

Contents

Introduction	4
Action local authorities should be taking in 2005-06	5
Vision	6
The wider children's context	7
The local authority role	8
Sure Start children's centres	10
Three- and four-year-olds	11
Extended schools	12
Disabled children	13
Improving quality, affordability and sustainability	15
Central/local partnership	16
Appendix 1 – Timeline	17

Introduction

'Choice for parents: the best start for children' sets out the Government's ten year strategy to create a sustainable framework for high quality integrated early years and childcare services for all children and families. Its aim is to make early years and childcare provision a permanent, mainstream part of the welfare state. To support this major change spending on early years and childcare will more than double from 2004-05 to 2007-08, an average annual rise of 24% in real terms.

The strategy will be implemented through the framework provided by the Every Child Matters programme for the reform of children's services. Working with your partners, increasingly through Children's Trusts arrangements, local authorities will have a central role in commissioning and coordinating the delivery of integrated early years and childcare services.

One of the key underlying principles of Every Child Matters is the active involvement of parents and the local community in the planning and delivery of services. Sure Start local programmes have a good track record of involving parents, and local authorities will wish to build on this work when developing and delivering the ten year childcare strategy.

This short guidance document builds on 'Sure Start Guidance 2004-2006' and will help local authorities plan for 2005-06 to deliver this new agenda. New, more detailed Sure Start guidance for 2006-08 will be issued in the autumn and we would welcome your thoughts on areas this should cover. A timeline of key dates can be found in **Appendix 1**; you may wish to circulate this locally.

Action local authorities should be taking in 2005-06

- ▶ Develop with parents and partners an early years and childcare vision for your locality including integrated early education and childcare, health, advice and support to parents, adult learning and support for employment, and outreach to all parts of the community.
- ▶ With parents, partners and childcare providers, review the supply and demand of childcare in your locality.
- ▶ Expand and roll out children's centres and extended schools.
- ▶ Develop local plans and programmes with parents and partners, based on 'Sure Start Guidance 2006-2008' (to be issued in the autumn), to increase capacity, sustainability and quality of services.
- ▶ Ensure plans and service provision reflect the needs of the local population, including disabled children and those from black and minority ethnic communities.
- ▶ Ensure these plans are an integral part of the local authority's wider Children and Young People's Plan.
- ▶ Develop a programme to grow the local childcare workforce and improve their qualifications and training to meet the commitments in 'Choice for parents: the best start for children'.
- ▶ Develop a programme to improve the skills of strategic and operational managers to deliver the integrated early years and childcare services.
- ▶ Review current arrangements for provision of advice and information to parents, including services delivered by Children's Information Services.

Vision

The Government's vision is to:

- ▶ ensure every child gets the best possible start in life by the provision of high quality integrated early education and childcare services
- ▶ maximise parents' choice in how they balance their work and family commitments by providing accessible and flexible childcare services that meet their individual needs
- ▶ have a children's centre in every community offering a range of information and integrated services according to local need, including early education and childcare, health and support services, including family and parenting support
- ▶ ensure parents have access to information and advice about locally available childcare and other support services; this includes information about quality of childcare, including inspection results
- ▶ increase the free early education entitlement for three- and four-year-olds from 12½ hours to 15 hours a week and in the longer term to 20 hours a week
- ▶ increase the number of extended schools and in particular to enable parents to access an out-of-school childcare place for all children aged 3-14 between the hours of 8-6 all year round
- ▶ maximise the involvement of local parents and partner organisations in the planning and delivery of local early years and childcare services

The wider children's context

'Every Child Matters: Next Steps' set out a national programme of change to improve the support given to children and parents to maximise children's opportunities and fulfil their potential. It also set out a new outcomes framework to act as a basis for agreeing local priorities and planning local change. Our ambition is to improve outcomes for all children and to narrow the gap between those who do well and those who do not. The evidence is now clear that the early years of a child's life are extremely important in determining their future outcomes, both in terms of success at school and in adult life.

The Children Act 2004 gives local authorities a clear key role in working with their partners to plan and deliver the change, increasingly through Children's Trusts. Early years and childcare services are an important element of this framework, which local authorities will increasingly be judged against. All authorities will be required to have a Children & Young People's Plan by April 2006 (excellent councils are exempt from this requirement) and integrated early years and childcare services will need to be a priority area within these plans.

Early years and childcare will therefore be an important element of the wider Every Child Matters monitoring and assessment of local performance through the improvement cycle for children's services. This includes:

- ▶ Joint Area Reviews
- ▶ annual priority setting conversations of children's services
- ▶ self assessment by local authorities
- ▶ Children and Young People's Plans

The new Directors of Children's Services and Lead Members for Children's Services will play a key leadership role in bringing together local parents and partners to develop and deliver the new early years and childcare services vision and in driving reform.

The local authority role

'Choice for parents: the best start for children' gives local authorities the leadership role in delivering our vision for the future of early years and childcare services. The strategy recognises that local authorities are best placed to have the full picture of what services are needed to meet parents' requirements for the families in their area.

The four main roles for local authorities will be:

1. Joining up access to services for families

Local authorities should develop a coherent pattern of services to support parental choice – securing the free entitlement for three- and four-year-olds and supporting more flexibility, developing children's centres and linking childcare into schools more effectively. Key to this will be improving the availability and accessibility of advice and information to parents so that they can act as informed consumers.

2. Addressing affordability and sustainability

Working with others, local authorities will need a good understanding of local supply and demand, and of particular local features, e.g. the types of childcare local parents prefer to use, areas of unmet need, how to invest funds strategically to support affordability and sustainability, how to ensure services meet the needs of the local population composition including black and minority ethnic communities. Particular priority should be given to families who have traditionally had low take-up of services, such as those from some minority ethnic communities.

3. Raising quality

The quality of childcare is directly related to better social, educational and behavioural outcomes for children. Well-trained staff, low staff turnover and strong leadership are essential to securing quality provision. Local authorities will need to work with childcare employers and Learning and Skills Councils to secure the

provision of appropriate training and support for the rapidly expanding workforce.

4. Brokering and partnership working

Our aspirations for parents to be able to access childcare through children's centres and schools mean that local authorities will need to strengthen relationships with the maintained sector whilst keeping existing strong links with private and voluntary groups. Local authorities will need to ensure diversity of provision is maintained to ensure good choices for parents, often brokering partnerships between schools and the private and voluntary sectors. Local authorities will also need to ensure skilled business support and advice is available.

'Choice for parents: the best start for children' sets out the Government's commitment to introduce a new duty on local authorities to secure sufficient provision of childcare to meet local need. The legislation will give early years and childcare services a legal underpinning so that they become core local authority functions – permanent and mainstream.

Sure Start children's centres

The development of children's centres is a key priority for the ten year strategy, with centres being initially developed to reach 65% of children in the 20% most disadvantaged areas in England by March 2006. It is the Government's intention that by March 2008 all the children in the most disadvantaged areas will have access to a children's centre. In addition, about 800 centres will be developed in other areas, with all communities having a children's centre by 2010. Part of the increase in the Sure Start budget is additional capital and revenue funding for local authorities to support the development of children's centres.

Local authorities will need to ensure that children's centres in the most disadvantaged areas offer the full core offer of services to babies and pre-school children:

- ▶ good quality early learning, integrated with full daycare provision for children (minimum ten hours a day, five days a week, 48 weeks a year)
- ▶ good quality teacher input to lead the development of learning within each centre
- ▶ parental outreach
- ▶ family support services
- ▶ local advice and information for parents
- ▶ a base for a childminder network and other training and support for other childcare providers
- ▶ child and family health services, including antenatal services
- ▶ support for children and parents with special needs
- ▶ effective links with Jobcentre Plus, local training providers and further and higher education institutions

There will be some flexibility in the model for more affluent areas. Updated guidance on the roll-out of children's centres will be issued shortly.

Three- and four-year-olds

'Choice for parents: the best start for children' includes a package of measures to extend the free early education entitlement.

Key commitments are as follows:

- ▶ From April 2006, the free early education entitlement of 12½ hours a week will be extended from 33 weeks to 38 weeks for all three- and four-year-olds, whether in mainstream, private, voluntary or independent provision.
- ▶ From April 2007, the minimum free entitlement will be extended to 15 hours per week for 38 weeks, for the first cohort of children. Parents will be able to use the free entitlement flexibly across a minimum of three days.
- ▶ From 2010, the minimum entitlement of 15 hours per week for 38 weeks will be in place for all three- and four-year-olds, on the way to a longer term goal of 20 hours a week for 38 weeks.

The Code of Practice on the provision of free early education will be substantially revised and restructured to support local authorities in planning for and managing change at local level. We intend to consult with partners on changes to the Code shortly.

Extended schools

'Choice for parents, the best start for children' sets out the Government's proposals for a childcare offer for school-age children. For primary schools this will mean that by 2010 all parents with children aged 5-11 will be offered the guarantee of affordable school based childcare between the hours of 8am-6pm, all year round. Half of all parents will be able to enjoy this service by 2008. Primary schools will make this offer themselves or in partnership with the private, voluntary and community sector. The provision of childcare should be in line with the local authority's overall strategic plan for the local area. This will often be on school sites, at a neighbouring school or on a different site, including childminders' homes, but with a guarantee that children will be safely transported there.

For the secondary phase this will mean that by 2010 all secondary schools will be open from 8am-6pm, all year round, offering a range of interesting activities for young people. By 2008 we want at least a third of all secondary schools to be making this offer, either themselves or in partnership with the private, voluntary and community sector.

Further information on extended schools is available on

www.teachernet.gov.uk/extendedschools

This website provides practical know-how on overcoming some of the barriers that may be encountered. We will be adding a number of additional downloadable know-how leaflets that draw on the practical experience of schools already delivering extended services. These will include case studies, 'how to' advice, hints and tips, and emerging evidence of the impact on child outcomes.

Disabled children

'Choice for parents: the best start for children' sets out the Government's commitment to improve support to disabled children (of all ages and as defined in the SEN Code of Practice). Disabled children and their families should have access to the full range of childcare options which are open to other families. Part of the additional money allocated for the implementation of the childcare strategy includes assumptions about increasing support to disabled children. Annex 11 of the 'Sure Start Guidance 2004-2006' lists the areas we would ask local authorities to prioritise.

In order to help local authorities improve support for disabled children in the early years we have been funding the Early Support programme. We would strongly recommend that all local authorities, in consultation with local parents and partners, use the Early Support materials and approaches to jointly review and improve the services they provide for disabled children and their families. Further information about the Early Support materials can be found here:

www.espp.org.uk

It is particularly important that all children centres and extended schools provide services which are accessible to disabled children and their families. Therefore local authorities should ensure that all planning for children's centres and extended schools includes measures to make these services fully inclusive. This planning should involve consultation with local parents of disabled children and voluntary sector groups.

From September 2002 all providers and commissioners of services have duties under the Disability and Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 to ensure that disabled children are not treated less favourably than other children. The DDA will be further strengthened through the Disability Discrimination Bill currently being discussed in Parliament.

Through inspections and monitoring of the implementation of the strategy we will ensure that local authorities give inclusion of disabled children a high priority.

Improving quality, affordability and sustainability

The Government aims to raise quality standards while ensuring that childcare is affordable for parents, and to support the development of a sustainable childcare sector while maintaining the diversity and choice that already exists.

High standards and sustainable businesses will not be achieved without a qualified, skilled and well-motivated workforce. Using the workforce development budget local authorities should develop local strategies to improve the skills and competencies of their early years and childcare workforce. This should take account of the Government's Children's Workforce Strategy (issued for consultation in April 2005) which includes a chapter on the early years and childcare workforce. In particular, we want to ensure that all daycare settings are led by graduate early years professionals and improve the qualifications and status of early years and childcare workers.

The Government will consult local authorities later in the year about its plans for the Transformation Fund. The Fund of £125 million a year from April 2006 will support the development of the workforce without compromising efforts to improve affordability. From autumn 2005, the Government (along with the GLA and LDA) will also be supporting pilots in London to test ways of improving the affordability and availability of childcare for lower income families.

Sure Start's funding allocations to local authorities for the creation of childcare places will be refocused on supporting sustainable business development and ensuring that provision matches local needs. Changes to funding and performance monitoring arrangements to support these objectives will begin from April 2005 and will be fully in place from April 2006.

Central/local partnership

The Government will support local authorities to deliver this new agenda through capacity building and workforce development. In particular, the Government will:

- ▶ support local capacity development
- ▶ clarify responsibilities and expectations
- ▶ promote local flexibility supported by effective performance management

The Government will work with the Local Government Association (LGA), the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) and others to ensure that local strategic leaders and front line staff have the skills and capacity to deliver the move to more integrated early years and childcare services. There will also be a strong focus on support to local authorities within the Every Child Matters performance framework.

Appendix 1 Timeline

2005	
April	Consultation on early years and childcare workforce issued as part of Children's Pay and Workforce Strategy
April	Consultation on the new Revised Code of Practice on free early education entitlement
May	Further children's centre 'phase 2' guidance issued
September	Integrated inspection commences
Autumn	'Sure Start Guidance 2006-2008' issued
Autumn	Guidance on Transformation Fund issued
2006	
March	Most local authorities to have Directors of Children's Services and Children's Trusts in place
April	Increase in free early education entitlement to 38 weeks a year
April	All local authorities to have Children and Young People's Plan in place
2007	
	Start to extend 15-hour free early education entitlement to three- and four-year-olds
2008	
March	2,500 Sure Start children's centres open
	Half of all families to have access to school based care for 5-11 year olds
	One third of secondary schools open from 8am to 6pm offering extended services
	New legal framework for local authorities planned to be in place
	Reformed regulation and inspection system for early years and childcare to be in place, supported by new birth-to-five quality framework
	All local authorities to have Directors of Children's Services and Children's Trusts

2010

All parents of three- and four-year-olds offered early education and childcare available all year round from 8am to 6pm weekdays

All parents of children aged 5-11 to have access to childcare from 8am to 6pm weekdays all year round, based in their school or early education provider, or nearby with supervised transfer arrangements

All secondary schools open from 8am to 6pm weekdays providing extended services

3,500 Sure Start children's centres – one for every community