

**EARLY YEARS AND CHILDCARE STRATEGY**

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**Responsible Cabinet Member** – Cllr Chris McEwan, Children and Young People Portfolio

**Responsible Director** – Murray Rose, Director of Children's Services

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**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. To seek Council approval of the Early Years and Childcare Strategy.

**Summary**

2. Cabinet met on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2008 and endorsed the Early Years and Childcare Strategy (attached at **Appendix A**) and referred it to Council for approval.

**Recommendation**

3. It is recommended that Council adopts the Early Years and Childcare Strategy.

**Reason**

4. In order to improve the support for working parents and those who are seeking employment or training.

**Murray Rose,**  
**Director of Children's Services**

**Background Papers**

No Background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

Gill Walker : Extension 2878

S17 Crime and Disorder	The contents of this report have been considered in the context of the requirements placed on the Council by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, namely, the duty on the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent crime and disorder in its area. This report is bringing forward strategies to improve the range and provision of after school and holiday activities for young people up to the age of 14 (17 for disabled young people).
Health and Well Being	The strategy will have a positive effect on children and young people's health and wellbeing.
Sustainability	The Early Years Strategy will enable families to contribute to and benefit from their local community.
Diversity	The strategy takes into account the needs of a diversity of population to ensure all childcare needs are met.
Wards Affected	All Wards
Groups Affected	Children, parents / carers, childcare providers, employers.
Budget and Policy Framework	<p>The issues contained within this report represent change to Council policy and are subject to approval at Council on 17 July 2008.</p> <p>The improved arrangements for conducting an annual audit of childcare need and the implementation of the Early Years and Childcare Strategy will result in a more effective provision to meet local need.</p>
Key Decision	This is a key decision as the Strategy affects all Wards in the Borough.
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	This strategy supports all themes in the Sustainable Community Strategy, in particular Prosperous Darlington as it will assist parents in returning to work, and Aspiring Darlington as it will improve the quality of provision.

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

5. The Early Years outcomes provisions in sections 1-4 of the Childcare Act 2006 (the Act) place a duty on local authorities to improve the five Every Child Matters outcomes of all young children in their area aged between birth and 31 August following their fifth birthday, and to reduce inequalities between them, through integrated early childhood services. Successful implementation of the Early Years Outcomes Duty requires strong partnership working and co-operation to translate the strategic aims imaginatively into real change for young children and their families.
  6. The Early Years Outcomes Duties (EYOD) Plan sits within the Children and Young People's Plan under the auspices of the Children's Trust arrangements. The EYOD plan focuses on services and practice, which can be improved in order to raise achievement and close the inequalities gap. The early years input to the Children and Young People's Plan and the Local Area Agreement is crucial in order to lay firm foundations for the children of Darlington. Sure Start children's centres are at the heart of the Every Child Matters programme and play a central role, particularly in reducing inequalities in outcomes for those in areas of high disadvantage. Key to success in the early years are:
    - (a) supporting parents
    - (b) maximising access to service; and
    - (c) raising the quality of services.
  7. The movement towards locality working has been endorsed within the context of Darlington's Local Area Agreement, which specifically promotes the further development of locality-based services. It builds upon the strategy for the development of Children's Centres and multi agency working. For early years this vision will ensure that for parents, from the time they know they are expecting a baby, to see a coherent pattern of accessible child health, early years provision and family support services ahead of them, some free at the point of delivery, some subsidised according to income. A good start in life is essential if children are to fulfil their potential, and high quality early childhood services will result in better outcomes for young children, their families and society.
  8. A comprehensive Childcare Sufficiency Audit (**Appendix B**) has been completed and this demonstrates that although there are slight variations between the individual clusters, overall in Darlington, there are five childcare services where significant gaps are predicted between current use and future demand (based on parent ideal childcare arrangements). The gaps identified are in Early Years Foundation Stage that is fit for future, after school clubs, breakfast clubs, holiday play schemes and homework clubs.
  9. The data shows that there is a shortage of breakfast clubs places, after school places and holiday places for children aged 5 – 14 years. Another issue, which appears to be creating a barrier for parents who want to access childcare, is a lack of service flexibility e.g. the ability to change the way childcare is being delivered at short notice to fit work or training requirements. Other barriers to access to childcare are the current costs of childcare, particularly holiday clubs and a lack of information around the availability of childcare.
  10. In the case of parents of children with a disability, very few use childcare service with more than two-thirds being looked after by their parent/guardian, family or friends. The audit
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shows that the largest gap between actual take up of childcare services and demand was with parents of children with a disability. Priority will be given to this aspect of childcare. More work will be undertaken to more clearly identify the childcare needs for parents with a disability. This will include the age profile of the children to identify whether pre-school or school age care is needed. A review of support arrangements in settings will also be completed.

11. The Early Years and Childcare Strategy identifies three main strands of activity. These are:
  - (a) **Service delivery** - This details how we will develop and improve the childcare offer, children centre services for all children in the Borough and swift and easy access to targeted services.
  - (b) **Quality improvement and standards** - This details the development of an effective quality improvement cycle for children centres and the implementation of the early years foundation stage. Improvements to inclusive practice and support for transition are also planned.
  - (c) **Children and families voice** - This details how we plan to improve consultation, engagement and communication with service users.

### **Outcome of Consultation**

12. A comprehensive period of consultation has been completed. This has included a detailed programme around the supply and demand for childcare, discussions and contributions from a number of Children's Trust Partners and a range of service providers.
13. A systematic approach to the communication of this strategy is planned to ensure that all service providers and users feel confident in the ongoing development of services for children and families in the Borough.
14. The Children's Trust will ensure that they understand local supply and demand for children's services, this will be reviewed on an annual basis. This will require regular consultation with children, their families and the wider community