

Briefing Note

Title: Early Years Update - Outcome of Peer Review

Date: 12th September 2019

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Job Title: Head of School Improvement

Intended Audience:

Internal Partner organisation Public Confidential

1. Purpose or recommendation

To report on the outcome of the Early Years Peer Review which took place in the city between 25 – 28 June 2019.

2. Background and context

On 12 December 2017 the Department for Education (DfE) launched *Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential: A plan for improving social mobility through education*. This plan had one overarching ambition: no community left behind.

Within the plan, Ambition 1 is to close the word gap in the early years. Children with strong foundations start school in a position to progress, but too many children still fall behind early, and it is hard to close the gaps that emerge. It is important to tackle these development gaps at the earliest opportunity, particularly focussing on the key early language and literacy skills, so that all children can begin school ready to thrive.

A key strand within this social mobility action plan is to focus on sector-led improvement across early years provision that is driven through peer challenge and support. To develop and embed this approach the DfE is working with the Local Government Association (LGA) who have significant experience and expertise in developing and delivering programmes of peer review that support improvements to service delivery and outcomes.

3. Overview

The LGA peer team was invited by City of Wolverhampton Council to conduct a review of early years provision with a specific focus on speech and language. The review was not a formal inspection, it was a supportive but challenging ‘critical friend’ approach designed to assist the Council and our partners in celebrating our strengths and identifying our own areas for improvement. The key purpose of the review was to stimulate local discussion about how the Council and our partners can become more effective in delivering improved outcomes for children.

The peer challenge allowed external colleagues from across Local Government to review the city’s early years system through a number of themes aligned to the ten elements in the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) Maturity Matrix (a self-assessment tool to measure

progress in delivering a system-wide approach to improving outcomes for children in the early years), with a particular focus on speech, language and communication skills.

The Key Lines of Enquiry were:

1. PLAN: Strategy, including leadership voice and culture
2. LEAD: Partnerships, with an emphasis on joint workforce planning
3. LEAD: Community ownership and engagement
4. EVALUATE: Evaluation including using and generating evidence

A self-assessment was provided to the peer review team, along with a bank of evidence. During the four days spent in the city, the review team spoke to a cross-section of senior officers and frontline staff, elected members, partners and they observed early years practice.

Appendix 1 is the report from the LAG Peer Review Team. The following points the recommendations that the team made to the Council.

1. Collectively ensure that the early years governance arrangements and the strategy review are evidence based and support a whole system and whole family approach
2. Create a shared clear vision for your early years services which is supported by a simple and widely understood definition of your collective offer
3. Actively involve parents and communities in shaping and delivering services
4. Communicate broadly your defined offer and the pathways for families with young children
5. Develop a performance dashboard with a shared data set from all partners reflecting the whole child's development
6. As part of your emerging whole system approach, seek opportunities to increase joint commissioning across early years services
7. Follow through your intention to create a joint workforce planning and development approach
8. Develop a clear Speech Language Communication Needs (SLCN) offer with a closing the gap plan which is supported by the speech and language therapy service

4. Next steps

- a) The report has been considered by the joint Education and Children's Leadership Team and the recommendations have been formulated into a draft action plan showing the themes highlighted as seven priority areas: governance, vision, co-production, partnerships, evaluation, commissioning and joint workforce plans. **Appendix 2** is the draft action plan which will be shared with early years partners across the city to ensure a common approach to the system priorities.
- b) The recommendations from the LGA Peer Review will be embedded into a comprehensive action plan which will ensure the continued delivery of the Early Years Strategy, 2017-2021. The revised plan will include aspects of work relating to the Early Outcomes Fund and Professional Development Programme, the Early Help Strategy, the SEND Strategy and Public Health priorities linked to the Healthy

Child Programme. Work is underway to embed the peer review recommendations into the action plan and this will be presented to the Strengthening Families Board on 13 November 2019.