

Report

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Report to:	Performance and Review Scrutiny Forum
Date of Meeting:	31 May 2011
Report by:	Executive Director (Education Resources)

Subject:	Best Value Review Early Years Service – Interim Report
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1. Purpose of Report

1.1. The purpose of the report is to:-

- ◆ provide an update on the progress of the best value review of early years provision
- ◆ advise on initial recommendations arising from the review

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1. The Forum is asked to note the following interim recommendation(s):-

- (1) that the following operational improvement actions will be implemented:-
 - the recording of agreed non-contact time for local government employees should be updated and linked to the Performance Development and Review process
 - transfer support staff within Early Years stand alone establishments to Support Services from June 2011
 - enhance outcomes for children and support Early Years' employees to gain qualifications in line with legislation through the delivery of targeted training
 - update staffing processes to enable the effective deployment of staff to meet the needs of children
 - further develop the Communication Strategy across the Early Years' Service for implementation by September 2011
- (2) that the review will continue to allow consideration of the following issues by September 2011 in order that proposed improvement actions can be reported:-
 - revise and update the current contract with partner providers for implementation by August 2012
 - develop ICT strategy for early years linked to the wider Education Resources ICT contract renewal in 2013
 - further assess local service delivery options to support improved integration of early years with learning communities and ensure that quality improvement support for establishments reflects changes in external scrutiny arrangements

3. Background

- 3.1. The current service structure within Education Resources was approved as part of the National Diagnostic Management Review. In summary, the structure is made up of:-
- 3 area groups of learning communities Cambuslang, Rutherglen and East Kilbride; Hamilton; and Clydesdale; and
 - 4 groups of central services (Curriculum and Quality Improvement; Finance and Personnel; Inclusion; and Resources).
- 3.2 A programme of service reviews was commenced within Education Resources to support implementation of the National Diagnostic initiative. A key focus for each of these reviews is on supporting the new area learning community and central services arrangements. The current review of early years will complete this review programme.

4. The Review of Early Years

- 4.1. A review group was established in September 2010, chaired by the Head of Education (Resources). Council and partner nurseries were consulted and invited to contribute to the review. This resulted in a widely representative membership which included:
- 3 headteachers of primary schools with nursery classes
 - 2 partner providers
 - 1 headteacher with a nursery centre
 - 4 heads of stand alone nurseries
 - 1 headteacher of a nursery school
 - 3 members of the Early Years Development Team
 - Trade Union representation
 - 1 representative from Education Finance Services
 - 1 representative from the Corporate Improvement Unit
 - 2 officers from the Central Early Years Team
- 4.2 From the outset the review group recognised the right of all young children to the highest quality of nursery provision through a holistic approach to meeting their needs and ensuring the best possible outcomes. The following were established as overall objectives for the review:-
- ensure all children aged 3-5 years within South Lanarkshire Council area have equal access to early years' education which is appropriate to their needs and delivered in fit for purpose accommodation.
 - ensure robust planning and monitoring arrangements are in place for all early years provision which supports positive outcomes for children.
 - ensure that the Service continues to deliver on national priorities including the Early Years Framework, Getting It Right for Every Child and Curriculum for Excellence.
- 4.3 Within the context of these overall objectives, the group agreed to focus on the following specific aspects of the service:-
- quality improvement support for establishments taking account of Curriculum for Excellence and changes in external scrutiny arrangements
 - contracting with partner providers of early years
 - staff deployment and registered nursery capacities
 - local service delivery options, taking account of the learning community structure
 - the quality of available accommodation
 - continuing demand for affordable high quality out of school care

- 4.4 Working groups were established from the wider review team to address specific issues and the following review activities were undertaken. These were agreed to ensure compliance with corporate guidance on the best value review process:-
- an audit was undertaken of existing service provision, including workforce capacity and deployment
 - review group meetings considered projected demand for early years provision over the next 5 years
 - national guidance on changes in external scrutiny arrangements was reviewed
 - comparative information from other Local Authorities was taken into account
 - consultation took place with heads of establishment, partner providers and other stakeholders on the specific issues addressed through the review
 - the progress with modernising accommodation was considered
 - options for future service delivery were considered including links with learning communities
- 4.5 At the outset, the Best Value Review Group recognised the trend in very good performance that had been achieved. The proportion of pre-school inspection indicators being evaluated by external assessors as excellent or very good rose from 26.0% in 2009 to 52.5% in 2010. Performance shows signs of continued improvement in 2011, to the end of April, with 60.0% of indicators being evaluated as excellent or very good.

5. Review Findings

5.1 Audit of existing service provision

The group confirmed that there are currently 58 Nursery Classes, 14 Stand Alone Establishments and 56 Partners delivering early education and childcare provision for approximately 9000 children aged 0-5 years. The review concluded that current provision meets demand, however, it was also recognised that the number of partner providers could fluctuate depending on the market environment.

- 5.2 The Early Years Central Service also provides a range of strategic and operational support including admissions, budget, personnel, effective staff deployment, training and development and quality improvement.
- 5.3 The review recommended the standardisation of recording agreed non-contact time for local government employees across the service. This can be implemented from August 2011 as part of the PDR/CPD process.
- 5.4 The review also recommended the transfer of support staff from stand alone nurseries to support services to help align training and development opportunities and provide a career structure
- 5.5 The group recognised that 93% of managers have achieved or are engaged in training to meet the qualifications criteria set by the Government. Targeting the remaining 7% (24 individuals) is the next priority for action in August 2011. An audit of training needs for other employees is currently being undertaken with the strategy to be confirmed by December 2011.
- 5.6 The group also considered the outcome of the PDR/CPD audit which identified areas for training across all nurseries. The programme of training and support opportunities through a varied range of delivery modes will be concluded for implementation commencing August 2011.

- 5.7 *Responding to projected and changing demand for early years provision*
The context for this aspect of the review is set by the strong track record of success within South Lanarkshire to deliver high quality pre school education for all eligible 3 and 4 year olds since 2002.
- 5.8 Local and national data was reviewed with the support of the Research and Policy Unit for future birth rates across South Lanarkshire. The outcome of this data suggests a static trend in the area.
- 5.9 However, the number of children attending individual nurseries can fluctuate significantly and there is a need to ensure that scarce staffing resources are best used. The group recommends that a revised guidance note on maximising the use of staff across establishments be prepared for discussion with trade union partners within the Early Years Joint Consultative Committee in June 2011 with a target implementation date of August 2011.
- 5.10 The group identified a range of approaches which will ensure the development of a Communication Strategy. This will include Glow, Early Years and Childcare Partnership newsletter, sharing HMle (SEQIA) and SCSWIS inspection outcomes, training and development, good practice sharing as well as attendance at National Forums. The group recognised the value of local network forums and recommended that this model be promoted across the Council.
- 5.11 The group recommends that the current partnership contract be reviewed by a working group including legal representation between May and November 2011. The updated contract would subsequently be circulated to partners for consultation in December 2011 with implementation in August 2012. The new contract will outline expected outcomes from inspection processes, e.g., SCSWIS and SEQIA as well as SSSC registration requirements for all staff. In addition, curriculum and quality assurance processes and measures will be identified to ensure the best possible outcomes for young children.
- 5.12 A working group has developed new ICT guidance which was distributed to all nurseries in April 2011. The next step will be the development of GLOW. In addition, two establishments will pilot a range of ICT materials including wireless connection to influence future developments from May 2011. The Education ICT managed contract will be renewed in 2013 and the review group recommended the inclusion of Early Years within this contract.
- 5.13 *Quality improvement support for establishments*
The group considered implications arising from the establishment of Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (SCSWIS). This new agency incorporates the Care Commission, Social Work Inspection Agency (SWIA) and part of HMle. In addition, there will be the creation of a new agency (SEQIA) for quality improvement in education. This will assume the functions of HMle and Learning and Teaching Scotland from July 2011.
- 5.14 It is anticipated that the new scrutiny system will become more proportionate and streamlined and will focus more on the outcomes for individual children and young people. The vision of the new bodies is one of less emphasis on a planned cycle of inspections and more focus on organisations evaluating their own performance and making improvements with the support of the new scrutiny bodies. These scrutiny bodies will have an important role in validating self-evaluation.

5.15 These significant changes in external scrutiny arrangements will require that guidance for all early years establishments is developed to support improvement in line with national expectations. It is recommended that quality improvement support be further considered by the review.

5.16 Options for service delivery linked to learning communities

The review should further assess local service delivery options to support improved integration of early years with learning communities and ensure that quality improvement support for establishments reflects significant developments including: changes in external scrutiny arrangements; a need to continue extending the use of self-evaluation within establishments; and the outcomes of the recent validated self evaluation exercise. The service structure sub group agreed that the following issues should be considered as the review progresses.

- **Learning Communities (LCs)**

A range of good practice initiatives were identified particularly in relation to transition from nursery to primary. It was agreed that there was a need to further develop the focus on early years within learning communities ensuring an increased consistency of approach in relation to early years' developments.

- **Quality Improvement Support**

The continuing review of quality improvement support should take account of external regulatory requirements, VSE, changes to HMIE inspection arrangements and Curriculum for Excellence.

- **Extended Service Provision**

Demand for nursery places for children aged 0-5 within 52 week extended hours provision exceeds places available. An opportunity exists to consider extending charging within these establishments.

- **Peripatetic Manager**

The group discussed the current peripatetic model of management in place at Rigside and Rural Communities Nursery which allows management in three locations. It was recognised that management structures and personnel flexibility were essential to success. Transport for group activities was considered essential to service delivery. This model should be further considered, taking full account of the size of the nurseries and their locations.

- **Learning Campus**

There was consideration of a learning campus model which would fully utilise available accommodation to extend nursery class hours, provide breakfast clubs, out of school care and holiday clubs as well as other services to meet the needs of children within the context of their family and community needs.

5.17 It is proposed that the Review Group consider these issues over the coming weeks with a target reporting date of September 2011.

6 Employee Implications

6.1 Employee implications will continue to be assessed should the recommendations be approved.

7 Financial Implications

7.1 The recommendations within paragraph 2.1a can be met from within existing budgets and the financial implications of recommendations within paragraph 2.1b will be assessed as the review progresses.

8 Other Implications

8.1 There are no direct risks associated with this report and no significant sustainability issues in connection with the recommendations within this report.

9 Equality Impact Assessment and Consultation Arrangements

9.1 Arrangements will be put in place to undertake an equality impact assessment if required.

9.2 Extensive on-going consultation across the early years services includes:

- Biennial review of Admissions Policy. The latest review in 2010 saw admissions priorities split for 0-3 and 3-5 year olds. Next review due 2012.
- Consultation of nursery charges
- Comparison with other local authorities on levels of charges and opening hours. Data available from Childcare Information Service as part of childcare partnership.

9.3 The BVR Group may require to consult with parents and carers on future service developments

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24 May 2011

Link(s) to Council Objectives/Improvement Themes/Values

- ◆ Raise education attainment for all
- ◆ Efficient and Effective use of resources

Previous References

None

List of Background Papers

None

Contact for Further Information

If you would like to inspect the background papers or want further information, please contact:-

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