


6 December 2023

Subject:	Sandwell Early Years Priorities
Presenting Officer and Organisation  Quality Early Years & Childcare Team	Sara Baber Early Years Manager Sandwell MBC sara_baber@sandwell.gov.uk
Purpose of Report	Information

1 Recommendations

- 1.1 To consider and comment upon the Sandwell Early Years Priorities.
- 1.2 That the Board are briefed on current priorities and challenges in Early Years

2 Links to the following Board Priorities

Priority 1	We will help keep people healthier for longer That children are School Ready and have the skills that enable them to achieve well at school and have a productive working life.
Priority 2	We will help keep people safe and support Communities We will develop a childcare sector that supports parents as well as children in localities close to home.
Priority 3	We will work together to join up services Sandwell Early Years and Childcare Team will actively seek out other services to ensure that services to parents and children are co ordinated and with a shared agenda.
Priority 4	We will work closely with local people, partners and providers of services We will fulfil our statutory duty to provide advice, guidance, and support to all childcare and Early Years providers and work with them to ensure that working parents are able to access childcare where they need too.

4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 Sandwell's Good Level of Development measure taken at aged 5 years remains 6% behind national results. Communication and language are the key to early success at school as much of the curriculum relies on children being able to articulate their thoughts and give explanations as to why things happen. From the WellComm data collected as a baseline of 3-year-olds in PVI nurseries (based on data of 1815 children) 45% had speech, language and communication below their chronological age on entry. 24% of these children were more than 12 months behind their chronological age.
- 4.2 Following the Sandwell Speech, Language and Communication pathway, referring to external services and delivering appropriate interventions the same children were rescreened in the summer term. Now only 11% were 12 months or more behind and the number of children now screening developmentally appropriate rose to 73%.
- 4.3 In Sandwell improvements were made in all Prime areas of learning of the EYFS at the end of Reception. Nationally, these figures all remained the same. This would indicate that an appropriate curriculum was being delivered to meet young children's needs.
- 4.4 Priority is given to developing quality adult to child interactions in all visits to schools and settings and features in the CPD training programme provided by the team. Communication and Language is also a feature of the Family Hubs action and delivery plans. Through Family Hubs funding we have been able to ensure all Schools, settings, Family Hubs and Childminders have access to a current WellComm toolkit and have conducted a series of WellComm Roadshows for all providers to ensure consistency of screening and use of data.
- 4.5 Developing quality childcare is an important task of the team. We intensively support the 3 Inadequate and 4 Requires Improvement settings as well as other settings that might give us cause for concern. The team also provide support to Schools when early years practice is considered weak or inadequate by the School Improvement Adviser or Ofsted.
- 4.6 The team also provide support to people who are looking to establish childcare in Sandwell or existing providers looking to expand their provision.
- 4.7 Sandwell has lost approximately 15-20 Day Care Nursery providers since the Pandemic and approximately 25-30 Childminders. Many parents were forced to stop using childcare and then did not return when

they were able. This made some nurseries financially unsustainable. Childcare work is generally low paid work, long hours and holds responsibilities of paperwork, planning, assessment etc. We have lost too many good, experienced practitioners to other employment where the stresses are lower, and responsibilities are less. Sandwell is not alone in this fact, there is a current national recruitment and retention crisis in the childcare sector.

- 4.8 In the Spring 2023 Budget the Government announced a big Childcare expansion initiative. This was in 2 parts.
1. Extended Entitlements for 30 hours funding for working parents of children aged 9mths – 36mths on a gradual timetable from April 2024 – September 2025.
 2. The National Wraparound Childcare Programme. There is a £289m investment to create additional capacity in the wraparound sector to support all families who need to access wrap around childcare from 8am-6pm for their primary school aged children during term time.

Both initiatives are about removing the barriers to work for parents.

- 4.9 The Covid pandemic saw our uptake of 3–4-year-old nursery funding drop significantly. Traditionally, uptake had been very healthy at 98% - 101% variable. The uptake dropped as low as 52% in 2020 and has steady improved. However, the average take up was 92% in 2022 so in the summer of 2023 we launched our participation campaign and we have seen an increase in funded places this autumn term compared with autumn term 2022 so we have reason to be optimistic that the yearly average will increase in 2023-24.
- 4.10 We have recently started a campaign to encourage the use of childminders and to try to recruit more people to be childminders. This will be vital if we are to increase our childcare provision for working parents. Childminders often offer a more personal service for children with SEND and can be more flexible for working parents who work shifts and unusual hours.
- 4.11 Sandwell Quality Early Years and Childcare Team are very proud of the joint working we have fostered with many agencies outside of the Education Directorate to support parents and young children. These agencies include Family Hubs, Health Visiting Team, Speech and Language Therapy, Early Years Inclusive Learning Services, Sandwell Library Service, Dental Service, Public Health, Sandwell Children's Trust and voluntary organisations within the borough.

5 Engagement

- 5.1 We are required by the Childcare Act 2006 to conduct an annual Childcare Sufficiency Review. This will involve a large consultation with providers, schools, and parents. The Childcare Sufficiency Report is published in the Autumn Term each year and it guides the development of childcare for working parents. This is published on the SMBC website.
- 5.2 The expansion of 30-hour Entitlements and the National Wraparound Programme will involve us doing some more engagement activities in specific areas of need over the next 5 terms as we support new providers and existing providers to expand the number of places they offer.

6 Implications

Resources:	The Early Years Team will require the support of the Council while continue to raise outcomes for our youngest children and develop the number of places the DfE are estimating. There is Department for Education funding to ensure a Wraparound Lead is in place to support the growth of the programme.
Legal and Governance:	A multi-agency Governance Group will be established to oversee the Capital element and expansion funding for the Wraparound programme.
Risk:	The recruitment and retention crisis in the childcare sector will impact on the number of new places that we can generate due to providers not being able to recruit staff.
Equality:	Equality of access and inclusion of all children is actively sought by all providers.
Health and Wellbeing:	That all young children are safe and nurtured and develop strong personal, social and emotional skills and are capable and resilient learners.
Social Value:	The Governments new childcare initiative is specifically to remove the barriers to work for parents to enable them to take up employment or work longer hours if they wish.
Climate Change:	There were no climate change implications directly arising as a result of this report.
Corporate Parenting:	To ensure that the youngest children in our care have access to high quality early years provision that will meet their needs and support them to be developmentally ready for their school life.

6 Appendices

Appendix One – Presentation

7. Background Papers

None.