

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

Patrick Leeson, Corporate Director for Education and Young People's Services

To: **Education and Young People's Services Cabinet Committee –
8 July 2015**

Subject: **Free Early Education for Two Years Olds: Take Up**

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Past Pathway of Paper: **Update and Progress Report only**

Future Pathway of Paper:

Electoral Division: **All**

Summary

This report provides information about Free Early Education for eligible two year old children and how this is delivered in Kent, with a particular focus on the current issue of the level of take up and how this is being addressed.

Recommendation

The Education and Young People's Cabinet Committee is asked to note the report, the actions taken to date and the next steps in promoting and supporting the take up of Free Early Education by eligible two year olds.

1. Introduction

1.1 This report provides information about Free Early Education for two year olds (in Kent called 'Free for 2', or FF2), including

- History and background, including eligibility criteria
- Delivery in Kent
- Take up (historical and current)
- Current activity
- Next steps

2. Financial Implications

2.1 Free Early Education for two year olds is funded by the Government via the local authority to registered early education providers. The current level of funding provided by the Government is £4.94p per child per hour. KCC currently funds providers of two year old places at £4.95p per child per hour. Even though KCC passes on to providers a penny per child per hour more than it receives from the Government, the level of funding continues to lead to financial sustainability challenges for many providers.

3. History and Background

3.1 In September 2013, the Government introduced Free Early Education for approximately 20% of two year olds, increasing this to approximately 40% in September 2014. For a child to be eligible, parents must be in receipt of one of the following

- Income Support
- income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)
- income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
- support through part 6 of the Immigration and Asylum Act
- Child Tax Credit and/or Working Tax Credit and have an annual income under £16,190
- the guaranteed element of State Pension Credit
- the Working Tax Credit 4-week run on (the payment you get when you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit)
- Universal Credit

Local authorities are advised of eligible children and families via lists sent periodically from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)

Children are also entitled to a place if

- they are a Child in Care
- they have a statement of special educational needs or an Education, Health and Care Plan
- they are in receipt of Disability Living Allowance
- they have left care under a special guardianship order, child arrangements order or adoption order

These children are identified within and by the local authority itself.

4. Delivery in Kent

4.1 In the context of the above criteria, approximately 7,000 two year olds in Kent are now eligible for a free early education place at any one time. The Early Years and Childcare Service ensures the supply and quality of places, proactively markets the FF2 scheme and also has a 'FF2 Delivery Team', which is responsible for the process and administration of FF2 places. The Service works closely with Children's Centres, where the responsibility for outreach, engagement and local take-up sits

4.2 Supply of places

Whilst ensuring the availability of sufficient places has been challenging, our overall supply is now strong. There are currently 10,261 places developed across the county which is made up of 7,774 places in the private, voluntary and independent sectors and 2,487 places with childminders. Eleven maintained nurseries are also signed up to offer FF2 places. Whilst there is a good supply of places in all districts, there may be localised pockets where group provision is not always readily available, however childminders can usually respond to need under these circumstances. All providers have signed up to offer this number of places subject to vacancies, however they are not able to hold places open as this will affect their business sustainability.

4.3 Quality of places

As judged by Ofsted, 90% of early years provision in Kent is good or outstanding. Currently, 91% of children accessing a FF2 place are attending a good or outstanding setting. Targeted support is provided for settings 'Requiring Improvement', to enable them to become at least good as quickly as possible. FF2 children are not placed in settings deemed by Ofsted to be inadequate, and FF2 children already attending a setting that subsequently receives such a judgement would be quickly found a place elsewhere.

4.4 Information and Marketing

Through the distribution of information and marketing materials we have sought to ensure that information about FF2 is available and shared with families who are eligible, including

- railing banners (supplied to early years providers with space to display and to children's centres)
- pull-up banners – used at seminars, conferences etc.
- posters and leaflets - distributed to all providers, children's centres, Jobcentreplus, housing associations, health colleagues etc.
- Bus panels (inside and out)
- Links to online information and application - www.kent.gov.uk/freefor2
- Social media adverts on Facebook and Mumsnet

4.5 Delivery Process

The FF2 Delivery Process is as follows

- The FF2 Team receives the DWP list
- A FF2 postcard is sent to all eligible parents
- Parents can then either apply by completing an application form
 - ✓ online at www.kent.gov.uk/freefor2
 - ✓ at a children's centre
 - ✓ at a registered FF2 provider / childminder
- The application form is received by the FF2 Team and processed to confirm eligibility
- Eligibility is confirmed either back to the parent, children's centre or provider (If necessary the children's centre or Children and Families Information Service will assist the parent in locating a registered FF2 provider)
- Parent agrees with their chosen provider, days and times required
- The child starts at the setting
- Information is sent to individual children's centres to inform them of children eligible within their locality and then refreshed periodically to advise of children who have and haven't taken up a place.

4.6 Children's Centres

Children Centres have a key role in supporting the take up of FF2 places and actively promote this at all available opportunities through a variety of means. There is an identified FF2 'champion' within each District and all staff within Children Centres are aware of the importance of, and significant benefits to be achieved for the child, through taking up their entitlement. This message is re-inforced through the

various strands of work that take place within centres, whether that is via individual or group work. Children Centres use the E-start database to identify potential children and this is complemented by information received from the FF2 Team that identifies eligible children who have been contacted by postcard but who have not replied. Children Centres then seek to follow up through a variety of means, e.g. phone calls and visits where practicable. A progress log is also kept on those that have applied but who are not within the age range at the time of application. Children Centres also have a role in supporting the delivery of an effective 'sell not tell' message to other professionals who have contact with parents of young children; e.g. health visitors, schools, and local child care providers.

Examples of the work that is undertaken in Children Centres include

- Marketing via banners, display boards and posters within centres with relevant and current information – which is regularly updated with information about the settings and child-minders that accept FF2
- Specific FF2 events to register families following receipt of the DWP data;
- Liaising with local providers to identify available FF2 vacancies and where places are not immediately available, providing weekly sessions for eligible parents in order to maintain contact until places do become available
- Training all staff, including support service and crèche workers, to promote FF2 at every available opportunity.
- Ensuring that staff and partner agencies have an understanding of the FF2 scheme via community meetings, appraisals and supervision
- Compilation of FF2 packs that contain application forms along with information on criteria and guidance, plus a list of local registered providers; (this is updated on a regular basis)
- Encouraging health visiting colleagues to refer any families from the two year development check, as well as alerting parents at the one year check.
- Working closely with Social Care colleagues to encourage take up from eligible families.
- Using questionnaires to identify who has actually taken up a FF2 places and how they went about accessing the service
- Promotion of the FF2 scheme via linking with other schemes such as Bookstart and, in some areas, with promotion of other benefits such as membership at a local leisure centre
- Staff routinely asking parents in groups and home visits if they know a child is coming up for age

5. Ff2 Take Up

5.1 The take up of places by eligible two year olds is presenting a challenge for us. As the numbers eligible for a free place have increased, take up is less than we would like it to be. FF2 take up is currently measured in different two ways.

- 1) Annually within Kent, as part of the Early Years and Childcare Strategy 2014 – 2017, being the total number of children in an academic year (September to August) who access a free place. In this context, for the academic year 2013-14, 78% of all children eligible during that period accessed a place.

This figure for 2014-15 from to September 2014 to March 2015 is 79%, so we are on track to achieve our target of 83% for the academic year September 2014 – August 2015.

2) Periodically by the DfE on a 'snapshot' basis, of the children actually accessing a place at any given time. On this basis, Kent's monthly profile from September 2014 to date is shown below (percentages are rounded up to the nearest whole number)

- September 40%
- October 49%
- November 53%
- December 54%
- January 48%
- February 53%
- March 56%
- April 56%
- May 57%
- June 56% (snap shot taken on 16 June.)

Take up typically rises throughout each month as providers submit claims forms for that month, hence we can expect June take up at its highest to exceed the 57% figure for May.

5.2 While it is the choice of parents to use the free place for two year olds, we are encouraging and supporting more parents to take up their free entitlement. In this context, county-wide 'snap shot' targets have been set for 60% for July and 65% for October. Current take up and targets for increasing take up by district are

Weekly total of FF2 children in settings for summer term 2015				
Produced 16/6/2015				
District	Totals at 16/6/15	Feb 2015 DWP List	% Take up	Target agreed within District Performance Management cycle
Dartford	249	473	52.64%	65%
Gravesham	164	544	30.15%	65%
Sevenoaks	157	343	45.77%	65%
North Total	570	1360	41.91%	
Ashford	343	565	60.71%	80%
Dover	356	555	64.14%	70%
Shepway	361	529	68.24%	80%
South Total	1060	1649	64.28%	
Canterbury	320	540	59.26%	80%
Swale	421	782	53.84%	70%
Thanet	573	912	62.83%	80%
East Total	1314	2234	58.82%	
Maidstone	336	660	50.91%	65%
Tonbridge & Malling	215	406	52.96%	65%
Tunbridge Wells	156	280	55.71%	65%
West Total	707	1346	52.53%	
Total	3651	6589	55.41%	

5.3 The promotion of FF2 take up is now firmly embedded within the Performance Cycle of all Children Centres. Targets are set following the Annual Conversation that takes place in November. These are reviewed and adjusted as necessary on a quarterly basis by the District Advisory Board.

6. Reasons for low take up

6.1 While the overall trend figure is in the right direction the above table illustrates a considerable variation in take up between districts A recent 'mini survey' undertaken by the FF2 Team of 95 families who had been confirmed as eligible but had subsequently chosen to not take up a place provided the following information

- 34 responses (38%): Chosen setting full and preference is to remain on the waiting list rather than consider a place elsewhere (even if there were places available)
- 26 responses (29%): Place identified but choice is to wait until September until the child is a little older (i.e. parent thinks the child is too young)
- 4 responses (3%): in the process of moving house and want to wait until afterwards
- 6 responses (6%): Kent resident but accessing a place in Medway
- 4 responses (3%): 'health' reasons for child not accessing place
- 2 responses (2%): regularly attending 'stay and play' type activities and prefer this
- 19 families (20%) could not be contacted (this is being followed up)

N.B percentages are rounded up or down to the nearest whole number

6.2 We have also recognised particular issues in Gravesham and Sevenoaks.

- In Gravesham the key issues identified from parental feedback are a lack of provision (sometimes of choice rather than actual availability) both in terms of number of places and also their location, as well as a cultural choice. The availability of suitable premises in Gravesham for development of expansion continues to be a significant issue.
- In Sevenoaks analysis has shown that there is further work to do with regards to raising awareness of both the FF2 scheme as well as the different options others than settings, e.g. childminders. It is also the case that in more affluent areas it can be a challenge to ensure that providers, who are independent businesses, maintain sufficient FF2 places as there is considerable demand from working parents of 'non-eligible' children.

6.3 We are also in the process of carrying out some analysis on FF2 take-up (who typically does and doesn't take it up) using Mosaic as a tool for this, in order to target marketing and other activity in a highly differentiated way that is bespoke to particular communities.

7. Current Activity

7.1 Activity over recent weeks and months to improve take up has been

- Researching the potential for an 'on-line eligibility checker' through the purchase of a web based system, to enable parents to check their own eligibility on line. This has identified that our current options for eligibility checking (paragraph 4.5)

already offer at least 75% of what an on-line eligibility checker can offer, hence we are now in the process of further developing our own digital solution to provide this 'uplift'

- Developing a differentiated approach to marketing and to the provision of information based on particular communities (a preliminary launch is scheduled for July with a full launch in September). This approach involves 'de-stigmatising' the FF2 offer by stating that all children are eligible for free early education though not all at the same time
- Correspondence from the Corporate Director, Education and Young People, to all early years providers, children's centres and schools, raising their awareness of the situation and seeking their support to promote and encourage take up
- Introducing the aforementioned children's centre district FF2 'champions'. In Gravesham and Sevenoaks these are senior staff members.
- Setting children's centre based FF2 take up targets to support the county-wide targets of 60% and 65% in July and October respectively
- Extending the involving a wider range of relevant partners and health particularly in ensuring the provision of information – health visitors will move to providing information at the one year check in addition to the check at 27 months
- Holding a 'Theory of Change' workshop to facilitate enhanced understanding of the situation and therefore how to move forward more effectively
- Recently attending a Statistical Neighbour Seminar to share effective practice
- Monitoring the situation overall to track progress and impact
- Extremely recently, an additional £150,000 has been identified to support the new marketing campaign

We anticipate seeing the cumulative benefit of this activity in take up figures with effect from September.

8. Next Steps

8.1 Further to the Theory of Change Workshop, the following next steps have been determined

- Develop and launch a county-wide campaign to further raise awareness with parents of the purpose and value of FF2 places
- Integral to this, introduce a campaign about the particular benefits of very young children being placed with a childminder
- Working with Early Years Collaboration Leaders, to identify where eligible children are on a waiting list for a preferred provider, to encourage them to access a place elsewhere
- Introduce 'parent champions' of FF2, being those for whom having a free place for their two year old has made a positive difference for both them and their child
- Further develop differentiated marketing by using Mosaic to provide a highly refined and locally bespoke approach to particular communities not generally accessing their free places
- Develop a 'Children's Centre Free Early Education Take-up Toolkit', which will have some core 'tools' plus some additional strategies and resources that (as informed by Mosaic) are mostly likely to have a positive impact for different communities

8.2 Enhancing Family Involvement in Children's Learning (EFICL)

In September the Kent EFICL programme will be introduced. EFICL is a refreshed drive developed in Kent to create pathways across the county to enhance family involvement in their children's learning. In consultation with multi-agency partners, EFICL has been developed to include a range of strategies which comprise a 'toolkit' for early years and childcare providers, as well as parents to support increased parental and whole family involvement in children's learning. The EFICL Toolkit consists of

- *Self reflection and audit tools* for early years settings and children's centres
- An *EFICL Calendar* in which each month shares a strategy which early years settings can use to engage families
- *Schema DVDs*, one which settings can share with parents to support their understanding of schema and the second which the Early Years and Childcare Service can use to support its training
- An *EFICL App* for parents called 'Smarter Play', including the opportunity for parents to keep an electronic diary of their children's learning, pop-ups for ideas on what parents can do to be involved with their children's play, a geo-location feature highlighting various family friendly areas and a link to websites and the CFIS and information on what to look for when looking for high quality childcare.
- The *Learning Links* training package for parents to be used in children's centres to support families to better understand their children's learning and development (in particular their schematic play)

Whilst EFICL had broader scope than FF2 Take up, its core purpose will promote and support increased understanding of the nature and value of early learning and hence encourage more FF2 eligible parents to access their place. The App particularly will have a direct link to information about FF2.

8.3 Health Involvement

From October 2015 local authorities will take over responsibility from NHS England for planning and paying for public health services for babies and children up to 5 years old, including health visiting and the Family Nurse Partnership Programme. This will provide an enhanced opportunity to embed the role of health visitors particularly in continuing to drive increased take up of FF2 places

9. Conclusions

9.1 In relation to Free Early Education for Two Year Olds in Kent, the supply of places and quality of provision is generally good or better. The particular issue is the take up of these places by eligible children and which we are seeking to significantly improve. A range of measures have been introduced over recent months with more identified going forward. Take up is being closely monitored and we anticipate seeing the impact of current and future activity in September and beyond.

<p>10. Recommendation: The Education and Young People's Cabinet Committee is asked to note the report, the actions taken to date and the next steps in promoting and supporting the take up of Free Early Education by eligible two year olds.</p>

11. Contact details

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