

Background

- The Early Years and Childcare Strategy (EY&CC) 2015–2018 set out the specific commissioning and operational approach that delivered the strategic direction for the Authority, and the Council's early years and childcare statutory duties.
- This created the conditions to give all children the best possible opportunity to succeed; to thrive in school and be able to make a positive contribution throughout their lives.
- A cross directorate team was put together to review the EY&CC Strategy 2015–2018, understand the current landscape, produce and implement a new version of the Strategy.
- During the Discovery phase the project team did an;
 - Analysis of the Essex GLD data.
 - Initial engagement with schools, early years settings and parents.
 - Initial review of the impact of Covid-19.
 - Horizon scanning.
 - A series of workshops with key ECC staff
- The Project team then entered the design phase to produce a draft of the new EY&CC Strategy 2022. which was then developed with all key stakeholders during stakeholder engagement and finalised ready for Governance to approve the go live in January 2022.



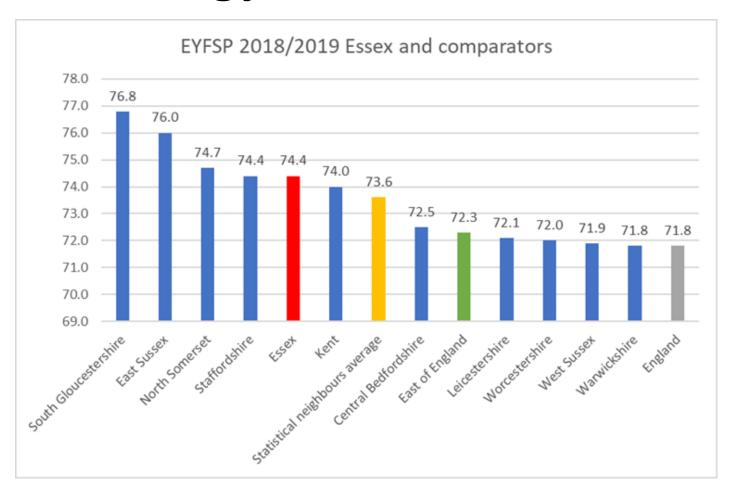
About this Strategy

- This Strategy sets out a high-level overview of the different things we intend to do to achieve our intentions building on the outcomes of the previous Strategy.
- This Strategy has been developed through engagement with a variety of people who work with children and young people in Essex. We also spoke to families through a survey, to which over 1,200 parents responded.
- We have used this engagement to develop our thinking and have shared back what we have been planning to do to ensure it makes sense to everyone and reflects what they think are the things we should be focusing on.
- As we implement this Strategy, we will continue to engage with parents, professionals and volunteers and with children and young people to ensure we continue to do the right things to address need and so we know if what we are doing is having an impact.



Positive Impact of the last Strategy

- During the life cycle of the last strategy we continued to improve the Good Level of Development (GLD*) from 67.7% to 74.4%.
- The introduction of the Essex Child and Family Wellbeing service which is a pre birth to 19 integrated service delivery model
 - Joined up offer
 - Upskilling the workforce
 - Reducing parents need to tell their story more than once
 - Bring all these elements together into one service offer (Early Learning, Health and Family support inc Parenting)
- Free Early Education Entitlement (FEEE) 93.3% take up for 3&4 year olds, against an England average of 89.7%.
- Of those Childcare providers that have had an Ofsted inspection 96.6% received a Good or Outstanding judgement.



*GLD is part of the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) and refers to a summative assessment judgement which is made for each EYFS child at the end of the Reception year. It is a measure of attainment, not progress. Achieving a good level of development will help a child to make a good start in Year 1.

Early Years and Childcare Vision

In Essex there will be no barriers to children achieving the best they can be and realising their full potential. To achieve this vision, we will ensure:

- There are sufficient affordable, quality and inclusive early years and childcare places for all children in Essex
- All schools in Essex are inclusive and provide quality education for children no matter what their needs are
- All children in Essex are supported through all their transitions in Early Years
- All families are supported to be the best they can be
- Families understand the services available to them and how they can access these
- All children in Essex can express themselves in their individual way and are confident in how they communicate with others
- Essex County Council provides access to the support and expertise needed to fulfil this vision



Our Strategy Aims

To implement our vision, we have agreed the following six aims:



1. CHILDREN AND
THEIR FAMILIES
ACHIEVE THEIR
POTENTIAL WITH
SUPPORT FROM AN
EFFECTIVE AND
CONNECTED EARLY
YEARS SYSTEM THAT
HAS A CLEAR VISION,
PURPOSE, AND
DIRECTION



2. ALL CHILDREN
HAVE A
POSITIVE
JOURNEY
THROUGH THEIR
EARLY YEARS
AND ARE WELL
SUPPORTED TO
TRANSITION TO
RECEPTION AND
START YEAR 1



3. CHILDREN
WHO MAY BE AT
RISK OF POOR
OUTCOMES ARE
PRIORITISED
FOR HIGH
QUALITY
TARGETED
SUPPORT



4. CHILDREN'S **EARLY LEARNING** AND **DEVELOPMENT IS EXPERTLY** SUPPORTED BY A STRONG, SKILLED, AND KNOWLEDGEABLE **EARLY YEARS AND CHILDCARE SYSTEM** WORKFORCE



5. PARENTS CAN **ACCESS** AFFORDABLE, SUFFICIENT, **HIGH QUALITY** AND FULLY **INCLUSIVE CHILDCARE** PLACES THAT SUPPORT EARLY **LEARNING AND** WORKING **PARENTS**



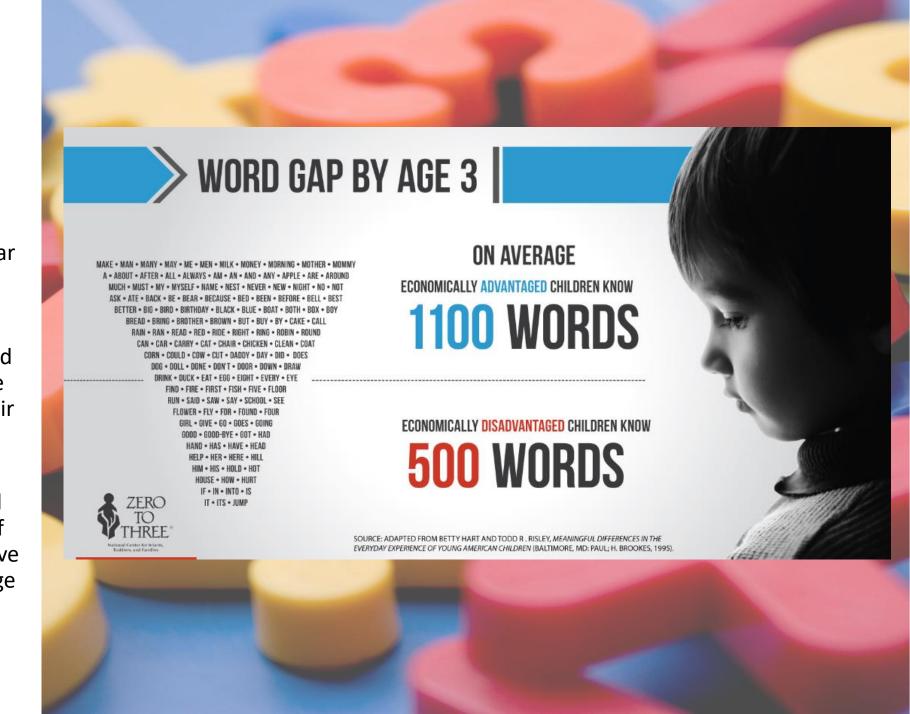
6. FAMILIES ARE ENABLED TO BE THE BEST THEY CAN BE

Did you know?

- We have: -
 - 84,837 under 5's in Essex.
 - 2,438 early years and childcare (EYCC) settings in Essex.
- The majority of children attend an Essex EYCC provider that is rated as Good or Outstanding by Ofsted.
- A child formally finishes early years and starts school when they start Year one and not when they start in a Reception class.
- 24% of 2yr olds in Essex are eligible for Free Early Education Entitlement (FEEE)
- The current Essex annual budget for the FEEE funding for 3 and 4 year olds is £75m and the hourly rate we pay the early years sector is £4.32 per funded hour.

The Word Gap

- By the age of three, more disadvantaged children are – on average – already almost a full year and a half behind their more affluent peers in their early language development. And around two fifths of disadvantaged five-year-olds are not meeting the expected literacy standard for their age
- A child who is not at the expected standard in language at the age of five is 11 times less likely to achieve the expected level in math's at age 11."



What's are the key priorities for Year one of the new Strategy?

The insight we have at this point tells us we need to focus our Year One Delivery Plan on the following elements: -

- The impact of Covid-19 on young children's learning
- Continue to build on the good outcomes we have achieved so far in the last strategy, with an ambition to further increase the % of children achieving GLD
- Focus on identifying those children as early as possible that will need more support, ie improved assessment at the 2 year check, focusing on the cohorts we know generally do not achieve a GLD ie summer born / SEN
- Increase the take up for eligible 2 year olds to access a funded learning place.
- Focus on economically disadvantaged children to help narrow their word gap
- Contributing to the Levelling Up Agenda with a focus on the Strong Foundations in Early Years goal
- Join up with the Life Long Learning Strategy and the Education Taskforce Year of Reading planned for 2022.
- Focus on the Working Families Programme aims for early years
- Making sure our Parents are as informed as they can be in order to make the right choices



Delivery

- This Strategy will be translated into a more detailed five-year delivery plan (which is currently being developed), this will prioritise the actions we intend to take, outline specifically what we are planning to do and when we are planning to do it
- This Plan will be delivered by the Essex Early Years and Childcare Service working in partnership with other parts of Essex County Council and with our partner agencies
- There are many other strategies, plans and programmes of work which we will take account of and ensure alignment with, including our Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Strategy, the work of our Education Task Force, our Educational Disadvantage Strategy, our Inclusion Framework, our Early Help Offer, the Levelling Up Agenda and our Working Families Programme
- It is critical that this is seen as a long-term commitment that builds on previous success to ensure positive changes are embedded in a child's formative years to improve outcomes throughout their Education
- There will be a oversight group set up to monitor and oversee the performance of the strategy and its delivery plan
- At this point it is anticipated that the current budget allocated to Early Years and Childcare will be sufficient for its delivery but there may be projects or activity that might need additional funds. Business cases will be produced to request additional funding if needed.
- Implementation of the Essex Early Years and Childcare Charter.



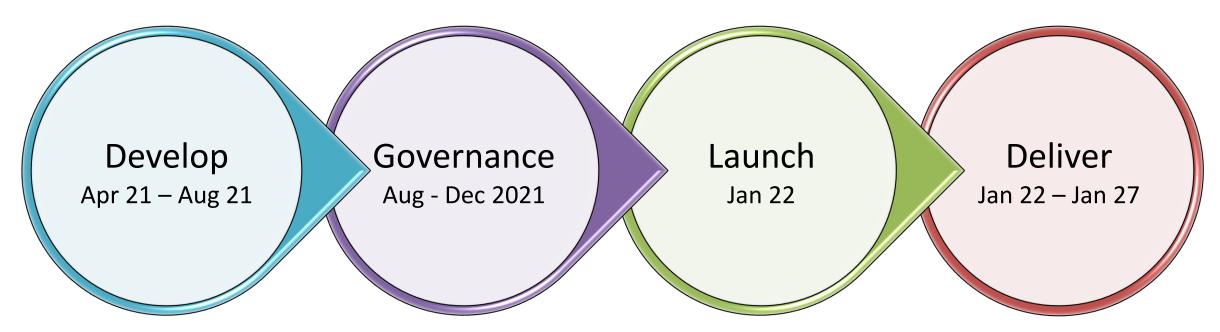
Questions

We need to deliver the strategy collectively in collaboration with all Districts.

- Would this Strategy help improve outcomes in your District?
- We know we need to ensure on going connections to Strategies such as the Working Families Programme, the Levelling Up Agenda and the Life-Long Learning Strategy. Are there any strategies or programmes of work in your District that we need to be aware of?



Timeline and Key Deliverables



- Share Strategy with Internal and External Stakeholders
- Develop Strategy following feedback from Stakeholders
- Develop Outcomes and Performance Measures
- Comms & Go Live Plan
- Draft Delivery Plan
- Draft School Readiness Definition
- Draft Early Years Charter

- Project Governance EY&CC Strategy Contents

 signed off
- Strategy designed and finalised in an external facing document
- Finalise Delivery Plan

- Launch Strategy
- Launch The Early Years
 Charter
- Engagement sessions with Key Stakeholders for Strategy Launch and Delivery Plan
- Pilot new ideas
- Realise Outcomes and Measure Success

Statutory Duties

Essex County Council provides leadership to the Early Years System and has specific legal responsibilities to do the following:

- Ensure there is sufficient childcare available in Essex
- Secure sufficient children's centres that are accessible to all families with young children, and targeted evidence-based interventions for those families in greatest need of support (Family Hubs in Essex)
- Provide information, advice, and assistance to families (which we do through our Families Information Service)
- Secure information, advice, guidance, and training for childcare providers
- Support improvement in the quality of childcare
- Ensure that all children have access to up to six terms of high-quality nursery provision, as reflected in the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework, from the term after their third birthday
- Ensure sufficient and high-quality childcare is available for all 2-year-olds eligible for 'Free Early Education Entitlement funding'
- Meet the childcare needs of families with children over the age of five through out of school care and provision for children and young people up to the age of 14 (or to 25 for children with disabilities)
- Safeguard and promote the welfare of all children throughout all aspects of the work of Early Years and Childcare with specific regard to ensuring that early years and childcare providers understand their responsibilities and are accountable for their practice
- Ensure that all providers delivering funded early education places meet the needs of children with Special Educational Needs and / or Disabilities in accordance with the SEND Code of Practice 2015
- Participate in the identification and planning for the needs of children with SEND, including coordinating joint commissioning arrangements across Education, Health and Social Care and in other legal duties related to Education, Health and Care Plans and Preparing for Adulthood



Aim 1: Children and their families achieve their potential with support from an effective and connected early years system that as a clear vision, purpose and direction

Summary:

- Successfully delivering this Strategy requires shared commitment, ownership and contribution from the whole early years system.
- The early years system is complex and there are known areas where we need to improve how agencies work together, especially around transition, early identification and disadvantaged groups. There are also many strengths in the system and good opportunities to expand on these.
- We want to improve outcomes for all children by supporting our early years system to work better together.
- We will take a variety of actions to strengthen the cohesion and collaboration of the early years system, targeted at known weaknesses and building on existing strengths. We will exploit opportunities presented by Covid while also supporting the system to recover from its impact.

- Wide collective ownership of this Strategy from a broad range of partners who are willing to make commitments to furthering its aims
- All aspects of the system feel that their contribution is recognised and valued
- Partners work in collaboration, identifying and exploiting opportunities for improved integration wherever possible
- Transition across the system is well managed, contributed to by a high level of trust between partners
- Parents are recognised as key contributors to the early years system and are supported by it to help their children achieve good outcomes
- Parents' experiences of engaging with the system are positive, they have a good understanding of the help that is available, how they can access it and they experience good, joined up responses from agencies
- The system effectively focuses on those who are in most need and enables them to receive effective early help, including a specific focus on improving the experiences of children with SEND

What we need everyone to do:

- We need all partners in the Early Years System to sign up to this Strategy, consider the implications of this for their own practice and align what they do to the intended outcomes.
- We need everyone in the System to understand and appreciate the role of others and to identify ways in which they could work better with others around the needs of families, minimising opportunities for gaps and duplication and maximising on the benefits of effective multi-agency working.
- We need everyone across the system to target activity to the same identified groups who are most in need of support.

Aim 1: Outcomes

- 1. The system delivers the outcomes in the 'early years system card'
- 2. The System effectively mobilises to improve outcomes for identified groups
- 3. Professionals across the early years system work collaboratively with others to ensure best outcomes for children and their families'
- 4. Each stakeholder can clearly articulate their contribution to this Strategy and report progress to other stakeholders
- 5. Parents are well informed about how to best help their child develop and are easily able to access help when they need it



Aim 2: All children have a positive journey through their early years and are well supported to transition to Reception and start Year 1

Summary:

- We want all children to have lifelong benefits from having a great start in their early years and to arrive at school well prepared to benefit from the experiences they will have their, whatever their individual needs and abilities.
- We know that not all children benefit to the same extent from the good support we currently have in place. To ensure more children benefit, everyone across the system needs to work together to deliver the right support, in the right place, at the right time.
- We want our system to work together better to give more children and their parents/carers the support and tools they need.
- We will take a range of actions aimed at ensuring more children have a successful start to their school journey.

- All children are well supported by their families and the agencies they work with and as a result receive lifelong benefits from having a great start in their early years
- Everyone, including parents, understands the role they play in supporting children to prepare for starting Reception class at school and moving through this into Year 1
- There is good quality information, advice, and guidance for parents on the options available when children are due to start Reception Year, and on how they can best support their children to start and benefit from this
- Everyone has a good understanding of the groups of children who may be less likely than others to have good outcomes and targeted support is provided at an early stage to enable these children to reach their potential
- All children who would benefit from accessing quality early education provision are encouraged and enabled to do so
- There is an agreed system wide approach to, and acknowledgement of, the importance of early language and communication, and relationships and attachment to children's development
- The system demonstrates an understanding of the latest research and insight about how to best support children in early years
- The system adopts the following statement: School Readiness: A child's early years journey from birth through to the end of reception

What we need everyone to do:

- We need everyone who works with children under five and their parents and carers to understand the importance of this early period, what needs to be in place to enable children to be well prepared to start Reception class at school, to move through Reception into Year 1, and the options that are available to parents.
- We need health agencies who provide support at an early stage to expectant and new parents to provide access to good quality information and support that enables them to make good choices in the ante and post-natal period.
- We need early years settings and schools to work effectively together to support children moving into school and schools to commit to continuing to provide a positive and inclusive early years experience for children through reception to year 1.
- We need everyone to works with children under five to be alert to children who may need extra support and to ensure that those children are able to access the extra support that is available.
- We need parents to make proactive use of the sources of information, advice and guidance that are available on how to provide quality home learning environments, to actively apply this from conception and to seek help and support when needed.

Aim 2: Outcomes

- 1. Improving the % of children achieving a Good Level of Development
- 2. Children are resilient and able to learn well
- 3. One agreed definition of School Readiness that is communicated and used across the System.
- 4. Information and support is easily accessible and able to support parents with home learning environments



Summary:

Aim 3: Children who may be at risk of poor outcomes are prioritised for high quality targeted support

- Some children are disadvantaged or are at risk of disadvantage. This can make it harder for them to achieve the same outcomes as other children without these disadvantages.
- We have a good understanding of the children who generally do less well than others when using standard measures such as 'Good Level of Development'. We have access to a range of evidenced based approaches which can used to better support these children to overcome barriers and ensure that all children achieve expected or better than expected progress for their starting points.
- While championing the achievements of all children we want to ensure that children who are at risk of poorer outcomes than others are identified and provided with effective support and opportunities which meets their individual needs at an early stage. We also want to work in partnership to address aspects of our system or society which puts families at disadvantage.

- The system understands which children are less likely than others to achieve against standard measurements (such as GLD) and has an embedded understanding of how to support these children to achieve their individual potential.
- There are strong and effective system which identify children who need additional support at an early stage and once identified practitioners use a range of targeted early interventions to provide effective early support
- All children are supported to access high quality early years provision and are supported by skilled and knowledgeable early years practitioners
- There is a high level of take up of our early help opportunities, including Free Early Education Entitlement
- All early years services and provisions adhere to the requirements of the Equality Act 2010
- We understand our local communities and, in partnership with others, work towards removing disadvantage and inequality
- We are committed to learning more about and from disadvantaged groups and to taking innovative approaches which we will learn from to inform our longer-term strategies

What we need everyone to do:

- We need everyone who works in early years to agree to prioritise support and activity around the needs of certain identified children and families who need additional support.
- We need this prioritisation of certain children and families to be reflected in strategic and on the ground decision making around where and how resource is targeted.
- We need everyone who provides services accessed by families to consider what more they can do to make their provision accessible to children with differing needs.
- We need everyone to commit to a shared high aspiring vision for what 'good' looks like for children with specific needs.
- We need parents whose children have identified additional needs or who are in disadvantaged groups to proactively engage with available sources of help and support – for example accessing additional early years entitlement.

Aim 3: Outcomes

- 1. Children are supported by their families, their community and where necessary professionals to thrive and be successful
- 2. Increased take up of Special Educational Needs (SEN) Early Years and School Provision and Free Early Education Entitlement (FEEE) Placements for Children with SEN
- 3. Increased take up of FEEE Placements for 2, 3 and 4 yr old from disadvantaged households
- 4. Early identification of children and young people whose learning and development may require targeted or specialist support
- 5. For all children to make good progress from their individual starting points



Aim 4: Children's early learning and development is expertly supported by a strong, skilled and knowledgeable early years and childcare system workforce

Summary:

- The quality of the early years and childcare workforce is a key contributory factor to enabling children to achieve good outcomes in early years and beyond and to successfully implementing this Strategy.
- The early years workforce is complex and multi-faceted and there are many issues to contend with to enable it to be optimally supported. We have specific responsibilities to ensure those who work in early years settings are well trained, but it is also important that we consider those who work in other agencies such as health and in the voluntary sector. Ultimately, we want to give all those who have involvement with early years to work effectively together using core skills and around shared aims.
- We want to enable all aspects of the early years workforce to access continuous professional development through an expanded range of means. We want the training and development accessed to result in more children achieving good early years outcomes.
- We will take a variety of actions to ensure that the overall quality of the early years workforce in Essex is improved, focused both on what practitioners can access and how we enable them to do this.

- Careers in early years in Essex are well respected, valued and popular; recruitment and retention rates across diverse groups are good
- Agencies, settings and practitioners work together across barriers and boundaries to share good practice, insight and training and development opportunities aimed at developing mutual understanding of each other's roles and strengthening the sector as a whole
- There is a desirable mix and breadth of different skill levels across the sector including strong leadership and an increased number of practitioners holding higher level qualifications at level 3 and above
- The early years workforce is enabled to access a training and development offer which meets its needs and contributes to continued and sustained professional development
- The training and development offer to the early years workforce is joined up and coordinated between the different agencies; it is clear for the workforce to see what is available and how and where they can access this
- Training accessed translates into a positive impact, demonstrated through both the outcomes achieved by children, the quality of settings and changes in practice
- There is good promotion of informal networks and opportunities that can be accessed by those working in early years to improve knowledge and get support from other agencies – for example early help drop-in clinics, local children's partnerships, networking meetings etc

| What we need everyone to do:

- We need everyone working in the early years system to actively commit to continually developing their skills and knowledge and to take an open-minded approach in how they do this.
- We need all providers of early education and childcare or help and support to families to actively commit to delivering and enabling their staff to attend more opportunities to learn together and alongside each other, focusing on the core skills which enable multi-agency working.
- We need all employers to recognise the value of training and development and to actively commit to enabling their staff to attend available opportunities.
- We need Government and other national agencies involved in the delivery and funding of training and development for the early years and childcare sector to recognise and respond to the challenges being faced in respect of funding and accessing quality support. We need training providers to proactively ensure that training is providing workers with the skills and competencies necessary to optimally support young children.

Aim 4: Outcomes

- 1. The wider workforce who support children and young people are confident in their role as facilitators of learning and development
- 2. A workforce that puts a clear focus on children and their families' needs
- 3. Internal Staff have access to appropriate continued professional development
- 4. External Staff have access to appropriate continued professional development



Aim 5: Parents can access sufficient, high quality and fully inclusive childcare places that support early learning and **Working Parents**

Summary:

- Being able to access the right early years and childcare provision is a key contributory factor to enabling parents to work and children to achieve good early years outcomes. Essex County Council is required by law to ensure both pre-school and school age childcare meets parents' needs by being sufficient, accessible, and high quality.
- There are a wide variety of options for early education and childcare, but these do not always meet the needs of all parents. Covid is likely to have long term implications on the sector which may make this worse. Childcare, particularly its cost, is a considerable source of stress for some working parents.
- We want to reduce the barriers to parents accessing the early education and childcare and make childcare less of a source of stress for parents while also supporting the sector to stay sustainable.
- We will take a range of actions aimed at developing a sustainable early years and childcare sector in Essex which better meets the needs of more working parents and those entitled to funded hours. We will ensure that parents are well informed about options and are supported in making decisions.

- There is sufficient pre-school and school age childcare in Essex to meet the needs of working parents and those wanting to access funded entitlements
- All settings are inclusive and so capable of meeting the diverse needs of all children
- Childcare businesses in Essex are well managed, plan effectively and are financially robust reflected both in their financial security and the quality of care they provide
- We effectively support the long-term sustainability of our early years and childcare sector, including supporting providers to manage and respond to the short, medium, and long-term impacts of the pandemic
- We recognise the strains on working families and seek to help them manage their childcare needs
- There is good quality information, advice and guidance for parents on finding, accessing and affording suitable early education and childcare
- Where parents want to access early education and childcare, we will work with them to help remove barriers to them doing so
- We recognise the importance of informal childcare to parents and support those both using and providing informal childcare

What we need everyone to do:

- We need childcare providers to work in partnership with Essex County Council to address areas of low childcare sufficiency and to consider how provision could be made more accessible and affordable to families.
- We need childcare providers to work in partnership with Essex County Council to help develop better understanding about the challenges of delivering quality childcare within the existing financial and other restraints.
- We need the whole of the early years system to support ECC and childcare providers in considering innovative approaches that could be taken to address the problems that exist and in supporting our lobbying on the issue at a national level.
- We need all partners, including community organisations and venues and businesses to consider what more they could do to support those delivering and seeking informal childcare, including ensuring there are places that carers can go to access quality learning experiences for the children they are looking after.
- We need schools to consider what more they could potentially do to assist with parents needs for out of school provision. We need parents to proactively make use of the information that is available on the different types of childcare that can be accessed and how this can be made more affordable.

Aim 5: Outcomes

- 1. There will be sufficient high quality and fully Inclusive childcare places for the community, that supports working parents and provides funded early learning places.
- 2. There is clear and accessible information advice and guidance for parents and they are aware of all childcare options available to them
- 3. The sector is supported to understand and meet the needs of community, including working parents
- 4. Parents feel confident in the childcare options available to them



Aim 6: Families are enabled to be the best they can be

Summary:

- Essex County Council has statutory duties to provide information, advice and guidance to parents. This is a complicated area with many different agencies involved but doing this well has potential to make a large impact on parents' ability to optimally support their children and achieve their own ambitions.
- We need to consider parents' widely varying needs to access information, advice, guidance and support. There are a lot of options available and to best support parents, we need to better coordinate what is available across the system and listen to parents to ensure it is meeting their differing needs.
- In addition to being able to access information, advice, and guidance we want parents to feel well supported by their communities and other parents, so they have strong networks to draw on when needed and enjoy bringing up children in Essex.
- We will undertake a range of actions to ensure that we are effectively meeting our statutory duties, to engage with parents to ensure their needs are being met, and to broaden the available support.

- Parents in Essex are supported to be resilient and to have high aspirations for themselves and their children
- Parents know what information, advice and guidance is available, from whom, and how to access it
- Agencies across the early years system have a good understanding of the different roles and responsibilities of other agencies in supporting parents and work well together to sign post parents to the most appropriate sources of information, advice and guidance
- Our offer reflects a good understanding of the types of information, advice and guidance parents require and how they would best like this delivered
- Parents feel well supported by strong social networks and can access a good range of support in their local communities
- Parents, children and young people can access a range of resources to meet individual need, including those to help recovery from the impact of the pandemic
- The support we offer to parents is evidence based and reflects insight and learning
- Our information, advice and guidance offer contributes to the delivery of effective early support

What we need everyone to do:

- We need everyone to prioritise the needs of parents and consider what more could be done to deliver quality support.
- We need everyone to consider the information they provide and how this could be better aligned with that available from other agencies, including how we could make best use of collective information resources, websites etc.
- We need community and voluntary organisations and commissioned services to consider what more they could do to empower parents to develop peer support networks and how we can best enable parents to feel confident to make use of these opportunities.
- We need local councils and business owners to consider what more they could do to make their services and spaces more 'family friendly'.
- We need parents to actively seek out and make use of sources of information and support in their communities, for example that provided by local Essex Child and Family Wellbeing Service Hubs.
- We need parents to support one another both informally and where possible through volunteering their time where needed.

Aim 6: Outcomes

- 1. Parents are well informed about how to best help their child develop and motivated to make great choices
- 2. Parents feel confident in the childcare options available to them
- 3. All parents and carers are supported with information and resources to encourage their role as effective partners in their child's learning and development.
- 4. Families, Parents, Carers and young people are able to make proactive choices with respect to their child's or own needs.

