

Early Years Strategy 2021 - 2026 KEY DECISION NO. CACH S022	
CABINET MEETING DATE 13 September 2021	CLASSIFICATION: Open
WARD(S) AFFECTED All	
CABINET MEMBER Cllr Caroline Woodley, Cabinet Member for Families, Early Years, Parks and Play	
KEY DECISION Yes REASON Affects two or more wards	
GROUP DIRECTOR Jacquie Burke, Group Director Children and Education	

1. CABINET MEMBER'S INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Every child has the right to be as happy, healthy and ready to learn as they can possibly be – no matter what their individual circumstances or needs. In Hackney we want to help each child grow in confidence, and to share easily accessible resources, advice and support with their families and carers. We know how important it is to give children the best start in life and we want our young people to carry a great sense of pride in growing up in our borough.
- 1.2 This strategy sets out our vision for Early Years, our priorities, our principles and what we want to achieve. The challenge for families in a densely-populated borough like ours should not be underestimated – too many of our children are born in poverty, but with effective early years services we can help every parent and carer prepare to raise their child with confidence and every child to reach

their potential. Working together with parents and families, our information services can help to secure the right support from pregnancy through immunisations to choosing a playgroup, nursery or childminder. Where children have additional needs we can do more to help families and carers to understand and support their child's development, build resilience and promote wellbeing. For some, dropping into stay and play sessions can make all the difference. For others, the opportunity lies in engaging in local activities, training and employment skills.

- 1.3 For our children, it's important to let them know from the very start that their voices will be heard, that we understand their behaviour and can help them to understand it too. With access to early education, children will find help with their communication, with language and discovering the joy of reading. In broadening the role of our children's centres into children and family hubs we recognise the importance of child and parent attachment and encourage the development of supportive peer networks. In further integrating our Early Years and Health Visiting service we can ensure we have collaborative and holistic support in place right from the start.
- 1.4 In Hackney, we take great pride in building an inclusive culture. If we can get it right in Early Years, our children will grow in self-esteem and inspire us all with their creativity, curiosity and desire to learn.

2. GROUP DIRECTOR'S INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 98% Hackney and 97% national registered settings, and 98% Hackney, 95% national registered childminders are judged good or better by Ofsted. The Early Years Service continues to provide focused support for those settings that are not yet judged to be good.
- 2.2. The most recent (2019) Early Years Foundation Stage profile results measured at the end of reception at 5 years, showed 77% of children in Hackney maintained schools (70% of all children inclusive of those in independent schools, 72% national and 74% London) achieved a good level of development. We want Hackney to remain above, or in line with national and London average, with a focus on children at risk of underachievement.
- 2.3. 64% (2020) eligible 2 years olds in low income households accessed their free 15 hours early years entitlement at a setting. The most recent comparison data in 2019, showed 60% take up the 15 hours entitlement compared to 61% national. Disadvantaged 2 year olds remain a focus.
- 2.4. Changes across the borough include a wider divide between children living in higher income households and those in lower income households. Pupils eligible for free school meals increased to 32% in 2020. The previous three years from 26% to 30%, compared to 13% to 17% nationally. Children in the Charedi community in the north of the borough makeup over 20% of Hackney's child population.

- 2.5. Covid-19 has presented a number of challenges for children and their families which is likely to impact on school readiness. Lockdown in particular has had an impact on children's communication and language, physical, social and emotional development. Supporting families and settings remains a priority of this strategy.
- 2.6. This strategy presents opportunities to build on the strength of parenting support from children's centres, and the close working relationships children's centres have forged with parents and partners, in order to further develop children's centres into children and family hubs to support parenting across early years, primary and secondary phases.
- 2.7. The 0-25 commissioning arrangements from Public Health England to support the Healthy Child Programme. Offers an opportunity to begin the lengthy process of working towards designing a new early years and health visiting service to work better together to support children's outcomes in the first 1,001 days.

3. RECOMMENDATION(S)

3.1 Cabinet is recommended:

To approve the Early Years Strategy, the underpinning principles and the proposed direction of travel.

4. REASONS FOR DECISION

- 4.1 Hackney Council is required to fulfil the Statutory Duties for Early Years. The Council is required:
 - 4.1.1 To improve outcomes so that young children achieve a good level of development in the 3 prime areas of learning set out in the Early Years Foundation Stage framework - language and communication, physical development, and personal, social and emotional development.
 - 4.1.2 To shape effective quality early years settings, evidenced to be a key element in improving outcomes and life chances for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.
 - 4.1.3 To provide advice, information and guidance to parents and carers, settings and agencies through the Parenting & Family Information Service.
 - 4.1.4 To ensure sufficient early education & childcare provision, and a coordinated approach to services for pregnant women and preschool children. Working through children's centres, to promote integrated health, education and parenting support, training and employment skills.

4.1.5 To support eligible 2 year olds, and all 3 and 4 year olds to take up their 15 or 30 hours free early years entitlement.

5. DETAILS OF ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

Not applicable

6. BACKGROUND

6.1 Evidence of the impact and need to intervene early

6.1.1 The best start for young Londoners: Strengthening London's early years education offer following the Covid-19 pandemic (February 2021), identifies the impact of the pandemic on children's outcomes. The report says that the pandemic has the potential to reverse the achievement gains in recent time, and widen firmly established disadvantage. It goes on to say that *"Any gaps in access to early years provision and reduction of take up, especially in areas with higher levels of deprivation, can be damaging to children's life chances, holding back their attainment at school and beyond"*.

6.1.2 The Best Start for Life; A vision for the first 1,001 critical days (The Early Years Healthy Development Review Report, 2021). Sets out a vision for joined up services to transform how families are supported to ensure every baby gets the best start in life. The report draws on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on babies' ability to socialise due to social distancing, and restricted access to services.

6.1.3 The Best Start for Life report, builds on the cross party 1001 Days Manifesto (2014) which cites the early years of life as a crucial period of change; alongside adolescence this is a key moment for brain development. As our understanding of the science of development improves, it becomes clearer how the events that happen to children and babies lead to structural changes that have life-long ramifications. Science is helping us to understand how secure attachment - love and nurture by caring adults is hard wired into the brains of children'.

6.1.4 The review into poverty and life chances; The Foundation Years Preventing Poor Children Becoming Poor Adults, found that children's life chances and outcomes are grounded in their development in the first five years of life. Parental education and opportunities for learning in those important years have a greater impact on later outcomes than income (Frank Fields, 2010). What parents do is more significant than who they are.

6.1.5 Study of Early Education and Development (SEED) showed the association between high quality early years settings and children's educational, cognitive, behavioural and social development in both the short and long term (Barnes and Melhuish, 2016).

6.1.6 Multi-disciplinary teams working virtual or co-located, highlighted the importance and quality of the dialogue between stakeholders from different sectors in the safeguarding process (Systematic Review, Luckock, 2015).

6.2 Priorities for the Early Years Service

6.2.1 High quality early education & childcare to support children to achieve a good level of development at the end of the foundation years, managing disproportionality.

6.2.2 Maintain minimum 90% settings and childminders judged good or better by Ofsted.

6.2.3 80% eligible 2 year olds, and 90% 3 and 4 year olds take up their free 15 or 30 hours early years entitlement.

6.2.4 Currently 77% of children in Hackney maintained schools (70% inclusive of those in independent Hackney schools) (71% national and 74% London) achieve a good level of development in Early Years Foundation Stage profile results at the end of reception. We want Hackney to remain above, or in line with the national and London average.

6.2.5 Ensure parents, carers and their family network have access to the information they need to support their parenting and increase their confidence and resilience.

6.2.6 Integrated health and education development reviews at 2 years, physical health and nutrition.

6.2.7 Ensure children's centres are focused on improving outcomes for children and their families, with a specific focus on the most disadvantaged children, in order to reduce inequalities in child development, and school readiness.

6.3 Principles to underpin the strategy

6.3.1. Partnership with parents and carers to promote home learning; and child and parent attachment.

6.3.2. Ensure that parents and carers have all the information they need at the right time in order to access services and opportunities.

6.3.3. Partnership with settings, (including independent settings), agencies and organisations, to forge strong relationships that deliver integrated, seamless and broad-ranging services to children and families, which are inclusive and accessible.

6.3.4. Inclusive practice that promotes a healthy start - physical activity, health, and nutrition.

- 6.3.5 Deliver excellent universal and targeted services which supports early identification of need and early help, underpinned by an assessment of need. With support to children with special educational needs or disability.
- 6.3.6 Deliver family support that respects, values and thinks about the whole needs of the family, informed by an understanding of trauma and secure attachment, and a suite of evidence informed interventions that build resilience and promote wellbeing.
- 6.3.7 Support children to understand their own feelings and those of others, and to regulate their own behaviour, and develop early language, communication, personal, social and emotional skills, central to supporting their outcomes.
- 6.3.8 Explore opportunities to broaden the role of the 6 multi-agency children's centres into children and family hubs, to provide family support across all phases - early years, primary and secondary, where it makes sense to do.
- 6.3.9 This strategy compliments other local strategies which enhance the life chances of children and families, with particular attention to health outcomes, meeting the needs of children with additional needs, and supporting parents' economic outcomes.
- 6.3.10. Develop greater synergy, through integrated leadership and planning between Early Years and Health Visiting, to achieve greater efficiency in intelligence and the deployment of resources to support babies in the first 1001 days.

6.4 What we want to achieve

- 6.4.1 A seamless service for young children and their families through a new model of integrated funding, leadership and planning for Hackney Early Years and Health Visiting Service. These services are entwined, serving the same children. The cessation of the current Health Visiting contract, along with the new public health 0-25 commissioning arrangements, offers an opportunity to start the lengthy design journey to achieve a new contractual model where the Council retains greater autonomy. A joint service will improve pathways for parents, communication, and information sharing, to achieve early intervention.
- 6.4.2 Work with partners to broaden the role of the 6 multi-agency children's centres into children and family hubs with particular attention to:
- vulnerable and disadvantaged children from conception to 5yrs
 - universal services such as stay and play activities to support children's development
 - targeted multidisciplinary family support to support parenting across all phases - pre-birth to 19 years linked to the early help review.

6.4.3 Review and reconfigure the children's centres portfolio in accordance with our childcare sufficiency assessment, corporate priorities and deliver savings towards the Councils budget gap through this process.

- Scrutiny Panel completed a review of the arrangements for Hackney's children's centres in 2019. As part of the review, an engagement programme took place over a 6 week period May to July 2019. 1,400 responses were received. 87% were existing users or had previously used children's centres. 97% of respondents were positive about the children's centres they used. 35% parents cited that Stay and Play activities were by far the most valuable and helpful service, above family and parenting support indicated by 20% parents.
- Hackney Early Years launched a parent survey in May 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic. The objective of the survey was to establish the impact of the pandemic on families with young children. The survey was completed over a 4 week period April to May 2020. 316 responses were received. 57% of the responses were from parents who use children's centre nurseries, 34% from stay and play families, and 9% were families who used health or other services at children's centres. 70% cited enjoying elements of lockdown, with some challenges. 20% were completely enjoying lockdown and 10% expressed difficulties. 60% accessed the children's centre online resources and requested more resources. 10% parents wanted support to access food, and 20% required support with their mental health. The survey informed the children's centres response to families during the pandemic.
- A parent survey on the universal birth to five resource will be published in September.
- In addition to children's centre-led engagement, users of children's centres multi-agency early help system, completed the early help user survey in January 2019. Parents were very positive about the support they received from children's centres.

6.4.4 Robust leadership and governance to reduce inequalities in outcomes for disadvantaged and vulnerable children, and children with additional needs.

6.4.5 Embed a system of outreach to enable marginalised communities to access services, information and opportunities.

6.4.6 A programme of support, training, information and guidance to early years settings and childminders, to maintain effective quality provision.

6.4.7 A programme of multi-disciplinary workforce development to underpin and shape practice.

6.4.8 Synergy between the 6 children's centre planning areas and 8 primary care network neighbourhoods. To establish links between children's and adult services in order to achieve holistic child and family intervention.

7 POLICY CONTEXT

7.1 This strategy also aims to fulfill the aims for first class schools and high quality services.

7.2 This strategy aims to help the Council fulfil its Early Years Vision '**happy, healthy and ready to learn**'; we want:

- Every child in Hackney to have the best possible start in life so that they can grow and develop to fulfil their potential, regardless of where they started.
- To improve the life chances and wellbeing of every child, especially children from disadvantaged backgrounds, so they develop as confident, capable and ambitious learners.

8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

8.1 The strategy seeks to improve the life chances and wellbeing of the most disadvantaged children, and narrow the gap between children likely to experience health and education inequalities, and their peers.

8.2 The 2020 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment, showed that 23% private, voluntary and independent settings had vacancies, 13% maintained nurseries in schools, and 57% childminders. More recently the Spring term census (January 2021), reported a 7.5% decrease in the number of children accessing provision compared to Spring 2020. The childcare sector post Covid is changing significantly. This trend, if continued, may impact childcare sustainability.

8.3 We aim that all children's centres reflect their diverse communities with an equitable mix of children and families. Any changes in the number of children's centres may impact services. Any planned reduction in children's centres capacity in accordance with the childcare sufficiency assessment and budget envelope, will impact on working families who currently benefit from subsidised childcare places, particularly lower income families. Vulnerable children on a child in need, child protection, early help or education, health and care plan, may also be adversely affected by changes.

8.4 However, these changes will be mitigated by access to the Early Years Inclusion Fund which will continue to support children on a child protection, child in need, early help or education, health and care plan to access childcare at alternative children's centres, settings or childminders.

8.5 The Childcare Act 2006 section 6 places a duty on the Council to ensure that there are sufficient childcare places for working families, and for eligible children to access their free 15 and 30 hours nursery education. However, there is no requirement on the Council to provide such provision themselves. Children's Centre Nurseries are used by working families including Council

staff, and children in receipt of free nursery education. Families will continue to access subsidised childcare at Children's Centres, with the greatest subsidy to families earning less than £70,000. There remains a commitment to support all current nursery children and staff, affected by service reforms, to secure appropriate provision at an alternative children's centre or setting, where there are currently surplus places across the borough.

9. SUSTAINABILITY

- 9.1 The proposed strategy to integrate health and early years, and to review the configuration of children's centres in line with the childcare sufficiency assessment and budget savings will facilitate future sustainability.

10. CONSULTATIONS

- 10.1 The strategy was consulted on with internal colleagues and stakeholders such as the Children & Education Senior Management Team and Hackney Education Senior Leadership Team and with officers in April 2021.
- 10.2 The draft strategy was presented to the Children, Young, People, Maternity & Families 0-5 Workshop in April 2021.
- 10.3 The strategy was presented to the Early Help Members Oversight Group in May 2021.
- 10.4 Formal consultation on the refreshed early years strategy and proposed changes will commence in September. The consultation will be open for six weeks, to give residents and stakeholders the opportunity to comment on the new early years strategy and service reforms, which will keep the most vulnerable children central to decisions.

11. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 11.1 The Council would be at risk of not fulfilling its Early Years Statutory Duty if it does not have a strategy for the service and children and their families in the borough.

12. COMMENTS OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND CORPORATE RESOURCES

- 12.1 The recommendation of this report is to approve the Early Years Strategy. The proposed strategy will seek to integrate health and early years, and to review the configuration of children's centres in accordance with the childcare sufficiency assessment and the Council's wider financial context to ensure future sustainability of the model.
- 12.2 There are no direct financial implications emerging from the Early Years Strategy, however plans will need to be developed in the context of the

significant financial challenges facing the Council. All services will be in scope to deliver efficiencies to mitigate the Council's budget gap in 2022/23 and 2023/24. Any subsequent proposals from the strategy will be appraised and considered separately, as necessary.

12.2 VAT Implications on Land & Property Transactions

Not applicable

13. COMMENTS OF THE DIRECTOR OF LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE SERVICES

- 13.1 Cabinet is asked to consider and approve the Early Years Strategy. The aims of the strategy incorporate the various statutory duties imposed on the Council, including the duties under section 1 of the Childcare Act 2016, the duty to secure 30 hours of free childcare for working parents, and various duties under the Childcare Act 2006. The statutory duties require the Council to improve the outcomes of all children under 5 and reduce inequalities, to secure sufficient childcare, to secure free early years provision of the prescribed description for each young child in the Hackney under compulsory school age, to assist others to provide childcare (including free early years provision), including giving financial assistance, for the Council to provide childcare if no other provider is willing to, or it is appropriate for the Council to provide it, to provide information, advice and assistance to parents about childcare in the area, and to secure the provision of information, advice and training to childcare providers and childcare workers.
- 13.2 Section 149(1) Equality Act 2010 imposes a Public Sector Equality Duty(PSED) on the Council. The PSED requires the Council to have "due regard" to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010, the need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it, and the need to foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it. Compliance with the PSED duty is usually demonstrated through undertaking an Equality Impact Assessment, which is referred to elsewhere in this report.
- 13.3 With regards to any future consultations, the Council must ensure that such consultations are undertaken in accordance with relevant law and guidance and that it takes into account any representations that it receives during the consultation period prior to making any final decision.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Draft Early Years Strategy

The draft early years strategy will be finalised following feedback from stakeholders in early September. It sets out the vision for early years, key principles and objectives ahead of the launch of the public engagement mid-September. The strategy can be found here:-

[HDS14383 - Early Years Strategy V5 spd.pdf](#)

EXEMPT

Not applicable

CONFIDENTIAL

Not applicable

BACKGROUND PAPERS

In accordance with The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) England Regulations 2012 publication of Background Papers used in the preparation of reports is required

None

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