

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

EDUCATION COMMITTEE - 27 MAY 2003

INTEGRATED STRATEGY FOR EARLY YEARS CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

Report by Director of Educational and Social Services

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek Committee approval for the response set out in Appendix 1 to the Scottish Executive Consultation Document on an Integrated Early Years Strategy.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Scottish Executive issued a consultation document in April 2003 regarding an Integrated Early Years Policy. The document sets out five key outcomes for consultation. Importantly, the consultation document had been prepared from across three ministerial portfolios.

- 2.2 The key outcomes are:

- improved children's health
- improved children's social and emotional development
- improved children's ability to learn
- strengthened families and communities
- reduced barriers to employment - especially for lone parents

3. CONSULTATION PROCESS IN EAST AYRSHIRE

- 3.1 In order to reflect the integrated approach taken by the Scottish Executive both written responses were requested from individual organisations and a multi-agency seminar was held on 20 May 2003 to ensure that the response reflects an integrated approach from a range of agencies delivering early years services in East Ayrshire.

- 3.2 Those involved in the consultation included:

- Early Years Heads
- Learning Partnerships
- Social Work Services
- NHS Ayrshire & Arran (Health Board, Primary Care Trust and LHCC)
- Childcare Partnership
- Voluntary Sector Organisations

- 3.3 Appendix 1 sets out the proposed response to the consultation document.

4. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The consultation document itself has no direct policy implications at this stage, however, the final document will have potential implications for policy for children's service planning and educational priority for improvement objectives.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Nil

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 It is recommended that members of the Education Committee approve:
- (i) the response to the Integrated Early Years Consultation document; and
 - (ii) otherwise note the contents of the report.

John Mulgrew
Director of Educational and Social Services

12 may 2003
KG/SR

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Integrated Strategy for the Early Years Consultation Document

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

IMPLEMENTATION OFFICER: KAY GILMOUR

**EAST AYRSHIRE RESPONSE TO AN INTEGRATED STRATEGY
FOR THE EARLY YEARS**

1. **Are the proposed outcomes the right ones to let us measure if we are successfully meeting the needs of children in the early years? Are there any that you think should be added in and if so, are they capable of measurement? Will the proposed outcomes allow us to measure if agencies are successfully targeting the needs of more vulnerable and deprived children and families? Is there the right mix between “hard” quantifiable indicators and “softer” qualitative data?**

The overall outcomes are generally endorsed.

Poverty is a factor across a number of the proposed outcomes and it is questionable whether the better integration of services alone will have an impact.

‘barriers to employment’

There can be adequate childcare for a return to employment or to ensure access to employment, however, if there is no employment to access then the measures become meaningless and would not solely be the result of an integrated approach.

‘improvement in children’s ability to learn’

There needs to be a recognition that as well as attainment in schools there requires to be a focus on overall achievement. Although it is acknowledged this is more difficult to measure, if the only success criteria in this outcome is attainment then it will be too narrow for many families.

‘improve children’s social and emotional development’

There needs to be clarity about what is to be measured. Rather than the number of referrals to the hearing system being reduced, it is possible that referrals to the Reporter might increase as more vulnerable children are identified. Lower referrals may not necessarily be the best measure and perhaps a better measure would be the number of vulnerable children in nurseries which would reflect that we are meeting the target group of children.

The impact on children of parents who are misusing drugs and/or alcohol is significant and is evident through the number of children on the child protection register. Should one of the indicators to **improve children’s health** be a reduction in the number or the proportion of parents abusing alcohol and drugs. The increase in the number of women breastfeeding,

smoking etc. are all to do with 'mum's' behaviour and assume that a mum is already in contact with services. This presumably is only the case if she has a baby and perhaps the measurement should therefore be refined around a second pregnancy.

General

There is no indication of the timescale over which these outcomes will be monitored and measured. The danger is that there is an expectation that there will be some impact evidenced over a relatively short timescale which is unrealistic. Unless there is some consistent means of collecting information about the measures, in the absence of national data recording across all measures, there will be a significant challenge.

The Local Government Scotland Act 2003 sets out the requirement through Community Planning to ensure public consultation. There is clearly nothing in the document which supports that these outcomes have been the result of consultation which has taken place with communities. There is ample evidence to suggest that priorities in local communities are not always the same priorities set by either the statutory sector or potentially the voluntary sector and there is an immediate tension where resources are then allocated.

The planning, aims, outcomes and performance measures guidance issued in late 2001 does not necessarily match the outcomes proposed in this document. There is an expectation that the previously issued indicators will be collected through Children's Service Planning arrangements and local authorities and their partners have already started to gather baseline information as required by the Scottish Executive.

2. What changes might be needed to planning mechanisms to ensure that the range of early years interests reflect in this strategy are involved fully in service planning? What would this mean for the role of childcare partnerships? Would early years planning fora provide a way forward?

East Ayrshire and its partners would not support an additional Forum in relation to planning. East Ayrshire Childcare Partnership is already an integral part of children's service planning and a representative of the Partnership sits on the East Ayrshire Children's Service Plan Strategic Group. The Chair of the Partnership leads on the theme 'A Good Start in Life'.

The Scottish Executive does however require to issue guidance about structure and content of plans which remain consistent over at least a three year planning cycle.

In summary, fewer Forums, greater direction, focus on local authority and planning partners responsibilities and targets that can actually be measured

would be of great assistance.

This needs to include the bringing together of Child Health Strategies.

3. What barriers are there to developing and delivering integrated early years services in your area? What changes and actions would remove these barriers and improve service delivery? How far would the proposals in this draft strategy help?

East Ayrshire is a mix of urban and rural communities and the geographic isolation of many communities is a challenge to delivering the better integration of early years services. There are clearly resource implications for rural authorities.

Learning Partnerships are established in East Ayrshire which already reflect a multi-agency perspective through clusters of schools. The local authority and its partners are therefore in a strong position to further develop and deliver integrated early years services. However, there remains the need to reduce any barriers through different organisational cultures and different planning cycles.

In addition, the short term funding associated with many developments is unhelpful and doesn't allow agencies to effectively consider the issues of sustainability. There is already a very well established close working relationship between education early years services, health and social work and this needs to continue to be built on.

Support from the Executive to reduce barriers in relation to systems would be most helpful. The most pressing need is to reduce the barriers for sharing information between agencies and to learn from for the joint futures agenda in relation to better alignment of different agencies budgets.

There can be limitations to delivering services for very vulnerable children including those with special educational needs through nursery schools and classes which operate term time only. A more flexible approach to 52 weeks service delivery for those who require it needs to be considered. This clearly has staffing implications for all local authorities, and potentially the voluntary and private sector.

4. Are the proposals on monitoring and evaluation sufficient to ensure we are making progress against the set of outcomes? What might agencies need to help them adequately monitor their performance?

Although the hard quantifiable indicators are clear the softer qualitative data is difficult to measure and without seeing a draft evaluation framework it is difficult to make further comment. The work currently being carried out by the University of Edinburgh looking at the feasibility of evaluating the impact

of early years services may well provide some answers.

As there is a significant challenge to monitoring and collecting data on the softer measures, it would be the view of East Ayrshire Council and its partners that the evaluation study being considered on the effectiveness of early years policies would be the most productive way to move forward. This of course assumes that there is an understanding that any evaluation will be longitudinal in nature.

In relation to monitoring hard data, there is a need to bring systems closer together and clearly one of the objectives of the Changing Children's Service Fund is to provide pumping monies to enable local authorities and their partners to do this. Recognising that this is work in progress, there needs time for this to be completed.

5. It would be helpful if you could give any examples of service provision that, in your view, particularly demonstrates good practice.

The development of East Ayrshire's Learning Partnerships, although in their early stages are already proving to be highly successful in the better integration of children's services. An evaluation of the first year of Learning Partnerships is due to be conducted in the summer of 2003 and this may prove useful to share with others. Learning Partnerships comprise heads of early years establishments; primary schools; secondary schools and special schools; social work services; health services; community learning and development and leisure and recreation services.

The development of Fit Ayrshire Babies in East Ayrshire seeks to support parents understand the benefits of physical play. In the first year of operation children under 3 were targeted. All children in nurseries are part of the programme which now includes Topstart.

Family Care Workers attached to Family Centres support vulnerable families with young children in the community. They provide services within the Centres and in people's home. Their work is part of essential care planning with social work, education and health.