Business Newsletter - Autumn Term 2026

Welcome to the latest edition of the Early Years Sufficiency and Entitlements Business Newsletter. We hope you find the information useful and relevant to supporting your business.

If there is anything you would find beneficial to include in future editions, please let us know. Likewise, if you require any further support or advice, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Email: earlyyears@warwickshire.gov.uk

Website: Early Years & Childcare Providers

For those that are viewing this for the first time please note this newsletter can be viewed by scrolling down the screen and particular sections can be viewed using the small squared lined icon which you will see in the bottom right hand corner of the screen.

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

To print the newsletter, click the three-dot menu and select the option to export as a PDF. Once exported, the document can be printed as needed.

In This Edition

Marketing Matters: How Visible Is Your Provision?

Focus Feature: The Provider Agreement

Finance Focus: Do Your Numbers Add Up?

To Stretch or Not to Stretch?

Inspector Calling?

Childminder Start-Up Grant: New Funding Opportunity

Autumn Term Early Years Business Spotlight Sessions

Funding & Grant Opportunities

Contact Us

Useful Contacts

Marketing Matters: How Visible Is Your Provision?





Search for your setting online and view the results as a parent would.

Is the information current, clear and easy to find?

Many providers have historically relied on word of mouth to fill places, and for some settings this has worked successfully for many years.

However, the childcare landscape is changing. Whether you operate a day nursery, pre-school, childminding business, breakfast club, after-school club or holiday provision, it is more important than ever to consider how visible your service is to prospective families.

Whilst word of mouth remains valuable, it should not be your only marketing tool. Even if your places are currently full, it is worth considering how families will find your setting when vacancies arise. A steady flow of enquiries can help support the long-term sustainability of your business and reduce the risk of unfilled places impacting income.

Maintaining a healthy waiting list can also be an important part of long-term sustainability. Waiting lists can help providers fill places more quickly when children leave, reduce the impact of unexpected vacancies and provide valuable intelligence about future demand. For this reason, providers should be cautious about reducing marketing activity simply because current occupancy is strong. Families may not require childcare immediately, and maintaining visibility can help ensure a continued pipeline of enquiries for future places.

Increasingly, parents turn to online platforms when searching for childcare. Before making contact, many will review websites, social media pages, online reviews and Family Information Service (FIS) listings to help them decide which settings to consider. Taking time to view your provision from the perspective of a potential parent can be a useful exercise.

If your setting does not currently have a website or social media page, consider whether establishing an online presence could support your marketing activity. Many families expect

to find information about opening times, age ranges, vacancies, fees, funding options (where applicable) and how to make contact online before making an enquiry.

Even a simple online presence can help families access accurate and up-to-date information about your provision.

A quick marketing health check can help identify simple improvements that make it easier for families to find and choose your setting.

Ask yourself:

- Can families easily find information about your provision online?
- Are your contact details, opening times, age ranges and fees easy to find?
- Are you using social media?
- If so, are your social media pages updated regularly with current information and activities?
- Is your Family Information Service (FIS) record up to date?
- If your provision is located within a shared building or site, is it clearly signposted from the main entrance?
- If your provision is part of a larger organisation, is it prominently featured on the organisation's website?
- If your provision operates from a shared site or within another organisation's premises, is information about your service clearly available on the host organisation's website?
- Are you continuing to promote your provision and capture enquiries, even when occupancy levels are high?
- Would a family understand what makes your provision unique after spending a few minutes looking at your online presence?

It is also important to remember that an inactive online presence can sometimes create the wrong impression. Social media pages that have not been updated for many months may lead potential families to question whether a setting is still operating. Regular updates do not need to be time-consuming, but they can reassure parents that your provision is active and engaged.

Perhaps most importantly, do not assume that parents know what you know. Information that may seem obvious to you, such as opening times, age ranges, fees, funding offers, vacancies, session availability or how to make an enquiry, may not be obvious to someone visiting your website or social media page for the first time. Clear, accessible information helps families make informed decisions and can encourage them to make contact.

The key message is simple: **don't become complacent.** Small, consistent steps to promote your provision can help ensure that families can find you, understand what you offer, and choose your setting when they need childcare. Effective marketing is not just about filling vacancies today; it is about maintaining a steady pipeline of enquiries to support the long-term sustainability of your provision.

Focus Feature: The Provider Agreement





Don't just sign it, read it!

Taking time to read the Provider Agreement can help you understand your responsibilities.

Each year, before the start of the new academic year, funded providers are required to sign the Provider Agreement.

But when was the last time you REALLY read it?

The Provider Agreement is more than just a form to complete. It is the agreement between Warwickshire County Council and funded providers, setting out how funded early education and childcare places should be delivered and the responsibilities of both parties.

What is it for?

The Provider Agreement:

- ✅ Sets out the responsibilities of both the Local Authority and funded providers.
- ✅ Explains the requirements for delivering funded entitlements.
- ✅ Brings together key information on funding, eligibility, charging, SEND, safeguarding and quality.
- ✅ Provides a useful point of reference when responding to parent and carer queries

Understanding the language used in the Provider Agreement

The Provider Agreement uses specific wording to indicate the level of expectation attached to different requirements.

Must: Providers are required to comply because it is a mandatory requirement based on legislation, statutory guidance, funding agreements or other enforceable requirements.

Should: Providers are expected to follow the guidance unless there is a valid reason not to do so.

How to interpret common terms

- **Must / Must ensure** = A mandatory requirement that providers are required to meet.
- **Should / Should ensure** = Expected good practice unless there is a justifiable reason to take a different approach.
- **Will ensure** = A commitment or action that Warwickshire County Council, or the party being referred to, will undertake.

⚠️ **Remember: signing the agreement is a declaration**

When signing the Provider Agreement, providers are confirming that they have read, understood and will comply with the requirements set out within it. The declaration also confirms that the setting has the necessary arrangements in place to access Early Education Entitlements Funding.

Providers should not sign the agreement unless they are satisfied that they understand its contents and the responsibilities it places on their setting. Where responsibility for signing sits with an owner, committee member, headteacher or head office representative,

consideration should be given to how key requirements and updates are communicated to staff involved in the day-to-day delivery and administration of funded entitlements.

Taking time to review the agreement before signing can help ensure that everyone involved in delivering funded places understands their responsibilities and is working in line with current requirements.

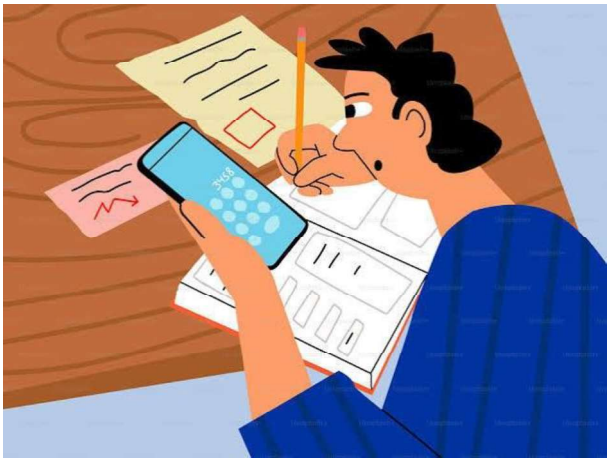
Why revisit it?

The Provider Agreement is updated annually to reflect changes to statutory guidance and local requirements. Reviewing the latest version can help ensure that everyone involved in delivering funded places understands their responsibilities and is working from the most up-to-date information.

An annual review can help providers identify updates, check that policies and procedures remain aligned with requirements, and ensure funded entitlements are delivered in line with the requirements of the Provider Agreement.

👉 **Access the full Provider Agreement on the Warwickshire Early Years website -**[Early Education Funding Entitlements – Education and Early Years providers]

Finance Focus: Do Your Numbers Add Up?





Know your numbers!

A quick check of expected income against claims, invoices and payments received can help identify discrepancies early and support the financial sustainability of your provision.

With increasing financial pressures across the childcare sector, it is more important than ever for providers to understand their income streams and how they contribute to the sustainability of their provision.

For providers delivering funded early education entitlements, this includes understanding the funding that should be received each term or month. However, the same principle applies to all childcare providers, including those delivering wraparound care, holiday provision and services that do not offer funded places. Having a clear understanding of expected income, expenditure and occupancy levels, and regularly reviewing these against actual figures, can help identify issues early and support effective financial management.

Do you know how much income your provision should be receiving?

Funding payments should never come as a surprise. While exact figures may vary due to adjustments and corrections, providers should have a reasonable understanding of the number of funded children attending their setting, the number of funded hours being claimed, and the age groups those claims relate to.

More broadly, all providers should have visibility of expected occupancy levels, booking patterns and anticipated income. Understanding what income should be generated from places, sessions, wraparound care or holiday provision can help identify discrepancies and support financial sustainability.

Recent audits have identified cases where funding has been underclaimed because providers were unaware that children had been omitted from their claim or that fewer hours had been submitted than the child was actually accessing. In some cases, the discrepancy was not

identified by the setting and was only discovered during an audit. Some of the underclaims identified were substantial, highlighting the importance of regularly checking claims against payments received.

What should providers be checking?

A simple reconciliation process can help identify issues early.

Providers delivering funded places should have a rough idea each term of:

✅ How many funded children are attending.

✅ Which entitlement each child is accessing.

✅ The age groups being claimed for.

✅ The number of funded hours being claimed.

✅ The approximate value of the funding expected.

All providers should also have an understanding of:

✅ Expected occupancy levels.

✅ Income generated from fees and charges.

✅ Trends in bookings and attendance.

✅ Any significant changes in income or expenditure.

✅ Whether actual income aligns with expectations.

✅ Whether fees and charges remain sufficient to cover delivery costs.

These figures can then be compared against submitted claims, invoices and payments received.

Why is reconciliation important?

Regular reconciliation can help providers:

✅ Identify missing or unexpected income.

✅ Spot funding, invoicing or payment discrepancies.

✅ Ensure funded claims accurately reflect children's attendance and entitlements (where applicable).

✅ Resolve issues more quickly and make use of correction or adjustment periods where available.

✅ Improve budgeting and cash flow forecasting.

✅ Monitor occupancy trends and their impact on income.

✅ Inform decisions regarding fee reviews and charging structures.

✅ Understand the impact of rising costs on the provision.

✅ Support informed business planning and decision-making.

✅ Strengthen the long-term sustainability of the provision.

The sooner an issue is identified, the easier it is to investigate and correct.

Whether your income comes from funded entitlements, parental fees, wraparound care, holiday provision or a combination of sources, having a clear understanding of what you expect to receive and regularly reviewing this against actual income can help protect the financial health of your provision. Regularly monitoring expenditure and reviewing fees and charges can also help ensure that income remains sufficient to support sustainable delivery.

To Stretch or Not to Stretch?





Before introducing stretched funding, consider parental demand, occupancy patterns and the financial implications for your provision. What works well for one setting may not be the right approach for another.

Stretched funding can offer valuable flexibility for families and providers alike. Before deciding whether it's right for your setting, consider the benefits and practical implications.

Benefits

- Supports working families by providing childcare throughout the year rather than term-time only.
- Predictable attendance patterns can help with occupancy and staffing planning.
- Improved parent satisfaction through greater flexibility and continuity of care.
- Reduced holiday drop-off as children attend more consistently across the year.
- Can enhance retention by meeting the needs of families looking for year-round childcare.

Considerations

- Lower weekly funded hours may be difficult for some parents to understand.
- More complex administration, with funding calculations requiring careful management.
- Potential cashflow implications if occupancy levels fluctuate during holiday periods.
- Staffing challenges, as demand may remain high throughout the year, limiting quieter periods for training and annual leave.

- Mixed attendance patterns, if some families stretch funding and others do not, can create planning complexities.

Stretching Isn't Annualising!

Stretching allows children who attend fewer hours each week than their maximum entitlement to access all their funded hours over a greater number of weeks, often across the full year that a setting is open.

For example:

A child eligible for the 30-hour entitlement can access:

- **30 funded hours per week for 38 weeks** (term time only); or
- **22.35 funded hours per week for 51 weeks** (stretched across the year).

In both examples, the child is accessing the same annual entitlement. The number of funded hours available each week is simply reduced so that the entitlement can be spread over more weeks.

Averaging is different.

Averaging enables parents to pay a consistent monthly amount for any additional, non-funded sessions. This is calculated by spreading the total annual cost of chargeable sessions across the contracting period to produce a regular invoice amount.

For example:

A child attends:

- **30 funded hours per week during the 38 funded weeks**, and
- **30 chargeable hours per week during the remaining 13 weeks of the year**.

If the total cost of those chargeable sessions over the 13 weeks is **£1,950**, the provider may choose to divide this amount across 12 equal monthly payments.

Rather than receiving larger invoices during school holiday periods, the family would pay:

£1,950 ÷ 12 = £162.50 per month

This can make childcare costs more predictable for families whilst also supporting more consistent income for providers.

Remember...

- **Stretching** changes how funded hours are distributed across the year.
- **Annualising/Averaging** changes how parents are invoiced for chargeable sessions.
- A setting may choose to offer one, both, or neither approach.

Need help with the calculations?

Use Columns A, B and C on the PDF to support stretch calculations and ensure funded hours are distributed correctly across the weeks attended.

Need a refresher? Further information is available from page 54 in the Guidance for Early Years Entitlements Funding 2026.

Food for thought: Could stretched funding provide the flexibility your families are looking for? And if you already operate year-round, could annualised billing help make childcare costs more predictable for families whilst supporting consistent cashflow for your provision?

Inspector Calling?





The inspector has left the building... but there's still one important thing to do.

If you deliver funded early education entitlements, please remember to notify Warwickshire County Council of the outcome of your Ofsted or Childminder Agency inspection within **3 working days**.

We would also encourage all other early years and childcare providers to share their inspection outcomes with us as soon as possible. Doing so helps us keep provider records up to date, celebrate successes and ensure the right advice and support is available where needed.

You can use earlyyears@warwickshire.gov.uk or earlyyearsadvisors@warwickshire.gov.uk

Childminder Start-Up Grant



Warwickshire County Council is pleased to launch the **Childminder Start-Up Grant**, offering up to **£1,500** to support newly registered childminders in setting up high quality, affordable childcare places across the county.

The grant is available to childminders who have registered with Ofsted or a Childminder Agency **on or after 1 April 2026** and aims to help with start-up costs such as registration fees, training and equipment.

Funding Available

The grant is available in two stages:

- **£1,200 Start-Up Grant** for newly registered childminders.
- **Optional £300 Enhanced Grant** for childminders who choose to offer funded early education places within their first year of registration.

A total of £30,000.00 has been allocated to support the establishment of new childminder provision across the county. Applications will be considered on a first-come, first-served basis and, once all available funding has been allocated, no further applications can be accepted.

Eligibility

Applicants must:

- Be registered with Ofsted or a Childminder Agency on or after **1 April 2026**.

- Not have been registered with Ofsted or a Childminder Agency in the **two years** prior to applying for the grant.
- Not have had a registration ended due to regulatory compliance matters within the **last three years**.

How to Apply

To apply for the initial £1,200 grant, applicants must:

- Hold an active Ofsted or Childminder Agency registration certificate.
- Complete the Childminder Start-Up Grant application form.
- Submit receipts and proof of purchase for eligible start-up costs.

Applications should be emailed to **earlyyearsadmin@warwickshire.gov.uk** with the subject line:

Childminder Start-Up Grant Application

Successful applicants will be notified within 15 working days of the Early Years Funding Panel decision and payment will be made once a signed grant agreement and all supporting receipts hashave been returned.

Additional £300 Funding

Childminders can apply for an additional **£300** if they:

- Sign up to deliver Early Education Funded Places within their first year of registration.
- Register their first funded child on the funding provider portal.

More information about delivering funded childcare can be found here: https://schools.warwickshire.gov.uk/early-years-childcare-providers/early-education-funding-entitlements

Important Information

Successful applicants must provide childcare places in Warwickshire for a minimum of two years. If the business closes during this period, grant funding will be subject to clawback in line with the grant terms.

The Childminder Start-Up Grant is an excellent opportunity for new childminders to receive practical financial support while helping meet the growing demand for early years education and childcare places across Warwickshire.

Early Years Business Spotlight Sessions

Connect, Share, and Learn Together

Our free Early Years Business Spotlight Sessions offer a relaxed and informal space for providers to network, share ideas, celebrate successes, and discuss the issues that matter most to them.

Open to **owners, managers, trustees, directors, and those with responsibility for the leadership and sustainability of early years and childcare provision**, these sessions provide a supportive environment to exchange experiences, offer peer support, and explore both the challenges and opportunities of running an early years business.

Some sessions are designed for specific provider types, such as childminders or term-time only settings, creating opportunities to discuss issues that are particularly relevant to those groups. We also offer All Provider Sessions, which are open to everyone. Providers are welcome to attend the session most relevant to their setting, the All Provider Sessions, or both.

While most sessions are open discussions shaped by attendees, we occasionally include guest speakers or focus on topics of particular interest to the sector.

Your voice helps shape these sessions, so we'd love to hear your suggestions for future discussions.

Book your free place below and join the conversation!

Book Here:

Business Spotlight: Open to All Providers



For all early years and childcare providers in Warwickshire

- Tuesday 17th November 2026
- 11:00 - 12:00
- Book here

Business Spotlight: Childminders



A session for registered childminders in Warwickshire

- Thursday 10th December 2026
- 18:30 - 19:30
- Book here

Funding and Grants

Wooden Spoon Society - Grants for Children's Projects

Wooden Spoon offers grants to organisations supporting children and young people facing disadvantage or living with disabilities. Funding may be available for projects that improve learning, health, wellbeing, and access to play and physical activity.

If your setting or organisation is planning a project that could benefit children and families in your community, you may wish to explore this funding opportunity.

Find out more and apply: Apply for a grant: Wooden Spoon, the children's charity of rugby | Wooden Spoon.

The National Lottery Community Fund

The National Lottery Community Fund offers a range of funding programmes that support projects helping communities thrive.

While eligibility varies, some grants may be suitable for Early Years settings, particularly voluntary-managed, committee-led, and charitable providers delivering projects that support children, families, wellbeing, inclusion, and community engagement. Providers are encouraged to explore the available programmes to see if their project may be eligible for funding.

Find out more: Funding programmes | The National Lottery Community Fund

Tesco Fruit & Veg Grants

Tesco Fruit & Veg Grants are available to schools and community groups to help children and young people learn about growing, cooking, and enjoying fresh fruit and vegetables. Grants can support projects such as growing areas, gardening activities, outdoor learning spaces, and initiatives that promote healthy eating and wellbeing. If you are looking to enhance children's understanding of food, nutrition, and the natural environment, this could be a valuable source of funding.

Find out more and apply: Fruit and Veg Grants - Tesco Fundraising | Tesco PLC

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.

Find out more and apply: 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 and apply: nBS Foundation - npower Business Solutions

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.

There is one remaining bidding round this year. The closing date for applications this year is:

- **4th December 2026**

Find out more and apply: Community Grants | Royal Leamington Spa Town Council

Contact Us

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

Early Education Funding queries: eyfunding@warwickshire.gov.uk

Childminder Funding queries: childminderfunding@warwickshire.gov.uk

Warwickshire Early Years Quality, Standards and Safeguarding: 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

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

Early Education and Funding Entitlements support page

Important information and forms for funded providers