

<i>item:</i>	8
<i>report:</i>	CYP05/08

## **EARLY YEARS REVIEW UPDATE**

**By Bill Alexander**

### **Summary**

This report updates members on progress following the Early Years Review report presented to the Committee on 7<sup>th</sup> November 2007, and also in relation to the consultation on Childcare & Family Resource Partnerships.

### **1. Early Years Review**

- 1.1 Since the meeting of the Joint Committee in November, Council officers have reviewed previous mapping exercises, and been meeting with members in a number of wards to discuss the need for making changes to local provision. Members have been informed at Business Meetings of the groups that may be affected and the processes by which Officers seek to engage with providers, parents and communities.
- 1.2 Childcare and Family Resource Officer have to date, attended Ward Business Meetings in Wards 3, 4, 5, 9, 10, 12, 21, 22. Officers have met with members in wards 12 and 22 on two occasions. Further Ward Business meetings will be attended in the New Year.
- 1.3 Meetings have been held with Playgroup committees and parents in communities in Ross, Skye & Lochaber and also in Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey.
- 1.4 Meetings have been scheduled with Playgroup committees and parents in Caithness, Sutherland & Easter Ross, and for further meetings in the other two Areas.
- 1.5 These local consultations will examine in detail how a combination of early education child care from 8am to 6pm, five days a week can be developed in each local Associated School Group. Communities with separate 3yr and 4yr services are asked to consider the potential for a combined provision. (Most of Highland's children already receive their pre-school education in combined 3 and 4yr centres).
- 1.6 Communities will be encouraged to run provision themselves wherever possible, although it is appreciated that in many locations, parent-led committees continue to be fragile and this may leave provision vulnerable.
- 1.7 It is envisaged that officers will be able to make specific recommendations about changes to service provision at the March meeting of the Committee.
- 1.8 In the meantime, and as an example of the continuing pressure on the voluntary sector, and the need to both support and consolidate provision, Strathy Bairns, a full day care service in Kingussie, ceased operating on Friday 21<sup>st</sup> December 2007. This will leave around 45 children from 30 families with no provision after the holiday break. It will be difficult to replace the day care for under 3 year olds.

### **2. Childcare and Family Resource Partnerships**

- 2.1 A meeting of the Highland Childcare and Family Resource Alliance was held on 12<sup>th</sup>

December 2007.

- 2.2 Consensus was reached that the future organisation of the Childcare and Family Resource Partnerships should be as follows:
- In principal there should be one Childcare and Family Resource Partnership in each of the Highland Council's administrative areas, to be held twice yearly with responsibility for advising the Highland Council on local planning of priorities and budgets.
  - In Caithness, Sutherland & Easter Ross there will also be geographically based sub groups, that can be supported with small delegated budgets.
  - Ross, Skye & Lochaber is also considering the possibility of retaining smaller geographic sub groups and expanding the formal constitution held by the Lochaber Childcare and Family Resource Partnership to cover the wider area. Local negotiations are ongoing and a final structure is to be decided.
  - Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch & Strathspey is not considering geographically based sub groups, preferring to hold four meetings each year in each of the four localities.
- 2.3 The Strategic Core Group will continue to represent the Partnerships for planning and service development with regard to the Children's Plan. Members of the Core Group should represent area partnerships and service providers from the voluntary, private and statutory sectors.
- 2.4 The Highland Family Resource Alliance should continue as an occasional forum sharing best practice and consultation on a conference basis.

### **Recommendations**

The Joint Committee is asked to note the Early Years Review progress and agree the recommendations made as a result of discussions held on the future of the Childcare and Family Resource Partnerships, namely:-

- I. that there be one Childcare and Family Resource Partnership in each of the Highland Council's administrative areas, to be held twice yearly with responsibility for advising the Highland Council on local planning of priorities and budgets;
- II. in Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross there also be geographically based sub groups that can be supported with small delegated budgets;
- III. that Ross, Skye and Lochaber is also considering the possibility of retaining smaller geographic sub groups and expanding the formal constitution held by the Lochaber Childcare and Family Resource Partnership to cover the wider area;
- IV. that Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey will not have geographically based sub groups but will hold four meetings each year in each of the four localities;
- V. the Strategic Core Group continue to represent the Partnerships for planning and service development with regard to the Children's Plan; and
- VI. the Highland Family Resource Alliance continue as an occasional forum sharing best practice and consultation on a conference basis.

**Bill Alexander**

Head of Integrated Children's Services