

Brighton & Hove City Council

Children, Young People & Skills Committee

Agenda Item 26

Subject: Early Years Strategic Action Plan

Date of meeting: 7 November 2022

Report of: Executive Director – Families, Children & Learning

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Ward(s) affected: All

For general release

1. Purpose of the report and policy context

- 1.1 In 2017 Brighton and Hove City Council published its Early Years Strategy 2017 - 2019 and in 2022 published its strategy for tackling educational disadvantage 'Better Outcomes, Better Lives'. BHCC has been working with the Local Government Association, council staff and stakeholders to consider a new framework for early years strategic thinking with consideration to these strategies and the national context for 'Best Start for Life'.
- 1.2 Brighton and Hove is developing a Family Hub model which will include launching its 'Start for Life Offer' in March 2024.
- 1.3 In developing the 'Start for Life Offer' Brighton and Hove will need to develop a Start for Life Strategy by March 2024 as part of its Family Hubs development which will replace the Early Years Strategy. An Early Years Strategic Action Plan will be developed to ensure delivery of the Early Years priorities in the interim period and to ensure we can fully understand the impact of Covid on early years children and early years settings.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Committee agrees the Early Years Strategic Action Plan for the transition period in implementing the Brighton and Hove Start for Life Strategy in March 2024.
- 2.2 That Committee agrees the four priority areas for the Early Years Strategic Action Plan as further detailed in section 3 of this report:
 - 1) To ensure sufficient and appropriate support for early years children identified with Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND)
 - 2) To ensure clear and consistent assessments and pathways for early years children
 - 3) To ensure there are sufficient early years childcare places in the city so that all children can take up their early years free entitlement and parents can work
 - 4) To ensure early years provision is good quality and supports outcomes for disadvantaged children with the aim of closing the gap between them and their peers
- 2.3 That Committee requests an update on the Start for Life Strategy to come to a future meeting of the Children, Young People and Skills Committee.

3. Context and background information

- 3.1 The Early Years Strategy is due for review and will become the Start for Life Strategy in March 2024 as Family Hubs are developed. The Early Years Strategic Action Plan will ensure a focus on the needs of early years children during the transformation period.
- 3.2 The aim of the strategic action plan will be to support the delivery of early years services from pre-birth to five and facilitate high quality childcare throughout the early years and beyond. The intended outcomes are to improve the wellbeing of young children and reduce inequalities.
- 3.3 In March 2021 the government launched The Best Start for Life: a vision for the 1,001 critical days which sets out the importance of the first 1,001 critical days from conception to the age 2 in determining outcomes for children. The strategy identifies 6 action areas to support families during these early stages:
 1. Seamless support for families
 2. A welcoming hub for families
 3. The information families need when they need it
 4. An empowered workforce
 5. Continually improving the Start for Life Offer
 6. Leadership for change

- 3.4 We are yet to fully understand the impact of the pandemic on early years children and early years services. We consider this as part of the Early Years Strategic Action Plan and in the development of the Start for Life Strategy in March 2024.
- 3.5 Our Early Years Strategic Action Plan and future Start for Life Strategy will link with:
- Addressing the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic on children’s early learning in early years settings, Action Plan (June 2021 to September 2022)
 - The Best Start for Life: a vision for the 1,001 critical days
 - The Family Hubs transformation
 - Starting Well Delivery Plan
 - SEND Strategy
 - A Fairer Brighton and Hove
 - Education Disadvantage Strategy
- 3.6 The Early Years Strategic Action Plan will focus on the following priority areas as outlined in Appendix 1 and below.
- 3.7 **Priority 1** will be to ensure there is sufficient early years provision for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, including reviewing the Additional Support Funding rates. The national Early Years Census shows an increase in the percentage of children reported by early years providers as having SEND – Two-year-olds – 4.7% in 2018 to 6.6% in 2022 (2.5 percentage points higher than national) Three and four-year-olds from 6% in 2018 to 7% in 2022 (same as national). We have seen an increase in Additional Support funded children locally by 19% over the last 3 years. This increase is reflected in the increased caseload for Brighton and Hove Inclusion Support Service Early Years Teams which has increased by 43% since 2019. In addition, 33 children met the eligibility criteria for The Jeanne Saunders Centre with 18 spaces available.
- 3.8 **Priority 2** will focus on reviewing and developing clear assessment and intervention pathways to support the needs of early years children. We need to fully understand the needs of our early years children including the impact of the pandemic ensuring appropriate consistent strategies to support identified need. The Integrated Progress Review at 2 has not been reviewed prior to the pandemic which has had an impact on the current process. Speech, Language and Communication has been highlighted as a key area of development as part of the new Early Years Foundation Stage Framework as well as being highlighted as an area impacted by the pandemic with an increase in Speech and Language referrals since 2019. A key action will be the development of a clear Speech, Language and Communication Pathway for Brighton and Hove.

- 3.9 **Priority 3** will focus on ensuring sufficient childcare spaces in Brighton and Hove. The Brighton and Hove Childcare Sufficiency Assessment will be completed and an update provided to the CYPS Committee in March 2023. This will ensure we can review the impact of the pandemic and recruitment issues which are being experienced by childcare providers as well as looking at parents' access to early years and childcare provision. In particular funded hours which are standalone and free of charge. The CSA will also review childcare for school-age children of working parents. The Department for Education is currently consulting on a change to the national early years funding formula for three and four-year-olds, and on a change to early years funding for two-year-olds. The consultation closed on 16th September 2022, figures are noted in section 7 and illustrate the previously low funding rates in Brighton and Hove.
- 3.10 **Priority 4** will focus on ensuring that support continues for early years and childcare providers, so provision throughout the city is of high quality and a comprehensive workforce development programme is in place. Recruitment and Retention has been identified as an issue across early years services both nationally and locally which may impact on the quality of provision.
- 3.11 We have worked with the Local Government Association on a national framework for developing an Early Years Strategy. This work will support the development of the Start for Life Strategy in March 2024 and ensure we can meet both our statutory duties and the needs of early years children.

4. Analysis and consideration of alternative options

- 4.1 An option would be to update the Early Years Strategy now but this would need to be updated again to become the Start for Life Strategy in March 2024 and would not enable us to fully understand the impact of the pandemic on early years children and settings, therefore the preferred option is to use the Early Years Strategic Action Plan in the interim.
- 4.2 The Early Years Strategic Action Plan will ensure a focus on early years whilst the Family Hubs Transformation is delivered and the Start for Life Strategy is developed in March 2024.
- 4.2 The priority areas have been developed using local data and knowledge of services highlighted in section 3 this will ensure a focus on the needs of early years children and support early years services.

5. Community engagement and consultation

- 5.1 The Local Government Association facilitated two workshops one with stakeholders and one with early years settings to discuss the priorities for early years across the city. A parent session was offered but no parents chose to attend, future sessions will be targeted and more widely advertised. A Start for Life Parent Focus Group will be established as part of the Family Hubs Transformation.

- 5.2 The Early Years Strategy Group meet quarterly with a focus on early years priorities and service delivery. The priorities of the Early Strategic Action Plan have been agreed by this group.
- 5.3 Co-production and co design are an underpinning principle of the family hubs transformation and will include staff, stakeholder and families for Early Years children.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 The Early Years Strategic Action Plan should be implemented and priorities agreed to ensure an early years focus whilst the Family Hubs transformation is delivered and to support the development of the Start for Life Strategy in March 2024.

7. Financial implications

- 7.1 The Department for Education is currently consulting on a change to the national early years funding formula for three and four-year-olds, and on a change to early years funding for two-year-olds. The consultation closed on 16th September 2022.

Illustrative rates published by the DfE in the consultation for three and four-year-olds for Brighton and Hove indicate an increase from £4.79 per hour in 2022 / 2023 to £5.96 in 2023 / 2024 (an increase of 24.4%). However, the DfE is proposing to cap increases at 4.4%, which would result in an actual rate of £5.00 per hour.

For two-year-olds the illustrative increase is from £5.57 to £6.86 per hour (23.2%) but this is capped at 8.6% resulting in an increase to £6.05 per hour.

- 7.2 The current rate for additional support funding is £10.50 per hour and this will need to be reviewed in line with the uplift in the living wage amounts. Funding for additional support funding is provided through both the early years and high needs blocks of the Dedicated Schools Grants and any increases to the hourly rate would need to be funded from these sources.

Name of finance officer consulted: Steve Williams Date consulted: 27/09/22

8. Legal implications

- 8.1 The Early Years Strategic Action Plan will ensure a focus on the needs of early years children and in doing so will enable the Council to better deliver duties to children and families under the Children Acts 1989 and 2004. The council cannot deliver the Best Start for Life programme referred to in the report alone, it requires the engagement of other public agencies, in particular health.

- 8.2 The Childcare Act (2006) requires local authorities to improve the well-being of young children and reduce inequalities between young children in their area. It also requires local authorities to make arrangements to secure that early childhood services in their area are provided in an integrated manner which is calculated to facilitate access to those services, and maximise the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children, and to identify parents or prospective parents in the authority's area who would otherwise be unlikely to take advantage of early childhood services that may be of benefit to them and their young children, and to encourage those parents or prospective parents to take advantage of those services.
- 8.3 Local authorities are required to secure sufficient childcare for working parents including for children who are disabled.

Name of lawyer consulted: Natasha Watson Date consulted :24/10/2022

9. Equalities implications

- 9.1 The Early Years Strategic Action Plan aims to improve outcomes for disadvantaged children including those in low income households and with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.
- 9.2 All early years providers follow the statutory Early Years Foundation Stage which promotes equality of opportunity and anti-discriminatory practice, ensuring that every child is included and supported, this is promoted through the training and support packages provided.
- 9.3 A focus of the Strategic Action Plan is to ensure sufficient early years childcare for all children including support for children identified with SEND.
- 9.4 A full equalities impact assessment will be completed as part of the family hubs transformation process.

10. Sustainability implications

- 10.2 Improving outcomes for early years children will support better outcomes as they move into adulthood thus reducing inequalities for the city.
- 10.1 Sufficient early years childcare spaces will ensure there are local places available to families thus reducing the need to travel.
- 10.2 The Early Years Recruitment Strategy will support local employment opportunities.

11. Other Implications

Public Health implications:

- 11.1 The Start for Life Offer for Early Years will include the delivery of services to meet the six high impact areas for Health Visiting.

11.2 The Starting Well chapter of the city's Health and Wellbeing Strategy is a key link to support families at risk of disadvantage, recognising the importance of the link with the work overseen by Public Health and will link to development of the Start for Life Strategy for the city.

Supporting Documentation

1. Appendix 1 Early Years Strategic Action Plan