

**From: Sue Chandler, Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services**

**Rory Love, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills**

**Sarah Hammond, Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education**

**To: Children's and Young People's Cabinet Committee – 18 July 2023**

**Subject: Member led 0-5 Task and Finish Group activity for 0-5 Strategy development**

**Classification:** Unrestricted

**Past Pathway of report:** N/A

**Future Pathway of report:** N/A

**Electoral Division:** All

**Summary:** This report provides an update to the Cabinet Committee regarding the progress of the Member led 0-5 Task and Finish Group. It explains the four key areas examined by the group and the data used to support this.

**Recommendation(s):**

The CYPE Cabinet Committee is asked to note the work of the Task and Finish Group and consider how this report might inform ongoing work.

**1. Introduction**

- 1.1 Following a request from Mrs Chandler, the Lead Member for Integrated Childrens Services, at the CYPE Cabinet Committee in July 2022, a Task and Finish Group of cross-party Members chaired by Cllr S. Hamilton was established.
- 1.2 In December 2022, the Member led, 0-5 strategy Task and Finish Group commenced with an aim to evaluate the data and expert advice provided by officers and partners to help shape an evidence base to ensure the best outcomes are realised for Kent residents.
- 1.3 The Task and Finish Group included KCC elected representatives from the Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat, Green and Independent groups.

- 1.4 Across the six meetings, the group met with officers and partners, scrutinised data, and made recommendations on the following key areas:
  - i. The Best Start for Life agenda, in line with Kent's Public Health Strategy
  - ii. Engagement with the Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) childcare provider sector
  - iii. Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) applications within the 0-5 age group, with specific reference to the perceived increase relating to Speech, Language and Communication needs (SLCN).
  - iv. The promotion and take up of the free childcare offer for eligible 2-year-olds, (FF2) as well as 3 and 4-year-olds, including strategies to encourage take up within vulnerable families and communities.
- 1.5 Relevant officers and experts in the field were invited to attend each meeting to contribute to a meaningful and detailed discussion.

## **2. Best Start for Life**

- 2.1 In September 2020, Andrea Leadsom MP began a review into improving health and development outcomes for babies in England. The review focused on support to families in the first 1,001 days of a child's life, the 'Start for Life system'. Within this review the development of Family Hubs was created as welcoming places for families to access 'Start for Life' services.
- 2.2 In March 2021, The Best Start for Life: a vision for the 1,001 critical days was published by the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) following the Early Years Healthy Development Review, also chaired by Andrea Leadsom MP.
- 2.3 The review focused on the period between conception (-9 months) and the age of two (the first 1,001 critical days) considering evidence gathered from a wide range of sources including virtual visits to areas, meetings with parents/carers, academics, practitioners, civil society organisations, representative bodies and many others.
- 2.4 The paper identified examples of good practice and circumstances where change was needed to make a real difference to the lives of parents, carers and babies. The Family Hub model extends the transformation of services from conception until the age of 19 (or 25 for young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities [SEND]).
- 2.5 Parent Carer Panels, which are being developed in Kent as part of the Family Hub programme work, are pivotal in supporting the design of the Start for Life offer, by promoting feedback from parents, carers, children and young people into the co-produced services.
- 2.6 The Best Start for Life is key to the development of Family Hubs and is also a key pillar on which the development of the Public Health strategy is built. During the first Task and Finish Group Ellen Schwartz, Deputy Director of Public Health, shared the [Kent and Medway interim integrated care strategy](#). This

data driven and research based strategic document has been co-produced by the Integrated Care Board and KCC Public Health services. The aim of which is to help improve the health and wellbeing of children and young people by developing links with local organisations and facilities.

2.7 The Task and Finish Group recognised the strong relationships and community engagement through maternity voice partnerships, as well as the positive impacts of the perinatal mental health community team.

2.8 The Task and Finish Group welcomed the strategy and also noted that, the quality of housing, parenting, attachment and nurturing is critical in a child's early development.

2.9 Recommendations from the Best Start for Life focus meeting included;

- i. Ensuring the involvement of housing providers, in any early years strategy, as they are crucial to the development of a rounded approach to ensuring the Best Start for Life agenda is implemented in Kent.
- ii. Improving communication with District Housing providers to ensure that joint working opportunities are clear and robust.
- iii. The development and promotion of KCC and NHS buildings as a 'safe space' for mothers to breastfeed.
- iv. Ensuring that links between housing providers and statutory services are clear and robust.
- v.

2.10 Ongoing actions

- i. The ongoing development of Family Hubs will ensure that all Family Hubs are welcoming, safe spaces for mothers to breastfeed.
- ii. Family Hubs will work in partnership with libraries and other universal buildings to support a welcoming culture for expectant and new mothers.
- iii. All families will be offered information sessions before a child is born, and a virtual infant feeding contact after birth. For identified families in some areas Family Hubs may also develop innovative practice in the way that they support maternal women who may not feel that breastfeeding support is for them and/or prefer not to breastfeed or cannot breastfeed.
- iv. As part of the Family Hub development, Public Health are co-developing a strategy for infant feeding, parent-infant relationships and peri natal mental health. The learning from this will be fed into future developments of a wider 0-5 strategy.

### **3. The perceived rise in EHCP Applications within the 0-5 Age Group**

3.1 The 0-5 Task and Finish Group met on 10 February 2023 to discuss the perceived rise in Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) within the 0-5 age group.

- 3.2 Between June 2022 and May 2023, Kent received 3,755 requests for an EHC assessment. Of the 3,755 EHCP requests, 32% (1,194) were within the 0-5 cohort. 860 of these requests went onto have a statutory assessment, 245 were declined for an assessment by KCC, 89 have not yet had a decision whether to assess, and 3 were withdrawn before a decision whether to assess could be made.
- 3.3 Of the 860 that underwent an assessment, 519 had the issue of a draft plan agreed, 19 were declined for the issue of a draft EHCP by KCC, 318 have not yet had a decision whether to issue a draft EHCP, and 4 were withdrawn before the assessment was completed.
- 3.4 Of the 519 where it was agreed to issue a draft EHCP, 269 went on to have a final EHCP issued, the remainder have not yet had the final EHCP issued.
- 3.5 Whilst at request stage there is insufficient data to identify the primary Need Type, this data is available for issued EHCPs. KCC data shows that in May 2023, for the 0-5 cohort, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) was the highest need type, with 16 issued EHCPs, followed by Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) with 11 issued EHCPs. Comparing data over the last 2-years shows that there has been a reduction in both the overall number of EHCPs issued and the specific number of those given for SLCN difficulties. This might indicate that the perceived increase was as a result of COVID, however, the Local Authority will need to track the numbers over a period of time to be sure.

	SLCN	Total
Jun 2021 and Jun 2022	-3	-1
Jul 2022 and Jul 2022	-2	-8
Aug 2021 and Aug 2022	-4	-8
Sep 2021 and Sep 2022	17	25
Oct 2021 and Oct 2022	-1	2
Nov 2021 and Nov 2022	1	-1
Dec 2021 and Dec 2022	-1	-2
Jan 2022 and Jan 2023	2	-8

- 3.6 The Task and Finish Group was advised of the National shortage of SLCN professionals. It was further advised that the way in which Kent has chosen to address this is through enhanced partnership working, with health colleagues to develop the evidence based 'Balanced system', working alongside schools and families.
- 3.7 The Balanced System® framework and principles are in place in a growing number of localities as universal SLCN provision.
- 3.8 The approach has made changes to NHS Speech and Language Therapy services, for timely and easy access to advice and support for families through 'Talking Walk-in' drop-in sessions. Families are able to get local support at the earliest possible point, which helps to increase parental confidence in

supporting SLCN and ensures graduated support for the child can be put in place in a timely way.

- 3.9 The Balanced System® is focused on developing inclusive practice for SLCN within Early Years settings. 8 Early Years settings across Kent are developing their provision for SLCN through The Balanced System®: Scheme for Schools and Settings accreditation process. This supports settings to use provision based on SLCN outcomes to support the five strands of the system: Family/Environment/Workforce/Identification and Interventions at universal, targeted and specialist levels.
- 3.10 The professional advice is that setting achievable outcomes and impact measures supports families to become confident communication support partners in a range of everyday activities and by following the model settings are also reporting visible impact for individual children and their families from this SEN support level provision development.
- 3.11 Management Intelligence and Information services have developed district profiles outlining the number of EHCP requests, the level of need and Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). These can be found in the supporting documents.
- 3.12 The data map will be used to support the identification of need and the allocation of resource to best meet that need and service delivery.
- 3.13 Recommendations from the EHCP focus group include:
  - i. To explore how the SEN area partnership can increase the speech and language resource or improve the reach of the existing resource to best meet identified need in Kent.
  - ii. Consider the existing research evidence base or commission a local longitudinal study of children who receive an EHCP in their early years to review progress and best understand 'what works'.
  - iii. To undertake a review of existing progress on current EHCPs to ensure that they are necessary and that they bring added benefit to the education and support for children with special educational needs. Consider the pathways and current levels of EHCPs, including how the 'SEN system' in Kent can better support children with additional needs without recourse to an EHCP.
  - iv. To maximise the use and opportunities of the 'Local Offer' to better inform parents, partners and stakeholders in supporting children with additional needs in the early years.
- 3.14 Ongoing actions
  - i. The area SEND Accelerated Action Plan will develop opportunities to better understand the work to improve the EHCP process.
  - ii. The SEND area partnership is reviewing its response to SLCN and the 'Balanced' system of intervention.
  - iii. In-depth analysis of SEND challenges in the early years is taking place as part of the Early Years Review.

- iv. Deep dives will be completed for areas including Pathways, SENIF and LIFT Process, School Readiness, Sufficiency Planning, Specialise Intervention Nurseries, and Portage.

#### **4. Engagement with the PVI Sector**

- 4.1 The engagement with the PVI sector session included colleagues from The Education People (TEP), KCC Commissioning and members of Kent's Early Years and Childcare Provider Association.
- 4.2 An [Early Years and Childcare Strategic Plan](#) was introduced in Kent for the period 2014 – 2017, followed by subsequent iterations for 2016 – 2019 and then 2020 – 2023. The reviewing and refreshing of this Strategic Plan was integral to KCC's Specification with The Education People in 2018 (and the Early Years and Childcare Service particularly), the context of which was agreed through the 2020 – 2023 version.
- 4.3 The Task and Finish Group were advised by providers that the current level of central government funding in the Early Years and Childcare Sector is not adequate to ensure the ongoing sustainability of provision.
- 4.4 The group also heard that this creates significant challenges in the recruitment, retention and morale of staff. Challenges in pay, conditions and workload were identified as issues which further exacerbate the variation in geographical sufficiency, particularly in areas where the majority of children are funded from government grants, as the grant allocation per child is significantly lower than the fees paid by families not supported by grant funded placements.
- 4.5 PVI sector professionals advised the group that even though the evidence base and the experience of parents supports the need for good early years education and childcare, professionals from within the sector are not recognised for their contribution to the learning and development building blocks that good early years learning brings.
- 4.6 School leaders and data shows us however that the absence of a good early years learning experience impacts speech, language, and communication development, school readiness and achieving the Best Start in Life.
- 4.7 Children from disadvantaged backgrounds or those who have additional learning needs are less likely to experience a high-quality HLE. Children's services, schools, early years settings, and health colleagues all acknowledge that increased layers of need are being further exacerbated as a result of the pandemic.
- 4.8 Phase one of the Early Years Review is now complete. The report makes a number of recommendations and identifies several areas for additional analysis through deep dives, including Children's Pathways, Portage, SEN Inclusion Fund (SENIF) Process, School Readiness, Specialist Intervention Nurseries and Sufficiency Planning in order to meet the needs of vulnerable children. The deep dives were planned to be undertaken between April – June 2023, with the final report including recommendations to be produced in September 2023.

#### 4.9 Recommendations from the Task and finish group include:

- i. To consider the development of an automated process to identify children's eligibility when reviewing the funding application forms
- ii. A drive to improve the communication with partners, stakeholders, and parents that PVI's should be recognised as equal partners in the development and delivery of a universal education system for all children.
- iii. A review of the Kelsie interface with schools to ensure it is relevant and aligned with the strategic direction of travel for education across Kent.
- iv. Discussions with District Council partners to review the opportunities to remove or reduce business rates for childcare settings in Kent.

#### 4.10 Ongoing actions

- i. As part of Kent's journey to becoming a Family Hub Transformation Authority, we have commenced development of the DfE mandated element of the Home Learning Environment activity, as part of this we will support an Early Years Officer to develop best practice across the Early Years workforce. This will also help to mitigate the £128k reduction in the TEP contract discussed at the May CYPE Cabinet Committee.
- ii. A good home learning environment (HLE) encourages children to have positive attitudes to learning, to be curious, and to have confidence in themselves. Early language acquisition impacts all aspects of babies' and young children's non-physical development. The home learning environment encompasses a range of activities that can support a child's development and learning at home through daily activities.
- iii. The Family Hub Home Learning Environment funding will be used to
  - a. Train practitioners to support parents with HLE
  - b. Provide evidence based HLE interventions
  - c. Provide co-ordination of the programme locally to embed support including parent education to support parents in interactions that develop early language with their babies and children in and around the home, including the sharing of a range of tools, resources, and knowledge.

### 5. The Promotion of Free Childcare

- 5.1 Provision of free early education places for 2-year-olds in Kent is referred to as the Free for 2 or 'FF2' scheme. KCC has a duty to ensure sufficient places for all eligible 2-year-olds. This means up to 570 hours of free early education a year over 38 weeks of the year during term time to families receiving the eligible benefits, or Looked After Children, children with an EHCP, children receiving Disability Living Allowance or children who have left care under an adoption order, special guardianship order or child arrangement order.
- 5.2 The aim of the FF2 offer is to ensure that every eligible child is given the opportunity to experience high quality early years education with support of a trained, high quality registered childminder, nursery, or pre-school to help their school readiness.

- 5.3 Research shows that children from low-income families often have less good access to learning materials than more affluent peers. A lack of access to resources in the home can increase the risk of a widening attainment gap. Therefore, families in receipt of certain benefits, may be eligible for up to 15 hours per week free childcare for their two-year old, over 38 weeks of the year. The Governments eligibility criteria can be found [here](#).
- 5.4 Of the 4,639 families identified as eligible on the DWP list in August 2022, 3437 (74.09%) took up the offer. The FF2 offer is promoted to eligible families through Health Visiting Services and Children's Centres. Families who apply for the funding, but do not take up the offer are contacted by Children's Centre staff, who share information, advice and guidance whilst promoting the offer further.
- 5.5 Although KCC meets its overall sufficiency of placement targets, there are geographical hot spots where there is not enough sufficiency. This is increasingly because the provider market is under intense financial pressures as described above. A summary of the sufficiency information can be found in the background documents.
- 5.6 Member recommendations include:
- i. Review the availability and take up of the FF2 offer
  - ii. Review the geographical variation in sufficiency
  - iii. Review the support available in Early Years sector to support children with additional needs
- 5.7 Ongoing actions
- i. Continuous review of the availability and take up of early years entitlement through the annual sufficiency plan.

## **6. Financial Implications**

- 6.1 The role of the Task and Finish Group was to undertake an initial fact finding and scoping exercise to help set out some strengths and areas for development across the sector and consider both new and existing opportunities to streamline ways of working and partnerships. This paper makes no further recommendations in relation to additional funding streams or existing budget commitments.

## **7. Conclusions**

- 7.1 Through the Task and Finish Groups activity Members have correctly identified areas of strengths, areas for development and areas that demand further exploration.
- 7.2 In pulling those findings together this report also identifies ongoing work, data and opportunities that are in place and new developments which will help improve the activity and outcomes for children within the 0-5 age range across Kent.



- 7.3 KCC are already revising and drafting a number of policy documents, including;
- 7.3.1 The Early Years Review,
  - 7.3.2 Deep dives into SENIF and LIFT Process,
  - 7.3.3 School Readiness,
  - 7.3.4 Sufficiency Planning,
  - 7.3.5 Early Years and Childcare Strategic Plan,
  - 7.3.6 Kent and Medway interim integrated care strategy.
- 7.4 Through this work we will ensure that these documents and future opportunities are joined up, integrated, and driven by partnership working and coproduction.
- 7.5 The development of Family Hubs will help to bring these developments together to achieve their maximum potential through partnership working. When all of these strands of work are pulled together, we will have the ingredients for a full 0-5 strategy to be developed.
- 7.6 The opportunities for next steps include focus groups, which are specific to the four key areas mentioned throughout the report.

## **8. Recommendation(s)**

### **Recommendation(s):**

The CYPE Cabinet Committee is asked to note the report and is informed of the development of the 0-5 Task and Finish Group.

## **9. Background Documents**

- 9.1 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment
- 9.2 District profiles

## **10. Contact details**

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