

**29 April 2019****Agenda Item: 4****REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, COMMISSIONING AND RESOURCES****NOTTINGHAMSHIRE EARLY YEARS IMPROVEMENT PLAN****Purpose of the Report**

1. To update the Committee on the progress and impact of the Nottinghamshire Early Years Improvement Plan 2018-19.
2. To seek approval from the Committee to develop a 'Best Start Board' which will develop and progress a 'Best Start Strategy' for 2020-2025, and for the proposed Best Start Strategy to be brought to the Committee for consideration and recommendation to Policy Committee for approval; approval of the Strategy will also be sought from the Health and Wellbeing Board.
3. To seek approval from the Committee to extend the hours of the new Early Years Workforce Development Advisor (Grade 5) post from 0.4 fte to 0.6 fte to enable the delivery of the new Early Years Professional Development Fund.

**Information**

4. The Early Years Improvement Plan aims to improve the outcomes of the most vulnerable young children by ensuring they achieve a good level of development, and captures the key findings of the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment. The Plan is developed and overseen by the Early Years Attainment Group which is made up of a number of organisations including Community Health Services, the Children's Centre Service, Public Health, schools, and the Private Voluntary Independent (PVI) childcare sector amongst others.
5. The current plan focusses on four key priorities, informed by progress and impact of actions identified last year, and changes to government policy. The four key priorities within the Nottinghamshire Early Years Improvement Plan continue to focus on:
  - i. Ensuring that early childhood services are working effectively together to provide early help for children and families to meet identified need.
  - ii. Ensuring there are sufficient, sustainable, high quality, inclusive and safe early education and childcare places.
  - iii. Improving school readiness, especially for the most vulnerable children.
  - iv. Effective parental engagement.

## **Progress of the 2018-19 Early Years Improvement Plan**

6. The Early Years Improvement Plan includes a range of key performance targets. Key progress is highlighted in **Appendix 1** of this report under each priority.

## **Future Proposals**

7. Nationally, the Department of Education (DfE) has encouraged local authorities to work with its partners to review and evaluate its early years services and interventions using a 'Maturity Matrix' tool devised by the Early Intervention Foundation. The Maturity Matrix should be completed in partnership and will involve a process of peer challenge. Discussions have taken place with the Councils nearest statistical neighbours to peer review respective self-assessments and share best practice to facilitate accelerated improvements.
8. Prior to confirming the priority actions outlined in **Appendix 1**, it is proposed that the Early Intervention Maturity Matrix is used to review the current position and to share with colleagues from the Council's statistical neighbours group for informal peer challenge.
9. As Early Years Foundation Stage results in Nottinghamshire are below the national and statistical neighbour average, a review of evidence has taken place to inform future plans. In order to improve outcomes, interventions need to start much earlier with a focus on pre-conception, pregnancy and the ante-natal period up to three years of age. It is proposed therefore that the Early Years Attainment Group and Improvement Plan have a wider remit including maternity services and greater engagement with Clinical Commissioning Groups and Public Health colleagues. The Group will be chaired by senior management in the Commissioning and Resources division of the department and Public Health located in Adult Social Care and Health. The refocused group will become the 'Best Start Board' which will report to the Children and Young People's Committee, the Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee, and the Health and Wellbeing Board. The Best Start Strategy will focus on a range of outcomes for young children and families because of the interconnectedness of health and wellbeing outcomes on attainment and vice versa.
10. The proposed evaluation of the current plan and subsequent development of the Best Start Strategy and revised improvement plan will build on established partnerships to create a greater sense of what is working well and a shared understanding and commitment to drive accelerated improvements. It is proposed that the draft Best Start Strategy be brought to the Committee for consideration and recommendation to Policy Committee for approval, with approval also being sought from the Health and Wellbeing Board.

## **Early Years Professional Development Fund**

11. The Department for Education recently announced that Nottinghamshire County Council has been successful in securing a grant worth £391,800 for the new Early Years Professional Development Fund which will span two years. The grant will provide high quality professional development for practitioners in pre-reception nursery settings.
12. The intention of the Professional Development Fund is to identify and train champions from across the local early years sector with support provided by a national delivery partner and the local authority. Champions are required to cascade their learning through a 'train-the-trainer' model to other practitioners working in pre-reception PVI and school-based settings, through local partnerships across England, convened and administered by selected local

authorities. The training will equip the champions with a strong understanding of effective pedagogy and practice to improve pre-reception children's early language, literacy and numeracy, focused on implementing an evidence-based approach to help improved outcomes for disadvantaged children.

13. Successful Local Authorities are required to:

- a) facilitate the establishment of three early years Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Partnerships, each comprising of 10-15 early years settings by identifying and recruiting settings in the areas of greatest need
- b) work with Partnerships to identify and nominate suitably skilled and experienced practitioners as champions
- c) work with the Partnerships to agree a delivery plan to ensure the cascade of CPD activity by the CPD Champions can be delivered locally over the lifetime of the programme
- d) organise and provide the venues to cascade activity, including refreshments, travel and any other logistics required to ensure successful delivery of the cascaded CPD activity to Partnerships
- e) manage and monitor the budget for staff cover for practitioners to leave their settings to participate in CPD, including reimbursing travel costs
- f) engage in national and local evaluation
- g) facilitate links between partnerships and other relevant local services as relevant, e.g. Health Visitors, specialist speech and language services
- h) support dissemination of learning / sharing of practice more widely across other pre-reception/reception settings in the LA area.

14. Part of the grant will be required to provide additional capacity within Early Childhood Services to fulfil the requirements of the Department for Education. It is therefore proposed that the new Early Years Workforce Development Advisor post which was approved at Committee in March 2019, lead on these duties by increasing their working hours to three days (0.6fte) per week rather than two (0.4fte), costing £6,370 per annum.

### **Other Options Considered**

15. Consideration has been given to continuing with the Early Years Improvement Plan and Early Years Attainment Group; however the plan has been in existence for a number of years and yet the attainment levels for the most disadvantaged children remains lower than the national average. It has been recognised that a change of direction is now required taking into account the latest evidence of what works.

### **Reason for Recommendations**

- 16. The Early Years Improvement Plan sets out actions required to ensure the Council meets its statutory obligations and continues to improve outcomes for young children and their families, especially those less likely to achieve a good level of development.
- 17. *“Early years education for children below the age of four has a positive impact on the life chances of disadvantaged children, yet disadvantaged children spend significantly less time in pre-school than children from more affluent backgrounds”* (House of Commons

Education Committee 2019). With this in mind, additional work is required to engage low income families prior to the age of three and low income families not accessing early education or childcare.

18. Central Government has considered research and evidence and has identified the need to engage families and children much earlier, taking a wider partnership approach, engaging children and families during pregnancy and before children access early education and childcare. *“The first 1,001 days of life, from conception to age 2, is a critical phase during which the foundations of a child’s development are laid.”* (House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee 2019). The Best Start Board and Strategy will focus on research and evidence of what works, using local data to target resources effectively.

## **Statutory and Policy Implications**

19. 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.

## **Financial Implications**

20. The activities included in the Early Years Improvement Plan are funded through the core budgets of all delivery partners; this will be replicated for the new Best Start Strategy.
21. Payments to early years providers for eligible children are funded from the early years block of the dedicated schools grant through the early years local funding formula; this is agreed annually by the Schools Forum.
22. The Professional Development Fund grant is worth £391,800 during the life of the programme. The grant can only be used to ensure that the Council has sufficient delivery capacity and expertise to deliver the programme; to cover backfill costs for teachers and early years practitioners to attend training, plus any associated logistical costs e.g. venues, refreshments, travel, administration. Any deviation from this remit could likely affect the potential reach and expected outcomes of the programme, so the Council will only retain a small proportion to ensure there is sufficient capacity to allocate and administer the Fund; the proposed increase in the working hours of the new Early Years Workforce Development Advisor post at a cost of £6,370 per annum is part of that.

## **Human Resources Implications**

23. The current job description for Early Years Advisor has been revised to reflect the specific nature of the Early Years Workforce Development Advisor post. The post has been evaluated as a Grade 5 and will be advertised as a temporary part-time post.

## **Safeguarding of Children and Adults at Risk Implications**

24. Current practice and funding will continue to ensure the most vulnerable children have access to services and are effectively supported. The completion of the Maturity Matrix

assessment will provide opportunities to review and evaluate such practices and help identify areas for further strengthening.

### **Implications for Service Users**

25. Implementation of the Best Start Strategy will prioritise children and families most at risk of poor outcomes, ensuring that their education, health and wellbeing outcomes are improved.
26. Young children and families will benefit from renewed commitment and co-ordination of early childhood services by key partners with clearly defined actions for future improvements.
27. The Professional Development Fund aims to close the 'word gap' for disadvantaged children in the early years, supporting the workforce to improve the quality of early years provision in disadvantaged areas; ultimately reducing the proportion of children that finish reception without the expected skills in early communication and reading.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

That:

- 1) the proposal to develop a Best Start Board and Best Start Strategy for 2020-2025 be approved.
- 2) the proposed Best Start Strategy for 2020-2025 be brought to the Committee for consideration and recommendation to Policy Committee for approval, with approval also being sought from the Health and Wellbeing Board.
- 3) the new Early Years Workforce Development Advisor (Grade 5) post in Early Childhood Services is extended from 0.4 fte 0.6 fte be approved.

**Laurence Jones**  
**Service Director, Commissioning and Resources**

**For any enquiries about this report please contact:**

Irene Kakoullis  
Group Manager, Early Childhood Services  
T: 0115 9774431  
E: [irene.kakoullis@nottsgov.uk](mailto:irene.kakoullis@nottsgov.uk)

### **Constitutional Comments (EP 03/04/19)**

28. The recommendations fall within the remit of the Children and Young People's Committee by virtue of its terms of reference.

### **Financial Comments (SAS 09/04/19)**

29. The financial implications of the report are contained within paragraphs 20 – 22 above.

## **HR Comments (BC11.04.19)**

30. The staffing implications are contained within the body of the report. The post will be recruited to in accordance with the agreed vacancy protocol and recruitment procedures.

## **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.

Nottinghamshire Early Years Improvement Plan – report to Children and Young People’s Committee on 18<sup>th</sup> December 2017.

Establishment of a Temporary Early Years Advisor Post within Early Childhood Services – report to Children and Young People’s Committee on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2019.

## **Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected**

All.

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