

## **Appendix 5 Additional Information**

### **The Graduated Response and Special Education Needs Inclusion Funding (SENIF): How it all fits together.**

- 1.1. The graduated response refers to the implementation of strategies and interventions at a universal, targeted and specialist level in a mainstream setting. Each level of strategy must be implemented, and the outcomes assessed through a plan, do, review cycle. Implementation of a graduated response with limited success must be evidenced to access SEN Inclusion Funding (SENIF).
- 1.2. In Kent, the graduated response consists of:
  - Universal support provided by the Equality and Inclusion team.
  - Targeted support provided by SENIF Practitioners.
  - Specialist support provided by Early Years STLS.
- 1.3. The provision of SEN Inclusion Funding is itself a statutory funding scheme. All local authorities are required to have SENIF and must fund it themselves from the early years funding block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), the High Needs Funding (HNF) block of the DSG or a mixture of both. In Kent, SENIF is currently funded through the HNF block.
- 1.4. Local authorities are expected to pass most of their SENIF to early years providers in the form of 'top-up grants' on a case-by-case basis, although they are also permitted to use part of this fund to support specialist SEN services in their local area.
- 1.5. Estimated funding for SEN is not notionally defined within the funding received by early years providers for free entitlements, unlike state funded primary and secondary schools (where a notional SEN amount is defined from the core budget). Like State funded schools, early years providers are expected to support children with additional needs using existing resources and funding where possible and may be eligible for further top-up funding to support individual child's needs (known as SEN Inclusion Funding or SENIF for Early Years).
- 1.6. SENIF funding can be requested:
  - for a child attending a Kent setting, a registered Kent childminder, or registered Kent Out of Hours provider and SENIF criteria is met (see below).
  - for a maximum of 30 hours per week pro rata on attendance and eligibility for the Free Early Education Entitlement (FEEE).
  - when the child is in receipt of Free Early Education Entitlement (FEEE) for three- and four-year-olds in line with the Headcount dates.

1.7. It is non statutory currently to provide this funding for eligible two-year-olds in receipt of Free Early Education Entitlement, however Kent funds support to these children on case-by-case basis, up to a maximum of 15 hours attendance. The expansion of the governments free entitlement to two year olds will inevitably have an impact on this fund.

1.8. The funding should target children with lower level or emerging SEN. The most common uses of the SENIF reported by settings is to provide additional staff support for children with SEND focused on their particular needs.<sup>1</sup>

1.9. Once a need for SENIF funding has been evidenced, Kent uses a three-level system for identifying levels of funding allocation for 'top-up grants'.

1.10. These are:

#### Level 1

- There is evidence that the child is not meeting their milestones, that there is a delay in their development in two or more aspects of at least 12 months.
- The graduated response has been implemented.
- The Equality & Inclusion Adviser has provided universal support and advice.
- EY LIFT has been accessed and advice from a Specialist Teacher has been implemented and evaluated.
- Adult support is required to remove barriers to learning (over 40% of the time)

#### Level 2

All of the above and ...

- There is evidence that the child is not meeting their milestones, that there is significant delay in their development in four or more aspects of 18+ months
- The graduated response has been implemented and outside agency support has been sought and is ongoing.
- Is likely to be known/referred to the Portage Service due to profound, severe or complex needs.
- Is likely to have a Children's Care Co-ordinator.
- The setting is likely to be in receipt of Disability Access Fund (DAF) for the child (the family are in receipt of DLA and the child is eligible for the 3- and 4-year-old funding)
- A high level of adult support is required to remove barriers to learning (over 65% of the time).
- Consideration for additional support will also be given if a child is assessed at their age expected Milestone of Development whilst having a complex health condition that can be unpredictable or unstable or if a child has significant sensory (hearing/visual impairment) needs.

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<sup>1</sup> [How early years providers support disadvantaged children, children with SEND, the home learning environment and healthy eating](#)

### Level 3

All of the above and ....

- The child has high level medical/sensory needs (deaf, blind or multi-sensory impairment as confirmed by a relevant medical consultant).
- The child has a life limiting condition and is dependent on an adult for all needs and is considered to be at high risk without this support.

1.11. Most of the funding (over 70%) is allocated to those children meeting the criteria in Level two.

1.12. Decisions about the allocation of the funding itself are made by SENIF Finance Manager within the SENIF team in the Council.

1.13. In 2021-2022, there were 1015 applications made on behalf of 723 individuals, totalling £1.6m. Total spend on SENIF in 2022 – 2023 was £1.9m. As of 27 January 2023, there were 500 active SENIF agreements in place.

1.14. Currently, one of the biggest challenges is the increase in the complexity of needs in children for SENIF applications. In the last year, there has been an increase of over 20% for requests of Level 3 funding. One reason for this may be the increase in levels of need and their complexity, there are also many requests coming through where settings have had no time to allow for strategies to be implemented or embedded for an opportunity to determine how effective the support could be.

1.15. In Kent, the general process to access SENIF requires progression through the Graduated response. As outlined below:

<b>Setting identifies a need</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• If this need has already been identified and the child is being supported by the Portage service, then there is a different process which is detailed below in Table 2. There is also a separate process for children who are being supported by the Sensory STLS and this is detailed in Appendix C.</li><li>• If the child is not with Portage or supported by Sensory STLS, then the following process is followed:</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Setting implements the Best Practice Guidance and develops a Targeted Plan.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• If the child shows no or limited progress, the setting makes a referral to the Equality and Inclusion Team, managed through The Education People (TEP), who are a KCC traded service. TEP work with the setting as a whole to</li></ul>

<p>implement universal measures that can meet the needs of children in the setting. They do not work with individual children.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Setting will implement universal strategies provided by TEP.</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If the child shows little or no progress, then the setting will consult with the parents before making an application to the Local Inclusion Forum Team (LIFT) meeting for specialist advice.</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Setting will attend LIFT to discuss the needs of the child and receive support and advice. LIFT is attended by other early years settings, specialist teachers, sometimes an Educational Psychologist and often Early Help, although this fluctuates between districts.</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Following LIFT, a specialist teacher may be allocated. If the specialist teacher is not allocated, then the setting cannot access SENIF funding or a SENIF Practitioner. However, a SENIF Practitioner may be allocated at this meeting in addition to a specialist teacher.</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If a SENIF Practitioner is allocated at LIFT, they will then liaise with the Lead Practitioner to timetable their support.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If a Specialist Teacher is allocated, they will review any existing Targeted Plans or write a Plan and write a Record of Visit (ROV). Ideally, this will follow an in-person visit, however the visit may be done remotely due to capacity.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The SENIF Practitioner (if allocated) supports the setting to implement the Targeted Plan.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interventions and strategies provided by the Specialist Teacher are implemented by the setting and the Targeted Plan is reviewed at least once.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If there is still a need for further support, the setting consults with the parents and checks the Graduated Response Tool (Appendix D) before making the request for funding.</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The setting makes an application for SENIF funding, setting out all evidence that the graduated response (i.e. the implementation of universal, targeted and specialist interventions) has been implemented and the reviewed and current Targeted Plan.</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The request is made through a Firm Step form created by KCC Digital Services and comes into a central inbox which is regularly checked by the</li> </ul>	

SENIF Finance Manager and the SENIF Finance Assistant.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Any missing evidence is requested from the setting and the application is designated 'Awaiting Evidence' and a deadline is given.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If the requested evidence is not received by the deadline, then the SENIF team will send a Not Agreed outcome, detailing why the request cannot be considered at this time. The team will support the setting to obtain evidence before the deadline.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Processing of requests is done by the SENIF Finance Assistant and the SENIF Finance Manager. Allocations are decided by using the SENIF published criteria and the amount of eligible hours the child is attending according to the SENIF Level that the child meets as per the criteria.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All Level 3 (see above in Finance for the differentiation in levels) decisions are quality assured by the Complex Case Advisory Group who meet monthly. This group consists of the SENIF Finance or the SENIF Finance Assistant presenting cases to three SENIF Monitoring Officers and the SEND Support and Inclusion Manager (Early Years).</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Funding is not backdated, and is allocated up to one year, or the end of the academic year if the child is in their pre-school year.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All funding allocations are monitored by a Monitoring Officer. How the visit takes place (in person, via TEAMS or telephone) will depend on a RAG rated list or mutually agreed between the Monitoring Officer and the setting if it is not possible to arrange mutually convenient time.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Settings are able to make a request for continuation of funding through an application process, using the SENIF Review Form which is active from September 2023.</li> </ul>

1.16 Although there are exceptions in specific instances, and although every effort has been made to simplify the process, it is generally regarded as overly bureaucratic and time-consuming.

1.17 SENIF funding is an essential financial mechanism to support inclusive practice in early years settings. However, feedback is that:

- The process of evidencing that the graduated approach has been followed can be time-consuming and bureaucratic. It has at least three different application processes which require significant and often duplicated information. The process of application coupled with waiting time for the required resources can result in up to six months before support is in place. As the child's time at a setting is considerably shorter than the time attending school, it could mean

that by the time funding has been provided to the setting, the child may be approaching transition stage to primary and the agreement in place ends.

- Some providers report that they do not access the available funding at all because they cannot release staff for additional administration periods or because practitioners with limited ICT skills can find the process intimidating.
- Application forms are not always completed adequately due to ability, capacity or lack of understanding of requirements by early years practitioners, leading to either a request for further information or a decline of the request if the information is not available or supplied.
- Settings have told us they save their efforts for children who would fit into the Level Two or even the Level Three levels of need and manage the children who would fit into Level One without the support of the funding. This means that a supported early intervention is not always in place, leading to a potential escalation of need.
- In Kent, funding is not to be used for commissioning one-to-one services such as therapies, for example speech and language therapy. However, the graduated approach and application process is specific to a named individual child in most cases.
- SENIF funding does not continue with child into Year R, although this is still considered early years provision. This means that there is often a gap between SENIF funding and HNF for the child in Year R impacting on the support received in school for the same child.
- The process places additional demand on the associated resources (E & I and STLS) but is often seen as a tick box exercise by settings, meaning that this resource is being used to complete a process rather than implementing meaningful interventions.
- In February 2022, a virtual exploration session was held with colleagues from E&I teams, SENIF practitioners and STLS early years leads and teachers to understand the current process and explore what potential avenues there were to take a different approach. Views and experiences were not too dissimilar, and it was agreed unanimously that the process should be and could be improved.