

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee
30 September 2021

Early Years Entitlements

Report of the Head of Legal and Governance

1 Purpose

- 1.1 To review uptake of early years entitlements and progress in delivery of the commitment originally set out in the Council Plan 2019-2023, and subsequently the Strategic Council Plan 2021-2023 to ensure that at least 75% of eligible 2 year olds access free nursery provision.

2 Action required

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to identify if any further scrutiny is required and, if so, the focus and timescales.

3 Background information

- 3.1 The Council Plan agreed by Council in 2019 included a commitment that at least 75% of eligible 2 year olds access free nursery provision. The new Strategic Council Plan 2021-2023, agreed by Council on 13 September, retains this commitment, and states that the Council will encourage take up of funded childcare and nursery places to support early years development and help children achieve their potential through ensuring children are ready for school when they start. The Plan states that the take up of childcare places for eligible two year olds/ free nursery education will be a measure of improvement.
- 3.2 In November 2020, while reporting on progress with commitments in the Council Plan 2019-2023, the Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People informed the Committee that, at that time, the expected outcome for this commitment was 'amber' and that anecdotally childcare providers had reported negative impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic such as a reluctance by parents to take up places for reasons such as concerns about Covid-safety or parents becoming unemployed or working at home and therefore not sending children to early years settings. Concerns were also raised about the sustainability of early years providers and the impact that this could have on access. The Portfolio Holder informed the Committee that there would be targeted campaigns about the importance of early years provision for child development, socialisation and school readiness.
- 3.3 Given that improving take-up of early years provision is a stated priority for the Council, as articulated in the Strategic Council Plan 2021-23, and one that has previously been reported to the Committee as challenging, the Committee decided to explore the issues in more detail.

- 3.4 The Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People, Corporate Director for People and Director for Education have submitted a report (attached) detailing uptake of early years entitlements in the City, access and sustainability of providers in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Childcare Sufficiency Statement for Summer 2021 is also attached. The Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People will be attending the meeting to answer questions about this and, progress in delivering the Council's commitment regarding the percentage of eligible 2 year olds who access free nursery provision. The Committee will want to use this information to consider whether it is satisfied with levels of uptake or if further scrutiny is required, and if so the focus for that scrutiny.

4 List of attached information

- 4.1 'Early Years Entitlements Funding' report from the Corporate Director for People, Director for Education and Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People
- 4.2 'Childcare Sufficiency Summary Report Card' Summer 2021

5 Background papers, other than published works or those disclosing exempt or confidential information

- 5.1 None

6 Published documents referred to in compiling this report

- 6.1 Council Plan 2019-2023
- 6.2 Strategic Council Plan 2021-2023
- 6.3 Minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee held on 26 November 2020

7 Wards affected

- 7.1 All

8 Contact information

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