

4. Early Years Single Funding Formula 2026/27

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This report sets out the outcome of the 2026/27 Early Years Funding consultations, and proposals for decision as outlined below. This is to ensure the Council meet its statutory requirements as per the Schools Forum regulations and Early Years Financial Regulations.

The Early Years Sub-Group, comprising representatives from a range of local provider types, has engaged constructively with the proposal and provided valuable input throughout its development. A key preference expressed by members was for the local consultation to be timed to follow the DfE's announcement of national funding rates, while avoiding the Christmas period. This would ensure that providers are able to consider the local approach with full sight of confirmed funding levels. The DfE confirmed the national funding formulae and hourly rates for local authorities for the 2026/27 financial year on 15 December 2025, alongside the expectation that local authorities will pass through a minimum of 97% of this funding to providers.

For 2026–27, the Council proposes to maintain stability in the Early Years Single Funding Formula (EYSFF) by keeping the current structure unchanged. This includes retaining the existing universal base rate and deprivation supplement, with no alterations to eligibility criteria or rates.

Any additional funding received from the Department for Education will be fully passed on to providers through increases in the universal base hourly rates.

The Special Educational Needs Inclusion Fund (SENIF) will also remain unchanged, with no amendments to existing rates or processes.

In line with national regulations, the Council will retain the maximum 3% of the EYSFF to fund central services necessary to administer and support the delivery of the early year's entitlements.

On 12 January 2026, the Early Years Single Funding Formula consultation paper and online link for responses was emailed to 270 childcare providers registered for early education funding within Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council (BCP). The deadline for responses was on 25 January 2026. 20% of providers engaged with the consultation. Overall, providers were supportive of the proposal for 2026/27 EYSFF. The consultation response is summarised at Appendix A.

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Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council

Proposed Changes to the Early Years Single Funding Formula for the Funded Early Entitlements for April 2026 – March 2027

Outcome of the Consultation

January 2026

The Early Years Single Funding Formula consultation paper and online link for response was emailed to 270 childcare providers registered for early education funding within Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council (BCP) on 12 January 2026.

Three virtual briefing events were held during the consultation period.

The consultation close date was 11pm, 25 January 2026.

Total issued 270

Type of Setting	Total Issued	Response (Number)	Response (%)
All Respondents	270	53	20%
Childminders	124	25	20%
Day Nursery	77	19	25%
Pre-School	50	8	16%
School Nursery	15	0	0%
Independent Nursery	4	1	25%

Overall, 20% of the sector returned feedback on the consultation. While childminders are the largest respondent group, the sector feedback for only group settings in isolation is 19%.

The outcome from each question asked within the consultation is summarised below.

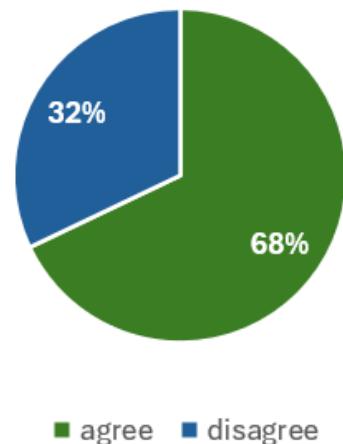
This document also includes any comment left by a provider (anonymised where necessary).

Question 1:

Do you agree with the proposal to make no changes to the existing local EYSFF formula structure, including the universal base rate, deprivation supplement and SEND Tier funding for the 2026/27 Financial Year?

Type of Setting	Agree	Disagree
All Respondents (53)	36 (68%)	17 (32%)
Childminders (25)	14 (56%)	11 (44%)
Day Nursery (19)	15 (79%)	4 (21%)
Pre-School (8)	6 (75%)	2 (25%)
School Nursery Class (0)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Independent Nursery (1)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)

All Respondents (53)



The table above shows broad support for the proposal to keep the existing Early Years Single Funding Formula unchanged.

Comments:

Day nursery:

higher base rate for over 3s - higher 1-1 for SEN to help hire staff
N/A I'm happy with the proposal
Overall we support the proposal
The under 2s and 2 year old rates I believe are good. The 3/4 year old rates still fall short for our business.
Retaining the existing EYSFF structure provides stability and certainty for providers at a time of significant operational and financial pressure. Consistency in the base rate, deprivation supplement, and SEND tier funding supports effective business planning and avoids unnecessary disruption.
nothing due to constraints of funding given from Government
Use the excessive and unnecessary overfunding for Under 2's towards enhancing the base rate for 3 & 4 year olds, as well as the SEND Tier funding.
Nothing, this looks to be the best option with the limited funds available

Does it matter - we are never listened to anyway.

It is ridiculous to think that the SEN funding will achieve anything. If you have a child who NEEDS support are we employ a apprentice to care for them as this is the only rate that covers what you are offering on the higher tier!

Councils should employ the SEN workers and then distribute hours to settings ie - Sarah from BCP goes to nursery 1 and works with Tom for 3 hours. She then goes to nursery 2 and supports Bella for 2 hours. But that would be tricky as Sarah does not work for less then NMW.

The current funding leaves do not reflect the raising costs faced by early years providers including staff wages, pension, national insurance rent, food and all the consumables we us at X.

Happy with no change so we can max the base rate as much as possible

We will still struggle with the low 3-4 year old funding

Preschool:

Take into account the council tax rates increases

I understand from the consultation briefing that some money is being made available to Dingleys promise, I think that this should be added to the SEND tier funding instead. Extra on the tier funding will directly benefit individual children enabling them to attend early years settings with the support they need throughout their early years.

I agree with the current formula

The 3 and 4 year base rate needs to be higher

Childminders:

Under our rates

I would look at ways to increase the 3 and 4 year old funding rate. These children use more resources and time. Large settings cannot be the only ones considered when making decisions on these rates.

Change the 3/4yr funding rate

I would ensure that increases to the base rate genuinely reflect rising costs faced by childminders, including staff wages, food, utilities, insurance, training and compliance. I would also review age-band rates, as current funding for 3-4-year-olds does not cover delivery costs, and ensure funding keeps pace with the National Living Wage.

Unsure

I agree with council decision

Ideally Increase 3/4 year old rate, otherwise all is good

Keep it as it is.

Same amount of funding for all age groups

Make an increase

Give more to 3 & 4 yr olds

I WOULD OFFER 3 AND 4 YEAR OLD FUNDING A HIGHER RATE

I honestly believe that some of the much higher rates for the children under 2 should be used to bring up the rate for the 3 and 4 year olds.

Raise the rate for 3/4years

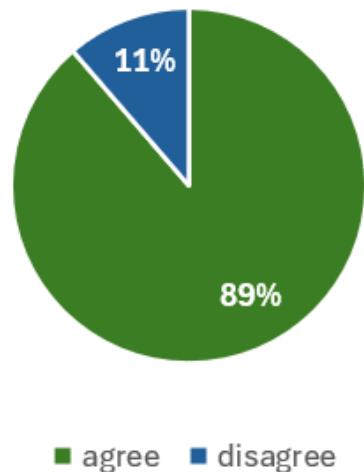
Change to 3/4 year funding to a higher rate as it's lower than providers hourly rate and due to restrictions on top up fees, we are down in pay or will be forced to be a younger setting, meaning 3/4 year olds miss out.

Question 2:

Do you agree with the proposal to add all additional funding received from the DfE for the new financial year directly to the universal base hourly rates for providers?

Type of Setting	Agree	Disagree
All Respondents (53)	47 (89%)	6 (11%)
Childminders (25)	21 (84%)	4 (16%)
Day Nursery (19)	17 (89%)	2 (11%)
Pre-School (8)	8 (100%)	0 (0%)
School Nursery (0)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Independent Nursery (1)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)

All Respondents (53)



The table above shows a strong cross-sector consensus to pass through any uplift received from DfE to the base rate.

Comments:

Day nursery:

higher base rate for over 3s
I disagree with the additional 25p going to under 2's. Why is it not being used to increase the 3&4 year old base rate?
Nothing
Again it would be good if the 3/4 year old rates are looked at
Directing all additional DfE funding into the universal base rate is welcomed, as it ensures all providers benefit from increased investment and helps address rising costs, particularly staffing, National Living Wage increases, and delivery of expanded entitlements.
Government to be more realistic in funding amounts given to support the sector - BCP can only work with what they are given
Please see above answer
Nothing as much as possible needs to be done to raise the base rate

Does it matter - we are never listened to anyway.

Stop giving Parents false hope as what childcare actually costs.

Employ someone who actually understands how to run a business.

3-4 year olds need more funding. Giving the u2s the additional is not common sense when it is so high already.

Central Government need to sit down pen to paper compare the amount we actual charge for u2s and then proportion the funding accordingly.

Nothing

to up with inflation

SEN provision

A better base rate

The 25p to be added to 3 and 4 year rate

Childminders:

it is still under what we charge

“Give childminders and nurseries a higher hourly rate per child, paid automatically.”

Less money skimmed off for central costs or complicated supplements. Fairer and simpler.

Unsure

Add more to the 3 & 4 year old funding base rate instead of the under 2's.

I have my trust in the funding team

Keep it as it is

Nothing would add it to the base rate

I don't know

Please see my comments below

I would give less to under two and more to the 3/4 yr olds.

I tend to bury my head in the sand because it often feels as though the government is trying to phase out home-based childcare in favour of school-based nurseries, which is really sad. Children should have more access to outdoor play and learning, and that is something you are far less likely to get in a school-based nursery.

Apply the funding rates to the 3 and 4 years olds.

Raise the rate for 3/4years

Up the 3/4 year funding to meet hourly rates and support small settings that want to continue funding their high level of care and businesses that they pride themselves on

Question 3:

Please use this section to provide any additional comments you wish to make.

Additional comments shared by providers are presented in the next section.

Day nursery:

I think the additional 25p could be used more effectively. Private settings and childminders are concerned that the 3&4 year old rate is very low, potentially causing settings to favour younger children (especially childminders working on a smaller ratio), so why is the 25p not being used to help bring the 3&4 year old rate up and alleviate some of this issue? I appreciate that there may be more 3&4 year old funded hours across the county but a lower value could be offered for this age group? I think this would be more beneficial than creating a larger gap between the age groups.

Just want to add some clarity for when these comments are published. We need to put to bed this myth that babies are 'overpaid' in the funding formula.

Based on ratios the under 2's are paid £33.75 per 1 FTE, the 2-3's are paid £41.35 per FTE and the 3&4's are paid £46.88 per FTE

Babies are still well underpaid via funding compared to other age groups.

What would happen to the contingency if the local authority don't have to pay it back?

Overall, the proposed approach for 2026–27 strikes an appropriate balance between stability, transparency, and sustainability. Maintaining the existing EYSFF structure while passing increased funding directly into base rates supports provider viability and enables more accurate forward planning. Continued investment through deprivation supplements and SENIF is essential to support disadvantaged children and those with SEND, and it is positive that these mechanisms remain in place. Retaining a contingency fund is also sensible to manage in-year pressures. The funding rate for two-year-olds and, most notably, for three- and four-year-olds remains too low. Without parents choosing to pay additional services business would be unsustainable as the funding rate does not represent the cost of providing good quality care and education.

It is essential that BCP Council considers reducing or removing business rates for early years settings. Business rates place a significant financial burden on providers, and local authorities have discretion in offering relief. Any reduction would help to offset the ongoing funding shortfall for two-year-olds and, most notably, for three- and four-year-olds.

Our only concern is the 'slice' the DSG takes from parents funding allocation when children reach 4 years old, depending on which term. The DSG is considerably more per hour than early years settings are receiving. Can we please have a parent 'leaflet' developed from BCP so it is easily explain to parents why their funding entitlement gets reduced, so this saves us admin time, a parents have a better understanding please?? Thank you.

I THINK I HAVE COVERED EVERYTHING

We do not get enough money from government for hourly rate to keep going as a nursery. we just stay afloat from privet hours.

Formula is fine, rates need inflating for 3 year olds as this is our biggest spend

Whilst the funding amount is adequate for the under two's and two year olds we will still be left with a shortfall from the three and four year old funding particularly now that the voluntary contributions are now in force. It is frustrating that the inadequate funding for three and four year olds has still not been acknowledged

It would be more beneficial for the 25p additional amount to be increased for 3 and 4 year rate rather than baby rate

Preschool:

I appreciate this is a very difficult task, and thank you for giving us the opportunities to understand the decisions.

Thank you for the support that you give all BCP providers

Childminders:

Still under our rates

Increase the 3 and 4 year old funding rate. These children use more resources and time. Large settings and their logistics cannot be the only ones mostly considered when making decisions on these rates.

While adding additional DfE funding to the universal base rate is a positive step, the overall funding formula remains insufficient to reflect the true cost of delivering early years provision. Childminders face rising costs for wages, food, utilities, insurance, training and compliance, yet funding rates—particularly for 3–4-year-olds—do not cover these costs. A more sustainable formula is needed to ensure childminders can continue to offer funded places and remain in the sector.

Add more to the 3 & 4 year old funding base rate instead of the under 2's.

I am happy with the funding team decisions

A separate rate for childminders where all the ages were the same rate and it was averaged out across the 3 categories would be ideal because we have different ratio constraints to nurseries and can only have 3 under 5 regardless of age category so 3/4 age group becomes a financial loss at the moment.

Keep it simple is the best thing

By giving more funding to the early ages will mean less child care for the over 3's in the future maybe

Would a small setting rate be able to be discussed especially for childminders whose ratios are different to that of nursery and larger settings.

We often feel as though we are having to agree to a formula that best suits nurseries.

The additional 25p being added to under 2 year olds rate would have been better added to the 3/4 year old rate for my business

A higher rate should be given to 3 & 4 yr olds

I tend to bury my head in the sand because it often feels as though the government is trying to phase out home-based childcare in favour of school-based nurseries, which is really sad. Children should have more access to outdoor play and learning, and that is something you are far less likely to get in a school-based nursery.

I don't fully understand all the process but have been told there is a small settings rate that can be applied for to boost the 3,4 year old funding as it is beginning to feel like a way to push school based childcare by making childminders not sustainable.

I've done everything asked by the government in regards to asking for voluntary contributions to make up the shortfall between the funding (£5.34) and my hourly rate (£6.50) I have 2 sets of parents claiming universal credit, who have told me that UC won't pay the consumables and they can't afford to pay me so have lost out there. And also 2 families who have insisted on sending food, snacks etc (no nappies as over 3) so again I have the choice of giving them notice or losing her more money. Once sept children have gone to school I will no longer be keeping children once they are eligible for 3 year funding as I can not afford to lose so much money.

Just the 3/4 years is too low

The formula and restrictions feel as if childminders are being pushed out and parents are having less choice on settings that suit their own children and needs of the parents.

As a childminder, it doesn't matter what we say, we are a very small percentage of the early years section and we look after few children. We usually have to do everything alone, the bigger and faster the fee for funding hours, the better, the more secure our livelihood can be.

Text analysis/Issues raised

Increase 3- and 4-Year-Old rate

Many providers argue that the 3- and 4-Year-Old rate is too low vs delivery costs, particularly for small settings and childminders.

Council response: The council understand that delivery costs - especially for small settings and childminders - continue to rise and that this puts pressure on providers' budgets. The hourly rates the council passes on to providers are determined by the DfE, and local authorities must allocate funding in line with the national Early Years Funding Formula and statutory guidance. Within these constraints, the council works to ensure that all available funding is distributed fairly and transparently, and we continue to feedback providers' concerns to the DfE.

Under 2's rate too high

A minority view, more commonly raised by childminders; some nurseries counter this argument in comments.

Council response: The council acknowledges the comments suggesting that the rate may appear too high when compared with other age groups.

The rate for Under 2's is set in line with the Department for Education's national funding allocations, which reflect the higher staffing levels, smaller ratios and increased delivery costs associated with caring for the youngest children. Local authorities are required to pass this funding through to providers according to the national framework.

While the Under 2's rate may seem comparatively high, it is designed to ensure that providers are able to meet the statutory staffing requirements and provide safe, high-quality care for this age group.

Small settings / childminder rates

Some comments suggest separate rates for childminders due to fixed ratios and revenue mix.

Council response: The council understands the challenges faced by childminders and recognises that their operating structures can differ significantly from those of larger settings. However, the DfE requires local authorities to apply the same base rate across all provider types, including childminders, PVIs and schools. The only mechanism available to differentiate funding between types of providers would be to introduce an additional supplement specifically for childminders. Implementing such a supplement would require the council to reduce the universal base rate for all settings.

In consultations, providers across all sectors strongly expressed a preference to keep the base rate as high as possible, and therefore not to introduce new supplements that would reduce the universal rate.

SEND funding insufficient

Calls to put more into tiers/SENIF

Council response: The funding available for SEND support is determined within the overall early years allocation provided by the DfE. Within this allocation, the only way to increase SEND tiers funding would be to reduce the universal base rate for all providers so that additional resources could be redirected into SEND support.

In consultations, providers across all sectors have been clear that their priority is to keep the base rate as high as possible, and there has been strong opposition to any reduction of the base rate.

The council will continue to review how SEND funding is used, ensure it is distributed fairly and transparently, and share provider feedback with the DfE so the Department aware of the increasing pressures on early years settings.

Voluntary contributions

Providers commented that some parents are unwilling/unable to pay additional, optional fees; admin burden mentioned.

Council response: The council recognises that managing optional fees can be challenging, particularly when balancing affordability for families with the rising costs of delivering high-quality early years provision.

Under DfE guidance, funded hours must be delivered free at the point of access, and any optional charges must remain voluntary. The council understands that this can limit flexibility for settings and may create extra administration when some families are unable to contribute. The council continues to review processes to keep administrative requirements as manageable as possible and is committed to sharing clear information with parents to help reduce pressure on providers.

The council will also continue to reflect provider feedback to the DfE so they are aware of the financial and administrative challenges settings face.