

**Wiltshire Council**

**Select Committee**

**26 November 2024**

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**Early Years Childcare Strategy 2025-2028**

**Proposal**

That the committee considers and approves the proposed Early Years Childcare strategy.

The strategy looks at the needs of the local area in regard to Early Education and Childcare for children under the age of 5 years, including reception classes in school.

There is a nine-point action plan that forms part of the strategy that the Early Years teams across the council will be working on over the 3 years.

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## **Early Years Childcare strategy 2025-2028**

### **Purpose of report**

This report highlights the main points within the Early Years strategy, it is asked that the committee consider and approve the strategy.

### **Background**

The Best Start in Life section of the Wiltshire Business Plan makes reference to the implementation of an Early Years strategy to bring services together.

The strategy takes into account the Local Authority statutory duties and responsibilities, and strengthens the work we will be doing to meet these duties whilst also improving outcomes for young children and their families.

### **Main considerations for the committee**

The strategy was identified in the Council's current business plan as a way of bringing services together across Early Years.

#### **The Best Start in Life:**

- Empower People to get the best start in life:
- Ensure every one of our children achieves their optimal physical, emotional and mental health
- Support the development of speech and language, ensuring that children are ready to learn at 2 years of age and ready for school at 5 years of age
- Guarantee that there are enough high quality and accessible preschool places.
- Find the right specialist support for children with special educational needs.
- Ensure all school pupils, including those who are vulnerable, can access a high-quality education provision and are well prepared for their next stage in life.
- Provide 'early help' to make sure families will get the right help at the right time from the most appropriate professionals.
- Provide high quality Early Years services from birth to 5 years.

#### **Thriving Economy with the right skills to prosper:**

- Support educational establishments to reduce the risk to vulnerable pupils by developing early help practices and multiagency support, enabling all pupils to realise their potential.

Early Years is a priority area as it provides childcare to allow parents to work and achieve their potential, as well as to support Wiltshire's thriving economy. High Quality early education has also been shown to improve the life outcomes for young children as well as raise aspirations.

Early Years is a rapidly changing area with expanded entitlements for working families who have under twos, two year olds, as well as the development of school-based nurseries. The strategy is designed to provide a framework and action plan for the sector so that Wiltshire Council can meet its statutory duties as well as meeting the needs of the local communities.

The outcomes for the youngest children in Wiltshire are good. 68.9% achieve a Good Level of Development, which is slightly above the national average (67.2%). However, there is a gap for our most disadvantaged learners, in 2024 48% of Wiltshire's disadvantaged children achieved a Good Level of Development compared to 52% nationally, this was a 4.4% gap. We are hoping that through targeting our work on this area we will start to narrow that gap and be more in line with national outcomes. The strategy will help us to focus this work more closely and look at the factors that affect children's learning and development in the Early Years whilst also ensuring that working parents are able to access high quality childcare when they need it.

The strategy was written with support from the Local Government Association (LGA) and involved extensive consultation with partners, stakeholders, parents and teams within the council.

The strategy has a nine-point action plan which will be addressed over the next three years. The actions have been identified through stakeholder consultation as well as from local area and community needs.

### **Action points identified**

- Good Level of Development and school readiness
- Provision of family hubs
- Sufficient childcare and employment support for working parents
- Transitions
- Improving the wellbeing of young children
- Integrated early childhood service and workforce development
- Information and advice for key stakeholders in early years services
- Supporting SEND in the Early Years
- Transport/Rural Wiltshire

The strategy is vital to the council's business plan as without sufficient, high quality childcare parents will be unable to work and this will impact on other areas of the council such as housing and revenues and benefits.

Early years education and childcare is important for all families but especially working parents or those looking to return to work.

It offers flexibility to enable parents and carers to go to work and work the hours that they need. Childcare enables parents to increase their income, access better paid

work or more secure work.

Without high quality childcare in the early years children may fall behind their peers and have reduced opportunities. This will lead to reduced life chances as they move into adulthood and work.

This strategy will support our ability to support improvement of children's educational outcomes. High-quality early education helps children to develop skills that they need for later life such as communication, resilience and independence. Attendance at good quality settings helps close the attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their peers.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the Early Years and Childcare strategy has been developed to bring together all aspects of childcare and our duties as a Local Authority. There is a clear three-year action plan which will focus and align work, with robust accountability.

The focused work from this strategy will improve outcomes for very young children and their families whilst also enabling and encouraging parents into work which will reduce their dependence on local authority support.

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## **Appendices**

The Early Years and Childcare Strategy 2025-2028

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