

Cabinet Meeting on Wednesday 15 November 2023

Strategic Vision for Early Years



Councillor Mark Sutton, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People said,

“Childcare in Staffordshire is excellent, with 97 per cent of settings rated Good or Outstanding by Ofsted.

The Government’s move to extend the provision of funded childcare is an opportunity for young children to enjoy high-quality play and learning to pave the way for later life.

We are developing how we back childcare providers across the county and help young families, particularly with early identification of support for delayed development and SEND.”

Report Summary:

This report provides an update on National and local changes that are planned or have changed the way we work in Staffordshire. It seeks to explain how these changes require a new approach and as such proposes to review the structure of the Early Years Service within Staffordshire County Council following the transfer of the team from Entrust.

The proposal will improve outcomes for children and families through a more efficient, joined up and holistic services for our youngest children and their families so that they can:

- a. maximise their take up of provision
- b. have timely access to high quality early education and childcare provision

We will do this by ensuring that the team design and delivery is integrated into the Family Hub model so that we continue to build on this as the integrated access to Early Help services and support.

Recommendations

I recommend that Cabinet:

- a. Endorse the strategic vision for the early years' service and acknowledge the contribution this will make to Staffordshire's Strategic Plan.
- b. Endorse the principles for the proposed reorganisation of the Early Years Service delivery model detailed within this report and agree support for Officers to further develop this model with staff and stakeholders.
- c. Delegate authority to the Director for Children's Services in consultation with the lead member for Children and Young People and lead member for Education and SEND to approve the final staffing structure for the service.
- d. Endorse the planned budget profile for the Early Years Service and investment in new areas of delivery.



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Recommendations of the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

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Local Member Interest:

N/A

Report of the Director for Children and Families

Reasons for Recommendations:

1. We are a hugely ambitious county. We know that investing in the child's earliest years can pave the way for their future. A good start in life is likely to lead to better outcomes into adulthood. In recent years developments nationally have focussed on supporting parents with affordable childcare to enable more people to work, yet this is also an opportunity to ensure that children in their earliest years have access to high quality play and learning experiences that pave the way for later life. This paper sets out how we plan to achieve this.

National Context

Extended Childcare Entitlements:

2. In the spring budget, the Chancellor announced transformative reforms to childcare for parents, children and the economy. This investment will provide additional funded hours for childcare, helping working families with their childcare costs and empowering them to progress their careers and support their families.
3. The new entitlements will be introduced in phases. The Government will soon be funding up to 80% of all childcare places in England, up from 50% before the spring budget. The biggest change is the extension of the subsidised 30-hours entitlement from 3-and 4-year-olds down to 9-month-olds. (Appendix A)
4. In March 2023 the Chancellor also announced a national wraparound childcare scheme providing schools and local authorities with funding to support the set-up of wraparound provision for primary school children from September 2024. (Appendix B)
5. In July 2023, the Government launched a funding consultation on the approach to funding 2-year-olds and under from 2024-25. This consultation sets out the proposed new funding formula for calculating local authority hourly funding rates for the entitlements for 2-year-olds and under from April 2024. It also details the local funding rules proposed for local authorities to follow when passing on this funding to providers. The outcome of this consultation will not be known until the autumn term 2023. (Appendix C)
6. Whilst these announcements are welcome, they are on the backdrop of a market that was already struggling to be sustainable. This is due a variety of reasons including:
 - a. National changes to pensions and the living wage
 - b. Funding rates
 - c. Rising costs of running businesses, including rent, energy costs and consumables
 - d. Staff shortages
 - e. Increasing costs for childcare and parents working more flexibly

Some providers have needed to subsidise the overall costs with fees and top up fees for privately paying children.
7. Nationally, numbers of Ofsted registered providers have fallen by 7% during the period March 2022 to March 2023. (Appendix D)

Education Recovery in Early Years:

8. Ofsted's 2022 report on Education Recovery in Early Years Provision found that the pandemic continues to affect young children's communication, social, emotional and physical development, as well as reducing independence and self-care skills. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds have been particularly affected by this. (Appendix E)
9. The number of children diagnosed with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) has continued to rise in recent years. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of children diagnosed with developmental delays and speech and language difficulties continues to rise. (Appendix F)

1001 Critical Days:

10. The Best Start for Life Review: vision for the 1,001 Critical Days has outlined a programme of work to ensure the best support during these crucial first 1001 days, setting the foundation for babies to maximise their potential for lifelong emotional and physical wellbeing. (Appendix G)

Local Context

Staffordshire Strategic Plan:

11. Our Staffordshire Strategic Plan for 2022-26 outlines our ambitions and priorities for the years ahead.



Vision: An innovative, ambitious and sustainable county, where everyone has the opportunity to prosper, be healthy and happy

Outcomes	Priorities	How we work
<p>Everyone in Staffordshire will:</p> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; margin-bottom: 10px;">  <div style="margin-left: 10px;"> <p>Have access to more good jobs and share the benefits of economic growth</p> </div> </div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; margin-bottom: 10px;">  <div style="margin-left: 10px;"> <p>Live in thriving and sustainable communities</p> </div> </div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center;">  <div style="margin-left: 10px;"> <p>Be healthier and independent for longer</p> </div> </div>	<div style="display: flex; align-items: center; margin-bottom: 10px;">  <div style="margin-left: 10px;"> <p>Support Staffordshire's economy to grow, generating more and better-paid jobs</p> </div> </div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; margin-bottom: 10px;">  <div style="margin-left: 10px;"> <p>Tackle climate change, enhance our environment, and make Staffordshire more sustainable</p> </div> </div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; margin-bottom: 10px;">  <div style="margin-left: 10px;"> <p>Encourage good health and wellbeing, resilience and independence</p> </div> </div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; margin-bottom: 10px;">  <div style="margin-left: 10px;"> <p>Fix more roads, and improve transport and digital connections</p> </div> </div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center;">  <div style="margin-left: 10px;"> <p>Offer every Staffordshire child and young person the best start in life, and the chance to achieve their potential</p> </div> </div>	<div style="display: flex; align-items: center; margin-bottom: 10px;">  <div style="margin-left: 10px;"> <p>Encourage our communities to help themselves and each other</p> </div> </div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; margin-bottom: 10px;">  <div style="margin-left: 10px;"> <p>Lead our workforce to be ambitious, courageous and empowered</p> </div> </div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; margin-bottom: 10px;">  <div style="margin-left: 10px;"> <p>Use digital technology and data to connect, inform and support the people of Staffordshire</p> </div> </div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center;">  <div style="margin-left: 10px;"> <p>Engage and listen to our communities, partners and business, working together to improve our county</p> </div> </div>

Pledge: Live within our means and deliver value for money

12. Figure 1 – Outcomes and Priorities: SCC Strategic Plan

13. Our ambition is for every child in Staffordshire, whatever their background, to have the opportunity to have the best start in life. High quality early education is proven to have a positive impact on children's outcomes in both the short and long term. We will continue to work in partnership with our early years settings to make positive differences for all children and families.
14. To deliver this vision and respond to changing national and local agendas we need to fundamentally review how we deliver our services. This includes our priorities, the ways we work collaboratively and our team functions, values and systems so that we are able to:
- a. Directly contribute to related local authority strategies such as safeguarding, inclusion, health and well-being and education through a preventative approach.
 - b. Connect to other service priorities through the Family Hub model and support the first 1001 days of life, ensuring children are school ready and able to thrive and that any emerging issues are identified, and appropriate support is put in place at the earliest opportunity.
 - c. Provide more connected support, including advice and information to parents about the ways in which the early years offers are changing and signposting to services within communities that will support them in managing the complex early years of their child's life.
 - d. Ensure the transformative reforms announced in the Spring budget are realised through the successful implementation of the extended entitlements, balancing the need to create additional childcare places with ensuring children get high quality experiences by attending settings that are rated good or outstanding by Ofsted.
 - e. Carry out a significant range of market management activities, including data analysis, consultant support for individual and groups of settings, business modelling and premises suitability to maximise sufficiency and sustainability across all sector types including childminders. This will enable eligible working families to access the right childcare provision, in the right place at the right time.
 - f. Provide support and challenge to early years settings, ensuring they continue to strive to improve outcomes and reduce inequalities for children across all areas of learning, through a range of early intervention strategies, programmes and projects that raise expertise across the sector workforce and lead to closing gaps in performance.
 - g. We support our service families by regularly attending the Ministry of Defence Local Authority Partnership group which helps keep us informed of national priorities. We have established links at the two barracks in Staffordshire with Community Development Officers and

intend to strengthen these links, ensuring all families are well informed about the newly announced childcare entitlements.

- h. Play a crucial role in the implementation and embedding of the new early help plan and the identification and support for children with development delay and SEND.

Delivery Model:

15. The Early Years Service is newly formed with 14 members of staff moving from Entrust via TUPE transfer to join the existing Early Education and Childcare Team.
16. The existing Entrust team structure is 'flat' with broadly defined roles for line management responsibility and significantly reduced resilience at a time when the need for these services has increased.
17. Job roles, responsibilities and accountabilities do not reflect the national and local context in which the team needs to operate. There is an opportunity to integrate the two teams to provide an overarching Early Years Team.
18. There is a need to review the purpose for the newly formed team, its functions, accountabilities, values and systems and how it fully supports the outcomes and priorities in the Staffordshire Strategic Plan.
19. We want to make a commitment to change the way we currently deliver services to early years settings, families and children. We can provide a more connected more place-based approach, through greater partnership working so that our support for settings, children and families is more streamlined and effective.
20. We recognise the important role we play in supporting early years settings to be inclusive, identifying any additional need and making provision effective for children at the earliest point. We know that more children and families could benefit, and long-term outcomes could be improved if we have more opportunities and capacity to support early years settings to develop inclusive practices and ensure families are provided with the right help, at the right time, in the right place.
21. We understand the significant expansion of the recently announced early years entitlements and the vital role childcare plays in enabling parents to work or take on new opportunities; it is more important than ever that we get the delivery model right. We know there will be more families requiring childcare places and therefore ensuring we plan effectively and develop team capacity to create sufficient high-quality places is central to our purpose and the success of the extended new offer for families.

Our Values

22. Staffordshire County Councils People Strategy puts at its heart the values we want for our organisation. These values are central to the way in which we want staff within the Early Years Service to work.
23. We recognise this will require personal ambition, courage and empowerment to deliver this for the youngest children in our county who need us to be ambitious about their futures, have the courage to take action to diminish the differences they experience and provide opportunities for them to play and learn in their earliest years and for their parents to also access more and better jobs knowing that their children have high quality childcare.

Our Principles

24. Our principles underpin those already identified in Staffordshire's Children and Families system:
- a. A child centred service that is committed to doing what works best for our children and settings and is informed by their views.
 - b. Restorative approaches that help create a positive team culture and mirror the types of interactions staff should have with colleagues, partners, settings, children and families.
 - c. Strong team leadership, which supports our Councils aim to be an 'excellent employer with a welcoming culture, in which people live and breathe our values'. A strengths-based attitude by leaders who prioritise quality of practice and outcomes and who have ambitions to help the team develop, alongside a genuine interest in their work and practice.
 - d. A skilled, flexible and agile team who have clear accountabilities and responsibilities and are able to rapidly adjust to changing needs.
 - e. A commitment to continuous service improvement through the identification of team plans and indicators with clear reporting mechanisms that support the priorities of the Early Years Advisory Board who also oversee and monitor progress of agreed priorities.

Our Response

25. We have worked rapidly to plan and prepare for the expansion of the funded entitlements and wrap around provision. The short time frame from announcement to implementation has required people to work at pace to mobilise this. The council is already working quickly to prepare and plan for the extended entitlements through the use of short-term

arrangements but recognises the need to build future capacity to ensure the ambitions of the project are realised.

26. Ofsted commended Staffordshire, who have not seen the rate of setting closures of other Local Authorities in the region. We know that we provide good support to the market, however we need to maintain this aspect and grow it to ensure that we can mitigate and respond to the rising number of closures due to the challenging market locally. (Appendix H)
27. We have developed a range of support for the sector through quality support, professional development opportunities and partnership working with The Careers Hub and colleges to promote early years as a career of choice and encourage students to access relevant courses. The Early Years Service continues to provide high-quality support, training and mentoring to an increasing number of settings who have new or inexperienced teams and leaders, ensuring high quality practice is maintained so that Staffordshire children can benefit.
28. We plan to maintain and develop this offer through the revised structure and support settings and families to provide high quality early learning experiences that provide the foundations for children to make the most of their abilities and talents as they grow up.
29. Settings have reported an increase in numbers of children with developmental delay and SEN. This is reflected in the significant increase in the number of children who are referred to Early Years Forum, rising from 600 children in 2019 to 1020 children in 2023. To meet this increasing demand, the team have developed a risk management plan.
30. We now need to build capacity, enabling the team to be proactive and focus on early intervention more broadly, ensuring strategies and projects are maximised to ensure all children get the early support they need to prepare for happy and healthy adulthoods.
31. Referrals to Speech and Language Therapy services continue to rise. Midlands Partnership Trust have identified that currently there are 6398 children within the service and that many of these children need access to socialisation and language stimulating environments, rather than specialist services. To address these emerging patterns, we need to continue to prioritise and build on the highly our highly successful speech and language projects.
32. Staffordshire were one of 14 local authorities who delivered a pilot scheme on behalf of the DfE called 'The Early Outcomes Fund', this sought to invest in early childhood development. Two investment areas for this project were 'Hungry Little Minds' and 'Early Communication

Screening’ both of which have been incredibly successful having won national awards and featured in Nursery World and Children and Young People Now publications. (Appendix J) We plan to maintain and develop these two schemes using the current funding allocation so that the benefits can be maximised across the county.

- a. Hungry Little Minds is digital campaign for parents of children aged 0-2 supporting parents to chat, read and play with their babies. The take up for the campaign has exceeded all planned targets and feedback from families is extremely positive. As a result, this project will be sustained through the planned budget profile and the content will be updated to reflect feedback from families, the aims of the 1001 critical days and changing local contexts and priorities.
 - b. Early Communication Screening is a tool provided by Midlands Partnership NHS Foundation Trust. The tool supports early years practitioners to identify speech, language and communication needs at the earliest opportunity. This programme has been highly successful; our impact analysis data shows the significant progress that children make following early identification and intervention (figure 2). As a result, this project will be sustained through the planned budget profile enabling the delivery of training and provision of practitioner resources to sustain the longevity of this evidence-based programme.
33. This investment will help us to reduce referrals to speech and language services and improve outcomes for children with development delay and SEND.
34. The Family Hubs are delivering against the Early Help Strategy to provide families with the support they need. The Early Years Service needs to be central to this delivery and is committed to playing a key role in supporting the many ways in which early help can be provided for families.

Our Engagement

35. The Early Years Team have been engaged in the development of this proposed model. The main themes from the engagement are that staff:
- a. Recognise the need to review the Early Years Service delivery model to support the shared vision and priorities outlined in the Staffordshire Strategic Plan, to achieve better outcomes for children and families.
 - b. Recognise there has been a consistent reduction in team capacity over the last five years while the team have been within Entrust. A key priority is to now align and build team capacity to address the current

- requirements from Government and to support the challenges faced by the early years sector.
- c. Acknowledge that working towards a more holistic, place-based approach is key to ensure connection with other service and understanding the local needs of our settings and families.
 - d. Identify that the development of a service with new and challenging priorities will require opportunities for greater peer support, training and professional development.
36. Our Early Years Reference Group, which includes owners and managers from early years settings across Staffordshire have identified that there are:
- a. Higher numbers of children who have speech and language delay
 - b. Higher numbers of children with SEND needs who need support and referrals to early years forum
37. Our plans to develop team capacity, longevity of successful projects and our collaborative work through the Family Hubs will ensure a more timely, holistic approach to support.

Our Performance

38. We are proud of our work in the Early Years Service and know we are in a good position to review the way that we deliver services to realise our ambition to be the best that we can be. We have built and sustained effective relationships with our early years sector, the Department for Education and Ofsted and use these to respond more effectively to need and to strengthen the quality of our practice.
39. We lead Staffordshire's Best Start Plan, building relationships and working towards goals to help all Staffordshire children to be happy and healthy, feel safe and belong and enjoy and achieve.
40. We have a range of data collections within the service that are used to measure the impact of our work and to identify service priorities. However, we intend to continually improve our data and intelligence and reporting by developing a service dashboard which will more accurately illustrate the impact of our work, identify areas of strength and those areas that require further development.
41. We use data and intelligence to prioritise support for our early years settings, this ensures our support is targeted and prioritised according to need.

Early Years Performance



97% of settings are rated
Good or Outstanding by Ofsted



100% of settings rated Requires
Improvement or Inadequate by Ofsted
improved in their next inspection



67.5% of children reached a
good level of development at the
end of Reception - higher than the
national average



99% return rate from providers
of sufficiency survey allows

Our **speech and language programme** has been recognised by the Department for Education and Ofsted as a successful model with impressive impact data.



Children who had language within normal range 50% in September 2021 to 67% in July 2022



Children who had moderate delay 36% in September 2021 to 26% in July 2022



Children who had significant delay 14% in September 2021 to 8% in July 2022

42. Figure 2 Early Years Performance, August 2023

Legal Implications

43. The Early Years Service has statutory responsibilities aligned to the Childcare Act 2006 and 2016 and are specific to:

- a. providing information, advice and guidance for families including supporting them to access high quality childcare places.
- b. monitoring the early years childcare market to ensure sufficient childcare places are available for families.
- c. ensuring eligible families have access to the funded entitlements for 2, 3 and 4 year and are provided with information on childcare costs.
- d. establishing the Early Years Foundation Stage framework through high quality information, advice and guidance to the early years sector.
- e. ensuring that all providers have regard to the SEN Code of Practice to meet the needs of children with disabilities or SEN.

44. In the event this requires additional legal input this will be requested as soon as possible to enable any additional legal resourcing and support to be considered.

Resource and Value for Money Implications

45. To ensure our statutory duties are discharged effectively the Local Authority centrally retains expenditure from the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), this is limited to 5% of 3- and 4-year-old funding and is agreed by Schools Forum annually. This 5% is planned to be extended to include the newly announced childcare entitlements for two-year-olds and under in line with the planned roll out dates. (Appendix K)

46. This grant funds all support services for settings who receive early education funding. The Early Years Service is funded through the DSG, including £300,000 from the high needs block. The amount available is: £1,827,350.

47. There is no additional financial input requested as part of this report.

48. The proposal will be delivered within the existing financial envelope and developed further as funding from the Department for Education increases. Details of the initial proposal have been costed (subject to change) within the existing budget.

49. The Department for Education are currently consulting on the way entitlement funding will be distributed from April 2024. As a result, any recommendations in this report assume that the early years budget for 24/25 remains in line with current allocations and if this increases, we will profile the resources in line with this paper.

	Staffing £	Non Staffing £	Total £
Management & Administration	167,000	3,000	170,000
Funding, Sufficiency and Market Development	537,000	52,000	589,000
Safeguarding, Quality and Workforce Development	449,000	52,000	501,000
SEND, Inclusion and Early Intervention	468,000	52,000	520,000
Early Years Outcomes Fund	-	20,000	20,000
Hungry Little Minds Campaign	-	27,000	27,000
	1,621,000	206,000	1,827,000

50. Any additional grants received from the Department for Education for local authority resource allocation will be used to scale up developments that ensure the ambitions in this report are realised.

Risks and Issues

51. For 24/25 the Early Years Supplementary Grant will be rolled into the DSG funding. However, for 2-year-olds as the formula is due to change for how LAs receive their allocation (10.5% driven by Additional Needs Factors), this has reduced how much funding Staffordshire receive. The proposed new rate for Staffordshire is £7.55; this is what Staffordshire currently pay to providers, therefore, to create an additional centrally retained fund from this rate would require a cut to the provider rate, meaning it would be extremely challenging to retain any additional, centrally retained funding from our 2-year-old budget.
52. The time frame from the extended entitlement budget announcements to implementation is very short, meaning the team is currently required to work at pace without the release of Government funding for additional capacity.
53. The low funding rate Staffordshire receives exacerbates the national picture of setting sustainability, recruitment and retention (Appendix I). We try to mitigate this by the high-quality consultancy support we provide. However, these challenges continue it makes our sufficiency duties more difficult to fulfil.
54. In 23/24 for 3- and 4-year-old funding Staffordshire remained on the funding floor before the allocation of early years supplementary grant (EYSG).
55. The illustrative modelling published as part of the most recent Government consultation suggests that Staffordshire is one of the 40 local authorities who are likely to see a lower 2-year-old rate in 2024-25, if this rate is compared with our effective combined 2-year-old rate from September 2023, which included the additional funding being provided to local authorities through the early years supplementary grant (EYSG).

Climate Change Implications

56. Although there are no direct climate change implications because of the recommendations set out within this report, it is recognised that there will be indirect impacts, for example, travel to early years settings. Where possible Team Managers will work to reduce these impacts as part of the wider commitment to tackling Climate Change by:
 - a. A more placed based approach and integration with the Family Hubs to limit the travelling distance for consultants. Minimising the need to travel long distances, when possible, will contribute to Staffordshire's transport carbon impact.

- b. Raising provider awareness of the advantages of using premises with high energy efficiency
- c. Promote the advantages of EV travel where possible.

List of Background Documents/Appendices:

Appendix 1 - Early Education Entitlements and Funding Update: March 2023: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-education-entitlements-and-funding/early-education-entitlements-and-funding-update-march-2023>

Appendix 2 - Chancellor unveils a Budget for growth
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/chancellor-unveils-a-budget-for-growth>

Appendix 3 - Early Years Funding – Extension of the Entitlements
<https://consult.education.gov.uk/funding-policy-unit/early-years-funding-extension-of-the-entitlements/>

Appendix 4 - [Main findings: Childcare providers and inspections as at 31 March 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Appendix 5 - [Education recovery in early years providers: summer 2022 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Appendix 6 - [Special educational needs in England, Academic year 2022/23 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](#)

Appendix 7 - The Best Start in Life: a vision for the 1,001 critical days
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-best-start-for-life-a-vision-for-the-1001-critical-days>

Appendix 8 - Setting Closures in Staffordshire

Appendix 9 - Recruitment and Retention Challenges in Staffordshire

Appendix 10 - <http://www.comms2point0unawards.co.uk/the-winners>

Appendix 11 - <https://www.cypnow.co.uk/best%20practice/article/digital-campaign-boosts-language-outcomes>

Appendix 12 - Extended Entitlements roll out dates

Community Impact Assessment

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