



Open Report on behalf of Heather Sandy, Executive Director - Children's Services

Report to:	Lincolnshire Schools' Forum
Date:	29 June 2023
Subject:	Early Years Annual Report

Summary:

This report is to provide the forum with:

- An update on the support provided to the early years and childcare sector in Lincolnshire during 2022-23.
- Outline the priorities for the service during 2023-24.

Recommendation(s):

The forum is asked to:

- Note the content of the report.
- Agree the priorities for 2023-24.

Background

Early Years and Childcare Support (EYCC) provides information, support, challenge, and training opportunities to all early years and childcare providers within Lincolnshire. This includes Academies, Schools, Private, Voluntary, and independent providers, Registered Childminders and Out of School Clubs. For the benefit of this report, these will be referred to as "providers".

Early Years and Childcare Support offers providers access to effective support to deliver the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework and ensure there is sufficient provision available for families in Lincolnshire. This support enables providers to effectively meet the needs of children and has a particular emphasis on the most disadvantaged and vulnerable families, to reduce inequalities in child development and promote the school readiness agenda.

The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) early years block funding supports 2-, 3- and 4-year-old provision. The total budget for 3- & 4-year-olds in 2023-24 is indicative and this has been calculated at £37.089m which includes additional funding for 30 hours. Centrally retained funding for direct early years services is £1.627m during 2023-24, which represents 4.39% of the budget allocation.

The centrally retained budget is utilised to provide a range of support services to the early years and childcare sector, as described within this report.

Early Years and Childcare Support has responsibility for six key areas within Children's Services. These are:

1. Funding and delivery of the Early Years Entitlements for 2-, 3- & 4-Year-Olds
2. Provision of sufficient and sustainable early years and childcare provision for children aged 0-14 years (18 years for those with SEND)
3. Delivery of quality provision and educational outcomes for children (within the EYFS framework)
4. Professional development and workforce training in the early years and childcare sector
5. Inclusion funding and SEN advice and support
6. Partnership working in relation to school readiness including health and the quality and delivery of Children's Centres

Lincolnshire has a diverse marketplace, made up of 826 Ofsted registered childcare providers, including registered childminders, private, voluntary and independent group-based provision and early years provision delivered by schools and academies.

The childcare provision in Lincolnshire allows working families to access full day care for children aged 0-5 years, with 600 providers offering the Early Years Entitlements (EYE) 15 hours or 30 hours for eligible 2-, 3- & 4-year-olds, 66 non-funded childminders, 100 schools and academies delivering some form of out of school care and 60 private or voluntary providers delivering provision for school aged children up to 14 years (18 years for children with a Special Educational Need or Disability).

Following the EYCC annual report to Lincolnshire's Schools' Forum in June 2022, the service identified key priorities for the last academic year. With the aim to drive forward plans for the Family Hubs Programme and key reforms to service collaboration to ensure we are delivering the best possible outcomes for children and families in Lincolnshire.

Updates on the key priorities in the Early Years and Childcare Support Service in 2022-23:

1. Increase take-up of Early Years Entitlement places through effective outreach activities

Evidence shows that attending high quality early education has a lasting impact on social and behavioural outcomes of young children. The entitlements make childcare more accessible and affordable for families and enables them to access training, work or increase their working hours if they wish to do so.

By May 2023, 81% of the total eligible 2-year-olds are accessing childcare places in Lincolnshire. This is above the national average and outreach activities are being targeted

at areas with lower take-up, to support families and identify if sufficient childcare is available to meet the needs of families.

Extensive marketing is being disseminated. A dedicated outreach officer within the Early Years team is actively engaging with locality teams, other professionals and attending events across Lincolnshire to reach families and inform them of the Government offers. From the recent parent survey, 54% of families said they were unaware of the benefits of Tax-Free Childcare. There will be a continued priority to support the dissemination of information regarding Government offers and is engaging with other professionals to ensure parents are encouraged to access childcare provision.

All 3- and 4-year-olds are entitled to 15 hours a week of free early learning. Take-up was at 90% nationally in 2022 and take-up in Lincolnshire was at 92%. The Early Years and Childcare Support team has been working in collaboration with locality teams, health visitors, childcare providers and a wide variety of partners to share data to encourage families to access their entitlements and improve take-up. There is a continued commitment to ensure that funded early education is available to support the most disadvantaged 2-year-olds in Lincolnshire and further collaborative work is on-going to encourage children into places at the earliest opportunity.

2. Review the sufficiency of childcare provision across Lincolnshire and implement a strategy for supporting the future sustainability of the marketplace

The annual Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA) has been completed for 2023 and data is currently being validated to understand the current market position.

Following the review in 2022, a childcare delivery plan was developed and schools forum approved the local authorities request to convert £0.780m from Dedicated Schools Grant reserves, to invest in the development of new childcare places in areas across Lincolnshire with a sufficiency deficit.

A Disapplication Request was submitted to the DfE for Secretary of State (SoS) approval. The Local Authority has successfully received approval for this conversion and launched the capital grant programme in May 2023.

A parent survey has just completed, hosted on the Let's talk Lincolnshire online platform. A record 1,893 responses were received through this platform. This is a 22% increase from last year and the most respondents to any LCC survey, showing that parents want to be heard.

The responses from Boston was low, however 35% of the respondents from this area said they were unable to access the childcare they needed. We had a an expected response from South Holland with 39% of parents saying they could not access the provision they need.

Further analysis is needed on this, however initial analysis shows that in all areas parents are finding it difficult to access wrap around a care, this includes breakfast clubs,

afterschool and holiday clubs for school aged children. The predominant reasons for being unable to access childcare being cost and no places locally.

Capital funding will support the development of early years places and we hope the new Government announcements will support Lincolnshire to increase wraparound provision for school aged children.

As part of a package of reforms to early years and childcare, the government announced an investment of £289m over two academic years, from September 2024, to support local authorities to work with schools, trusts and other providers to set up and scale up wraparound childcare provision. This is the first step in the government's ambition for all parents of primary school children who need it to access childcare in their local area from 8am – 6pm.

3. Embed the effective working groups to deliver outcomes identified in the Early Childhood Strategy

This has been superseded by the Family Hubs Programme and Start for Life offer. The working groups have been adapted to ensure these follow the workstreams within the DfE delivery plan for the programme. The Early Childhood Strategy will be developed this coming year to develop this into our Start for Life Strategy. The working groups will contribute to the review of this strategy, including all partners in the review. The governance board will be responsible for signing this off and a final version will be presented to the schools forum next year.

4. Work in partnership with the early years sector to develop and maintain high quality and inclusive education provision

At the beginning of the year Ofsted gradings for early years settings were becoming a growing concern with higher numbers of settings being graded as inadequate than previously seen. EYCC undertook a review of how the safeguarding and welfare requirements are supported in settings and implemented a relational based offer of visits to all settings who were due an inspection in the current cycle. So far those that have since been inspected who have taken up the offer of a visit have achieved a Good rating from Ofsted. The approach has been shared with key colleagues who support the EY sector to ensure there is consistency.

The sector was consulted with on what their worries and concerns were regarding their upcoming inspection and over 100 providers attended sessions to help shape a CPD opportunity. In June, countywide face to face Ofsted Inspection seminars were held based on needs identified by the sector. Approximately 80 practitioners attended from a range of provider types there was positive feedback with the majority of providers telling us they felt more confident following the seminar.

Lincolnshire EYCC was successful in securing a place on a NASEN/DfE funded project for 4 Local Authorities. The project focussed on a whole setting approach to SEND and 15 Lincolnshire setting SENCOs took part and conducted SEND reviews in their setting.

EYCC also trialled partnering with 5 Outstanding Providers to work alongside aspiring settings to achieve at least a good outcome at their next inspection.

EYCC hold termly early years SENCo network, to make these more interactive and to capture the knowledge and experience of the sector, solution circles have been introduced with the support of the LA Practice Advisers from the Quality and Standards team. These are now embedded in the termly sessions so that SENCos can offer advice and guidance to their peers.

In February this year EYCC was also successful in securing an opportunity to work with the National Children's bureau on a small DfE funded project to improve the provision and support for the Home Learning Environment for young children with SEND in the area. This comprised training sessions for both practitioners and parents and we were delighted to be able to involve the Lincolnshire parent Carer Forum in this opportunity.

5. Analyse the GLD from 2022 EYFS profile data and produce a set of targets based on improving children's development outcomes

The GLD this year showed that nationally and locally there was a significant dip in outcomes since 2019. Lincolnshire GLD was 64.1% whilst the National GLD was 65.2% - whilst Lincolnshire remained below national, the gap had narrowed. Data analysed at a district level outlined where some areas had lower outcomes in their GLD and this information has helped inform priority areas linked to the placement of Family Hubs networks.

Lincolnshire as performed better than national in the communication and language goals, however it underperformed in goals linked to self – regulation. This has helped inform what programmes need to be focussed on when looking at the Family Hubs delivery model for Lincolnshire.

Where schools have had significantly lower GLD than national, EYCC has put in a package of support around developing a locality early years network of settings and partner agencies, there are currently 8 of these locality networks in place this year and their outcomes at GLD will be closely monitored. The focus of these networks is around building strong transitions and prioritising school readiness. Updates on these have been shared at the Headteacher briefings throughout the year.

The 2022 EYFS Profile Data was unpredictable following 2 years of assessment disapplication due to pandemic restrictions, a reformed EYFS and new Profile Assessment was launched in 2021 with changes to the early learning goals. There was also uncertainty over the impact of the pandemic lockdowns on children's learning and development, this will need to be closely monitored as we see children who were born in the pandemic move through their early years education.

6. Provide CPD for the sector with a focus on programmes and activities that improve early language and communication including supporting staff to acquire the skills

to enhance children's early language development. SEN Level 2 and Level 3 to enable staff to support those children with the greatest need

Early years providers tell us that increasing numbers of children are presenting at their settings with additional needs and that they are struggling to meet need. EYCC are seeing rising numbers of applications for Inclusion funding and we know that there are rising numbers of younger children for whom Education Health and Care plans are being requested. The most effective resource any setting has is its staff, EYCC has reviewed the CPD offer for SENCOs in EY settings and developed a pathway with new training opportunities including L3 SENCO Award for Early years for current SENCOs, L2 SEND training for aspiring or secondary SENCOs. From 2022 -2023, 50 early years SENCOs have completed the L3 SENCO award by Certsey. Over 100 aspiring SENCOs have been trained in the L2 SENCO award delivered by Liverpool School Improvement.

In 2022-23 EYCC worked in partnership with the DfE to deliver a communication-based programme of CPD to the sector bespoke to Lincolnshire. Over 45 practitioners were trained in ELKLAN, communication friendly spaces and provided with Wellcomm resources to enable them to track children's language and provide targeted support based on need.

EYCC continues to source LSCP training for providers through the Lincolnshire LSCP, in order that settings can meet their requirements under the EYFS. Other mandatory training such as First Aid and Food Hygiene is also secured for the sector. Local and national information shows that the sector need support in developing resilience and managers are needing support to manage the mental health needs of the sector (the Early years Alliance has identified high numbers of practitioners within the sector who are struggling with their mental health [Mental health and the early years workforce | early years alliance \(eyalliance.org.uk\)](https://www.evalliance.org.uk)) EYCC has sourced training to support managers and provide some opportunities for practitioners to build their resilience and self-esteem. Networks and briefings are returning to face to face, however a high number of practitioners are telling us they prefer the online offer for ease of accessibility.

EYCC liaises with the DfE in the roll out and promotion of the DfE COVID recovery programmes which is providing more CPD into the sector including:

- Stronger Practice Hubs: (Pen Green) East Midlands provider offering research-based programmes and linking with local areas to establish needs of the sector
- DfE Online Child Development Tool
- Experts and Mentors (Settings): A peer support programme, the local Area Lead for this is Amy Stancer St Giles Nursery
- Leads and Mentors (Childminders): A Peer Support programme 5 Lincolnshire mentors – 2 of whom are EYCC colleagues.
- L3 SENCO Award : Delivered by Best Practice Network online training 5000 places nationally, Lincolnshire SENCOs have secured 25 places

7. Develop the specification in conjunction with commissioning for the Best Start service

The service specification has been developed and agreed and fits within the vision for a child's first 1,001 days which is a unique period, setting the foundations for lifelong emotional and physical wellbeing. The new service specification has been in place since April this year and is monitored through contract board meetings.

8. Review the quality assurance system for Children Centres to enable localities to produce clear action plans based on analysis of data by working collaboratively with the central team

The quality and assurance for CC is delivered in partnership with other services through learning walks. The learning walks take a restorative approach to identify what's working well, what are we worried about and what needs to happen. The learning walks are linked to the data sets and action plans for each centre to ensure there is a robust approach to planning.

9. Refresh the quality assurance pathways to reflect the new commissioned service.

There is a workstream in place to link the quality and assurance for commissioned services (within Children's Centres) to the overall quality and assurance plan.

10. Self-evaluate our early years' service against minimum and go further standards within the Family Hubs against the draft service specification.

The local authority has completed a rigorous process with the Department for Education, to agree an appropriate delivery plan for the Family Hubs programme. This encapsulates the minimum and go further standards required to meet the expectations of the 3-year programme and uses evidence-based research to inform the training and support packages that will be delivered to staff and families in Lincolnshire.

The core project team has identified costs associated with all areas of the programme and carefully considered funding that will be dedicated to rolling out the programme successfully.

A detailed analysis of the services already offered in our 48 Children's Centres has been completed in the spring term 2023. This identified that Lincolnshire is already meeting 75% of the required standards in the Family Hubs programme. We intend to build upon these further in the next year.

11. Draw together an action plan to measure successes against standards and implement these through the working groups under the steering group.

Two quality and data tools are being used to report to the DfE. A Maturity Self-Assessment and Management Information template is used to gather data and have set the benchmark for where Lincolnshire currently sits within the workstream areas. Individual action plans have been developed under each workstream as part of the Family Hubs programme and these are updated frequently and reviewed by the Governance Board.

The overall delivery plan and progress is being updated and reported monthly to the DfE and progress is monitored regularly.

12. Implement key areas and publish Lincolnshire's Start for Life offer

Lincolnshire's Start for Life Offer has been published and a virtual website space is now live www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/startforlife. A briefing paper to outline the Start for Life offer has been created and shared with stakeholders. Brand Guidelines and a detailed communications plan has been developed and is being used across the core project team. Launch events have been organised at the 10 Children's Centre sites identified as Family Hub sites. Flyers, posters, banners etc and various marketing information has been developed to ensure a succession of marketing can now start to be completed in Lincolnshire. Bus adverts, radio announcements, magazine articles and various materials have been designed and will be published shortly.

Conclusion

Priorities identified for the Early Years and Childcare Support service for 2023-24 includes:

1. Spring budget announcements. In the [Spring Budget](#), the Chancellor announced the single biggest investment in childcare in England ever, including expansion of childcare support for working parents to include children from 9 months old up to school age, and changes to Universal Credit childcare payments. This will be a focus for the Sustainability & Development Team in the coming years, to ensure the new entitlements are rolled out successfully in Lincolnshire.
2. Team structure to meet demands. Early Years and Childcare will need to complete a scoping exercise to fully understand the demands of the service, with the introduction of the new Government entitlements, and developing new childcare to support the national expectations to introduce or expand childcare provision on either side of the school day from 8am – 6pm.
3. Start for Life Strategy. The existing Early Childhood Strategy will be reviewed and developed to ensure this strategy is developed in collaboration with all partners involved in the Family Hubs programme and Start for Life offer.
4. CPD around 0-2 years. There will be a need to invest in the development of the workforce in EYCC and localities to support the 1,001 critical days and Lincolnshire's Start for Life offer.
5. SEN & Communication – The need for a stronger qualified workforce to meet the needs of children with SEND and communication needs is key. There will need to be investment in CPD in these areas. There will need to be a refocus into preventative work at an earlier stage through quality, safeguarding and inclusion teams.
6. Consideration will be made on the use of the Early Years block underspend identified from 2022-23 (£0.800m), to support the sector to deliver better outcomes for our children in Lincolnshire. Of this sum, £0.200m had been earmarked against the fluctuation contingency fund for 3- and 4-year-olds in 2023/24, as the Local Authority looked to maximise the hourly rate to providers.

Consideration will be made in the October Schools' Forum Revised Budgets report on the use of the underspend.

Consultation

a) Risks and Impact Analysis

There has been an increase in the number of providers with a less than good outcome at inspection, many of the settings being inspected are those who have not been seen by Ofsted since 2017 due to the impact of the pandemic restrictions. Many of those providers have been found inadequate or requires improvement as they have not met the safeguarding and welfare requirements of the EYFS 2021.

A higher than usual number of providers were graded Inadequate at their inspection in the first part of 2023. Early Years and Childcare reviewed the data and considered whether any learning could be carried out. After careful consideration, all providers most likely to be inspected sooner on the Ofsted cycle were offered a face-to-face learning walk visit. In addition, approximately 80 providers have booked to attend events taking place in the summer term 2023 to support Ofsted readiness. Since these actions have been implemented, the rate of providers being graded as inadequate has slowed.

In line with statutory duties (Childcare Act 2006 Section 13), Lincolnshire Early years and Childcare (EYCC) currently provides targeted support to those providers awaiting their first inspection or those with a less than good inspection outcome. There is a universal offer of guidance and advice through training, networks and forums for all other providers. The support offer encompasses Learning & Development and safeguarding & Welfare.

There is a need for more preventative and early intervention support for settings to slow the increase in the number of settings achieving a less than good outcome and more than that ensure that Lincolnshire children are safe and healthy as they access their funded 2, 3- and 4-year-old entitlement. There is a need for early years and childcare settings to have regular face to face visits to ensure that children are being safeguarded and protected.

There is a need to increase the level of funding paid to the childcare sector, to secure the provision long-term and deliver the new Government entitlements. The Government recognise the pressure the sector has been under so a funding uplift from September 2023 will restore rates for 3- and 4-year-olds to meet cost pressures the sector is facing and provide a substantial uplift to 2-year-old rates. This sits on top of funding uplifts already shared with the forum for 2023-24 in the January 2023 meeting.

Further investment will be required to develop sufficient wraparound childcare for school aged children across Lincolnshire. The Early Years and Childcare Support team will actively participate in Government led initiatives to support this agenda.

Background Papers

The following background papers as defined in the Local Government Act 1972 were relied upon in the writing of this report.

Document title	Where the document can be viewed
Early Years Funding Formula January 2023	https://lincolnshire.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=166&MId=8503&Ver=4
Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities	https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-education-and-childcare-2

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