

## Update from the Early Years Partnership on the main findings of the Early Years Health Needs Assessment

### Report of the Director of Public Health, Communities and Prosperity

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Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Committee before taking effect.

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#### **1) Recommendation**

That the Health and Wellbeing Board be asked to:

- (a) note the report.
- (b) consider if further updates from the Early Years Partnership Board are required.

#### **2) Background / Introduction**

The purpose of this report is to inform the Health and Wellbeing Board of the focus of the Early Years Partnership Board (previously called the Best Start in Life Board) and to provide a summary of the main findings of the Early Years Health Needs Assessment.

In Autumn 2022, the Best Start in Life Board extended its scope to span the entire early years period to cover conception through to school readiness (including the transition through reception class into end of the Early Years Foundation Stage in Year 1 at five years of age). In June 2023, The Best Start in Life Board took the decision to change its name to the Early Years Partnership Board to better reflect the purpose of the Board and to provide improved clarity for stakeholders.

#### **3) Main Body / Proposal**

##### **Early Years Partnership Board**

In June 2023, the Early Years Partnership Board was established to review the observations of the Early Years Health Needs Assessment and use the system-wide evidence to develop and implement a Shared Early Years Strategy.

The purpose of the Early Years Partnership Board is to ensure that strategy, service development and commissioning activity is approached jointly to deliver the best possible early education, health and wellbeing outcomes for children five and under and their families in Devon. The Board is chaired by Public Health and has representation from Devon County Council's Public Health Devon and Children's Services, NHS Devon, Action for Children, Children and Family Health Devon and Royal Devon University Healthcare.

## **Early Years Health Needs Assessment**

This Early Years Health Needs Assessment was carried out by Public Health at the request of the Best Start in Life Board in Autumn/Winter 2022 to provide a broad overview of risk factors, services and outcomes across the early years to identify and prioritise areas for improvement across the whole early years system, drawing upon the expertise of key stakeholders. This provides a foundation for further in-depth work looking at specific service areas and focussing in on certain populations.

The objectives of the Health Needs Assessment were to:

- Identify areas of service overlap
- Foster closer collaborative working
- Improve continuity of care and transitions
- Establish collective goals and shared outcomes
- Prioritise areas for improvement
- Inform the development of a shared Early Years Strategy

The methodology involved understanding the population by examining multiple national and local datasets, mapping services to identify assets, core stakeholder engagement via interviews with service area leads and determining priorities. This has resulted in a series of observations for commissioners, which will subsequently undergo a prioritisation process by the Early Years Partnership Board.

A total of 49 specific 'whole-system' observations were generated under the following headings:

1. Integration and collaboration – 9 specific observations
2. Improving intelligence and evaluation – 10 specific observations
3. Empowering families – 11 specific observations
4. Identifying unmet need and reducing inequalities – 7 specific observations
5. Strengthening and supporting the workforce – 12 specific observations

In addition, a total of 54 topic specific observations were made across the early years period, focussing on pregnancy and birth; infancy and toddlerhood; and early childhood.

This Health Needs Assessment identified evidence to support the role of improved integration and collaboration of services across the early years period to improve early education, health and wellbeing outcomes for children five and under and their families in Devon. An abundance of literature supports the assertion that stakeholders should work in close partnership and that hub-based models may improve multiple aspects of service delivery.

Much of the analysis was based on publicly available data obtained via national reporting systems. For certain metrics, data was relatively old. There were also instances where key metrics were not readily available or were of uncertain quality. This Health Needs Assessment has therefore identified a need for improvement in local data systems and sharing of data to inform health needs assessments, direct the allocation of scarce resources and facilitate more meaningful evaluations of the impacts of services and interventions.

There was clear consensus from all stakeholders that it is essential to engage with and empower families to influence the planning and delivery of services. However, the breadth and depth of family feedback and input into service design was variable. The Maternity Voices Partnership model was seen as a strong asset to the system, and similar models may be helpful at other levels of the system. Careful consideration is needed to optimise the way in which the voices of families are captured across the Early Years period.

Devon exhibits significant socioeconomic inequalities across the county. There are also known inequalities related to coastal deprivation and issues with accessibility of services for those living in sparsely populated rural areas (Department of Health & Social Care, 2021). Addressing inequalities through the identification of children and families at higher risk of adverse outcomes and prioritisation for high quality early intervention and support in the early years will have downstream generational impacts on the health and wellbeing of these families.

All stakeholders recognised the importance of staff wellbeing and the need to support the workforce across the whole early years system. Key challenges in the recruitment and retention of midwives, health visitors, school nurses, social care workers and education and care staff, and how these issues have been exacerbated by the pandemic and the current cost-of-living crisis were highlighted.

#### **Next Steps**

- Public Health Devon will publish the Health Needs Assessment on the Health and Wellbeing Board webpages on behalf of the Early Years Partnership Board.
- The Early Years Partnership Board will review the findings and recommendations of the Health Needs Assessment and use the system-wide evidence to develop and implement a shared Early Years Strategy
- The Early Years Partnership Board will focus on the strategic planning, commissioning and delivery of services that promote health and wellbeing of children five and under and their families
- The Early Years Partnership Board will ensure that these activities are approached jointly to make the most effective use of our collective resources to deliver the best possible outcomes for children five and under and their families

#### **4) Options / Alternatives**

Nil

#### **5) Consultations / Representations / Technical Data**

Nil

#### **6) Strategic Plan**

The work described in this report aligns with the vision and priorities in the Council's Strategic Plan 2021 – 2025 - <https://www.devon.gov.uk/strategic-plan>

This includes:

- Be ambitious for children and young people, including the aim of being a child friendly Devon
- Tackle poverty and inequality (address poverty, health and other inequalities)
- Improve health and wellbeing, including any public health impacts
- Help communities be safe, connected and resilient

## **7) Financial Considerations**

Nil

## **8) Legal Considerations**

This report has no specific legal considerations.

## **9) Environmental Impact Considerations (Including Climate Change, Sustainability and Socio-economic)**

This report has no specific environmental impact considerations.

## **10) Equality Considerations**

This report has no specific equality considerations. This report is to inform the Health and Wellbeing Board of the work of the Early Years Partnership Board as well as the main findings from the Early Years Health Needs Assessment. One of the core principles of the Early Years Partnership Board is to reduce inequalities in the Early Years and the Early Years Health Needs Assessment has analysed intelligence where available to quantify inequalities across Devon to inform the work of the Early Years Partnership Board.

## **11) Risk Management Considerations**

Nil

## **12) Summary / Conclusions / Reasons for Recommendations**

Nil

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