



## Regulatory and Other Committee

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

Report to:	<b>Lincolnshire Schools' Forum</b>
Date:	<b>08 October 2020</b>
Subject:	<b>Report for Early Years - Response and Recovery</b>

#### Summary:

1. The purpose of this report is to provide an overview and update on the progress of 2019 priorities set out within this report.
2. Provide information on the response and delivery of Early Years and Childcare support during the COVID 19 pandemic lockdown and the recovery phase.

#### Recommendation(s):

1. Schools Forum is asked to consider the content of the report, and
2. Agree the priorities for Early Years and Childcare for 2020/21.

## Background

### Early Years, Childcare and Childrens Centre support (EYCC)

Lincolnshire has a diverse market place, made up of 933 (summer 2020) 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, offer the Early Years Entitlement (EYE) 15 hours or 30 hours for eligible 2, 3 & 4 year olds and out of school care for school aged children up to 14 years (18 years for children with a Special Educational Need or Disability).

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'.

EYCC provides access to effective support in order 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, in order to reduce inequalities in child development and promote the school readiness agenda.

The DSG Early Years block funding supports 2, 3 and 4 year old provision. The total budget for 3&4 year old budget is £35.049m during 2020/21 which included additional funding for 30 hours. Centrally retained funding for direct Early Years services was £1.491m allocated to central costs during 2020/21 which represented 4.19% 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 Centre Services (this work is funded by non DSB)

Above sets out an overview of the business as usual work that EYCC undertake. In addition it provides a summary of the funding envelope provided by the DfE for the delivery of the Early Years Entitlement and includes the allocation that funds the work of EYCC and the support services provided to the sector.

Usually the annual report would provide work undertaken throughout the year in detail with information of the impact the work has had on the sector and the outcomes for Lincolnshire children. However the greatest focus for the service this year has been supporting the sector through the Coronavirus outbreak on this basis much of this report will give details of the support provided to the sector since February 2020 with regard to Covid 19. This will be set out over three phases:

- The initial reaction to the outbreak and the subsequent national lockdown.
- The response during wider reopening of services.
- The recovery planning and delivery phase.

Prior to setting out details of this work, the report will provide an update on the priorities set out within the June 2019 report.

The biggest priority for 2019 was to develop a strategy to set out the wider work across the system with regard to supporting children and families through those earliest years of parenthood from pregnancy to the time when a child leaves their reception year at school at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).

In the June 2019 annual report for Early Years and Childcare Support there were nine priorities set out for the coming year.

<b>Early Years and Childcare Support - Key Priorities 2019/20:</b>	<b>Progress</b>
Develop an effective audit function for the Early Years Entitlements to ensure all funded and government supported childcare offers are being delivered appropriately to families in Lincolnshire.	This work was planned for the spring term 2020 and due to the Coronavirus this work was suspended to enable the team to support the sector through the implications and impact of the pandemic on their business sustainability. This work will continue in due course.
Review the impact of deprivation supplements within the Early Years formula using an appropriate monitoring system with the childcare sector in 2019/20.	After taking guidance from a number of sources locally, regionally and nationally it is felt that due to the financial implications of the pandemic it was not appropriate to undertake this review at this time. The situation will be monitored and will be undertaken when there is a greater understanding of the impact of the Coronavirus on the sector.
Deliver actions identified within the Childcare Delivery Plan to support sufficiency priorities identified within Lincolnshire's annual sufficiency report, 'A Parental Perspective of Childcare in Lincolnshire'.	Some elements of this work have continued as we have needed to ensure sufficiency of provision during the pandemic. The annual sufficiency report has been rescheduled and the work will take place in autumn 2020 to review our position and inform future developments.
Complete Local Government Association (LGA) Early Years Peer Review during autumn term 2019.	Completed successfully. The peer review had an initial partnership meeting attended by over 40 representatives of the Early Years system on the 30th September 2019, which contributed to the direction of travel and key lines of enquiry set out in the planning for the peer review which took place between the 5th and 8th November. The feedback was shared at a range of partnership forums including the spring HT Briefings and L+M briefings for the EY and Childcare sector.
Further embed joint working with health visiting teams to monitor the	This work is on-going and during the pandemic has been delivered through a

roll out of the Lincolnshire joined up approach to the Integrated two year old review.	virtual offer which has proved to be very successful in a rural county and further work on this is continuing to embed a blended offer as part of our recovery planning going forward.
Work in partnership with the Early Years sector to deliver the Professional Development Fund.	Due to the coronavirus the PDF timetable has been reviewed by the DfE. The training events planned in the early stages of the outbreak were delivered through a virtual offer with all Lincolnshire participants successfully completing the first phase of the programme. The implementation phase has been postponed. We continue to participate in this work and will provide further update in our next annual report.
Continue to explore with partners a shared multi-professional understanding of "school readiness" so that outcomes for children are improved.	An early childhood strategy has been developed during the autumn of 2019 with wider stakeholder engagement undertaken in spring 2020. This was due to be approved by the Children and Young people Scrutiny Committee (CYPSC) in April however due to the pandemic the meetings were suspended. In September 2020 the completed strategy was presented to CYPSP and approved and a final version is now ready to be launched in autumn 2020.
Launch the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment for Early Years.	The Early Years chapter of the JSNA was developed and launched in the autumn of 2019. Completed, this will be reviewed periodically to ensure the data remains current and up to date.
Provide information to the Lincolnshire Early Years Sector on Ofsted's new Education Inspection Framework 2019.	In collaboration with Ofsted EYCC delivered county wide engagement events with the sector to roll out the new EIF from September 2019, with over 300 participants.

**Coronavirus Pandemic, React – Response - Recover**

**What changed as a direct result of the COVID-19 Pandemic?**

In response to the escalation of the Covid-19 outbreak being declared a national pandemic, the government announced on 17th March 2020 it would continue funding LAs for all Early Years Entitlements (EYE) during any periods of nursery, preschool or childminder closures, or where children could not attend due to Coronavirus as there was increasing anxiety across the sector. Funding was duly allocated through the EYE funding formula to providers using this approach.

Whilst Ofsted suspended routine inspections as of 17th March 2020 they continued their regulatory work, and inspectors were able to use enforcement actions if appropriate.

The LA role in managing and conducting the moderation of the EYFSP was halted following the DfE announcement on 18 March, that the 2019/20 National Curriculum assessments including the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) profile would not take place due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

The government made the decision to close schools and childcare settings to all except vulnerable children and the children of keyworkers workers from the afternoon of Friday 20th March. From that point nurseries, childminders and other childcare settings were asked to change what they were doing at short notice, in the best interests of their community, the primary goal being to slow the spread of the virus (Covid-19).

EYCC followed government advice in relation to social distancing so the staff team commenced working from home from 20th March. Further, face to face events such as training courses, setting visits and briefings in the near future were cancelled or postponed. Those further ahead were kept under review at this point.

In April 2020 the government temporarily disapplied and modified certain elements of the EYFS statutory framework. The current disapplications were lifted on 25th September 2020 with a two-month transitional period for disapplications around staffing levels and Paediatric First Aid. This is in recognition that some providers may need time to get back to full staffing levels once the disapplications are lifted. Further restrictions or requirements related to coronavirus (Covid-19) due to a local or national lockdown, may affect a provider's ability to comply with the EYFS. Therefore, new regulations came into force on 26th September 2020 which (with the exception of the EYFSP disapplication) allowed the disapplications to reapply where a provider is prevented from complying with the EYFS due to coronavirus related restrictions of requirements which have been imposed by government. Full details can be found in the updated EYFS disapplications guidance.

Lincolnshire Children's Centres suspended all group based face to face activities from the middle of March 2020 and a decision to close all centres to staff and members of the public was taken in the interests of public safety.

### **React: March – June 2020**

#### **What was put in place during the Lockdown phase of the Pandemic?**

As the national position changed there was a recognition that the childcare market place is an essential part of the county's economy, providing access to high quality early education and childcare, and enabling parents to access work. This raised the profile of the need to maintain childcare for key workers as a top priority during the Lockdown phase.

In Lincolnshire, we have a large number of small business providers who responded to the call to action from a moral perspective rather than from a financial

position. The profit margins for childcare provision are very minimal, many remain sustainable but do not excessively profit from providing childcare and early education to children and families.

Approximately 55% of providers in Lincolnshire remained open throughout the lockdown, and where provision closed some children (where parents required access to childcare) transferred their place to an alternative provision and demand for places was delivered by the providers who were able to remain open during this time.

Lincolnshire has been operating a live monthly payment system based on numbers of eligible 2, 3 & 4 year old children accessing provision since 2018. This provides the sector with real-time payments and this continued during the lockdown phase.

Financial support was made available nationally to Early Years and Childcare providers, including:

- Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) and bonus scheme
- Self-employed Income Support Scheme
- Business Rates Holiday (District Council)
- Small Business Grant Scheme (District Council)
- Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme
- Bounce Back Loan
- Repayment holidays for loans and mortgages
- Discretionary Grant (District Council)

The financial solutions offered via the government provided some support to the sector, however not all providers were eligible for the government grants and some were not designed to sufficiently support the short term cash flow issues providers faced.

The local authority followed this position and continued to pass on the government EYE funding it received for these entitlements to providers, in the event that they were advised to close by Public Health England or children were not able to attend, to minimise short-term disruption.

Many of the parents paying private fees for additional childcare hours, did not access this provision and therefore providers will have faced a reduction in income. The scale of the reduction would have been based on the operating model of that provider, and its proportion of government funded EYE and private fees.

The Early Years and childcare team provided a range of support from the outset of the early stages of the pandemic. This included disseminating a rolling cycle of Coronavirus updates from the government including the DfE advice and guidance via email and promoted on Facebook for providers to ensure they were updated with the latest position as the situation was fast changing. This was complimented by an offer of support from EYCC to navigate and implement the government guidance. Each setting received a telephone call at the beginning of lockdown to check their status and offer support. EYCC also responded to requests for further support (900 calls).

In response to the DfE's request for Local Authority to provide twice weekly updates on childcare provision across the country, EYCC worked with Performance to send a weekly snap survey to gather this information from all providers. EYCC and Business Support made weekly calls to settings to encourage completion of the Early Years (EY) survey to gain clear understanding of provision across the county to inform short term sufficiency provision planning. Business support tools were developed by EYCC and were emailed out to the sector and added to the website. 24 one to one listening clinics were provided to support with bespoke support.

Support calls were also made by Sector Support team following responses to an EYCC survey to the sector regarding their sustainability. Providers who responded to say they were not open were also contacted to see if support could be provided. 345 calls were made to support settings when reopening to ensure they were fully aware and compliant with the DfE guidance on re-opening. EYCC collaborated with the Family Information Service team within Digital to ensure their records of open and closed settings were kept up to date to enable parents to access open provision in their area via the Family Services Directory. EYCC also took and managed a number of direct calls from parents who were key workers and supported them to find available childcare in their area.

EYCC collaborated with the Early Help locality teams to ensure that children who were open to services and were due to start school had a virtual offer of support. As part of wider work on transition EYCC worked in partnership with the Children Centre commissioned provider (EYA) to set up virtual ready steady go to school sessions. Contact for Early Years and Childcare providers with an Ofsted judgement of less than good continued through a remote support offer, for those who remained open.

EYCC Partnership with LSCB training team was renewed to ensure safeguarding training continued to be available to the Early Years and Childcare sector—face to face training was adapted to be delivered virtually. A virtual training/CPD presentation was developed to update the sector and distributed as a YouTube video in collaboration with the LCC Digital team. EYCC identified an E-learning training offer in partnership with NDNA which was made available to all Early Years Sector staff; there have been 800 allocated registrations to date, with 664 recorded as passed. EYCC have continued to support new childminder registrations on an individual basis as existing briefings postponed.

The Children's Centre commissioned services, Early Years Alliance (EYA) and the translation service PAB worked with the team to develop a virtual offer using ZOOM to conduct online group sessions with parents and children as part of the Best Start Early Years and Family Service Children's Centre contract delivery. The offer included Early Years' sessions such as rhyme time, movers and shakers, Growing Talk, Learning Together and Stay and Play, and for 1:1 family support work with families. PAB continued offering support to families as well as increasing their offer of translations. To ensure pregnant women could continue to receive antenatal care in a safe environment near to their home centres were opened for the delivery of essential antenatal services only. Seven centres in the first instance

were made available solely to maternity services to provide safe access for pregnant women to attend their essential antenatal appointments.

### **Response phase: June - September 2020**

#### **What was put in place during the gradual re-opening phase of the Pandemic?**

During the summer term, childcare providers remained relatively sustainable with high numbers of pre-registered children's places funded throughout the lockdown, regardless of the providers open/closed status. When wider re-opening of childcare was announced from 1st June, a sustainability survey with funded education providers was completed to inform the local authority of their intentions for wider opening. By the end of the summer term, Lincolnshire reported 86% of funded education providers open and offering places to childcare and families. The survey also gathered data on the financial impact the pandemic had on childcare provision. The survey demonstrated significant financial losses within the sector, with 41% of providers indicating they were in deficit following the pandemic. In addition, those providers that re-opened, suggested a much lower take-up level than prior to the lockdown. The reduced numbers of children will continue to have a financial impact on the childcare sector moving forward.

The sustainability survey showed that 55% of childcare providers had not completed a cash flow forecast, and therefore did not fully understand their financial position or long term sustainability. Early Years and Childcare Support has reallocated capacity to this area of work for a temporary period until the end of March 2021. Due to increased demand for business support and advice following the Covid-19 outbreak and the concerns over sustainability and uncertainty that is ahead for the sector, this provides an opportunity to have dedicated and focused support on this area of work.

This has allowed the improvement advisors to refocus on quality of delivery within provision as we move into the recovery phase. They will support the sector with the current and future guidelines to offer quality childcare and education to the children that attend their provision.

Virtual forums facilitated by EYCC on reopening and preparation for September were attended by 50 providers. 81 providers and schools attended virtual transition meetings hosted by EYCC to support with children making a successful transition in to school. The Food in Nurseries project was re-established as the settings involved re-opened. Support for settings with an Ofsted judgement of less than good and those awaiting their first inspection recommenced virtually as they re-opened. Virtual 'Listening Clinics' were facilitated by EYCC for those Out of School Providers and Committee run settings who needed support.

EYCC redesigned the paediatric first aid course to minimise contact with others yet still meeting HSE requirements of 6 hours face to face training. 17 courses were scheduled, each with 12 delegates, total 204 delegates. To support providers to feel confident to respond to the impact of the pandemic, EYCC purchased 6 webinars from NDNA that focused on the impact of Covid-19, these have been attended by 218 Lincolnshire Early Years practitioners. To respond to the sector's

needs, EYCC has also designed and delivered virtual training sessions that focus on the financial impact of Covid-19.

EYCC has initiated discussions with LSCB colleagues to develop and pilot virtual Designated Safeguarding Lead briefings for Early Years to complement those for schools. Virtual Early Years SENCo forums were developed and delivered to 35 practitioners in the summer term to support providers with transition for children with additional needs and to share examples of how the graduated approach was delivered both with children in setting and those staying at home.

The virtual offer has been replicated and expanded for families who would have accessed Children's Centres. This included the Early Days zoom postnatal group which is delivered countywide in partnership with Children's Health Service. These sessions are in response to national evidence that women who have given birth during lockdown are feeling isolated and the level of referrals to perinatal mental health services has increased. Antenatal Q&A sessions delivered in partnership with Midwifery, EYA and the Children's Health Service were commenced too, as a replacement to the antenatal top tips sessions that were delivered face to face pre Covid. EYA have developed and delivered Five Ways to Wellbeing in partnership with Healthy Minds Lincolnshire. EYA have an offer of support with school readiness to universal families which has had excellent uptake. There has been good take up off the virtual offer and there are areas of good practice that will remain in virtual form even when restrictions are lifted for example families in very rural areas accessing sessions more easily than travelling to a centre.

The translation service PAB have sought to increase the number of families to access the Early Years offer by creating short films and a poster advertising the services on offer for families. These resources are aimed at Midwives, Health Visitors and Children's Centre staff to engage expectant mums and mums with babies. The films/posters are translated to all of 6 languages PAB are contracted to work with. PAB are also joining the antenatal Q&A sessions to support EAL families and have now become part of the Maternity Voice Partnership (MVP).

A further 6 centres were opened to accommodate essential antenatal appointments making 13 centres in total that are delivering midwifery service. There is also a request for more centres to be available to deliver midwifery appointments and this position is being continually reviewed. From the middle of July, centres were made available to the Children's Health Service to provide the 6-8 week mandated check as part of the Healthy Child Programme (HCP). This service is being delivered from a total of 26 centres.

### **Recovery: September 2020 next steps**

The Getting to Good and the Targeted Improvement Programme continues to be delivered though our virtual offer to ensure providers are supported as interim inspection visits by Ofsted have recommenced to all providers with a less than Good inspection judgement who were issued actions for a breach of one of more of the EYFS Safeguarding and Welfare requirements.

All training scheduled to take place until the end of March 2021 is being delivered virtually except for the required mandatory training that have a HSE stipulation attached. This training was extended as an interim measure but the end date for this is 25th November so we have adapted the courses and prepared for a safe delivery to ensure that settings are able to continue to offer a safe service.

The EYCC in-house training offer is being reviewed and will be re-packaged to be delivered virtually. Support for childminder groups, previously attending Children's Centres, will be supported through virtual forums via the link for each childminder group with the first taking place in October 2020. In addition during October there are 25 Early Years settings currently booked on EYCC's Risk v Reward virtual sessions. Transition meetings have been booked virtually to explore how successful transition has been for children this year and to carry out agreement trialling of assessments together to develop a shared understanding. Leadership & Management briefings have been adapted to be delivered via Microsoft Teams, autumn briefings dates have been set and the take up of this offer has been very well received.

An options paper is being presented to the Corporate Leadership team on a recovery plan to increase activity delivered from Children's Centres. Quality Improvement of the virtual offer is currently taking place of the zoom sessions provided by the EYA (the Childrens centre commissioned provider). EYCC teaching staff are conducting these alongside EYA leads.

### **The sustainability and sufficiency of provision**

Providers indicated that the usual footfall they would have had during the summer term ready for September reduced significantly and there is an overwhelming concern about the loss of income from the autumn term.

From September 2020, the DfE advised LAs not to fund providers that are closed, without public health reason. From the start of the autumn term 2020, Local Authorities have been advised to continue to fund providers that are open at broadly the levels they would have expected to see in the 2020 autumn term had there been no Coronavirus (Covid-19) outbreak.

The intention is to fund on the basis of 'as if autumn term 2020 were happening normally'. In order to do this, the DfE has advised Local Authorities to use the numbers of children in places in the previous autumn to inform funding levels this autumn.

Therefore, if providers show a decrease in hours in September 2020 compared to September 2019, the difference will be paid to providers as an exceptional payment. This will be paid using the 2020-21 hourly base rate for 2 year olds and universal / extended rate for 3 and 4 year olds. This provides financial certainty to providers for the government EYE funding.

The DfE guidance will be used to implement any funding changes for Early Years providers. The government will fund LAs based on the January 2020 rather than the January 2021 for the autumn term 2020. It is anticipated that funding will

continue for providers closed due to Covid-19 if a lockdown is imposed. The Local Authority will implement learning from the summer and previous lockdown measures. It is expected that there will be different challenges for childcare providers during the autumn and winter months. Data gathered from the two aforementioned areas of work being completed in the autumn term will be used to target support for the sector and protect the future sustainability of the market.

Funding for Local Authorities and providers are expected to return to normal from spring 2021.

A full assessment has been completed in September to understand the wider opening and take-up levels of funded education.

Figures collected during September show the following:

### Providers Open

Total Providers Registered to deliver EYE funded education places	Providers Open	Providers Closed	% of Providers Open
675	671	4	99.4%

### Take-up levels of funded education

	2 Year Olds	3&4 Year Olds Universal	3&4 Year Olds Extended
Number of children in September 2020	1,493	6,997	3,183
Number of children in September 2019	2,019	7,794	3,717
% of children compared to 2019	73%	89%	85%
Difference compared to 2019 funded hours	-24%	-10%	-13%

### Future Plans:

As we move out of Lockdown the work towards the wider priorities of the EYCC Service Plan has restarted.

### For EYCC the key priorities for the coming year will be:

1. Launch the Early Childhood Strategy in the autumn term as a mechanism to share our ambitions and drive forward our improvement journey. Although the full impact of the Coronavirus pandemic is yet to be fully determined, it is acknowledged that the priorities set out within the strategy will be revisited in

due course to ensure priorities reflect the changing needs of Lincolnshire children as a result of the pandemic.

2. Ensure the sustainability of the sector to meet the duties placed on the LA for the sufficiency of childcare provision and EYE places.
3. Support the delivery of good quality delivery and practice across the Early Years and Childcare sector.
4. Maintain the delivery of community based activities delivered from Children's Centres as and when it is safe to do so and in line with government advice and guidance.
5. Prepare for further escalation of the restrictions to be able to react and respond effectively to support the delivery of Early Years childcare and Children's Centres services.

### Consultation

**a) Have Risks and Impact Analysis been carried out??**

No

**b) Risks and Impact Analysis**

N/A

### Appendices

These are listed below and attached at the back of the report	
Appendix A	N/A

### Background Papers

Document title	Where the document can be viewed
Early Years National Funding Formula	<a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-national-funding-formula-allocations-and-guidance">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-national-funding-formula-allocations-and-guidance</a>
Early Education and Childcare Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities	<a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-education-and-childcare--2">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-education-and-childcare--2</a>

This report was written by Michelle Andrews, who can be contacted on 07917463431 or [michelle.andrews@lincolnshire.gov.uk](mailto:michelle.andrews@lincolnshire.gov.uk).