

Report for: Cabinet – 8 March 2022

Title: Early Years Strategy

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Ward(s) affected: All

**Report for Key/
Non Key Decision:** Key Decision

1. Describe the issue under consideration

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Cabinet's agreement to move to consultation on proposals for the Early Years Strategy. The strategy has come out of the Early Years review as there is no current strategy and we need one to consolidate and clarify our focus over the next five years.
- 1.2 The proposals have been developed by officers, working with stakeholders, including governors, head teachers, the early years sector and professional partners.
- 1.3 The implementation of an Early Years Strategy is subject to statutory consultation and therefore permission is being sought from Cabinet to carry out a formal consultation with service users, stakeholders and residents on the basis of the strategy contained within this report.

2. Cabinet Member Introduction

It is well-established that a child's early years experiences can influence their development and outcomes in life. Providing high quality early education and childcare, and ensuring there is early intervention for children who are vulnerable or who have special needs, is therefore of great importance, and is a priority for this administration. The Council has a strong record in directly providing this high quality provision, and of supporting other providers in this work, with over 99% of settings graded good or outstanding by Ofsted. A strategy to shape and strengthen the service, which supports children, parents, carers and families is long overdue, and I am pleased to bring this report and the draft strategy to Cabinet.

3. Recommendations

Cabinet is asked:

- 3.1 To approve the commencement of a statutory consultation on the Early Years Strategy (attached at Appendix 1).
- 3.2 To approve a 90 day period of consultation to commence in May and end in August 2022.
- 3.3 To agree that a report on the outcome of the consultation and final proposals for the Early Years Strategy will be submitted to Cabinet in November 2022.

4. Reasons for decision

- 4.1 Following the Early Years review stakeholders felt that the lack of a dedicated Early Years Strategy led to inconsistency of approach and a reduced focus on the importance of intervening in the early years. The strategy will give a clear focus on early years and provide a distinction between Early Years and Early Help.
- 4.2 The Early Years Strategy would ensure that there is more focus on the developmental benefits of prevention and universal support in the early years.

5. Alternative options considered

- 5.1 To continue without a strategy; however, was rejected as the strategy will give a clear focus to improving outcomes for the youngest children in the early years and developing wide partnerships across the early years sector. A strategy will enable us to set out aims and priorities and ensure there is a monitoring process in place to keep us on track to achieve them.
- 5.2 Funding for early years provision could be at risk without the outcomes, priorities and benefits being clearly articulated through a strategy.

6. Background information – Early Years review

- 6.1 From July 2021 – December 2021 an Early Years Review was completed with key stakeholders which set out to:
 - Review what we currently offer for children and families 0 – 5 years in an inclusive and comprehensive way
 - Propose a joined up Early Years approach and strategy that would meet the needs of local residents and families, deliver our statutory duties, improve outcomes and best utilise the assets and resources available.
- 6.2 The Early Years review identified four key strands of work:
 - Development of an Early Years Strategy for Haringey
 - Current delivery arrangements and scope of the children's centres
 - Sustainability of Haringey's Nursery Schools and their role in supporting quality improvement and system leadership
 - Early education and childcare provision in the borough.

- 6.3 Working groups with a range of partners and stakeholders were established to develop priorities and sets of options for action, with an Early Years Reference Group and Strategic Oversight Group providing robust scrutiny and challenge.
- 6.4 The main areas for action and focus of each group were as follows:

Children's Centres

- Review the current model of delivery in the Children Centres
- Consider the budgetary implications to deliver services and define a fit for purpose model moving forward that is equitable and responds to demand.
- Development of a Family Hub Model in Haringey. A bid of £1.2m has been submitted to the DfE to support the development of 4 Family Hubs in Haringey.
- Ensuring there is a core offer for childhood services across the Borough (including SEND)
- Ensuring data is timely, appropriate and proportionate to contract

6.5 **Maintained Nursery Schools**

- Working in partnership with both the Early Years advisory team and Haringey Education Partnership to provide system leadership for our schools and settings
- Working in partnership by providing high quality training for the wider Early Years sector
- Supporting Nursery Schools to be a sustainable model of integrated childcare and community services

6.6 **Early Years Education**

- Narrowing the attainment gap for different groups of children including Boys, Black Caribbean, Turkish and Kurdish children and young people.
- Ensuring there is equal access to early education and childcare for all children and especially those with SEND.
- Increasing take up of the 2 year old free entitlement as an integral part of our early intervention approach.
- Increasing and broadening participation in the 3 and 4 year old free entitlement.
- Working with underrepresented groups including the Turkish, Kurdish, Somali and Jewish communities
- Retaining sustainable early education and childcare to meet changing demand across the borough in a post pandemic landscape.

6.7 **The Early Years Strategy**

- 6.7.1 The strategy working group highlighted the following three challenges, recognising that addressing inequalities across communities was both a key driver and a key outcome:
- Improving access to early years education and the take up of the free entitlement childcare offer support for all and for our most vulnerable children
 - Improving all young children's development especially social, communication, and speech and language.

- Improving health outcomes and reducing health inequalities across all areas, including emotional health and wellbeing, healthy weight, healthy nutrition and healthy development

6.7.2 An Early Years Strategy has been drafted which sets out our work with children and families and is guided by a set of principles below which support and enable all that we do. If we hold these principles in mind, they will support us to achieve our ambitions in the ways which will strengthen our approach.

- Whole family approach involving and enabling parents at all levels with co-production embedded throughout
- Prevention, early identification of need and early intervention to reduce harm
- Whole systems and partnership working throughout the borough, to build capacity, capability, workforce development and impact across all agencies including the voluntary and community sector, Private Voluntary and Independent Nurseries, schools and the NHS
- Equitable outcomes through a focus on localities and making sure our joined up responses meet locally identified need flexibly
- Funding supports and follows every child, is setting neutral and offers equitable access to high quality early years settings for all children
- Integrated planning and resources to deliver improved sustainability and outcomes.

6.7.3 To help us ensure these principles, there are some cross-cutting enablers which we need in place to deliver our wider aspirations to improve outcomes for our youngest children:

- Long term approach to making the best use of resources across our partnership, to build sustainability and long-term impact
- Joined up approach to multi agency workforce development across partners in the statutory and voluntary sector
- Support for co-production and engagement with residents – at all levels of implementation and delivery
- The effective use of digital communication to complement face to face delivery, strong information and enhanced capacity across all priorities
- Locality working multi-agency model so that parents can access support close to home, have equality of access and reach of services within local communities
- Robust and comprehensive data on our local communities and families
- Family hub development to facilitate the infrastructure needed to embed a whole family approach.

6.7.4 The formation of the strategy was informed by Haringey strategies and other Government and health initiatives. In addition to aligning to existing Haringey strategies and policies, the strategy was informed by a range of sources including stakeholder task and finish groups and focused conversations with the early years sector, partners and parents.

6.7.5 An oversight and reference group including representatives from the Early Years Sector, partner agencies and different service areas in the Council

including the Lead Member for Early Years, Children and Families and the Director of Children's Services provided scrutiny and challenge.

6.8. Consultation Process

There will be a 90 day period of consultation to commence in May and end in August 2022. The consultation will involve parents, agency partners, schools and the wider early years sector as well as service areas in the Council. We will be specifically targeting community groups through established networks and the voluntary sector. The consultation will be a combination of online surveys and face to face discussions.

7. Contribution to strategic outcomes

- Best start in life: the first few years of every child's life will give them the long-term foundations to thrive
- Happy childhood: all children across the borough will be happy and healthy as they grow up, feeling safe and secure in their family, networks and communities
- Every young person, whatever their background, has a pathway to success for the future
- All adults are able to live healthy and fulfilling lives, with dignity, staying active and connected in their communities
- Strong communities where people look out for and care for one another.

8. Statutory Officers comments (Director of Finance (including procurement), Head of Legal and Governance, Equalities)

8.1 Finance

The recommendation to commence consultation on this Early Years Strategy will not give rise to any financial implications and can be contained within existing resources.

Future decisions arising as a result of the consultation may have financial implications, therefore further work may be required to quantify the impact on the council's budgets. Any additional funding or savings proposals would need to be considered in the decision making on future Medium-Term Financial Strategies (MTFS).

It should be noted that this Early Years Strategy includes a DfE bid for £1.2m capital funding to incorporate Family Hubs into Children's Centres.

8.2 Procurement

The content of this report is noted.

8.3 Legal

The proposed Early Years Strategy would enable the Council to deliver on its statutory obligations under the Childcare Act 2006, in particular, relating to its

general duties to improve the well-being young children and reduce inequalities between young children in their area (Section 1); and specific duty to make arrangements to secure that early childhood services in their area are provided in an integrated manner which is calculated to – a) facilitate access to those services, and b) maximise the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young people (Section 3).

The proposed Strategy includes a commitment to implement a Family Hub Model to build on the current Children's Centre offer in Haringey and to implement a locality model of East, West and Central. Section 5D of the Childcare Act 2006 requires the Council to carry out consultation before making arrangements to secure that early childhood services are provided in an integrated manner in children's centre, or before any significant change is made in the services provided through a relevant children's centre. A change in the manner in which, or the location at which, services are provided is to be treated as a change in the services. In addition, if the proposed Strategy would affect or impact on the existing services provided to or received by children, parents and prospective parents in the Borough, fairness demands that they be consulted before a final decision is made on the Strategy.

For the consultation to be fair, the consultation must be undertaken at a time when proposed Strategy is still at a formative stages. The Council must give sufficient reasons for the proposal to permit of intelligent consideration and response. Those consulted should be aware of the criteria that will be applied when considering proposals and which factors will be considered decisive or of substantial importance. Adequate time must be given for consideration and response to the proposal. The feedback from the consultation must be conscientiously taken into account before a final decision is made on the Strategy.

8.4 Equality

The Council has a Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act (2010) to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Act
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share those protected characteristics and people who do not
- Foster good relations between people who share those characteristics and people who do not.

The three parts of the duty applies to the following protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy/maternity, race, religion/faith, sex and sexual orientation. Marriage and civil partnership status applies to the first part of the duty.

The proposal is to consult on the new Early Years Strategy. Those most affected by this decision are babies and children under 5, including those with SEND, their parents and carers.

The strategy recognises that children under five, particularly those born just before or within the pandemic, and their parents have been disproportionately disadvantaged by the closure or reduction of services during the pandemic and that the long term impacts that are not yet understood. It also recognises that lower income families, amongst whom Haringey's Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) families are disproportionately represented, will have been even more greatly affected.

There is a strong focus on equity and inclusion which runs through the strategy which emphasises access and outreach, and achieving more equitable outcomes.

The formal consultation with service users, stakeholders and residents on the strategy contained within this report will be used to seek feedback on the anticipated equality impacts of this strategy and results from the consultation will inform the final strategy and be published as part of the final Cabinet report.

It can be anticipated that the Early Years Strategy will have a positive impact on residents in Haringey who share the protected characteristics noted above to the extent that the strategy's objectives are achieved.

9. Use of Appendices

Appendix 1 – Early Years Strategy

10. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

Not applicable.