

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

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To: Education Cabinet Committee 14 March 2014

Subject: Early Years and Childcare Strategy 2014 - 17

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of Paper: Education Cabinet Committee, 27 September 2013 and 14 January 2014

Future Pathway of Paper: Cabinet for final agreement

Electoral Division: All

Summary: This report presents the Education Cabinet Committee with a summary of the consultation responses received on the proposed Early Years and Childcare Strategy 2014 – 2017. The vast majority of respondents supported the ambition, strategic aims, priorities and proposed ways forward.

Recommendations: Members are asked to:

- note the positive responses to the consultation;
- note and comment on the amended Early Years and Childcare Strategy 2014 – 2017, attached to this report;
- note that the consultation responses, the outcomes of Education Cabinet Committee’s discussion and the amended Strategy will be presented to Cabinet in April for final approval.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 On 14 January 2014, building on previous and current successes, Education Cabinet Committee agreed to support the Cabinet Member’s decision to consult on a refreshed, draft Early Years and Childcare Strategy 2014 – 2017.
- 1.2 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, child-minders, before and after school and

holiday childcare provision) and across all sectors, (maintained, voluntary, private and independent).

1.3 The draft Strategy incorporated the following Ambition, Strategic Aims and Priorities:

Ambition

Our ambition for Early Years and Childcare in Kent is for a vibrant, increasingly diverse and thriving early education and childcare sector that is of good and outstanding quality, achieves very good outcomes for children and that is sufficient, affordable and easily accessible for parents and carers. In fulfilling this ambition we aspire to achieve the following:

- a culture of collaboration between all providers, schools, the local authority, other professionals, and parents working together in partnership to support and achieve the best possible outcomes for children, young people and their families;
- every child and young person is supported to develop well, make good progress and achieve their full potential in a safe environment;
- providers are self- improving and evaluative and strive for continuous improvement;
- the voice and needs of children, young people and their parents and carers are central, with their needs being consistently identified early and effectively met.

Strategic Aims

- 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.

Priorities

1. Integration of provision and services

- Ensure more effective joined up working across and between early education and childcare providers, schools, children's centres, the local authority, health and all other relevant agencies and professionals

- Develop collaborative working and improve information sharing and communication with and between providers of early education and childcare
- Improve communication with and the provision of information for parents and carers in relation to early years and childcare matters.

2. Continuity across the 0 – 5 age range

- Ensure the provision of support for parents to better engage in their children's learning in the very earliest years
- Ensure the availability of free, quality early education places for specified two year olds in line with Government targets and timescales
- Extend the Free Early Education Entitlement offer for two, three and four year olds so that is available during the school holidays, in line with the availability of provision
- Support improved continuity and progression in learning for all children by improving current approaches to transition.

3. School Readiness

- Ensure that more children achieve a Good Level of Development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage and are resilient and well prepared for school.

4. Mitigating the effects of disadvantage

- Accelerate the narrowing of gaps in achievement by ensuring that children in the early years who may be vulnerable to poorer outcomes (including those with SEND) have their needs identified as early and possible and receive appropriate additional support to develop well
- Ensure there is a sufficiency of high quality and accessible out of school childcare places for school aged children to age 14 (up to 18 where a young person has a SEND and/or is in the care of the local authority) so that parents are not inhibited from work or training by the absence of childcare.

5. System wide continuous improvement

We need to ensure that increasing levels of provision are good or outstanding and that providers seek to continuously improve the quality of their provision through the development of their workforce by:

- Supporting providers receiving an Ofsted judgement of 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate' to quickly move to 'good' or better
- Delivering a comprehensive and highly flexible early years and childcare chargeable improvement service
- Ensuring a comprehensive work force development offer, designed to address gaps in qualifications and other training, and including those related to inequalities.

2.0 Consultation

2.1 Method

The consultation on the draft Strategy took place from 16 January to 13 February 2014 with the communication approach and consultation methods being as follows:

- Consultees included providers of early education and early years and out of school childcare in the private, voluntary and independent sectors, childminders, children's centres, schools, parents, relevant KCC teams and services and health commissioners
- The consultation was launched via bulletin or email to consultees with a link to an online response form on the KCC website
- The Contact Centre was the access point for hardcopy formats if requested

2.2 Questions

The consultation asked the following questions:

- Is the Ambition comprehensive?
- Are the Strategic Aims the right ones?
- Do the Priorities reflect what we need to achieve?
- Does the Way Forward include the right things?

Additionally, in order to inform our review of how we communicate with providers, they were asked to comment on what they consider to be the most effective way(s) of achieving this.

A free text box was available for any respondent to provide any other comment that they wished.

2.3 Respondents

47 responses were received in total, of which

- 29 were providers
- 13 were parents
- 5 were from Children's Centres

2.4 Responses

The Ambition

85% of respondents agreed that the Ambition is comprehensive. Of those that didn't agree, three were parents, three from a children's centre and one was a provider. No comment was offered as to why or how the Ambition could be improved.

The Strategic Aims

97% of respondents agreed that the Strategic Aims are the right ones. Of those that didn't agree, one was a parent and two were providers. No comment was offered as to why or how the Strategic Aims should be amended.

The Priorities

87% of respondents agreed that the Priorities are the right ones. Of those that didn't agree, two were parents and three were providers. No comment was offered as to why or how the Priorities should be amended.

The Way Forward

76% of respondents agreed that the Way Forward included the right things. Of those that didn't agree, five were parents, six were providers and two were from children's centres.

Comments made by providers related almost exclusively to the changes being brought about by Ofsted now being the sole arbiter of quality for early years and childcare provision and the introduction of improvement services on a chargeable basis.

Communication with Providers

The free text box asking providers how we could most effectively communicate with them, and they with us, generated a range of comments that consistently welcomed the review of this and named a range of methods including by webpages, email, bulletin, network meetings and collaborations. These will be taken forward in the implementation of the Strategy.

Any other comments

Any other comments were almost exclusively from providers and in relation to the new national framework and its implications.

Two respondents (one parent and one provider) made comments about ensuring that in supporting children at risk of under achievement, children who were potentially gifted and talented did not get overlooked. One respondent (a parent) commented on the need for more out of school childcare. These comments will be taken forward as appropriate and necessary in the implementation of the Strategy.

3.0 Equality Impact Assessment

3.1 An Equality Impact Assessment was attached to the draft Strategy as part of the consultation, which included the following statement:

The Strategy is universal and applies equally across all sectors including all groups of protected characteristics. The three-year implementation plan will support improved continuity and progression for all children and young people by reviewing and refreshing current approaches to transition to school. The plan will also accelerate the narrowing of gaps in achievement

by ensuring that children and young people who may be vulnerable to not achieving their full potential (including those with SEND) have their needs identified as early as possible and that they are supported to achieve their full potential.

- 3.2 No comments were received on the Equality Impact Assessment. It has not been possible to undertake an equalities analysis of the responses as over 70% were submitted on the behalf of provider organisations.

4.0 Analysis of consultation responses

- 4.1 The level of agreement with and support for the Ambition (85%), Strategic Aims (97%) and Priorities (87%) is very positive, supportive and encouraging and is a clear indication that for the vast majority of respondents the general scope of this refreshed Early Years and Childcare Strategy is appropriate.

- 4.2. Whilst there was a good majority still for the various elements of The Way Forward, the slightly lower level of agreement at 78% was largely attributable to the significant change in culture and climate for providers, brought about by national changes to the overall framework for early years and childcare services. However, following the introduction of chargeable services with effect from May 2014 the likely level of purchase is extremely encouraging. Some providers have said that they believe the introduction of chargeable services will support their increased autonomy and independence. We can therefore look forward to continuing to work positively and supportively with the sector to continue to improve outcomes for children.

- 4.3 A small number of respondents (providers particularly) asked how the Strategy was going to be implemented. This is described in Section 5 below and will be communicated in due course

- 4.4 In the context of the responses to the consultation and full consideration of these, the final Strategy is attached to this report as Appendix One

5.0 Delivery of the Strategy

- 5.1. Implementation of the 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 wide ranging offer of chargeable improvement services; by facilitating greater collaboration between providers to share best practice; by developing a specific programme of support to narrow achievement gaps in 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 took place between 8 January and 10 February 2014.

- 5.2. The Early Years and Childcare Service

The new Early Years and Childcare Service structure takes into account the requirements of the government's strategy *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. Further to the staff consultation, the restructured Service will incorporate the following four teams:

- **Sufficiency and Sustainability** (key focus to ensure a sufficiency of early education for two, three and four year olds and childcare for 0 – 14 year olds and up to 18 for those with a SEND and/or who are a CIC);
- **Improvement and Standards** (key focus on supporting providers 'requiring improvement' or that are 'inadequate' to move to 'good' as quickly as possible and also on workforce development and delivering a chargeable Improvement Service);
- **Equality and Inclusion** (key focus on providing a programme of advice, support and training to registered early education and childcare providers to promote and enable equality and inclusion and to narrow gaps in achievement);
- **Partnership and Integration** (key focus to ensure information, advice and support to parents and prospective parents regarding early education and childcare and to ensure the engagement of and communication with providers).

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. 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 or west).

Each of the priorities in the Strategy and related actions is included in one of the four teams' areas of responsibility and also reflected in the job description for the manager of each team. Responsibility for overall leadership, management and coordination of the Service and hence delivery of the Strategy sits with the Head of Service.

5.3 The Early Years and Childcare Service and Children's Centres

Children's Centres are a key part of early childhood services for young children. Further to the consultation on the Early Years and Childcare Service restructure, the new Service will have two roles in relation to Children's Centres, as follows:

- Where a Children's Centre has a private or voluntary pre-school or nursery as part of its provision, the Early Years and Childcare Service's full range of statutory, discretionary and chargeable services will apply;
- For Children's Centres overall (i.e. more broadly than any integral pre-school/nursery provision), the Early Years and Childcare Service will provide advice, support and guidance to ensure that the early learning ethos and any early learning activities are in line with EYFS principles and best practice.

6.0 Conclusion

6.1 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 final Early Years and Childcare Strategy for 2014 – 2017 is presented to Education Cabinet Committee for consideration and comment. The final Strategy will be presented by the Cabinet Member for approval by Cabinet.

7.0 Recommendation

Recommendation: Members are asked to:

- note the positive responses made to the consultation;
- note and comment on the amended Early Years and Childcare Strategy 2014 – 2017, attached to this report;
- note that the consultation responses, the outcomes of Education Cabinet Committee's discussion and the amended Strategy will be presented to Cabinet in April for final approval

8.0 Background Documents

8.1 More Affordable Childcare

8.2 Early Years Strategy 2014 – 2017 Consultation and Equalities Impact Assessment

<http://consultations.kent.gov.uk/consult.ti/EarlyYearsStrategy/consultationHome>

Early Years Strategy 2014 – 2017 Report to ECC – 27 September 2013

<https://democracy.kent.gov.uk/documents/s42551/Item%20D5%20-%20Early%20Years%20and%20Childcare%20Strategy%202014%20-%202017.pdf>

Early Years Strategy 2014 – 2017 Report to ECC – 14 January 2013

<https://democracy.kent.gov.uk/documents/s44519/Item%20D3%20-%20Early%20Years.pdf>

9.0 Contact details

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