

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET – 31 AUGUST 2011

KEY MESSAGES ARISING FROM THE EARLY YEARS REVIEW

Report by Executive Director of Educational and Social Services

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to inform Members of Cabinet of the key messages arising from the outcome of the Early Years Review.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Cabinet on the 9 February 2011 asked for a report to be brought forward for consideration before the summer recess for a new model for the delivery of early years provision.
- 2.2. For the purposes of the review Early Years is defined as children pre-birth to eight years of age. This is within the context of the Early Years Framework, published by the Scottish Government in December 2008.
- 2.3 This report is bringing forward to Cabinet key messages arising from consultation carried out with parents/carers and staff, as a first phase, with a view to presenting recommendations to Cabinet after the summer.
- 2.4 The Early Years Framework is intended to improve the life chances of Scotland's children and tackle inequalities by targeting the early years of a child's life.

“What happens to children in their earliest years says much about our society and is key to outcomes in adult life.” Early Years Framework (2008)

- 2.5 There are ten key elements of transformational change in the Early Years Framework, namely:
1. A coherent approach
 2. Helping children, families and communities to secure outcomes for themselves
 3. Breaking cycles of poverty, inequality and poor outcomes in and through early years
 4. A focus on engagement and empowerment of children families and communities
 5. Using the strength of universal services to deliver prevention and early intervention
 6. Putting quality at the heart of service delivery
 7. Services that meet the needs of children and families
 8. Improving outcomes and children's quality of life through play

- 9. Simplifying and streamlining delivery
- 10. More effective collaborations.

2.6 *Getting It Right For Every Child* (GIRFEC) is seen as the key delivery tool for the Early Years Framework. The ethos of *Getting It Right For Every Child* is very closely aligned to the Government's vision for Scotland's children, better known as SHANARRI which states that children should be:

- **SAFE** – protected from abuse, neglect or harm at home, at school and in the community
- **HEALTHY** – having the highest attainable standards of physical and mental health, accessible to suitable health care, and support and learning to make healthy and safe choices.
- **ACHIEVING** – being supported and guided in their learning and in the development of their skills, confidence and self-esteem at home, at school and in the community.
- **NURTURED** – having a nurturing place to live, in a family setting with additional help if needed or, where this is not possible, in a suitable care setting.
- **ACTIVE** – having opportunities to take part in activities such as play, recreation and sport which contribute to health growth and development, both at home and in the community
- **RESPECTED** – having the opportunity along with carers to be heard and involved in decisions which affect them.
- **RESPONSIBLE** – having opportunities and encouragement to play active and responsible roles in their schools and communities and where necessary, having appropriate guidance and supervision
- **INCLUDED** – having help to overcome social, educational, physical and economic inequalities and being accepted as part of the community in which they live and learn.

2.7 In East Ayrshire, the focus has been in relation to:

- Helping children, families and communities to secure outcomes for themselves;
- Using the strength of universal services to deliver prevention and early intervention;
- Simplifying and streamlining delivery;
- More effective collaboration.

2.8 The Early Years Framework recognised that some of the key elements to support transformational change would include:

- More help to develop parenting skills with ante-natal and post-natal care in developing the capacity needed to deliver this;
- A renewed focus on 0-3 of the period of a child's development as it shapes future outcomes;
- Breaking down barriers between education and childcare through a move towards more integrated, flexible services;

- Improving play opportunities and addressing barriers to play;
- More consistent access to intensive family support services in the early years;
- More help for the informal support network;
- Nurseries, school and childcare centres developing their role in family and community learning;
- Adult services such as addiction, putting a greater focus on the needs of young children and families;
- Building on work already in progress through *Getting It Right For Every Child* and *Curriculum for Excellence* to provide child centered, outcome focussed services.

2.9 Two national reports have been published in 2011. One regarding the progress in respect of the Early Years Framework by the Scottish Government and the second one an independent report by Professor Susan Deacon “*Joining the Dots – A Better Start for Scotland’s Children*”. The latter report was written following a pledge from the Scottish Government to renew the national effort on children’s early years by inviting Professor Deacon to lead a dialogue on how best to take action to improve children’s early years of life.

2.10 The Scottish Government progress Report was published on the basis that it is reasonable to expect that most, if not all, short term actions in the Early Years Framework have been progressed.

2.11 The remit for Professor Deacon was to:

- *Lead a dialogue to build on the broad areas of agreement across Scotland and Scottish life which exists regarding the critical importance of children’s early life experiences and our shared responsibility to invest in their future; and, in particular, to encourage participation by elected representatives, business and the third sector*
- *Examine what more we can do in Scotland to ensure that children from all backgrounds and circumstances get the best possible start in life by considering how parents, families and communities; employers and businesses; civic and voluntary organisations as well as national and local government and our public services can pool efforts to achieve this;*
- *Challenge the link between poverty and lack of attainment and achievement, focusing on the need to create in children a readiness to learn and prosper no matter their social circumstance;*
- *Assist in building a public consensus around the link between how we prioritise investment in the early years and months of children’s lives and how Scotland prospers as a nation;*

- *Bring forward suggestions for practical action to deepen and intensify this effort across Scotland within the context of unprecedented pressures on public expenditure.*

2.12 The key messages arising from the report are:

- The need to develop a common sense consensus – this is with a view to agreeing a “core message around the importance of children’s early years not just among professionals and practitioners, but the wider public;
- De-cluttering the policy landscape – to undertake a systematic examination of the range of policy, and associated streams, guidance and activity;
- Creating a more child friendly society – to consider and explore how Scotland can become more child friendly and to develop ideas on how such a drive to work to change our wider culture could be taken forward;
- To examine the current landscape of measurement, indicators and targets and suggest how these can be simplified and improved;
- To develop a clear overview – through the range of information and knowledge which already exist of the range of services in place across Scotland and to consider how effective practice can be shared and built upon more systematically
- Simplifying and consolidating funding streams to consider the range of actual and potential funding support which exists for early years and early intervention and how to consider how these resources might be pulled and utilised more effectively in the future
- To consider how a “bias for action” might be embedded across services and activity on early years, both at national and local level;
- Championing improvement in early years – to identify practical steps which might be taken to build leadership to encourage and support the development of networks of champions at local and national level;
- To consider how early years support in services can be given greater priority; existing provision sustained and capacity built into the future – this should include, among other things, consideration of a possible statutory underpinning of early years as well as possible short term measures to sustain existing provision in light of public sector spending reductions
- Building and enabling greater parental, community and volunteer involvement – to identify steps which can be taken to build wider capacity and involvement to providing support in services to young children and families.

2.13 The emerging themes set out in Section 7 of the report are consistent with the priorities set out in both the Early Years Framework and subsequent associated reports.

3. PROCESS OF THE REVIEW

3.1 A small team representing early education and childcare; primary schools, NHS Ayrshire & Arran; social work services; educational psychology services and educational specialist services chaired by the Head of Service:

Community Support was established to agree a process by which the Early Years Review would be carried out.

- 3.2 One of the key challenges was to ensure that there were as many stakeholders as possible involved in the review and in particular, that there were representative views of parents and carers in the process.
- 3.3 Consideration was also given to the best means of engaging stakeholders recognising the resource limitations for staff to lead the review and secondly the timescale for completion.
- 3.4 It was therefore agreed that a CD-Rom would be produced which set out to exemplify the work carried out with children and parents/carers and an associated set of key questions for consideration. It was agreed that a workshop should be held in the north of the authority and one separately in the south of the authority, comprising stakeholders from across educational services; social work services; health services; partner providers and parent/carers.
- 3.5 The CD-Rom was produced in house and locally to reduce cost.
- 3.6 In total, 65 staff across services attended both workshops and 32 parents/carers.
- 3.7 CD-Rom's were issued to all nurseries, primary schools, special schools and partner providers with a view to workshops being organised with parents/carers and staff. CD-Rom's were also issued to colleagues within NHS Ayrshire & Arran and Social Work Services. Nurseries/schools held workshops with parents and staff or meetings with parent committees/parent councils. One school issued a questionnaire to parents in addition to the workshop. Workshop prompts were developed to support facilitators.
- 3.8 The consultation exercise sought to promote an open discussion on the nature of early years services, and through this debate identify the key service characteristics that were of importance to stakeholders. There was no requirement to explore particular structures of provision and how this might manifest itself in, for example, the status of particular establishments or services. It was far more important to elicit views on the future emphasis, priorities, aims and vision for the service at this stage. The key questions therefore were:
 - How can we support families to develop nurturing relationships with their children?
 - What early intervention approaches have a positive impact on child development?
 - What do services need to do to ensure your child has a quality learning experience between age 3 – 8 years?
 - How can we better integrate play and active learning up until age 8?
 - How better can services work with families as partners?

- How can we best support children who have additional support needs in their transition from nursery to primary?

The questions were kept open ended to ensure as wide and far reaching debate as possible. In total 33 educational establishments submitted responses:

- 12 Primary Schools
- 6 Primary Schools & Nursery Classes
- 2 Primary School, Nursery & Family Centre
- 1 Special School
- 11 Nursery Schools
- 3 Nursery & Family Centres
- 1 Partner Provider

Overall, parents/carers were very positive about the consultation and valued the fact that they were involved. A very small minority didn't like the Carousel approach to the two large workshops and would have preferred options presented to them, rather than open ended questions.

4. KEY EMERGING THEMES

4.1 There were wide ranging views expressed during the consultation. The recurring themes are set out below:

- The importance of a clear vision for services to children in their earliest years and their families
- Services should have an ethos which is welcoming, accessible and non stigmatising
- Pre-birth support should start in school with parenting as part of the curriculum
- Pregnant mums should have support in place during pregnancy if they are considered to be vulnerable
- Parenting support/programmes essential such as Solihull
- Access to health visitors should be more accessible and flexible, for example, drop in sessions in nurseries and closer links established between health visitors and school nurses
- Potential for co-location of staff working with families with very young children
- There is little in place for families for children under 3 years of age unless there is an identified need for referral to a Nursery and Family Centre
- More community involvement such as developing the role of volunteers; parent/toddler groups; mentoring support
- The importance of play in a child's development at home and in nursery and primary school
- The role of the teacher and early years workers essential in both nursery and primary 1
- Seamless transitions between nursery and primary starting earlier

- Joint continuing professional development for the 'Early Level' of Curriculum for Excellence
 - Resources need to be flexible to shape around the needs of the child
- 4.2 Running concurrently with the consultation are two pieces of work, namely, (i) reviewing the effectiveness of transitions between nursery and primary and (ii) reviewing trends in nursery education places across East Ayrshire. These will be concluded over the summer and reported on as part of the review.
- 4.3 Professor Deacon's report provided a summary of some of the points raised by Early Years Practitioners which are consistent with the messages received in relation to East Ayrshire's consultation. Some of the shared key messages include:
- All children deserve the best possible start in life and the building blocks for the future are laid down in the early years.
 - In the early years you capture the whole family ... creating an environment which builds family confidence about aspirations to learning and emotional wellbeing;
 - Parents need to know how big an impact they can have, and need encouragement;
 - A range of health and social services need to be available through early years centres;
 - Centres/nursery/others need to work in partnership to provide the best care for children and families;
 - Better multi-agency working e.g. joint training so people develop shared ethos and language;
 - Further developing the role of volunteering;

5. TAKING FORWARD THE EMERGING THEMES

- 5.1 What do we know about the needs of very young children in East Ayrshire?
- 19.2% of babies in East Ayrshire are exclusively breastfed at 6 – 8 weeks compared to 26.4% nationally.
 - The most common age range for children on the child protection register is 0 – 4 years.
 - In 2009/10 there were 37 referrals for pre-birth assessments
 - 250 children under 3 years of age needed support in one of the Council's nursery and family centres in 2010/11 or were placed with a day carer.
 - 2,670 sessional ante or pre-school educational places were accessed in 2010/11
 - 177 children 3-5 years have additional support needs
- 5.2 The governments vision for Scotland's Children is reflected in the following outcomes collectively known as SHANARRI:

Children should be:

- **SAFE** - protected from abuse, neglect or harm at home, at school and in the community
- **HEALTHY** – having the highest attainable standards of physical and mental health, access to suitable health care, and support and learning to make healthy and safe choices
- **ACHIEVING** – being supported and guided in their learning and in the development of their skills, confidence and self-esteem at home, in nursery and school and in the community
- **NURTURED** – having a nurturing place to live, in a family setting with additional health if needed or, where this is not possible, in a suitable care setting;
- **ACTIVE** – having opportunities to take part in activities such as play, recreation and sport which contribute to healthy growth and development, both at home and in the community;
- **RESPECTED** – having the opportunity, along with carers, to be heard and involved in decisions which affect them;
- **RESPONSIBLE** – having opportunities and encouragement to play active and responsible roles in their nurseries, schools and communities and where necessary, having appropriate guidance and supervision including having help to overcome social, educational, physical and economic inequalities and being accepted as part of the community in which they live and learn;
- **INCLUDED** - having help to overcome social, educational, physical and economic inequalities and being accepted as part of the community in which they live and learn.

These are essential to support the aspiration for all children to be:

- *Successful learners*
- *Confident individuals*
- *Responsible citizens*
- *Effective contributors*

5.3 Based on the emerging themes what would an overall vision for children in their early years look like in East Ayrshire?

The vision expressed for all citizens of East Ayrshire in the Community Plan is that *“East Ayrshire will be a place with strong, vibrant communities where everyone has a good quality of life and access to opportunities, choices and high quality services which are sustainable, accessible and meet people’s needs”*

5.4 The Children and Young Person’s Services Plan, set within the context of the overall Community Plan provides the strategic direction for children’s services. The national objectives and the Council’s overall vision set out in the Community Plan and the Children and Young Person’s Services Plan in simple terms, provides a context for the overall vision for East Ayrshire’s youngest children:

Each young child in East Ayrshire, including those who are not yet born to have the best start in life.

5.5 The four key principles to support the overall vision is that:

- The **rights** of the child is paramount;
- **Relationships** provide the basis for babies and young children's development and learning;
- **Responsive care and learning** means knowing and accepting each child and respecting each child as an individual;
- Each child should be treated with **respect** (remembering that each baby and child is a person who has the right to be responded to and treated with respect at all times).

5.6 In taking these principles forward, there are nine features which should be adopted in practice across services. These have been taken from Learning and Teaching Scotland (2010) *Pre-Birth to Three: Positive Outcomes for Scotland's Children and Families* and are relevant to all services that work with or support children aged 0 to 8 years. They support the effective delivery of services to all children in terms of their care, learning and emotional and social development.

- The role of staff

Staff bring their own qualities, values and principles to working with children in their early years and it is important to recognise the impact that these attributes have on children. There is an increased recognition of the need to have a core set of skills and competencies across children's services as well as recognising and maximising the use of appropriate professional qualifications.

Effective leaders promote distributed leadership at all levels which empowers staff to support, promote and improve evidence based practice.

High quality and relevant continuous professional development is fundamental to all staff working with children.

- Attachments

Responsive and caring adults are essential for young children to develop and thrive. Secure attachments also help young children to develop the skills, values and attributes which are essential for them to become confident individuals, successful learners, effective contributors and responsible citizens.

- Transitions

Where transitions are well supported, children can learn to manage change in a positive way. Effective transitions can provide opportunities to develop self worth, confidence and the capacity to be resilient in the process of dealing with change. Practitioners need to ensure effective collaborative approaches to ensure smooth transition.

Partnership working with parents/carers is key to supporting effective transitions.

- Intervening early based on observations; assessment, planning
Staff across services should place observation, assessment and planning at the heart of their practice. This should involve children in making decisions about their next steps whether in relation to a child's learning or care.
- Partnerships
There is a key commitment to building greater capacity for parents so that they can improve outcomes for their children and themselves. Working with parents involves understanding and respecting differences, individual circumstances and the changing needs of children and their families.

Effective partnership working across agencies is essential through the development of strong and collaborative partnership links with relevant agencies within communities. In some instances this may lead to better integration. In all cases it must lead to improved outcomes for children.

- Health and Wellbeing
Staff are in a strong position to be significant and positive role models for children and parents and should be aware of their responsibilities in the promotion of health and well-being. Health and wellbeing in the earliest stages of a child's life will lead to improved outcomes later in life.
- Literacy and Numeracy
Literacy and numeracy are fundamental to all areas of learning. Literacy and numeracy skills are essential in improving children's confidence and well-being, building meaningful relationships and understanding their own place and role in society. Building on a child's learning as part of a seamless transition to primary school within the context of a Curriculum for Excellence is essential.
- Environments
The environment both indoors and outdoor plays an important role in the development of children, from their earliest experiences. Children learn from and adapt to their environment as they build a self of self from the attitudes and values from the significant people around them. Adults who are affectionate, interested, reliable and responsive help children to develop a sense of trust and a positive self-image.
- Play
Play is very powerful in promoting children's development and learning. Children need the freedom to play, to practise skills, explore the world around them and develop knowledge and understanding in their own way and their own time.

Staff who are reflective and who continually review and consider their role in supporting children as they play know when to intervene, interact or use this time to make meaningful observations.

The above nine features will be developed into work streams with an associated action plan and presented to a future Cabinet for consideration.

6. PERSONNEL / LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Nil.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Nil at this stage.

8. COMMUNITY PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The overall vision for children in their earliest years and associated work streams are wholly consistent with the Community Plan.

9. RISK ASSESSMENT

9.1 Nil.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 Members of Cabinet are asked to:

- (i) remit the Executive Director of Educational and Social Services to return to Cabinet with the outcome of work being developed from the work streams; and
- (ii) otherwise note the content of the report.

Graham R Short
Executive Director of Educational & Social Services

May 2011
KG/SR

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

NIL

Members wishing further information should contact Kay Gilmour, Head of Service: Community Support, Tel: 01563 576104.

IMPLEMENTATION OFFICER: KAY GILMOUR