



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

Report to:	Lincolnshire Schools' Forum
Date:	30 June 2022
Subject:	Annual Early Years & Childcare Report

Summary:

This purpose of this report is to:

- Provide an update on the delivery of services to support early years and childcare provision across Lincolnshire.
- Outline the priorities for the Early Years and Childcare Support Service for 2022-23.

Recommendation(s):

Schools' Forum is asked to:

- Consider the content of the report.
- Agree the priorities for 2022-23.

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 2022-23 is indicative and this has been revised upwards to £36.889m¹ which includes additional funding for 30 hours.

¹ This indicative budget is based on pre-pandemic data – January 2020 pupil census information.

Centrally retained funding for direct early years services is £1.561m during 2022-23, which represents 4.23% 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 870 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 647 providers offering the Early Years Entitlements (EYE) 15 hours or 30 hours for eligible 2-, 3- & 4-year-olds, 79 non-funded childminders and 55 stand-alone out of school care for school aged children up to 14 years (18 years for children with a Special Educational Need or Disability).

Following the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) in 2019, data was analysed to review children's Good Levels of Development (GLD). The Early Childhood Strategy was developed, and a steering group was established in November 2021. Working groups have now been created to identify key areas for targeted work to drive forward improvements. Please see Appendix A for an overview of the working groups.

Childcare providers and partners are engaged in the steering group and working groups to ensure all necessary partners are involved. These working groups have developed action plans to take this focused work forward. This will feed into the steering group for decision making.

As the working groups become embedded, plans will be developed further and this work has been included in the priorities for 2022-23.

Following the EYCC annual report to Lincolnshire's Schools' Forum in June 2021, the service identified key priorities during 2021-22 as the government restrictions changed and we were working towards the wider priorities of the Corporate Plan.

Updates on the key priorities in the Early Years and Childcare Support Service in 2021-22:

1. Provide sufficient, high quality and inclusive education places locally.

During 2021, Early Years and Childcare Support has reviewed the annual Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA) cycle. This aims to enable the local authority to continue to meet its statutory sufficiency duties. The new cycle will align with school place planning and local growth plans (linking to capital section 106 funding). This will maintain the accuracy of data we hold on available childcare provision throughout Lincolnshire and ensure the CSA becomes a responsive document to manage the market and meet the needs of children and families in Lincolnshire.

The Local Authority completed the annual childcare sufficiency survey with all childcare providers from 25 April to 13 May 2022. These capacity surveys ran parallel to a public survey for parents to feedback to the local authority regarding demand.

Two childcare provider surveys were completed – one for Early Years which included 703 providers and a 97% response was achieved. One was for out of school childcare which included 165 providers and a 100% response was received.

The parent survey was hosted on the Let's talk Lincolnshire online platform. A record 1,496 responses were received through this platform. 139 parents had children with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities. This was 50% more responses than the previous survey completed.

61% of parent respondents felt they had sufficient childcare to meet their current needs. 1,031 parents responding had children aged 5-10 years old and the vast majority of those felt they needed more childcare for afterschool club places or holiday clubs. Early Years and Childcare Support will be working closely with Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme colleagues to ensure a joined-up approach is used to develop registered childcare and this programme is incorporated in the wider sufficiency plan to support families' needs.

Some areas in Lincolnshire have been identified as requiring additional childcare places to meet demand, including Spalding, Louth and Nettleham. Analysis is now underway to interpret all feedback received from both surveys and an annual report will be published with findings and recommendations to DLT in July 2022.

A comprehensive strategy will then be developed for improvements and capital investment will need to be considered to support childcare developments in areas across the county.

In addition, further training will be offered to childcare providers to develop their understanding of the occupancy levels and provide guidance on completing accurate future assessments.

2. We will ensure eligible children aged 2, 3, and 4 years old are able to access their Early Years Entitlement place in high quality inclusive provision.

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 the end of the autumn term 2021, 2-year-old places had increased by 6.48% compared to the previous year, with 1,890 children accessing places which represented 83% of the total children eligible.

There is a national strategy for increasing access to childcare and ensuring this is affordable for families, Changing Lives Through Childcare. We know the benefits of childcare and the importance of early intervention. We have developed marketing materials and information to get these messages out further. An outreach officer has been appointed within the Early Years team 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 88% nationally in 2021 and take-up in Lincolnshire was at 90%. 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.

Current outcomes since routine inspections resumed in May 2021

Outstanding	Good	Requires Improvement	Inadequate
3	78	4	5

Lincolnshire remains in line with national for at least Good at inspection, however below for Outstanding. Improving quality of provision and increasing the number of Outstanding judgements remains a key focus for the Early Years and Childcare Support service.

3. Deliver quality Children’s Centres (CC), which are at the heart of our communities supporting families, so their children thrive, through working with key partners and communities.

Children's Centres continue to deliver a core offer which responds to the changing needs of communities, and this is adapted as appropriate to meet the needs of children and families. Delivery in centres has returned to the pre-covid offer and all sessions are now offered face to face.

The core purpose of children centres is to improve outcomes for young children and their families by narrowing the attainment gap and reducing inequalities. The aim is to engage families as early as possible during the crucial first 1,001 days to ensure children are ready for nursery and school.

Lincolnshire maternity hubs continue to provide maternity care closer to home and over 1700 individuals have accessed an antenatal appointment at a children's centre in the previous twelve months.

The antenatal education offer to parents is delivered in partnership with the 0-19 health service, Early Years Practitioners, and our commissioned early years' service Early Years Alliance (EYA). This offer has remained virtual to allow as many families as possible to access it. CC registrations currently stand at 100% and attendance rates are up from 46.74% this time last year to 62.17%.

The new offer of free baby massage courses in children centres has seen over 225 courses delivered during the period of April 2021 to March this year with over 1200 parents/carers and babies accessing this offer.

The Family and Babies (FAB) worker supports families who have babies on the neonatal unit either in Lincolnshire or out of county. The FAB worker supports the partnership between the neonatal units and other services including Children's Centres as this is a key time for laying down the foundation for future health, wellbeing, learning and sets the groundwork for children developing emotional wellbeing, resilience, adaptability, and competencies they need to thrive.

4. Ensure fit for purpose, appropriate services are available for families to narrow the achievement gap, so all children thrive and achieve their potential.

EYCC has worked closely with the SEND transformation programme on a programme of changes to ensure that the 0-5 age range is reflected. Resources have been developed to reflect the Primary guidance and tools. 10 central and locality early years staff members have been trained up to complete joint education assessments to support with capacity. Over the past year more than 100 reports have been written by these colleagues and quality assured to support meeting the need.

5. Promote and support providers to understand the new Ofsted inspection framework across the early years and childcare sector.

To maintain and improve quality of provision targeted support programmes have resumed delivery on a face-to-face offer to ensure providers are supported as routine Ofsted inspections recommenced to all providers in May 2021. Ofsted are prioritising those with a less than Good inspection judgement, those who have yet to be inspected and those still to be inspected in this cycle. EYCC has provided one to one support and a range of forums to providers to support them achieve at least a good judgement at next inspection. 115 face to face audits on quality have been rolled out targeted to those settings due an inspection with another 43 planned for the summer term.

6. Engage providers, schools, academies, and partners in a sector led improvement approach to embed effective transition arrangements to better prepare children for school.

Transition support is coordinated centrally by Early Years and Childcare Support with partnership meetings between schools and early years settings, facilitated by the locality and central colleagues.

As well as termly local transition meetings, 7 early years locality networks have taken place across the county this year supporting schools and settings with strengthening transition support and outcomes for children.

The 'Ready, Steady, Go to School' programme has been rolled out for both universal and targeted support for school readiness in partnership with the commissioned provider for the Best Start contract and locality early years colleagues. EYCC has piloted the first transition forum and participation was good with 41 schools and settings attending. The second forum is due to run next week with 45 spaces currently booked. The recent summer term transition meetings had 103 schools and settings attend.

7. Design and deliver a good quality early years training and development programme focussing on the statutory requirements and the implementation of the new Early Years Foundation Stage.

To continue to support the needs of the workforce as they recover from the pandemic – these courses varied from previous years due to areas identified through feedback, covering subjects such as bereavement, managing change and with a greater focus on SEN.

Delivery of training remained virtual and this has proved beneficial for a number of courses, allowing the service to offer more places than previously and at times that were more convenient for the early years practitioner. Reducing cost with no

venue hire and easing the staffing situation in the early years setting as the staff member is not taking as long out of ratio.

The Professional Development Project, funded by the DfE saw 40 settings gain their Speech and Language qualification and Communication Friendly Spaces Award for the setting. 40 Early Years Practitioners were fully sponsored to achieve their level 2 SEN qualification, giving them the skills and Knowledge to support the families in their settings. 12 Level 2 and 12 Level 3 Forest School qualifications were fully sponsored and achieved by early years practitioners – utilizing the outdoor area was absolutely paramount in a pandemic and enabled the practitioners to deliver enhanced learning opportunities.

The Partnership with the LSCP continued, enabling the whole of the early years sector to access fully funded safeguarding training and Designated Safeguarding Leads to follow the 6-year pathway in line with other childcare professionals.

Conclusion

Priorities for Early Years and Childcare during 2022-23:

1. Increase take-up of Early Years Entitlement places through effective outreach activities
2. Review the sufficiency of childcare provision across Lincolnshire and implement a strategy for supporting the future sustainability of the marketplace
3. Embed the effective working groups to deliver outcomes identified in the Early Childhood Strategy
4. Work in partnership with the early years sector to develop and maintain high quality and inclusive education provision
5. Analyse the GLD from 2022 EYFS profile data and produce a set of targets based on improving children's development outcomes
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
7. Develop the specification in conjunction with commissioning for the Best Start service
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
9. Refresh the quality assurance pathways to reflect the new commissioned service

10. Self-evaluate our early years' service against minimum and go further standards within the Family Hubs against the draft service specification
11. Draw together an action plan to measures successes against standards and implement these through the working groups under the steering group
12. Implement key areas and publish Lincolnshire's Best Start offer

Consultation

a) Risks and Impact Analysis

The Local Authority is mindful of the impact the pandemic has had on children's education and their outcomes at the end of the foundation stage. Childrens Good Levels of Development will be reviewed following the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile in the summer 2022 and work will be targeted to support any areas identified as a concern.

Participation levels are returning to pre-pandemic levels which will support children's educational achievements. There is more work to do to focus on access to other services and the Early Childhood Strategy working groups and development of Family Hubs will all aim to support this further.

The Local Authority will monitor Ofsted outcomes and will be taking a proactive approach by contacting all providers to support their understanding of the EYFS statutory framework.

The pandemic may have impacted the overall deprivation levels within early years. There will be a time lag to understand this, therefore consideration will be made during the year whether the Local Authority needs to respond by increasing funding to providers to respond to potential increased demands of deprived children.

The Local Authority recognises the financial demands placed on the early years sector through increased costs in 2022/23 and the recruitment and retention concerns across the sector. The Early Years and Childcare Support team will continue to offer additional support to the sector to reduce potential closures that could affect the statutory childcare sufficiency duty.

Appendices

These are listed below and attached at the back of the report	
Appendix A	Early Childhood Strategy Working Groups

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
Lincolnshire's Early Years Single Funding Formula	https://lincolnshire.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s47073/7.0%20Schools%20forum%20paper%20-%20Early%20Years%2020%20Jan%202022%20final%20GN.pdf
Early Years and Childcare Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities	https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-education-and-childcare--2

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