

Early Years Working Group – 12/02/2026

Virtual meeting via Microsoft Teams

10am to 11:30am

Attendees:		
Theresa Staunton (TS) Chair	PVI representative on Schools Forum	
Jeni Murphy (JM)	Early Years Strategic Lead	
Denise Bushay (DB)	Schools Places & Admissions Head of Service	
Leigh McGuinness (LM)	Park Hill Infant School and Tunstall Nursery School	X
Shelley Davies (SD)	Director of Education	X
Melanie Farris (MF)	Croydon Locality SEND Support Senco	
Maria Reeve (MR)	Head of Purley Nursery School	
Yetty Osonaike (YO)	Alpha Day Nursery	
Kim Berham (KB)	Head of Sparkles and Millie's Pre-schools	
Sophoya Davis (SD2)	Child Minder in Croydon	
Shamsa Akhtar (SA)	Nursery Managing Director at J and S Playhouse Nursery	X
Jenette Indarsingh (JI)	Head of Thornton Heath Nursery School	
Kate Lanning (KL)	Head of School, Tunstall Nursery School	
Mori Bates (MB)	Clerk	
Abioye Aimolowo (AA)	Finance Manager	
Yetsie Adeboye	Finance Officer	

Agenda Items

1	Apologies and welcome	TS
	Apologies received by SD	
2	Previous Minutes	TS
	2.1 Minutes were reviewed by the working group and agreed to be a true record.	
3	Sufficiency Update	JM
	3.1 JM provided the working group with various updates. From September, the government will require LAs to make monthly payments to providers that want payments these way. 3.2 Currently, the LA is looking at the options for next year, with input from the sector to see how they would like payments to be received. It was noted that this method may affect childminders receiving universal credit 3.3 The headcount is now open and work will be carried out on these, with an emphasis being put on the adjustment headcount. The adjustment headcount should be used for late starters, rather than forgotten children.	

	3.4 AA expressed a desire for the sector to go with either payment method or the other, rather than a mixture for ease on the finance team's part. JM added that due to the timing of this information being released, there will likely be a brief period of time where the payments are distributed on a monthly basis, especially if there are any new providers. As it will be a requirement from September, monthly payments must be offered.	
4	SENIF Funding Update	MF
	4.1 MF provided the working group with an update on the SENIF funding distribution methodology. JM and MF have worked closely on developing some strategies for the distribution, noting that it is important to look at how the LA can suppose the key players within the SEND and EY sector. 4.2 The proposal is to use notional funding of SEND within the Early Years sector, so that providers will know the exact amounts they are receiving, rather than using indicative figures. There is an aim for money to be received at the end of March of which allows providers to plan ahead and decide how the money will be utilised. Q1: KL: Will this amount be for the year or for the term? A1: JM: The amount is for the year and based on the number of children on roll up until the actual headcount that acts as a cut-off point. Q2: JI: Is this funding amount just for 3 and 4YOs or does it include 2YOs? A2: JM: The amount is for the year and based on the number of children on roll up until the actual headcount that acts as a cut-off point. 4.3 TS queried how the methodology might work with childminders. MF explained that it would be helpful to explore and investigate the impacts on various providers, adding that there will also be access to the Early Years SEND team if assistance is needed 4.4 ACTION: MB to circulate the SENIF papers to the working group members post-meeting. (Action Completed 12/02/26) 4.5 MF added a proposal to purchase a subscription for Little Link for all providers through an online portal which would allow for them to screen a child with a baseline assessment with a RAG system evaluation. 4.6 A personalised plan can be created for individuals who require Early Intervention to help to integrate SEND in areas. It would be possible to track and review targets through Little Link and this can go on for as long as it is needed within the proposed year of subscription. There will also be a resource toolbox to give providers what they may need, along with CPD booklets for staff that can be downloaded as many times as needed. For additional support, there is online help and support provided by Little Link with speech and language therapists. 4.7 The LA will also have access to a dashboard to see the engagement with Little Link and the resource areas. 4.8 MF aims to buy the tool and subscription for each setting where the subscription will start in April, with the possibility of offering a start up fund and then an engagement fund for providers. Once this amount has been removed from the budget, there would then be a pot for professional support. Q3: JI: Is it going to be mandatory for settings to use? A3: MF: It will be a blanket approach, but we can use the dashboard to see who is and who is not engaging with Little Link. There are also SEND advisors who will be able to do visits in order to help implement plans. When we reached out to Little Link, they explained that East Sussex had done the same thing for their Early Years sector. 4.9 MF added that they are due to meet with the Croydon Education Partnership board to see if there is funding potential from their Inclusion & Removing Barriers working group. The working group agreed to the proposal of utilising Little Link to be available for all providers, including childminders.	

5	Finance Paper	AA
	5.1 AA provided the working group with a paper on the 24/25 Early Years Block Outturn and 25/26 Forecast Position, drawing the members' attention to various sections and tables shown in the paper. 5.2 Table 1 showed a breakdown of how the initial allocation of just under £50.8m has been broken down by the DfE for each of the funding types for 24/25. 5.3 Table 3 showed the Early Years Block allocations over the years, starting with £50,767,848 in December '23, rising to £55,308,289 in July '25. 5.4 Members of the working group noted the recommendations of the paper.	
6	AOB	
	6.1 N/A	

Action Log:**Current Actions:**

1.	Finance paper update for 24/25 budget	Finance	Jan'25	Completed
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