

London Borough of Tower Hamlets

“A day well spent” Report on the Mayor’s Early Years’ Summit

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Tower Hamlets Mayor, John Biggs, hosted an Early Years Summit on 30 November 2018 to hear from parents, partners and professionals to help shape future early years services. The summit has set challenging targets for how the Council’s range of early childhood services will ensure children and families have the best outcomes for life. Feedback will be used to develop a new early years strategy and provide the support parents and families need from early childhood education, health and social care services.

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1. Executive Summary

The Mayor of Tower Hamlets, John Biggs, hosted an Early Years' Summit on 30 November 2018 to hear from parents, partners and professionals so their views can help shape future services. The Summit was held at the Professional Development Centre in Bethnal Green. Challenging targets were set for the Council by parents. These focussed on developing the Council's range of early childhood services to ensure children and families have the best outcomes for life.

Feedback is being used to develop a new Tower Hamlets' early years' strategy for **all** service providers to give parents and families the support every family needs.

John Biggs, Mayor of Tower Hamlets said: "The summit was a way to explore how we can further improve our borough's early years' offer. The science is clear - adversity in a child's early years dramatically affects health and education outcomes for life. Our task is to disrupt those adverse childhood experiences, encourage learning from an early age and give our children and their families the best possible start in life."

Councillor Danny Hassell, Cabinet Member for Children, Schools and Young People said: "The summit has been an opportunity to look at building employment opportunities and developing early education to support all parents to get the best outcomes for their children. Ninety-seven per cent of the borough's early childhood education and care places are graded 'good' or 'outstanding' by Ofsted. We need to build on this early education offer and also make sure everyone can access universal services in children's centres."

Parents at the summit made it very clear that they want the high quality services from conception to age five and beyond to be reinforced by a stronger health and social care offer from those service areas. Parents told the Council that they want children's centres to become family health hubs. They valued the improved availability of health checks, integrated reviews and the support from specialist training and employment advisers, services which are now available through children's centres since the restructure.

They asked the Council to:

- Ensure all organisations attending the summit provide more meaningful information, presented in ways parents can access more easily – using smart phones as a platform, and focusing on specific apps, for example, around the availability of childcare places.
- Develop a stronger focus on early language development. They requested that health services make speech and language therapy available through children's centres for our youngest children.
- Provide more pre-natal and maternity services run by hospitals through children's centres.
- Create more support for childcare for children with additional needs.

2. Outline of the Summit

The Summit focussed on gathering the opinions of parents and young people about how the Council should develop its services from conception to age five and beyond. The views of parents will be included in the overall Council Strategy and in the Early Years' Strategy which forms part of this.

The Summit brought four strands of work together: the early years' strategy, work on tackling poverty, inclusion (SEND) and childcare sufficiency and quality. Many of the Council's partners,

including the voluntary and community sector, schools and private, voluntary and maintained (PVI) childcare also contributed their views and insights.

The most significant part of the day was two-fold: hearing direct from families about what they need in early years and discussions on four key questions. Parents from Children's House Nursery School spoke in person, many other parents gave their views via video clips. Pip Pinhorn of Toyhouse spoke for voluntary sector parents unable to attend. During the other important part of the day, the discussions, professionals from across the Council and beyond were able to listen to parents and explore how things can be improved. Parent discussions focussed on the following four questions:

1. What do we need from early childhood education and care? What do parents need? What do children need? What do parents want for their children?
2. How do we support our children to flourish?
3. How do we help our children to be great communicators?
4. How do we build resilience? For parents and for children, through education, promoting well-being and attachment, training and employment.

The findings from the groups have informed this report and are available on the Early Years' website www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/eysummit

There were eight speakers:

- The Executive Mayor, John Biggs
- The Cabinet Member for Children, Schools and Young People, Councillor Danny Hassell
- The Corporate Director Children and Culture, Debbie Jones
- The Director of Public Health, Somen Bannerjee
- The Head of the Integrated Early Years' Service, Pauline Hoare
- The interim Head of the Early Help Service, Mohammed Jolil
- James Hemsall, OBE, Director of Hemsall's and also National Programme Director, Childcare Works
- Dr. Kitty Stewart, Associate Professor of Social Policy and Associate Director of the Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion, London School of Economics

Their power points are available on the Summit website www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/eysummit.

The findings of the day have already been included in the process for the Mayor's Growth Fund, linked to the Tackling Poverty Programme, and are being used to develop the Early Years' Strategy and the new Children and Families Partnership Plan.

3. Introduction

At the Summit, everyone agreed that support, help and interventions must start before conception and that some families will need help throughout their lives. Everyone also agreed that the partnership working at the universal and preventative level that is already in place has to be further strengthened and developed. This is the work led by Public Health through the Tower Hamlets Together Children's Vanguard. This was called the Tower Hamlets Together Early Years' Transformation Programme Phase 1. Details of this work are available on the Summit website www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/eysummit¹.

¹ These are available on the Summit website: www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/eysummit .

Gaps in achievement between the poorest children and their better off counterparts are well established by the age of five.

“Unseen children 2013”²

4. Main Report

Part 1: What Tower Hamlets parents said during the day

Parents provided the main inputs for the day, presenting their views, experiences and recommendations in person and via video clips. These are available on the Early Years’ website. Parent delegates attending the Summit spoke inspirationally about what they and other families need most from their leaders in the Council.

Part 2: Summary of parents’ discussions of the four questions

The summary from the groups is available on the Early Years’ website. Parents’ views are captured in full in this document. The summaries below cover the main points they raised.

i. What do we need from early childhood education and care?

Summary

Early childhood education and care has to be flexible, affordable and convenient to enable parents to work. Parents want to practise their skills through volunteering before they go back to work. They need crèche provision for this and for attending training. Not all organisations recognise this need.

Children need to feel safe and loved, to stay healthy and make friends. They need to have love from whoever is caring for them and from their friends. Early education and care must be high quality with caring and dedicated staff. Staff need to be very sensitive to parents’ needs and the child’s needs and to communicate well with parents, other carers and children.

ii. How do we support our children to flourish?

Summary

The relationships between parents, care givers and children builds the foundation for well-being and for social and emotional development. Sensitive care giving, responsiveness to a child’s emotional needs and recognition of the child’s own thoughts and feelings are important in ensuring strong attachments. Economic disadvantage can make this more difficult.

iii. How do we help our children to be great communicators?

Summary

It is important to have a loving consistent and reliable relationship with an adult who will hold the child close, make sure they are well fed and provide a safe place to live. With these needs met, the baby will be ready to learn the underlying skills for communication. It is important that both the parents and the care-givers talk, play and read to the baby during everyday routines and activities.

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/unseen-children-access-and-achievement-20-years-on>

iv. How do we build resilience for parents and for children, through education, promoting well-being and attachment, training and employment?

Summary

Secure attachment is a protective factor that reduces the risks of poor development later on. It prepares a child to be a successful parent later in their lives. Without intervention, attachment difficulties are very likely to persist over the generations.

Part 3: Messages from the speakers

The Executive Mayor, John Biggs

The Mayor stated that the science is clear - adversity in a child's early years dramatically affects health and education outcomes for life. He said that our task is to disrupt those adverse childhood experiences, encourage learning from an early age and give our children and their families the best possible start in life. He re-stated his commitment to the regeneration of Tower Hamlets by encouraging the opening of childcare businesses for the children (birth to five) of parents and carers at work or in training, as well as helping to bring parents closer to job opportunities. This means:

- Working to ensure that there is a high quality, affordable childcare place for every family that needs it, across our diverse range of settings; nursery schools, nursery classes in primary schools, independent nurseries, child-minders and nannies, and newer models such as parent led co-operatives;
- Continuing to enable families with particular needs – such as those supported by social care or whose children have special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) – to access high quality childcare provision Seeking to make early years childcare in the borough more accessible and affordable by using our WorkPath employment service to train new, and upskill existing, childcare workers;
- Protecting and strengthening our excellent support for children with special educational needs and disabilities and their families through our Children's Centres, a range of childcare provision and in nurseries, mainstream and special schools.

The IEYS supports these aims by:

- Ensuring high quality provision to support learning to narrow the gap between the most and least advantaged families in the borough in order to break the link between poverty, poor outcomes for education and health;
- Building family resilience through supporting parenting capacity; volunteering; training and employment;
- Working closely with Job Centre Plus and WorkPath, and with the third sector through children's centres.

The Cabinet Member for Children, Schools and Young People, Councillor Danny Hassell

Many diverse challenges face our families as previous speakers have identified. What can we do?

We can break the link between disadvantage and low outcomes by focussing on the universal and preventative offers to families locally.

Responsible investments in services for young children and their families focus should focus on the benefits relative to cost and services that do not meet quality standards are a poor investment.

The need to address significant inequalities in opportunity, beginning in the earliest years of life, is both a fundamental and moral responsibility and is a critical investment in Tower Hamlets' social and economic future.

Policy initiatives that promote supportive relationships and rich learning opportunities for young children create a strong foundation for school achievement after the child leaves the EYFS, followed by greater productivity in the workplace and solid citizenship in the community.

When parents, informal community programmes, and professionally staffed early childhood services pay attention to young children's emotional and social needs, as well as to their mastery of literacy and cognitive skills, they have maximum impact on the development of sturdy brain architecture and preparation for success in school.

The Corporate Director Children and Culture, Debbie Jones

Our early years' provision and health colleagues are the people who meet our parents and children first. They can support and advise families. They can also identify developing issues early. A lot of problems can be solved quickly.

Where barriers and difficulties are more complicated, we now have an Early Help Service that aims to address problems as soon as they are identified. Early years' colleagues perform a similar task very early in a child's life. We believe that this recently developed model will ensure that every contact counts, families and children have a known and trusted person with whom to share their problems and who can help them access help if they want to do so.

Early intervention begins with the universal offer from health visitors, children's centres, the voluntary sector, early childhood education and care settings (including schools). These universal services are in general the first point of contact for families with the range of services available from the Council and its partners, including the voluntary sector.

It is **after** families have made contact with this rich range of services that early help can be offered if the challenges are proving to be more difficult. Pathways for families to help them navigate their way through both the universal offers and the more specialist offers are an important recent addition.

Tower Hamlets is developing a local universal pathway, to be offered to all families by a range of partners working collaboratively including health visitors, children's centres and the voluntary sector. This will form the basis of a minimum level of service families can expect and will ensure services are coordinated and informed as families move seamlessly from one service to another.

The universal pathway will be complemented with the addition of a SEND pathway, clarifying and mapping the future journey of the family as they grow and support the needs of their child.

The Director of Public Health, Somen Bannerjee

What is it that makes life so difficult for some families? International research has identified adverse childhood experiences as a big part of the problem. It also indicates that these seriously affect health and life expectancy.

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are traumatic events that affect children while growing up, such as suffering child maltreatment or living in a household affected by domestic violence, substance misuse or mental illness. They can impact on physical health issues such as heart

conditions, mortality rates, diabetes and on social issues such as exclusions from school, family violence, and addiction. All our services within and beyond the Council who offer early years services have to work together better.

The Head of the Integrated Early Years' Service, Pauline Hoare

Why are the days between conception and age two so important? It is because this is when the foundations for the child's future are built.

Seven architectural facts about foundations

- Foundations take longer to create than buildings
- The higher the building, the firmer the foundations have to be;
- The more stress a building is likely to face, the more flexible the foundations need to be;
- When buildings are on poor ground, the foundations must be strengthened to compensate;
- If new buildings are to be added to existing buildings, making the right connections between their foundations is crucial;
- When testing foundations, early strength is not a reliable predictor of later strength;
- If foundations prove inadequate, it is very, very expensive to underpin them later on.

The interim Head of the Early Help Service, Mohammed Jolil

What's the difference between early years and early help? Early years is everything from conception to the start of Year 1. Early years and early help are everyone's responsibility wherever they work. Hundreds of organisations contribute to our early years' and early help services. Many children will be at home with their family during this period of time. All families are offered health services. All families can access children's centres and all the services they offer. The Early Help Service is there for all families who need it; giving them the right help at the right time. It's how we provide more support to children, young people and their families, as soon as problems start to emerge. The aim is for families to get help as early as possible, so needs do not escalate.

James Hemsall OBE, Director of Hemsall's and National Programme Director Childcare Works

What happens if we DON'T support children and families in the first 1,001 days?

An outline of the current national position of early years and childcare entitlements and the difference they have the potential to make.

- Universal entitlements for three- and four-year-olds.
- Targeted entitlements for least advantaged two-year-olds and three- and four-year-olds of working families.
- What have we learned so far?
- What could or should come next?
- The consequences of not delivering in the early years.

Dr. Kitty Stewart, Associate Professor of Social Policy and Associate Director of the Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion

Dr. Stewart reviewed 20 years of policy change, assessing the strengths and limitations of where we are today, and identifying priority areas and key next steps for policy attention.

She referred to three types of early years' policy:

1. Parental leave and parenting;
2. Early education and childcare; and
3. Financial support to households with young children.

The focus throughout was on narrowing gaps at school starting age between children from different social backgrounds – essential to breaking the cycle of disadvantage and making progress on social mobility. Dr. Stewart provided detail on how the poorest and most vulnerable families are increasingly disadvantaged.

5. Conclusion

The vision emerging from the Mayor's Summit

Parents' views as expressed at the Summit are closely aligned with the Tower Hamlets Together vision for children:

"To ensure that all children and their families have access to high quality, 'joined up' services and opportunities in order to optimise physical, social, emotional and cognitive development, improve life-long health and well-being and mitigate the effects of socio-economic deprivation."

Parents have set the Council some fascinating challenges

We know what parents have asked for. How do all the organisations involved in early years work together to make the changes needed? How do we work better together? There are three key elements to this:

- i. Being innovative and trialling new approaches, with a focus on outcomes for children ;
- ii. Using a Public Health approach around prevention.
- iii. Implementation based on research of 'what works' for children and families.

The early years involves many different partners within and beyond the Council: Public Health, the Health Visiting Service, the GP Care Group, Royal London and Barts, all the many early childhood education and care settings, Education and Partnerships, Youth and Commissioning (which includes the Integrated Early Years' Service, the Youth Service and Early Help), Children's Social Care, Tower Hamlets employment services (WorkPath, Young WorkPath and Job Centre Plus).

We can use the *Early Intervention Foundation maturity matrix: Speech, language and communication in the early years*³. This is a self-assessment tool to support a system-wide approach to improving outcomes for children in the early years, with a focus on speech, language and communication skills.

6. Recommendations

Actions

You said.... we will....

- Improve communications for families. Presenting meaningful information in ways parents can access more easily using smart phones as a platform, for example, around the availability of childcare places and support that is available.

³ Available here: <https://www.eif.org.uk/resource/eif-maturity-matrix-speech-language-communication-early-years>

- Develop an agreed SEND pathway for families linked to the Universal Pathway presented at the Summit.
- Work closely with Barts Health to develop on access to services such as speech and language.
- Look into under two's childcare for children with additional needs.
- Explore funding specialist SEND training for childminders and working with partners to discuss cost of placements.
- Link our early years work to our Tackling Poverty work to provide additional specialist advice and support for parents through children's centres to help address wider issues that present barriers to employment or training.
- Provide more pre-natal and maternity services run by health services through children's centres and continue to improve the reach of our services to our most vulnerable families.
- Create more childcare support for children with additional needs.
- Work with the Early Help Service to ensure that policies, procedures and working practices meet the needs of families with young children;
- Work with the voluntary and community organisations to ensure the Council is providing services that families find easy to reach.

Details of the Mayor's budget proposals for additional investment in Early Years and childcare can be found online at <http://democracy.towerhamlets.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=720&MId=8831>

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