



## Report to Children, Young People and Family Support Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee

**Report of:** Jayne Ludlam, Executive Director, Children, Young People and Families

**Subject:** Update on the Redesign of Early Years

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**Summary:** Plans for the redesign of early years services were approved by Cabinet on 27 February 2013. This report provides an update of the key issues, where we are one year on, the next steps the development of the new vision for early years and “a great start in life”.

**Type of item:** The report author should tick the appropriate box

Reviewing of existing policy	
Informing the development of new policy	
Statutory consultation	
Performance / budget monitoring report	
Cabinet request for scrutiny	
Full Council request for scrutiny	
Community Assembly request for scrutiny	
Call-in of Cabinet decision	
Briefing paper for the Scrutiny Committee	<b>x</b>
Other	

**The Scrutiny Committee is being asked to:** Note the developments.

### Background Papers:

List any background documents (e.g. research studies, reports) used to write the report. Remember that by listing documents people could request a copy.

**Category of Report:** OPEN

# **Report of the Director of Children, Young People and Families**

## **The Redesign of Early Years Services, Transition plans and Communication Strategy**

### **1. Introduction/Context**

- 1.1 On 27 February 2013 Cabinet approved the redesign of Early Years Services. This report shows the progress made and sets out where we are 12 months later. It outlines the priorities for early years' services to meet the needs of the Children and Families of Sheffield. It will set out our ambition for Sheffield "that every child, young person and family achieves their full potential by raising expectations and attainment and enabling enriching experiences by a great start in life"

The redesign was directly informed by the call for views Early Years Review 2011

### **2. Key areas and Progress made**

- 2.1 The following four areas were key to the redesign of early year's services;

1. Children's centres Areas
2. Quality of provision
3. Contracts for procurement of prevention and intervention services
4. Childcare.

### **3. Children's centre areas**

- 3.1 Children's Centres remain a statutory provision and the Local Authority has several duties that must be met as the accountable body. This includes ensuring there are sufficient children's centres to meet the needs across the city and to ensure services are provided in an integrated manner that improve the well-being of young children and reduce inequalities.
- 3.2 The reorganisation of children's centres took place on the 1st July 2013. The 36 existing children's centres were restructured to create 17 new areas still covering the entire city. Each new area has a designated building which is used for coordinating services and a base for delivery to children and families across the area. Opportunities for outreach services across the reach and registration area are taking place to increase the engagement of families. This reorganisation was carried out in conjunction with the Department of Education and OFSTED.

- 3.3 The governance and coordination of all children's centre areas and activity came into the Local Authority on the 1st July 2013. This meant a transfer of responsibility from 3 organisations: Action for Children, MCDT and Children's Hospital NHS Foundation Trust. The Local Authority children's centre coordinators are establishing relationships with key partners within the 17 new areas.
- 3.4 To meet the statutory duty to ensure each children's centre is operating within the remit of an advisory board, local stakeholder forums have been established in each of the 17 areas. These forums have representation from across the community they serve and play a role in encouraging parents to attend. They are providing advice, help and challenge to the children's centre coordinators to ensure the centre develops to meet the needs of the community.
- 3.5 To support the requirement to work in an integrated manner, a children's centre partnership charter has been developed. This enables the children's centres and local partners to establish clarity on areas for joint working and sharing of resources and knowledge. It also enables all those involved to promote the establishment of strong partnerships which in turn encourages families to engage in a variety of services provided across the community.
- 3.6 The 17 new children's centre areas are large geographical areas and it is important that the needs of small communities within this are understood and met. To ensure services are relevant to the local community and to support the need to reduce inequalities the data available to children's centres is being reviewed. An increasing amount of data is available at lower super output area level and additional data sets are being developed. Reach and registration figures have improved, however this is still a key priority. We have recently introduced an opt out approach to registration where all families are registered unless they state otherwise.
- 3.7 A marketing strategy has been implemented to ensure the promotion of children's centres and to increase awareness of services to families. A Sheffield children's centre face book page was launched on the 6th January and we are seeing an increasing number of families engaging with this. A 'what's on guide' is now available for each centre on the Sheffield City Council webpage. In addition a 2 week radio campaign took place in February alongside promotion in local community magazines across the city. An evaluation of the publicity campaigns will be undertaken over the coming months.
- 3.8 OFSTED inspections continue to be an important part of children's centre accountability. Since the new Ofsted framework for children centres has been introduced we have had 3 inspections. The outcomes were, one with a 'good' overall judgment and two 'requiring improvement'. Senior managers from the local authority are in liaison with OFSTED to ensure that any future developments fulfil our statutory duty and help us achieve good or outstanding in future inspections. OFSTED are supporting the direction we are taking to improve children centres performance.

## 4 Quality of provision

- 4.1 Following the agreement at cabinet Children and Families and the Inclusion and Learning Service have developed the strategy around securing quality in the early year's childcare provision. This places improved outcomes at the end of the foundation stage as a priority for all early years' settings. This will be achieved through differentiated challenge, monitoring and targeted interventions.
- 4.2 This approach is aligned with the Government's paper "More Affordable Childcare" July 2013, which sets out the new role of the LA as champions for disadvantaged children and their families, reflecting the challenge model deployed in schools, focusing on weaker providers which require speedy and sustained improvement.
- 4.3 The key focus of the strategy is to support and challenge providers who are struggling to improve quality and to target resources at those providers. There will be an expectation that providers will play an important part in meeting the needs of the harder to reach families. It is the LA's role to identify hard to reach families, by analysing the MAST and children's centre data. This will help families understand the early years education and childcare support available to them, and support them to choose an early education provider for their child. There will be greater emphasis on the early learning environments for 2 year olds.
- 4.4 Ofsted is the main arbitrator for the assessment of quality and the LA work closely with Ofsted, using the information gathered in inspections to target the support and challenge to the providers who "require improvement." There will be an expectation that providers take up the appropriate support as a condition of them receiving Free Early Learning (FEL) funding. The LA will also signpost providers to appropriate training opportunities.
- 4.5 This approach will include:
- Engaging in targeted monitoring, challenge and support
  - Intervening and challenge weaker provision (Group care and Child-minders) as those deemed as inadequate or requiring improvement by Ofsted
  - Set up area based peer support networks within Families of Schools and develop a peer-to-peer network based on the principles of the teaching schools model, recruiting the highest quality childcare providers to share expertise and mentor the "requires improvement" provision
  - Support the group care and child-minders to meet the statutory EYFS safeguarding and welfare requirements to a good standard.

Where providers fall in to inadequate parents will be informed of their status

- Build capacity within the sector and raise awareness of the prevention and early intervention agenda and facilitate relationships across localities with health and MAST teams
- Monitor the sector provision to assure and promote local services to meet the need of children with SEN and disabilities
- Moderation will reflect the principles of the moderation in Schools model and a central collection of electronic performance data will be established to maintain an overview of the city's provision

## **5. Contracts for procurement of prevention and intervention services**

- 5.1 Both Prevention and Intervention Services were put out to tender in 2013 based on a three and a half year Framework Contract until March 2017 during which time an annual mini-competition would be run which could be entered by all providers who had successfully completed the tender process. The decision to utilise the Framework Process was taken due to the uncertainty of annual budget levels rendering it inadvisable to offer successful bidders a long-term contract to 2017.
- 5.2 MCDT was issued a contract in the East of the City for intervention services. In the North and West of the city the successful bidders declined the delivery contract but were still entitled to remain on the Framework Agreement. All providers who were offered a contract to deliver Prevention Services declined the offer but were able to remain on the Framework Agreement and enter into a mini-competition in 2014.
- 5.3 Due to the organisations declining the contracts for intervention services in the North and West of the city, it was necessary to TUPE across appropriate staff from NHS, Action for Children and Family Action, in order to deliver the intervention services in-house. This was successfully completed in November 2013. MCDT have met the contractual requirements and have worked in partnership with the LA.
- 5.4 Following the tender process it became apparent that we needed to review the prevention services currently delivered in Children's centres (E.g. Toddler Groups/Stay and Play groups etc.). A short consultation was carried out in each children's centre area with local users and the outcome revealed lots of interest and requests by parents to become trained volunteers to run groups and preventative services. In some instances parents suggested that activities could continue if sites were available for parents to use without the need for additional staff to run them, or where alternative organisations/schools were already offering this kind of provision. In many cases some groups have come to a natural end, the HV Drop In's and Midwifery activities have continued, some groups have closed due to the reorganisation and parents have been signposted to alternatives.

- 5.5 Under the terms of the framework we were intending to carry out a mini competition for intervention services. However due to probable issues of TUPE, which remains a key barrier there is a delay on progressing this. We intend to develop a new commissioning strategy for prevention and intervention services to be procured from April 2015. This will be informed by policy changes which will outline a new vision for early years services.
- 5.6 In terms of the prevention services we will continue to fund targeted services such as Family Nurse Partnership (FNP), Doula and breastfeeding peer support in partnership with NHS. However, we will not be commissioning prevention services such as toddler groups and stay and play groups. During the last 6 months we have built up a capacity of over 40 trained volunteers in children's centre areas and we are working with volunteer organisations to develop substantial preventative activities across the city. We are also gathering feedback and information about good practice in other LA's to inform us of the types of engagement activities that are successful and can be supported locally.

## **6. Childcare**

- 6.1 Childcare forms a key part of the package of services which every child should be able to access to support them to reach their full potential, and also supports parents to enter, or remain in work or training. We want to make sure this is a priority and that we play a key role in facilitating the childcare market.
- 6.2 The outcome of the early years review in 2011 provided an informed view of how Sheffield's childcare services should develop. There was an emphasis on childcare (group care and child-minding) being flexible, affordable and responsive to the needs of working families and children with special needs. Whilst it was acknowledged that there was a significant level of concern about the removal of childcare subsidy grants and the perceived closure of provision resulting from this it was also recognised that there was inequality in access to childcare across the City. Therefore it was essential that the local authority assumed their role as market facilitator in a responsible and fair way to ensure high quality childcare is accessible across the city and providers are able to sustain and develop.
- 6.3 The main funding stream for childcare is through the Free Early Learning Initiative. It is vital that providers maximise the opportunity to increase take up of the FEL places for 3 and 4 year olds and in particular to develop 2 year FEL places to meet the expected increase through the Governments expansion. It is also beneficial that providers offer FEL hours in a flexible way providing services between 8-6 at weekends and all through the year. This aligns with new government thinking on flexible childcare provision and parental views.
- 6.4 With regard to the cessation of childcare grant funding from 31<sup>st</sup> March which affected 21 providers. The LA has provided ongoing advice and support to providers and families to ensure that all children attending provision that was potentially unsustainable were able to access

alternative early year's provision in their locality. There has been minimum impact for parents, with the majority of these providers continuing to operate. NHS and Action for Children decided to close their provision and where it has been appropriate other providers including schools have been able to offer places for the children in those areas.

- 6.5 The transfer of the local authority childcare provision has progressed and as proposed in the cabinet report schools have taken on the management and are currently involved in transition.
- 6.6 The LA has brought forward the expansion of the 2 year FEL programme from September to April in order to help sustain the sector and provide services to the most vulnerable families. Capital funding has been made available for developing additional places for 2 year olds in areas of most need and this has resulted in the creation of over 200 potential additional places to date. The expansion to date is broadly in line with targets set at the beginning of 2013 and the next stage of expansion is being rolled out 6 months ahead of government deadlines.
- 6.7 We continue to provide the childcare market with the information needed to identify the likely demand for places through provider briefings and where practicable area meetings involving all local FEL providers in area of particular concern. An example of this is in the Fir Vale area providers have agreed to develop closer partnerships between the PVI and local schools. Evaluation of provider briefing sessions demonstrates their value in supporting market development.
- 6.8 We will continue to develop other options to provide additional places which will include exploring and developing child-minders co-ops / agencies and group care on an individual basis where there is a need and the opportunity presents itself. We recognise that there are development opportunities through recent government proposals to increase access to childcare and we will utilise these to maximise delivery and support parents into employment and training.

## **7.0 Next Steps**

- 7.1 We recognise that early year's services are going through significant change across health, education and childcare. It will be necessary to focus any future development on reducing the negative impact on families of living in poverty and supporting opportunities for employment and training. An innovative approach to these challenges and an increase in attainment and children's readiness for school will be the driver for a new vision and the key priorities in the next two years.

## **8. What does this mean for the people of Sheffield?**

- 8.1 The redesign of the early year's services has enabled resources to become more targeted and means that:

- The number of 2 year old FEL places has increased and is expected to continue to increase following the new criteria, which will be rolled out from May 2014. More settings and child minders will be offering provision for 2 year olds.
- More families are registered with children's centres and accessing services in their local area and the services are more flexible in order to meet individual needs of families.
- All families can access early support in children's centre areas and where families are identified as potentially vulnerable additional support is available through the MAST teams.
- Families are using the new children's centre face book page, which is developing as a positive social networking site and information source.
- There has been a successful high profile media campaign to promote early years which has encouraged more families to access and attend activities in their local children's centre area.

## **9. Recommendation**

- 9.1 The Committee is asked to consider the progress made and accept future reports that will outline a new vision for early years and a "great start in life".