

1 April 2003

Scrutiny Report to the City Council

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The review considered:
- (a) Early years provision including the monitoring of quality and availability;
 - (b) The Saint Thomas Early Excellence Centre; and
 - (c) Funding arrangements after the cessation of Sure Start funding.
- 2.2 The review heard evidence from a range of officers and others, and received written evidence. A glossary of terms is included in Appendix 1 of this report to assist those unfamiliar with this area of work.
- 2.3 Recurring themes were the establishment of new early years provision; funding issues; local authority provision; and, the impact of early intervention on the future performance of children.
- 2.4 This report makes 10 recommendations. There is an underlying theme to these which is a strong wish for Birmingham to identify and make the best use of the opportunities currently presenting themselves through various local and national initiatives in the early years area. These are opportunities for expansion of provision and for joint working between sectors to the benefit of young children and their families.

3. Introduction

- 3.1 The Review was part of the review schedule established by the Education and Arts Overview and Scrutiny Committee for 2002-2003. Members requested a review of early years provision in the light of expanded funding from national initiatives for this age group and the transfer of 5 family centres from social services to education in 2002.
- 3.2 Members of the review team were:

Councillor John Clancy (Chair)
Councillor Sybil Spence
Councillor Mike Ward
Councillor June Fuller
Joanne Cohen (co-opted)

4. Terms of Reference

- 4.1 The review team was asked to consider and report on:
- (a) Early years provision including the monitoring of quality and availability;
 - (b) The Saint Thomas Early Excellence Centre; and
 - (c) Funding arrangements after the cessation of Sure Start funding.

5. Method of Investigation

- 5.1 The review team met 7 times between 9 October 2002 and 15 January 2003. Evidence was heard from EYDCP officers, the Director of the St Thomas EEC, the Pre School Work Co-ordinator, the Sure Start Coordinator and the Interim Head of Early Years and Childcare. A visit was made to the St Thomas EEC and to the Pre School Work Team.
- 5.2 Evidence both written and oral addresses, in particular, the following issues:
- (a) the aims of, impact of and monitoring arrangements for the national neighbourhood nursery initiative;
 - (b) the inequity of provision across the city in terms of full time and part time early education places;
 - (c) the impact on exclusion rates of older children of their early years experience;
 - (d) the change in governance regulations allowing governing bodies to provide services such as childcare and other services of benefit to the community;
 - (e) the multiplicity of funding streams and the consequent bureaucratic burden on providers and on officers;
 - (f) the role of the pre school worker service with under 3's and their parents;
 - (g) the role of the St Thomas Early Excellence Centre and its future plans;
 - (h) the role of Sure Start in respect of under 3's and their families, and its future funding issues;
 - (i) the purpose of the Childcare Tax Credit and its impact
 - (j) the expected national initiative to create a children's centre in every disadvantaged ward and Birmingham's readiness to address this;
- 5.3 The review team noted that the work undertaken with this review compliments that of the review (currently in progress), with regard to Sure Start and the Pre School Work Service.
- 5.4 The review team was briefed on the breadth of the services, which exist under the catchall "early years". The review was not long enough to be able to look into the detail of all of the constituent parts so it focused on 0-4 year olds, their early education, and to some extent the support for their parents and their childcare issues. Along the way it found itself looking at issues affecting older children, such as whether or not their early experiences impacted on later learning or exclusion rates, and the changes in governance regulations allowing governing bodies to provide childcare (for 4-14 year olds) and other community services. Out of school care could provide a subject for a future scrutiny review.

6. Findings

6.1 The National Context

- 6.1.1 The government's National Childcare Strategy (NCS) was launched in 1998. A major part of the NCS has been to establish that every 3 and 4 year old has the right to a free, part time, quality early education place, if his/her parents wish. There has been a huge expansion nationally in provision for 3 and 4 year olds in maintained, private and voluntary settings. All sectors work together to provide for this age group under the auspices of the EYDCP in every LEA. Alongside this expansion has grown services to support it: comprehensive training programmes for providers and practitioners, the development of the foundation stage curriculum, support teachers for private and voluntary settings without qualified teachers, creation of area SENCO's to work with private and voluntary settings and others.
- 6.1.2 Every EYDCP has had to produce a succession of Strategic Plans and Implementation Plans for scrutiny by the DfES in order to draw down the available funding.
- 6.1.3 Included in the expansion of early education has been the creation across the country of Early Excellence Centres and the Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative. Alongside the expansion in early education has

Nurseries Initiative. The conclusions of this are that area based initiatives need to be better integrated and that Sure Start needs to become part of the mainstream. Recognising that one of the barriers to better integration is the Government's own separation of such initiatives, it has now created a single Sure Start department within the DfES which incorporates all early years functions.

6.2 Part Time and Full Time Places in the local situation

6.2.1 In Birmingham part time early education for 3 and 4 year olds is delivered through a partnership of the maintained, private and voluntary sectors through

23 Maintained nursery schools

24 Maintained community day nurseries

2 Early excellence centres

274 Voluntary private nurseries & playgroups

156 Nursery Classes in maintained infant/primary schools

28 Independent schools

12 Sure Start programmes

(The expansion of the above through the Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative is described in section 6.3.)

Part-time places in Local Authority settings, nursery classes, nursery schools, community day nurseries and Early Excellence Centres are funded either through the Authority's Fair Funding Scheme, or, where they are outside the Scheme's Regulations, through direct allocations to settings as appropriate.

Part-time places in other settings are part or all funded through Nursery

- 6.2.4 Currently there are 974 full-time and 977 part-time pupils in Birmingham's nursery schools (1462 FTE). There are 3092 full-time and 5190 part-time pupils in Birmingham's nursery classes (5687 FTE).
- 6.2.5 A review of the distribution of full-time and part-time places in infant/primary schools would need to take place alongside the consultation on the Fair Funding Scheme for 2004/5.
- 6.2.6 The Education Act 2002 changes the status of nursery schools to require them to have governing bodies and delegated budgets allocated via a formula by April 2004. The process of review has therefore already started to examine the implications. In the meantime, the government's inter-departmental review has recently published its findings indicating the shape of future provision for Early Years beyond 2004. These proposals include a commitment to create a children's centre for every disadvantaged ward, building on existing Sure Start and Early Excellence Centres. Birmingham is intending to ensure that similar activities can take place in other wards through the creation of early years networks. Such networks will also assist early years service provision and planning in all wards.
- 6.2.7 Birmingham's nursery schools are well placed to be the heart of future Early Years' reforms due to the experience and expertise of staff currently working within these settings. It is likely, however, that effectively utilising Local Authority resources alongside government funding will have implications for the roles of nursery schools.

6.3 The Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative (NNI)

- 6.3.1 NNI helps meet the targets in the National Childcare Strategy and the national aim is to open 1 million new places before March 2004. The rationale behind NNI is that in disadvantaged communities potential demand exists for childcare from parents who would access training or employment if childcare was available. To break this cycle NNI funding will support new nursery developments and the first three years' expenditure. After three years, it is anticipated that enough local places will be sustainable. Neighbourhood Nurseries are also expected to be community childcare hubs that support other initiatives and projects. This could involve hosting a childminder network, providing training in conjunction with a local college, holding a health visitor drop in session, etc.
- 6.3.2 Birmingham EYDCP has been asked to open 1400 Neighbourhood Nursery places before March 2004. Most nurseries will need to be for 50 places to ensure that they are sustainable. This means opening 28 nurseries. 25 wards have been identified by DfES as being disadvantaged. (Appendix 2) Some of these wards already have reasonable levels of childcare provision and efforts are being made to

made links have been made with other partners for example, Sure Start, Nursery Schools and the Community Day Nurseries.

Three Neighbourhood Nurseries have been established so far:

1. Whizzkids (Acocks Green)
2. Westhill House (Kings Norton)
3. St Paul's (Balsall Heath)

A further 20 nurseries are applying for capital funding via the EYDCP. This totals 725 places. Revenue funding only will be given for 140 Neighbourhood Nursery Places in existing provision in maintained, voluntary and private settings in the disadvantaged wards before March 2004. There is the opportunity for these additional places to attract matched funding from other sources, for example, Sure Start, colleges, Advantage West Midlands, etc.

6.4 St Thomas Early Excellence Centre

- 6.4.1 The review team visited the Centre and spent some time talking with the Director about the creation of the Centre, its current provision and plans for its future. The creation of Early Excellence Centres nationally is part of the national childcare strategy. Pre 1998 some integrated centres existed across the country and indeed Birmingham's oldest maintained nursery schools were just such centres established to provide day care support for working mothers around the time of the second world war although their remit changed in later years. Across the country there are 100 early excellence centres. They are all different and all offer a model of how agencies can work together in partnership to the benefit of the local community.
- 6.4.2 Early Excellence Centres have to provide extended day and extended year care, family support, lifelong learning opportunities, the dissemination of good early years practice, and contribute to research and development.
- 6.4.3 In Birmingham Adderley Nursery School was an integrated education and social services provision for some time before 1998. It has now been awarded early excellence status too.
- 6.4.4 The St Thomas Centre currently provides:
- early education through the nursery,
 - out of school care for older children in partnership with National

- a base for and leadership of all of the training provided through the Early Years Partnership for providers and practitioners,
- a base for the Pre School Work team,
- a base for the Centre for Research in Early Childhood,
- a base for the Ishango after school club.

6.4.5 The Centre has recently been designated by the DfES as a leadership and management centre for early years management training and the first modules of this training course are soon to be delivered.

6.4.6 The Centre has plans for the refurbishment of some of its accommodation to provide a national conference facility, and is also currently working with a private provider of nursery services to develop an on site neighbourhood nursery for 0-4 year olds.

6.4.7 The Director of the Centre explained that her particular frustrations were: -

a) The difficulty of attracting pump priming funding to enable provision for under 3's to be established. The Centre has room and the wish to provide for this age group in greater numbers than at present.

b) The present multiplicity of funding streams all of which have their particular constraints in their use and all of which need to be accessed in differing ways leading to time being spent pursuing funding and trying to match criteria set by various agencies.

c) The apparent lack of coherence of family support activities
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because it means that parents can afford quality childcare, which can be charged at a more realistic and viable rate.

6.5.2 From April 2003, Working Families' Tax Credit and Childcare Tax

services in areas which would benefit but which have not been designated as Sure Start programme areas.

- 6.7.6 Sure Start programmes are likely to include support with postnatal depression, quitting smoking in pregnancy, parenting, breast-feeding, speech and language, play and learning opportunities for 0-4 year olds, and seeking employment. However, each Sure Start programme is different and develops according to the results of local consultation and the involvement of parents, which include fathers.

7. Conclusions

- 7.1 The area within the Education Service referred to, as "early years" is very broad in its content and impact. Whilst the provision of quality part-time education is a central plank of the early years, the service is also crucial to the development and provision of extended day care and

6.7.6

for the very young to attend appropriate sessions (such as Stay and Play) in the same building as an older sibling.

- c) Pockets of deprivation exists outside the wards defined as disadvantaged by the DETR and these should be catered for in all future planning and development work.
- d) A city-wide review of existing maintained nursery school provision be undertaken with a view to improving the present level of provision by addressing the current inequality in access and availability of this type of service. The review to include a comprehensive mapping of existing and planned expansion of early years and costings.
- e) Preventative/early intervention family support services developed and extended through maintained nurseries, Early Excellence Centres, future Children's centres, community day nurseries and schools interested in extending their role to the benefit of their local communities. Existing good practice should be identified and shared.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Children's Centres

Centres offering integrated services at a local level including childcare to children and families. Details of a national initiative to create children's centre in disadvantaged wards nation-wide are expected later this year.

Extended day

8am – 6pm (so that childcare is available during the hours when most working parents need it).

Early Excellence Centres (EEC)

EECs have been set up nationally as part of the NCS. They are all different but, all provide as a minimum, integrated early education and care, family support, lifelong learning opportunities and the sharing of good early years practice.

Extended Schools

Schools which act as a hub in a community for accessing a range of services and facilities for the benefit of pupils, their families and the wider community. This will include health and social care, childcare, and family and community learning.

Early Years and Childcare Development Partnership (EYDCP)

EYDCPs were established in every LEA in 1998 to deliver the NCS. They represent and draw together a diverse range of providers covering early years and childcare, and to a lesser extent business, regeneration and employment interests. EYDCPs have no legal status but every LEA is currently required to ensure that one exists in its area.

Extended Year

50 weeks (so that childcare is available when most working parents need it).

Fair Funding Scheme

The scheme, which describes how the LEA devolves funding to locally managed schools.

Family Support

This term generally refers to a broad range of activities designed to support families, from coffee mornings to targeted support with behaviour management.

Flying Start

A programme for 0-3 year olds and their families which focuses on the promotion of positive behaviour, developing and raising standards in language, literacy and numeric skills.

National Childcare Strategy (NCS)

This was launched by national Government in 1998. It has developed over the years but its aim remains to deliver quality, affordable and accessible childcare in every neighbourhood.

National Neighbourhood Initiative (NNI)

A strand of the NCS, which aims to establish 1 million new places by March 2004 nation-wide in disadvantaged communities. Its aim is to provide childcare for parents who would access training or employment if childcare was available. Disadvantaged communities usually have fewer childcare places than better off ones.

Nursery Education Grant (NEG)

This is the funding which supports the provision of part-time places for 3 and 4

Disadvantaged Wards (DETR)

Acocks Green
Aston
Bartley Green
Billesley