

Update Finance and Resources Scrutiny Committee 18th October 2022

Title	Maintained Nursery Update
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1. **Introduction:**

1.1 As North Northamptonshire Council is only funded for the 15 hours universal entitlement based on participation in Maintained Nursery Supplement (MNS), it was decided to move towards a participation model of funding for MNS in 2023-24. This is deemed the only proportionate, fair and sustainable mechanism. This was presented to School Forum earlier this year.

1.2 In order to ensure the future sustainability of the four maintained nurseries and to ensure the MNS funding was being spent appropriately a series of reviews and activities took place over the summer, they include:

- Financial/Compliance Audit
- Scrutiny Oversight Committee to undertake site visits
- Monitoring of one year Transition Grant funding issued to each setting

1.3 The reviews taking place should enable the Local Authority to:

- Understand the issues of direct relevance to local people and seeks to understand the reasons for the apparent inequity in funding across the 4 nurseries.
- Consider the outcomes of children attending (or who have attended) the nurseries and determine if the delivery of outcomes is proportionate to the funding of the nurseries.
- Understand how the nurseries adapt to deliver early years provision that meets the needs of their communities and supports a local and inclusive agenda through a strong start in life.
- Enable the Local Authority to ensure there are proposals to deliver ‘future proofed’ tangible recommendations for equitable, outcome improvements for children accessing maintained nursery provision across the communities of NNC.

2. The overall review of maintained nurseries in North Northants is underway and below is a summary and update of each of the actions that will contribute to a detailed analysis of the and feedback to Scrutiny when complete.

3. **Finance and Compliance Audit**

3.1 An in depth financial/compliance audit for the four maintained nurseries was undertaken during August and September 2022. All information is currently being reviewed and will result in a report on the findings with recommendations. A detailed action plan of all work being undertaken is attached in **appendix 1**.

3.2 Due to the complexities of staffing and financial processes in one of the nurseries, it has resulted in the need to make additional audit enquiries in relation to safer recruitment processes, this audit is due to take place as soon as a date is agreed. A letter of concern has been sent to the nursery requesting sight of all documentation and processes and procedures. A response is to be provided by 6th October 2022 to AnnMarie Dodds

3.3 In order for the Local Authority to be certain that the nurseries are properly safeguarding the children in their care, an Independent Safeguarding Audit will be undertaken at each of the 4 Maintained Nurseries. This audit will appraise measures currently in place to ensure that they are up to standard and effective, fully compliant legally but also that all policies and procedures are read and understood by staff.

3.4 The audit will also ensure that there are processes to ensure that information is communicated to parents and any other relevant parties. It will also look at record keeping, training of staff and the single central record. Safeguarding is a limiting judgement in any Ofsted Inspection and it has been some time since a Safeguarding Audit has been undertaken by the LA, so it seems appropriate to undertake it alongside the financial compliance audit.

3.5 Officers are in the process of procuring an independent provider to undertake the Safeguarding audits and they will take place as soon as practically possible.

4 Maintained Nursery Schools Review - Task & Finish Group

A subcommittee has been convened to undertake visits to each of the four nurseries

Cllr Valerie Anslow

Cllr Jim Hakewill

Cllr Richard Levell

Cllr Paul Marks

Cllr Steven North

Cllr Mark Pengelly

Cllr Malcolm Ward

4.1 A presentation was given to the Sub Committee on 8th September 2022, to support their understanding of Maintained Nurseries and the funding they receive, a copy is attached in **appendix 2**

4.2 An officer will accompany the committee on their visits and as an aid we have provided them with a set of questions attached in **appendix 3**. Visits are to take place between 7th and 17th October 2022

5. One-year Transition Grant

5.1 The Council awarded the four maintained nurseries a one-off LA Transition Grant from the Council's Contingency Budget to support the nurseries and ensure their sustainability moving forward. The award is as follows:

- £350k to Pen Green
- £100k each to Croyland, Highfield and Ronald Tree

5.1 All grant agreements have been signed and each nursery has been provided with monitoring documents to evidence the spend and financial tracking document to ensure all monies are receipted and goods delivered by 31st March 2023.

Appendices:

Appendix 1	Maintained Nursery Action Plan
Appendix 2	Presentation to Scrutiny
Appendix 3	Questionnaire prompt sheet