

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

Patrick Leeson, Corporate Director for Education, Learning and Skills

To: **Education Cabinet Committee - 14 January 2014**

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

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Past Pathway of Paper: **Education Cabinet Committee 27 September 2013**

Future Pathway of Paper: **Education Cabinet Committee (post consultation) and then to Cabinet for final agreement**

Electoral Division: **All**

Summary: This report presents the draft Early Years and Childcare Strategy 2014 – 2017 for comment and endorsement to consult.

Recommendation: Education Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse the draft Early Years and Childcare Strategy 2014 – 2017, prior to consultation.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Early Years and Childcare Strategy has been refreshed and developed further to reflect the context of major changes that the Government is introducing for early education and childcare. It also reflects Kent's ambitious targets for improvement in early years provision and outcomes and comes at a time when KCC is taking significant steps to develop more integrated working across a wide range of partners.

1.2 There are currently clear plans and targets 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 national averages.

1.3 The Strategic Aims of the Early Years and Childcare Strategy are to:

- Develop a more integrated approach to early years and childcare provision and services;
- Ensure better continuity of provision and services across the 0 – 5 age range;
- Ensure that increasing numbers of children are school ready at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage and make a successful transition to school;

- Mitigate the effects of poverty, inequality and disadvantage through the provision of high quality early education and childcare, more effective support for parents and narrowing of the early development achievement gaps for the most disadvantaged children;
- Develop a system wide approach to continuous improvement in early education and childcare provision through more collaborative networks of providers and the use of traded services.

1.4 The scope of the Strategy includes the continued sufficiency of and inclusive access to high quality Free Early Education places for all three and four year olds and for increasing numbers of two year olds. In addition it is to secure sufficient childcare for all children and young people aged 0 – 14 and up to 18 where the young person has special educational needs and/or a disability (SEND) and/or is a Child in Care. 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).

2. Bold Steps for Kent and Policy Framework

2.1 Bold Steps for Kent

The Early Years and Childcare Strategy 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 higher education and employment with training. The early years and childcare strategy supports this by ensuring the availability of high quality early years provision, particularly good provision to meet the needs of young children who are or may be vulnerable and disadvantaged. The early years and childcare strategy 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 or train, all of which directly contribute to economic growth and reducing family 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. It is a priority for all early years and childcare provision to work in partnership with children, young people and parents and carers in the development and delivery of the services that support them.
- *Tackling disadvantage:* Tackling disadvantage is integral to the core of the early years and childcare strategy. There is considerable disadvantage, inequality and poverty in Kent and supporting parents in the early years to

care for their children well, and ensuring access to high quality early education and childcare provision is intended to give every child the best start in life, reduce achievement and developmental gaps which emerge in the early years and ensure that all learners meet their full potential.

2.2. Bold Steps for Education

Sitting in the broader context of Bold Steps for Kent is Bold Steps for Education, the key strategic document for all stages of education which sets out clear priorities and targets for improvement. 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 families, children and 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 for improvement;
- 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 educational outcomes for children and young people;
- 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.

2.3. Interface with other Strategies and Plans.

Whilst this Strategy has a clear and specific scope, it aligns with a number of other key strategies and initiatives, particularly strategies for Primary Education, the SEND Strategy, the plans for greater integration of early intervention and prevention services for 0 – 11 year olds, and the Children's Centres programme.

3. Early Years and Childcare Strategy

3.1. The draft Early Years and Childcare Strategy 2014 – 2017 is attached to this report as Appendix One. Also attached are:

- Appendix Two, Equality Impact Assessment;
- Appendix Three, Questions for the Consultation;

3.2 Equalities Implications

An Equalities Impact Assessment is attached as Appendix Two.

4. Consultation.

The consultation period for the Strategy is proposed to be from 16 January to 13 February 2014, with the communication approach and consultation methods as follows:

- Engagement with representative stakeholders and relevant KCC teams has been on-going during the drafting stage
- Consultees will include providers of early education and early years and out of school childcare in the private, voluntary and independent sectors, childminders, children's centres, (through all of which parents and carers views will also be welcome), schools, relevant KCC teams and services and health commissioners
- The launch of the consultation on the Strategy will be via bulletin or email to consultees with a link to an online response form on the KCC website
- The Contact Centre will be the access point for hardcopy formats if requested
- The consultation results will be reported to ECC and the Cabinet prior to final approval of the Strategy.

5. Delivery of the Strategy

Implementation of the Early Years and Childcare Strategy will be achieved by working in a more focused and targeted way with settings that require improvement or have been judged inadequate by Ofsted; by offering a more wide ranging offer of traded support services for the early years sector; by facilitating greater collaboration between settings to share best practice; by specifically developing a programme of support to narrow achievement gaps in the EYFS outcomes; by continuing to provide additional support for settings for children with special educational needs through the Specialist Teaching and Learning Service; and through a restructured Early Years and Childcare Service, the staff consultation for which is scheduled to take place between 8 January and 10 February 2014.

The proposed structure takes into account the requirements of *More Affordable Childcare*, the revised Early Years and Childcare Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities issued in September 2013 and local issues reflected in the draft Strategy.

Proposals are to restructure the Early Years and Childcare Service into the following four teams:

- Sufficiency and Sustainability
- Improvement and Standards
- Equality and Inclusion

- Partnership and Integration

Each of these teams will be lead and coordinated by a manager, delivering statutory, discretionary and chargeable functions as appropriate in line with national and local requirements.

Each of the priorities in Section 7 of the draft Strategy and related actions in Section 8, The Way Forward, is included in one of the four teams' areas of responsibility and also reflected in the job description for the manager of each team. An additional key part of each of the four managers' roles is to lead and coordinate all Early Years and Childcare activity within one area of Kent (north, south, east and west). Responsibility for overall leadership, management and coordination of the Service and hence delivery of the Strategy sits with the Head of Service.

6. Conclusion

In the context of the Government's document *More Affordable Childcare* and also significant KCC plans for improvement in the early years provision and outcomes for children, plus developments for more integrated, collaborative working, the draft Early Years and Childcare Strategy for 2014 – 2017 is presented to Education Cabinet Committee for consideration and comment prior to consultation. A final draft Strategy will be presented to Education Cabinet Committee in March 2014 for comment and suggested amendments to the Cabinet Member before approval by Cabinet.

7. Recommendation

Recommendation

The Education Cabinet Committee is asked to comment on and endorse the draft Early Years and Childcare Strategy 2014 – 2017, prior to consultation.

8. Background Documents

7.1 More Affordable Childcare

9. Contact details

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