



Hartlepool's Strategy for the Early Years

Autumn, 2021

Table of contents

Glossary of abbreviations and terms	p3
Foreword	p4
1.0 Introduction	p5
2.0 Case for change	p5
3.1 Vision and values	p6
3.2 Our vision	
3.3 Our values	
4.0 Key factors supporting implementation	p7
5.0 Our strategic priorities	p7
6.0 How will we do this?	p10
7.0 Monitoring and measuring progress	p13
Appendix A – Hartlepool data	p14
Appendix B – national drivers	p14

Glossary of Abbreviations and Terms

Continuous professional development – CPD

Department for Education – DfE

Early intervention – trying to identify and resolve problems before they become more difficult to reverse.

Early Intervention Foundation – EIF

Early years – in this report, the period from conception until a child is aged five

Early Years Foundation Stage – EYFS

Early Years Partnership – EYP

Home Learning Environment – HLE

Local Government Association – LGA

Speech and Language Team - SALT

Special educational needs and disabilities– SEND

Special educational needs inclusion fund - SENIF

Speech, language and communication – SLC

Voluntary and Community Sector - VCS

Foreword

We are delighted to introduce Hartlepool's Early Years Strategy 2021 – 2024.

Our ambition is that all children get the best possible start in life. This can only be achieved if we change the way we work and provide the most effective support to children and their families so that they feel safe, have good health and achieve their full potential.

We know that what happens during pregnancy and in a child's Early Years shapes their physical health, their speech, language and communication, and their emotional wellbeing.

We are therefore committed to the delivery of high quality Early Years services in Hartlepool together with early intervention that is equally accessible to all through a continuum of support from conception through to the age of five. This strategy is based around our vision for babies and young children which is for them to:

- Be safe, supported, valued and loved
- Be as healthy and as happy as they can
- Have access to opportunities, be supported to be an individual and to achieve their full potential
- Live free from poverty
- Be equipped and ready for life.

The development of this strategy, and the support behind it, is an important milestone in the partnership between Hartlepool Council, the Education Sector, Health, other services and local partners. It follows the work carried out in 2020 by the Local Government Association (LGA) whose findings offered us an opportunity to re-think our approach to early years. It has created a renewed impetus and focus on the importance of Early Years which we believe will achieve improved outcomes and a reduction in inequalities.

Councillor J Lindridge, Chair of Children's Services Committee

1.0 Introduction

Every child deserves the best possible start in life. A child's earliest years, the period from pregnancy to statutory school age at five, are crucial to their long term life chances. Children develop rapidly in the early years and research shows that this stage of learning and development matters more than any other (Unknown Children Destined for Disadvantage, Ofsted, 2016).

Children are born ready and eager to learn and the support they get during the first five years has long term effects on their health, well-being and educational outcomes. Young children thrive in environments that are predictable and responsive to their needs but struggle in environments that are neglectful, unpredictable or overwhelming. A positive early years experience is critical to improving educational outcomes and preventing poverty in adulthood. 'If we get the early years right, we pave the way for a lifetime of achievement. If we get them wrong, we miss the opportunity to shape a child's future' (Ofsted, 2016). This is particularly important for disadvantaged children where support in the early years can have the greatest impact.

2.0 The case for change

Child poverty in Hartlepool is rising at an alarming rate. Latest data from the North East Child Poverty Commission places Hartlepool at 37.8% with Hartlepool now in the top 10 local authorities across the country with the highest percentage increase of children living in low income families in the past five years (Stone, 2021). We know that poverty and disadvantage can have an adverse impact on a child's life chances yet The Early Intervention Foundation states, 'the effects of disadvantage or adversity in early life can be negative, but they are by no means universal or irreversible' (EIF, 2020).

The Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) results show that children in Hartlepool from poorer backgrounds do not achieve as well as those from more affluent homes. In 2019, only 61.6% of children from disadvantaged backgrounds (measured by pupil premium) achieved a good level of development (GLD) whilst 77% of children from more affluent homes achieved a GLD. Children are defined as having reached a good level of development if they achieve 'expected' or 'exceeded' levels of development for the prime areas of learning - literacy and maths.

We know that poverty and disadvantage can have an adverse impact on a child's life chances yet the Early Intervention Foundation states, 'the effects of disadvantage or adversity in early life can be negative, but they are by no means universal or irreversible'. (EIF, 2020)

Whilst there are lots of services and support for the Early Years in Hartlepool, we recognise, in light of the above reasons and with the legacy of missed learning through the COVID pandemic, that we need a new positive vision and a coherent strategic approach to ensure that every child accesses the support they need to get the best start in life.

Hartlepool's Strategy for the Early Years encompasses the council's statutory duties to improve outcomes for all young children, reduce inequalities and ensure that there is sufficient high-quality early years provision. It contributes to the council's ambition that all children have the

best possible start in life and champion's the government agenda for social mobility by focussing on the most disadvantaged children and families and targeting services that support narrowing the gap between disadvantaged children and their peers. All this demands joined up thinking. By working together we will lay the foundations for all children to start school ready to learn by ensuring children in their early years are ready for the next stage in their learning journey.

The strategy sets out our early years vision and values, identifies our key priorities and lays out the objectives and actions we will take to achieve these goals over next three years.

3.0 Vision and values

3.1 Our vision

Hartlepool is a place where all families are valued and respected; a place where every child gets the best start in life so that they can grow up healthy, safe and secure, and able to fulfil their potential.

We want all our early years children to:

- Be an individual
- Be safe, supported, valued and loved
- Be as healthy and as happy as they can
- Have access to opportunities and supported to achieve their full potential
- Live free from poverty
- Be equipped and ready for life.

3.2 Our values

Prevention and early intervention: we will have a renewed focus on identification, prevention and intervention - from conception all the way through pregnancy to birth and up to the age of five years. We will harness the expertise within existing services and bring partners together to target resources. We will constantly look for opportunities where we can to work cooperatively. We will work closely with parents, partners and communities to design and deliver services.

Children and young people first, driven with selflessness

Improving the opportunities and life chances of all of our children and young people, which will drive policy and decision making, with a legacy of hope and aspiration. We value all aspects of the life of the child, recognising the importance of taking a holistic approach to supporting children's development and addressing their needs through wellbeing and resilience. We know that emotional and physical safety is foundational to child health and development. We work collectively to keep our children safe in Hartlepool.

High expectations for all

We want the very best for each and every child and young person, no matter what their background is, or what their individual needs are. We believe that children should feel valued and have equal opportunities. We have high expectations of all of our children.

A cooperative community

We are committed to keeping children at the heart of strong and effective collaboration, based on honest relationships and clear communication. Supporting the whole community including parents and carers is very important to us.

Clear accountability and measures, doing what is right with integrity

We will set ourselves ambitious and clear milestones, which are research informed where possible, so that everyone knows how well we are doing and what we need to do to improve.

Listen to and respond to need

The needs of the child are at the centre of what we do. We will listen to the needs of individuals and our learning communities. We take an **inclusive** approach with all children, families and communities and we will ensure we use our collective resources efficiently to meet need.

4.0 Key Factors Supporting Implementation

Governance and leadership

A new 'Early Years Partnership' (EYP) will ensure consistency of approaches throughout the Early Years by providing clear direction, purpose and accountability. The EYP will drive forward the strategy which in turn will feed into the Children's Strategic Partnership for Hartlepool. The EYP will include a cross-spectrum of professionals from partner agencies with a collective will and desire to effect positive change for children in the early years. It will include local parents who will keep us grounded and be best placed to tell us what will and will not work.

The Early Years Strategy will be supported with 'a plan on a page' and an action plan which identifies the key tasks that need to be undertaken including who will do them and by when. We are ambitious and intend to begin to see the impact of our work by the end of 2024.

5.0 Our Strategic Priorities

We know that no single service, programme or activity will be successful in transforming and sustaining improved outcomes in the Early Years in Hartlepool. There are no quick wins. It will take a concerted and long term effort across a range of partners, strategic policies and services to deliver the changes we want to see. Using the recommendations set out by LGA in 2020 together with the experience of a range of professionals across care, education and health sectors the following strategic priorities have been identified:

Information and Data Sharing

Create a comprehensive performance information framework that clearly indicates through the collective use of partner agency data, the early years position in Hartlepool enabling us to focus

our attentions in areas of greatest need. The framework will work on a baseline of conception through to children aged 5 years.

A Multi Agency Early Years Team

Create a multi-agency early years' service (or team) that includes the broadest possible spectrum of people that reach children in their early years. Enable this team to work innovatively, creatively and collectively to support the achievement of our strategic goals, sharing their knowledge, skills and expertise for the good of the child.

Speech, Language and Communication

Speech, language and communication skills are crucial to young children's overall development. Being able to speak clearly and process speech sounds, understand others, express ideas and interact with others are fundamental building blocks for a child's development. Research suggests that good communication, language and literacy at a young age have the highest correlation with outcomes at school.

- Develop an integrated local strategy for early language and literacy that places speech, language and communication at the core of our early years work ensuring that every child experiences a language rich environment at home, in the community and in their education and care setting.

Poverty and Social Mobility

Ensure that our early years' strategy includes a robust understanding of the levels and impact of poverty in Hartlepool and support efforts to eradicate this. Encourage aspiration which in turn supports social mobility. Link our strategy for the early years directly into the town's wider anti-poverty strategy so that impact can be achieved at an early age.

Early Identification and Intervention

The benefits of early identification are widely recognised – identifying need at the earliest point, and then making effective provision, improves long-term outcomes for children. All those who work with young children should be alert to emerging difficulties and respond early. Once children fall behind, it is hard for them to catch up and they are likely to fall further behind throughout school. Early years is a key opportunity to make a difference as gaps in a child's learning in the early years, with the right support, are likely to catch up.

- The multi agency team to implement an effective early identification and early intervention pathway for 0-5s that ensures children who require additional support are identified and proportionate intervention is in place as soon as possible, including those with emerging/low level and transient need.

SEND

Early identification of needs and the timely provision of appropriate support, together with high aspirations, can help ensure that the vast majority of children who have SEN or disabilities can achieve well and make a successful transition into adulthood.

- Develop an Early Years Special Educational Needs and Disabilities strategy that ensures our SEND children aged 0-5, their families and the professionals that engage with them are provided with the necessary support to ensure they achieve their full early years potential.

The Home Learning Environment

The HLE and its impact on children's skills have been widely studied in recent decades and its impact on child development has been documented extensively. Evidence shows that the quality of the HLE is a key predictor of a child's future success.

- Develop services that acknowledge parents and carers as their child's first educator and give the support they need to fulfil this role.

Health and Wellbeing – the best start in life

In order to support children and their parents to be healthy we need to ensure that we provide universal access to services, that professionals identify early and intervention services are offered as early as possible.

High Quality Early Education and Childcare Provision

Research tells us that high quality early childhood education and care have positive and long-lasting impacts on children's outcomes, particularly for disadvantaged children.

- Develop a programme of support for early years providers that involves local quality assurance methods and ensures every childcare and education setting is at least 'good' (as identified by Ofsted) and is on a continuous improvement journey.

Effective Early Years Transition

Smooth transitions within the EYFS depend on a commitment from all professionals involved to develop positive communication links in order to promote continuity for all children experiencing transitions between settings. It is important that there is a shared approach between all those professionals involved. Transitions in the early years need to be carefully planned, as if they are not, they can prevent a child from engaging quickly and fully in the learning opportunities on offer. Transitions should therefore be the highest priority for schools and settings, planned with individual needs in mind.

- Work with early years professionals to develop transition practice guidance that supports effective transitions across early years.

Early Years Sector Skills and Expertise

Skilled and well-qualified practitioners are a key element of high quality early education and care and make a proven difference to children's learning and development, particularly for children from low income and at risk families (Sylva, 2014). Workforce quality is key to addressing gaps both in terms of attainment and emotional wellbeing as early as possible, and in improving a child's long-term life chances and social mobility (Trust, 2020).

- Develop a comprehensive and inclusive early years workforce development strategy that supports the early years workforce to be the best they can be by providing flexible CPD and support that meets the needs of all providers; supports the early identification pathway and ensures all those that come into contact with children in their early years have the skills and knowledge necessary to make a difference to their early years development.

The Voluntary and Community Sector

Strengthen the role of the voluntary and community sector (VCS) to support parents and their children in their local communities. The VCS have a vital role to play being well placed to know their local community and have the trust from parents to deliver services to meet their needs.

6.0 How will we do this?

Information and Data Sharing

- Develop an understanding of what data and information is available and what will enable us understand need
- Develop an information sharing protocol that allows all relevant agencies share information to enable an effective performance management framework be developed.
- Create a baseline so that future performance can be effectively measured
- Drill down into child level data so that effective intervention can take place where there are concerns
- Prepare a score card so that we can see the turn in the curve.

A Multi Agency Early Years Team

- Harness the resources available across partner agencies to establish a multi-agency early years' service or team that clearly understands strategic priorities and goals and shares accountability
- Tackle concerns around a 'lack of joined-up-ness', clarifying roles, pathways and agencies responsibilities to ensure an effective offer is available
- Enable this team to work innovatively, creatively and flexibly to deliver exceptional early years services and support
- Empower the team to use their funding to support the strategic priorities and goals.

Speech, Language and Communication

- Review current SLC arrangements taking into account parents and professionals' concerns around waiting lists and delays.
- In partnership with ICAN, develop a SLC strategy that:
 - promotes the importance of early language and early literacy across health, education and community services
 - establishes a clear pathway for identifying and supporting SLC needs including low level and emerging need, as soon as need is identified 0-5
 - ensures that all communications across health, education and community services around early years continually promote the importance of early language

- ensures that a newly developed training and development programme and associated materials have a strong focus on early language and early literacy
- establishes clear connections between SLC/early language and literacy and the Home Learning Environment enabling parents and caregivers to understand the importance and how to effectively support SLC and early literacy
- ensures that at every point a parent or caregiver is seen the importance of SLC is stressed including providing information on how the parent can get ideas, resources or support if they need them
- promotes the use of WellComm and the Early Language Identification Measure as early identification and intervention tools

Poverty and Social Mobility

- Ensure that the Early Years Partnership and Early Years Team have a thorough understanding of the levels of poverty across Hartlepool and the strategic priorities that have been agreed to address this
- Link the early years' strategy firmly to a newly developed town wide anti-poverty strategy acknowledging that the early years is the beginning of a child's journey and that it is crucial that every effort is made to make this a positive life experience.
- Promote aspiration and educational achievement as a route out of poverty and an opportunity to increase social mobility.

Early Identification and Intervention

- Implement an effective identification, prevention and early intervention pathway that ensures children that require additional support are identified as soon as possible; this includes children with special educational needs and disabilities
- Consider how health pathways and statutory checks could be re-designed to ensure that we see a child at every possible stage and identify problems early
- Re-shape the integrated two year old check to be more effective including finding effective solutions to information sharing across early years providers
- Ensure that the Early Years Team knows about all children, in all cohorts from conception through to age five and that they can enable intervention if required
- Support professionals in their engagement with families where there are concerns that a child has not been taken to an appointment and/ or the family appears to be disengaged from support
- Ensure every parent knows who their Health Visitor is and how to contact them for advice
- Re-shape information sharing processes for the statutory development check at aged 2 to support early identification and intervention
- Explore the opportunity to create a further development check at or around age 3 to support children's transition to nursery that assesses early language and early literacy skills as a further early identification of need. This would require additional resources or identification of other suitable professionals to undertake this work.

SEND

- Ensure that every child with SEND is identified early so that their development and progress is not limited
- Ensure families and caregivers have the help they need by developing clear pathways to access SEND services and support
- Ensure the early years workforce has the training, skills and knowledge to equip them to work with children with SEND
- Ensure that funding such as SENIF has the maximum impact through thorough review and monitoring.

The Home Learning Environment

- Ensure that parents have access to the support they need to be the best parent they can be
- Ensure that at all points that a child is seen their home learning environment is considered and that parents and caregivers are supported if needed with ideas, resources and intervention if required
- Ensure that professionals and all those that come into contact with early years children understand the importance of the HLE and support parents to do the very best they can
- Be mindful that the HLE is linked to parent support and that parents need to have the capacity to create a positive HLE and that they may need help and support to do this
- Further develop Hartlepool Now to hold all the information a parent needs with places to go, things to do and where to get help for a child; communicate this offer clearly to parents
- Continue to deliver parent and child support within community hubs and consider the role of the VCS in this delivery model
- Support the VCS to continue to deliver local parent and child groups that encourage socialisation, SLC and peer to peer support for families.

Health and wellbeing – best start in life

- Ensure children's physical and emotional health and wellbeing is supported through early identification and intervention and access to universal services
- Ensure parents and caregivers physical and emotional health and wellbeing is supported – including peri and post-natal mental health
- Ensure the early years' workforce knows how to help children and their families' access health and wellbeing support.
- Focus attention on infant feeding helping parents understand the importance of their early decisions and behaviours
- Engage the VCS in activities such as parent support and breastfeeding support being well placed to work in local communities gaining trust and engagement.

High Quality Early Years Education and Childcare

- Create a profile for each early years setting that provides a clear understanding of the quality of all care and education based on their Ofsted judgement and local assessment processes
- Provide a programme of universal and targeted support for early years and childcare settings that utilises a quality assurance process and encourages self-evaluation
- Support providers in their engagement with a newly developed free early years training programme that includes a focus on prevention, early intervention, SEND, SLC and the HLE.

Effective Early Years Transition

- Develop guidance on transition practices to ensure robust procedures are in place to support children at all transition points in their early years
- Resolve data sharing issues to ensure that important information about a child is shared at appropriate transition points
- Support professionals to acknowledge the importance of transition information in their understanding of the needs of the children
- Provide opportunities to share transition good practice.

Early Years Sector Skills and Expertise

- Support early years professionals to be able to access training; make training as accessible and flexible as possible to enable the engagement of learners
- Create a workforce development strategy and associated programme that focuses on the requirements of the early years foundation stage and reaches out to all those that come into contact with children
- Embed SLC, SEND and the HLE in workforce training and development
- Create a library of resources (virtually and physically) that is accessible to everyone across the early years workforce
- Provide opportunities for networking and the sharing of good practice.

The Voluntary and Community Sector

- Strengthen the role of the voluntary and community sector (VCS) to support parents and their children
- Support the VCS to offer e.g. local opportunities to parents and their children improving socialisation and mental health for both parent and child
- Support the VCS to locate and secure funding to enable them to develop and deliver services in line with the strategy.

7.0 Monitoring and measuring progress

The Early Years Partnership will meet monthly and will provide clear leadership in the area of early years. It will oversee the early years' strategy and plan and ensure the key priorities remain on track. It will monitor the newly developed early years' performance management framework and provide critical analysis and challenge where needed. It will direct resources to areas of need.

Success will take time to be visible however it will be measured by:

- an increase in the number of children accessing their early years entitlements
- improved inspection outcomes for early years providers
- improved educational outcomes for children
- a narrowing of the gap between disadvantaged children and their peers
- fewer children needing statutory intervention including Early Help or Social Care support
- a reduction in the number of children requiring SALT referrals
- improvements in the ASQ for children aged 2 / 2.5 years
- a reduction in children living in poverty.

Appendix A – Hartlepool data

Population of Hartlepool	93,800
Number of children and young people 0-16 years	17,800
Number of children aged 0-5 years	6,202
Level of relative poverty (financial)	37.8%

Appendix B - National drivers

Childcare Act 2006 Places a duty on councils to improve outcomes for all young children, reduce inequalities and ensure that there is sufficient, high-quality early years provision and childcare for parents locally.

Children and Families Act 2016 Places a duty on local authorities to secure free childcare for qualifying children.

The early years statutory framework for the early years foundation stage, Sept 2021 Sets the standards that all early years providers must meet to ensure that children learn and develop well and are kept healthy and safe. It requires a strong focus on early language and early literacy skills and early identification of need and intervention.

The Code of Practice 0-25 for children and young people with special educational needs and disabled children and young people (2015) Sets standards for SEND provision. Providers must have arrangements in place to support children with SEN or disabilities.

0 to 19 agenda / Best start in life and beyond, March 2018 Statutory guidance that supports local authorities in the commissioning of health visiting and school nursing services to lead and coordinate delivery of public health for children from birth up to the age of 19.

The Marmot Report, 2010 on health inequalities cites evidence that development begins before birth and that the health of a baby is crucially affected by the health and well-being of the mother. *'The foundations for virtually every aspect of human development – physical, intellectual and emotional – are laid in early childhood. What happens during these early years (starting in the womb) has lifelong effects on many aspects of health and well-being.'*

Unknown Children Destined for disadvantage (Ofsted 2016) This report recognises that, 'The role of local authorities is paramount. They are charged with meeting the needs of young children through the Childcare Act 2006. All this demands joined-up thinking. *'When learning, development and health are so inextricably linked for the under-fives, tackling all forms of inequality should be integrated across the range of local children's services. This, in turn, requires strong and effective leadership at every level from the council cabinet to those leading early years provision.'*

Language as a wellbeing indicator report, 2017 recommended that children's language development should be viewed as a public health wellbeing indicator, rather than just as an individual or 'clinical' concern and that a child's language development should be formally monitored between aged two and five, so that those not making good progress are offered additional support.

Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential: a plan for improving social mobility through education (DfE, 2017) This government plan sets an overarching ambition: 'no community left behind' and set their ambition to close the word gap in the early years. '*Children with strong foundations will start school in a position to progress, but too many children still fall behind early, and it is hard to close the gaps that emerge. We need to tackle these development gaps at the earliest opportunity, particularly focussing on the key early language and literacy skills, so that all children can begin school ready to thrive.'*'

July 2018, The Secretary of State for Education announced his ambition to halve the proportion of children who do not achieve at least expected levels across all goals in the "communication and language" and "literacy" areas of learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Profile at the end of reception year by 2028.

Best beginnings in the early years report, July 2020 a proposal from the Children's Commissioner to give every child the best start in life. The report recommends 'to bring about change, we need to focus on the first years of life'. It recognises that investment in the early years has been inconsistent and has resulted in services to the youngest children and their families has become disjointed and fragmented in some areas.

Identifying and supporting children's early language needs (Public Health England, 2020) '*The gap in the cognitive development and specifically oral language skills between children from different social backgrounds is widely acknowledged. This gap is identifiable very early in life and well established by school entry and can have long term consequences in terms of educational attainment and outcomes in adulthood. Effective interventions are available but matching the right intervention to the child's needs is sometimes a challenge, in part because the rate at which children's language develops naturally varies and it can be difficult to know when to consider intervention. Central to this process is the review of child development carried out by health visitors at the Healthy Child Programme 2 to 2½ year review'*'.

Public Health England (PHE) and the Department for Education's (DfE) Best Start in Speech, Language and Communication Programme, September 2020 aims to improve the rate of early identification of need in the early years and increase the number of children who are ready for school by the age of 5. This includes a suite of materials to support commissioners including the Early language identification and intervention measure (ELIM).

Best start in life and beyond: improving public health outcomes for children, young people and families, August 2021. This report recognises that the foundations for virtually every aspect of human development including physical, intellectual and emotional, are established in pregnancy and early childhood. For families facing multiple challenges, the importance of appropriate support at this crucial time can have lifelong impact.