

Provider Engagement Reference Group

Date: 22 January 2026

Format: Virtual

Chair: Lisa Morris (Early Years Team Manager, Solihull MBC)

Attendees

- Lisa Morris – Early Years Team Manager, Solihull MBC
- Rosie Ratcliffe – Family Information Service Manager, Solihull MBC
- Stephen Fenton – Finance (Early Years Funding), Solihull MBC
- Ann Pearson – School Place Planning / Sufficiency, Solihull MBC
- Bev Khosla – EY Lead, Tudor Grange Schools
- Sarah Stroud (In the Woods Nursery) – PVI representative
- Apologies: Asmita Parmer, Bethany Roden, Mandy Barlow, Tom Cure.

Purpose of the Group

- To strengthen partnership working with providers.
- To gather “word on the street” intelligence on local authority decisions and their impact.
- To act as a feedback and reference group

Key Agreements

- **Meetings** will continue **virtually**, with the option to review face-to-face meetings in future.
- **Membership term** agreed at **two years**, with refresh/re-advertising around **January 2028** to allow wider provider participation.
- **Terms of Reference** to be finalised and published
- **Meeting summaries** (not full transcripts) to be published on the Council website.

No provider agenda items

Early Years Funding Update (Stephen Fenton)

- National funding rates were released **15 December**, with short statutory timescales.
- Solihull funding remains **low compared to some of our neighbouring authorities** (e.g. Birmingham). Rate for Solihull providers is reflective of the amount the local authority receives (less than other LAs).

Government Funding Early Years Rates 2026-27									
West Midlands	2026 to 2027 3 and 4-year-old funding rate (£ / hr)	Change (£) from 2025 to 2026	Change (%) from 2025 to 2026	2026 to 2027 2-year-old funding rate (£ / hr)	Change (£) from 2025 to 2026	Change (%) from 2025 to 2026	2026 to 2027 under 2s funding rate (£ / hr)	Change (£) from 2025 to 2026	Change (%) from 2025 to 2026
	DSG rate		DSG rate	DSG rate		DSG rate	DSG rate		DSG rate
Birmingham	£6.61	£0.41	6.6%	£9.47	£0.47	5.2%	£12.99	£0.63	5.1%
Coventry	£6.21	£0.28	4.7%	£8.91	£0.32	3.7%	£12.12	£0.40	3.4%
Dudley	£6.01	£0.30	5.3%	£8.48	£0.39	4.8%	£11.52	£0.51	4.6%
Herefordshire	£6.01	£0.30	5.3%	£7.80	£0.36	4.8%	£10.50	£0.43	4.3%
Sandwell	£6.34	£0.33	5.5%	£9.25	£0.41	4.6%	£12.59	£0.52	4.3%
Shropshire	£6.01	£0.30	5.3%	£7.92	£0.37	4.9%	£10.74	£0.51	5.0%
Solihull	£6.03	£0.26	4.5%	£8.58	£0.32	3.9%	£11.69	£0.46	4.1%
Staffordshire	£6.01	£0.30	5.3%	£8.27	£0.33	4.2%	£11.25	£0.48	4.5%
Stoke-on-Trent	£6.26	£0.36	6.1%	£8.85	£0.50	6.0%	£12.02	£0.64	5.6%
Telford and Wrekin	£6.01	£0.30	5.3%	£8.40	£0.37	4.6%	£11.37	£0.45	4.1%
Walsall	£6.13	£0.32	5.5%	£8.79	£0.41	4.9%	£11.96	£0.51	4.5%
Warwickshire	£6.08	£0.25	4.3%	£8.40	£0.32	4.0%	£11.40	£0.45	4.1%
Wolverhampton	£6.33	£0.33	5.5%	£9.00	£0.44	5.1%	£12.25	£0.55	4.7%
Worcestershire	£6.01	£0.30	5.3%	£8.11	£0.40	5.2%	£10.98	£0.53	5.1%
National Average	£6.42			£8.90			£12.04		

- Local funding rates already shared with providers; changes are **unlikely** pending formal ratification in February.
- Funding formula principles reiterated:
 - Maximise the **basic hourly rate**.
 - Maintain **stability and consistency** for providers.
 - Limit supplements (only deprivation and historic teacher pension supplement).
 - Ensure transparency – all funding is fully accounted for.
- Movement of unused SEN Inclusion Fund (SENIF) monies into the basic rate where not being spent.
- Move toward **termly census (13/14/11 weeks)** to better align with DfE funding and reduce volatility.
- Commitment to explore **tweaks and longer-term options**, including SEN funding for children with EHCPs.

Funding Clarifications

- Published hourly rates explained (including confusion caused by dual national rates).
- Local authority rate for 3- and 4-year-olds reflects allocation after central spend and supplements.
- Providers encouraged to raise follow-up questions after reflecting on information.
- LM shared the fact that she was working to use unclaimed DAF monies to support SEND in Solihull settings

Compliance and Charging Transparency (Rosie Ratcliffe)

- New statutory guidance requires **clear, transparent information** for parents on:
 - Funded hours
 - Charges (meals, consumables, extras)
 - Opt-out options
- Majority of providers now compliant; some settings, schools and childminders still being followed up.

- Artificial breaks within funded sessions are **not compliant** and have been addressed.
- Two publication options supported:
 - Provider's own website
 - Local authority template linked via Family Information Directory
- Ongoing dialogue with DfE regarding how explicit settings must be about offering "funded-only" places.
- LA approach remains **supportive, not punitive**, with case-by-case resolution where issues arise.

Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (Ann Pearson)

- Annual statutory duty to assess childcare sufficiency (supply vs demand).
- Provider data is critical and more valuable if response rates improve.
- Proposal supported to:
 - Add **short supplementary questions** alongside the **termly headcount census**, rather than one large standalone survey.
 - Possibly vary questions by term (e.g. places, vacancies, waiting lists).
- Aim to make data collection easier and more useful for providers' **business planning**.
- Feedback will be shared with providers to demonstrate how their data is used.

Actions

Action	Lead	Timescale
Finalise Terms of Reference and remove "draft" status	Lisa Morris	February 2026
Circulate meeting summary to reference group members for comment	Lisa Morris	w/c 26 Jan 2026
Publish agreed meeting summary on council website	Lisa Morris / Rosie Ratcliffe	After member comments
Continue provider compliance support on charging transparency	Rosie Ratcliffe / Team	Ongoing
Develop draft supplementary questions for census-linked sufficiency data	Ann Pearson (with Tom)	Spring/Summer 2026
Bring draft questions back to reference group for comment	Ann Pearson	Summer 2026

Next scheduled meeting [Microsoft Teams] Thursday 21st May 2026 6.30pm-7.30pm