

DECISION-MAKER:	CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES		
SUBJECT:	EARLY YEARS PROVISION IMPROVEMENT STRATEGY.		
DATE OF DECISION:	29 JANUARY 2013		
REPORT OF:	SENIOR MANAGER CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE STRATEGIC COMMISSIONING, EDUCATION AND INCLUSION		
<u>CONTACT DETAILS</u>			
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STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY			
None			

BRIEF SUMMARY

There are 360 Early Years Providers across the City. Early Years Providers are either private or voluntary group settings, nurseries, or childminders, who provide day care provision for 0 – 4 year olds. Parents make personal decisions about using and financing Early Years Provision between the ages of 0 – 3 years of age. From the age of 3 the Local Authority does cover the cost, through the Dedicated School Grant, of 15 hours of access to early years provision for all 3 and 4 year olds.. There is a growing body of evidence showing the negative impact on children's life chances if they do not develop to their full potential in their earliest years (Field, 2010, Allen, 2011). The experience of a high quality pre school can ensure that a child develops their potential. High quality provision is dependent on committed qualified staff. Currently 78% of providers have been judged as 'Good' or 'Outstanding' by Ofsted, the national regulatory inspection service. This performance has directly impacted on the increase in children, at the age of 5, securing the national average Early Years Foundation Stage Profile, 35.8% in 2006 to 56.3% in 2012.

Since 2005, Southampton City Council has invested in an Early Years team. The Early Years team comprises qualified teachers with early years specialism, working alongside the private and voluntary sector to improve the quality of provision available to children. This report summarises the Early Years Provision Improvement Strategy, (see Appendix 1) the tool for supporting/enabling Early Years Providers to provide high quality provision. The strategy is based on the premise that the Local Authority has a duty, through legislation, to support and enable the growth of high quality Early Years Provision, within the City, for under five year olds. Only provision that is judged as 'Good' or 'Outstanding' against the Ofsted framework, are deemed to be offering high quality. With 78% of providers graded 'Good' or 'Outstanding' there is still significant work to ensure all children have access to high quality provision. However, this compares favourably with the national average figure of 74%.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- (i) To approve the Early Years Provision Improvement Strategy, as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report.
- (ii) To delegate authority to the Director of Children's Services to remove providers from the Early years Provider Register following the procedure set out in the Early Years Provision Improvement Strategy.

REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Government issued new statutory guidance that local authorities in England must have regard to when fulfilling their duties to secure free early education for 3 and 4-year-olds, and 2 year olds from September 2013. The Early Years Provision Improvement Strategy reflects the new guidance.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

2. The option to do nothing has been considered and rejected as this would mean the Council were: not working to secure high quality early years provisions for the City's under 5s; failing to compile with the new statutory guidance or represent value for money.

DETAIL (Including consultation carried out)

3. The Childcare Act 2006 created new requirements for local authorities, which were updated in September 2012 to:
 - Improve the well-being and reduce inequalities between young children in their area.
 - Deliver the free entitlement through early years providers who deliver the full Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and are registered with Ofsted or are schools which are exempt from registration with Ofsted.
 - Provide information, advice and training to childcare providers.
4. The new guidance clarifies that local authorities should only fund providers rated 'inadequate' or 'satisfactory' if they can evidence a commitment to improving the quality of their provision by meeting additional eligibility criteria. Any provider judged as 'inadequate' or 'satisfactory' would be supported to improve their provision. On occasion this might require intervention from the Local Authority, against a provider's wishes. The Strategy clearly outlines the situation in which the Local authority would intervene, when a provider is judged by Ofsted as 'inadequate' or 'satisfactory' with no evidence of improvement, or when serious concerns have been raised by the public, including professionals, investigated and found to be proven. The intervention could include the Local Authority removing a provider from the Early Years Provider Funding register. The register is used by parents to identify Providers that qualify for the Early Years funding of 15 hours per week, from the Local Authority.
5. The new Early Years Improvement Strategy describes the: legislative context; the approach to developing the early years workforce including levels of support for providers; process for intervention with settings that are failing, judged by Ofsted to be inadequate or satisfactory; the process for removing a

provider from the Council's Early Years Funding Register where provision continues to be inadequate or is assessed as unable to sustain improvement, see Appendix 1.

6. The Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership, the Early Years Leadership Team and Early Years settings and Childminders have been consulted on the revised Improvement Strategy.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Capital/Revenue

7. The Council funds early years providers who are registered with Ofsted, to provide free places for 3 and 4 year olds for 570 hours per year, and some targeted places for 2 year olds. The fund is distributed via a Nursery Education Funding Agreement with each provider funded from the Dedicated Schools Grant.
8. Settings and childminders, who are registered with Ofsted and meet the criteria, are placed on the Early Years Funding Register. The providers are funded by the Council for each eligible 2, 3, and 4 year old. In order to receive the funding every provider signs a Nursery Funding Agreement annually. The Funding Agreement is to be revised for April 2013 to reflect the new Improvement Strategy and the Statutory Guidance.
9. The Strategy will be implemented from within existing resources including a multi professional team of early years specialists to support and improve quality in early years provision.

Property/Other

10. None.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Statutory power to undertake proposals in the report:

11. The Childcare Act 2006 has key provisions relating to funded early years provision:-
 - Places a duty on local authorities to secure free early years provision for eligible children in their area, section 7.
 - Gives local authorities the power to place conditions of funding on providers of childcare, section 9.
 - Places a duty on local authorities to secure the provision of information, and training to childcare providers and childcare workers, section 13.
12. The Government issued "Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities on the Delivery of Free Early Education for Three and Four Year Olds and Securing Sufficient Childcare" in September 2012.

Other Legal Implications:

13. In carrying out it's duties under the Strategy, the Council shall have regard to it's duties under the Equalities Act 2010 and the Human Rights Act 1998. In particular, the removal process has been determined having regard to the article 6 rights to a fair trial and the Council is satisfied that the provisions of the intervention and removal strategy and necessary and proportionate

having regard to the need to ensure the safeguarding of children and ensuring the provision of safe and high quality learning environments for children in the City.

POLICY FRAMEWORK IMPLICATIONS

14. The proposals in this report are wholly in accordance with the Council’s Policy Framework.

KEY DECISION? Yes

WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED:	All
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SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices

1.	Early Years Provision Improvement Strategy
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Documents In Members’ Rooms

1.	Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities on the Delivery of Free Early Education for Three and Four Year Olds and Securing Sufficient Childcare-September 2012. Department for Education.
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Equality Impact Assessment

Do the implications/subject of the report require an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) to be carried out.	No
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Other Background Documents

Equality Impact Assessment and Other Background documents available for inspection at:

Title of Background Paper(s)	Relevant Paragraph of the Access to Information Procedure Rules / Schedule 12A allowing document to be Exempt/Confidential (if applicable)
1. None	