

REPORT TO:	CABINET 14 SEPTEMBER 2022
SUBJECT:	Croydon Partnership Early Years Strategy
LEAD OFFICERS:	Debbie Jones, Interim Corporate Director, Children, Young People and Education Shelley Davies, Director of Education, Children Young People and Education Denise Bushay, Head of Service, Early Years, School Place Planning and Admission
CABINET MEMBER:	Councillor Maria Gatland, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People
WARDS:	All

SUMMARY OF REPORT:

This report presents the final draft of Croydon's Partnership Early Years Strategy. The draft Strategy sets out Croydon's vision for Early Years, the priorities, the principles, and the outcomes we want to achieve for children from before they are born up to the age 5 at the end of the foundation stage, and their families. This draft strategy will span a three-year timeframe from 2022 to 2025 with proposals to create a child-centred system with joined-up policies and services to support our youngest residents and their families

The draft strategy aligns with the Government's Family Hubs approach which is a system-wide model of providing high-quality, joined-up, whole-family support; and Best Start for Life which is focused on the 1,001 critical days through pregnancy to the age of two. It is also in line with the Beyond Boundaries (ISOS) report which calls on local leaders within Councils, in health and the community, to prioritise the development of closer working to integrate all parts of the 'pre-birth to five system'.

The vision is that 'All children achieve the best possible development, health, wellbeing and education outcomes from before pregnancy to the end of reception and for children to feel safe, secure and loved'. This vision is underpinned by a commitment to prevention, and the earliest possible intervention to reduce inequalities that could impact children's life chances.

The draft strategy celebrates the diversity of Croydon's young children and their families which includes people from different family structures, disabilities, ethnicity, gender, religion and sexual orientation different ethnic, and cultural groups, such as the traveller community, asylum seekers and refugees. We recognise that the first years of life are among the most important for a child's mental and physical development and support and services should be delivered in a way that helps children and families thrive.

The proposals in the strategy have been developed in collaboration and consultation with parents and carers, the Early Years Partnership consisting of Croydon Council,

Public Health, Croydon's Integrated Care System, early year's practitioners, schools, and wider partners.

The draft strategy provides the guiding principles for the development of Family Hubs and Early Help transformation and will advance efforts for integrated pathways across the Early Years system, with particular emphasis on involving residents and the voluntary and community sector.

The need for a Partnership Early Years Strategy has been further strengthened by the COVID pandemic which impacted the Early Years through increased poverty and anxiety, impacting on emotional wellbeing and mental health, reduced access to childcare, restricted social engagement, speech and language developmental delay, less face-to-face contact with health, social care and education professionals.

Croydon's Partnership Early Year's strategy is for: all parents, carers, and their children from before pregnancy to the end of reception (age 5 to 6); and any statutory, private, voluntary organisation - education, health, social care - involved with and supporting parents, carers, and their children in the early years.

We are seeking the Executive Mayor's approval for the final draft of Croydon Partnership Early Years Strategy, its publication, and development of the Delivery Plan.

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – full draft of the Partnership Early Years Strategy.

Appendix 2 - Consultation outcomes report

Appendix 3 - Equality Impact Assessment.

Subject to approval of the draft Strategy, the next step in the process is the development of the Strategy's Delivery Plan. The Delivery Plan will be an action-oriented document, co-produced with parents, carers, and partners; it will set out how we will work towards the successful delivery of the Strategy's aims and objectives. An accessible version of the delivery plan will be produced for use and reference by families, carers and partners. A directory of early years services will be developed as part of publishing Croydon's Best Start in Life offer.

Governance of the strategy will be overseen by internal strategic management groups and partnership boards to ensure effective delivery of the vision and implementation of the strategy / proposals. A new Early Years partnership board will be established for the implementation the Strategy and co-production of the Delivery plan. The draft strategy is a live 'working document', which will be reviewed and refreshed to incorporate new and relevant data as it becomes available and reflect developing policy.

COUNCIL PRIORITIES 2022-2026

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

The recommendation to approve and publish the Partnership Early Years Strategy will not result in any additional cost to either the Council or Croydon's Integrated Care System.

Following the development of the Delivery Plan for the implementation of the strategy/proposals, any costs will be met from within existing funding streams and government grants.

Anecdotal evidence shows that prevention and early intervention represent good value for money, cost savings and cost avoidance. Future commissioning intentions, children's transformation programmes and service improvements may emerge later, allowing for reinvestment and / or innovations across the system, to improve outcomes for children in their early years and beyond.

KEY DECISION REFERENCE NO: [insert number if applicable/not a key decision]

This is a policy decision and will affect more than 2 wards.

[The notice of the decision will specify that the decision may not be implemented until after 13.00 hours on the 6th working day following the day on which the decision was taken unless referred to the Scrutiny and Overview Committee. [delete text as applicable]

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Executive Mayor, in Cabinet, is recommended to:

1. consider and approve the final draft of Croydon's Partnership Early Years Strategy 2022 – 2025,
2. approve the publication of the Strategy and development of its Delivery Plan.

1. DETAIL OF YOUR REPORT**1.1 Context and Background**

It is generally agreed that services provided during pregnancy and when children are young have greater impact on outcomes. Early childhood is one of the most critical phases of human development. It begins before birth, when a baby's body and brain are being formed, continues through early infancy when key relationships are established, and developmental milestones reached and includes the preschool years and the transition into school.

- 1.2 National reviews and strategies support integrated service provision and interventions that are focused on prevention and early intervention for children and pregnant women to ensure children get a good start in life and reach their full potential. Early intervention is a public policy approach to identify and support children and their families at an early stage, to prevent problems developing later in life, such as poor physical and mental health, low educational attainment, crime and anti-social behaviour.
- 1.3 Croydon's Partnership Early Years Strategy will deliver key statutory functions, including:
- management of funded free early education including the extended entitlement
 - supporting and monitoring standards and provision across early years settings
 - the provision of early help support in partnership with Public Health
 - SEND services and support for early years provision
 - the moderation of EYFS (Early Years Foundation Stage) statutory assessment
 - Best Start children's centres offer services, activities and support for families with children under 5.
- 1.4 In developing Croydon's Partnership Early Years Strategy, as well as using feedback from partners, parents/carers and practitioners, we have taken account of the strategic context in relation to national and local priorities and relevant policy guidance. The Strategy aims to provide integrated working across all partners which is vital to the delivery of high-quality services and targeted support for vulnerable children and families. The high-level objectives of the strategy are designed to reflect all the influences on a child in the early years.

2. The Legislative Context

Croydon's Partnership Early Years Strategy provides a framework for service delivery within the context of statutory duties (namely but not exclusively the Childcare Act 2006 and 16, www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/21/contents)

- 2.1 The responsibilities on local authorities were further defined by the Children and Families Act 2014 which seeks to improve services for vulnerable children and to support families. It underpinned wider reforms and policies to ensure that all children and young people can succeed, no matter what their background which is further strengthened by the Equalities Act 2010 and the SEND Code of Practice.
- 2.2 The strategy links to other commitments made by government in various report/guidance such as:
- Working Together to Safeguard Children A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children
 - Keeping children safe in education - early information sharing is vital for effective identification, assessment and allocation of appropriate service provision

- Healthy child programme - partner services working collaboratively with the midwife to provide continuity of care and providers equipped to design effective, family-oriented services
- The best start for life: a vision for the 1,001 critical days
- Family Hubs: a system-wide model of providing high-quality, joined-up, whole-family support services.

3. The Local Context

Croydon has the 4th largest population of children and young people in London: 22.2% (85,672) of the population are aged 0–15 years. The projected growth in the population of children between the ages of 0 and 6 in Croydon between now and 2030 is just under 1000 - 40,431 – 41225.

- 49% of the eligible 2-year-old population benefitted from a funded early education place in January 2020.
 - 85% of 3- and 4-year-olds benefitted from a funded early education place in January 2020. For both age groups, take up is below the London and England averages.
- 3.1 In 2019, 74.6% of pupils achieved a good level of development in Croydon in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) in line with London and above England (71.8%).
- 3.2 The Croydon Health and Care Plan (2019 – 2025) identifies Better start in life and Maternity as a priority for parents and carers with young children and recognises that to improve their health and wellbeing services need to focus on ‘prevention and proactive care’, untapped potential in our ‘community assets and skills’ and ‘integrated services.’²¹
- 3.3 Croydon’s Prevention Framework aims to create the conditions in which prevention initiatives will flourish and to support Croydon’s aim to reduce inequalities. This is being used to inform this early year’s strategy. The aim of the prevention framework is to:
- underpin the development of our strategies and implementation plans, ensuring our strategies following the same preventative priorities and therefore have a greatest impact and
 - set out the approach for how we will embed the preventative approach in all we do.

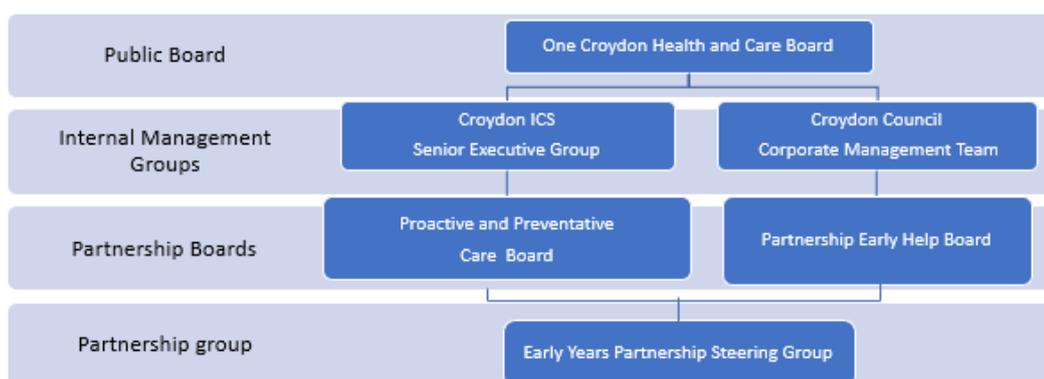
4. Implementing the Strategy

Subject to approval of the draft Strategy, a Delivery Plan will be co-produced with partners, parents/carers, and practitioners. The delivery plan will transform the strategic aims, objectives and priorities into practical, measurable and time bound actions. An accessible version of the delivery plan will be produced for use and reference by families, carers and partners. A directory of early years services will be developed as part of publishing Croydon’s Best Start in Life offer.

The delivery of the strategy will be a shared responsibility for those delivering Council services, maternity and health services, early years providers, schools and the community and voluntary sector. The Strategy is a live 'working document', which will be reviewed and refreshed to incorporate new, relevant policy developments, guidelines, and regulations.

5. Governance

The One Croydon Health and Care Board is responsible for improving the health and wellbeing of Croydon's residents and reduce inequalities. The Early Years Strategy is aligned to the One Croydon Health and Care Plan, directly addressing the priority for a Better Start in Life and Maternity. Governance of the strategy will be overseen by internal strategic management groups and partnership boards (see chart below). An Early Years Partnership steering group will be established as part of these proposals to implement the strategy and co-produce the delivery and action plan.



6. Consultation

Consultation is an essential part of how we will deliver the Mayoral / Council's priorities. In developing this Partnership Early Years Strategy / proposals we listened to and took into consideration the diverse views of Croydon residents, providers and those that will be affected by or have an interest in the strategy. Please see continuous cycle of engagement image below:

Early Years Strategy Continuous Cycle of Engagement



6.1 Consultation with senior management groups and partnership boards have informed the strategy and proposed governance outline above. Consultation with partners – colleagues across and beyond the Council supports the strategy’s vision.

7. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS/PROPOSED DECISION

7.1 To seek the Mayor’s approval for Croydon’s Partnership Early Years Strategy, its publication and development of its Delivery Plan.

8. OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

8.1 The option to have a single Council Early Years Strategy was considered but not pursued as this was not in line with national or local policies.

9 FINANCIAL AND RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS

9.1 Revenue and Capital Consequences of Report Recommendations

None of the strategy results directly in a financial consequence. The potential cost implications for implementing any of the recommendations in the strategy plan will be subject to an option appraisal with a business case.

Other recommendations in the plan will be financed through the proposed nationally awarded Family Hubs funding and development of the Start for Life offer in Croydon.

There are likely future savings opportunities to be explored to ensure continued value for money across all the services. One of these objectives in the strategy is to look at opportunities from integrating budgets across services. The table below represents the budget position over the next few years.

Table 1 – Medium Term Financial Strategy

	Current Year	Medium Term Financial Strategy – 3-year forecast		
	2022/23 £'000	2023/24 £'000	2024/25 £'000	2025/26 £'000
Revenue Budget Available				
Income DSG	(29.260)	(30.723)	(31,650)	(32.594)
Income General Fund	-	-	-	-
Expenditure DSG	29.260	30.723	31.650	32.594
Expenditure General Fund	8.700	8.700	8.700	8.700
Effect of decision from report				
Income (None)	-	-	-	-

Expenditure (None)	-	-	-	-
Remaining Budget	8.700	8.700	8,700	8.700

9.2 As indicated in table 1, significant share of the budget is related to Dedicated Schools Grant payable to Early Years providers. The rest of the budget which represents General Fund and Health contribution makes up approximately £8.700m. All these funds are invested in the early years strategy to improve children’s health, development and education and wellbeing outcomes, and reduce inequalities.

9.3 The Effect of the Decision

The 2006 Childcare Act requires local authorities to work with their NHS partners to improve outcomes for all children aged up to five years and to reduce inequalities by ensuring services are integrated to maximise benefits to families. If the draft strategy is not approved, the Council may fail to fully meet its statutory duties.

9.4 Risks

The main risk to the implementation of the strategy is insufficient commitment from partners to delivering workforce, organisational and service changes to deliver more integrated services for parents and carers in the Early Years. The partnership has been engaged in the development of the strategy but this will need to continue through the delivery planning and implementation phases. A significant risk is capacity particularly with health partners such as health visiting and to a lesser extent midwifery.

9.5 Options

Do nothing is not an option as this strategy is also a requirement of the Family Hubs approach which Croydon will received ringfenced funding for.

9.6 Future Savings/Efficiencies

Any potential future savings or efficiencies will be identified in the Delivery Plan stage; however this cannot be pre-empted at this stage.

9.7 Approved by Matt Davies, Interim Director of Finance and Deputy s151 Officer.

10 LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

10.1 The Childcare Act 2006 (“the 2006 Act”) imposes several duties on local authorities, including to work with partners to improve the outcomes of all children up to five years of age and reduce inequalities between them. The Council must secure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that the provision of childcare is sufficient to meet the requirements of parents in their area who require childcare in order to enable them to work or undertake education or training.

- 10.2 Additionally, Section 11 of the Children Act 2004 places a duty on the Council to decide to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. It is not anticipated that the proposals outlined in this report will affect the Council's ability to meet its duties.
- 10.3 The Local Authority has already undertaken a public consultation in relation to these proposals to inform the decision making and ensure fairness. This is set out in the report under the heading-'Consultation'. The responses to the consultation must be conscientiously considered when taking the decision in respect of the proposals.
- 10.4 The Local Authority completed an Equities Impact Assessment as part of the development of the Strategy, this should be considered before deciding whether to proceed with these proposals. The decision-maker must have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful conduct under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the need to advance equality of opportunity and to have regard to the impact of decisions on protected groups and the need to foster good relations between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 10.5 The proposed Early Years Strategy would enable the Council to deliver on its statutory obligations under the Childcare Act 2006 relating to its general duties to improve the well-being of young children and reduce inequalities between young children in the area; and specific duty to decide to secure early childhood services in the area and such services are discharged about the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.
- 10.6 Approved by Doutimi Aseh, Head of Social Care & Education Law on behalf of Stephen Lawrence-Orumwense, Director of Legal Services & Monitoring Officer.

11 HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT

- 11.1 There are no immediate human resources implications arising from this report for Council employees. However, workforce is a key aspect of Croydon's Partnership Early Years Strategy, which will have HR implications for both our partners and Council services. Where this is the case, the relevant policies and procedures will be observed, and HR advice must be sought at an early stage.
- 11.2 Approved by: Debbie Calliste, Head of HR for Children, Young People and Education on behalf of the Director of Human Resources.

12. EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 12.1 Under the Public-Sector Equality Duty, due regard must be given to the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. Consideration must be given to the potential impact any decision may have on groups of people with protected characteristics. This means we must take particular care to ensure that we seek the views of protected equality groups who are often 'seldom heard'

- 12.2 The Early Years strategy can treat some characteristics such as disability more favourably and it will not constitute discrimination under the Equality Act. Refers to both physical and mental health needs and is extended to include parents of disabled children.
- 12.3 Due consideration should be given to gender reassignment/identity and sexual orientation. This is to ensure that parents do not feel excluded if they do not identify in the gender that they were born in or present as.
- 12.4 Due consideration should also be given to ensuring that the strategy meets the needs of both racial and religious groups and that this is explicit to parents to ensure inclusion.
- 12.5 The pandemic and the cost-of-living increase have had a profound impact on financial wellness for many parents. Many of which have been impacted by unemployment and debt. Consideration should also be given to socio economic inequalities and its impact on parents, noting that there are some wards with high levels of deprivation in particular in the north and east of the borough. It is likely that pockets of deprivation are likely to impact more on some ethnic groups such as Asian, African, African Caribbean, asylum seekers, refugees and travelling community. There are also some wards with deprivation that are comprised of largely white British parents. This along with poor housing conditions may have impacted on the mental health of many parents.
- 12.6 An Equalities Impact Assessment (EQIA) was undertaken as part of the development of the draft strategy which found no negative impact on protected groups. In terms of Equality and Diversity Monitoring, respondents to the consultation were asked to complete an equality and diversity questionnaire, looking at Gender, Age, Ethnicity and Disability. The information collected will help identify any special requirements and promote equality and diversity. The EQIA should be updated to ensure that further data is collected from parents of all characteristics including gender reassignment and identity and sexual orientation, to ensure that the needs of parents from these characteristics are also met.
- 12.7 Approved by Denise MacCausland on behalf of the Director of Equalities.

13 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

- 13.1 It is considered that there are no increased or decreased negative environmental sustainability impacts arising from the proposals in this report.
- 13.2 (Approved by: *[A N. Other]* on behalf of the Director of XX)

14 CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPACT

- 14.1 The proposed strategy seeks to improve the pathway for services for the borough's youngest residents and their families; to improve their outcomes, build resilience and community networks. The Early Years partnership will work together to support children and families exposed to sexual violence and domestic abuse.

14.2 It is considered that there are no increased impacts on children and families from these proposals.

14.3 (Approved by: *[A N. Other]* on behalf of the Director of XX)

15 DATA PROTECTION IMPLICATIONS

15.1 WILL THE SUBJECT OF THE REPORT INVOLVE THE PROCESSING OF 'PERSONAL DATA'?

NO

15.2 HAS A DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT (DPIA) BEEN COMPLETED?

NO

15.3 DPIAs may be required for individual projects to deliver the strategy but they are not required at this stage. If required in the future, Information Management will be consulted for advice at the earliest opportunity.

15.4 Approved by: Shelley Davies, Direction of Education

CONTACT OFFICER: Denise Bushay, Head of Service, Early Years, School Place Planning and Admissions; 07850882628

APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT:

Appendix 1 – full draft of Croydon Partnership Early Years Strategy

Appendix 2 - Consultation outcomes report

Appendix 3 - Equality Impact Assessment.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS – LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

[For executive decision making it is a requirement that all Part A (open) reports & Part B reports (closed) must list and provide an electronic and a printed copy of all background reference.]