

Date: 13<sup>th</sup> April 2026**Ref: Early Education & Childcare Funding Provider Agreement - Staffordshire**

Dear early years provider,

In line with the Department for Education's (DfEs) new early education and childcare [statutory guidance](#) from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2026, Staffordshire County Council will be refreshing its provider agreement and the parent declaration and privacy notice during summer term 2026. Further updates will be made over the coming months.

Until the new roll out we are advising providers that the terms and conditions in the current [Staffordshire Early Education and Childcare Provider Agreement 2025 will](#) remain in place for summer term - 1<sup>st</sup> April to 31<sup>st</sup> August 2026.

Providers are reminded that the agreement outlines the current conditions and parameters of supplying early education funded places.

Although Staffordshire is not yet updating its agreement due to minimal changes in the new statutory guidance, early years providers are advised that the following conditions, as outlined in the DfEs new statutory guidance, will come into effect prior to Staffordshire's refreshed provider agreement.

This update advises early years providers of:

- New conditions **already in effect** – from page 2
- New conditions effective from **1<sup>st</sup> April 2026** – from page 3

**Information, advice and guidance**

The current agreement and support for early years providers can be viewed at:

[www.staffordshire.gov.uk/eefsupport](http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/eefsupport)

Yours Sincerely



**Helen Gibson**

**Head of Early Years**

## Already in effect:

In late autumn 2025 we advised providers of the potential funding impact of some gradings under the new inspection framework. This is as follows:

- [Inspection Judgements and specified grades](#) – in line with Ofsted’s new report cards, providers inspected since November 2025 will receive specified gradings. The following conditions are already in effect and would be an addition to **Section 14 - Quality** (from page 25) of Staffordshire’s current [Provider Agreement](#).

Local authorities are **not required** to fund providers who receive the following gradings under the new framework.

- For Early Learning for 2-year-olds (Think 2)– provider receives ‘**needs attention**’ or below in leadership and governance or safeguarding is ‘**not met**’.
- For all funded entitlements – provider receives ‘**urgent improvement**’ in leadership and governance or safeguarding is ‘**not met**’.

Although local authorities are not required to fund providers with the above gradings but may choose to do so in appropriate cases, for example to ensure sufficiency of free places. In these circumstances, [local authorities may also wish to:](#)

- Seek assurances from providers regarding their post-inspection action plan and how they will address concerns raised in the relevant sections of the report.
  - Devise an informal staged intervention process with providers they deem capable of improvement within the expected timeframes. Local authorities may choose to do so before withdrawing funding to help with sufficiency issues, or to maintain positive relations with providers they trust capable of improving the quality of provision.
  - Wait for the relevant inspectorate to reinspect the provider to see if quality improvements have been made before withdrawing funding. This might be suitable where the above do not apply. Local authorities would continue to retain the ability to intervene immediately where necessary.
- References to **Childcare Choices** in the current Staffordshire Provider Agreement where parents would previously be signposted to apply for the Working Parent Entitlement should now be referred to as:
    - the **Government’s online Childcare Service** – [www.beststartinlife.gov.uk](http://www.beststartinlife.gov.uk)

**Effective from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2026:**

- The entitlement previously known as the ‘disadvantaged 2 year old entitlement’ or ‘2-year-olds from families receiving additional support entitlement’ will now be referred to as [Early Learning for 2 year olds](#).

In Staffordshire this entitlement will still be known, or referred to as **Think2**

- [Charging](#) - in line with guidance the following two clauses would be a new additions to **Section 16.10 – Charges** (from page 35) of Staffordshire’s current [Provider Agreement](#):

That providers do not charge parents for the following in connection with the entitlement hours:

- non-refundable retainer fees in relation to entitlement places
  - additional support costs for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) as part of their entitlement hours or as a condition of accessing an entitlements place. See paragraphs [A1.45](#) and [A1.46](#) regarding the Disability Access Fund and special educational needs (SEN) Inclusion Fund.
- [Transparency](#) – applicable to the Charging section in the DfE’s guidance, most of what is in this new section is already in guidance and Staffordshire’s Provider Agreement. These notable additions would be made to **Section 16 – Charging** of Staffordshire’s current [Provider Agreement](#):
    - Providers should also make parents aware of what types of alternative arrangements are available for those parents who do not wish to purchase consumables, additional hours and services.
    - The costs of chargeable extras should be published on provider websites or, where they do not have any website, on local authority Family Information Services. These should be clear, up to date and easily accessible to parents, to enable parents to make an informed choice of provider. They should set out, for each setting, the amounts charged for the chargeable extras listed, as well as the pattern of hours that parents can take the entitlements. Local authorities should ensure providers illustrate a breakdown of costs, as detailed in [DfE’s Chargeable extras: template](#).