursery Schools and Nursery/Reception classes in Primary or Infant schools

The statutory guidance further states that training provided should be limited to that which has a documented need (statutory EYFS; SEND / Safeguarding):

“Secure information, advice and training for providers in their area on the following matters: meeting the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage; meeting the needs of children with special educational needs and disabilities, vulnerable and disadvantaged children; and effective safeguarding and child protection.” Pg.32

WBC Early Years Service therefore offer a revised training programme which included these core aspects, but additionally includes practice-based topics, where there is an evidenced need.

Wokingham delivers its duties, with >95% of settings graded Good or better. Furthermore, Wokingham children achieve higher than their national counterparts by the end of the Foundation Stage. Parental satisfaction is very good, and the percentage of eligible children accessing their free early education entitlements is well above the national averages at every stage. Children/families who are eligible for a funded place, have access to one. The take up of the 30-hour free entitlement has been good, and 85% of settings and 60% of childminders now offer this extended entitlement, which affords flexibility and choice to parents. Recent changes made within the Early Years and Childcare Service working practices mean that Wokingham Borough Council sustains, maintains and improves on these outcomes whilst only retaining 80% of the amount it is allowed to retain from the financial resource allocated to it. Thus, this allows a higher percentage of monies received to be passed through directly to early years providers in Wokingham.

Appendix A

RAG Rating Criteria

Three outcomes will be possible; Bronze, Silver or Gold. 'Bronze' represents a need for the setting to have the highest level of support. 'Gold' represents settings that will receive the lowest level of support. 'Silver' represents settings who may require additional support for a short space of time, for a specific issue, or with multiple 'low-level' concern indicators. The aim with Silver settings is that intervention is provided before there becomes a risk to a reduction in quality.

*Settings with an 'Inadequate' inspection outcome will automatically be considered 'Bronze'

**Settings with a 'Requires Improvement' inspection outcome will automatically be considered 'Silver'

If neither of the above apply, settings with at least one of the following indicators will be considered 'Silver'
Settings with 3 or more of the following indicators will automatically be considered 'Bronze'.

Due an Ofsted inspection with next 12 months
Manager been in post <6 months, is qualified at level 3 or below, or with < 2 years experience
Setting has been open less than 1 year
Setting has been taking 2 year olds for < 6 months
Setting is operating at <65% occupancy
Safeguarding Lead has not yet satisfactorily completed relevant training
SENCO has not yet satisfactorily completed relevant training
At least one LADO involvement with the setting in the past 12 months

Appendix B

Offer of support to settings, based on RAG rating outcome

Bronze	Silver	Gold
<p>Access to Practitioner Pages web portal</p> <p>Access to WBC Early Years training package at reduced rate</p> <p>Face-to-face review of Annual Compliance check audit – to support/inform the FIP</p> <p>Invited to attend termly cluster update meetings</p> <p>Monthly support meetings to review progress against a Focussed Improvement Plan</p> <p>Support to develop a robust 'Focussed Improvement Plan' (FIP) with SMART targets.</p> <p>Access to remote support (telephone / email) fortnightly if required</p>	<p>Access to Practitioner Pages web portal</p> <p>Access to WBC Early Years training package at reduced rate</p> <p>Telephone review of Annual Compliance check audit with setting</p> <p>Invited to attend termly cluster update meetings</p> <p>3 x 0.5 day visits per year, with written report giving clear actions and recommendations</p>	<p>Access to Practitioner Pages web portal</p> <p>Access to Statutory Element of WBC Early Years training package at reduced rate</p> <p>Provision of the Annual Compliance Check audit tool, for the setting to self-review</p> <p>Invited to attend termly cluster update meetings</p>

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