

Extraordinary East and South LPG Virtual Meeting Minutes
Thursday 11th June
10.30am

Attendees:

Natasha Brennan	Lorag/Chair
Martin Sloan	BHSCT/LPG Coordinator
Alison Templeton	New Life Counselling
Natasha Moore	South I Family Support Hub
Judith Searle	Barnardos
Natalie Killough	BHSCT
Amy Gillen	EBCDA
Rosy McLean	Inner East Family Support Hub
Joan Davis	Family Mediation NI
Paul O'Neill	BHSCT
Charlene Mitchell	Outer South & East Family Support Hub
Joy Poots	Sure Start
Joan Henderson	Solas
Stephen Cruise	Oasis
Clare Humphrey	Barnardos
Dee Brennan	Short Strand Community Forum
Julie Kinnear	South II/Casa Family Support Hub
Jennifer Heverin	LPG Administration

Apologies:

Barbara Smith	Eastside Partnership
Linda Armitage	EBCDA
Gabi Mornhinweg	BHSCT
Sinead Campbell	Advice NI
Gillian Hamilton	EBCDA
William Olphert	CWA-NI
Stephen Atkinson	Gems NI
Patricia Morrow	Extern
Adrian Green	Mount Merrion Church
Carriann Rainey	Cedar Foundation
Ben Hanvey	BHSCT
Laura Forte	NIACRO
Clare Flynn	Forward South Partnership
Fionnula McCotter	An Droichead Primary School
Laura Feeney	Save the Children
Phil Lindsay	Barnardos
Ann Marie Doyle	Princes Trust
Janet Douds	Taughmonagh PS
Roberta Richmond	East Belfast Counselling
Bronagh Muldoon	NSPCC
Dermot Magorrian	Youth Justice Agency

Debbie Sterritt
Kara Bailie
Fiona O'Donnell

Health Visiting BHSCCT
QUB
Senac

1) Introduction

Natasha Brennan (Chair) opened the meeting, inviting those in attendance to introduce themselves and give a brief overview about their organisation. Natasha also advised that Paul O'Neill had to leave the meeting early so he was going to speak first:

Childcare Guidelines

Guidance regarding childcare has been released on the Family Support NI website. This is Departmental advice, not advice from the Health and Social Care Trust. The basic overview is about creating childcare 'pods' with no more than 12 children per pod with the same members of staff attending each pod where possible. The same standards will still apply regarding maximum number of children allowed per room; a huge room could contain 2 pods separated by screens but the most likely scenario will be one pod per room.

The key worker list has been extended with the Department of Education list merging with the Department of Health list. This will create more demand.

The current fund lasts up until the 30th June and there has been no decision made whether there will be any support beyond this.

Guidance has also been released to Childminders advising they can take children from up to 3 different families.

Regarding risk assessments, these will be carried out via online meetings as there will be no site visits. It is reassuring that existing groups that never closed have been operating at a very high standard, even more risk aware than the current guidelines require. It is possible that these guideline could change further down the line but we can only plan for what we have today.

Action: The guidelines from the Family Support NI website will be emailed out to all the members via Martin

Questions put to Paul O'Neill regarding the new childcare guidelines:

Q: Joy Poots: With regards to sessional care - will the guidelines for this be the same as those for daycare? When will sessional care be allowed?

A: Cannot say what this will look like with us as Sure Start may have different ideas of what targets are expected. At the present time, the issue of sessional daycare has been raised and is being discussed but no decision has yet been taken. However, it is unlikely that it would deviate greatly from the current daycare guidelines.

Q: Stephen Cruise: The guidelines are a welcome change, however, has it been accepted that social distancing is an impossibility with children?

A: Yes, within a pod of 12 they can mix freely and don't have to social distance. Children are not thought to have a high infection risk, the concerns are more for staff. If a provider is not strictly adhering to these guidelines they will not be penalised as these are guidelines, not rules. Each place to use their own risk assessment.

Q: Joan Henderson: With regards to finance, there was a commitment from the BSO for a 5 day turnaround on applications, however Solas have been waiting 3.5wks. Will this be done any sooner and it is going to cause difficulties coming into the summer with no cash flow?

A: Contacted every group and provided multiple statistics and names of who was open. Finance's are beyond Paul's remit and it was suggested to perhaps contact DE, Paul doesn't know who the BSO contact is for finances.

Natasha Brennan suggested that it may be an idea to have a sub group for South and East Belfast focusing on childcare.

Action: Martin to send an email to gauge interest on joining a childcare sub-group.

2&3). Updates from Members and Emerging Issues

i) Joan Henderson: Solas

They have been dealing with a large number of fathers who are distraught at not being able to see their children. There have been some valid reasons for this such as someone being classed as vulnerable, however, some are using Covid-19 as an excuse to keep fathers from their children. This is having a significant mental health impact on both the father and the children. Solas have continued to carry out mediation sessions via Zoom.

Action: Joan to pass on any guidance or contact details to Martin to distribute.

Natasha Brennan: lots of issues arising around education so we should perhaps look further into this. Martin to set up meetings and invite someone from the Education Authority. Also look into how we can get school Principals involved. It would be good to have this as an agenda item at next meeting.

Action: Martin to add the topic of Education to the next agenda and invite someone from the Education Authority

ii) Judith Searle: Barnardos

BAME families experience a lot of digital poverty and Barnardos have worked with schools to gain access to devices for those in need. There is also physical and financial poverty. There is a need to focus on getting children back to school and offering support to families, especially those who don't have English as a first language.

It was then noted that education is a major topic that requires further consideration. It was pointed out that the school Principals will always make the final decisions for their own schools and therefore it would be prudent to engage with Principals.

Action: Natasha and Martin to contact school Principals.

iii) Natasha Moore: South I Family Support Hub

Parents concerned about children only returning to school two days per week. When parents are off furlough and back to work – who will mind the children?

Action: Natasha and Martin will discuss as part of the Childcare meeting.

iv) Julie Kinnear: South II/Casa Family Support Hub

12 families referred in April; 7 were Covid-related concerning children with additional needs struggling with lockdown; 5 were food bank referrals which in turn led to further referrals. There have also been concerns around childcare with some parents having to leave their jobs as no childcare available. From May onwards referrals have mainly been around stress/anxiety due to families spending so much time together. They have also found that parents can be stressed about home schooling, feeling they are letting their children down if they can't stay on top of their children's work, either educationally or technically.

v) Charlene Mitchell – Outer South and East Family Support Hub

The main topic they have been dealing with is anxiety and depression in post-primary school children. Some young people have been isolating from their family by not leaving their bedrooms.

Another recurring issue is the transition back to school, especially for children with ASD and Autism. These children may have become more settled into a home routine only to be uprooted again into a new and different school routine.

vi) Rosy McLean – Inner East Family Support Hub

In the beginning it was practical needs around food and bills but now more family support is required. Again the issue of anxiety about children returning to school is prominent. Parents are also worried about coping over the summer.

4. AOB

- Martin wanted to clarify that they would push education and childcare as priorities for the sub-group meetings.
- Joy Poots stated that lots of online work had been taken place and hopes this will continue even after lockdown ends. Also Joy suggested that more could be done outdoors over the summer such as puppet shows/Jo Jingles/play parks and the like. It was agreed that this was a great idea and suggested that we share any ideas we may have for this.
- It was advised that nothing has been heard with regards to the Belfast Council or Education Authority's funding or summer scheme events. Once any information is received it will be circulated to all members.
- Everyone agreed that they were happy to keep both the South LPG and East LPG meetings merged for the time being when we are gathering virtually.
- No date confirmed yet for the next meeting. This will be advised.

Natasha thanked everyone for their attendance and support.