

Communications Strategy for the Flexible Offer

Phase 1

Establishing supply and demand

Communication with Settings

Establishing Supply and Potential Supply

The purpose of this work is two fold.

Firstly to establish the level of flexibility within existing provision in both the maintained and non-maintained sectors. Additionally we will assess where there are barriers that prevent existing providers from delivering a more flexible service and how the local authority will work with providers to overcome those barriers.

Secondly to make providers aware of the free entitlement so that they can factor it into their business planning and consider any implications it may have for their future delivery of funded early years foundation stage places.

The approach will take two forms.

Firstly all existing providers will be asked to fill in a questionnaire (attached at Appendix 1) about their current delivery. This will include any potential for additional flexibility and any known or perceived barriers. This questionnaire will be piloted with members of the flexible offer working group prior to general circulation.

It will be sent out with the headcount forms in order to encourage providers to return it.

Secondly we will hold a series of meetings with provider groups, using mainly existing fora such as the nursery managers' forum and the supervisor's forum, the children's centre co-ordinators group and the nursery heads group.

Additional meetings will be arranged to cover accredited childminders and those settings who do not attend any of the above e.g. the private nursery chains. These meetings will give the opportunity to both share information and to explore any concerns.

Following on from these initial meetings we will hold further sessions for providers who are interested in exploring flexibility further. At these sessions we will involve existing providers who have already developed a more flexible offer so that experience can be shared.

As a result of these sessions those settings wishing to develop a flexible offer will be supported by the Swindon Sure Start Partnership to put together an outline business case as a prelude to their proposal being accepted as a project.

Communication with Parents

Establishing demand

The purpose of this work is to survey parents to establish the likely demand from parents.

We will look at two specific areas: - lengths of session required and type of provision used.

Length of session

There will be particular emphasis on the likely demand for 10-hour sessions and for 2-hour sessions as they are outside our established patterns of working.

We will also ascertain whether parents are likely to want their sessions spread evenly across each week i.e. 5 three-hour sessions or as longer but equal sessions i.e. 3 five-hour sessions.

The final question will give parents the opportunity to specify their exact preference.

Type of Provision

Parents will be asked whether they wish to use

- A maintained nursery
- An accredited childminder
- A full day care nursery
- A pre-school/playgroup

We will also look at whether parents will wish to use their entitlement at only one type of provision or at a combination of two types of provision

This consultation will be carried out in two ways

- Through discussion with individual parents of children under 3 at toddler groups, stay and play sessions and other appropriate groups. Parents will be supported to fill in a questionnaire (attached at Appendix 2). Target 10 parents per visit. Groups will be selected to ensure that priority and excluded groups such as BME groups and parents of disabled children are included, so that the responses are representative of the wider population.
- Questionnaires will be sent to parents of children at existing PVI and maintained settings. The questionnaires will be sent to settings with a pre paid envelope for return. Settings will encourage parents to fill them in so that a high response rate is achieved. An explanatory letter will accompany the questionnaire. This letter will also clarify that the LA and settings will not always be able to match parents' request and that individual settings will normally not be able to offer the full range of flexible options.

The same questionnaire will be used in both cases so that responses can be aggregated.