

ITEM 6e.

EARLY YEARS REFERENCE GROUP

Terms of Reference

1. Introduction

The Early Years Reference Group (EYRG) is a subgroup of the Cheshire East Council Schools' Forum which considers the Government's plans for Early Years Block Funding.

Key to the successful delivery of the Free Early Years Education Entitlements (FEEE) is for local authorities to achieve a balance in their priorities; securing sufficiency, quality and accessibility in free provision. Critical to achieving this is a strong partnership between LAs and providers in all sectors; private, voluntary, independent, maintained and childminders, to enable them to assess and meet demand according to local circumstances and market.

2. Purpose

The purpose for the EYRG is to offer advice, experience, information and recommendations to the Local Authority and the Cheshire East Schools' Forum in relation to the practical exercise of developing, reforming and implementing early years funding arrangements including:

- To act as the principal channel by which those involved in ownership and management of early years settings may convey their views.
- Reviewing and modelling the local funding formula for distributing the funding for the free entitlement between all early years sectors in a fair and transparent way.

3. Terms of Reference

To offer advice, experience, information and recommendations to the Local Authority and the Cheshire East Schools' Forum to ensure early years and childcare funding follows national and local requirements and priorities. The aim being to secure the best possible outcomes for children by delivering an early education and childcare entitlement which is high quality, flexible and accessible, and gives parents choices about what is best for their children.

This will include:

- promotion of sustainability and preservation of a mixed market, as well as encouraging clear terms of engagement with parents as key delivery partners;
- acting as the principal two-way channel by which those involved in ownership and management of early years settings may convey their views;
- monitoring the impact of the funding formula including undertaking ongoing costing analysis of the free early years entitlement as necessary, and reviewing its operation for future funding periods, including impact assessment;

- providing a view on the arrangements for the administration of central government grants for early years and childcare administered locally.

4. Membership

The membership of the EYRG should be representative of the different types of early years education providers across the borough who are eligible and registered to offer free early education. It will include representatives of the following sectors providing early education:

- private sector
- voluntary sector
- independent sector
- Childminders
- Local Authority maintained and academy primary schools
- Local Authority Nursery School
- State-Funded Governor-Run

The number of representatives from each sector should be proportionate to the number of free early education places in each sector.

Members will be selected by inviting expressions of interest from all early education providers and selected by the LA in consultation with the clerk of the Schools' Forum with a view to maintaining a geographical spread in the membership. Membership will normally last for up to three years from the date of appointment.

Meetings may be held virtually, i.e. via MS Teams or discussion papers circulated by email for comment, or in person. The group will be supported by officers of Cheshire East Council as determined by the Director of Education, Strong Start and Integration.

Meetings will be chaired by the Childcare Development Manager. Clerk of the EYRG will be the Early Years Data and Finance Manager.

5. Conduct

In carrying out their functions, members of the EYRG are expected to act in accordance with seven principles of public life set out in the first report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life: selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership. It is important that Reference Group members take a strategic view of the issues they are considering when contributing to the Group's business by focussing on the needs of the children and young people of Cheshire East generally (aged 0-19).

6. Approval

Schools' Forum adopted these Terms of Reference, membership and conduct for the Early Years Reference Group on 02 October 2025.

UNCLASSIFIED