
Scrutiny Committee on Children's Services – 15 September 2011

Report of the Acting Director of Children's Services

Time for two's Project

Purpose of Report

1. To inform Children's Services Scrutiny Committee of the project for two year olds called Time for two's supported and delivered by the Directorate of Children's Services, Childcare Strategy Team.

Background

2. The Time for two's programme was launched in 2006 in response to growing evidence of:
 - the strong influence that family background, and in particular the home learning environment, can have on children's cognitive and social development from a very young age
 - how high quality early education can counter the potential negative effects of living in circumstances that do not facilitate children's cognitive and social development
3. The two year olds programme is therefore seen as playing a crucial role in improving disadvantaged children's social and cognitive outcomes (e.g. social confidence and independence, verbal skills and reasoning ability), and in ensuring that by the age of five they are as ready as their peers to start and fully benefit from school.
4. There are two important features of the pilot offer. Firstly, the provision of support for parents, as well as early education, to ensure that disadvantaged two year olds fully benefit from the programme. Through links with other initiatives (e.g. children's centres), the offer gives parents access to a range of support they need in order to deal with challenging circumstances which may prevent them from providing the kind of home learning environment children need to thrive and fully develop their potential. This can be very wide ranging and include, support with home learning and parenting skills, health advice, counselling, housing and benefit advice and employment support and access to training.
5. Secondly, the evidence, as mentioned above clearly shows that only good quality early education results in improvements in cognitive and social development, and at every stage the programme has tried to ensure that the funding is given to childcare providers that can offer good quality early education.

6. During 2006 – 2008; 32 local authorities were asked to participate in the scheme which was to be delivered in a prescribed way to offer 7.5hrs of early education for 38 weeks to each eligible child. In 2008 an additional 31 local authorities were asked to participate, including Dudley, these local authorities were asked to deliver a more targeted offer for a specified number of children with a focus on economic deprivation and additional funding was included for outreach and family support. Our target was to reach 120 two year olds living in the 10% most disadvantaged areas of Dudley borough. We exceeded the target by March 2011 and reached just over 200 children.
7. In 2009 the remaining local authorities joined the pilot. At the same time rules were tightened in relation to expectations about the quality of provision this being that childcare providers could be funded if:
- they have a good or outstanding Ofsted rating, or,
 - they have a satisfactory Ofsted rating but can provide sufficient evidence that they are working towards a good rating.

Other conditions of funding include:

- for group settings to have or be committed to employing a graduate with Early Years Professional Status
- for childminders, being part of a network recognised by the local authority and preferably having or working towards a relevant level 3 qualification
- regularly evaluating the quality of provision and participating in local or national quality improvement schemes, in Dudley we utilise the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS) and Infant and Toddler Environmental Rating Scale (ITERS)

8. **Next steps 2011 -2015**

In October 2010, the coalition government announced as part of the Fairness Premium, the **legal entitlement** to 15 hours of free early education for every disadvantaged two year old from 2013 (currently only three and four year olds are legally entitled to free provision).

9. The Department for Education (DfE) is introducing legislation through the Education Bill that will place a statutory duty on local authorities to provide the entitlement from 2013. Clause 1 will amend Section 7 of the Childcare Act (2006), so that through regulations a statutory entitlement can be introduced to free early education for disadvantaged two year olds. In Dudley we have identified that there are approximately 1000 disadvantaged two years olds living in the 20% most disadvantaged areas of the borough.

Finance

10. Funding for the expansion of the two year old offer is provided through the Early Intervention Grant. The government has set out its aspirations for use of the Grant, and DfE will monitor how much funding each authority spends on free places for two year olds. Furthermore, there is an expectation that local authorities will recognise the need to increase investment in early education for two year olds over the next two years, as they move towards a legal duty to provide free places for all disadvantaged two year olds

Law

11. The main legislation governing this aspect of our work is the Childcare Act 2006

Equality Impact

12. Equality and Diversity issues are integral to all service development and delivery.

Recommendations

13. That Scrutiny Committee note, comment on and endorses the project and implementation of the two year old pilot, known as 'Time for two's'.



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Appendix 1 – Time for two's break down of hours