

**Manchester City Council
Report for Information**

Report to: Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee – 9 September 2020

Subject: Early Years sector update and the response to Covid-19

Report of: Director of Education

Summary

This report provides an update on how the Early Years sector has responded to Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, the report gives an update on the key activities that have taken place to support the Early Years sector and plans to support providers moving forward in the Autumn term.

Recommendations

Committee members are asked to note the next steps including the continuing support settings and children centres will need for recovering planning, for the resumption of their core offer including their targeted offer and the need to work closely with children centres, schools and settings to support the transition back into educational settings for children who have not attended.

Members are also asked to note the financial support offered to providers across the city and to have awareness of the vulnerabilities around financial sustainability. In addition members are asked to note the changes to the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile from September 2021.

Wards Affected: All wards are affected

Environmental Impact Assessment - the impact of the issues addressed in this report on achieving the zero-carbon target for the city

Education about the environment starts in the Early Years and a high quality Early Years sector supports this agenda. In addition the buildings review of the Tendered Day Care Sites will enable the sites to have greater energy rating efficiency.

Our Manchester Strategy outcomes	Summary of how this report aligns to the OMS
A thriving and sustainable city: supporting a diverse and distinctive economy that creates jobs and opportunities	The continuing improvement to the city's early years sector will continue to create opportunities for employment in settings and those businesses which are involved in the supply of goods and services.

A highly skilled city: world class and home grown talent sustaining the city's economic success	A sufficiency of high quality early years education provision will provide future generations with the skills and behaviours to benefit from the City's economic success.
A progressive and equitable city: making a positive contribution by unlocking the potential of our communities	The Early Years sector produces creative environments in which the diversity and talent of Manchester's children is celebrated. Children are supported and encouraged to achieve their aspirations and maximise their potential.
A liveable and low carbon city: a destination of choice to live, visit, work	The development of high quality early years with high outcomes making Manchester a more attractive city to live and work
A connected city: world class infrastructure and connectivity to drive growth	A development of a well-connected system between schools and early years to allow a smoother transition for our young people

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Background documents (available for public inspection):

None

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 During the Covid-19 pandemic Manchester's early years (EY) sector has been essential in making sufficient childcare provision available for children of key workers and vulnerable children. This report sets out the provision that has remained in place since the end of March; the challenges the early years sector has faced; support offered from Manchester City Council to support the sector and how the early years sector has increased the sufficiency on offer across the city since the 1st June, with a clear focus on having the provision needed for September.
- 1.2 This report will outline the support which will continue into the new academic year; the challenges for the new academic year including the substantial change to the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework (EYFSP) and the conclusion of the review of Manchester's tendered day care provision in Sure Start Children's Centres.
- 1.3 Prior to the Coronavirus pandemic, Manchester had 157 group childcare registered early years settings across the City, of which 134 were early years settings and 23 were Out of School and holiday care settings on the Early Years Register. In total these settings provided 9371 childcare places in addition to the 2631 places provided by the City's 413 childminders. Over recent years there has been significant improvements in the quality of early years provision in the City with 97% of settings and 87% of childminders judged to be good or better by OFSTED. In Spring 2020, 6701 three year olds and 2494 two year olds accessed a free entitlement to early learning place.

2.0 Response and financial support to the early years sector during Covid-19

- 2.1 Following the Government's decision to introduce a lockdown in response to the Coronavirus pandemic, the Early Years private, voluntary and independent sector worked collaboratively with Manchester City Council to ensure that day care was available for key workers and vulnerable children. In March, 30 Manchester settings remained open in addition to around 40 childminders, offering essential childcare to on average 330 key workers and vulnerable children every day which helped to maintain childcare sufficiency. The number of open settings increased to 70 at the start of June, along with 90 childminders, offering essential childcare for 1000 children. Currently, there are 78 settings and 159 childminders open, with a total of 2265 children attending each day on average. Based upon current assessments of the market, it is anticipated that by September all but 5 settings will be open. It is more difficult to predict the impact upon childminders. However, the vast majority report that they intend to be open in September. Just under 50% closed during the lockdown period and many have chosen to remain closed over the summer holiday period.
- 2.2 During lockdown it became clear that there were several challenges to the financial sustainability of the PVI sector and concerns were raised about the potential long term impact nursery closures could have on residents.

- 2.3 In response the Government made a commitment to provide Free Early Education Entitlement (FEEE) funding to day care settings whether they were open or closed throughout the summer term. However this funding entitlement did not allow for daycare providers who remained open and helpfully responded to the demands from key workers and vulnerable children who needed places due to their setting being closed. There were approximately 60 children who moved to a new setting due to the closure of their original setting.
- 2.4 The settings which remained open were also faced with a range of further challenges including the furloughing of staff; supply of essential items including PPE; staff self-isolating; enhanced cleaning and other health and safety measures and loss of income, particularly for settings which usually rely upon private fee paying families.
- 2.5 Manchester City Council ensured that settings who remained open and were providing for additional children entitled to 2, 3 & 4 year old or 30 hour funding were allowed to claim this funding, whether or not a claim has been made by another closed setting. This process created a double funding model, however this was necessary to support key worker and vulnerable children across the city to have access to nursery provision . It is estimated that the cost of double funding of the free entitlement over the summer term was £82K, a further six weeks in the autumn term would take the cost up to £120K.
- 2.6 Nurseries registered as business rates payers received a Covid-19 business rates relief for the financial year 2020/2021 and nurseries eligible for Small Business Rate Relief may also have been eligible for a grant. Currently around a third of nurseries in Manchester stand to benefit from the grant, and a significant amount of work took place with the City's Business Rates team to identify where nurseries qualified.
- 2.7 In addition to the business rates relief, there was still concern that some providers would miss out. Consequently, MCC established a grant scheme for day-care settings not listed as the billable entity and therefore not entitled to Small Business Rates Relief to mitigate any financial pressures which they would not be able to meet. This small hardship grant was made available to settings who met a certain criteria. The grant applied to Quarter 1 of Financial Year 20/21 and was intended to alleviate the pressure of business rates contributions where the setting did not qualify for Small Business Rates Relief and Small Business Grants Fund.
- 2.8 Manchester City Council (MCC) has also given nurseries that occupy an MCC tendered site a 3 month rental holiday to support them through the current financial challenges.
- 2.9 As we move into the autumn term, the government has now released guidance around finance support for the Early Years sector. Funding for both the private, voluntary and independent and schools sector in relation to Early Years funding will be based on autumn 2019 figures as minimum. Early Years providers will still submit actual numbers in October in the usual way but will

receive funding based on autumn 2019 numbers or autumn 2020 – whichever is highest.

- 2.10 The autumn funding commitment does not include private fee paying families and it is still unclear whether the number of private fee paying families will return to pre-covid-19 levels. A series of virtual meetings with different areas of the Early Years sector have been initiated with more planned for September to ensure sufficiency across the city. The DFE system for monitoring attendance twice weekly will continue, allowing analysis to see whether attendance returns to pre-lockdown levels.

3.0 Quality Assurance support for early years sector during the Covid-19 pandemic

- 3.1 Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic the Early Years Quality Assurance team have offered support to owners, managers and childminders operating in the Early Years sector to make sure they understand the changing government guidance specific to the sector.
- 3.2 Providers have received weekly emails identifying the specific DFE guidance and other information including template risk assessments for the work place and for use with employees developed by the Councils' Health and Safety team. All open settings also received an allocation of PPE for emergency use from the locality hubs.
- 3.3 Officers have offered advice on how environments could be adapted to meet new requirements and have made sure providers have the right staffing ratios given the challenges they have faced. Officers have also ensured providers have met their statutory duty in relation to Paediatric First Aid and Designated Safeguarding Lead.
- 3.4 The childminder pre-registration course was moved to a virtual delivery model to make sure childminders involved would be able to finish the course in time for September.
- 3.5 Early on during the lockdown period, a brokerage system working with the contact centre and children's social care was established to secure nurseries places that were required for key worker and vulnerable children. Through this process approximately 60 places were found for priority children.
- 3.6 A frequently asked questions document for the Early Years sector was distributed. There were also opportunities for all provider types to attend a virtual forum to allow feedback and allow for dialogue between providers that would normally be available through locality forums in person.

3.7 Transition to primary school

- 3.7.1 A clear communication process between practitioners and schools was developed in a virtual manner to allow regular contact between schools and settings.

- 3.7.2 A transition passport for individual children, alongside the Getting Ready to Learn leaflet was sent to all schools to support preparation for September. Positive feedback has been received from both the Early Years sector and schools in relation to the value of the transition passport.
- 3.7.3 Regular contact between families and Early Years providers have remained throughout the lockdown period, even if the setting has been closed. For example, families have received regular text messages; video conferencing for key groups; story telling sessions through their website; shopping for vulnerable families; home learning materials to be collected or delivered to the doorstep; delivery of Easter eggs and videos of learning walks to show the changes that have been made to their early years environment to support families and children being more prepared to return to their setting.

3.8 SEND/vulnerable children

- 3.8.1 A close working relationship between the Early Years Quality Assurance team, Rodney House Outreach Service, Early Years Service and the statutory assessment teams has enabled tracking of all children in the Early Years with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) transitioning to school in September 2020. This process supported a clear transition plan for each child with the receiving school, and included settings that were both open and closed. This process led to 63 children with an EHCP being identified as requiring support with their transition and support offered to children and families to make sure reasonable endeavours were in place to meet the provision specified in their EHCP.
- 3.8.2 In relation to safeguarding, the Early Years Quality Assurance team also made contact with all providers to support the transition of any child involved with social care to ensure a plan was in place. Any specific concerns during this process were identified and escalated.

3.9 Support from Sure Start Children's Centres

- 3.9.1 Towards the end of March as a result of the pandemic Early Years Sure Start services undertook a review to identify key services that could be delivered safely. The review led to the majority of Manchester's Sure Start Children's Centres remaining open throughout lockdown, to facilitate the delivery of essential services such as Antenatal Clinics, Food Clubs and Food Banks. In addition, during this initial lockdown period Early Years Outreach Workers provided a wide variety of support to families including information advice and guidance on issues such as housing, debt, domestic abuse, and parenting support, along with activity ideas for families to do with the children at home. Early Years commissioned CAPs and Speech and Language Therapy Services services also maintained contact and offered support, mainly by telephone, to children and families who were accessing their services at the point of the lockdown.

Work has also been undertaken by the service's commissioned partners to adapt their approach to the assessment of need and delivery of appropriate interventions. This has resulted in the development of a flexible model of approaches including virtual sessions, socially distanced face to face and small group contacts as well as telephone and helpline support.

To support the learning and development needs of vulnerable two year olds, entitled to 15 hours Early Years provision, Manchester Children Centres have developed a program which targeted two year olds who were attending a setting from January 2020, most of whom will be nursery age from September 2020, and those children who were entitled to a place from April 2020 but were unable to take up their entitlement due to setting closures or parental choice during the Covid-19 Pandemic.

- 3.9.2 The project has run over the summer and involved Early Years outreach workers working closely with the Early Years Quality Assurance Team and settings to initially make contact with parents and to maintain this contact and the engagement of parents throughout the project. Sure Start Children's Centres have then continued to provide support to families and vulnerable two year olds, supporting parents with creating a positive home learning environment so that children continue to thrive and develop.
- 3.9.3 The project provided families with a pack of resources to promote early year's key skills in the prime areas of Communication and Language and Literacy, development of characteristics of effective learning, supporting Positive Wellbeing and Mental Health for two year olds. Pre and post project assessment questions were devised to facilitate the monitoring of children's progress pre and post project.
- 3.9.4 In addition to the targeted programme of work for two year olds, Early Years Outreach Workers also targeted families with three year olds with the gifting of a resource pack to support their transition into Nursery. The service has carried out both staff and building risk assessments and appropriate health and safety measures have been put in place to ensure all buildings are COVID safe.
- 3.9.5 Currently the service is working with its wider partners who have also adapted their approaches to service delivery with a view to build on the current offer of services and activities with a wider range being on offer from September onwards.

3.10 Support for the early year sector in the autumn term 2020

- 3.10.1 As we move into the autumn term, providers will still need a substantial level of support as the number of children returning to the sector increases. The Early Years team have already agreed more virtual forums for each type of provider.

- 3.10.2 Early years providers will also be able to attend a webinar with Public Health England in September. The purpose of this is to establish how the track and trace system works and the implications for early years providers.
- 3.10.3 Quality Assurance visits to support providers for OFSTED readiness will be reinstated in the Autumn term with the view that inspections will recommence from January 2021. There will also be more bespoke support for any providers that are currently not graded as a good provision, as the expectation is OFSTED will visit these settings in the autumn term.
- 3.10.4 More significantly, as the system becomes more settled and children have returned to their settings, a significant amount of support and training will be needed to support early years providers with new Early Years Foundation Stage framework

4.0 Changes to the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework

- 4.1 The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework is mandatory for all Early Years settings, including maintained schools, non-maintained schools, independent schools, all nurseries and childminders on the early years register, and all childminders registered with an early years childminder agency. It sets the standards that schools and early years providers must meet to ensure that children are taught and develop well, and are kept healthy and safe from birth to age 5. The EYFS learning and development and the EYFS profile requirements have been dis-applied for the duration of the Covid-19 outbreak.
- 4.2 Last October, the Government launched a consultation on reforms to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). The following changes have been made to the main learning areas and will be introduced from September 2021:
- Communication and language will remain
 - Personal Social and Emotional Development (PSED) will include additional information on self-care and healthy eating
 - Physical Development will be strengthened to include a greater focus on development from birth to reception and on the link between grosso and fine motor skills
 - Literacy will include a stronger emphasis on pre-reception literacy learning, and the link between language comprehension and later reading and writing
 - Mathematics will include a greater detail on the importance of shapes, spatial reasoning and measure as part of early maths learning, and how children can foster a love of maths
 - Understanding the World will include wider experiences for children
 - Expressive Arts and Design will include a wider variety of ways children can develop their creative skills.

Safeguarding and Welfare - Promotion of oral health

- 4.3 Evidence published by Public Health England suggests that more than 1 in 5 children age 5 have experienced tooth decay with one or more teeth being extracted or filled. The promotion of good oral health in the early years can help reduce the incidences of tooth decay and hospital admissions. While the EYFS framework currently requires providers to promote the good health of children attending the setting, it does not explicitly specify that this also includes oral health.
- 4.4 This new requirement is now included within the new EYFS framework, specific to dental health. It will be for individual settings and schools to determine how this requirement is met. In addition, practitioners and teachers will not be required to assess this.

Assessment and moderation

- 4.5 The purpose of the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) is to form a professional dialogue between reception and year 1 teachers about an individual child and to inform parents about their child's development. The statutory duty for Local Authorities to externally moderate the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) in 25% of schools each year has been removed. Therefore the the EYFSP will no longer be used as an accountability measure for schools or for teachers and will not be used as a baseline for progress measures.
- 4.6 Schools will still be required to submit Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) data to their Local Authority and this will still be collected nationally.

Impact of the reforms for Manchester City Council

- 4.7 Education programmes - Manchester has maintained a stubborn gap in the performance of 5 year olds in the prime learning goals specific to numeracy and literacy. The changes to the educational programmes poses a significant challenge for Manchester. In literacy, the focus on comprehension and children's understanding of what they are reading introduces a new challenge for the early year's sector. Clear training and development for Early Years professionals in the next academic year is essential to ensure staff are able to support children to develop this skill. The change in numeracy to have a key focus on fostering a love of maths will also be a challenge. In a similar way to literacy, a key focus in the next academic year will be to support staff to consider ways they can ensure children foster a love of maths and strategies to develop children's deeper understanding of shape, spatial reasoning and measure.
- 4.8 Assessment - The removal of the LA statutory moderation of Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) poses a significant challenge, as the data returned to the Local Authority for the 17 Early learning Goals (ELG) generates the school and Local Authority figure for children's good level of

development (GLD). As this process will no longer be moderated, the validity of the measure is open to interpretation.

5.0 Review of day care provision in Sure Start Children's centres

- 5.1 In 2012, the Council began to withdraw from the direct provision of day-care services moving to a new model, where the Council acted as a commissioner of day-care services. Following a competitive tender process the Council entered into daycare contract and lease arrangements on 37 vacant daycare sites across the City from 2013. Applicants were invited to submit their preferred lease term, rental to be paid and proposed capital investment into the building. All leases included a full repair and maintenance responsibility.
- 5.2 Since 2015, 19 daycare provider leases have been surrendered as a result of spiralling building maintenance costs, increased staff and utility costs, increases in business rates, increased competition particularly with schools offering places to younger children, the funding rate for 2 and 3 & 4 year old places being insufficient and the limited opportunity to income generate on private places following the introduction of 30 hours free childcare.
- 5.3 At the beginning of January a process of reviewing the current condition of 34 Sure Start Children's Centres commenced. This was to ascertain the current condition of the early years buildings based on a significant number of providers giving notice due to the financial challenges faced at tendered day care sites.
- 5.4 Alongside this, a piece of work has commenced to review lease arrangements, procurement processes, management of the estate and sufficiency assessments in the locality to establish if the current arrangements allow daycare providers to operate a sustainable business model for each site.
- 5.5 During the last 12 months 6 tendered day care sites have given notice to MCC. The maintenance of these sites and loss of rental income is of significance to Manchester City Council. Moving forward the need for tendered day care provision will be judged more on the need in the area.
- 5.6 The site survey work was paused in the middle of March due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The survey work recommenced in July and it is expected all site surveys will be completed by mid September with the review being completed by October. This will outline the options available to allow tendered day care provision to be more sustainable in the long term and reduce the number of sites where notice has been given.

6.0 Conclusion

- 6.1 Manchester City Council has seen improving quality in the Early Years sector for a number of years and has worked to ensure sufficiency across the city. Local Authority officers have continued to provide regular support to the sector to ensure there was sufficiency of quality child care provision throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. Officers are working closely with the sector to support the

children transitioning back into settings including vulnerable children and those with identified Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

6.2 There have been challenges in recent years in regard to the financial sustainability of the Early years sector and the Covid-19 crisis has increased these pressures. The long term financial viability of many settings will be determined on whether attendance at settings return to pre-covid levels.

7.0 Next Steps

- To continue to closely monitor the financial impact of Covid -19 crisis on the Early Years sector.
- To establish a Strategic Steering Group with the Director of Education, key stakeholders and Early Years providers.
- To review the support and challenge offered to providers across the city to ensure they have the relevant knowledge and are aware of frequent guidance changes to ensure that the quality of child care provision in Manchester is retained,
- To work closely with schools and settings to support the transition back into educational settings for children who have not attended.
- To work closely with schools and settings to prepare for changes to the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile from September 2021
- To continue to survey the tendered day care site condition, review and produce a report on the findings.
- Consider the financial support offered to providers across the city
- To continue to work with EY settings and Children Centres on recovery planning in light of the implications of the covid crisis and support increased take up of our core offer
- Early Years service to continue working with its wider partners who have also adapted their approaches to service delivery to build on the current sure start offer of services and activities with a wider range being on offer from September onwards.
- Target children who are not in any setting with interventions to support school readiness and actively target all eligible children to help increase the uptake of the 2 yr old offer
- Children centres to work with schools in a targeted way to identify families and children who would benefit from WellComm and REAL will support the development of communication language , and literacy skills.