

17 March 2014**Agenda Item: 9**

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, YOUTH, FAMILIES AND CULTURE

THE EARLY YEARS PLAN

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to invite the Committee to comment on the proposed Early Years Plan (attached as an **Appendix**) and recommend it to Policy Committee for approval at its meeting on 2 April 2014.

Information and Advice

2. The proposed Early Years Plan sets out the Council's ambition to *ensure that all young children and their families, including those with special educational needs and disability (SEND), are able to reach their potential by having the best start in life through the provision of high quality, integrated early childhood services to prepare them for school.* The Plan is attached as an **Appendix** to this report.
3. It reflects:
 - changes to Government policy as outlined in documents such as Families in the Foundation Years, Supporting Families in the Foundation Years, and More Great Childcare, More Affordable Childcare.
 - changes made to the statutory requirements of local authorities emphasising their role as 'guardians' for disadvantaged children and to ensure they have access to high quality early years provision that prepare them for school.
 - revisions made to Ofsted frameworks that emphasise the need for improved standards for early education places for 2 year olds in particular, advocating that a **Good** rating is now only good enough.
4. The Plan has three high level priorities:
 - *to ensure that early childhood services are effectively integrated/coordinated to identify vulnerable children and those least likely to meet their development goals, and to provide appropriate early help and prevention services.*

- *to ensure there are sufficient, high quality, inclusive and safe early learning and childcare opportunities that prepare children for school, in recognition that only Good is good enough.*
 - *to ensure that the early years workforce has access to training and development opportunities that lead to required service improvement and prepare children better for school.*
5. The first priority focuses on strengthening working practices to make sure that we know which children are vulnerable through effective information sharing between key practitioners, so that they and their families are supported to access early help services; to assess more effectively potential development delay; to support those eligible to access their early education entitlement; and to develop systems to share information about the progress of individual children on transition.
 6. Priority two focuses on ensuring there is sufficient early education provision in those areas where it is needed and that it is of sufficient quality to ensure that children get the best possible provision. The childcare sufficiency audit is helping to identify potential gaps in provision, and the allocation of capital funding from Government is being used to create new childcare places for 2 year olds. A review of the quality improvement support to the sector is also underway to ensure available resources are targeted at those settings that require improvement, thus creating further additional places. Strategies are in place to monitor/support settings to meet the needs of those children most vulnerable and/or with additional needs. Ensuring parents have access to accurate information about local provision remains a priority as well as the support from settings to help parents create effective home learning environments.
 7. The third priority is focused on the workforce, recognising the importance of all early years practitioners knowing and understanding their contribution to delivering services within the Early Years Foundation Stage framework (EYFS) with an emphasis on child development, early help and safeguarding. The recent Ofsted report 'Getting it right from the start'¹ also highlights the need for strong leadership in order to develop and sustain high quality provision across the sector. It is our intention to review workforce development commitments and establish a universal and targeted offer based on the requirements of the EYFS and Ofsted framework - prioritising settings that require support to 'Get to Good'. We will explore opportunities to create packages of 'sold services', with available resources focused on targeting support where service improvement is required.
 8. The Plan identifies key actions and timescales to be achieved which will be monitored at an operational level through the Early Help Executive Board, chaired by the Service Director for Youth, Families and Cultural Services. The Plan contributes to the Closing the Gap agenda and the Closing the Gap Performance Board will also receive updates. The Early Years Attainment Group has operational responsibility for its implementation and will monitor progress through its quarterly meetings. The Early Years Plan will be reviewed annually.

Other Options Considered

¹ Getting it right from the start – Ofsted, July 2013

9. No other options have been considered.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

10. To ensure the delivery of effective early years services for Nottinghamshire's 0-5 years population within the resources available to the Council and its partners.

Statutory and Policy Implications

11. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, finance, human resources, human rights, the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults, service users, sustainability and the environment and ways of working and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Public Sector Equality Duty Implications

12. An equality impact assessment was undertaken in October 2013 and is available as a background paper.

Safeguarding of Children and Vulnerable Adults Implications

13. The priorities set out in the Plan seek to strengthen support and practice which will safeguard those children and families which are most vulnerable.

Implications for Service Users

14. Children and families will benefit from increased and/or improved services aimed at giving young children the best start in life, preparing them better for school.

RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1) That the Committee comments on the proposed Early Years Plan and recommends it to Policy Committee for approval at its meeting on 2 April 2014.

Derek Higton
Service Director, Youth, Families and Culture

For any enquiries about this report please contact:

Justine Gibling
Group Manager, Early Years and Early Intervention
T: 0115 9774426
E: justine.gibling@nottscc.gov.uk

Constitutional Comments (LM 28/02/14)

15. The Children's and Young People's Committee has delegated authority within the Constitution to approve the recommendations in the report.

Financial Comments (KLA 04/03/14)

16. There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Equality Impact Assessment

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

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