

Early Learning and Childcare Strategy 2014-2018



**“Rounded,
Resilient
and Ready”**

BACKGROUND

This Early Learning and Childcare Strategy for Kirklees is produced in direct response to the statutory duties placed on all Local Authorities under the Childcare Act 2006, and supports the commitment to give every child the best start in life.

The long term goal to reduce child poverty, reduce inequality and increase social mobility also forms part of the context to this strategy and it therefore takes account the findings from independent reviews and research¹ which highlight the ways in which high quality pre-school education and childcare for 2, 3 and 4 year olds support improved life chances for children particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds and the way in which childcare services for older children remove the barriers to work for parents.

High quality childcare provision forms part of a menu of services that support improved life chances for children. Childcare plays a crucial role in supporting the goal to reduce child poverty and also supports economic development and regeneration. Parents cannot take up new job opportunities and progress in their careers without affordable, flexible local childcare to support them.

The long term benefits of high quality pre-school childcare is well documented, but childcare in after school or holiday clubs allows older children to take part in a wide range of activities that fosters their personal development in a safe environment. In addition, by removing barriers to work for parents childcare also supports the agenda to reduce poverty and the number of workless households where young children live.

Childcare is therefore a crucial element of the Council's early intervention and preventative strategies to improve outcomes for children, families and communities and for reducing inequalities in the long term.

CONTEXT

The Childcare Act 2006 was the first legislation to regulate the development of childcare and to place a statutory duty on Local Authorities to improve outcomes for children under 5. The Act formalises the strategic role of Local Authorities through statutory duties which relate to:

The improvement of young children's wellbeing - Local Authorities and their partners must work together to improve the wellbeing of young children under 5 and reduce inequalities between them. There is a duty on local authorities to make arrangements to ensure that early

¹ Review on Poverty and Life Chances(Field 2010); Early Intervention : Next Steps (Allen 2011) Review of Child protection: a child centred system (Munro 2011), The Early Years Foundation Stage: Report on the Evidence (Tickell 2011); Nutbrown Review : Foundations for quality (Nutbrown 2012)

childhood services in their area are provided in an integrated manner in order to facilitate access and maximise the benefits of those services to young children and their families.

The provision of childcare - Local Authorities should ensure that there is sufficient childcare to meet the needs of parents who require childcare in order to enable them to:

- a) Take up, or remain in, work, or
- b) Undertake education or training which could reasonably be expected to assist them to obtain work.

Free early education for eligible children – Local Authorities must secure free early education and care for all eligible children.

Information advice and assistance – Local Authorities have a duty to provide information, advice and assistance to parents up to their child's 20th (25 for young adults with special educational needs and disabilities) birthday and to prospective parents about available services.

This Early Learning and Childcare Strategy supports a number of the Councils Priorities.

Life chances for young people

Improving Outcomes - By ensuring that every 3 and 4 year old and eligible two year olds have access to their entitlement to high quality early learning experiences in a variety of childcare settings and in the home.

Narrowing the Gap – By targeting interventions effectively and reducing the levels of developmental delay in young children to improve readiness for school and lifelong learning.

Reducing poverty - By removing barriers to work for parents by raising confidence of the quality of childcare services in Kirklees, and by ensuring that no matter which type of childcare provision they choose they can be assured that it is of the highest quality, delivered by highly skilled professionals.

Jobs and Business Growth

Economic development and prosperity - A high proportion of Kirklees childcare services are delivered by private, voluntary and independent providers. The sector employs approximately 2,000 people and contributes approximately £50- 60m to the local economy.

Services that are effective and productive

Efficiency and effectiveness - High quality universal early learning and childcare services have proven long term benefits for society², they also reduce and prevent the escalation of local costs through savings in areas such as SEN and social care provision.

² See Field, Allen, Tickell.

INTRODUCTION

The term childcare is made inclusive of education for children under compulsory school age and can include any supervised activity for school age children outside of school hours. The term 'early learning' refers to the period in a child's life from birth to age 5.

The local authority has a statutory duty to secure sufficient childcare provision for children up to the age of 14 (18 for children with disabilities) to meet the needs of parents who require childcare in order for them

- to take up, or remain in work; or
- undertake education or training which could reasonably be expected to assist them into work

Local authorities must also secure free early education for all young children who are eligible. Currently this means all that from the term after their third birthday and until they reach statutory school age all children are entitled to a maximum of 570 hours of free early education and care a year. In addition, approximately half of all 2 year olds in Kirklees are also eligible for free early education.

Childcare Provision in Kirklees

Kirklees has a diverse childcare market in which the maintained, private, voluntary and independent sectors play an equally important part. Childcare provision takes many forms and

- Has mixed funding arrangements – part public funded (free entitlement for nursery education); part subsidised (tax credits); part privately funded (parental fees)
- It is challenged by competing pressures to be accessible and flexible and still be affordable for parents.
- Availability and choice of childcare provision varies from place to place even within communities across Kirklees.
- Parents may choose to access childcare provision to suit a number of different circumstances which fit their lifestyle e.g. they may choose childcare provision based on location of their work, grandparents, schools attended by older siblings; they may choose the type of childcare based on personal preference family and friend recommendations etc.

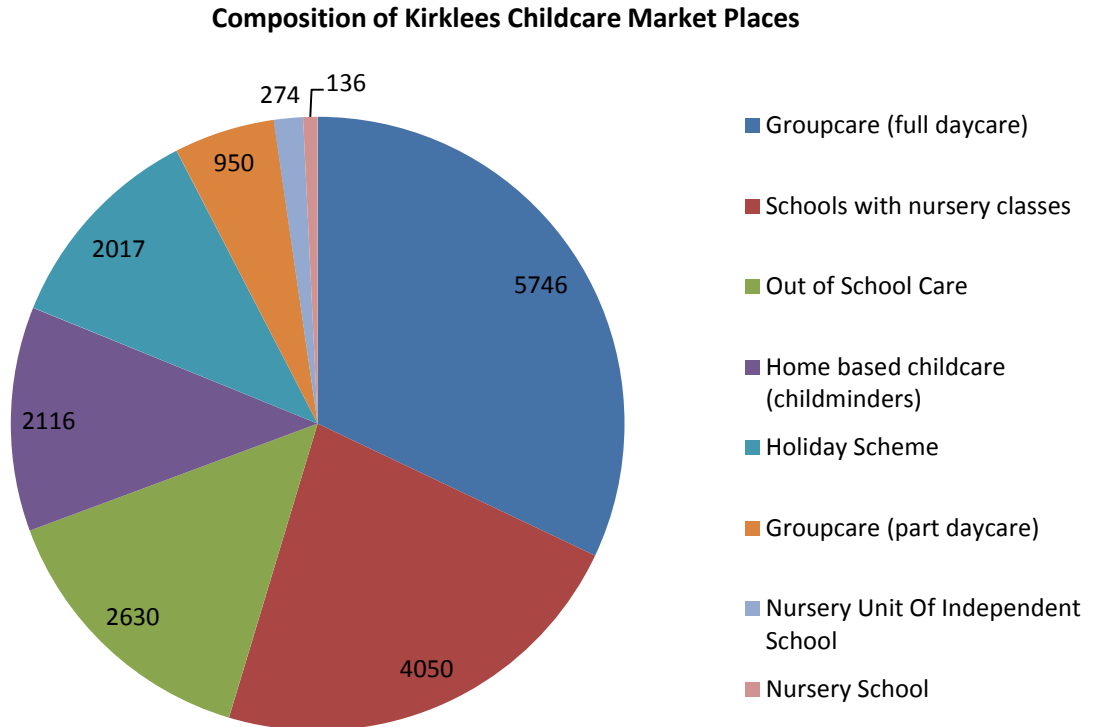
Types of childcare

In Kirklees, there are **802** (February 2014) registered providers of childcare made up as follows:

- 170 groupcare settings; private day nurseries and pre-school playgroups (131 full day and 39 part day)
- 75 schools with nursery classes
- 3 nursery schools
- 6 nursery units of independent schools
- 395 home based providers (childminders)
- 89 out of school clubs
- 64 holiday schemes

Number of childcare places in Kirklees³

17,919 places are provided by a variety of providers in Kirklees



Whilst childcare for older children is an important element and ensures that parents are able to work, 74% of the market is made up of provision for children aged 0-5.

The Kirklees childcare market is estimated to contribute between £60 to £70 million to the local economy each year.

³ For more information about childcare provision in Kirklees go to www.kirklees.gov.uk/childcare

KIRKLEES EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE STRATEGY

When resources are scarce, priorities must be clearly established, as it is particularly important to allocate them where there can be confidence of achieving significant impact and good value from any investment.

This Strategy sets out our approach to ensuring high quality childcare services are available in Kirklees which meet the needs of children, parents and families. It outlines the actions we are taking which make the best use of resources and ensure improved outcomes for children and families.

Securing Childcare Sufficiency

In securing sufficiency the Local Authority has to take account of the complexity of the local childcare market and must work in partnership with childcare providers.

The role of the Local Authority is to facilitate and support the local childcare market to ensure the provision meets the needs of parents with children up to the age of 14 (18 for children with disabilities).

The power to provide childcare directly is greatly restricted by the Childcare Act and local authorities can only provide childcare if it is satisfied that nobody else is willing to provide childcare, or if someone is willing, that in the circumstances it is more appropriate for the local authority to do so.

In fulfilling its statutory duty to secure childcare sufficiency the Local Authority will:

1. Assess and keep under review sufficiency of childcare in Kirklees by
 - Assessing demand for childcare at ward level
 - Assessing supply of childcare at ward level
 - Analysing the gap between supply and demand
 - Publishing a Childcare Sufficiency Assessment document (CSA)

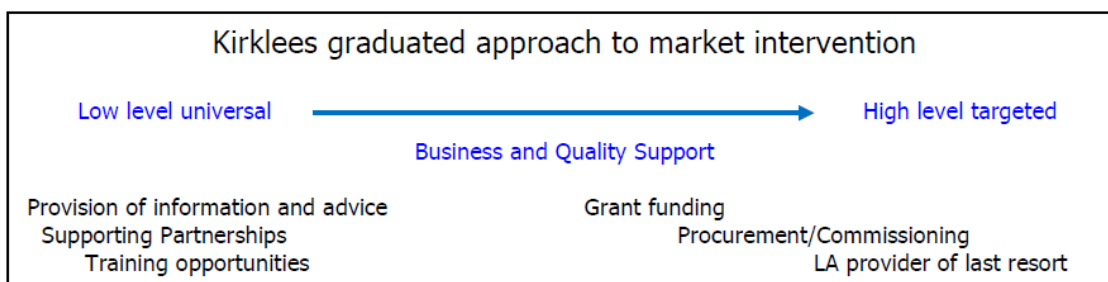
2. Develop and deliver a robust action plan to address gaps identified in our Childcare Sufficiency Assessment.

In partnership with childcare providers Kirklees Council produce a Childcare Sufficiency Action Plan each year. This plan outlines key priorities and is included in the local authority's Early Learning and Childcare Action Plan. A key priority in this plan is to ensure that the childcare needs of families in challenging circumstances are met.

3. Manage the childcare market through the use of a graduated approach to market intervention.

In Kirklees the starting assumption is that the Local Authority will act as a commissioner and not as a provider of new provision. Where the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment identifies gaps and risks in provision the local authority will use a graduated market intervention approach (see below) to stimulate the market. Where higher levels of targeted market intervention are required such as grant funding, commissioning, procurement and tendering, the local authority will ensure that all criteria,

processes and decisions are fair and transparent and in accordance with UK and EU law, regulations and guidance.



The Importance of Quality

The Childcare Act places a duty on local authorities and their partners to improve outcomes for all young children and reduce inequalities between them. Fulfilling this duty requires a broad and inclusive strategy, part of which should focus on the provision of high quality early learning and care.

After the home learning environment, high quality childcare provision makes the most difference to children's learning outcomes. High quality early learning, delivered by professionals who understand and respond to each child's needs and work in partnership with parents, has a real impact on learning and development, school readiness, later school performance and chances of social mobility in the long term.

All settings providing childcare for children aged 0-5 implement the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework to support each child's learning and development. However, implementing this framework alone does not always guarantee high quality provision. The Local Authority has a critical role to play in ensuring effective mechanisms for continuous quality improvement of childcare provision is embedded in all settings. Poor quality childcare and early learning has no more impact on children's outcomes than no early learning at all and can in fact be detrimental to a child's development.

The Importance of Parents and the Home Learning Environment

'Of all the potential areas for investment it is in the combination of child development and learning in the early years, including language and communication skills; and parenting support that the most significant impact on outcomes can be made'.⁴

There is now compelling evidence⁵ to show that what a child experiences in their early years (including in the womb), lays down the foundation for their later life; we know how important good parenting is to successful outcomes. Parents have the most significant influence on a child's early

⁴ C4EO Research – Grasping the Nettle (2010),

⁵ The Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) Project; final report A longitudinal Study 1997-2004; National Evaluation of Sure Start (2008) The Impact of Sure Start Local Programmes of 3 Year Olds and their families;

development and learning. Children with a positive home learning environment, where parents play and talk to their babies, sing rhymes and read stories, achieve better outcomes in the early years and throughout their school career.

It is therefore important that any strategy to improve outcomes and school readiness for young children includes support for parents which gives them confidence to engage in their child's learning and development. The role of children's centres and childcare providers in this is critical. In Kirklees, the Child's Journey framework has been developed and is delivered through children's centres to provide support and guidance for parents as their child's first educator.

The recent review of the Early Years Foundation Stage has recommended increased emphasis on the role of parents and carers as partners in their child's learning and increased focus and support on the development of practitioner skills in engaging parents.

The Importance of Early Language and Communication

There is also unequivocal evidence that the focus on developing language skills during a child's early years is critical in narrowing the gap in attainment in the early years and reducing inequalities in later life. The ability to communicate is an essential life skill which underpins a child's future development, but more children struggle than is commonly recognised⁶. In Kirklees we recognise that early intervention to support children at risk of delayed or dysfunctional language development is critical element of our early learning and childcare strategy.

Consequently high quality early years services that support language development in children and support parental engagement in their child's early learning are at the forefront Kirklees Preventative and Early Intervention Strategies

The Vision for Early Learning and Childcare in Kirklees

To proactively support the development of sufficient, high quality childcare provision and early learning activities in Kirklees which secure improved outcomes for children at the end of the Foundation Stage and in later life; and removes barrier to work for parents.

⁶ National statistics suggest that approximately 50% of young children in socially disadvantaged areas have significant language delay on entry to school.

KIRKLEES EARLY LEARNING and CHILDCARE STRATEGY PRIORITIES

We aim to deliver the vision for early learning and childcare by:

- 1. Supporting, and where possible improving the quality of home learning environments**
- 2. Raising the status of early language development as a critical element of improving outcomes for young children.**
- 3. Planning and delivering early intervention strategies to raise standards, improve early learning and school readiness and narrow the gap at Foundation Stage.**
- 4. Supporting childcare providers to continuously improve their services.**
- 5. Increasing take up of childcare and removing barriers to access.**
- 6. Reviewing & publishing the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment, undertaking analysis, identifying gaps and /or potential gaps in provision and developing and implementing actions which ensure childcare sufficiency.**
- 7. Maintaining effective processes for administering the allocation of Free Early Education and Care funding, and reviewing these in line with requirements of Early Years Single Funding Formula and the implementation of the Code of Practice to ensure effective financial accountability and best value for money.**
- 8. Maintain effective governance and accountability through partnership working which ensures true engagement from key stakeholders and ensures effective communication and consultation.**

1. Supporting and improving the quality of home learning environments

In ensuring support for parents we will:

- Support implementation of the Childs Journey framework in Children's Centres to agreed standards, which ensure consistency and high quality delivery across Kirklees.
- Provide training and support for schools and settings to extend knowledge and confidence in working with parents as partners in their child's learning.

2. Raising the status of early language development as a critical element of improving outcomes for young children.

In order to reduce the prevalence of language delay in the early years we will:

- Develop a co-ordinated and cohesive strategy for communication language and literacy in the early years which extends into Key Stage 1
- Support all settings to create language rich environments.
- Target interventions - such as 'Every Child a Talker' in settings where young children are at risk of underachievement; and work towards ensuring all settings are equipped to deliver these strategies.

3. Planning and delivering early intervention strategies to raise standards, improve early learning and school readiness and narrow the gap at Foundation Stage.

In Kirklees we recognise the importance of preventative work and we believe it is better to identify problems early and intervene effectively to prevent their escalation. In order to do this we will:

- Use data effectively to identify vulnerable groups and those at risk of underachievement at Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Design and implement evidence-based strategies to support schools and settings working with disadvantaged and vulnerable groups
- Support childcare services to be accessible and cater for children with additional needs, SEN and disabilities.

4. Supporting early learning and childcare providers to continuously improve their provision.

High quality provision is the best basis for reducing inequalities between young children, because the characteristics of high quality early learning for all children are those that enable a focus on meeting the needs of every individual child. Our strategy for quality improvement will also extend up the age range to include out of school and holiday clubs. This will ensure increasing levels of parental confidence in the quality of Kirklees childcare services. In Kirklees we will:

- Develop a consistent concept of what quality childcare provision looks like across all sectors.
- Implement a systematic and differentiated challenge and support strategy which is consistent across all sectors, drawing on the full range of incentives and levers available to the local authority.
- Support the effective delivery of the EYFS including support for effective pedagogy, welfare and safeguarding requirements in every setting.
- Support effective transitions between settings.
- Support the development of the childcare workforce
- Support sector led improvement to increase capacity in the sector through the development of self-sustaining networks.

5. Increasing take up of childcare and removing barriers for families in challenging circumstances.

- Identify the barriers to take up of the free early education entitlement and secure effective information and support for parents.
- Support schools and settings to be inclusive and accessible.
- Ensure effective integrated working with children's centres.

6. Meeting the local authority's duty to secure sufficient childcare services

- Undertaking childcare sufficiency assessments including analysis, identifying gaps and /or potential gaps in provision.
- Produce Childcare Sufficiency Assessments and related action plans
- Maintain a childcare data base.

- Implement an approach to childcare market management which is shaped by open and transparent arrangements for the use of Council funding to support the delivery of its childcare sufficiency duty and which ensures that Council priorities are met.
- Secure expansion of free early education for two year olds.

7. Maintaining effective processes for administering the allocation of Free Early Education and Care funding, and reviewing these in line with requirements of Early Years Single Funding Formula and the implementation of the Code of Practice to ensure effective financial accountability and best value for money.

- Implementation of the Statutory Guidance for Early Education and Childcare
- Effective financial management and accountability to secure best value for money.

8. Maintain effective governance and accountability and monitor progress and impact of this strategy.

The local authority must be accountable for its interventions and be able to demonstrate the impact of its work to improve outcomes for young children. In order to do this we will:

- Ensure effective partnership and governance arrangements to set priorities and monitor performance.
- Use existing performance indicators and measures where relevant. In particular Early Years Foundation Stage Profile and Ofsted data.
- Ensure effective capture, security, analysis and presentation of data.
- Evaluate feedback to identify where action plans can be updated and adjusted so that services can be responsive to change.

GOVERNANCE

The Local Authority's Learning Board under the auspices of the Children's Trust, is responsible for ensuring the development and implementation of Kirklees Early Learning and Childcare Strategy.

The Learning Board is accountable for ensuring key priorities are identified and actioned in order to ensure statutory requirements of the Childcare Act are met. Key Priorities for 2014-2018 are articulated in the Early Years Outcomes Duty Plan.

The actions to address these priorities are overseen by three Strategic Working Groups.

