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Mark Dance Cabinet Member for Operations, Resources and Skills
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To: Cabinet – 15 September 2008

Subject: KCC STRATEGY FOR EARLY EDUCATION AND CHILDCARE (0-5 years)

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This paper presents to Members of the Cabinet the draft Strategy for Early Education and Childcare (0 – 5 years), reports on the very positive outcomes of the consultation on the strategy and seeks formal approval.

Introduction

1. (1) KCC's Towards 2010 'Learning for everyone – Getting it right from the Start' recognises the importance of providing our youngest children with the very best start in life and that early years provision has an enormous impact on improving outcomes.
- (2) The Government confirms the vital role that the Local Authority plays in improving the outcomes of all young children from birth up to the August following their fifth birthday and reducing inequalities between them through legislation set out in the Childcare Act 2006.
- (3) The draft strategy (attached at appendix 1) is intended to reflect the path KCC will take in order to achieve its aspirations. It is part of a suite of strategies developed by the Directorate to improve the outcomes of children and young people. This strategy is included in the Forward Plan as a key decision.
- (4) This strategy has been subject to widespread consultation, including all party Members and the full range of early years providers (of which there are around 2,600*). Further information about the consultation arrangements and its outcomes are set out in paragraph four and appendix 3 of this report. * includes registered childminders

Policy Framework

2. (1) This strategy is not a Policy Framework document and therefore does not require ratification by the Council. However, this strategy falls under the umbrella of the Kent Children and Young People's Plan.

Implications

3. (1) These are set out as follows:

(a) Budget/Financial

Resources to implement the strategy are identified in appendix 2. All action identified falls within existing budgets and staffing allocations, and assumes the current level of funding is continuing. It will also need to be borne in mind that the delivery of the strategy will need to be balanced against emerging national and local priorities, and that we may need to vary what we do over time.

(b) Equality and Diversity

This is a broad-based strategy, intended to benefit all young children in Kent. The strategy has undergone widespread consultation and a full equality impact assessment in May 2008 following consultation.

(c) Customer Service and Delivery

The strategy is intended to ensure that all young children thrive in their early years and that families, are supported and have access to flexible and quality provision.

(d) Towards 2010 Targets

KCC's Towards 2010 sets out its commitment to improving the quality of early years education by strengthening the links between pre-schools/nurseries and primary schools, thereby improving children's ability to learn when they enter primary school.

The Development of the draft strategy and consultation arrangements

4. (1) The draft strategy has been developed in consultation with the Kent Early Years, Childcare and Extended Schools Board (EYCESB) and its four working groups. It was subject to widespread consultation between January and April 2008 with the aim of seeking views from the full range of stakeholders to inform the final draft. This included:

- The Kent Children's Trust
- CFE Policy Overview Committee (and all Members through the Member Information Briefing)
- The Kent EYCESB and its working groups
- Health Professionals and JobCentre Plus
- PVI Providers and Children's Centres (through the Early Years Conferences and by writing to all early years providers, of which there are around 2,600)
- The Primary Forum (and through the e-bulletin to all schools)
- Parent Networking Groups
- Church Representatives Group
- The Race Equality Forum, Race Equality Council, KCC Staff Groups and various 'equality' groups (or those where representation includes the equality perspective such as the Kent Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE)).
- KCC officers.
- Staff Union Groups.

- (2) The draft strategy has received a very positive response and has been updated to reflect a broad and balanced representation of the comments arising from the consultation being mindful of the remit of the strategy and the context within which we work. A summary of the findings of the consultation is attached at appendix 3.

Local Members

5. (1) The strategy has a Kent wide focus. All KCC Members have been consulted on an individual basis through the Member Information Briefing. Members have also been consulted through cross party representation at CFE Policy Overview Committee and strategic groups such as the Kent Children's Trust.

Next Steps

6. (1) Once adopted by KCC, the strategy will be produced in a summary version similar to that produced for the Kent Primary Strategy 2006 for dissemination with stakeholders.
- (2) Arrangements for taking forward the strategy are set out in appendix 2. The action plan will be monitored and reviewed bi-annually.

Conclusion

7. (1) The Local Authority has a key role to play in supporting young children to be nurtured and, develop effectively both educationally and emotionally. The development of this strategy puts in place a framework for the County Council to achieve this.

Recommendations

Members of the Cabinet are asked to:

- (a) note the development of the draft strategy; and,
- (b) approve the strategy.

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Background Documents:

None

Other Useful Information:

None