

Cabinet

19th March 2014

The Early Years Strategy



Report of Corporate Management Team

Report of Rachael Shimmin, Corporate Director, Children & Adults Services and Cllr Ossie Johnson Lead member for Children Services

Purpose of the Report

- 1 The Early Years Strategy has been developed jointly by the council (including input from Public Health) and the county Durham & Darlington Foundation Trust, and was consulted upon widely with a range of partners including GPs, Midwives, Nursery and Day care Providers and Schools during December 2013 and January 2014.
- 2 The Early Years Strategy sets out the council and partners' ambitions to deliver high quality support and provision for children from pre-birth to 5 years old.
- 3 This report seeks Cabinet approval of The Early Years Strategy, as set out in Appendix 2.

Background

- 4 The County Durham Joint Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2014-15 and the Children, Young People & Families Plan 2014-17 have a shared priority to help children and young people make healthy choices and have the best start in life since evidence shows that this provides the basis for best outcomes throughout life. The Early Years Strategy will contribute to the delivery of this key priority.
- 5 The health and wellbeing outcomes of individuals and communities are greatly shaped by a wide variety of social, economic and environmental factors, such as poverty, housing, ethnicity, place of residence, education and environment.
- 6 The health and wellbeing of young children in county Durham is significantly worse than the England average.
- 7 The level of child poverty is worse than the England average. In 2011 23% of children under the age of 16 lived in poverty in County Durham.
- 8 In order to narrow the gap and improve outcomes for children and their families in County Durham, the Council will, through the deployment of its resources, ensure there is a determined and concerted effort to provide

additional support to those children and families who are vulnerable and in greatest need.

- 9 We must ensure that our services provide appropriate and effective levels of support to children and families most in need of additional and early help. In the current climate of significant public sector funding cuts it is essential to deliver value for money and show that our investment is having a demonstrable impact on outcomes for our children. In order to deliver a good return from early years services, we must satisfy ourselves that scarcer resources are put to more efficient and effective use. This will make a difference to our children and their families, and particularly those who need it most.
- 10 Outcomes for children are measured using the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework. The EYFS is the statutory framework that sets the standards that all Early Years providers must meet to ensure children learn and develop well and are kept healthy and safe. The EYFS promotes teaching and learning to ensure children are ready for school and gives children the broad range of knowledge and skills that provide the right foundation for good future progress through school and life.
- 11 In 2013 in County Durham, 41.7% of children achieved a “Good Level of Development” in the Early Years Foundation Stage, compared to 52% of children across the Country. For those children living in the top 30% most deprived wards, the achievement level is 36% compared to 44% nationally.
- 12 In 2012 County Durham was named in the “Annual Report of the Chief Inspector of Ofsted into Early Years Settings and their outcomes” as one of the ten lowest performing authorities in the country. The inspection outcomes of a range of services were included in this review and included Children’s Centres, Nurseries and Daycare providers and Childminders.
- 13 A number of services, in addition to the above, contribute to supporting the wellbeing and development of children and families throughout their early years and include Midwifery, GPs, Health Visiting, Primary Schools and Voluntary & Community Sector organisations such as Domestic Abuse services.
- 14 Shared ownership and a joint approach to improving outcomes for children and their families during their formative years is vital if we are to secure the required improvements across the early years sector in the provision of high quality services.
- 15 Early years provision in County Durham must have a clear and shared focus on making sure the gap between the poorest achieving and their peers during the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is narrowed so that all of our children are equipped with the skills necessary to engage in their learning when they start school.
- 16 Despite a recent increased focus on the provision of support to vulnerable children and families, which has led to better performance, the required scale of improvement in EYFS outcomes for our children has not been achieved. Our resources remain stretched and will be further reduced as public spending reductions continue.

- 17 It is clear a greater emphasis is required on identifying and supporting those children and their families who are at risk of poor outcomes during their formative years, so that they get the best possible start in life. This will necessitate a review of the current model of service delivery to ensure services are able to deliver on this strategy so that the following is provided:-
- Support targeted to those who need it most;
 - Accessible services for all;
 - Flexible use of resources;
 - Effective community engagement in early years delivery;
 - Continued development of an expert workforce;
 - Emphasis on people providing services rather than the building services are provided in.
 - Improved outcomes.

The Early Years Strategy

- 18 Despite a shared recognition by all partners of the importance of high quality support for children and their families during their early years, and despite the wide range of services involved in the provision of early years services, to date there has been no Strategy in place that sets out our shared ambitions.
- 19 In order to address this the Children & Families Partnership established an Early Years Review Group, made up of relevant partners to develop a Strategy and an accompanying action plan to support the required improvements in both service delivery and outcomes for children.
- 20 The Strategy (Appendix 2) makes particular reference to inequality of outcomes for some children in County Durham and makes the link between poor outcomes in early years and poorer outcomes in later-life. The Strategy recognises that some children start their lives with reduced life chances as a result of economic and social disadvantage or because there are other risk factors present in families.
- 21 Revised Ofsted guidance in 2012 required an increased focus on vulnerable families in most need of support. Despite this increased focus, the scale of improvement in outcomes for our children has not been achieved. Our resources remain stretched and will be further reduced as public spending reductions continue.
- 22 It is clear that an approach supported by a model of service delivery is required to identify and support those children and their families who are at increased risk of our outcomes during their formative years.
- 23 The Strategy sets out a clear intention to address this inequality of outcomes and describes a new service delivery model which will ensure that through the provision of high quality universal services such as midwifery, health visiting,

nursery and daycare provision, additional help and support will be provided to those children and families who need it most.

- 24 The new service delivery model requires a high level of commitment to partnership working and information sharing and takes a robust approach to targeting resources towards those in greatest need of additional support. Its specific intention is to narrow the gap in outcomes through access to additional early years support and provision.
- 25 In developing the Strategy, a broad consultation has taken place across the Early Years sector in County Durham. A number of common themes emerged throughout the consultation and these have been incorporated into the Strategy as our “Key Ambitions”, namely:-
 - a. **Quality of Care:**
All children have access to high quality universal health and learning opportunities that are safe.
 - b. **Equity of Outcomes:**
Children who are not making the required progress or whose outcomes are compromised are identified and additional help is provided to them and their families at the earliest possible opportunity.
 - c. **Working Together**
All partners involved in the delivery of early years services work together in a coordinated way in the provision of a genuinely joined up, integrated service to children and families.
- 26 Action plans have been developed which will support the delivery of the ambitions set out in the Strategy and which will improve support offered to children and families, particularly those that have the greatest need, which in turn will lead to improved outcomes.

Next Steps:

27. To support the Strategy and Action Plan a performance framework will be developed with a clear set of performance indicators which will be used to provide timely and accurate data on progress. This will be monitored through the Children & Families Partnership
28. Subject to approval of the Strategy and Action Plans, the Early Years Review Group will continue to monitor outcomes for children and families through the implementation of the Strategy and the delivery of the Action Plans on behalf of the Children & Families Partnership.

Recommendations:

29. Cabinet are requested to:-
 - a. Approve The Early Years Strategy and Action Plan
 - b. Forward the Strategy and Action Plan for the approval of the Children & Families Partnership

Contact: Carole Payne, Head of Children's Services; Tel. 03000 268 983

Appendix 1: Implications

Finance – The Strategy will provide a framework for future service structures / delivery mechanisms and efficiency in light of austerity / spending reductions. Aiming to increase accessibility and outcomes by better / more accessible service delivery and a focus on service delivery not structures / assets.

Staffing – Despite efforts to improve our focus on support for the most vulnerable children and families, we expect to reconsider our service delivery model to ensure activity is focussed on the provision of additional help and support to children and families with the greatest need, in line with this Strategy.

Risk – None identified

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty – Ongoing access to services will be available for all children and families through the provision of universal early years services together with a more targeted approach to reach those children and families who experience disadvantage. This will ensure there remains a focus on equality and diversity in service provision.

Accommodation – The review of the existing service model referred to in the strategy may have an impact on existing buildings used for the delivery of early years services.

Crime and Disorder – None identified.

Human Rights – None identified.

Consultation – Consultation has taken place with key stakeholders in the production of the strategy and action plan.

Procurement – None identified.

Disability Issues – None identified.

Legal Implications – None identified.