

**MINUTES of the meeting of Early Years Development and
Childcare Partnership held at : Education and Conference
Centre, Blackfriars, Hereford. on Wednesday, 6th June,
2007 at 7.00 p.m.**

ATTENDANCE

Present:

Bella Barron	Independent Schools Sector
Cath Beeks	Association of Primary Head Teachers
Di Gibson	Home Start
Linda Goodson	Maintained Schools with Nursery Classes
Lynne Marsden	Herefordshire Childminding Association
Liv Moss	Voluntary Sector Providers
Councillor Sally Robertson	Herefordshire Council
Ben Straker	Travelling Families
Phil Vallely	Jobcentreplus

In attendance:

Lea Abbotts	Children and Young People's Directorate
Michele Allan	Green Croft Centre
Marj Bevan	Kington Children's Centre
Debbie Bourne	Hereford Travellers' Playscheme
Viv Daly	Green Croft Centre
Liz Davies	Children and Young People's Directorate
Heather Donaldson	Legal and Democratic Services
Alex Fitzpatrick	Children and Young People's Directorate
Ros Hatherill	Children and Young People's Directorate
Ann Heath	Children and Young People's Directorate
Emma Hughes	Children and Young People's Directorate
Councillor Jenny Hyde	Herefordshire Council
Rose Lloyd	Bridges Childcare
Alan McLaughlin	Legal and Democratic Services
Sharon Menghini	Children and Young People's Directorate
Kate Moss	Broadlands Bright Sparks
Alison Murphy	Children and Young People's Directorate
Sue Peasgood	Children and Young People's Directorate
Kathy Peers	Dollymixtures Pre-School
Lianne Piggott	Bridges Childcare
Amanda Preece	Fourways Day Nursery
Pam Stevenson	Jumpstart
Sue Smith	Green Croft Centre
Bryan Twitty	Children and Young People's Directorate
Alison Webb	Whitecross Day Nursery
Sarah Wilson	Elms School
Clare Williams	Children and Young People's Directorate
Donna Williams	Hunderton Neighbourhood Nursery
Philip Wood	Jumpstart

626. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Norris Boyland, Sarah Chedgzoy, Joyce Elliott, Andy Gosling, Janice Greenow, Tracey Kneale, Janet Murray, Ailsa Robbie, Frances Roberts, Rose Spitzmaul.

627. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Kathy Peers for Joyce Elliott; Cath Beeks for Tracey Kneale.

In addition, Councillor Sally Robertson introduced Councillor Julie Woodward to members, reporting that she would represent the Council at future Partnership meetings.

628. LATE ITEMS / ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Sue Peasgood reported that she had received two additional applications for Nursery Education Fund after the agenda had gone to print. The Partnership agreed to consider them with Agenda Item 8 (APPROVAL REQUEST FOR RECEIPT OF NURSERY EDUCATION FUND).

629. MINUTES

AGREED: that the minutes of the meeting held on 8th March, 2007, be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the following amendments:

- **Minute 614 (APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE):** Joyce Elliott's name be added to the list of those giving their apologies.
- **Minute 620 (MINUTES):** The paragraph headed "Minute 604 (MINUTES) be amended to read: "Sue Peasgood said that the documentation for the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework had been delivered, and the Framework would be launched shortly. It would be in place fully in 2008."

630. DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES

The Partnership welcomed Sharon Menghini, the newly appointed Director of Children and Young People's Services, to the meeting. She said she was excited about being in Herefordshire, and about the various tasks which she would complete over the coming months. A key element of her role would be to implement the Children's Trust by 2008. In the interim, she suggested that the Partnership considered ways to interface with the forerunner to the Trust: the Children and Young People's Partnership Board. She felt that communication and celebration of good practice were key elements of the Partnership's work, adding that she did not underestimate the difficulty of this due to the large number of partners and organisations involved. She said that she aimed to make the Partnership fit sensibly between existing meetings.

In response to a question, she said that the Children's Trust would work alongside the emerging Public Sector Trust (PST), although no decisions had been made

about how this would happen in practice, because both bodies were still evolving. The PST would involve the creation of one local authority comprising Herefordshire Council and the Herefordshire Primary Care Trust. It was envisaged that this would lead to better services, easier communication, and greater efficiencies and economies of scale. She said that the Children's Trust would be shaped by the needs of the public and professionals in Herefordshire.

631. FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS FOR CHILDCARE SETTINGS

George Salmon presented a report which compared funding (and other) arrangements for places for three and four year olds, in Local Authorities, and Private and Voluntary Settings. He highlighted the following essential differences:

Local Authority Settings	Private and Voluntary Settings
Funding allocated as part of the overall school budget on the basis of £2,517 per place for 190 days per year. Equivalent to £419 per child per term.	Funding allocated on the basis of £552 per child per term to a maximum of £1,656 per place for 190 days.
Receive funding per place provided, regardless of whether the places are filled or not.	Receive funding only for each place occupied.
Have no choice over the number of places on offer. Any changes have to be subject to statutory notice and public consultation.	Cannot exceed the number for which they are registered, but can choose how many places to offer beneath that limit.
Staffing levels in schools are set at a maximum rate of 26 children per 2 adults. 1 must be a fully qualified teacher; the other must have a minimum of Level 3. All staff have the same terms and conditions as teachers.	Staffing levels are set at 8 children per 1 adult. Qualifications can vary. No legal constraints on pay levels.

George Salmon said that the Council acknowledged these differences, and said that it was debatable which arrangement was the most favourable. He advised that any changes might risk detriment to one of the sectors, and he sought members' views on the matter. Members made the following points in discussion:

- In response to a question, George Salmon said that the school set-up was dictated by statute, and that schools could not refuse to provide a place if asked. This meant that schools could fill a place at any time during the year.
- Sue Peasgood explained that all LA nurseries were under continuous review to keep spending on places to a minimum, and that staff redundancies did happen in LA nurseries.

- One nursery provider felt that the arrangements discriminated against private and voluntary sector providers because of the bureaucracy surrounding place provision. She said that her establishment often had to make places available at short notice, and the current arrangement meant that this was a difficult process. She highlighted the apparent discrepancy in accountability, saying that private and voluntary providers were immediately accountable for every place, and LA providers were not. George Salmon explained that Nursery Education funding was public money, and as such, needed to be fully accounted for and subject to stringent audit processes. He acknowledged that there was sometimes pressure on private and voluntary sectors to adhere to the necessary measures. He added that Central Government dictated some of the processes.
- One issue which needed to be addressed was the misconception amongst parents that they could split their free provision between different nurseries. In general, LA nurseries could not allow for this practice.
- Members felt that there was merit in forming a working group to list all of the issues involved in funding arrangements, and their implications. It would then make proposals on how to address some of the perceived inequalities. The group would take account of additional factors, such as the falling numbers of children in the county.

AGREED: that a Nursery Education Fund Working Group be established, involving stakeholders, in consultation with Ros Hatherill and George Salmon, to review the funding arrangements for LA, private and voluntary sector childcare settings, and make recommendations to address any inequalities.

632. CHANGES TO THE NURSERY EDUCATION FUND AGREEMENT

Bryan Twitty presented a report on the proposed changes to the Nursery Education Fund (NEF) Provider Agreement for 2007/08. All providers of free nursery education funded places had to sign the agreement every year. In doing so, they were obliged to abide by the "Code of Practice on the Provision of Free Nursery Education Places for Three and Four Year Olds: February 2006". He highlighted the specific differences between the current agreement, and the proposed one. The proposed changes were necessary because of the implementation of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Sue Peasgood explained that one of the key changes brought about by Central Government, was that the LA was accountable for inadequate settings. Alison Murphy added that, although Quality Assurance had been part of the agreement since 2002, the new proposals meant that national Early Years standards would need to be raised. Settings were required to follow a continual quality assurance assessment, and to invest in a "Kite Mark" for children. The system was currently under review. She reported that 82 settings were currently working through quality assurance programmes, and that they were achieving a high number of "outstanding" and "Good" accolades.

AGREED: that the changes to, and clarification of the Nursery Education Funding Provider Agreement be endorsed.

633. LATE PAYMENTS

Ros Hatherill presented an oral report on the issue of late payments of Nursery Education Fund (NEF) to providers. Joyce Elliott of Gateway Nursery, who had highlighted the difficulties that late payments had sometimes caused, had raised the issue. Ros said that the issue had been reviewed, and that there was now no reason why NEF payments should be late. She added that previously, settings had received an interim payment of 50% of the funding, with the remaining 50 % being payable upon receipt of all paperwork and evidence that the children had been attending. The second payment usually followed 4 or 5 weeks after the initial payment. She reported that the funding arrangements would be changed for a trial period starting in September 2007, with 80% payable initially, and a further 20% payable on receipt of the paperwork. She said that some settings had requested all of the funding in one payment, because they had to operate a commercial basis. It was possible that these settings could make a final financial settlement with the LA in the final term of the year. However, administering the full funding at the start of the year would prove difficult to calculate accurately, because terms varied significantly in length. She reported that, starting in September 2007, nurseries would also receive their paperwork earlier, so there would be no reason why they could not obtain the funding earlier.

Ros Hatherill said that the "head count" date was also important in relation to the timing of funding. This was the date several weeks after term started, when settings were asked to verify how many children were actually attending out of those that had signed up at the start of term.

The Partnership felt that there was merit in referring the issue of late payments to the Nursery Education Fund Working Group, to form part of its review.

AGREED: that the Nursery Education Fund Working Group review the issue of late payments of Nursery Education Fund.

634. APPROVAL REQUEST FOR RECEIPT OF NURSERY EDUCATION FUND

Sue Peasgood sought the Partnership's approval for 3 new early years settings that had applied to be included in the Herefordshire Directory of Providers and to receive Nursery Education Fund from September 2007. The settings were:

- Down on the Farm, at Norton Brook Farm, Grafton, Hereford
- Holmer Pre-School, Holmer, Hereford
- Sparklers Nursery at Holmer, Hereford

All 3 providers had agreed to the conditions required of settings wishing to receive NEF.

AGREED: that the inclusion of Down on the Farm, Holmer Pre-School, and Sparklers Nursery in the Herefordshire Directory of Providers be approved, in order for them to receive Nursery Education Fund from September 2007.

635. CHILDREN'S CENTRES AND EXTENDED SCHOOLS

The Partnership received a presentation on progress made with children's centres and extended schools. The core offer for extended schools and children's centres was the provision of quality care, health services, access to information, training, advice, family support and parental outreach.

The various stages of development were outlined for areas of Herefordshire, including progress made with the Leominster Children's Centre, Green Croft, Bromyard, Kington, Ross-on-Wye and Hunderton. The latest stages of development involved the creation of more children's centres, and widening the extend schools programme to meet community needs and fill gaps in service provision. A key feature of extended schools in some locations, was to develop additional services alongside ones that already existed in a community. The aim was for all schools to offer some extended services by 2010.

AGREED: that the report be noted.

636. THE ROLE AND FUNCTION OF THE EYDCP

Members considered a draft constitution for the EYES Partnership, which had arisen following an extensive consultation on its role and function. Members also welcomed the Head of Legal and Democratic Services, Alan McLaughlin, to the meeting. He had revised the proposed draft before the meeting, and he circulated a copy with his suggested amendments, which reflected all the legal requirements that would be necessary, and provided further guidance on operational issues.

He highlighted the following points in his revisions, which he asked Members to consider:

- It was important to set out clearly the Partnership's aims and objectives so that Members and the public knew what to expect, and how things would be done;
- The Partnership could have a consultative role, whereby key partners were asked for regular feedback on Early Years and Extended Schools matters;
- The agenda should be time-limited;
- Reports must come back to the Partnership after they have been looked at by other bodies;
- Under "Decision Making", he had added an additional "Paragraph 22" which would allow members the flexibility to change the constitution;
- A working group might be a useful way of dealing with a particular single issue. The group should receive a report from the Partnership with proposed actions and recommendations – and the Group must compile a similar report when presenting its findings back to the Partnership.

The Director of Children's Services and Young People, Sharon Menghini, felt that the Partnership was still a very necessary forum, even though it was no longer statutory. She added that the EYES Partnership should feed into the Children and Young People's Partnership Board because it was the main

policy-and decision-making body. It also needed to report to the developing Children's Trust (although this structure was still evolving and not fully in place yet). This reporting procedure needed to be a standing item on every agenda. She expressed an opinion that the emerging Trust needed to be strategic, and charge the Partnership with specific tasks.

Klaus Wedell spoke about the need to increase communications with partners prior to, and after every meeting, and he cited noticeboards, websites, and newsletters as ways to achieve this.

AGREED: That Alan McLaughlin, the Head of Legal and Democratic Services, would make further revisions to the EYES Constitution, with a view to further consultation and finalising it at the next Partnership meeting.

637. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Bryan Twitty reported on a major consultation underway in relation to assessing the sufficiency of childcare within Herefordshire. The Council had been charged with this task as a statutory duty, and would need help to complete the consultation. He would need to assess supply, demand, and any gap in the market, and wanted to enlist the help of parents and providers with the task. To this end, he had circulated a questionnaire, and asked providers to issue them to a random selection of parents.

Joyce Elliott had forwarded a query about register marking, and had stressed the importance of filling in the start and finish times so that those settings offering 2 hours (as opposed to 2) could be identified.

The Partnership felt that the issues surrounding quality assurance merited further discussion and exploration, and asked for this to be a future agenda item. Alan McLaughlin suggested looking at what other authorities were doing with quality assurance, as a benchmarking exercise.

AGREED:

That (i) the comments made by Joyce Elliott about register marking be noted and incorporated into future practice; and

(ii) the issue of quality assurance be examined at the next partnership meeting.

638. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Partnership noted that the next meeting was programmed for 11 October 2007. They agreed to change this date to **07 November 2007**, to fit in with the meeting and reporting cycle of the Children and Young People's Partnership Board.

The meeting ended at 9.10 p.m.

CHAIRMAN

