

Appendix 3

Early Years SENCO Workshop - Top up funding consultation

Wednesday 7th February 2024

Session aims:

- To gain early years setting views on the current TUF process
- To collate EY setting views on suggested improvements

Attendance: 23 of Halton's early years SENCO's/early years practitioners attended the session. This included representation from maintained and private and voluntary sector. No childminders attended the session.

The session was facilitated by STAS and Early Years Team

The current process:

Positives:

- Staff reported that they could not identify any positives regarding the current process
- They do feel supported by some local authority staff on what information is required to complete paperwork

Areas for development:

- Increase frequency of panels
- Cant submit request until two cycles of A-P-D-R (despite level of need being obvious). This impacts early intervention and ability to support child.
- Staff report it is easier to get an assessment for EHCP than DTUF
- Hours awarded are not sufficient or consistent
- Funding in hours causes confusion and frustration for parents and settings
- Settings cannot recruit staff to provide additional support when given such low funding hours e.g. 1.5 hours per week
- Completion of paperwork is extremely lengthy and isn't worth completing for the restricted award. Settings feel they get more realistic funding outcomes through EHCP route
- Panel decisions are inconsistent
- Settings would prefer a 'banded' system like schools. This would mean they could collate additional funding to recruit and spread interventions across day. This would reduce impact of 1:1 over reliance

EY Setting proposal:

- Increase frequency of panels to match schools ability to apply for TUF

- Reduce repetitiveness and time to complete paperwork
- Consider using 'banding' formula (like schools DTUF)
- Enable earlier requests for DTUF when family have been supported by agencies prior to starting at nursery e.g. social care/virtual school, Portage/SEN Support Practitioners/ early help/health services

Second round of consultation November 2024 open for 4 weeks

How easy is the current top up system to access?

Rating 1.

How has top up funding helped you to support children with SEND?

We didn't get accepted

How much impact has top up funding had on helping children with SEND to access their Early Years Education?

Rating 1.

What are the main barriers with the current top up funding system?

Being told the dates too close to the cut off date, or not being told the dates at all.

What changes can be made to improve the current system?.

List of dates for the year, training on how to complete the forms

It is very difficult to navigate the hours system and manage parental expectations of support with small numbers of hours being given. I have given some feedback to the Early Years Team Lead in person about this and explained that if you only have a couple of children, it is not possible to employ someone or use a ratio-ed member of staff to give children individual support if they only get a few hours per week. Last year it was easier when we had a higher amount of hours given to children and could group hours together, at present we have 5 hours for a morning child and 5 for an afternoon in 2yo rooms at one setting. In real terms, the cost of a member of staff at our settings to deliver this child's particular support works out approximately half the hourly rate for TUF. This is very difficult when managing financial support and directing of staff to deliver this support.

We have a challenge at our Nursery Schools whereby we have 1:13 ratios in 3-4s as we are teacher led. Our 2yo provision our ratios are much smaller 1:5 and often the need for further support happens when a child moves from this provision to the larger ratio. In these transitions, we see that the requirement for support for these more complex children significantly increase on the higher ratio with more group times and structured routines.

As a Nursery school, we do not have the same funding as Primary School early years settings which, considering this teacher ratio, is a challenge for us to navigate with all of our SEND services. I appreciate that the panel would treat all settings as the same but this, and the higher ratios in 3-4s, would perhaps provide some context as to our reason for application at this transitional point.

It would also be helpful to get some clarification about children's hours, for example, if a

child was to be given an amount of funding on the basis they attend 15 hours but then increase, do we then need to reapply? I was asked to reapply to TUF for a child recently to verify the hours they receive - I didn't feel that this was a good use of my time after only doing this a few months previous. I think that in cases where all the necessary information hasn't been received by the panel in order to pay for a longer period of time, perhaps an informal catch up or a way of discussing with someone would be more time efficient for SENCOs rather than re-doing the paperwork once again.

I think a banding system would be better for parents and staff to navigate. This would bring Halton in line with other local authorities and the EHCP process for schools.

Perhaps a small guide for applications would be good for people with some hints for how best to present the paperwork and what to include/what not to include, this would ensure that SENCO's are using their time efficiently and not gathering/scanning/sending paperwork that isn't necessary.

Recently the EHCP Co-ordinators ran a drop in session, I wonder if this could be useful for TUF with some examples of applications? I recently had a meeting and talked through application process with the Early Years Team Lead and it was really helpful but I wonder if a drop in would be a good idea for other Sencos to discuss, too.