

10 February 2020

Agenda Item: 10

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, COMMISSIONING AND RESOURCES

EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES COMMUNICATIONS PLAN 2020-2022

Purpose of the Report

1. This report seeks approval of the Early Childhood Services Communications Plan (April 2020 - March 2022), attached as **Appendix 1**.

Information

2. The Council has a statutory duty to ensure that there are sufficient childcare places so that families take up their free childcare entitlements and are supported to access high quality early years provision; this includes sharing information regarding how and where to access early years provision and what funding is available for families.

Communications Plan

3. Early Childhood Services have produced a communications plan that sits alongside the service's delivery plan. A summary of the plan is included in **Appendix 1** of this report. The plan aims to prioritise key activities throughout the year and requires Committee approval.

Local Priorities

4. 2 year olds from low income families are entitled to 15 hours of funded early education per week. Take up rates for eligible 2 year olds are increasing with 80.4% now accessing their entitlements, however take up rates are lower in some localities. Increasing take up rates for this group contributes towards reducing the attainment gap and enabling children to achieve developmental milestones.
5. Funded early years places are available to all 3 and 4 year olds (15 hours per week), and those from working households are eligible for extended childcare (30 hours per week). Extended childcare entitlements were launched in September 2017 and, despite early successes, there is a continued need to inform parents before their child turns 3. Parents are also required to re-register each term in order to secure their place, so reminders are required to encourage parents to regularly reapply.
6. Working parents with children under the age of 12 (or under 17 for disabled children) are able to open an online account to pay for registered childcare through the 'Tax Free

Childcare' scheme. Central government will top-up the money paid into the account. For every £8 parents pay in, the government will add an extra £2. Parents can receive up to £2,000 per child per year or £4,000 per child per year for disabled children. Take up of Tax Free Childcare is low across the country including Nottinghamshire, additional promotion is therefore required.

7. The availability of childcare is promoted to parents through the statutory Families Information Service (FIS) which is hosted by Inspire. This service facilitates the Notts Help Yourself website and the FIS Facebook page. A review of the Notts Help Yourself website is currently underway with plans to increase the resources available including sharing tools to encourage home learning.
8. Children at risk of poor development are prioritised in relation to supplementary funding which enables early years providers to better address their needs. The service intends to increase the take up of supplementary funding through promotion with early years settings and parents. Funding is available for children with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND), children known to social care including Looked After Children and children from low income groups.
9. Parents under the age of 20 who are in school or further education are entitled to have their childcare and travel costs paid for through the national Care to Learn childcare grant worth £160 per week. Take up of this grant is poor in comparison with statistical neighbours and further work is required to promote this fund to pregnant teenagers, young parents and the services working with them.
10. Consultation with parents and the early years sector is required when assessing childcare sufficiency levels and reviewing services and interventions. Consultation is a key element of the annual Childcare Sufficiency Assessment and Children's Centre Service contract management.
11. Early Childhood Services intend to strengthen promotion of their traded 'Training and Development Opportunities' (TADO) service to increase participation by local practitioners to increase skills and confidence.
12. The service will increasingly use social media as a tool to engage parents and families and will aim to keep up to date with opportunities to share information, signpost to services, support and advice. Opportunities to communicate with parents and carers by working with other partners will be progressed and improved e.g. using the FIS and Children's Centre Facebook pages.
13. The Children's Centre Service is transferring to the Council in June 2020 and the service will be relaunched so that families and stakeholders know what services are available and how to refer. Promotional information will be added to the Council's website with increasing use of Facebook pages and some hard copy literature where required. Additional promotional work will be provided to help recruit additional Children's Centre volunteers.

Other Options Considered

14. No other options have been considered.

Reason for Recommendation

15. Communicating with parents, families, early years providers, Children's Centre Services and internal and external stakeholders is central to the successful delivery of Early Childhood Services. Effective communication and promotion improves participation levels and increases take up of funded childcare entitlements.

Statutory and Policy Implications

16. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Data Protection and Information Governance

17. Information is shared on a consent basis with stakeholders opting in to receive emails, and early years providers signing the local Early Years Provider Agreement. Sensitive information is only shared using data encryption tools.
18. Parents give their consent to join the Families Information Service and Children's Centre Facebook pages and opt in to follow the Council using Twitter and 'Email Me' bulletins.

Financial Implications

19. Communication activities such as posters and banners are funded by the Early Years Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). The Early Years Block of the DSG is also used to fund the Families Information Service at a value of £93,000 per annum with an additional cost to the Council's budget of approximately £6,000 for the Notts Help Yourself data base.
20. Communication and consultation activities for early years settings, stakeholders and parents are led by Early Childhood Services at no extra cost to the Council.
21. Materials required for the relaunch of the Children's Centre Service will be funded through the Children's Centre Service budget.

Implications for Service Users

22. Service users will be made aware of childcare entitlements, where and how to access childcare and funding, how to access services and examples of home learning activities. In turn, this should increase the numbers of parents in work, enable children to achieve developmental milestones, close the attainment gap and provide early help services for families with specific needs.

RECOMMENDATION

- 1) That Committee approves the proposed Early Childhood Services Communications Plan 2020 - 2022, attached as **Appendix 1**.

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Constitutional Comments (EP 30/12/19)

23. The recommendation falls within the remit of the Children and Young People's Committee by virtue of its terms of reference.

Financial Comments (SAS 30/12/19)

24. Communication activities such as posters and banners are funded by the of the Early Years Block (Centrally Retained element £1.153m) of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). This is also used to fund the Families Information Service at a value of £93,000 per annum with an additional cost to the Council's budget of approximately £6,000 for the Notts Help Yourself data base.
25. Communication and consultation activities for early years settings, stakeholders and parents are led by Early Childhood Services at no extra cost to the Council.
26. Materials required for the relaunch of the Children's Centre Service will be funded through the Children's Centre Service revised budget which, in a full year, will be £9.4m.

Background Papers and Published Documents

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.

None.

Electoral Divisions and Members Affected

All.

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