

From: **Roger Gough, Cabinet Member for Education and Health Reform**

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To: **Education Cabinet Committee**

Subject: **Early Years and Childcare Strategy 2014 - 17**

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Future Pathway of Paper: **Education Cabinet Committee in December**

Electoral Division: **All**

**Summary:** This report provides the rationale for a new Early Years and Childcare Strategy, including its national and local context, its scope, what it will aim to achieve and the process and timescales for its development, consultation, final agreement and implementation.

**Recommendation(s):** Education Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and note the need for a new Early Years and Childcare Strategy and to endorse the process and timescales for achieving this.

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The reason for developing a new Early Years and Childcare Strategy now is to reflect the context of major changes that the Government is introducing for early education and childcare. It also comes at a time in Kent when significant steps are being taken to develop integrated working across a wide range of partners.
- 1.2 There are currently clear plans in place to improve quality and outcomes in the early years and to ensure there are sufficient childcare places to meet parental demand, The quality of provision and outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage in Kent are above average.
- 1.3 The scope of the proposed new Strategy will continue to be the sufficiency of and inclusive access to high quality Free Early Education universally for three and four year olds and for increasing numbers of two year olds. In addition it will be to secure sufficient childcare for all children and young people aged 0 – 14 and up to 18 where the young person has a special educational needs and/or disability (SEND). This applies to all early education and childcare provision of all types (pre schools, nurseries, nursery classes and Kent's one nursery school, childminders, before and after school and holiday childcare provision) and across all sectors, (maintained, voluntary, private and independent). Furthermore, there is a need now to develop more integration between early years settings, children's centres and schools, with other partner agencies as part of a new strategy.

## 2. Financial Implications

2.1 Following a recent consultation, the Government has stated it will not be making any changes to the regulations covering centrally retained funding and the Early Years Single Funding Formula. Over time, however, the Government will reform early education funding so that it is simpler and more transparent and that where possible more funding goes directly to providers. From the 2013-14 financial year local authorities are required to publish more information about how much funding they retain centrally and how this is used. The level of centrally retained budget in Kent – which funds our statutory roles in respect of early years – is already below the limits that the Government had considered imposing in the original consultation proposals and we do not anticipate any issues with providers when making more information available.

## 3. Bold Steps for Kent and Policy Framework

### 3.1 Bold Steps for Kent

The Early Years and Childcare agenda supports Bold Steps for Kent in the following ways:

- *Helping the economy to grow:* A thriving economy needs children and young people who aspire to and do become economically active as adults. This starts with good outcomes for children at the earliest age, so that children and young people are in the best possible position to progress and achieve at school, hence opening up pathways for employment and/or training. The early years and childcare agenda supports this by ensuring the availability of high quality early years provision, particularly that this provision is able to meet the needs of young children who are or may be vulnerable and disadvantaged. The early years and childcare agenda also helps the economy to grow through supporting the development and sustainability of the childcare market, for all children up to 14 and up to 16 where a young person has a special educational need and/or disability. This aims to ensure that the lack of childcare is not a barrier for parents who wish to work/study/train, all of which directly contribute to economic growth and reducing poverty and worklessness.
- *Putting the citizen in control:* Seeking the views and listening to the voice of children, young people and their families is essential to putting the citizen in control. At the heart of early years and childcare provision should be to work in partnership with children, young people and families in the development and delivery of the services that support them.
- *Tackling disadvantage:* Tackling disadvantage is integral to the core of early years and childcare. For a variety of complex reasons, certain groups in the community start from a point of disadvantage. Ensuring access to high quality early education and childcare provision should give every child the best start in life, linking with the Bold Steps priority to “ensure that all pupils to meet their full potential”.

### **3.2. Bold Steps for Education**

Sitting in the broader context of Bold Steps for Kent is Bold Steps for Education. The vision states clearly that Kent '*should be the most forward looking area in England for education and learning so that it is the best place for children and young people to grow up, learn, develop and achieve*'. Strategic priorities are to ensure that all pupils meet their full potential, to shape education and skills provision around the needs of the Kent economy and improve services for the most vulnerable young people in Kent.

Bold Steps for Education priorities particularly relevant to early education and childcare are to:

- Develop a new partnership relationship with all schools and other providers, based on collaboration and shared effort, to build greater capacity in the system;
- Focus relentlessly on raising educational standards and support and challenge lower performing schools and other providers to improve quickly;
- Support greater choice for parents and families by commissioning a sufficient and diverse supply of places in strong schools and quality early years settings;
- Make the most effective and efficient use of the available resources to support improved Outcomes;
- Support vulnerable pupils, including looked after children and pupils with special educational needs and disabilities so that they achieve well and make good progress
- Ensure every child has fair access to all schools (*and other provision*);
- Promote and champion educational excellence and provide vision and drive for a world class system.

Bold Steps Early Years specific targets include that, by 2016:

- The percentage of all Early Years providers judged by OfSTED as good or outstanding will have risen to 89.5%
- The percentage of pupils achieving a 'good level' of development by the end of the EYFS will be 80%.

### **3.3 Interface with other Strategies and Plans.**

Whilst this Strategy has a clear and specific scope, it interfaces and must strategically align with a number of other key strategies and initiatives, particularly strategies for Primary Education, SEND, the Kent Integrated Adolescent Support Services, Children's Services 0 – 11 Integration, Early Intervention and Prevention, Children's Centres.

## **4 Early Years and Childcare Strategy**

### **4.1 National Context**

In January 2013, the Government published *More Great Childcare*, setting out the steps it would take to improve the quality of children's early education and

childcare. Further to consultation, on 16 July, *More Affordable Childcare* was published, setting out the Government's plans to:

- help families to meet the costs of childcare;
- increase the amount of affordable provision; and,
- give parents the right information so they can make informed choices about childcare.

The key messages within *More Affordable Childcare* are:

(i) Helping families to meet the costs of childcare

*(a) New Funding*

Phasing in from autumn 2015, a new scheme will be introduced to offer tax-free childcare to working families. From April 2016, £200 million of additional support with childcare costs will be provided, within Universal Credit.

*(b) Funded Early Education*

The commitment remains to funding 15 hours a week of early education for all three- and four-year-olds, extending to around 20 per cent of two-year-olds from September 2013 and around 40 per cent of two-year-olds from September 2014.

(ii) Increasing the amount of affordable provision

*(a) Improving regulation and removing barriers*

The Government intends to improve regulation by bringing forward legislation to introduce a new childcare registration system, following consultation. This would replace the current system with a single, consistent set of welfare and safeguarding requirements for all childcare providers.

*(b) Making better use of schools*

The Government would like to see primary school sites open for more hours each day and for more weeks each year and intends to work with schools and childcare providers to look at ways in which it can be made easier for out-of-hours provision to be made available on school sites. Schools will continue to have autonomy to make decisions about the hours that they are open.

(iii) Improving quality

The Government intends to further improve the quality of early years provision by:

- reforming qualifications by introducing Early Years Teachers and Early Years Educators;
- strengthening the inspection regime, making OfSTED the sole arbiter of quality;
- introducing Childminder Agencies to increase the number of childminders and improve the training and support they can access.

(iv) Helping parents make informed choices

The Government wants parents to tell them how best to improve the information available about childcare providers in their area and intend to ask an independent

organisation to work with parents to find out what they think of the current information sources and make recommendations in the spring about which channels are most useful to parents and how services might be improved.

## **4.2 Implications for Local Authorities**

### 4.2.1 Acting as 'champions' for disadvantaged children and their families

Local authorities play an important support and challenge role with schools as the 'champions' of children and parents, especially the most disadvantaged. They focus their resources on supporting and intervening in those schools which require most improvement. The Government wants to ensure local authorities take a similar role in the early years. As 'champions' of children and parents, local authorities will be required to identify harder-to-reach families, make sure they understand the early education and childcare support available to them, and support them to choose an early education provider for their child. It will be particularly important that local authorities play this role in supporting the implementation of early learning for two-year-olds.

### 4.2.2 Quality improvement

Local authorities will continue to play an important part in ensuring there is high quality provision in their areas. However, at a time when resources are under pressure, the Government believes local authorities should not undertake their own quality assessments of providers (which is Ofsted's role) but should focus on challenging and securing support for early years providers who 'require improvement'. The Government will therefore reform the law to no longer require local authorities to make additional quality-based requirements on good or outstanding private, voluntary and independent sector providers.

Where a provider receives a 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate' rating from OfSTED, this will continue to trigger intervention by the local authority, based on the issues raised by OfSTED in its inspection. Local authorities will therefore specify that these 'requires improvement' providers take-up appropriate support as a condition of funding. Local authorities will also need to ensure that these providers can access training and support, and where such support is not available, provide it directly.

We know that the quality of provision is particularly important for disadvantaged children. New guidance on early education therefore sets out the expectation that local authorities should only fund early learning places for two-year-olds in settings judged to be 'good' or 'outstanding'. The Government is considering whether, from September 2015, to require that local authorities only fund early learning places for two-year-olds in settings judged to be 'good' or 'outstanding'.

The Government will provide an annual update of existing benchmarking data on the proportion of providers rated 'good' or 'outstanding' in each local authority area. For the first time, from this year, it will include data on the proportion of children accessing their funded place in a provider rated as 'good' or 'outstanding' in each area.

### 4.2.3 Sufficiency

The local authority role in relation to the sufficiency of early years and childcare provision is unchanged; being to ensure that there is a diverse, sufficient and sustained market of early education and childcare provision.

### **4.3 Local Context**

#### 4.3.1 Integrated working

KCC Education, Learning and Skills has been developing more coordinated and integrated ways of working in districts, supporting schools, supporting learning and securing the best outcomes for children, young people and their families

Senior officers have been working with Early Intervention Delivery Managers (in KCC Families and Social Care), together with schools and agencies in their Districts to ensure that resources are being deployed against priorities to deliver improved outcomes. They will ensure that there is a coordinated focus on those schools, settings or groups of children and young people requiring support, co-ordinate developments across Districts and tackle any issues, including gaps in provision or inflexibility of services.

The majority of Kent's schools are now working in local partnerships with other schools to drive the improvement agenda; making better use of resources within the education system, exploring new ways of working, new ways of delivering school to school support and challenge.

In this broad context of more integrated Working, over the past year, significant progress has been made to integrate services for adolescents through the Kent Integrated Adolescent Support Service (KIASS). Plans are now also developing for a similar approach to the better integration of services for 0 – 11 year olds, within which Children's Centres and other early years settings are key.

We aim to ensure strong and sustainable working relationships between early years providers, children's centres, schools and health services, laying the early foundations for life long learning and good health. An important element of the Early Years and Childcare Strategy therefore will be to support integrated working for children and parents aged 0-11, working with early years providers.

### **4.4 The Strategy**

4.4.1 The proposed strategy will be our response to More Affordable Childcare and the local context of more integrated, district based working. A Strategy Steering Group has been formed, representative of all relevant agencies, including the full range of early education and childcare providers themselves.

#### 4.4.2. Vision

The draft Strategy is still in development, and its broad vision is proposed to be for a vibrant, increasingly diverse and thriving 'market' of early education and childcare provision that is sufficient, sustainable and sustained, accessible, inclusive and of the highest quality possible, integral to which:

- the culture and climate is one of collaboration, with the local authority, providers and parents working together in partnership to support and achieve the best possible outcomes for children, young people and their families;
- young children are supported to progress towards and achieve their full potential;
- providers are self reflective and evaluative and strive for continuous improvement;
- the voice and needs of children, young people and their families are central and paramount, with needs being consistently identified, reviewed, responded to and met and regularly reviewed.

#### 4.4.3 Aims

The broad, proposed aims of the Strategy are, by working in a culture and ethos of partnership and collaboration with all stakeholders:

- to support progress through and improve outcomes at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage for all children;
- to narrow the gaps between the achievement of and outcomes for children who are vulnerable to underachievement and all children, significantly incorporating those with special educational needs and/or who are disabled;;
- to make available to parents/carers good, accurate and timely information about early education and childcare provision and services;
- to ensure that there is a sufficient, diverse and sustained market of early education and childcare provision, (including places for two year olds);
- to ensure equality of access to and inclusivity within early education and childcare provision;
- to support the highest quality early education and childcare provision possible, within a climate of continuous improvement;
- to ensure that children are safeguarded within early education and childcare provision;
- to support good transition from early years provision into Primary education;
- to support parents/carers to work/study/train by ensuring that the absence of childcare is not a barrier;

#### 4.4.4..Process and Timescales

A number of Working Groups are currently considering data and other information relevant to the above aims. The outcomes from and recommendations of the various Working Groups will inform the Strategy. A draft Strategy will then be presented to the Education Cabinet Committee in November, prior to consultation. Following the consultation, the results of this and the ensuing recommendations will come back to Education Cabinet Committee in March, for comment and amendment before approval by Cabinet. .

### **4.5 Equalities Implications**

A full Equalities Impact Assessment is being undertaken integral to the development of the Strategy, which will be included in the consultation.

## 5. Conclusions

5.1 In the context of the Government's document *More Affordable Childcare* and also significant local developments for integrated, collaborative working, a new Early Years and Childcare Strategy for 2014 – 2017 is being developed in Kent, in readiness for consultation. Work is in progress to bring a draft Strategy to Education Cabinet Committee in November, prior to consultation. Further to consultation, a final draft Strategy will be presented to Education Cabinet Committee in March 2014 for comment and amendment before approval by Cabinet. .

## 6. Recommendation(s)

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6.1 The Education Cabinet Committee is asked to note the need for a new Early Years and Childcare Strategy and to endorse the proposals for achieving this.

## 7. Background Documents

7.1 DfE Policy Report - More Affordable Childcare

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/more-affordable-childcare>

## 8. Contact details

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