**Early Years Resource Panel**

**TERMS OF REFERENCE**

**1. Purpose**

To allocate funding, resourcing and / or agree lease awards to registered childcare providers in Essex to support the Local Authority’s duty of sufficiency. The resourcing must:

* Support Essex County Council’s Early Years and Childcare Strategy 2022-2027. Specifically, the strategic aim – Parents can access affordable sufficient, high quality and fully inclusive childcare places that support early learning and working parents
* Support high quality provision
* Support Early Years Foundation Stage outcomes (in settings where delivery of this framework is required)

The resources currently available to childcare providers and within the remit of the Early Years Resource Panel (‘the Panel’) are as follows:

* Full Inclusion Funding
* Renewed Inclusion Funding
* SEN Premium Funding
* SEN Premium Additional Hours Funding
* Increase In Hours Inclusion Funding
* Emergency Childcare Funding
* S106 Capital Funding
* Capital Funding accessed vis DfE initiatives
* Lease opportunities
* Inclusion Partner support
* Early Years Early Intervention Partner support
* Engagement Facilitator support

The purpose of the Panel is to reach a consensus decision based on the resourcing criteria in place at the time on whether to agree or decline submissions. Panel may also reach a consensus decision based on Special Educational Needs Inclusion Funding (SENIF) criteria where appropriate.

In addition to assessing submissions and making recommendations for the most appropriate resourcing and banding, the Panel will also:

* Decide upon additional clauses to be inserted into funding agreements
* Stipulate what additional information is required to be submitted when an application is due for a renewal, and the deadline for submission of such renewal
* Make recommendations to refer cases to other relevant bodies
* Maximise the impact and coverage of available funding

In addition, the Panel may also make recommendations to award a lease of a property to a childcare provider, using the existing application process and having regard to the criteria set out in the same. Such lease may relate to an ECC owned building or a new building being funded through S106 and ECC capital funding for the provision of early years provision (buildings) on school land.

**2. Membership**

Membership of the Panel is as follows:

**Resource Panel Voting members:**

* Chair
* Representative(s) from Early Years and Childcare
* Representative from ECC SEND Services
* Business Management Consultant – for Capital Grants and lease opportunities only

Internal ECC staff and representatives from settings may also attend panel in an observing, non-voting capacity. All attendees will read and sign the Terms of Reference.

**3. Ratification of recommendations for Funding**

The minutes of the meeting with all recommendations clearly recorded will be agreed by the Chair. The agreed minutes will be transferred to a document for a Chief Officer’s Action (COA) by the delegated officer on a quarterly basis.

Recommendations for all Capital funding will be approved via a Cabinet Member Action (CMA) and published in line with current ECC Governance requirements.

**4. Meeting Administration and Assessment Process**

Meetings will be held once per month from 1st April – 31st March each financial year. At the meetings in February and March recommendations on submissions for resourcing from 1st April onwards may be considered. The dates will be decided in January each year for the following financial year. The Panel will be held on the third Thursday of the month (although this may differ on occasion to accommodate school holidays and/or panel business). All dates will be published on the Council’s Early Years and Childcare website.

All resourcing applications must be submitted directly to the EYCC Inclusion Funding inbox, the Pre-School Panel Allocations inbox, the EY Capital inbox or via any available online form by the published deadline. Incomplete applications will be rejected. The EYCC Investment Officer will circulate all applications for comment to the relevant officers and partners in line with the current processes. It is the responsibility of these officers and partners to ensure they read all submissions fully and complete the relevant comment sheet. Failure to do so could mean submissions being deferred or declined due to lack of relevant information. Voting members should read the submissions and the associated comments sheets and send any queries to the Panel administrator prior to the deadline set when submissions are circulated.

Applications for either capital funding or lease opportunities should be sent to the EYCC Capital inbox by the published deadline. The nominated early years and childcare officer will circulate all applications for comment to the relevant officers and partners in line with current processes. It is the responsibility of these officers and partners to ensure they read all applications fully and complete the relevant scoring sheet.

**5. Out of Panel Recommendations**

Emergency Childcare Funding applications will be considered by the members of Panel via an electronic circulation and voting system. The outcome of these applications will be recorded on the next panel meeting minutes.

**6. Panel Responsibilities**

* To consider all resourcing outcomes, based on the merits of the information supplied by the setting
* Treat circulated information and discussions held in a confidential manner
* Not to discuss decisions to decline or recommendations for funding outside of the meeting until such time as minutes have been circulated and applicants have been informed of decisions
* To declare any actual or potential conflicts of interest
* To read all requests for resourcing in full prior to the meeting. Queries and requests for additional information need to be with the EYCC Investment Officer in time so that as far as possible all outstanding queries can be resolved prior to the panel.
* Resource panel voting members will remain objective at all times and make decisions based solely on the submitted information
* Incomplete submissions will not be reviewed by the Panel and will be rejected. Rejected submissions can be resubmitted to the next available panel when fully complete and all requested amendments have been made
* Resource panel decision is final. Appeals will not be considered, although providers may reapply at another time after taking into consideration reason for the rejection
* The agenda for each panel will be set in advance. Any other business will be considered if added to the agenda prior to the Panel meeting commencing
* All members will treat each other with respect and only one conversation will take place at any one time. This is to avoid important information being missed which could have an impact on decisions taken. When speaking at Panel, members will address all those present
* An Equality Impact Assessment for the panel will be completed annually to support Cabinet Member Actions recorded for that year
* Panel members will review and vote on Emergency Childcare applications electronically. Should there not be a clear consensus of this vote, the Chair will have the final say on whether an application should be funded or not. Applications will be submitted to the panel members as they are received. The Panel member must respond to the application within 3 working days.
* Recommendations on whether to fund and at what value or hourly rate will be agreed by consensus.
* The Panel members should arrive promptly and confirm attendance/absence on receipt of the Agenda
* If a member confirms their absence they should, where appropriate, arrange a suitable replacement to attend.

**6. Chairperson**

The EYCC Sufficiency and Sustainability Manager will chair the meetings and a nominated individual from the Panel Membership will Chair in the event of any absence of the EYCC Sufficiency and Sustainability Manager

**7. Role of Chairperson**

The key role of the Chairperson is to ensure that the Panel meetings are run effectively, focusing on priorities and making the best use of time available, and ensuring that all members have an equal opportunity to participate in discussion and decision-making. The Chairperson will be expected to have clear lines of communication with the Early Years and Childcare service and their partners.

**8. Declaration of Interest**

From time to time, the Panel may be asked to make a decision concerning resourcing where a member of the Panel has a direct financial, professional or personal interest in the outcome. Panel members (including the Chair and Vice Chair) are asked to declare such interests as a condition of their membership and may be asked to leave the meeting for a time whilst particular decisions are made.

**9. Meeting administration**

The Panel is administered by the EYCC Investment Officer with assistance from Business Support. The agenda will be produced and circulated in advance of the meeting. Minutes of the meetings are recorded and circulated; any amendments should be notified to the EYCC Investment Officer at the time of circulation. Minutes are signed off by the Resource Panel at the following meeting.

**Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Agreement**

I declare that if I have a personal and/or professional and/or financial interest in a childcare provider or organisation submitting an application, or a family connection, personal or professional knowledge of a child/family referred to in the submission - I will declare this and, if required to by Essex County Council, will not be involved in any part of the discussion or voting at Panel.

I declare that I will treat all information provided by Essex County Council and/or any information submitted by childcare providers in relation to the Panel as confidential and not disclose this to people outside of the Panel. I will not use this information for any purpose other than to inform the decision-making process of the Panel. I will not store this information in any place other than the folder location provided for the purposes of reviewing submissions for Panel.

I declare that discussion about submissions for resourcing will also be limited to the conversations through the panel process and understand that any feedback to childcare providers relating to the outcome will be managed by the EYCC Investment Officer, designated CCDL or the EYCC Sufficiency & Sustainability Manager.

Name……………………………………………………………………

Signed …………………………………………………………………………

Date ……………………………………………………………………………