



# Peterborough & Cambridgeshire Early Years Social Mobility Pilot Peer Review

24-27 July 2018

## **Feedback Report**

## 1 Executive Summary

There is strong, committed leadership across both Peterborough and Cambridgeshire. The shared Executive Management Team arrangement provides a platform to share ideas, good practice and achieve better outcomes for children from the respective early years/early help services. There are challenges, including recruitment and retention of professional staff and budget reductions but this also provides opportunities to deliver services in different ways.

The lack of a multi-agency early years strategy means that not all partners understand how early years, early help and early support join together with the aim of ensuring that services are provided to families in a way that is right for them. There are examples of good practice in settings that can be shared with other providers.

Political leaders across both local authorities are committed to ensuring that children have the best start in life. However, there is a lack of challenge, or scrutiny at a political level around the early years agenda. There is an opportunity to ensure that the proposed multi-agency strategy is scrutinised across a range of governance arenas.

Data has been used to inform innovative projects but there is potential to use data in a more meaningful way. The Wisbech Literacy project was a good example of data being used to show the impact of withdrawing the project on literacy levels. The project has been reintroduced and rolled out to three other areas.

The START programme in Peterborough is transformational and could be used as a model for future projects in terms of governance, planning and community engagement.

There is a lack of clarity around strategic leadership in health which creates issues for accountability and responsibility. Community health provision for 0-19 services is delivered by two providers, with two different approaches and midwifery services provided by three others. There is an opportunity to look at the delivery models, identifying the best practice from each and ensuring that the right resources are targeted to the right areas to achieve Better Births and Best Start outcomes.

Where services work together there is a positive impact on children and their families. There are some good examples where Early Years Area Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs) and Portage Home Visitors have made a real difference to people's lives.

The recent review of the Speech and Language Therapy service has resulted in the introduction of a credible new approach, based on the Balanced System model. However, practitioners in a variety of other services expressed concern about access to routine advice, and to service drop-ins. The 'drop-in' model does not seem to be consistent and access to some drop-in clinics is challenging due to lack of available slots and this has an impact on disadvantaged families.

The Integrated Review at age 2 to 2½ years is not consistently being applied across the two local authority areas. This is partly due to health visitor capacity.

Training for staff involved in Early Years across both local authorities is seen as good but different charging mechanisms may be a barrier to access. Childminders would benefit from access to the full range of courses.

Early Help Assessments and requests for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) are being used as a referral mechanism for services by some practitioners. This may be due to the lack of understanding around thresholds or the role of settings in early intervention. The number of EHCPs completed before Reception is low across both local authorities and parents felt that early identification in the early years settings was a contributory factor.

Partners want to get things done and there are good working relationships around school clusters. A willingness to work together and share learning has created a positive culture with the aim of improving outcomes.

Early Help in Peterborough is dynamic and it is embedded across all services. Strategies are in place for 2020 when the Troubled Families funding ends to ensure the services are sustainable.

There are opportunities to work with the Library Service to improve language and literacy. The Fenland and East Cambridgeshire Social Mobility Opportunity Area should also be a driver for innovation.

Overall there is a commitment to prioritise early years, including speech, language and communication needs across the whole system and good multi-agency work at practitioner and setting level. There is an opportunity to bring all the strands together in a multi-agency strategy for early years/0-5s to ensure that the children in Peterborough and Cambridgeshire have the best start in life and are 'school ready'.

## **2 Summary of the peer review approach**

The fundamental aim of the review is to help councils and their partners work together to improve outcomes for children.

It is important to remember that a review is not an inspection; it provides a critical friend approach to challenge the councils and their partners in assessing their strengths and identifying their own areas for improvement. The approach involved reviewing a range of documentation and data; interviewing a range of staff from early years settings, council and health commissioners, parent representatives and provider organisations. Visits to settings were carried out alongside a range of focus group sessions. It is important to recognise that the findings are based on this range of activity. Peterborough and Cambridgeshire together with their partners are encouraged to reflect on what the findings mean in relation to the area as a whole.

### **The peer team**

Peer reviews are delivered by experienced officer peers. The make-up of the peer team reflected your requirements and the focus of the peer review. Peers were selected on the basis of their relevant experience and expertise and their participation was agreed with you. The peers who delivered the peer review at Peterborough and Cambridgeshire were:

- **Lead peer** – Sarah Newman, Deputy Director, Children's Services, Portsmouth City Council
- **Operational Peer Early Years** – Stephanie Douglas, Head of Service, Early Years, Doncaster MBC

- **Operational Peer – Education** – Rebecca Sherwood, Executive Headteacher, Kintore Way Nursery School & Children’s Centre, Bermondsey
- **Health Peer** – Sarah Baker, LGA Health Associate
- **Specialist Peer** – Ben Lewing, Senior Adviser, Early Intervention Foundation
- **Review Manager** – Jill Emery , LGA

### 3 Scope and Focus

On the 12th December, 2017, the Department for Education (DfE) launched *Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential: A plan for improving social mobility through education*. Over the course of five ambitions the DfE social mobility action plan sets an overarching vision of no community left behind. Ambition One is to close the word gap in the early years. Strong foundations in early years enable children to start school in a position to progress. Gaps in development are most effectively tackled at the earliest opportunity, focussing on key early language and literacy skills, so that all children can begin school ready to thrive.

A key strand within the DfE social mobility action plan is a focus on sector led improvement across Early Years provision, driven through peer challenge and support. The DfE is working with the Local Government Association (LGA) to develop the sector led improvement offer and in particular to stimulate local discussion about how the councils and their partners can become more effective in delivering improved outcomes for children at this crucial stage in their development

Peterborough and Cambridgeshire councils, through their shared senior management teams, expressed an interest to be one of the pilots for this Early Years Social Mobility Peer Review. The specific purpose of these reviews is to look at speech, language and communication.

The peer review team were asked to focus on three key lines of enquiry:

#### Leadership

- Lead members and senior leaders understand the population, the challenges they face and the impact that the provision of a good early years offer, focused on language and communication development can have

#### Wider Child, Family & Health Services

- There is an effective model of support for all children including disadvantaged families to be school ready and which is widely communicated, understood and accessible
- There is a shared approach across all services to tackle the barriers that disadvantaged families face and there are strategies in place to address these

#### Partnerships

- There is a shared vision for early years delivery and a common understanding of the challenges, opportunities and what works including resources being targeted at those children and families with the greatest needs
- Partners (including the voluntary sector organisations) join up different initiatives and projects to ensure families and children experience services that are joined up and seamless

## 4 Main Findings

### 4.1 Leadership

There is a strong commitment to put children and families at the centre of an early years system that makes sense for them. We heard from a range of senior leaders and practitioners, all of who talked passionately about the work they do and what they are aiming to achieve. The aim is to be ambitious, innovative and creative through system leadership.

There are dynamic and creative practitioner teams who are keen to learn and work together to make a difference. We saw examples of good practice in the two early years settings that were visited by the team. The early years teams who support schools and early years providers, have begun to work collaboratively to provide a 'joined-up' offer for providers across both the sector and both local authorities. Similarly, the support brokered for children with complex needs at transition points by the Portage Home Visitors and the early years practitioners in both health and education was exceptional in Peterborough. The right families were accessing the children's centre and it was a hive of activity. There was evidence of good multi-agency work to support disadvantaged families. The learning environment was well thought out and promoted the use of natural open-ended resources, children were highly motivated and were observed independently accessing resources.

The 'place based' approach is assisting creative thinking across both authorities and we saw how this could be an opportunity to broaden thinking across traditional boundaries of geography and professional disciplines. A good example was the Wisbech literacy project that has now been rolled out to three other areas.

Elected members are working well together to ensure there is an effective early year's offer across the two authorities. Although this joint working is relatively new there was a consensus that 'politics are left at the door and it is about children'. There is a political willingness to explore new ways of working. Members are involved in the Education Shared Programme Board which works across the two local authorities to look at ways education services can be improved.

There is a shared understanding of the challenges including:

- the recruitment and retention of social workers, teachers and health visitors,
- inequalities in areas of deprivation and
- reducing budgets, creating opportunities to deliver differently.

The priority actions identified by local partners using the Early Intervention Foundation's Maturity Matrix are supported by this review.

There is a lack of a holistic early years strategy that reflects the key elements of Better Births, Healthy Child Programme and Early Years Foundation Stage. We heard that there are challenges within this, and comments made included:

- 'Early years – we fumble with it- we need to bring it together'
- 'The early years agenda needs a push'
- 'School readiness is a joint agenda – health, local authority and community, and it starts at the earliest point – pre-birth'
- 'Are we all clear what our strategies and priorities are and are we moving in the same direction'
- 'We need to avoid 'narrowing the gap' fatigue and going for a quick fix'

- 'We need to take risks – it's the only way to survive'

An early years strategy would clarify the graduated offer across universal, targeted (Universal Plus) and specialist (Universal Partnership Plus) provision but needs to be aligned with the emerging Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) strategy. It will also be an opportunity to create a shared language so everyone understands what early years means and outcomes for all aspects of early years are clear.

The multi-agency governance and scrutiny arrangements for the whole 0-5 agenda are unclear. There has been no political scrutiny around early years in either authority either by a Scrutiny Committee in Peterborough or at a committee level in Cambridgeshire. Health scrutiny appears to be absent in relation to early years. Scrutiny and challenge should form an integral part of the multi-agency early years strategy with links to the joint Safeguarding Children's Board and Health and Wellbeing Board.

There is some confusion across the workforce about the relationship between early years, early support and early help in Cambridgeshire – the model is clear but the implementation and delivery is less well understood.

The use of data to explore what is working and to secure funding for community initiatives is good. One example we heard about was the Wisbech literacy project set up to promote home learning for disadvantaged children. By analysing data it was identified that following the withdrawal of the initial scheme, literacy levels dropped in this group. The project has now been reintroduced following investment and includes a further three local areas. Data is also used to good effect in sufficiency planning.

We did find that there is a wealth of data across the system that could be used to better effect to identify vulnerable cohorts and influence shared decision making. This is an opportunity to identify gaps and what could be done differently. The team was really impressed with the START initiative in Peterborough which is considered transformational with good governance, strategy, planning and community engagement. Practitioners are referencing this initiative in their practice to engage families in driving school readiness and it was promoted in the Queensgate shopping centre. There is a question about how it is being promoted with the 'hard to reach' groups for example the traveller community.

There is a lack of clarity about the strategic lead for health and the interface between the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), Director of Public Health (DPH) and Community Health providers. The peer team found it difficult to identify who the strategic lead was and this was reinforced through our interviews with staff and partners.

The way that the two community health providers operate is different. For example in Cambridgeshire there is a focus on achieving the Best Start mandated checks which might impact on meeting other aspects of service delivery. Joint working with GP's is different in each area with greater alignment in Cambridgeshire and a geographical approach in Peterborough. There is a good opportunity to rethink the service specification, delivery model and outcome framework for community health provision as it is being brought together across the 2 local providers. This will help identify what is needed in the workforce and what will work best in achieving 'Working Together' arrangements. However, it will be important to ensure that health visitors across Peterborough and Cambridgeshire are fully involved in the redesign.

Currently Cambridgeshire health visitors do not feel they are involved in future planning.

## **4.2 Wider Child, Family & Health Services**

The team heard that when the system works together the impact for the child and family is a positive experience. One particular example was from a childminder in Peterborough. The cohesive support and advice she had received from a range of early years services had proved invaluable in enabling her to confidently provide care for a child with complex needs over an extended period of time.

Early Years Area SENCOs and Portage Home Visitors in Peterborough are valued across settings and this is supported by Family Voice in Peterborough who represents parents and carers of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. Children with SEND are accessing nursery provision and generally able to attend the school of their choice.

The unborn baby panel is highlighted as a good multi-agency approach across both authorities. The panel brings together social workers, legal advisors, health visitors and children centre staff to discuss how unborn babies can have the best start in life with the necessary support.

This leads to the question of how 'early' early intervention is or should be in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, both in the terms of the life course and the development of problems. The pre natal and ante natal periods are critical to achieving this. Some speech, language and communication needs are influenced by what happens before children are born, and intervening at the age of 3 may seem more like late intervention. Other speech, language and communication needs can be met through support from universal or targeted services rather than waiting until an issue becomes a problem that needs a more specialist intervention. A consistent understanding should be part of the local approach to an early years strategy and provide clarity around when early intervention should start across services and settings.

Investment has been secured to relaunch the Wisbech Project to promote home learning environments and this will be offered in another three areas.

Every Child A Talker (ECAT) and ELKLAN training are seen as strengthening the skills of practitioners to support speech and language within the children's centres and settings across both local authority areas

There is a good quality training offer across both local authorities although the Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) sector does experience difficulties attending training due to the need to maintain staffing ratios. Childminders would also benefit from full access to the courses on offer. The different charging mechanisms across the two local authorities need to be reviewed to ensure access is equitable.

Although the voice of the parent is strong there was limited evidence of the voice of the child and this could be stronger to inform the early years offer. We heard that both authorities were getting the views of older children but there was no evidence of the voice of 0-5 year olds. The START leaflet examples had comments from children that did not seem appropriate for the pre-school age group.

There was evidence that some settings are using Early Help Assessments and Education and Health Care Plan requests as a referral mechanism for services rather than understanding their role in the early intervention system. This would appear to be an issue around the understanding of thresholds for services. This will need to be clarified to ensure that families have access to the right services at the right time. The revised threshold document for both authorities should begin to address this as long as it is communicated and understanding is checked, across all partners and settings.

The role of the Family Nurse Partnership is not well integrated in either the early years or early help offer with take up rates being particularly low with only 20% of those eligible receiving the service. Attrition rates are also high.

The recent changes to the Speech and Language Therapy Service have had mixed reviews. Although the concept of the Balanced System model is sound, the delivery mechanisms are causing difficulties for some parents, particularly those who are disadvantaged with limited income. We were told that parents could attend drop-ins, only to be told there were no slots available and had to return on another day. Similarly, due to lack of transport and cost some parents were unable to access the clinics. This has the capacity to delay interventions or cause parents not to attend at all. There was also a perceived lack of understanding of the role partners need to play in the new service arrangements.

Concerns were expressed from the workforce about the availability of perinatal mental health services. Lack of support for those mothers who need mental health support will have a significant impact on the experience of the baby and young children at a formative stage of their lives.

Safeguarding leads for Early Years are promoting a joined up approach to child protection. Appropriate safeguarding training is available through both the safeguarding board and the early years training but it is essential that this is accessible for childminders..

The Integrated Review is not yet embedded consistently and in some areas is dependent on health visitor capacity especially in Cambridgeshire. In Peterborough the model is much stronger across the early years setting and therefore there is recognition by the workforce that the process can be effective.

The number of EHCPs completed before Reception year are low in both Peterborough and Cambridgeshire. In Peterborough there were no EHCPs completed at age 2 and only 1 at age 3. There is then a significant rise at age 4 with 26 and 58 at age 5. In Cambridgeshire there were 12 at age 2, 27 at age 3, 118 at age 4 and 158 at age 5.

Parents felt that there are issues with early identification in the early years settings and practitioners are not starting the process early enough. The question is whether they should be completed earlier so early support is provided for young children with SEND.

There is also a need to understand the gap in the SEND offer for 0-2 year olds in Cambridgeshire. In discussion, this was perceived to be the role of health. There was a lack of clarity as to the pathway a parent would follow to receive support. Similarly, both authorities should consider reviewing the process for parents to sign up for the 2 Year Old Entitlement to childcare. Take up is lower than the national

average and feedback from parents and practitioners indicated that the sign up process was a barrier to take up due to the complexities of the systems.

### **4.3 Partnerships**

We found that practitioners are keen to get things done and there is good professional engagement around school clusters in both local authority areas. Transition was seen as a positive experience and we were told that parents said 'we had wonderful transition'. Another positive comment was that the 'transitions speed dating was really useful'.

There is a positive culture across both authorities and a willingness to share learning and work together to improve outcomes. This offers an opportunity to consider an integrated, consistent offer of support to early years settings, across both local authorities, including workforce development. There are also challenges that will need to be addressed in terms of a language, culture and the diverse nature of the two areas.

The approach to early help in Peterborough is dynamic and there are strategies in place to be sustainable post Troubled Families funding 2020. Early help is embedded across all services and it provides a seamless service for families.

Public Health is leading an integrated bid to promote early literacy to support school readiness which involves health partners and the two local authorities.

There is a joint commissioning arrangement for children's services which is overseen by the Executive Director – People and Communities, Public Health and the CCG.

There are some high performing settings who are developing networks and offering peer support and there are opportunities to expand this further to drive innovation particularly in the specialist sector. Private, Voluntary and Independent providers of early years services want to be involved in, and consulted on, new ways of working.

There is an exciting opportunity to work with the library services who are very keen to engage in the 0-5 agenda. Libraries hold data about usage of service which could provide rich information for targeting support in areas where library services are not being accessed. Libraries already provide a place-based approach to language and literacy which is not being fully maximised, particularly in early years.

The work of the Fenland and East Cambridgeshire Social Mobility Opportunity Area can be a significant driver in terms of funding for innovation in the development of communication, language and reading in the early years and support for those with SEN and this should be explored. The model can also be used to roll out to other areas.

Key early years indicators are not yet driving aspirational outcomes.

## **5 Key Messages**

- There is real energy to prioritise early years provision across the whole system and this can be used to promote aspiration for children and system leadership
- Strong leadership across the two local authorities is promoting a learning culture which should enable the authorities and their partners to bring together best practice and share this across the local area.
- The conceptual model of Speech and Language Therapy Services is rational but the delivery needs to be reviewed to ensure that children from disadvantaged families can access services.

- Observed practice across two early year settings was impressive. There was clear information available which was accessible for families, good intervention and the impression that the right families have access to the right services
- There was evidence of good multi-agency working through a number of early intervention panels which was enabling families to access services at an early stage.
- There needs to be strong leadership across **all** partners to deliver the early years/0-5 agenda and in particular health.
- The aspiration for the 0-5s which is clear at a leadership level is not yet being clearly articulated to frontline practitioners and settings.

## **6 Recommendations**

From the peer team findings there are some key recommendations for the local authorities and their partners:

- Carry out a mapping exercise around needs, services and expertise across the different locations to support 'place based' working and capacity planning
- Develop a multi-agency early years/0-5 strategy and clarify the governance arrangements to ensure that challenge and formal scrutiny is built into the delivery and it is clear where accountability and responsibility sits.
- Develop an integrated 0-5 outcomes framework which specifically references speech, language and communication with aspirational targets to enable the identification of trends, deficiencies and areas of good practice.
- Review the service specification and delivery model of the community health offer pre-birth to age 5, including the role of the Family Nurse Partnership to ensure that resources are appropriate and directed to the identified areas of need
- Ensure that all practitioners are engaging with the Early Help offer at the earliest opportunity and that the Integrated Review is embedded consistently across both local authority areas to promote positive outcomes in terms of health and wellbeing and learning and development, in order to facilitate appropriate and timely early intervention
- Ensure that the SALT offer is easily accessible for families, particularly for those who are disadvantaged and that where services are not being accessed by parents, checks are made to ensure that the child's needs are being met.
- Afford high priority to the Social Mobility Offer Area in Fenland and East Cambridgeshire to drive innovation in the wider early years system

## **7 Next Steps**

The Local Government Association would be happy to discuss how we could help you further through Rachel Litherland, the LGA's Principal Adviser, e-mail [Rachel.litherland@local.gov.uk](mailto:Rachel.litherland@local.gov.uk) Tel: 07795 076834 or Andrew Bunyan, Children's Improvement Adviser, e-mail [Andrew@abdc.co.uk](mailto:Andrew@abdc.co.uk) Tel 07941 571047

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