



Hartlepool's Strategy for the Early Years

Autumn, 2021

Table of contents

Glossary of abbreviations and terms

Foreword

Introduction

Case for change

Vision and values

Our vision

Our values

Key factors supporting implementation

Our strategic priorities

How will we do this?

Monitoring and measuring progress

DRAFT

Glossary of Abbreviations and Terms

Department for Education – DfE

Early intervention – trying to identify and resolve problems before they become more difficult to reverse.

Early Intervention Foundation – EIF

Early years – in this report, the period from conception until a child is aged five.

Early Years Foundation Stage – EYFS

Early Years Partnership – EYP

Home Learning Environment – HLE

Local Government Association – LGA

Special educational needs and development – SEND

Speech, language and communication – SLC

Foreword

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Introduction

The case for change

Poverty in Hartlepool is rising at an alarming rate (currently 37.8%) with Hartlepool now in the top 10 local authorities across the country with the highest percentage increase of children living in low income families in the past five years (Stone, 2021). We know that poverty and disadvantage can have an adverse impact on a child's life chances yet The Early Intervention Foundation states, 'the effects of disadvantage or adversity in early life can be negative, but they are by no means universal or irreversible' (EIF, 2020).

We know that whilst our young children record good levels of general development at age 5 their speech, language and communication is below expected levels. On average, 40% of the overall gap between disadvantaged 16- year-olds and their peers has already emerged by the age of five. By the age of three, on average, more disadvantaged children are already almost a full year and a half behind their more affluent peers in their early language development (DfE, 2021).

Across the board research tells us that what happens during the first five years of a child's life has lifelong effects on their health and well-being and educational achievement. A positive early years experience is critical to increasing a children's life chances and preventing poverty in adulthood.

Whilst there are lots of service and support for the Early Years in Hartlepool, we recognise, in light of the above reasons and with the legacy of missed learning through the COVID pandemic, that we need a new positive vision and a coherent strategic approach to ensure that every child accesses the support they need to get the best start in life.

This strategy document sets out our vision and key priorities and lays out the objectives and actions we will take to achieve this goal.

Vision and values

Our vision

Hartlepool is a place where all families are valued and respected; a place where every child gets the best start in life so that they can grow up healthy, safe and secure, and able to fulfil their potential.

We want all our early years children to:

- Be safe and supported
- Be as healthy and happy as they can
- Have opportunities to achieve their potential
- Be provided with the foundations so they are ready for life.

Our values

Prevention & early intervention: we will have a renewed focus on identification, prevention and intervention - from conception all the way through pregnancy to birth and up to the age of five years. We will harness the expertise within existing services and bring partners together to target resources. We will constantly look for opportunities where we can to work cooperatively. We will work closely with parents, partners and communities to design and deliver services.

- **Children and young people first, driven with selflessness**

Improving the opportunities and life chances of all of our children and young people, which will drive policy and decision making, with a legacy of hope and aspiration. We value all aspects of the life of the child, recognising the importance of taking a holistic approach to supporting children's development and addressing their needs through wellbeing and resilience. We know that emotional and physical safety is foundational to child health and development. We work collectively to keep our children safe in Hartlepool.

- **High expectations for all**

We want the very best for each and every child and young person, no matter what their background is, or what their individual needs are. We believe that children should feel valued and have equal opportunities. We have high expectations of all of our children.

- **A cooperative community**

We are committed to keeping children at the heart of strong and effective collaboration, based on honest relationships and clear communication. Supporting the whole community including parents and carers is very important to us.

- **Clear accountability and measures, doing what is right with integrity**

We will set ourselves ambitious and clear milestones, which are research informed where possible, so that everyone knows how well we are doing and what we need to do to improve.

- **Listen to and respond to need**

The needs of the child are at the centre of what we do. We will listen to the needs of individuals and our learning communities. We take an **inclusive** approach with all children, families and communities and we will ensure we use our collective resources efficiently to meet need.

- **Prevention**

We will focus on prevention and early intervention to prevent the escalation and reoccurrence of unmet need.

Key Factors Supporting Implementation

Governance and leadership

A new 'Early Years Partnership' (EYP) will ensure consistency of approaches throughout the Early Years by providing clear direction, purpose and accountability. The EYP will drive forward the strategy which in turn will feed into the Children's Strategic Partnership for Hartlepool. The

EYP will include a cross-spectrum of professionals from partner agencies with a collective will and desire to effect positive change for children in the early years.

The Early Years Strategy will be supported with 'a plan on a page' and an action plan which identifies the key tasks that need to be undertaken including who will do them and by when. We are ambitious and intend to begin to see the impact of our work by the end of 2024.

Our Strategic Priorities

We know that no single service, programme or activity will be successful in transforming and sustaining improved outcomes in the Early Years in Hartlepool. There are no quick wins. It will take a concerted and long term effort across a range of partners, strategic policies and services to deliver the changes we want to see. Using the recommendations set out by LGA in 2020 together with the experience of a range of professionals across care, education and health sectors the following strategic priorities have been identified:

Priority 1: Information and Data

Create a comprehensive performance information framework that clearly indicates through the collective use of partner agency data, the early years position in Hartlepool enabling us to focus our attentions in areas of greatest need. The framework will work on a baseline of conception through to children aged 5 years.

Priority 2: An Early Years Team

Create a multi-agency early years service (or team) that includes the broadest possible spectrum of people that reach children in their early years. Enable this team to work innovatively, creatively and collectively to support the achievement of our strategic goals, sharing their knowledge, skills and expertise for the good of the child.

Priority 3: Speech, Language and Communication

Place Speech, Language and Communication at the core of our early years work ensuring that each and every child in Hartlepool receives comprehensive opportunities to develop their SLC at home, in the community and in their care and education settings.

Priority 4: Poverty and Social Mobility

Ensure that our early years strategy includes a robust understanding of the levels of and impact of poverty in Hartlepool and support efforts to eradicate this. Encourage aspiration which in turn supports social mobility.

Priority 5: Early Intervention

Implement an effective prevention, identification and early intervention pathway that ensures children that require additional support are identified as soon as possible. This includes children already identified by statutory agencies and receiving support (e.g. social care).

Priority 6 – SEND

Ensure our SEND children, their families and the professionals that engage with them are provided with the necessary support to ensure they achieve their full early years potential.

Priority 7: Parent as the first and primary educator / The Home Learning Environment

Acknowledge that a child's parents and caregivers are their primary educators and ensure they have the support they need to fulfil this role. Support all children to grow up in a secure Home Learning Environment (HLE) which includes not only the physical environment but the learning and support provided by their parents and caregivers.

Priority 8: Health and Wellbeing

Ensure pathways are in place to support the physical, emotional and general wellbeing and mental health of children and their parents and caregivers.

Priority 9: Quality Assurance

Ensure every care and education setting is at least 'good' (as identified by Ofsted and supported by local quality assurance methods) and are on a continuous improvement journey.

Priority 10: Transition

Put in place robust procedures to ensure significant transition points in the early years including birth, childcare, nursery and school result in good information sharing leading to an enhanced level of understanding of the child's needs. Ensure parents at the centre of the process at each and every transition point.

Priority 11: Workforce development

Develop a comprehensive and inclusive early years workforce development strategy that ensures all those that come into contact with children in their early years have the skills and knowledge necessary to make a difference to their early years development.

How will we do this?

Priority 1: Information and Data

- Develop an information sharing protocol that allows all relevant agencies share information to enable an effective performance management framework be developed.
- Develop an understanding of what data and information is available and what will enable us understand need.
- Create a baseline so that future performance can be effectively measured.
- Drill down into child level data so that effective intervention can take place where there are concerns.
- Prepare a score card so that we can see the turn in the curve.

Priority 2: An Early Years Team

- Harness the resources available across partner agencies to establish a multi-agency early years service or team that clearly understands strategic priorities and goals.
- Enable this team to work innovatively, creatively and flexibly to deliver exceptional early years services and support.
- Empower the team to use their funding to support the strategic priorities and goals.

Priority 3: Speech, Language and Communication

- Ensure that all communications around early years continually promote the importance of SLC.
- Ensure that a newly developed training and development programme and associated materials has a strong focus on SLC.
- Establish clear connections between SLC and the Home Learning Environment enabling parents and caregivers to understand the importance of SLC and how to support effective SLC.
- Ensure that at every point a parent or caregiver is seen the importance of SLC is stressed including how the parent can get ideas, resources or support if they need.

Priority 4: Poverty and Social Mobility

- Ensure that the Early Years Partnership and Early Years Team have a thorough understanding of the levels of poverty across Hartlepool and the strategic priorities that have been agreed to combat this.
- Ensure that parents, caregivers and professionals are fully aware of where to get a child help if they need it.
- Promote aspiration and educational achievement as a route out of poverty and increase in social mobility.

Priority 5: Early Intervention

- Implement an effective identification, prevention and early intervention pathway that ensures children that require additional support are identified as soon as possible. This includes children with special educational needs and development.
- Re-design health pathways and statutory checks to ensure that see a child at every possible stage and identify problems early.
- Re-shape the integrated two year old check and create a further check at or around age 3.
- Ensure that the Early Years Service knows about all children, in all cohorts from conception through to age five and that they can enable intervention if required.

Priority 6: SEND

- Ensure that every child with SEND is identified early.
- Ensure families and caregivers have the help they need.
- Ensure the early years workforce has the training, skills and knowledge to equip them to work with children with SEND.

Priority 7: Parent as the First Educator / The Home Learning Environment

- Ensure that parents have access to the support they need to be the best parent they can be.
- Ensure that at all points that a child is seen their home learning environment is considered and that parents and caregivers are supported if needed with ideas, resources and intervention if required.
- Ensure that professionals and all those that come into contact with early years children understand the importance of the HLE and support parents to do the very best they can.
- Be mindful that the HLE is linked to parent support and that parents need to have the capacity to create a positive HLE and that they may need help and support to do this.

Priority 8: Health and wellbeing

- Ensure children's physical and emotional health and wellbeing is supported.
- Ensure parents and caregivers physical and emotional health and wellbeing is supported.
- Ensure the early years workforce knows how to help children and their families' access health and wellbeing support.

Priority 9: Quality Assurance

- Ensure every care and education setting is at least 'good' supported by a comprehensive training and development programme that focuses on the early years.
- Establish a clear understanding of the quality of all care and education providers based on their Ofsted judgements and local assessment.
- Support providers in their engagement with a newly developed early years training programme that includes focus on prevention, early intervention, SLC and the HLE.

Priority 10: Transition

- Ensure robust procedures are in place to support children at all transition points in their early years.
- Resolve data sharing issues to ensure that important information about a child is shared at appropriate transition points.
- Support professionals to acknowledge the importance of transition information in their understanding of the needs of the children.

Priority 11: Workforce Development

- Create a workforce development strategy and associated programme that focuses on the early years and reaches out to all those that come into contact with children.

- Ensure SLC and the HLE are embedded in workforce training and development and seen as crucial to the child's early years.
- Support early years professionals to be able to access training; make training as accessible and flexible as possible to enable the engagement of learners.
 - Create a library of resources (virtually and physically) that is accessible to everyone across the early years workforce.

Monitoring and measuring progress

The Early Years Partnership will meet monthly and will provide clear leadership in the area of early years. It will oversee the early years strategic strategy and plan and ensure the key priorities remain on track. It will monitor the newly developed early years performance management framework and provide critical analysis and challenge where needed. It will direct resources to areas of need.

Success will take time to be visible however it will be measured by:

- an increase in the number of children accessing their early years entitlements
- improved inspection outcomes for early years providers
- improved educational outcomes for children
- a narrowing of the gap between disadvantaged children and their peers
- fewer children needing statutory intervention including Early Help or Social Care support
- a reduction in children living in poverty.