



CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Tuesday 23 July 2024

REPORT TITLE:	EARLY YEARS QUALITY AND SUFFICIENCY
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION

REPORT SUMMARY

This report covers key updates for the early years' service, including two-year funding take up for the disadvantaged entitlement and working family's entitlement. The two-year funding take-up for disadvantaged entitlement has decreased however it is thought that families potentially eligible for both working families and disadvantaged entitlements have applied through working family's entitlement. This is being explored further so we have a system to ensure that families take up the most relevant entitlement.

The report also includes two models, the first the Family Information Service (FIS) in terms of meeting section 12 of the Childcare Act 2006, which places a duty on Local Authorities to share information on childcare provision and services. The model to support early years providers is also attached, this details the work of the quality improvement and training team to support providers and ensure all provision is of the highest quality. An update on the wrap around programme has also been included; supply and demand mapping has been completed and a proposed delivery plan has been submitted to the Department for Education (DfE) to approval.

This report affects all wards

This report is not a key decision

RECOMMENDATION/S

The Children, Young People and Education Committee is requested to note the report and receive a further update following further rollout of the early years entitlement funding.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1 The report is to highlight key updates to the committee to raise awareness of the ongoing work within the early years.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 The roll out of early years funding is a statutory responsibility and no other options are applicable

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 **2-year-old uptake:** In 2013 the government introduced 15 hours a week funded childcare provision for two-year-old who were possibly disadvantaged. The aim of the policy was to improve the reduce the early years attainment gap and ensure children were better prepared to start formal schooling. The government has now introduced two-year-old funding for working families from April 2024, to support families into work with childcare costs. Families can be eligible for both entitlements and government guidance is to apply disadvantaged entitlement to families who meet the criteria, as they cannot fall out of eligibility for the disadvantaged entitlement. There are also families that will not be eligible either entitlement, children and families will be supported with early years opportunities through family hubs. The table below details the take of the two-year-old entitlements.

Two-old entitlement	Codes issued	Eligible children / codes validated	Take up	Percentage
Disadvantaged	N/A	934	643	69%
Working	1486	1257	1233	98%

- 3.2 The disadvantaged entitlement has seen a significant decrease in take up. The data is currently being interrogated but the initial hypothesis is that families eligible for both entitlements have taken up under the working entitlements. The team are currently exploring how we identify families who are eligible for both entitlements to ensure they are assigned to the appropriate one. The Department for Education (DfE) predicted we would need 1910 places, so roughly 66% of families gained a code with 98% of families taking their code to an early year's provider to validate their code and secure a place. As 98% of families took their place it is assumed that the 24 families either took up disadvantaged entitlement or changed their mind on taking up a place. For Autumn term we have had 272 codes issued for two-year-old working entitlement and 425 codes issued for under two-year-old working entitlement.
- 3.3 **Family Information Service (FIS):** Section 12 of the Childcare Act 2006 requires local authorities to establish and maintain a Family Information Service (FIS) which provides information on the provision of childcare services which might benefit parents, prospective parents or children and young people. Wirral has a hybrid

approach with many services supporting different elements of the service. Please see attached FIS model for clarification.

- 3.4 At the heart of the FIS offer is a digital offer through the Family Toolbox, with information about services and how to find the right childcare providers. Currently the Family Toolbox has links to the council website for information on childcare providers. Once the new Early Years and Education System (EYES) software is implemented it is hoped there will be a search function for families to find childcare. Also at the heart is the Family Hub offer where families can drop in to find services they need or find out about childcare providers.
- 3.5 Supporting the Family Toolbox are other online services where families can gain information or support., linking to relevant websites such as Zillo for young people or SENDLO for families with a child with Special Educational Needs or Disability (SEND). Families can also phone or email for information. Various social media platform also shares information such as My Child Can and Wirral's Twitter account. The Family Hubs are supported by other face to face services, for example through the early years team brokerage service, with knowledge of different types of provision they can support families to find the right provider. The children's centres offer advice and information to parents and are fundamental in promoting entitlements to parents. The early years team regularly attend events parents are attending to share information on childcare providers and other services that might be beneficial. The hybrid offer is to enable all families to access the information and advice they need in a timely manner.
- 3.6 **Support for Early Years Providers:** The Quality Improvement and Training Team have developed a holistic offer for early years providers to access, designed to ensure the right level of support is available. With 98.09% of early years providers judged good or above by Ofsted it is important that the service is proactive to ensure providers can maintain this and reactive to ensure any changes to provision are supported as quickly as possible- the support offer is therefore very much based on a premise that involves empowering providers to make sustained changes and to embed quality practice. The attached model details what support is available for providers at each level, however, is also flexible to allow for meeting individual needs in each instance. As the universal offer details what every provider can receive, the targeted offer is available to identified providers for example a new manager. The specialist offer is for settings that have received a less than good inspection judgement from Ofsted. A Quality Officer is assigned to work with the setting on a weekly basis to address concerns and make improvements as efficiently as possible.
- 3.7 The Quality Improvement and Training Team have released the third iteration of our Effective Practice Quality Mark (EPQM) from April 24, with two separate course syllabus- one for childminders and one for settings. This year's courses have been designed with three criteria in mind- feedback from the sector, Ofsted trends and changes to Early Years including the early years funding entitlement expansion. We have utilised a mixture of internal/external facilitators, all based in the Northwest to ensure that local context is at the heart of training, allowing providers to really relate to the content. A blended offer has also been created, incorporating both virtual and face to face courses, delivered at a variety of times including evenings- this has been chosen to ensure the training is as accessible as possible. Courses in this year's syllabus include inspection readiness, coaching, self-regulation, and learning/development for children 0-2.

- 3.8 The EPQM syllabus sits alongside our core offer of training that we deliver on a recurring basis to support the sector. This includes WellComm training- focused on practical skills to use the toolkit and effective use of Testwise. As well as Curriculum courses to help settings develop their own unique educational approach. Termly cluster meetings are also delivered, designed to bring the sector together to receive key updates- both from the team and external partners such as the DfE, Public Health and Ofsted.
- 3.9 Since the beginning of May 2024 the Quality Improvement and Training team have also been fielding Operation Encompass notifications, working in partnership with Merseyside Police to roll out the process through the Early Years sector. To date we have received 23 individual notifications which have all been passed on to providers, ensuring that children within homes where parental conflict occurs appropriate support is provided. In the main providers have been aware of family difficulties and are supporting each child whilst also monitoring the situation. For the small number of providers that were not aware of family difficulties, the settings have acted promptly to support children and monitor the situation. To co-ordinate Operation Encompass notifications moving forward, an Early Years Inclusive Placement Officer has been recruited. Once inducted, the postholder will develop the support around Operation Encompass notifications ensuring settings are being as proactive as possible were settings have concerns around parental conflict, whilst also ensuring the right support is put in place for children.
- 3.10 **Wrap around provision expansion:** In March 2023 the government announced the ambition that all parents of children aged between 5-11 wanting to access wrap around childcare are able to do so during term time. The aim of the programme is to over supply the market to create the demand over the two-year life of the implementation programme. The funding is tapered so will reduce as parents take up the offer. The expectation is that 50% of places will be delivered by September 2024.
- 3.11 The early years team have mapped supply and demand across Wirral and have drafted a delivery plan. Wirral currently has 32 schools that meet the full provision criteria, 61 schools that have partial provision and 8 schools with no provision. The 61 schools with partial provision; the majority need to extend their hours to 8am till 6pm and 8 schools need to develop new after school provision. 7 of the schools that need to develop wrap around provision are special schools which adds some complexity to ensure children's needs are met. It is anticipated that Wirral will create 970 places that meet the DfE criteria.
- 3.12 Whilst all schools are encouraged to engage in the project if they can evidence that their community of parents do not want to change their provision, they do not have to take up the offer. Childcare works on behalf of DfE are currently reviewing the delivery plan once approved work will commence on liaising with schools to determine next steps for their provision.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The council has a responsibility to distribute funding received from the Department for Education via the Early Years block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).

4.2 The council has a requirement to meet the approved funding as decided by schools forum in relation to early years funding.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The council has a statutory responsibility to maintain sufficient childcares places across to meet the demands of the local area. On a three year basis the council will produce an annual report in relation to child care sufficiency.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

6.1 The council must maintain the required staffing resource to distribute relevant funding to education providers.

6.2 The council supports local early years providers with support in relation to training, guidance, and opportunities for wider partnership work. This is delivered through Early Years Quality team.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

7.1 Schools may not engage in the wrap around programme reducing the anticipated number of new places being created. In order to mitigate this risk, we have taken a funding allocation approach rather than expect schools to apply for funding to encourage participation.

7.2 Schools with limited provision may not be able to change staff hours to accommodate quickly enough to enable places to be available from September 2024, which in turn could mean the council does not achieve 50% of new places being created by September 2024. To mitigate this risk, we are looking at having alternative delivery models schools could adopt.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

8.1 The wrap programme has a project group which includes school headteachers from each school cluster and the primary headteacher consultant to keep schools updated. The school forum also has an early years sub group which includes early years providers and schools representatives to liaise with around encouraging take up of two-year-funding. Children's centres also assertively target eligible families for two-year funding to encourage take up.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 An equality impact assessment has been completed.

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

10.1 Not applicable

11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 The generation of further opportunities for growth in the Early Years sector allows further employment opportunities across the borough. To support this activity an early years jobs fair will be taking place in the summer term.
- 11.2 The jobs fair will allow residents to access information in relation to training, apprenticeships and employment in the early years sector, the fair will be supported by training providers and employers.

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APPENDICES

- Appendix 1: FIS Model June 2024
Appendix 2: QIT Team Offer to Early Years Providers

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Early Education and childcare: Statutory Guidance for local authorities. January 2024
[Early education and childcare \(applies from 1 April 2024\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/102121/early-education-and-childcare-statutory-guidance-for-local-authorities-january-2024.pdf)

National wrap around childcare programme handbook. February 2024
[National Wraparound Childcare Programme Handbook - a guide for local authorities \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/102121/national-wrap-around-childcare-programme-handbook-february-2024.pdf)

TERMS OF REFERENCE

This report is being considered by the Children, Young People & Education Committee in accordance with Section A of its Terms of Reference, exercising management, oversight and delivery of services to children and young people in relation to their care, wellbeing, education or health, with the exception of any powers reserved to full Council.

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date

