

<i>item:</i>	6
<i>report:</i>	CYP11/09

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT NEEDS IN THE EARLY YEARS **by Bill Alexander**

Summary

This report sets out a policy framework to promote equity for families with young children with additional support needs when accessing pre school education and childcare. The report seeks to demonstrate how the *Getting it right for every child* approach, as part of the national Early Years Framework, will support improved outcomes for young children.

1. Background

- 1.1 *For Highland's Children 2* set out to ensure that children in Highland are provided with the necessary support to help them towards achieving their potential.
- 1.2 *Getting it right for every child*¹ (GIRFEC) will introduce new assessment, planning and intervention processes to help all children achieve the vision for Scotland's children, including by supporting the implementation of the Curriculum for Excellence 3-18 agenda, The Additional Support for Learning (Scotland) Act 2004, Health for all Children (2003) (Hall 4) and The Disability Discrimination Act (1995)
- 1.3 Although there are current strategies in place to support young children with additional support needs, there has been a disparity experienced by some families and providers in accessing equal levels of services or support.
- 1.4 The introduction of the Additional Support for Learning (Scotland) Act (2004) broadened the categories of children with recognised support needs. This, alongside Hall 4, which places a responsibility on Health Visitors to link with pre school education centres and better overall interagency working, has led to an increased awareness and demand for support.

2. Current Issues

- 2.1 There are several key issues summarised as follows;
 - The need for a single pathway.
 - The need for aggregated budgets.

- The need for a clear training pathway, both in terms of general awareness raising and for individualised training in relation to specific children and their carers.
 - The need to identify appropriate staff to co-ordinate support to children and providers.
- 2.2 These issues have in part arisen as a result of the rapid development and progress of pre-school education and childcare services across Highland, which has created issues for providers including parental expectations, capacity and fragmented funding of additional support.
- 2.3 There has been no overall co-ordination of additional support services across the local authority, voluntary and private sectors. Although assessment of needs in relation to the issues surrounding children and young people are made by professionals, the needs of the providers accommodating the children and young people are not often assessed as part of the same process. Accordingly, the varied needs across centres may not be addressed and are not presently being consistently monitored and evaluated.

3. Pre School Education

- 3.1 Although the additional support needs of children may be identified before they attend pre school education, only the child's needs are assessed at this stage – not the circumstances and capacity of the future service provider. It is difficult for providers to know who to approach to enable them to meet these identified needs.
- 3.2 Both local authority and partner providers use the Highland Council's staged intervention process to implement and evaluate strategies and identify further support needs. This is a pathway for assessing learning needs and accessing additional services to support the child within school and Early Years establishments. It emphasises early intervention to identify, record and assess children with additional support needs and is based on the philosophy that assessment is ongoing and not restricted to a particular point / episode in a child's life.
- 3.3 Staged intervention is a fundamental element of *Getting it right for every child*, which involves using the 'My World Triangle' at every stage to consider the child's or young person's needs and risks, as well as the positive features in their lives.
- 3.4 However, the process is more advanced and consistently used in the local authority sector, and requires to become the norm across all provision. All pre school education providers require the confidence, skills and appropriate advice to provide the optimum support to children with specific additional support needs.

- 3.5 Further, the staffing ratio across all pre school education is 1:10. In larger centres of between 16 – 20 children, this is a vulnerability, as it means that two staff are working with this size of group, and are under additional pressures if the group includes children with additional needs. Indeed, even without children with identified additional support needs, a staff member having to attend to the personal care needs of a 3 year old not quite toilet trained can leave one other member of staff looking after up to 19 children.
- 3.6 This situation would be exacerbated if the number of such centres were to increase, should the Scottish Government extend entitlement to 2½ year olds.

4. Partner Centres provision

- 4.1 CALA (the Highland Care and Learning Alliance) administers an additional support scheme on behalf of Highland Council and NHS Highland, for children accessing commissioned pre school education provision in partner provision. This enables providers to apply for funding for extra help.
- 4.2 This has in practice meant that any group providing pre school education that has had a child with an additional support need has applied for funding to enable them to employ an additional member of staff. A brief assessment of need is usually endorsed by the local Health Visitor, but no desired outcomes or work/training required as a result of the additional support are identified. This can lead to providers employing an unqualified, inexperienced member of staff who “shadows” the child and may bring little added value to the group of children.
- 4.3 A management forum was established in June 2007 to assist CALA to use this budget more effectively to meet children's needs - e.g. moving away from one:one support regardless of the wider needs of the centre and staff. Members of the Early Education team or Psychological Services now visit partner centres to review and observe the effectiveness of the support and review the ongoing need for additional staff. This system has proved effective, but is unsustainable in the medium to long term because of the lack of capacity to undertake ongoing observation and assessment. Neither does the process address the requirements of Local Authority provision.

5. Local Authority provision

- 5.1 While the additional support needs of children can very often be met within the existing staffing, there are occasions when additional staff may be necessary. School provisions have though been generally less likely than partner centres to be allocated additional staffing.

- 5.2 On occasions, there will have been good reasons for this. On other occasions though, there are examples of children not being able to attend nursery for their full entitlement of sessions due to the Head Teacher not being able to meet their additional support needs within the existing staff numbers.

6. Childcare Provision

- 6.1 Childcare provision relates to services to children from 0-11 years of age. Whilst the Local Authority is required to provide access to pre school education, it does not have a duty to provide childcare services.
- 6.2 Childcare providers offer a service to parents who wish to go out to work or undertake training. In all cases, the mainstream childcare fee is paid by the parent, but there is a further cost of providing additional staffing to meet additional needs.
- 6.3 Childcare costs for children with additional support needs have been met on occasion, but there has been no standard approach to this across Highland. For Childcare and Out of School Care providers, applications are made to the local Childcare and Family Resource Partnership. Consequently, funding of additional staff or resources has been dependant on local discretion, including whether there is a sufficient budget within the Childcare Strategy allocation.
- 6.4 To provide the additional support some children need to attend childcare provision is costly. One real example of this is where a parent of a young child returned to work and paid the mainstream cost in the same way as all parents. However, the childcare provider could only accommodate the child's needs by employing an additional member of staff. The parent worked for the usual 35 hours per week, but including the travel time to and from work, the additional cost in staffing was over £300 per week.
- 6.5 Parents may receive assistance with childcare costs via central government schemes - for example childcare tax credits or childcare vouchers (salary sacrifice). However, the maximum payable through the childcare element of working tax credit is not enough to enable parents of children with additional support needs to meet the higher childcare costs. The maximum contribution of childcare tax credit paid out to those on the very lowest incomes is 80% of a maximum of £175 for one child and £300 for two or more children.
- 6.6 There would be significant and prohibitive budgetary implications if the Council was to assume responsibility for funding the additional needs of children whose parents are using a childcare service.
- 6.7 This does make it more difficult for parents of children with additional needs to undertake employment or training, and the national Early Years Framework recognises this inequality:

*“By far the largest cost tends to be associated with childcare, and the UK Government has established two separate schemes to support parents with these costs – the childcare element of working tax credit and childcare vouchers. It is clear that uptake of both schemes is lower than it could be and this is, in part, linked to the complexity of tax credits and the lack of awareness amongst employers of the benefits of childcare vouchers. In the short term, the Scottish Government will work to influence the UK Government to simplify the tax credits system and promote greater availability of childcare vouchers in the public and private sectors. There are particular problems for some families within the current system. **The limits on the amount of childcare costs which can be supported work against larger families and those with disabled children, who face higher costs and, in many cases, a higher risk of poverty.** We will use our influence with the UK Government to improve support for these groups”*

6.8 Given these challenges, it is evident that Highland Council cannot alone provide the means by which parents with children who have additional support needs can access childcare.

6.9 The situation is though different where families and children have assessed needs for respite.

7. Respite Care

7.1 Respite care for children aged over the age of 5 is presently under review, and will be the subject of a further report to Committee.

7.2 It would be unusual for families of very young children to access respite without a Social Work assessment. Requests, based on assessed need, for the additional support required to enable parents to make use of childcare provision for respite are presently made to the local Childcare & Family Resource Partnership. There have been no formal links with the Additional Support Needs staff, which may lead to duplication of service or a lack of service.

8. Direct Payments

8.1 Direct payments are payments made to families with children who have been assessed as needing help from social work services, but who wish to arrange and pay for their own care and support services, instead of receiving them directly from the local authority.

8.2 Currently £400,000 is paid out to families in Highland and is used to fund various packages of care for social interaction after school. This applies to 51 families. 3 have children aged 5 or under.

9. Getting it right for every child and the Early Years Framework

9.1 The *Getting it right for every child* programme builds on the contextual assessment of a child's needs in relation to their environment, and creates a common platform for requesting a service based on a practitioner's knowledge of the child in their particular (pre-school and childcare) setting. It reinforces the requirement to work in partnership with parents and have the child and family at the heart of all activity surrounding them, including those who may be vulnerable or at risk. It is part of the staged approach to identifying and assessing need by the named person in health in conjunction with the most appropriate early years education colleagues.

9.2 The national Early Years Framework further confirms that:

- *“Within universal services, there needs to be the capacity to provide additional support and early intervention for families facing greater challenges, whether on a temporary or more long-term basis. Wherever possible, universal services should take responsibility for providing that additional support rather than referring onwards, in line with the principles of GIRFEC. This has implications for both capacity and workforce skills/roles, as a higher dose of the same type of service will not meet all types of additional need.*
- *In some cases, additional needs can be met through an enhanced level of access or entitlement to universal services, for example subsidised childcare or earlier entry to pre-school. At the moment, there is a feeling that some of these additional entitlements are not offered within a consistent framework or based on an assessment of local needs or the contribution they can make to outcomes*
- *Individuals can have different or higher needs for a variety of reasons, including language, ethnicity and disability, as well as social circumstances”.*

10. Proposals

10.1 The Committee is asked to consider and comment on the following proposals, which would then be subject to further consultation, as a means of achieving:

- One single pathway to access assessment, support & resources.
- Aggregated budgets.
- Joint training across the Local Authority, health, voluntary and private sectors.
- An agreed additional staffing provision, used equitably across sectors.

10.2 Pre-school Home Visiting Teachers (PHVT) are presently involved in assessing the developmental capacity and needs of many young children. This is an appropriate specialist assessment, and it is proposed that PHVTs could assume the co-ordination of assessments

for all children and providers of pre school services to children with additional support needs.

- 10.3 Additional support needs would be addressed and included within the child's plan, which would determine the level of resourcing required, as part of a standard framework across each area and the authority.
- 10.4 In order to respond timeously the area's resource budget would also sit with the Pre-school Home Visiting Teachers. This will be an aggregated budget at area level, bringing together the current budgets for the different sectors.
- 10.5 The overall co-ordination of the child's plan should though remain with the named person - i.e. the Health Visitor, or Lead professional if a multi agency plan is already in place.
- 10.6 The remit of the Pre-school Home Visiting Teacher would also be broadened so that their skills can also be used in a consultative and advisory way for providers.
- 10.7 This would require some enhancement of the PHVT service, but would allow for a consistent quality approach across all of Highland, and enable the up-skilling of staff within centres, ensuring a more confident and skilled workforce.
- 10.8 The team currently have 7 Pre-school Home Visiting Teachers. This proposal would require the employment of three of those teachers (one in each Area) on a promoted scale, and overall management of the team by a Principal Teacher. This can be met within existing budgets.
- 10.9 A very small number of children in Pre-school settings may be assessed as requiring some additional support in childcare provision, to provide learning support or other planned interventions such as Speech and Language Therapy, Physiotherapy, Socialisation etc. Such assessments should include the additional advice of either Pre-school Home Visiting Teachers or Educational Psychologists, and be demonstrated within the Child's Plan.
- 10.10 In part, the resourcing of such provision would then fall on the local Childcare Strategy budget, and the current budget of around £100,000 is deemed to be sufficient for this purpose. This funding could be also used to make direct payments.
- 10.11 However, the likely need for additional staffing is obviously greatest in those centres of between 16 – 20 children, where the demands on staff are already high. Accordingly, it is proposed that the viability of an enhanced staffing model should be considered for this size of centre, involving the establishment of a new support worker post. It is

proposed that the outcome of this review be included in the package of operational developments that will require to be considered by the Education, Culture & Sport Committee to meet the demand for 15 hours a week provision from 2010 (and likely 2½ year old provision soon after).

- 10.12 Some children and families will also be assessed by Social Work staff as being in need of respite. This should be provided where the Child's Plan demonstrates that need.
- 10.13 Childcare should be funded for children whose Plan demonstrates that Childcare provision is needed. For children who are entitled to 12.5 hours of pre school education (rising to 15 hours from August 2010) this should be included in their respite entitlement. Over night provision can though be treated as distinct from day provision as this may be required outside of the pre school week or term. The funding of any additional costs beyond the pre-school entitlement should be met from existing budgets within Childcare Strategy funding. This funding could be also used to make direct payments.
- 10.14 For the reasons stated above however, it is not appropriate to fund additional support for any childcare that is required by parents to take up training or employment opportunities. Accordingly, funding should no longer be provided solely for childcare purposes.
- 10.15 Finally, there is a need for the provision of common training for all staff to develop core competencies for working cooperatively with children, whatever their professional background. Multi agency training and single agency training will up-skill all staff involved with Early Years re Additional Support Needs ensuring real inclusion and encouraging a more flexible, open and participative culture.

Recommendations

The Joint Committee is asked to consider this report, and to agree a consultation with families, providers and the relevant agencies about the various proposals included within it.

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