Northumberland County Council

CHILDMINDING FRAMEWORK CONSULTATION

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BACKGROUND

The Childminding Training Framework has been developed, following the request from Childminders to help them demonstrate the range of training they have attended and their commitment for continuous professional development. This Framework supports the Government's Workforce Reform Agenda; the Quality Improvement Agenda; and the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). The Training Framework helps those looking for childcare to make an informed choice along with other information that is available to choose the childcare they need.

This framework was launched in 2006 Following concern from a number of the childminders and discussions with the County Council's Legal team, it was agreed that the Childminding Training Framework should go out to consultation with the childminders so that their views and opinions could be taken into consideration.

The Childminding Training Framework is a framework that lists various criteria that childminders must work towards and meet in order to be categorised into one of three different coloured bands: Lime (where the fewest criteria must be met), Purple and Cerise (where the most criteria must be met). Within the 3 colour bands, criteria are then broken down into essential and desirable.

OUR APPROACH

Three focus groups were held at three venues in the Northumberland areas: Ashington (South East Northumberland), Hexham (West Northumberland), and Belford (North Northumberland). Childminders were chosen at random from the Families Information Service database and invites sent out to ensure there was equal representation from across the County.

The Focus Groups were held on the following days:

- **A** -12th April 2010 – Ashington Children's Centre
- **B** -19th April 2010 – Hexham Children's Centre
- **C**- 26th April 2010 – Bellview, Belford

Each focus group was asked a series of questions on the Childminding Framework based on their views and understanding of it. The comments were recorded and the main findings are highlighted in the “Summary of Key Findings”.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

This section presents the findings from the Childminding Training Framework Focus Groups conducted by the Northumberland Information Network Team.

The fieldwork was carried out over three sessions held on: 12th, 19th and 26th April 2010. There was a range of 6 - 9 participants in each group

Childminding Training Framework Consultation – Focus Group Questions

1. **Have you seen this framework before today?**

Focus Group A. Only one of the group said they hadn’t seen the Childminding Training Framework before attending the focus group.

Focus Group B. Everyone in the group was aware of the Childminding Training Framework before attending the focus group.

Focus Group C Everyone in the group was aware of the Childminding Training Framework before attending the focus group.

2) Do you understand the Childminding Framework and its principals?

A) What do you understand about it?

Focus Group A - Most had a good understanding of the Framework but one had thought it was a list of different courses childminders could attend.

Focus Group B - Had a good level of understanding of the framework and believed it to be based around different levels and would encourage better qualifications. It

would help parents recognise the qualifications that childminders had completed and would help parents make an informed choice.

Focus Group C - Some of the group thought it was a grading system and thought it would be difficult to get to the cerise level as the EYFS quality framework was aimed more towards settings. One member of the group said it wasn't a good idea to have a graded system as all childminders should be good if they are to care for children.

B) What do you not understand about it?

Focus Group A - This group was unclear about the courses as a lot had changed and some of the courses weren't on the framework. They didn't understand where it fitted with the Early Years Quality Framework and this also has three levels so found this confusing. One childminder had concerns about the CCF network and what it was.

Focus Group B – Some of the qualifications have been discontinued that are on the framework. They were unsure about the Quality First as they have been told that it can't be approved again.

Focus Group C - The group was thought it would be confusing and meaningless for parents. Why it was that settings didn't have to follow this framework. Continuous training for childminders would usually give an outstanding OFSTED which would be what parents are looking for.

3) Do you know which colour band you are in?

All of the childminders thought they new the colour band they were in apart from one in Focus group A

4) Do you think the framework will help you to identify a clear continuous professional development route?

All the childminders said no to this question and there main concerns were it was confusing as some of the qualifications weren't up to date. There wasn't a network in some of the areas therefore they were unsure as to how could they progress to the cerise band. One childminder wanted to do more specific training with disabled children.

5) Do you think it will be easy to progress through the framework?
Are there any barriers that you can identify?

Focus Group A - The childminders in this group thought that time to attend the courses would be a barrier to progress through the framework as some of the courses weren't always available at a time that was suitable. The childminders expressed concerns about not enough background information sent to them when being invited to events such as Early Years Quality Improvement Support Program (EYQISP)

Focus Group B - The entire group thought it would be easy to work through the Framework if there was training available. The Childminders identified that courses were being cancelled due to lack of take-up was a barrier to progress, as was the time, day and venue of the courses. Other concerns raised were unable to take time off childminding to attend a course, loss of earnings to attend and unsuitable venues.

Focus Group C - This group thought that food hygiene was unnecessary. The cerise band requires an EYFS quality framework which has not been rolled out to Childminders yet and this will leave less time to have one to one with the children.

6) Do you think the Childminding Framework is relevant to yourselves?

A) If yes in what way is it relevant?

B) If no why is it not relevant?

Focus Group A - Everyone from the group said that the Childminding Framework wasn't relevant to them.

The group all said that their vacancies are filled by word of mouth and not by the Families Information Service. Some childminders said that the parents choose the childminder as a person as opposed to the qualifications they held. They also thought that it wasn't relevant to parents as they don't understand this framework. One childminder said they were all for training, and this would help them be competent, confident childminders and it is only when you have done this training that you appreciate how it helps.

Focus Group B - The childminders in this group thought the framework was relevant as it made them feel recognised and a feeling of it's been worthwhile.
They all had concerns for newly qualified childminders who had difficulty progressing through the framework as they were unable to access the relevant training.

Focus Group C -The childminders in this group all believed that it wasn't relevant to them but could be relevant to those who needed help and guidance. They all were concerned that it would generate even more paperwork and they were already doing most of the framework. They thought it might not be favourable for Northumberland, as very few childminders would reach the cerise band.

7) Do you think there are any benefits for parents and carers if childminders are working through the framework?

a. If yes what are the benefits

b. If no why?

Focus Group A - The opinion of the group was that if they followed the framework it would benefit the children they were minding as the childminders would enhance their professional development. They all raised concerns and thought that some of the qualifications on the framework were irrelevant to their childminding. The childminders themselves didn't understand the framework so were unsure how parents would. The newly qualified childminders were automatically put onto a lime band so this may be difficult for them to fill their vacancies and gain the trust of parents.

Focus Group B - The group believed that training would bring knowledge and this would be a benefit. They thought that parents wouldn't be interested in the framework as they were mainly interested in the childminder's personality, costs and whether they had vacancies. Most of the contact from parents was from word of mouth.

Focus Group C - The group's opinion was that it would be a benefit if they could actually work towards the cerise band. Some of the childminders said it supported their progression of development.
They were concerned about the times and days of training as it was sometimes impossible to attend. The framework was making childminding too formal and

parents didn't always want this as they wanted a homely environment. The childminders were tired of all the courses and qualifications they had to attend. Experience isn't recognised on this framework.

8) Do you think there are any benefits for children if childminders are working through the framework?

A)If yes what are the benefits

B) If no why?

Focus Group A - The group said that they thought that children would benefit from the childminder's working through the framework. They all agreed that it helped them focus on what to document about the child. They were unsure about the reference to 18 hours of training. They would like to see continuous professional development include research, networking with other childminder's, attending focus groups and the child's file that the childminder is required to complete.

Focus Group B - This group also believed that the framework would benefit children as the childminders would have better knowledge. They said that there is evidence that a trained workforce provides better outcomes for children. They all thought that completing food hygiene and child protection training is crucial to children, however, they said that there were only benefits if this was put into practice. There was one newly qualified Childminder in this group who said that she had put things into practice before she had completed any training and was awarded an outstanding grade from OFSTED within a few weeks of being qualified.

Focus Group C The group's opinion was that it would be a benefit if they could actually work towards the cerise band. Some of the childminder's said it supported their progression of development.

They were concerned about the times and days of training as it was sometimes impossible to attend. The framework was making childminding too formal and parents didn't always want this as they wanted a homely environment. The childminder's were tired of all the courses and qualifications they had to attend. Experience isn't recognised on this framework.

9. Do you think there are any benefits for childminders business and marketing if they are working through the framework?

A) If yes what are the benefits

B) If no why?

Focus Group A – This group said it could be a marketing tool to get the parents through the door, but thought parents had made their mind up within 10 minutes of meeting them. They were of the opinion that most parents weren't interested in their qualifications.

Focus Group B – The group thought that it could benefit their business if parents were aware of the framework, and it was promoted. They were concerned about the jargon used in the framework that could confuse parents.

Focus Group C - Most of them in this group didn't think there were benefits at its present concept. They considered that it would be beneficial if it was achievable.

10. In what ways if any could the Childminding Framework be improved?

Focus Group A - The group said that there was too much jargon used in the framework and all of the training available that was relevant needed to be included. They all had concerns about being part of a network as this is essential criteria of the cerise band. They said there was too much of a jump between the purple and cerise. The childminders thought that settings should be required to work towards this framework.

Focus Group B - This group identified there needs to be more clarity in the framework as some of the courses were out of date and there wasn't enough information about networks. They didn't understand the need for a pen portrait to be part of the criteria. To support the training in the framework the childminders would like to see the Coordinators identifying when a childminder should be updating their training.

Focus Group C – The Childminders in this group would like to see a network created and suggested a combined setting and childminder network, otherwise the network criteria should come off the cerise criteria all together. They also would like the length of time that childminders are expected to complete training per year to be shortened.

They thought that if a childminder has an outstanding grade from OFSTED then they have completed enough training.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of these focus groups was to gain views and feedback from childminders about the Northumberland Childminding Training Framework and how it will raise their profile and support them in the future.

Only one childminder hadn't seen the Framework; all the other childminders that took part in the focus groups had seen and had a good understanding of the framework; and believed it was a framework based around levels and training and would encourage better qualifications. All of the childminders knew the colour banding they were in apart from one. They thought it would help parents have a better understanding of the qualifications that childminders have completed and help them make an informed choice when choosing childcare.

Most of the childminders believed that the framework was out of date as some of the qualifications had been discontinued. Because of this they all thought that it wouldn't support their continuous professional development. They also didn't understand where it fitted with the Early Years Quality Framework. Some of the group thought it would confuse parents as most parents would look at the OFSTED grades.
Some of the group wanted to know why settings didn't follow the framework.

Concerns were expressed about the lack of opportunity to join a network in some areas so would be unable to reach the cerise banding.

The childminders were concerned about a number of barriers to progress through the framework, mainly training being unavailable or not being at a convenient time or venue. Other issues raised included childminders being unable to take time off to attend training and loss of earnings.

Most thought the framework wasn't relevant to them and thought it might generate more paperwork and wouldn't support them to fill their vacancies as most were filled

by word of mouth. Some childminders thought that it was relevant especially for those who needed guidance and support.

Most of the childminders were of the opinion that by following the framework it wouldn't benefit parents, as they wouldn't be interested in their training and qualifications. They were mainly interested in the childminders personality, costs and whether they had a vacancy. One Childminder said about the framework "*It's nice to have the framework so you can always better yourself but it has to be a realistic goal."*

They all believed that the Framework would be a benefit for children, as it supported their progression of development and there is evidence that a trained workforce provides better outcomes for children.

The groups thought that it could benefit their business and could be used as a marketing tool if parents were made aware of it and understood the concept.

The childminders did recommend improvements and most thought that it needed more clarity. For example, there was too much jargon used in the framework. Training listed on the framework needed to be up to date to make it possible for the childminders to achieve the bandings. There were a lot of concerns about the networks as many childminders would not be able to accomplish the cerise band as there weren't networks in their area. Most wanted the settings to work towards the Framework.

Overall, the focus groups held showed that the childminders were receptive to the Local Authority's need to develop the Childminding training Framework for Northumberland childminders. This will support the Governments workforce reform agenda the Quality Improvement Agenda and the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).

The Training Framework will help those looking for childcare make an informed choice along with other information that is available to choose the childcare they need.