



## Report to Children Young People and Family Support Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee 27<sup>th</sup> February 2013

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**Subject:** Early Years Redesign

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**Background:**

On 12<sup>th</sup> December 2012 Cabinet considered a report on the redesign of the Early Years Service. This decision was called-in, and the Children, Young People and Family Support Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee considered it at its meeting on the 24<sup>th</sup> January 2013.

The Committee recommended that Cabinet:

- i) considers what transitional arrangements are needed to be put in place to ensure that good quality early years provision is able to be sustained; and
- ii) provides further detail of provision within the 17 areas, and gives assurances that a comprehensive communications plan is developed to inform parents of the locations of support, and the type of support available, in the 17 areas.

The Committee also resolved to give further consideration to the proposals when they are developed further and will scrutinise the operation of the new system when it is in place.

These recommendations were reported to Cabinet on the 13<sup>th</sup> February 2013.

The proposals have now been developed further (Cabinet report attached), and are due to be considered by Cabinet on the afternoon of the 27<sup>th</sup> February. In order that the Scrutiny Committee has the opportunity to comment on the proposals before a final decision is made, a special meeting of the Committee has been convened for the morning of the 27<sup>th</sup> February.

Any comments or recommendations the Committee wishes to make will be reported to Cabinet in the afternoon.

**The Scrutiny Committee is being asked to:**

Consider the proposals set out in the attached Cabinet report.

# Early Education

The British Association for Early Childhood Education

## Sheffield Branch – Spring 2013

### Response to the proposed plans by the City Council to re-design early years services in Sheffield

The committee of the Sheffield Branch of Early Education have been discussing the implications of the City Council's proposals to re-design and re-designate early years services (including Children's Centres) in Sheffield. Members of the Committee have attended the review meetings of 2012 and meetings relating to these proposals in 2013 to represent the perspectives of Early Education and the many Early Education members in South Yorkshire, as well as representing the voice of the children and their entitlement to high quality, pedagogical practice in all provision across the sector.

Early Education is a national, charitable organisation (90 years old) whose aims and principles are founded on the belief that every child deserves the best possible start in life and support to fulfil their potential

#### **The principles of Early Education are:**

- every child is a competent learner from birth who can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured
  - children learn to be strong and independent from a base of strong and independent from a base of loving and secure relationships
  - children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates. All areas of learning and development are equally important and interconnected
- Early Education supports families and early childhood practitioners across all early childhood education settings in order to deliver effective learning and care that is underpinned with a robust understanding of the development of young children.

#### **The ethics of Early Education are:**

Early Education believes every child deserves the best possible start in life and support to fulfil their potential. A child's experience in the early years has a major impact on their future life chances. A secure, safe and happy childhood is important in its own right, and provides the foundation for children to make the most of their own abilities and talents as they grow up.

If you would like to know more about the work of Early Education in Great Britain please look at the web site [www.early-education.org.uk](http://www.early-education.org.uk)

**The context:** The following points summarise Early Education Sheffield's main concerns for children, families and the quality of early years pedagogy and practice in Sheffield. These are underpinned by recent research, a wealth of experience and knowledge from experts in the early years sectors and an external, view point. We also offer some possible solutions and ways forward which we would like to discuss with you in more detail.

#### **Main Points and Questions:**

##### **1. Is there a shared vision and understanding of Early Intervention?**

The Governments agenda around early intervention is well known across all the sectors which is welcomed, however having a clear and shared understanding of what this means and looks like in practice is critical. This is a fundamental debate that needs to be discussed equally and fairly with all partners and stakeholders; there has to be a collegiate, shared vision especially in the early years sectors where early intervention with young children and their families looks very different to early intervention with older children and young people. A 0-19 approach may not be wholly relevant to young children and their families

because at this early stage early intervention has to be at its most focussed to prevent further problems later in life.

A strongly held view of early intervention, across the country, and supported by research, is that of Children's Centres located at the front line, engaging with hard to reach families and leading on the two year old entitlement as well as many other services to support young children and families. These core services **are early intervention**, frequently forging strong partnerships with parents by being in direct contact with them in their communities. Children's Centres philosophy and practice is designed to build the initial relationships, trust and respect on which children's future development and learning depend – these are critical early foundations which are acknowledged in research, including that commissioned by the Government.

Our concerns are based on

- Confusion around definitions of 'early intervention' which seems to be viewed in Sheffield as being provided by specialist services which come into play after family issues have spiralled to significant levels, rather than looking at early intervention as a 'prevention' model, based on supporting children and families, in their local community before problems become amplified.
- Family support services which are already in place in the community, offered through the Children's Centres, are often duplicated by the MAS Team. The former offering support and early intervention within the context of the community which is familiar to families and is based on a strong relationship and trust, and the latter providing services which are dis-embedded from what is familiar to families with little or no continuity of support.
- Good early years provision and practice has always been about early intervention and in the long term this is probably much more cost effective (this is very evident in the Highscope long term research studies in the US) than services which are trying to put the pieces back together at a much later stage.
- One of the barriers to progress here is the government's lack of ring fencing of the early intervention grant. However, councils have a choice to make in how they support and fund early intervention, which is hopefully based on retaining what is working well on the front line and the successful practice of supporting parents. Getting rid of successful, proven and respected services is a false economy and places Sheffield LA in a very difficult position to rebuild services in the future

A way forward would be to look at new and innovative ways to retain the services and settings which are successfully supporting children and families. A starting point would be a city 'think tank' which includes external perspectives and partners who can discuss and develop 'new ways of working'. Sheffield has a huge resource base of creative and innovative thinkers across professional sectors e.g. two universities with national and international reputations in the early years field, well-established community and voluntary

sector knowledge and experience, and industries which will be future employers of the city's young children and a Children's Champion with a national and international reputation in early childhood education. Early Education would welcome this and be more than happy to support and contribute.

## **2. How will the existing quality of early years provision and practice be retained for the longer term?**

The proposals are short term, re-active responses in a period of austerity which many have not experienced before. These are indeed challenging times but Sheffield has a rich history of surviving these periods and re-generating itself. In the 80's and 90's Sheffield LA was nationally renowned for its creative and innovative leadership of early years pedagogy – there was a strong vision, development of children's centres before their time and a philosophy which attracted people to work in the city. This was at a time when there was no funding for early years at all; LAs had to make their own decisions about investing in early years – and Sheffield did – it led the way in the field. Taking time to reflect back on the strategies and solutions that were used then in another period of austerity (perhaps even greater than this) how can we use the lessons learned then to inform decisions today?

Our concerns are;

- During the last 10/15 years there has been a massive investment in provision and practice for young children and families in Sheffield. This investment needs to be retained to ensure that there is continuity of quality pedagogy in the years to come. The significant investment in practitioners, teachers, Early Years Professionals and staff across the sector has created a workforce 'on the ground', who will make the biggest difference to children and families – they are the scaffolding of early intervention. Trying to get this back in 5/10 years' time will require even more investment and leave Sheffield's early intervention policy in pieces. Whilst the proposals are looking at immediate, quick fixes to funding demands it could leave the city in an even greater financial predicament than it is now; without even considering the emotional well-being and progress of future generations of children. This requires some innovative thinking around how this investment can be saved, particularly for those practitioners and settings with a proven track record of high quality i.e the settings with Outstanding or Good Ofsted reports

## **3. What is the vision for our most vulnerable 2 year olds? What will be the nature and quality of their early experiences? How will provision and practice support their immediate and current needs?**

There is much research both recent and on-going to show the impact of high quality early years provisions and practice for young children and their families. Early Intervention at this stage in life is much more likely to support children's current and future progress and ensure that parents/ families are given the help they need. Research has proven what those in the early years sector already knew, that it is early attachment, bonding and attunement that will lay the foundations for children's emotional and cognitive well-being; their early communication and language that will influence how well they progress in school and the support of their parents in the home that will influence their

current and future aspirations and ultimately the economic and social success of future generations.

Our concerns are;

- Further funding for vulnerable two year olds is to be welcomed and is a significant part of the early intervention agenda. However, this is not just about finding the required places by 2015 to meet a target. Provision and practice for these two year olds has to be of the highest quality otherwise it will have no impact at all for these children. The PVI sectors cannot be relied upon to provide these places without some underpinning support from the LA – the recent research brief from the Department for Education ‘Childcare Sufficiency and Sustainability in disadvantaged areas’ (Sept 2012 – DFE-RB246) gives clear messages about this and the conflicting purposes of private day nursery provision.
- The questions we should be considering are around what high quality experiences, care and early intervention we want to provide for the vulnerable two year olds of Sheffield? There are many settings in the sector that can offer just this – they are in the Community Children’s Centres and Children’s Centres of Sheffield. But providing for vulnerable two year olds requires a mixed economy between the LA and the Children’s Centres which needs to be fully explored.
- A move towards taking two year olds into school settings in order to meet the two year old offer would be completely inappropriate and damaging to young children’s well-being and social development and would impede development rather than accelerate it. Schools are barely coping with a single point of entry for young 3 year olds in their nurseries and young 4 year olds going straight into reception classes. Two year olds (and young 3 and 4 year olds) require a very different enabling environment with practitioners who are specialists in working with such young children at their most formative period of development.

#### **4. Is there a shared understanding and vision of what is meant by children being ‘School Ready’?**

Please see the Discussion Paper on ‘School Readiness’ written by the Sheffield Branch of Early Education (Autumn 2012) – attached with this paper or available from [info@dichilvers.co.uk](mailto:info@dichilvers.co.uk)

#### **5. Quality is at the heart of good early years services – how can this maintained and developed in a collegiate, meaningful and economic way?**

This point relates too many of the previous headings since the ‘quality’ of early years provision and practice is at the heart of early intervention. If the early experiences we are offering to young children and families are not rooted in quality pedagogy they will make little or no difference at all; the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) longitudinal research has clearly demonstrated this point (see references for full details).

Our concerns are;

- Ofsted have given a clear message about raising the quality of provision and practice especially in deprived areas. They acknowledged in their annual report that it is the Children's Centres which are making the most difference (Para 25. They go on to say 'our evidence suggests that the quality of early years provision that is directly linked to a children's centre is better overall than the quality of early years provision without such an association'. Sue Gregory (Ofsted Director Early Childhood) said that 'Children's Centres have a very important role to play and can make a real difference in children's early education'. With this in mind it makes little sense to close those Centres who have Outstanding or Good Ofsted reports; these are the Centres that should be leading the way, continuing their work with vulnerable families and children in their community and supporting others through peer support programmes. (HMCI's Annual Report (Early Years) – Nov 2012)
- The LA's intention to focus on quality improvement for all early years settings is very welcome; however, this does depend on what quality models are being used and how time consuming they are for those who are delivering the support and for the settings/schools. The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R) and the Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ITERS-R), which are used to measure the quality of settings in Sheffield, are time consuming and costly to undertake and in terms of impact on quality only measure the quality of the environment and not the quality of pedagogy and practice or what actually happens as practitioners engage with children. These were originally designed as research tools which enabled data to be gathered on a large scale – they did not set out to inform on the quality of practitioner's practice which is why other tools were used in research reports like Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years (REPEY 2002) and the Study of Pedagogical Effectiveness in Early Learning (SPEEL 2002). The Coalition response to the Nutbrown review argues that replicating the Ofsted inspection process is not the most effective use of limited finances.

Once the rating scales have been undertaken the crucial next steps are to provide support and training which has now been reduced or is not available, making this process of quality improvement incomplete and leaving settings with little or no support to improve.

A model of quality improvement which focuses on getting the settings to identify their own areas of development (self-assessment) is much more productive than a model which uses onerous paper work, tick lists and is time consuming for both those delivering it and the setting, and will most likely not have the same impact. For example quality processes used in the Every Child a Talker programme and the EYQISP (Early Years Quality Improvement support programme) both led by National Strategies have shown on-going impact in settings; much of this was based on self-assessment. Using the Children's Centres, settings and schools who have good or outstanding features in early years would be a way of maintaining, supporting and embedding quality improvement with partners.

- The DfE and National College (NCSL) have been focussing on ways to develop quality through shared support and peer to peer support. It is referred to as Systems Leadership where Outstanding/Good Leadership has been identified (Ofsted being one of the means of doing this) and it has been shared in partnership with other clusters of schools/settings/Children's Centres. Fundamentally it is based on the principle of a Learning Community or peer to peer support where the quality of pedagogy is informed through shared, collaborative thinking/dialogue over a long period of time. There has been a national pilot study for Children's Centres (undertaken by a neighbouring LA). Having worked on a joint DfE and Early Education peer to peer support initiative in two LA's, for 18mths, the impact on raising the quality of pedagogical practice has been significant. This model could be replicated in Sheffield with the Outstanding and Good Children's Centres leading the way and forming learning communities in their localities.

Thank you for reading our response to some of Sheffield City Councils proposals for the re-designation of Children's Centres, there is much more to say, however EE Sheffield have focused on these five issues as a matter of priority. We welcome your response and the collaboration of discussing these complex and difficult decisions together with you.

Further questions of queries please contact the Sheffield Early Education Committee via [info@dichilvers.co.uk](mailto:info@dichilvers.co.uk)

If you would like to become a member of Early Education please look at the Early Education web site for details: [www.early-education.org.uk](http://www.early-education.org.uk)

#### **References;**

Much supporting evidence is drawn together in the following documents:  
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The Schools White Paper – The importance of teaching (Nov 2010)  
Whitebread,D and Bingham,S (2012) School Readiness; a critical review of perspectives and evidence- Occasional Paper No:2, published by The Association for the Professional Development of Early Years Educators (TACTYC)

**Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) – Longitudinal Study funded by the DfE in partnership with the Institute of Education (London)**

- Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project (this part of the research followed children to the end of KS1)
- Effective Pre-School and Primary Education 3-11 (EPPE 3-11) Project
- Effective Pre-School, Primary and Secondary Education (EPPSE 3-14) Project
- Effective Pre-School, Primary and Secondary Education 16+ (EPPSE 16+) Project

Details can be found at <http://eppe.ioe.ac.uk/>