



# Early Years & Childcare Business Newsletter - Summer 2026



Welcome and thank you for taking the time to read our latest Business Newsletter, we hope you find it useful to support with the ongoing sustainability of your business. If there is anything that would be beneficial to include in future editions, please let us know and do contact us if you require any further support or advice.

Email: [earlyyears@warwickshire.gov.uk](mailto:earlyyears@warwickshire.gov.uk)

**Website:** [Early Years & Childcare Providers](#)

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When viewing the newsletter on some devices it may be necessary to click the 'play' icon at the top of the screen.

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## Newsletter Overview



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## Business Health Checks and Audits – Why They Matter and How They Support Providers



Over recent months, Early Years and Childcare Sustainability Officers (EYCSOs) have increased the number of business health checks and audits being carried out with early years providers across Warwickshire.

We understand that being contacted about an audit can feel worrying, so we want to be very clear about why this work is taking place and how it is designed to support settings, not catch them out.

### **A Proactive and Positive Approach**

Across Warwickshire, we are taking a proactive approach to reduce and prevent complaints about early years provision. Parents are now far more aware of:

- Their funded entitlements
- What they can and cannot be charged for
- Their right to challenge unclear or non-compliant fees

As a result, we have seen an increase in parental complaints across the county. By carrying out regular business health checks and audits, we can:

- Identify issues early
- Support providers to make improvements
- Reduce the risk of complaints escalating
- Ensure consistency and fairness across Warwickshire

The aim is to help providers remain compliant, transparent and confident in their business practices.

### **Common Themes We're Seeing Across the County**

Some key areas are appearing frequently in audits, and all providers may wish to review their documents with these in mind.

#### **Fee Sheets**

We are seeing fee sheets that:

- Do not clearly break down additional charges into:
  - Food consumables
  - Non-food consumables
  - Activities
  - Additional hours
- Do not clearly show that funded hours are charged at £0, even where this is the case. Even if something is free, it must still be clearly stated to ensure transparency for parents.

#### **Voluntary Charges**

All additional item charges must be voluntary to purchase, not mandatory. This should be clearly reflected in the settings fee sheet. Parents must be able to access their funded entitlement without being required to pay additional costs. Alternatives to paying for these service should be listed clearly in writing. For example: Parents supplying their own food.

#### **Invoices**

Invoices should clearly break down:

- Funded hours (shown as £0)
- Food consumables
- Non-food consumables
- Activities
- Additional hours

#### **A Reminder About Parent Declaration Forms (PDFs)**

The Parent/Carer Declaration Form is the parent's permission for the provider to claim funding on their behalf.

Please ensure:

- Forms are fully completed and signed before headcount
- The hours recorded reflect exactly what the parent has agreed to
- Any changes during the term are:
  - Documented
  - Agreed with the parent
  - Retained alongside the original PDF

These forms form a critical part of the audit process.

If PDF's are stored digitally, a helpful tip is to have access to a second computer or device. During parts of the audit, EYCSOs will need access to review documentation, and this allows you to continue with the day-to-day running of your setting.

### **Statutory Duty to Check Funding Claims**

As the local authority, it is our statutory duty to review and check that early education funding is being claimed accurately and appropriately. This includes ensuring that:

- Funded hours claimed match what has been agreed with parents on the PDF
- Claims align with registers and invoices
- Funding is being accessed in line with statutory guidance and the Provider Agreement

As part of this process, audits and business health checks may identify instances where funding has been overclaimed. In these instances, the EYCSO will explain to the provider why there will be a need for an adjustment at the next payment and contact the funding team.

### **In Summary**

Business health checks and audits are about:

- Supporting providers
- Reducing complaints
- Promoting transparency
- Ensuring compliance
- Protecting the sustainability of early years provision across Warwickshire

We encourage all providers to take time this summer to review processes, fee sheets and invoicing practices to ensure they are clear, compliant and parent-friendly.



## Using Third-Party Software and External Agencies: Know Your Responsibilities



Many early years providers now use external agencies or software packages to manage invoices, fee sheets, registers, staffing records and other documentation. These systems can be extremely helpful, saving time and reducing paperwork but it is important to remember one key point:

***The responsibility for keeping records always sits with the provider.***

### What's the Risk?

Most software companies and agencies store large amounts of data on behalf of the provider, including:

- Invoices and fee records

- Attendance registers
- Parent contracts and payment histories
- Financial reports

While these systems often feel like a “safe place” for information, continued access cannot be assumed once use of the service stops.

If the following happens:

- Change of software provider
- End of a contract with an agency
- Closure of a setting or merging with another setting
- Loss of access to an account

Then it may be found that:

- The account is closed immediately
- Data is deleted after a short retention period
- The company is unwilling or unable to retrieve historical records

Once the account is closed, there is no guarantee that documentation will be retained.

### **Financial Records: A Legal Requirement**

HMRC requires early years providers to keep financial records for at least six years, plus the current financial year. This typically includes:

- Invoices issued to parents
- Records of payments received
- Fee schedules and discounts
- Relevant financial reports

If HMRC (or another body) requests evidence, it is the provider who must supply it.

Unfortunately, saying “*the software company no longer has it*” will not be accepted as a reason for missing records.

### **Download Little and Often**

A common mistake is relying on the idea that everything can be downloaded “later”. For larger settings, trying to download seven years’ worth of invoices and data at the end of a contract can be overwhelming and, in some cases, technically impossible.

A much safer approach is to:

- Download invoices and financial reports regularly (e.g. monthly or termly)
- Save copies securely in the provisions digital or paper filing system
- Check that files are accessible and clearly labelled

This spreads the workload and ensures there is always access to what is needed.

### **Good Practice Checklist**

- Read terms and conditions of any software or agency
- Understand what happens to data when an account closes
- Keep copies of all financial records
- Store documents securely and back them up
- Plan ahead before changing provider or ending a contract

### **A Final Reminder**

External agencies and software providers are support tools. They do not replace any legal responsibilities. Planning ahead and keeping records protects the setting, saves stress, and ensures records can be accessed if ever requested.

If there is any uncertainty about having the correct documentation saved, now is a good time to check.

**The responsibility  
for keeping your  
records always  
sits with you  
as the provider.**

## Employment law changes - what's new from April 2026



From April 2026, a number of new employment law changes came into effect.

### Improved Family Leave Rights

Several family-related entitlements have changed, giving more flexibility and support to families. Here's a summary of the key changes and what they could mean for **staff members**.

#### **Paternity leave – now a day one right**

Staff members no longer need 26 weeks' service to qualify for paternity leave. If **they** are eligible, **staff members** can take paternity leave from their first day of employment.

#### **Parental leave – available from day one**

Ordinary (unpaid) parental leave is now available to **staff members** without needing a year's service.

Shared parental leave is now more flexible:

- Paternity leave can be taken even if shared parental leave has already been used, as previous restrictions have been lifted.

#### **Bereaved partner's paternity leave**

Where a child's mother or primary adopter dies, eligible fathers and partners can take up to 52 weeks of unpaid bereavement-related paternity leave. This leave must be taken within the first year following the child's birth or placement.



## Early Years and Childcare Sustainability Officer – Staffing Update



We would like to share an update regarding the Early Years and Childcare Sustainability Officer team and district cover arrangements.

- Rebecca Perry currently supports the Stratford District
- Tashika Bennett supports Rugby and Warwick Districts
- Corinna Jones supports North Warwickshire and Nuneaton & Bedworth Districts

Rebecca Perry will be commencing maternity leave at the end of May. During her maternity leave, Tashika Bennett and Corinna Jones will jointly support providers within the Stratford District to ensure continuity of service.

Providers should continue to contact the team via [earlyyears@warwickshire.gov.uk](mailto:earlyyears@warwickshire.gov.uk).

We would also like to take this opportunity to wish Rebecca every success and happiness ahead of the birth of her second child. We wish her all the very best during this special time and look forward to her return.

## **Information for landlords: childminder in England**



### Information for landlords: childminders in England

The Department for Education has produced this letter for childminders to show to their landlords. It sets out what childminders do, the standards they must follow and how landlords can support this important part of the childcare sector.

Childminders in England are self-employed, professional childcare providers. They largely provide childcare for children under eight years of age for more than two hours per day from their own home, and they are required to either register with a childminder agency or Ofsted to operate. Childminders are an essential part of the early education and childcare system, providing flexible, high-quality and affordable early education and childcare. As such, this government values childminders and looks for ways to support them.

We are aware that some childminders face difficulties when looking to open or expand a childminding business. This can be due to a number of reasons – including misunderstandings about the nature of childminding.

You can find some general information about what childminders do at <https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/job-profiles/childminder>. There is also a strict set of standards that all childminders must meet. As well as setting out the learning and development that childminders must deliver, it includes requirements around the suitability of premises, safety and the limits on the number of children that a childminder can care for. The Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework for childminders can be found at [Early years foundation stage \(EYFS\) statutory framework - GOV.UK](#). Depending on their registration, childminders are assessed against these standards by Ofsted or their childminder agency.

We encourage landlords to look at ways to allow childminders to use rented properties to provide childminding (subject to landlords continuing to meet all applicable legal requirements and insurance obligations in respect of the property). Many landlords already have childminding businesses operating on their premises. Once set up, childminders can generate regular and stable income as well as providing a valuable service that parents have told us they really value for its flexibility and quality. By supporting childminding in this way, landlords would be supporting the wider community and helping to ensure that children receive the best start in life.

We hope this reassures you about the childminding profession, what childminders do and the strict standards that they must meet.

If you have any questions about this letter, please contact the Department for Education using the details at the top of this letter.

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Yours sincerely,  
Department for Education

## Birth Dates Reminder



A useful reminder of when a child becomes eligible for different funding streams.

The following table shows when a child is eligible to receive the working parent entitlement (all dates are inclusive):

Eligibility start dates for children from 9 months old and above	
A child turning 9 months between:	Will be eligible for a funded place from:
<b>1<sup>st</sup> January and 31<sup>st</sup> March</b>	The start of the <b>Summer Term</b> (on or after 1 <sup>st</sup> April) following the date of turning 9 months old
<b>1<sup>st</sup> April and 31<sup>st</sup> August</b>	The start of the <b>Autumn Term</b> (on or after 1 <sup>st</sup> September) following the date of turning 9 months old
<b>1<sup>st</sup> September and 31<sup>st</sup> December</b>	The start of the <b>Spring Term</b> (on or after 1 <sup>st</sup> January) following the date of turning 9 months old



The following table shows when a child is eligible to receive the 2-year-old 2Help funding entitlement, (all dates are inclusive):

Eligibility start dates for children aged 2 years old	
A child born between:	Will be eligible for a funded place from:
<b>1<sup>st</sup> January and 31<sup>st</sup> March</b>	The start of the <b>Summer Term</b> (on or after 1 <sup>st</sup> April) following their 2 <sup>nd</sup> birthday
<b>1<sup>st</sup> April and 31<sup>st</sup> August</b>	The start of the <b>Autumn Term</b> (on or after 1 <sup>st</sup> September) following their 2 <sup>nd</sup> birthday
<b>1<sup>st</sup> September and 31<sup>st</sup> December</b>	The start of the <b>Spring Term</b> (on or after 1 <sup>st</sup> January) following their 2 <sup>nd</sup> birthday



The following table shows when a child is eligible to receive the 3- and 4-year-old Universal entitlements (all dates are inclusive):

Eligibility start dates for children aged 3 & 4 years old	
A child born between:	Will be eligible for a funded place from:
<b>1<sup>st</sup> January and 31<sup>st</sup> March</b>	The start of the <b>Summer Term</b> (on or after 1 <sup>st</sup> April) following their 3 <sup>rd</sup> birthday until statutory school age
<b>1<sup>st</sup> April and 31<sup>st</sup> August</b>	The start of the <b>Autumn Term</b> (on or after 1 <sup>st</sup> September) following their 3 <sup>rd</sup> birthday until statutory school age
<b>1<sup>st</sup> September and 31<sup>st</sup> December</b>	The start of the <b>Spring Term</b> (on or after 1 <sup>st</sup> January) following their 3 <sup>rd</sup> birthday until statutory school age



## Early Years Business Spotlight Sessions



Early Years Business Spotlight sessions – chaired by the Early Years Childcare Sustainability Officers.

These sessions are an open forums, interspersed with topic-based sessions as and when the opportunities arise. Please let us know if there are subjects that would be of interest to focus on or to contribute content for.

Please do sign up to the sessions below.

### **All Provider Session**

Date: Wednesday 10th June 2026

Time: 11:00-12:00

[Book here](#)

### **Childminder Session**

Date: Tuesday 16th June 2026

Time: 18:30-19:30

[Book here](#)

These sessions are free for providers of early years and childcare in Warwickshire. Our aim is to come together in a safe place to debate, discuss, and offer each other peer support; and to acknowledge the challenges and opportunities in the 'business' of Early Years.

Please note that there will be a short break in running the sessions during the months of July and August. We understand this is a particularly busy time for providers, with many managing transitions for children into new rooms or settings, as well as coordinating annual leave.

**Sessions will resume in September**, and we look forward to welcoming you back then.

Thank you for your continued participation and support!

## Funding and Grants



### **Armed Forces Families Fund - Early Years programme**

Under this programme the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust will award grants of between £5,000 and £80,000 on behalf of the MOD's Armed Forces Families Fund Early Years programme, towards projects lasting up to two years, which help enhance early childhood education and childcare settings to meet specific needs of young children from armed forces families.

To find out more: [AF3: Early Years programme - Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust](#)

**Grants of:** £5,000 - £80,000

**Apply by:** 15 July 2026



### **Childcare Apprenticeship Grant: Supporting Your Childcare Workforce.**

If you're considering hiring an apprentice in England, there are grants available to support you. You can get money to go towards the cost of training and assessment.

For more information and to apply, click the link below

<https://www.gov.uk/employing-an-apprentice/get-funding>

### **npower Business Solutions Foundation Funding**

The npower Business Solutions Foundation is a new fund to help create stronger, greener and more sustainable local communities. If you're a not-for-profit or educational institution that's at least two years old and based within a 50-mile radius of their office in Solihull (**B91 3ES**), then you're eligible. With three levels of funding bands available - up to a maximum grant of up to £100,000, depending on the size and turnover of your organisation - the npower Business Solutions Foundation could help you accelerate positive action. [Find out more.](#)



### **Royal Leamington Spa - Community Grant Fund**

The Community Grant Fund has been established to assist community and voluntary groups with projects that benefit the wider Leamington Spa community. This initiative contributes to the Town Council's objective of involving communities in identifying local needs and of supporting collaboration between the Council and partner organisations.

To find out more, click the link: [Community Grants | Royal Leamington Spa Town Council](#)

Application form: <https://www.leafingtonspatowncouncil.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/115/2026/03/RLSTC-Community-grants-app-form-2026-27.docx>  
(These files may not be suitable for users of assistive technology and are in the following formats: .docx. .pdf. [Request an accessible format.](#))

### **Warwick District Council launches Community Grant programme**

Application deadline: 5.00pm on Monday, 25th May 2026 Warwick District Council has launched a new [Community Grant programme](#), inviting local voluntary and not-for-profit organisations to apply for funding to support work benefiting residents most in need.

The programme offers funding across four areas: third sector support, financial inclusion, employment and digital support, and social inclusion in targeted communities. It aims to strengthen local communities and address challenges such as hardship, isolation, and access to services. An online workshop will also be held to help organisations understand the funding, eligibility, and application process. Further details are available at:

[www.warwickdc.gov.uk/VACgrant](http://www.warwickdc.gov.uk/VACgrant)

### Contact Details





If you have a question or would like any further support, please see below the contact emails for the Warwickshire Early Years Teams.

**Early Years Sufficiency and Business Support:** [earlyyears@warwickshire.gov.uk](mailto:earlyyears@warwickshire.gov.uk)

**Early Education Funding queries:** [eyfunding@warwickshire.gov.uk](mailto:eyfunding@warwickshire.gov.uk)

**Childminder Funding queries:** [childminderfunding@warwickshire.gov.uk](mailto:childminderfunding@warwickshire.gov.uk)

**Warwickshire Early Years Quality, Standards and Safeguarding:**  
[earlyyearsadvisors@warwickshire.gov.uk](mailto:earlyyearsadvisors@warwickshire.gov.uk)

Useful Business Support Websites & Contacts



### **Starting up a childcare business**

Information and tips on setting up and running your own business

<https://www.gov.uk/browse/business>

### **The Pensions Regulator**

Information and guidance on staff pensions and the responsibility of the employer

<https://www.thepensionsregulator.gov.uk/>

### **Charity Commission**

Useful information on setting up and running a charity

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/charity-commission>

**Coram Family and Childcare's resources are designed to help professionals working in childcare and early years**

<https://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/resources-professionals>

### **Companies House**

Information on starting up and running a company

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/companies-house>

### **NDNA – Business Zone NDNA Business Zone**

[http://www.ndna.org.uk/NDNA/News/Early\\_Years\\_Business\\_Zone.aspx](http://www.ndna.org.uk/NDNA/News/Early_Years_Business_Zone.aspx)

### **Staff Employment – ACAS**

Advice and information on staff employment matters

<https://www.acas.org.uk/>

### **Early Years Alliance – Business and Management**

<https://www.eyalliance.org.uk/business-and-management>

### **PACEY - Business Smart**

[Business-smart-health-check.pdf](#)

### **Foundation Years – Business Planning**

<https://www.foundationyears.org.uk/business-sustainability/developing-a-business-plan/>

### **Warwickshire County Council Family Information Service**

Free advertising for your childcare business on the childcare directory.

<https://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/fis>

### **Government help with childcare costs for parents**

[Childcare Eligibility Checker - Best Start in Life](#)

### **Warwickshire County Council - Childcare Sufficiency Assessment**

<http://schools.warwickshire.gov.uk/early-years-childcare-providers/early-years-childcare-business-support>

### **Out of School Alliance**

Information and support to individuals and organisations setting up and running out of school clubs, holiday clubs and playschemes.

<https://www.outofschoolalliance.co.uk/>

### **Warwickshire County Council - Support for businesses**

<https://schools.warwickshire.gov.uk/early-years-childcare-providers/early-years-childcare-business-support>

### **Ofsted research and analysis - Main findings: How childcare could be optimised across local areas**

Published: 14 May 2025

[Main findings: How childcare could be optimised across local areas - GOV.UK](#)

### **Early Education and Funding Entitlements support page**

[Important information and forms for funded providers](#)