Early Years Forum Agenda
Monday 6th October 2025 - 16.00 to 17.30
Jubilee Room, The Gateway

Attendance
Sue Bayliss, Dinah Ames, Alison Mapplethorpe, Sian Turner
Nicky Lovegrove, Karen Barnes, Claire Baker, Lorraine Murphy, Karen Millard, Emma Hoing, Eleanor Moody, Margaret Whelan, Pam Batty, Julie Manning, Michelle Browne

Apologies
Janice Winn

Updates

Sue Bayliss welcomed the Forum members and ran though the agenda.

EY Forum proportionate representation

Sue Bayliss referred to slide 3 and explained that the purpose of the Forum and that members are proportionate representatives of the various elements of the early years sector who receive early education funding. Sue noted the need for more childminder representation and announced an upcoming nursery member vacancy in the North, both vacancies will be advertised in sector updates.
Sue also mentioned monitoring sector engagement and following a question regarding childminder availability to engage in meetings she highlighted childminding networks that allow better interaction with Early Years (EY) representatives.

Engagement at the Early Years Forum is highly valued by the council and Sue proposed holding the Forum at a different time to enable representatives of the difference sectors to attend. It was agreed that an email vote would be conducted to determine members' preferences.

Early Years Census

Alison Mapplethorpe referred to slide 4.
After Spring 2026 the EY Census will become termly as required by the DfE.

Census Dates
- Spring 2026 – W/C 12th January 2026
- Summer 2026 – W/C 18th May 2026

- Autumn 2026 – W/C 28th September 2026
- Spring 2027 – W/C 18th January 2027

Questions relating to staff will only be on the Spring Census. Summer and Autumn will not be as detailed as the Spring.

Monthly payments

Alison Mapplethorpe referred to slide 5 and 6. After the successful pilot of monthly payments, the offer was opened to all providers from Autumn Term 2025. 47.37% of providers have opted for monthly payments. This is a continued good take up. Providers are asked whether they would like to take up monthly payments, as they join the directory. The response has been very positive and at this time, the Early Years service will continue to offer both methods of payment, as some of the providers preferred termly. A discussion was had around the benefits of the different payment intervals. It was expressed that this could be hard if children aren't funded on joining; for instance, starters not on the claim form could create problems with sustainability whilst waiting for payment.

LA/Provider contracts

Alison Mapplethorpe referred to slide 7 and informed the Forum that the current FE LA/Provider contract, based on the DfE template, has been reviewed by BC Legal Team, and feedback was given so some elements that may have been open to interpretation are firmer and clearer. The previous FE contract roll out took place before the nine months and 30 hours changes had taken effect. It was felt that it was a common sense move to view the summer as a transition period and allow providers to prepare for the changes.
The aim is to provide more clarity around some areas within the contract to support both providers and parents.
The Local Guidance will be updated to reflect any of these changes so that the two documents sit side by side.
The new FE contract will be rolled out to all providers in a staggered approach to sign after autumn half term
The government expectation that settings will display their pricing structure clearly on their website by January 2026. Compliance auditing of websites, invoices and Admissions & Fees policies has started to support settings and will continue.

Parent Queries

Alison Mapplethorpe referred to slide 8.
The Early Years Service/BFIS have received an increased number of parent queries demonstrating that there is:

- Trend of improved parent understanding on how funding is applied and the costs they are being asked to pay
- Increased awareness by parents of the funding rates paid which generates more queries particularly around possible top-ups and private hourly rates.
- Overly complex detail in setting's policies appear to create further queries from parents

- In some cases, providers are putting a notice period to parents accessing only their funded hours

Fees do need to be clear and transparent. The local authority will not overstep their remit into private fees and hours. Providers were advised to be careful about how information was communicated to parents, as simple is often better understood.

There was also some discussion on children moving to nursery within schools and the impact this has on existing nurseries and pre-schools and the catchment areas of the main school.

Provider policies

Alison Mapplethorpe referred to slide 9. On investigating these parental queries, it has highlighted that in some provider policies:

- Consumables charges - meals and snacks and additional outings are not always proportionate to what is used by the child.
- Overly complex lists of consumables and additional activities should be avoided as many are stating items which cover EYFS provision or would be considered business costs.
- There still need to be an emphasis on the funded offer providing high quality care; with voluntary extras applied for items which are not covered by the EYFS.
- Maintaining positive parent relationships as parents must not feel as though they would accept substandard levels of care if they do not pay for enrichment/enhanced offers.

Funding payments

Sue Bayliss referred to slide 10 and asked:

What is valued regarding the way we currently manage funding claims?

- Staff members are consistently accessible and provide reliable support.
- Sue Bayliss confirmed that closures on funded days due to unforeseen circumstances, such as water leaks resulting in a lack of water at a nursery, are likely to remain funded. Providers are required to notify the service both when closing and upon reopening.
- Alison Mapplethorpe noted that an alternative session should be offered to affected children whenever possible, and settings diligently strive to accommodate this. However, it was clarified that there is no obligation to offer a funded space during closures if it can be demonstrated that no alternative spaces are available.
- Exceptions may be considered for children taking extended holidays, though it was acknowledged that receiving timely absence notifications from parents can be challenging. The Funding Team remains supportive and is available to provide guidance in these situations.
- Despite established deadlines, claims continue to be followed up manually and processed whenever feasible, which was appreciated by meeting participants.
- The Funding Team is available to assist with payment-related inquiries and procedural matters.
- The change implemented in the Parent Provider Agreement (PPA) was well received.

What would be helpful?

- Sorting by date of birth or child surname is unreliable.
- Prepopulating forms with children's attended hours would help reduce errors, as tracking changes is increasingly complex. Highlighting these fields for review before submission could improve accuracy.
- Extending the two-week window to complete funding forms may be necessary due to increased workload.
- A consistent code expiry time set by the DFE, such as a termly cut-off, would save settings time spent chasing grace periods.
- Sector updates and the website can provide clearer guidance on financial and safeguarding record retention.
- Email feedback is encouraged, and collecting parent email addresses for reception applications could boost engagement—permissions may be obtained via the funding form.
- Reintroducing leaflet distribution through schools and early years settings could support school place advertising.

The next meeting is on:

- Monday 12th January 2026
- Time to be confirmed via an email vote.
- Venue: tbc

Agenda item – Funding rates