

Forward Plan reference number: 'Not applicable'

Report title: <i>Poppins Early Years Bursary</i>	
Report to: Cllr Louise McKinlay - Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Community, Equality, Partnership and Performance and Cllr Christopher Whitbread – Chancellor for Essex	
Report author: Ruth Gilbert – Director Sustainable Growth	
Date: 14 August 2023	For: Decision
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County Divisions affected: All Essex	

1. **Everyone's Essex**

- 1.1 The *Everyone's Essex* plan sets out ambitions to renew the Economy and to support health and wellbeing across Essex. The Council's Levelling-Up white paper sets out our ambitions to level-up outcomes and opportunities for people from disadvantaged backgrounds and communities across Essex.
- 1.2 This paper supports these ambitions by providing opportunities and interventions for residents from one or more of the priority cohorts or who are living within one of the priority areas.

2. **Recommendations**

For Cllr Louise McKinlay - Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Community, Equality, Partnership and Performance

- 2.1 To agree to implement the Poppins Early Years Bursary for three years (2023-26) to address workforce challenges in the Essex early years sector and to support delivery of the Essex levelling-up white paper.

For Cllr Christopher Whitbread – Chancellor for Essex

- 2.2 To agree to drawdown £931,000 from the Everyone's Essex Reserve in addition to £500,000 Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) funding to meet the cost of the Poppins Early Years Bursary which will be spread across 4 financial years (2023/24 to 2026/27) as follows:

	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	Total
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Proposed reserve drawdown	162	292	302	175	931
ESFA funding	50	150	150	150	500
Total	212	442	452	325	1,431

3. Background and Proposal

- 3.1 The Essex 2022 Early Years and Childcare Sufficiency audit estimated there to be 1,347 early years providers in total, made up of group based early years providers, such as day nurseries and pre-schools, school based early years providers and childminders.
- 3.2 The sustainability of the early years sector, is being impacted in several ways: the early years education entitlement funding is not meeting the actual cost of providing a funded place for eligible 2, 3, and 4-year-olds; increases to the national minimum wage, NI contributions, utility, and food costs, are causing additional financial pressures on providers which is seeing a decline in the number of providers in the market; there are not enough adequately trained staff within settings to enable them take on additional children, including those with SEND.
- 3.3 Nationally the total number of childcare providers fell by 3% between 2021 and 2022, with a 9% fall in the number of childminders in the same period. This is reflective within Essex.
- 3.4 The decline means there aren't enough staff to provide sufficient early years places to meet demand and enable parents and carers return to work.
- 3.5 It is proposed to create a Bursary that will be available for three years from December 2023 to provide funding to support people from the priority cohorts and priority areas as defined in the Essex County Council White Paper and all Essex residents from low-income households, to access training and qualifications to enable them to join the Early Years sector. The scheme focuses on increasing the early years workforce across the whole of Essex, including the priority geographical areas of Tendring, Harlow, Basildon, Colchester, Canvey and Rural Braintree as cited within the Council's Levelling-Up White Paper, and the areas identified by the Essex Early Years Team where additional early years provision is required. It is open to all Essex residents and will additionally support three of the identified priority cohorts that exist across the county: Children and Adults with SEND or Mental Health conditions, Working Families, and Young Adults not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), to access employment opportunities within the Early Years Sector. This decision will also support the pending government reforms within early

years and raise the profile of the sector through dedicated recruitment campaigns.

- 3.6 By implementing the scheme we will be able to support the Early Years sector to address challenges around workforce recruitment and retention, while crucially providing residents from disadvantaged communities and backgrounds (including those from levelling up priority cohorts and areas) with opportunities to access good jobs. The Poppins Early Years Bursary links directly into and supports the Essex County Council Early Years teams and their workforce development strategy.

The Poppins scheme has been modelled on the Nightingale Care Bursary which is delivered by ACL and addresses the skills gaps that exist within the health and care workforce. The Poppins scheme will also support people from the most deprived communities to gain qualifications in Early Years, from introduction to advanced level programmes, and enter (and remain in) employment. It has been designed to recognise the vital work of the Early Years sector and provide its staff with accessible and accredited training opportunities that will; improve quality and availability of early years care, upskill workforces and instil a sense of value and recognition within the workforce. The Poppins Early Years bursary will be open to all Early Years workers in Essex as well as those seeking employment within the sector. Applications will be made to ECC's Adult Community Learning (ACL) service through the website, over the phone or face to face in an ACL centre. The ACL Engagement Team will also contact Early Years Providers to promote the scheme and generate further applications. At application individuals will be assessed by ACL for eligibility to receive Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) funding. Those who are not eligible will be assessed to have their training funded by Poppins.

- 3.7 Implementing the Poppins Early Years Bursary will deliver against sector priorities to achieve the following outcomes:
- Attract 105 new early years practitioners through the gateway to childcare provision
 - Retain existing qualified and experienced staff by offering qualifications to upskill them and support their wellbeing and resilience.
 - Increase the number of qualified staff within the sector through engagement events, recruitment campaigns and schools activity programmes.
 - Increase participation in early years apprenticeship provision by recruiting at least 90 new apprentices.
 - Encourage at least 60 experienced early years practitioners, who have exited the sector, to return.
 - Provide training, support, and incentives to make the early years workforce feel valued and improve the quality of services provided including specialist SEND and management pathways
 - Enable childcare providers to offer childcare places at an affordable rate for parents and carers.
 - Increase the number of Childminders within Essex by supporting at least 30 new childminders to register.

- Support the implementation of the new Childcare Reforms, due to be introduced from April 2024 onwards, enabling parents to access a funded place for younger children.

3.8 Essex County Council Early Years Teams and the Poppins Project Lead will work together to promote the opportunities available through the scheme. This will include direct marketing, employer visits and meetings via the ACL Employer Engagement Team. Marketing campaigns and events will be ongoing throughout the lifetime of the project. Applications will be made directly to ACL where the enrolment team will assess applications for eligibility. Eligibility will be based on the funding rules published by the ESFA at the start of each academic year. All applicants will complete an application form and have an interview with a member of the ACL early years delivery team.

It is proposed to draw down £931,000 from the Everyone's Essex reserve to fund the bursary in addition to utilisation of £500,000 of ESFA funding bringing the overall commitment to £1.431m. The funding will be drawn down across four financial years and spent as follows:

a) Staffing cost: £290,000

A project team will be funded by this scheme and will be made up of a part time project lead, a business admin apprentice from a levelling up place and or cohort and an additional Tutor and Quality Assurer.

In addition, relevant ACL and Early Years staff will support the project through their existing work activities. ACL's Employer Engagement Officers already work with the Early Years sector and will promote Poppins as part of their current role. Their salaries are covered by existing ACL budgets and do not require funding from the project.

b) Marketing cost: £46,000

Engagement and Recruitment events will be delivered across the county and in areas of most need (both from a sufficiency and levelling up angle). This would require investment in branded marketing materials and campaigns to promote. It would include local providers who are looking to recruit additional staff. Target markets would be young people leaving school or college, over 50's looking to return to the workplace, parents and carers looking for flexible work opportunities and anyone thinking of either returning to work or to change careers. Additional focus will be given to breaking the gender stereotypes within the sector to attract more males into the workforce for example. Other areas of good practice derived from both Nightingale and other projects will be added and include reverse job fairs, Essex Opportunities Portal live events and a school and college engagement programme to enable young people aged 14-18 to understand the opportunities that exist within the

sector. The project lead will work in partnership with the ECC Early Years recruitment teams.

c) Training and Development cost: £1.016m

This component is made up of several work packages. The Gateway to Childcare will provide an intro to early years programme to generate interest from adults and provide a taste of what the sector can offer. This would include delivery of the Level 2 Certificate in Introducing caring for children and young people and up to 5 days work experience within an early years setting. It is expected that individuals would progress into work where they would complete the Early Years Practitioner Apprenticeship. The SEND Specialist Development Pathway will target current employees who wish to specialise in working with children with SEND. There has been a reduction in specialist provision and therefore a move towards greater inclusion across other settings. This means an increase in the diversity of children's educational needs, but a workforce who are not sufficiently trained to effectively support. The Management Development Pathway would be open to those currently employed within the sector or to those returning to the sector. Participants would complete the Level 2 Certificate in Team Leading before progressing onto the Level 3 Diploma in Leadership and Management. Management training has been highlighted as a skills need across all businesses by the Learning and Work Foundation, who cite that a lack of good, skilled and confident managers has an impact across all areas of a business; significant numbers of accidental managers. The additional work packages are: Welcome Back Programme, Train the Trainer, Apprenticeships, Routes into Early Years along with a full offer of industry recognised certificates and diplomas at levels 1 through to 5. There is an enrolment target of 525 learners across the 3 years. Courses will be delivered by ACL whose tutors are all Early Years sector experts. ACL's ESFA allocations will be used first for any individual wishing to access a learning opportunity. Where the individual is not fundable or only partially fundable through the ESFA, the Poppins Early Years Bursary Funding will be utilised. This model makes best use of ACL funding allocations and Essex County Council money to enable as many funded opportunities to address local skills needs as possible.

d) Support Bursary cost: £30,000

This money will provide laptops for loan for those required to complete a qualification and subsequent course work. The support bursary would be used once other funding streams have been exhausted. This element would be means tested and only available to individuals who meet the agreed criteria. This would align to current ESFA funding rules Any underutilised money would either be repurposed within Poppins or returned to the Everyone's Essex Reserve.

e) Gateway to Childminding cost: £50,000

It costs a new childminder approx. £1,000 to become a registered childminder. There is a government grant available to childminders of £600 when they register on their own or £1,200 if they register as part of a Childminding Agency. The set up includes the Level 3 Award in preparing to work in homebased childcare, the paediatric first aid certificate and a DBS check. The level 3 award does attract AEB funding so where possible ACL funding would cover this cost. ACL would also be able to deliver the first aid certificate. Poppins will cover the full set up costs for childminders, which may help attract new people into the marketplace if they don't have to pay the upfront fee. This will be provided as a grant of up to £1,000 for new childminders to directly pay their upfront registration fees. The individual would be required to apply for the grant payment and meet the low-income threshold to be eligible. Individuals would be subject to the grant terms and conditions and be personally liable for the registration cost should they not proceed as a childminder. ACL will pay the registration fee directly to the registration body on behalf of the applicant. This activity will only be delivered in the first two years so that the project infrastructure still exists to recover any monies if required. Unspent monies can either be repurposed within Poppins or returned to the Everyone's Essex reserve. There is a target to recruit 50 new childminders.

- 3.9 It is proposed that this three-year scheme starting in December 2023 will run across four financial years.
- 3.10 The ECC Adult Community Learning (ACL) Team will deliver the training and run the Poppins Early Years Bursary. Its delivery staff all have extensive early years sector experience from a range of settings and have held posts up to management level. It works across Essex and is the largest provider of adult education in Essex. If training need ever exceeds ACL's capacity to deliver it would work with other training providers, colleges and Higher Education establishments as required. ACL is funded by the ESFA to deliver qualifications to Essex residents. When a participant is eligible to receive full or partial funding through ACL's Education and Skills Funding Agency funding allocation this will be accessed first. If a resident is not eligible to receive full or partial funding the Poppins Bursary funding will be utilised. Eligibility for ESFA funding is determined by the rules published at the start of each academic year.
- 3.11 Progress of the project and its outcomes will be tracked and evaluated monthly. This will be completed by the Project Lead in line with the current approved reporting processes in place for projects funded through the Everyone's Essex reserve. A stop and pause activity will take place every 6 months to ensure that the project remains aligned to the needs of the sector and continues to meet intended outcomes and impact.
- 3.12 It is intended that the implementation of the bursary will enable at least 90 new childcare places within childminder settings and 480 in nursery type settings. Additionally, 75 practitioners will be trained enabling more settings to

be equipped to cater for children with SEND thus increasing access to this specialist support.

4. Links to our Strategic Ambitions

4.1 This report links to the following aims in the Essex Vision

- Enjoy life into old age.
- Strengthen communities through participation.
- Develop our County sustainably.
- Connect us to each other and the world.
- Share prosperity with everyone.

4.2 Approving the recommendations in this report will have the following impact on the Council's ambition to be net carbon neutral by 2030: Increase of localised Childminding opportunities decreasing the need to travel.

4.3 This report links to the following strategic priorities in the Organisational Strategy 'Everyone's Essex':

- A strong, inclusive and sustainable economy
- A high-quality environment
- Health wellbeing and independence for all ages

5. Options

5.1 **Do nothing – Not Recommended.** ACL will continue to deliver its current provision to train as many new and existing staff as possible utilising its ESFA funding allocation. This will deter those individuals who are not eligible for this funding and reduce the number of people that could be recruited and or retained within and to the sector. Individuals wishing to consider Childminding as a job will need to find up to £1000 to be able to complete the training and register to receive children. This will be a barrier to individuals from low-income households or without disposable income.

5.2 **Agree to the proposal - Recommended.** A dedicated Poppins team will work with the sector to drive up recruitment, improve quality and sufficiency of childcare, increase participation in learning and apprenticeship opportunities and support the workforce to overcome financial barriers. The three-year scheme will support the sector to gain some stability and provide further information to Essex County Council as to what other challenges the sector is experiencing and working with them collaboratively to find sustainable and long-term solutions. It will enable good traction and opportunity to raise awareness and make a positive impact on the sector. Unspent apprenticeship levy funds will be reduced through improved linkages via the Essex Apprenticeship Levy Transfer Service. Localised childcare will be enabled through an increase in childminders. Existing providers will have access to training that will support

their growth and ability to increase the number of children, including those with SEND.

- 5.3 **Reduce the proposal – Not Recommended.** Fund the Poppins Early Years Bursary for a period of 18months rather than the proposed three years. This would enable interventions in the proposal to be implemented but on a smaller scale. From other projects we know that it takes at least 12 months to really gain traction and show impact. Reducing the time frame would mean reduced impact and outcomes. Would not leave a sustainable proposition for the sector.

6. Issues for consideration

6.1 Financial implications

- 6.1.1 The Poppins bursary will total £1.431m and will utilise both the Everyone's Essex Reserve (£931,000) and a proportion of ACL's AEB allocation granted from the ESFA (£500,000). The AEB allocation will be used for any individual wishing to access a learning opportunity. Where the individual is not fundable or only partially fundable through the ESFA, Essex County Council funds will be utilised.

- 6.1.2 The total amount of funding sought to be drawn down from the Everyone's Essex Reserve is £931,000. ESFA funding totalling £500,000 is fully utilised on training elements of the scheme and the overall expenditure is phased as per the table below:

	2023/24 £000	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	Total £000
Staffing	26	84	97	83	290
Training Elements	146	318	320	231	1,016
Marketing	20	10	10	6	46
Grants	15	20	15	0	50
Support	5	10	10	5	30
Total	212	442	452	325	1,431

- 6.1.3 Training and development include costs for training 525 people from December 2023 for Level 2 to 5 Diploma's, short courses and train the trainer courses totalling £1.016m. This also includes bonus payments for up to 30 individuals completing the Train the Trainer course at £150 per individual over 3 years. Fees for the training and development is based on EFSA fixed fees as at 2023/24 prices.
- 6.1.4 Staffing includes an increase of 2.5 FTE (0.5 Project Lead role, 1 FTE Tutor role and 1 FTE Apprentice role) commencing in December 2023 for a fixed term period of 3 years. The roles are within the ACL staffing structure. Staffing costs include an assumed annual inflationary pay increase of 2% per annum. As staff

are employed on a 3-year fixed term basis, if any redundancy cost was to be incurred within the final year of employment, it would need to be mitigated from within ACL.

- 6.1.5 If the decision is approved to draw a total of £931,000 over 4 years for the Poppins Bursary from the Everyone's Essex Reserve, there will be a remaining £5.4m in the levelling up allocation from the Everyone's Essex reserve.
- 6.1.6 The Poppins bursary scheme has been costed with no additional contingency. If any unforeseen costs arise, they will be required to be managed from within the allocated resource.

6.2 Legal implications

- 6.2.1 The Council's financial regulations state that all drawdowns from reserves must be approved by the Cabinet Member for Finance.
- 6.2.2 Drawing down of money from reserves does not authorise any expenditure that is a key decision or any significant changes to ECC services or funding which must be authorised by the relevant Cabinet Member.
- 6.2.3 ECC does not have a statutory duty to provide this type of grant. A process will need to be run and agreements entered into to administer the grants when given.

7. Equality and Diversity Considerations

- 7.1 The Public Sector Equality Duty applies to the Council when it makes decisions. The duty requires us to have regard to the need to:
 - (a) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other behaviour prohibited by the Act. In summary, the Act makes discrimination etc. on the grounds of a protected characteristic unlawful
 - (b) Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - (c) Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.
- 7.2 The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, gender, and sexual orientation. The Act states that 'marriage and civil partnership' is not a relevant protected characteristic for (b) or (c) although it is relevant for (a).
- 7.3 The equality impact assessment indicates that the proposals in this report will not have a disproportionately adverse impact on any people with a particular characteristic.

8. List of Appendices

ECIA540098995

9. List of Background papers

Indices of Multiple Deprivation Index
Everyone's Essex
Essex County Council Levelling Up Strategy

I approve the above recommendations set out above for the reasons set out in the report.	Date
Cllr Louise McKinlay - Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Community, Equality, Partnership and Performance	21.01.24
Cllr Christopher Whitbread – Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources and Corporate Affairs	20.01.24

In consultation with:

Role	Date
Cllr Tony Ball – Cabinet Member for Education Excellence, Lifelong Learning and Employability.	17.01.24
Cllr Beverley Egan – Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Early Years	09.01.24
Executive Director, Corporate Services (S151 Officer)	11.01.2024
Stephanie Mitchener on behalf of Nicole Wood	
Director, Legal and Assurance (Monitoring Officer)	12.09.2023
Laura Edwards on behalf of Paul Turner	