

**Brent Early Years Education  
&  
Childcare Strategy  
2005-2010**

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## 1. Summary

This strategy addresses Brent Council's corporate priority, 'Supporting children and young people'. It sets the direction of Early Years Education and Childcare in Brent in line with current action plans, and reflects the government's long-term objectives for early education, childcare and parental employment. We aim to deliver this agenda in partnership with other key agencies and with our own community.

## 2. Early Years and Childcare vision and objectives

Brent's Corporate Strategy places a high priority on supporting children and young people. In *Building a Better Borough: Our Corporate Strategy 2002-06* Brent's key priorities are:

- Supporting children and young people
- Promoting quality of life and the Green Agenda
- Regeneration and priority neighbourhoods
- Tackling crime and community safety
- Achieving service excellence

The Early Education and Childcare Strategy links to corporate priorities in the following ways by –

- maximising investment through co-ordinated work with partner agencies, for example, the Primary Care Trust, Sure Start local programmes, Jobcentre Plus and the voluntary sector
- providing high quality universal services that stretch children's and parents' aspirations
- providing differing levels of service in response to differing levels of need
- being flexible and responding to ethnic, cultural and social difference, to meet the needs of the whole community
- seeking the views of local parents, children, employers and childcare providers and commissioning services
- supporting parents to return to training or to work, through the provision of childcare, early education, advice and services that are co-located and available outside working hours
- ensuring that services are needs led, are underpinned by sound risk and financial management and meet corporate governance arrangements

## The Children Act

The Children Act 2004 is the legislative spine that supports a number of reforms affecting early education and childcare. These encompass:

- *partnership* Local Authorities will work with local partners to agree priorities for improving outcomes and commissioning services
- *accountability* Local Authorities will appoint a single Director and lead member for Children's Services
- *focus* particularly on safeguarding children
- *inspection* Local Authorities will be subject to joint area reviews of children's services which will assess how well outcomes for children are supported by integrated working

## National and regional strategies

**The National Childcare Strategy (2004)**, '*Choice for Parents the best start for children*' is the government's delivery framework for early education and childcare services. It brings together government policies from the Treasury, Department for Education and Skills (DfES), Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and Department of Trade and Industry (DTI). Five key elements; **choice, flexibility, availability, affordability and quality**, form the drivers for planned changes to funding, entitlement, qualifications and Local Authority organisation for the future.

**The National Service framework (2004)** sets out a 10 year programme for sustained improvement in children's health and well-being through setting standards for the care of children, young people, and maternity services. It forms an integral part of the Every Child Matters: Change for Children programme.

**The London Childcare Strategy (2003)** anticipated the national focus, and set out to increase the availability of high quality affordable childcare, to lobby for tax incentives and to promote family friendly employment. In addition funds were allocated for a pan-London childcare guide and website to inform parents and carers of the choices available to them.

**The Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners (2004)** is the government's overarching plan for education and training, presented to Parliament in July 2004 by the Secretary of State for Education and Skills. The goal for Early Years is to; "give every child the best possible start in life, and all vulnerable children the care and protection they need". A key milestone for 2008 is the achievement of a 'good' level of development by the end of the Foundation Stage for 50% of children, and a narrowing in the achievement gap between children living in the 20% most deprived areas, and children living in other non-deprived areas.

## **Underpinning research**

Legislation, strategy and delivery frameworks for early education and childcare have been substantially informed by a longitudinal study, commissioned by the DfES, the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) research (2004). The study found that high quality pre-school provision can have significant and positive effects on children's cognitive and social development, and that these effects last at least until the age of 7. The study showed that positive effects were greatest for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, and that there was a reduction in the proportion of children entering primary school with Special Educational Needs (SEN) as a result of attending high quality pre-school provision.

## **Links to corporate priorities**

Childcare is a current issue for the Policy and Regeneration Directorate in terms of supporting parents to return to study and work; the current regeneration action plan sets a target of 160 out of school places and 92 new childminder places to be created by 2006 in disadvantaged wards. Childcare is also a current concern for Children's Social Services in terms of providing respite for parents, and a secure environment for children considered to be 'at risk'. In view of organisational changes already planned in Brent there will be substantial gains to be achieved through joint planning and service provision, taking the family as the focus for service planning, joint commissioning, and developing systems for managing the childcare market locally.

## **Every Child Matters Outcomes Framework and Local Authority Inspection Framework**

Early Years and Childcare Strategy will make a real contribution to positive outcomes for children and young people in all five areas. By giving every child the best start in life, supporting parenting, ensuring high quality care when needed, and supporting parents into training and work, the strategy impacts on long-term cognitive and social outcomes for children, and reduces workless households which in turn affect the number of children and families living in poverty.

The five outcomes for children and young people are:

**be healthy**  
**stay safe**  
**enjoy and achieve**  
**make a positive contribution**  
**achieve economic well-being**

Local targets and indicators will be developed in line with national measures. Children's Centres will integrate education, childcare, health, family support and employment services in a single location, and so are well placed to achieve multiple outcomes. High quality service delivery of day-care for children under 5, early years education and out of school care each contributes to several outcomes. The key to attaining targets is the assurance of high quality in all types of service provision.

Within the '**be healthy**' outcome area the contribution of high quality day-care, out of school care and early education will include:

- helping parents to ensure that their children are healthy
- promoting healthy lifestyles to children and parents
- making early assessments of children's health needs
- introducing and encouraging parents to take up sporting activities with their children
- promoting breast feeding to parents
- providing information and guidance for teenage parents, and those at risk of becoming teenage parents

Within the '**stay safe**' outcome area the contribution of high quality day-care, out of school care and early education will include:

- providing parenting information on keeping children safe and managing risks
- Providing guidance and training on child protection

Within the '**enjoy and achieve**' outcome area the contribution of high quality day-care, out of school care and early education will include:

- introducing and encouraging parents to take up cultural activities with their children
- providing parenting information on supporting children's academic and social development
- ensuring that children are well placed to engage with school activities and to learn effectively when they reach statutory school age
- Supporting children's personal and academic development from birth to 5

Within the '**make a positive contribution**' outcome area the contribution of high quality day-care, out of school care and early education will include:

- Supporting children to manage change and respond positively to challenges
- Helping children to contribute to decision-making

Within the '**economic well-being**' outcome area the contribution of high quality day-care, out of school care and early education will be to ensure that a sufficient stock of childcare is available to meet the needs of parents in work or seeking work.

Given the Government's stated intent to provide additional childcare places and greater service integration by expanding the Children's Centre and Extended Schools programmes, this strategy is developed from the premise that every community in Brent will have access to Children's Centre services by 2010.

# **Brent Early Years Education & Childcare Strategy**

## **The Vision**

**WE PLACE THE CHILD AND YOUNG PERSON AT THE CENTRE OF OUR STRATEGY, AND AIM TO ENSURE THAT EVERY CHILD AND YOUNG PERSON IN BRENT HAS THE BEST POSSIBLE START IN LIFE.**

**For children aged 0-3 this means:**

- freely available, high quality ante-natal advice and support to parents, delivered at times and locations to meet parental need
- freely available, high quality guidance on breast feeding, hygiene, nutrition and safety , delivered to parents at times and locations to meet their needs
- identification, support and care for those suffering from maternal depression
- interventions for parents to assist smoking cessation
- high quality daycare
- access to free early learning opportunities

**For children aged 0-5 this means:**

- universally provided parenting support and information, and specific support for children in need and 'hard to reach' families
- universally provided information and advice on child development and parenting skills at significant transition points (e.g. pre-birth, entering childcare, entering early education)
- access to high quality early education integrated with childcare
- information and support for parents in choosing childcare
- early identification of children with special needs and disabilities and the provision of specialist services to meet those needs with advice and support for families
- access to free informal learning opportunities

**For children and young people aged 0-16 this means:**

- encouragement and support for parents and carers who wish to consider returning to training and employment
- access to a free, high quality nursery education place in the maintained, private, voluntary and independent sectors for all parents and carers who want one
- access to a free, high quality education place in the maintained sector for children of statutory school age
- access to high quality out of school childcare that is accessible, affordable, flexible and of high quality
- access to appropriately resourced spaces for play, exercise and recreation
- access to free informal learning opportunities

**Local measures**

We recognise that change will occur at national and local level, and that our early years and childcare services must be able to react positively to those changes. We anticipate change through the Children Act 2004, and through the establishment of a Department of Children and Families within Brent. In order to respond effectively, and to maintain high standards in early years and childcare provision we will further develop a culture of openness, consultation, involvement, self-evaluation, and the pursuit of continuous improvement.

Our measures of success will be that children and families in Brent:

- expect service provision to change in line with best practice and variations in local need
- anticipate that Brent will be recognised for its service delivery excellence in early years and childcare
- are confident that the child remains at the centre of Brent's strategy regardless of refinement and change in service provision

**Supporting action**

Integrated and partnership working are key factors in maximising outcomes for children and families

For the delivery of early years and childcare services this means:

- Assessing and managing the associated risks
- Establishing clarity of roles, accountabilities and outcomes
- Managing internal and external communication strategies
- Developing the workforce to meet current and future needs
- Progressing a culture of consultation, involvement, evaluation and continuous improvement



### **3. Delivery methods**

#### **Community services and measures of effectiveness**

To ensure the best possible start in life for Brent's children, early years services will be defined by the children and families of Brent.

*For the delivery of early years and childcare services this means:*

- re-shaping services to better meet the needs of Brent's children and their families
- planning for service development and sustainability
- reviewing current and future projects for their potential to involve key partners
- reviewing funding mechanisms
- reviewing the workforce and its capacity to meet current and future need
- working within multi-disciplinary teams
- ensuring that effective means of communication are established within the local authority, between the authority and key partners, and with Brent children and their families

We will know we have been successful when children aged 0-16 and their families:

- experience seamlessly delivered services regardless of the level of need
- have confidence in communication and information sharing between professionals
- have trust in the quality of service delivery regardless of the location from which the service is delivered

#### **Ensuring parental choice**

Whilst Brent is currently offering a sufficient number of pre-school childcare places overall, these do not consistently provide the flexibility, affordability and quality that parents and carers require. It is difficult to sustain places developed in areas of the borough with high concentrations of low income and workless families. There have been pre-school closures, particularly in the voluntary sector, and it remains difficult to recruit well qualified staff. Parents with pre-school and school-aged children face considerable challenges in organising childcare to suit their needs, and these are exacerbated when a child has a special need or physical disability.

Parents are able to access paid maternity leave and to request flexible working arrangements; however, sources of advice on work-life balance have not been fully accessed by parents and carers, and local employers are not making use of subsidised childcare as a recruitment and retention initiative.

**In order to ensure parental choice** place planning will take account of housing and regeneration schemes, parents working patterns and preferences for the location and timing of care. In addition, place planning will take account of the balance between provision (0-2, 2-5, 5-11 and 11-16) and the effects brought about by over-provision for one age group. Place planning will match the availability of early years, primary and secondary school places to the numbers of childcare places in localities, whilst taking account of the range of providers within the sectors and recommending stimulation or depression of the market depending on population trends. The Children's Information Service will become a more visible and accessible resource for parents and carers, providing information on work-life balance as well as early education and childcare place availability. A more proactive approach will be taken with local employers through consultation processes.

## **Ensuring flexibility**

Funded early education is currently provided in line with statutory guidance for 2.5 hours per day, 5 days per week, 33 weeks per year. Whilst the nursery education framework currently allows for sessions to be taken flexibly within this entitlement, to meet parents' and carers' needs, the organisation of schools and settings usually dictates morning or afternoon sessions, this is particularly the case in maintained provision within Infant and Primary schools. Where providers offer 'wraparound' day-care, additional hours can be purchased to suit need. However, in both day-care and sessional after-school care, it is currently very unusual to find provision that operates before 8am or after 6pm. Maintained schools do not currently offer additional paid childcare places to meet the needs of working parents. Children with special needs or physical disability have their needs met, in general, through the Portage service and specialist nursery and school placements. In addition there is some out of school play provision for children of statutory school age, based on site at two of Brent's Special schools. There are also some out borough placements.

**In order to ensure flexibility** the recently announced home child-carers scheme will be promoted and integrated into the range of childcare options available in Brent. The government's proposal to increase the early education entitlement to 15 hours per week over 38 weeks per year will be used as a focus for integrating childcare and education in ways that support parents and provide seamless provision for children at a single location. It is likely that government will place a statutory duty upon Local Authorities to ensure that a sufficient amount of childcare is available for children aged 5-14.

Childcare for 5-14 year olds will follow the pattern of under 5's care, with provision linked to schools in a seamless way, either on site, or with well-planned transfer arrangements to another centre. In order to ensure accessibility we will develop a scheme for childminders and home child-carers to provide care outside of the school day, with options for respite and overnight care. Child-carers making provision for children under 5 will be linked to a local Children's Centre which will provide a focal point for child, parent and carer in terms of social activity, the provision of information, health and parenting advice in addition to training opportunities.

## **Ensuring quality**

The quality of early years education and childcare provision is externally assessed and reported by OFSTED. Whilst government intends to regularise current legislation during the next parliament, the current position remains that the inspection of sessional care, day-care, Nursery Education Grant (NEG) funded early education and early education provided in maintained schools, are each subject to different legislative requirements and must be reported separately. Judgements about the quality of provision made by a childminder receiving NEG, and provision made in a nursery class in a primary school, for example, are difficult to compare because we are not comparing like with like. Parents and carers make judgements about the quality and suitability of provision for their particular needs, and will take account of resources available, including human resources, cost, proximity to work or home, and times available, amongst other factors. Evidence suggests that parents do not judge the quality of the childcare they observe with accuracy. Parents tend to significantly overestimate quality, do not use all available information and believe that observable characteristics are indicative of non-observable quality. The 'Investors in Children' (IiC) scheme has not had a significant impact in Brent, and quality assurance has been achieved by only a minority of providers in all sectors.

**In order to ensure that quality is embedded** in provision we will inform parents about quality and illustrate quality with examples from all sectors. The government intends to reform regulation and inspection, and to introduce a quality assurance framework that will incorporate education and care from birth to five. The Brent Quality Audit will be introduced comprehensively to assist day-care providers in identifying the elements of high quality provision and establishing an on-going cycle of monitoring and self-evaluation. We will continue to support the take up of quality assurance schemes accredited through the Investors in Children programme. It is likely that the government will support full day-care settings in their employment of a graduate leader (level 5) from 2006, and so the need for well qualified managers is urgent. We will continue to support workforce reform, providing bursaries for vocational training, initiating tailored programmes with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), and helping current providers to develop their skills in line with market need, and changes to the regulatory framework.

## **Ensuring affordability**

The costs of sessional and full day-care are subject to local market pressures. There is a substantial variation in costs for children of different ages, and in provision located across

the borough. Childcare is funded by parents who can claim a childcare element from Working Tax Credit. An exception is the placement of children in Social Services nurseries and with respite carers. The government intends to increase the limit currently placed on Working Tax Credit from 70% to 80% of costs with means testing. A specific project on developing affordable childcare in London has been initiated for 2005 by the London Mayor.

**In order to ensure that childcare is affordable** we will ensure that parents and carers are aware of their financial entitlements. We will provide business advice and support for providers and incentives for the development of sustainable places in priority areas. We will engage with local employers, including Brent Council, to develop work-based childcare and employer subsidised care to meet recruitment and retention needs. Children's Centres will be developed to reflect local area needs with a 'universal offer' including paid elements on a sliding scale in most wards, and a 'core offer' with specifically targeted services and place provision in the 30% most disadvantaged areas.

### **3. Implementation**

#### **Timescales**

The early years and childcare strategy will mirror the life-cycle of the single Children and Young People's Plan to be developed for Brent. It identifies fixed points for consultation, review and forward planning in order to reflect national and local developments in early years and childcare, and to ensure that the delivery of services meets the aspirations of the children and families of Brent  
(see appendix I)

#### **Costs**

Direct funding of early years education and childcare functions are likely to continue until 2008, when the government anticipates that the integrated nature of joint area reviews will lessen the need for ring-fencing. The establishment of a Department of Children and Families will bring in both efficiency savings and opportunities for joint commissioning and new posts across divisions and service areas. Government is keen to place local authorities in a more strategic position with regard to planning and commissioning, and the transfer of Sure Start local programme funding to local authorities in furtherance of the Children's Centres programme illustrates this.

The Treasury has indicated increasing funding for the area, and the clear links to employment make it a key plank of progress towards eradicating child poverty, a government target for 50% reduction by 2010, and elimination by 2020.

### **Lead responsibilities internal and external accountability**

Lead responsibility for this area of work will lie with the Director of Children and Families, within Brent Council, through the Children's Strategic Partnership Board. External accountabilities currently held to the DfES and central Sure Start Unit are likely to undergo change, particularly at regional level, as funding streams, targets and monitoring arrangements are progressively combined.

### **Planning, consultation and reporting arrangements**

Planning will follow the 4 year corporate cycle, with annual reviews and forward plans incorporated into the Children and Young People's Plan. A range of consultation mechanisms will inform the plan, including the outputs of reference groups reporting to the Children and Young People's Partnership Group. The Early Years and Childcare Service will produce an annual report on the state of Brent's children and young people. This report will set out the current experience of families with children aged 0-16 in the areas of early education and childcare. It will contain quantitative information, numbers of childcare places available by age group and the average time taken to identify special educational needs and provide appropriate support, for example. The report will also provide qualitative information, case studies of families that illustrate whether Brent is effective in providing early education, childcare and family support services. This annual report will be progressively aligned to the Local Authority's annual performance assessment, and monitoring mechanisms developed within the themed groups that report to the Children's Partnership Board.

## **References**

The Market for Childcare, Mocan, National Bureau of Economic Research 2002

# **Appendix I**

## **2005**

### **10 Year Childcare Strategy targets**

- Increase in Working Tax Credit (£175 for 1 child, £300 per week limit)
- Publication of revised Code of Practice for nursery education

### **Brent Early Years and Childcare Service targets**

- April - publish Early Years Strategy
- April - revise place planning functions
- May - Early Years and Childcare action plan to March 2006
- September - CIS accessible from all Children's Centres
- September - marketing drive on quality provision (all sectors)

### **Brent council targets**

- April – Children's Partnership Board reference groups meet
- May - Children and Families Directorate established
- October - final Children's Centre in 04-06 tranche opened

## **2006**

### **10 Year Childcare Strategy targets**

- Increase in Working Tax Credit (increase in proportion of eligible childcare costs to 80%)
- Free early education entitlement of 12.5 hours per week increased from 33 to 38 weeks per year new Nursery Code of Practice introduced
- £125 million 'transformation fund' comes on stream to support raising of quality and sustainability of childcare

### **Brent Early Years and Childcare targets**

- March - plans for Children's Centres tranche 2 actioned
- March – strategy action plan reviewed forward plan in place
- April – State of Brent's Children report published

### **Brent council targets**

- January-March Local Area Review conducted
- April - Children and Young people's Plan submitted

## **2007**

### **10 Year Childcare Strategy targets**

- Paid maternity leave extended to 39 weeks
- Free early education entitlement of 12.5 hours per week, 38 weeks per year increased to 15 hours per week

## **2008**

### **10 Year Childcare Strategy targets**

- 50% of all families have access to school based care for 5-11 year olds
- New legal framework for local authorities in place
- Reformed regulation and inspection system for early years and childcare in place supported by birth to three quality framework

## **2010**

### **10 Year Childcare Strategy targets**

- Wraparound care linked to early education available for all 3 and 4 year olds, 38 weeks per year, 8am -6pm
- 100% of families have access to childcare from 8am-6pm, 48 weeks per year based in school or with a local early years provider