

Croydon Partnership Early Years Strategy

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Executive Summary

Croydon's vision for all children and young people is for them to be:

“safe, healthy and happy ’and will aspire to be the best they can be. The future is theirs’

The Early Years are the foundations on which this vision is built. Croydon's vision for its youngest residents is that:

- *'All children achieve the best possible development, health, wellbeing and education outcomes from before pregnancy to the end of reception (aged 5-6) and for children to feel safe, secure and loved'*

Croydon's Early Years include:

- all parents, fathers as well as mothers, grandparents, carers and their children from before birth to the end of reception (aged 5-6)
- any statutory, private, voluntary organisation - education, health, social care - involved with and supporting parents, carers and their children in the early years

Working in partnership with families and carers and partners across the voluntary, private and statutory sectors is crucial for implementing Croydon's vision. The vision is underpinned by a commitment to prevention, and the earliest possible intervention to reduce inequalities that could impact throughout a lifetime.

The strategy celebrates the diversity of Croydon's young children and their families which includes people from different ethnic, religious and cultural groups, such as the traveller community, asylum seekers and refugees, different nationalities, genders and sexual orientations. We recognise that support and services should be delivered so that all children and families can take part equally and thrive.

The COVID pandemic has impacted on the Early Years particularly and has added to the challenges already faced by many families and children in Croydon during the early years and beyond.

The strategy sets the strategic framework for delivering Croydon's vision for its youngest residents and their families over the next three years. It has been developed in collaboration with parents and carers, and the Early Years Partnership. The next step is the co-production of the delivery plan, which will transform the strategic aims, objectives and priorities into practical, measurable and time bound actions. An accessible version of the delivery plan will be produced for use and reference by families, carers and partners. A directory of early years services will be developed as part of publishing Croydon's Best Start in Life offer.

The high-level objectives of the strategy are designed to reflect all the influences on a child in the early years. They have been informed by engagement with parents, carers, partners and the evidence base. The objectives will each have specific actions as part of the Delivery plan workstreams.

The strategy recognises the interconnectedness with other priorities and will use opportunities to work together for example with the Early Help data task and finish group, the Strengthening Families

programme, the SEND Strategy, the Autism Partnership, the Family Hubs team, the Health and Care Board, the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Integrated Care Board.

Strong partnership governance arrangements and a commitment to monitoring both delivery of the objectives and principles and the impact on health and development outcomes are core requirements for ensuring positive direction of travel.

1 Introduction

1.1 Vision and scope

Croydon's vision for all children and young people is for them to be:

'safe, healthy and happy 'and will aspire to be the best they can be. The future is theirs'

The Early Years are the foundations on which this vision is built. Croydon's vision for its youngest residents is that:

- *'All children achieve the best possible development, health, wellbeing and education outcomes from before pregnancy to the end of reception (aged 5-6) and for children to feel safe, secure and loved'*

Croydon's Early Years include:

- all parents and carers, and their children from before pregnancy to the end of reception (aged 5-6)
- any statutory, private, voluntary organisation - education, health, social care - involved with and supporting parents, carers and their children in the early years

Croydon's vision is only achievable if we work in partnership with families and carers and each other to identify and respond swiftly to emerging needs and provide integrated, targeted support.

This vision is underpinned by a commitment to prevention, and the earliest possible intervention to reduce inequalities that evidence shows could impact throughout a lifetime. (NIHR, 2022)

The strategy celebrates the diversity of Croydon's young children and their families which includes people from different ethnic, religious and cultural groups, such as the traveller community, asylum seekers and refugees, different nationalities, genders and sexual orientations. We recognise that support and services should be delivered so that all children and families can take part equally and thrive.

The COVID pandemic has impacted on Early Years children and families in many ways. The pandemic saw an increase in poverty, illness and death in families and anxiety. There was reduced access to childcare, restricted social engagement, less face-to-face contact with health, social care and education professionals resulting in speech and language development. (DFE, 2022) (EIF, 2021)

And now we are experiencing the biggest cost of living crisis in many years. These have both added to the challenges already faced by many families and children in Croydon during the early years and beyond.

An effective Early Years system is central to the new Family Hubs approach (DFE, 2021) and Early Help continuum and to the reducing inequalities workstreams. (SWLCCG, 2022) This strategy is intended to integrate with and complement these workstreams by providing a focus for the Early Years' partners. The new Best Start for Life funding received as part of the Family Hubs transformation programme will enable improved delivery of the Early Years priorities. The governance arrangements will support the integrated working across these and other workstreams for example, the Integrated Care System.

The successful implementation of this strategy will depend on the 'buy in', action and support from all partners at both strategic and operational levels. Its delivery will therefore be overseen by an Early Years steering group with senior and operational leadership from across the partnership. The Terms of Reference for this group will include the requirement that its membership reflect the diversity of the Croydon population. The steering group will report to the Partnership Early Help Board and Proactive and Preventive Care Board.

We acknowledge that the level of transformational change required will need time, energy and commitment and similarly we recognise that Early Years partners have different perspectives, ethos and working practices and a common and unifying practice framework is required e.g. Thrive (I-Thrive, 2022)

1.2 The purpose of the strategy

The purpose of the strategy is to set the framework for delivering Croydon's vision for its youngest residents and their families / carers over the next four years. It includes the principles, objectives, key priorities and governance arrangements and will be accompanied by a detailed delivery plan. The document outlines an integrated approach to delivering services and develops the locality model of working in Croydon.

This strategy has been developed in collaboration with parents and carers, the Early Years Partnership which includes: Croydon Council, voluntary sector representatives, Croydon Health Services Croydon's Public Health team, primary care, South West London Clinical Commissioning Group, the early year's sector, and wider partners.

The principles and objectives are designed to ensure that the Early Years partners consider equality, diversity and inclusion in everything they do. The strategy acknowledges the complexity of the environment for children, their families and everyone who works in the Early Years which is captured in figure 1 below

- Refreshed ASD pathway when published
- Community Safety Strategy (LBC, 2022)
- Revised Suicide Prevention Strategy and Delivery Plan (published autumn 2022)

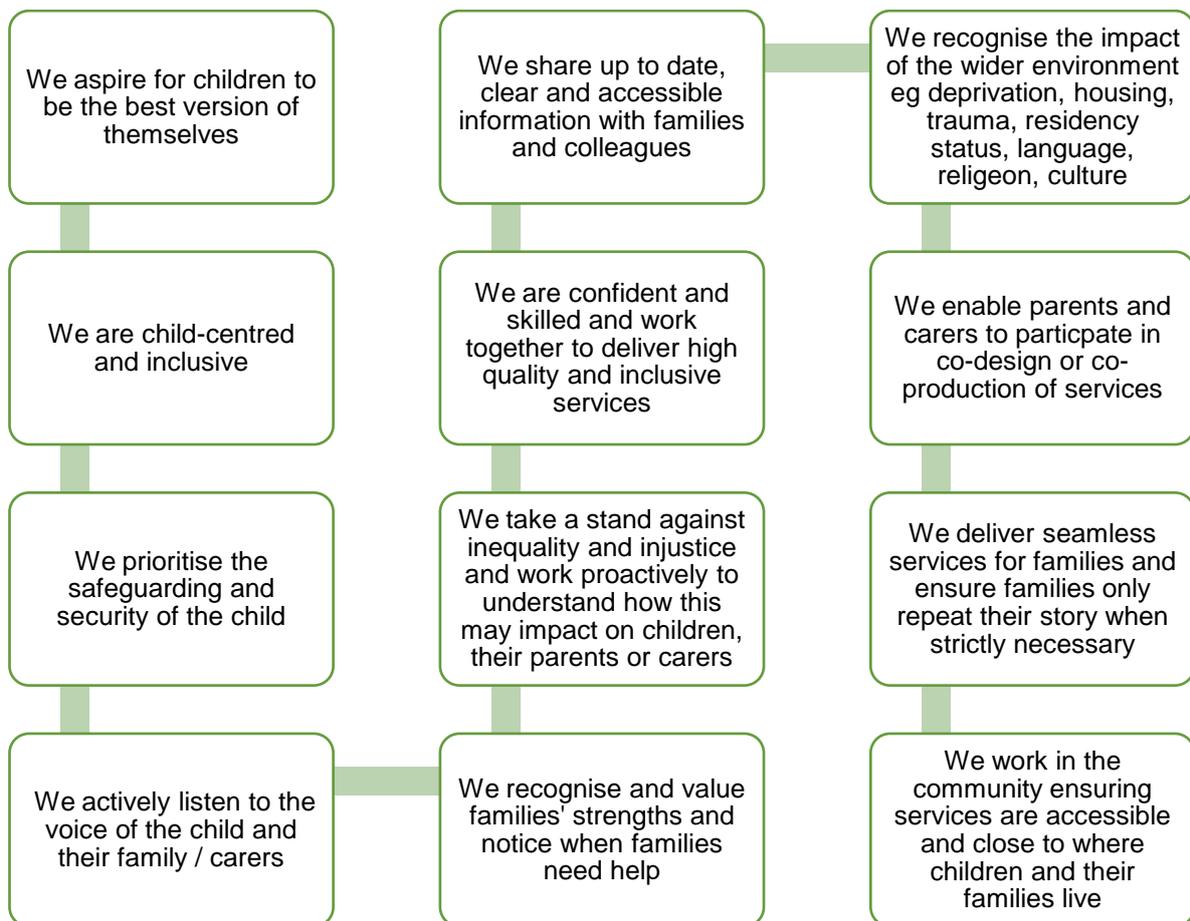
The Early Year's Partnership will utilise the 'Ladder of Engagement and Participation (NHS, 2022)' approach, as a widely recognised model for understanding and incorporating participation with residents and partners.

1.3 Principles by which we work

The Early Years Partnership (EYP) is committed to working in accordance with the principles in Figure 2. Improving how we work across the Early Years system will ensure services are more joined up and provide integrated care (London Councils, 2022) for children.

The EYP will review the implementation and impact of these principles on children and families.

Figure 2: *The principles of work*



1.4 Objectives

The strategic objectives set out in this document are designed to reflect all the influences on a child in the early years. They have been informed by engagement with parents, carers, partners, and the evidence base. The objectives will each have specific actions as part of the Early Years Delivery plan.

Figure 2 Early Years strategy objectives

1. Include the children, mothers, fathers, carers, grandparents, voice in everything we do

2. Provide healthy and safe environments for all children in Croydon to thrive, feel safe and grow into confident young people

3. Actively reduce the risk of education, health and wellbeing inequalities developing in the early years and beyond

4. Recognise and address the individual needs of children and families. For example needs deriving from poverty (food, fuel, and digital); english as an additional language; Looked After or looking after status; special educational needs and disabilities (parent or child); refugee or asylum seeker status; membership of a minority group; living in temporary or inadequate accommodation

5. Provide easy access to physical and virtual services which work together, value families' strengths and provide support at the right time and in the right place

6. Prepare parents and carers for parenthood and help them to develop and sustain a strong bond with their children

7. Enable families to access high quality childcare and all children are supported in childcare, early years and education settings

8. Support the emotional health and wellbeing of parents, carers and children

9. Support the physical wellbeing of children and reduce childhood obesity by promoting healthy eating and physical activity

10. Protect children from hidden harm and serious disease, through information sharing, screening and immunisation

2 The importance of the Early Years, the statutory frameworks and national policy context

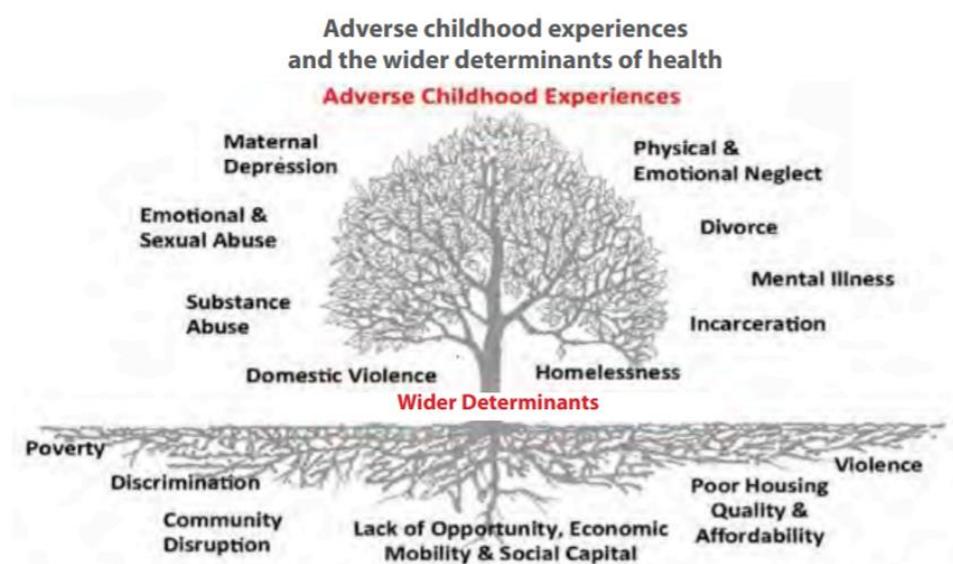
The early years evidence base, national policy and statutory obligations have been used to inform the priorities in this strategy.

2.1 The importance of the Early Years

The evidence base for the importance of the early years is substantial. Figure 2 below sets out the evidence across a range of themes.

What is clear is how interlinked every aspect is and how long lasting and wide ranging the impact of the early years is. For example, there is considerable evidence about the long-term health, social and behavioural impacts of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) experienced in the early years. This means that all staff in the Early Years should be aware of ACEs, their causes and consequences and be trained in trauma informed practice. (NIHR, 2022) Figure (3) below sets out types of Adverse Childhood Experiences / trauma children can experience in early childhood. We also need to consider the impact of being a refugee or asylum seeker on parents and communities.

Figure 3 Adverse Childhood Experiences



Adapted from: Ellis and Dietz, 2017²⁵¹

In another example, the 2018 Croydon Director of Public Health report highlights how the future of each child is inextricably linked with their family and wider environment. (LBC , 2018)

- 'The relationship between parents' and carers' social and economic circumstances, their own physical and mental health and that of their children, shows how vitally important it is for us all to understand the wider needs and circumstances of each family and their community. With this understanding, action and support can be offered, by the right people, at the right time, in the right place' (LBC, 2018)

Figure 4 The evidence base for the importance of the early years

The first 1001 critical days

- 'The 1,001 days from pregnancy to the age of two set the foundations for an individual's cognitive, emotional and physical development. Some of the most important experiences that will shape the architecture of a baby's brain come from their interactions with significant adults in their lives' (HMG, 2021)

Inequalities

- 'Socioeconomic inequalities in child development are already recognisable in the second year of life and have an impact by the time children enter school and persist and deepen during their school years' (Marmot, 2020).

The solutions are the same

- 'The 'things all children need to improve school readiness— responsive relationships, core adaptive skills, reduced sources of stress, and appropriate nutrition—are the same as those that are needed to support improved lifelong health' (Harvard Centre for the Developing Child, 2021)

Cost effective

- 'Investment in the Early Years, the stage at which the most significant changes can be made to people's long-term outcomes, is the most cost-effective and equity-effective time to invest. (Michael Marmot, 2020).

Children making the most of their abilities

- 'A secure, safe and happy childhood is important in its own right. Good parenting and high quality early learning together provide the foundation children need to make the most of their abilities and talents as they grow up' (DFE, 2021)

Deprivation

- 'It is easier to parent more effectively when social and economic circumstances are favourable and when stress and anxiety are lower. Reducing child poverty is an essential health and equity strategy, as well as important for influencing other outcomes throughout life' (PHE, 2021).

Adverse Childhood Experiences (trauma)

- A joint study with the World Health Organisation (WHO) found that children who had experienced four or more ACEs compared with children who had experienced no ACEs were:
 - 30 times more likely to have attempted suicide
 - 10 times more likely to have problem drug use
 - 8 times more likely to have committed a crime
 - 6 times more likely to have problem alcohol use
 - 4 times more likely to have depression
 - 4 times more likely to have been a teenage parent (LBC, 2018)

2.2 The statutory responsibilities in the Early Years

There are statutory responsibilities which are applicable to all Early Years partners.

Fundamental to improving outcomes for children is to ensure they are kept safe and anyone working in Early Years should make arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and work in accordance with:

- Childcare Act 2006: to improve the outcomes for all young children, reduce inequalities, and to ensure that there is sufficient high quality integrated early years provision and childcare for parents locally
- Working Together to Safeguard Children Statutory framework: legislation relevant safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children (DFE, 2018)

In practice this means working together to address emerging risks but also building on families' strengths, supporting them with the conditions and tools through which they can develop stability and resilience.

Other key guidance that services should be delivered in accordance with are:

- Children and Families Act 2014 (HMG, 2014)
- Statutory framework for the early years' foundation stage setting the standards for learning, development and care for children from birth to five (DFE, 2021)
- SEND Code of Practice (DFE, 2022)

Duties set out in these documents include:

- to work with partners to improve the wellbeing and outcomes of all children up to five years of age
- ensure that early childhood services are provided in an integrated manner to facilitate access and maximise the benefits of those services to young children and their families.
- to reduce inequalities between children
- to meet the needs of children with SEND.
- ensure that there is sufficient childcare to meet the needs of parents/carers who require childcare

2.3 The Early Years national policy context

Delivering a better start in life is a national priority. The NHS Long Term plan states:

'The NHS plays a crucial role in improving the health of children and young people: from pregnancy, birth and the early weeks of life; through supporting essential physical and cognitive development before starting school' (NHS, 2019)

An objective within the 2019 NHS Mental Health Implementation plan is:

'Support at least 30,000 more women each year to access evidence-based specialist mental health care during the perinatal period. This should include access to psychological therapies and the right range of specialist community or inpatient care so that comprehensive, high-quality services are in place across England' (NHS, 2019)

In March 2021 Best Start in Life report set out six key actions for the early years.

Figure 3 Best Start in Life Key actions 2021

Ensuring families have access to the services they need

1. Seamless support for families: a coherent joined up Start for Life offer available to all families.

2. A welcoming hub for families: Family Hubs as a place for families to access Start for Life services.

3. The information families need when they need it: designing digital, virtual and telephone offers around the needs of the family.

Ensuring the Start for Life system is working together to give families the support they need

4. An empowered Start for Life workforce: developing a modern skilled workforce to meet the changing needs of families.

5. Continually improving the Start for Life offer: improving data, evaluation, outcomes and proportionate inspection.

6. Leadership for change: ensuring local and national accountability and building the economic case.

This strategy has been developed in co-ordination with the development of the Family Hub approach, which aims to give families a physical and virtual offer of support from preconception to children aged 18 or 25 for those with SEND. There is a national requirement to have implemented Family Hubs by March 2025. A key principle of the Family Hubs is accessibility for all, including for example same sex parents, children and parents with disabilities, all ethnic groups and those who have English as an additional language

In July 2022 London Council's published their report and recommendations for integration in early years services. (London Councils, 2022). A statement from the report highlights that:

'Well-integrated early years services and systems can transform lives and this was a clear message from London parents we spoke to. They told us that when services are integrated effectively it helps them to access additional support that they had not realised their child needed, and find their way to specialist help more quickly. It also smoothed transitions and allowed mainstream services to better tailor responses. Conversely, when services are not joined up, this causes frustration, especially for the more vulnerable and those new to the system, including first-time parents and recent UK arrivals. Families who have high needs but are less visible to the system, and are less familiar with it, are at significant risk of falling "through the net"'

In the 2020 UKSHA report 'No Child Left Behind' (UKSHA, 2020) three priority areas for preventing children from being left behind were highlighted:

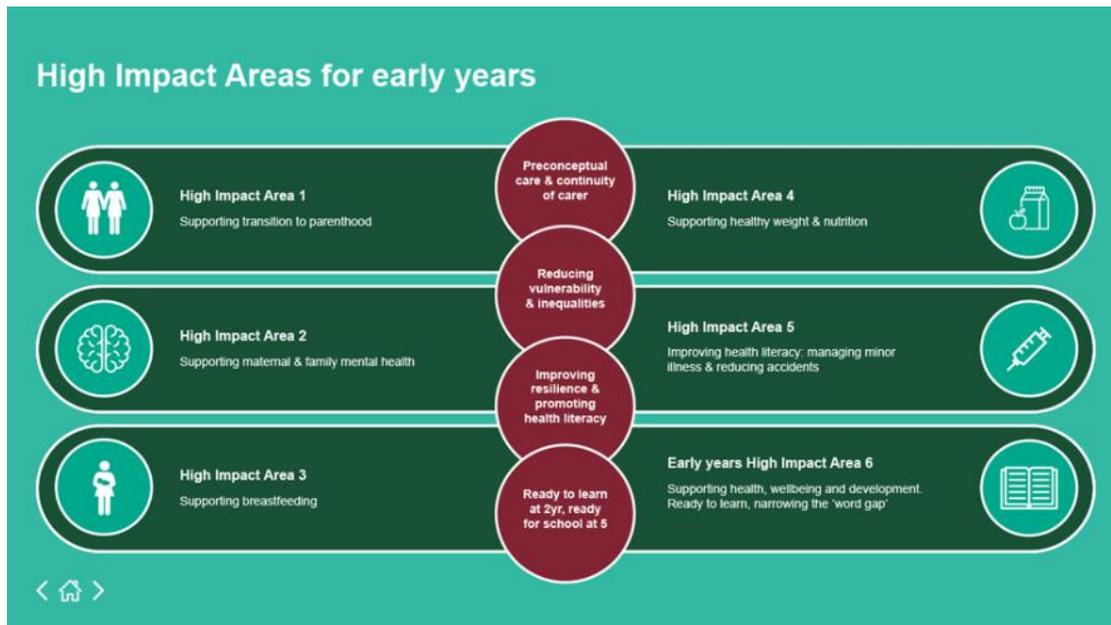
- primary prevention – interventions to address the root causes of vulnerability, tackling health inequalities and the wider determinants of health
- early intervention – interventions to support children and their families
- mitigation – ensuring services help to reduce the negative impact of circumstances and experiences and build resilience (tertiary prevention)

UKSHA advocated for the use of a systematic and holistic approach to effectively address the causes of poor outcomes for children. (UKSHA, 2020)

The government's revised Healthy Child Programme (2021) sets out the key health and wellbeing responsibilities and outcomes for the Early Years and the requirements for the mandated health visiting contacts and six high impact areas.

The six 0 to 5 High Impact Areas are applicable to all providers of services in the Early Years

Figure 4: Healthy Child Programme - 0 to 5 High Impact Areas (OHID, 2021)



3 Croydon situation

3.1 Local strategic context

The Croydon Health and Care Plan (2019 – 2025) identifies *Better start in Life and Maternity* as priority areas and recognises that to improve health and wellbeing services need to focus on:

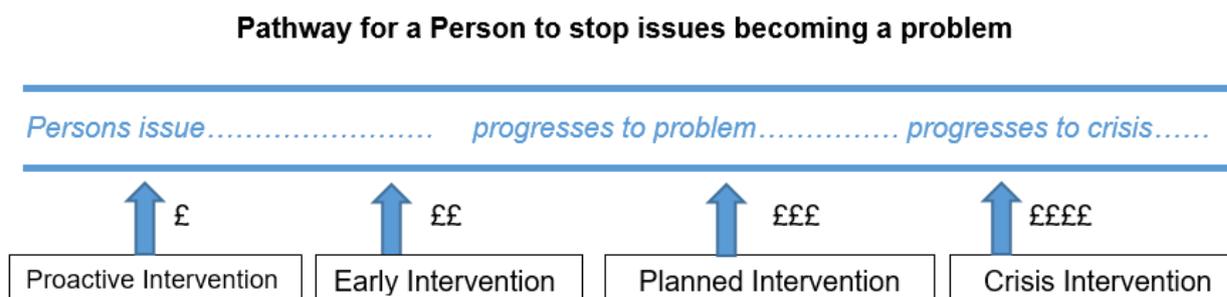
- prevention and proactive care
- untapped potential in our ‘community assets and skills’ and
- integrated services. (SWL CCG)

Croydon’s Prevention Framework aims to create the conditions in which prevention initiatives will flourish and to support Croydon’s aim to reduce inequalities. This is being used to inform this early year’s strategy. The aim of the prevention framework is to:

- underpin the development of our strategies and implementation plans, ensuring our strategies following the same preventative priorities and therefore have a **greatest impact** and
- set out the approach for how we will **embed the preventative approach** in all we do

Figure 5 below illustrates the relative costs of proactive, early and late intervention.

Figure 5 Croydon prevention framework - Pathway for a person to stop issues becoming a problem



The Maternity Transformation Programme (SWL CCG, 2022) aims to ensure high quality services for babies, children, young people and families. It includes actions to improve women's health before, during and after pregnancy, particularly for women from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. (SWL CCG, 2022) Research indicates that women from Black ethnic groups are more likely to enter pregnancy at an unhealthy weight and Black, Asian, and mixed ethnicity women are significantly more likely to die than their white counterparts.

3.2 Current Early Years strategy and governance

Croydon does not have a current Early Years Strategy or active partnership Early Years' governance arrangements. The Best Start Steering group which previously provided the leadership and governance for the Best Start services has not met since 2019. The original principles of the Best Start Services which launched in 2016 are still in place, but Croydon's Early Years services have become increasingly fragmented at both a strategic and operational level. Significant improvement to the coordination and continuity of early years support and services between health, early help, and education is required

Families and the practitioners that support them struggle to:

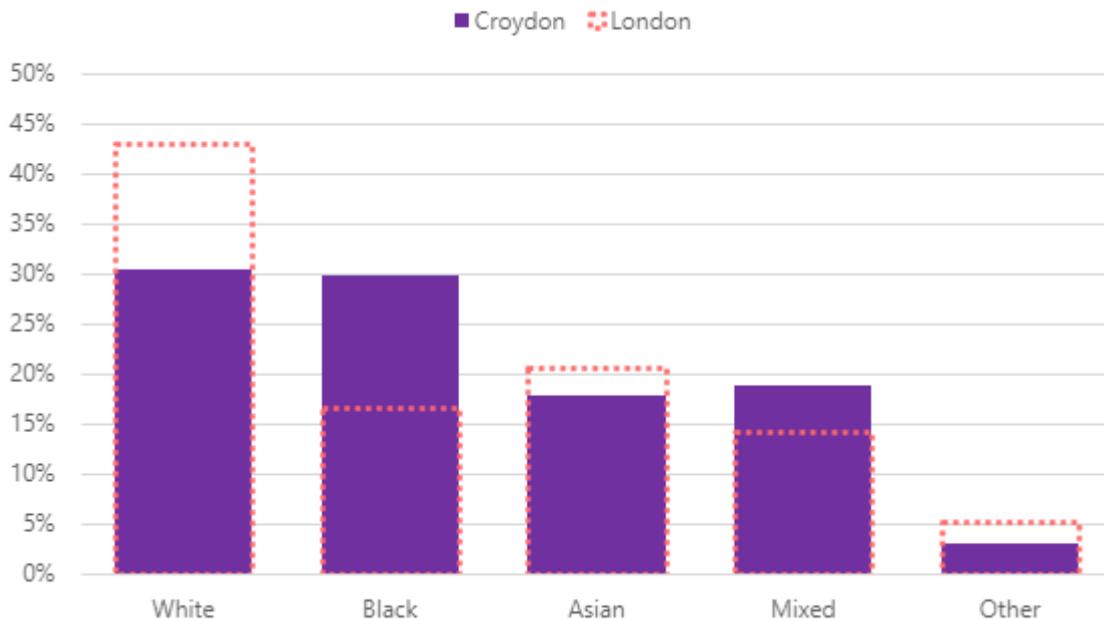
- find out what services are available and when
- access information
- navigate the system

This can discourage families from engaging with services and create delays in receiving help when needed.

3.3 The early years population

There are an estimated 32,774 children between 0 and 5 in Croydon which is the largest population of children aged 0-5 in London. The population is also very ethnically diverse with many parents with English as an additional language, and families and children from war torn countries, most recently the Ukraine. There is also considerable movement in the population across local authorities.

Figure 5 Ethnic mix of the Croydon 0 to 5 population



- 49% of the eligible 2-year-old population benefitted from a funded early education place in January 2020.
- 85% of 3- and 4-year-olds benefitted from a funded early education place in January 2020. For both age groups, take up is below the London and England averages.
- In 2020 74.6% of pupils achieved a good level of development in Croydon in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) in line with London and above England (71.8%)

4 Local priorities and issues

4.1 Parent, carer and partner feedback feed back

The parent survey and focus groups have identified what parents see as important. 36% of respondents to the parent survey were from ethnic groups, 11% considered themselves to have a disability, and this includes:

- support for preparing after the baby is born
- support for emotional wellbeing and mental health
- support for breastfeeding,
- accessible services close to where parents live including children centres, playgrounds, GP surgeries
- good quality, affordable childcare.

Messages which came across strongly from the partner engagement events were the need for: a joined-up approach, more support for SEND, clear communication, inclusive services and promotion of Early Years as a career.

The report of the first stage of parental and partner engagement can be found in the appendices

4.2 Current strengths, opportunities, challenges and issues

The Early Years partners and parents face a number of serious challenges including recovering from COVID, staff shortages, inadequate housing conditions and coping with the

cost-of-living crisis. Despite the number and range of issues there are also strengths and opportunities that can help mitigate the these.

Figure 6 sets out the strengths, challenges and opportunities that partners identified for the Early Years Services. These have been collected from the range of engagement activities.

Figure 6 The strengths, opportunities, issues and challenges of the current Early Years Services

Strengths	Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children and Families • The diversity of the Borough • The commitment of the partners across the Council, CCG and Voluntary and Community sector to make a difference in the Early years • Experienced, committed trained staff and leaders • The CSCP neglect priority and implementation of the NSPCC graded care Profile 2 Tool. • CSCP Multi-Agency Training Offer for anyone working or living in Croydon • SEND inspection outcomes • There are children’s centres in each locality of the Borough • Good and diverse early years provision • The Early Years parenting support offer • Family Nurse Partnership which provides intensive support to young parents from pregnancy until the child is two. • Feedback from parents in the parent survey about support received from Children's Centres • Work of the SEND delivery groups - Early Identification of Need in particular 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-production with families, carers and the wider partnership to ensure services are genuinely inclusive and reflect needs of families • Alignment with the ongoing developing Early Help offer and revised governance arrangements • Lots of potential future funding streams forthcoming via recent announcements of Strengthening Families monies, RPC monies and Family Hub Best Start for Life grants • Appetite amongst local communities to create opportunities for children • The new elected Mayor • SEND green paper and SEND strategy refresh • Rolling out locality SEND model for Early Years • Full licence holder for the Autism Education Trust – a platform for voluntary, independent and statutory providers to plan and develop appropriate autism education provision • Engagement of wider primary care such as optometrists • Willingness to engage across groups and services with respect and a shared purpose • Integrated two year review • Use of new technology such as QR codes on posters about Early Years • Inclusive services are highly valued by families • Early Years Stronger Practice Hubs • Utilise unique role of maintained nursery schools

Issues and challenges

- Increased demand due to the impact of COVID on for example young children's socialisation
- Impact of COVID on early diagnosis and correct school placements
- Maintaining communication across the partnership to ensure join up of the different 'pools' of activity / Lack of communication between teams can reduce the impact of the strategy
- The impact of the cost-of-living crisis on child poverty levels and fuel poverty
- High levels of deprivation.
- Increasing numbers of 0 to 5 children with SEND
- Need for more investment in Early Years SEND provision
- Lack of consistency between the schools and voluntary sector providers with respect to children with SEND
- Conflict between inclusive practice and SEND funding
- Need to link with the outcomes of the SEND inspection
- Challenges around good inclusive practice
- Ensuring that the needs of all children from diverse backgrounds are being met within this strategy
- Information system inter-operability
- Datasets are not sufficiently mature, nor routinely collaborated on, nor do they adequately inform challenge or service design
- Reduced investment in the Children's Centres and Best Start parenting offer
- Change of staff within the Council
- Not all children have their Health Visiting universal checks and there is limited coverage of the High Impact Areas
- The uptake of the funded two-year places is not as high as similar areas across the country
- Low uptake of childhood immunisations particularly MMR2
- Families do not see enough of their health visitors
- Insufficient funding
- The numbers of times families have to tell their stories
- Recruitment, retention and quality of staff
- Nursery settings struggling with staffing also declining quality
- Services are not joined up; there is role overlap which can lead to duplication and inefficiencies
- Instability of future funding for maintained nurseries
- Information and support is inconsistent
- Playgrounds and green spaces are not accessible or looked after well enough
- Funding e.g lack of and equality of access to SENDIF funding
- Transition between Early Years and reception
- Mobility of families not known to services
- The integrated two year review is not well supported across services
- Need to align with the Supporting Families Outcome Framework

5 Delivering the strategy

The strategy will be implemented through a delivery plan organised under six workstreams. Each of the workstreams will be required to work in accordance with the objectives and principles set out above. The delivery plan will run until March 2025. An accessible version of the delivery plan will be produced for use and reference by families, carers and partners. A directory of early years services will be developed as part of publishing Croydon’s Best Start in Life offer.

The six workstreams are:

- Finance, governance and communications
- Parental engagement and co-design
- Integrated pathways and accessible evidence-based service delivery
- Maximising opportunity and reducing the risk of health wellbeing, learning and safeguarding inequalities – children and parents with SEND, children and families in temporary accommodation, asylum seekers, refugees, children and families with protected characteristics, young parents, families with domestic violence
- Workforce development and training
- Needs, data and outcomes

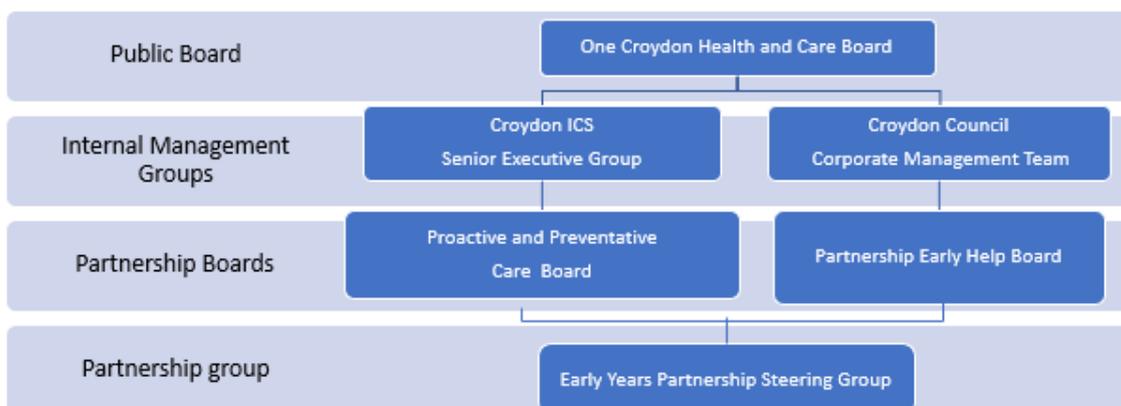
A brief outline of each of the work streams is provided below. The priorities under each of the workstreams will be transformed into a delivery plan in partnership with families, parents, carers and partners.

Each early year’s partner will be expected to align their own delivery plans to the objectives and priorities in the strategy and show how they are delivering against these.

5.1 Governance, finance, and communications

Effective governance arrangements will ensure senior oversight, strategic leadership and effective delivery of the vision and implementation of the strategy. The Early Help Partnership Board oversees the development of the strategy on an interim basis. One of key roles of this work stream will be articulating the vision of the strategy and ensuring that all members of the partnership including the voluntary and community sector are signed up to delivering it.

Through consultation with strategic management groups across Council, CCG and the partnership the proposed governance of the strategy is shown below:



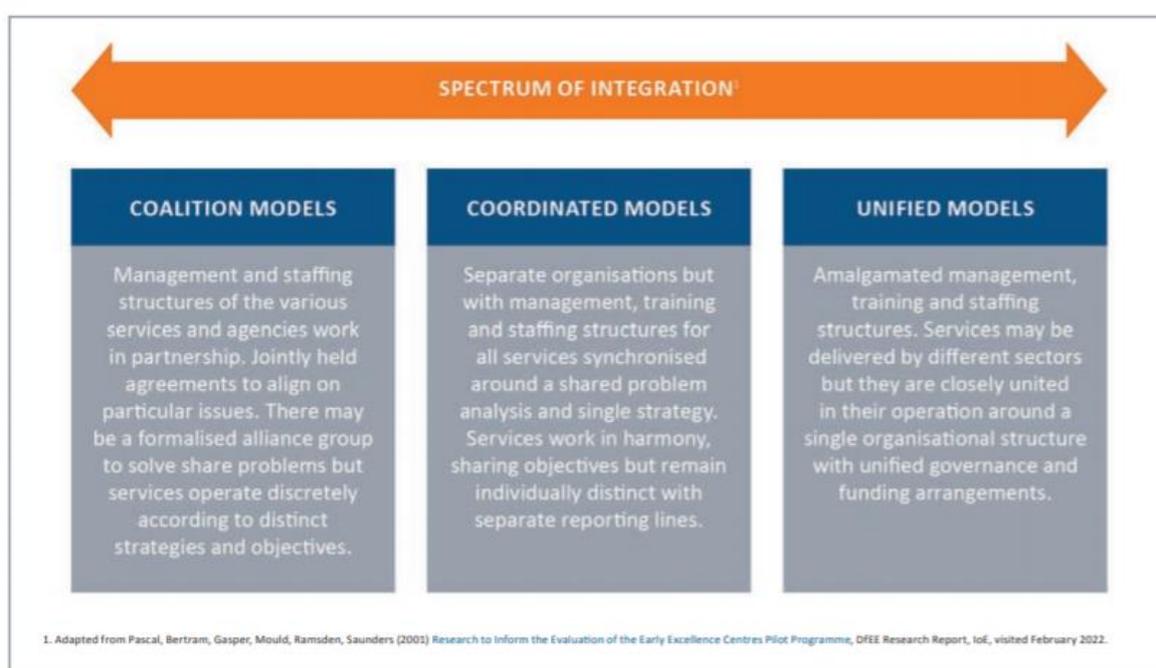
There is significant investment across the Council, Public Health, South West London CCG the Voluntary Community sector and private sectors in early years services. An understanding of the total investment is fundamental to maximising effective use of resources, and to identify and/or unlock opportunities for better targeting and integrating of resources to improve children’s outcomes

Developing joint funding protocols, integrating management, services and/or pathways will improve the child and families’ experience and make a difference to achieving outcomes for children.

Key priorities of the work stream will be to:

- define what level and type of integration is needed using the Beyond Boundaries framework (London Councils, 2022) For more information see appendices.

Figure 7 Spectrum of integration in the Early Years (London Councils, 2022)



- establish a sustainable governance structure for Early Years
- explore opportunities for shared management and budgets
- create integrated leadership/partnership teams across services
- develop a family virtual single point of access/front door
- work with the Early Help, Family Hub and other teams on the parent, child and family ‘directory’ of services
- consult on and create a communication strategy for early years

5.2 Parent and carer engagement and co-design

Parents and carers should be appropriately engaged both as part of the support and care of their child / children and in the design and delivery of services so that they meet the needs of Croydon’s diverse populations. There will be a continuous cycle of engagement (see figure 6 below) approach in developing the strategy; co-producing the delivery and action plan, and feedback from parents and carers as part of the annual review. Across the partnership the strategy will utilise service user feedback and share intelligence from across the Early Years partnership to inform continuous service improvements.

Figure 6 Continuous cycle of engagement



Key priorities of the work stream will be to:

- Develop a parent and carer engagement strategy that incorporates clear plans for engaging with seldom heard groups
- Link in with existing parent and community forums and implement the most effective ways for staff and families to work together on a system level,
- Increase engagement of parents/ carers in parenting programmes, e.g., Bookstart, Chatterbox and Best Start parent programmes
- Create parent panels which are representative of the Croydon population and people from protected characteristics
- Work with parents and carers on a review of accessible information needs
- Work with parents and carers to understand what 'inclusive' means to them.

5.3 Integrated pathways and accessible evidence-based service delivery including communications

Evidence based and accessible services and pathways between services, professionals and across ages which appear seamless for children and families are essential.

Systems and processes need to be in place to ensure continuity of high quality, accessible, early years provision and effective early years and childcare services.

Key priorities of the workstream are:

- Identify the integrated pathways that require improvement and develop actions plans with parents, carers and partners for each of them
- Work with the Family Hubs team to identify evidenced based options for use of the Best for Life offer funding
- Identify the number of times a family could be asked the same details about themselves across common pathways of care
- Develop an annual programme of service improvement for all Early years services
- Ensure that all mothers and new parents are offered appropriate breastfeeding support
- Agree and implement a plan for increasing the uptake of childhood immunisation
- Develop a clear pathway for families and staff for the Tier 2 Early Years weight management programmes

- Develop a plan for embedding the integrated 2-Year-old review across the Borough for all children
- Work with teams across the Early Years partnership and wider to ensure parents and carers received the right joined up support.



5.4 Maximising opportunity and reducing the risk of health wellbeing, learning and safeguarding inequalities – children and parents with SEND, children and families in temporary accommodation, asylum seekers, refugees, children and families with protected characteristics, young parents, families with domestic violence

Ensuring services are flexible and adaptable to children and families with enhanced needs, identifying these early and providing appropriate support is essential for reducing potential inequalities and enabling each child to be the best they can be.

Key priorities for this workstream:

- Review the systems for ensuring all services know children who are at risk at the earliest point
- Develop a service directory jointly with Early Help and other work areas
- Review the SEND provision in the early years, identify the gaps and priorities for development
- Ensure join up with the revised ASD pathway and autism strategy
- Use inequalities data to target interventions and support at individual and system level
- Developing a plan to increase the availability and take up of high-quality early years provision for children with SEND.
- Ensure good join up with the revised SEND strategy and ensure that the Early Years priorities are included in it
- Embed the 2YO integrated review to support early identification and intervention for early years children
- Work with the data from the need and outcomes group to identify the common factors of children in the Borough who are not reaching health and development milestones

5.5 Workforce development and training

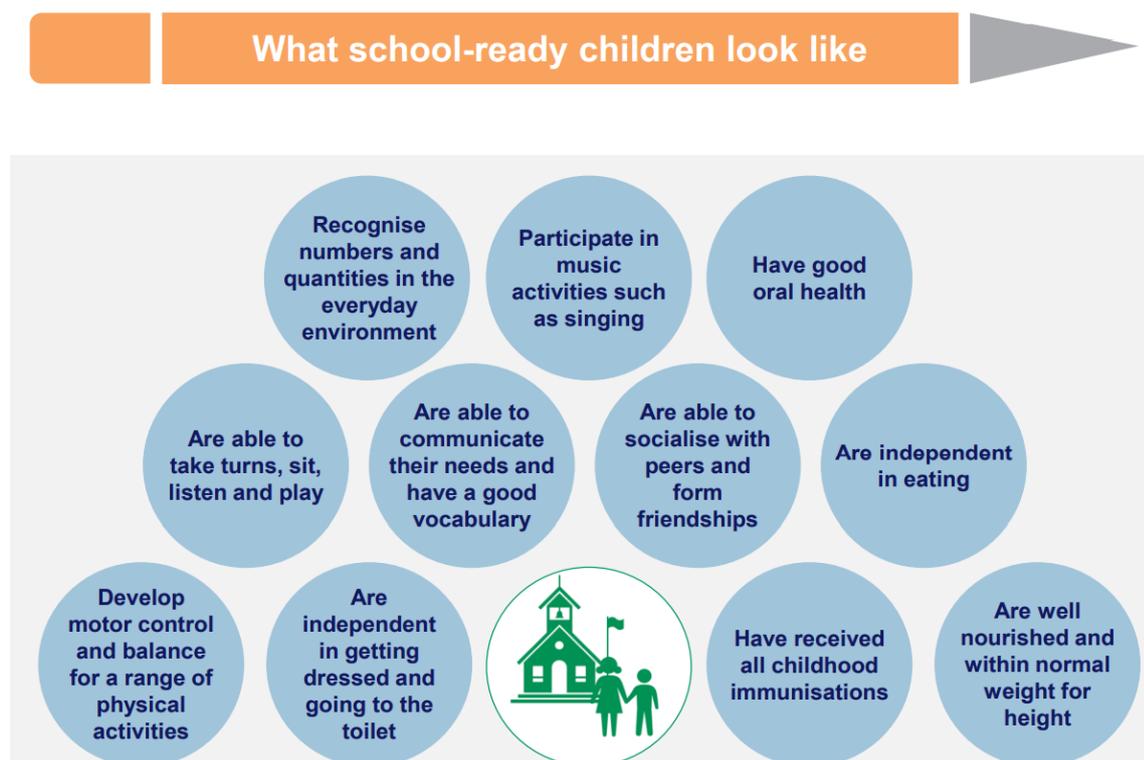
A competent and qualified Early Years workforce is essential so that they can continue to deliver high quality provision which is crucial to improving outcomes for children.

The competence of the team of practitioners, for example, midwives; health visitors; community health specialists; primary care, children's centre staff; childcare and education professionals, speech and language therapists, social workers makes the difference for effective support services for children and families, leading to better outcomes.

It is also essential that the workforce is demographically reflective of the population it serves including those with protected characteristics.

A multi-disciplinary training and development plan will be aligned to the Healthy Child Programme: Six Early Years High Impact areas, (OHID, 2021) the Early Years Foundation Stage (DFE, 2021) safeguarding, inclusive practice, strengths-based practice, trauma informed practice, to ensure the workforce is knowledgeable, and appropriately trained in child health and development, and are able to identify when key developmental milestones are not being met. (see figure 7 below).

Figure 8 What school ready children look like (OHID, 2015)



Key priorities of the workstream are:

- Create a common training framework across the Early Years workforce which is accessible to anyone working in early years
- Agree a common language and practice framework which all Early Years practitioners use e.g. IThrive or systemic practice
- Review the implications of implementing the requirements for the Early Years workforce in the school's white paper (DFE, 2022) and investigate the potential for an early years qualification pathway which encourages aspiration and continuing professional development
- Ensure staff understand their responsibilities for equalities, diversity and inclusive practice and that this is implemented by all. For example, staff to have attended unconscious bias training
- Ensure everyone working with families in the early years are competent in safeguarding practice
- Ensure that all staff working in the early years have attended the Tier 1 healthy behaviours training

- Strengthen the knowledge, skills and understanding of Early Years SENCOs to further their expertise. Implement the Level 2 Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) qualifications
- Identify ways of collecting data about the partnership workforce in order to meet Equalities Act requirements

5.6 Information systems, Outcomes, needs and data

Outcome measures that will both demonstrate how well the strategy is being implemented and what impact it is having on children and families in the early years are vital

The outcomes framework for the Early Years strategy will reflect national and local policy. It will include measures to:

- Assess how well the strategy is being implemented ie progress on the priority areas
- Assess direction of travel for key indicators
- Assess the level and effectiveness of the engagement strategy

Part of this will be identifying ways to assess whether parents and families are receiving the joined up care and support that is core to this strategy.

Data is often held in different places, systems and organisations. This limits the ability to provide seamless services. Data is often not stored in a retrievable format which restricts assessment of the impact of interventions. This workstream will work jointly with the Early Help Partnership Board on the priorities listed below. The role of the workstream will be to ensure that the priorities of the Early Years and its universal components are specifically reflected in the wider work.

Key priorities for this workstream are:

- Develop an Early Years outcome framework
- Develop an evaluation framework
- Use population level and equalities, diversity and inclusion data to identify inequalities across health, wellbeing, and education of service users and the workforce
- Identify the data sources required to evidence progress on the priorities
- Identify gaps in outcome data availability
- Review the information sharing and consent agreements agreement between partners
- Review existing and develop new information sharing protocols
- Establish a more efficient, integrated and comprehensive information system

6 Appendices

6.1 Early Years integration: Beyond Boundaries report 2022 (London Councils, 2022)

Figure 9: A conceptual framework for what matters for early years integration

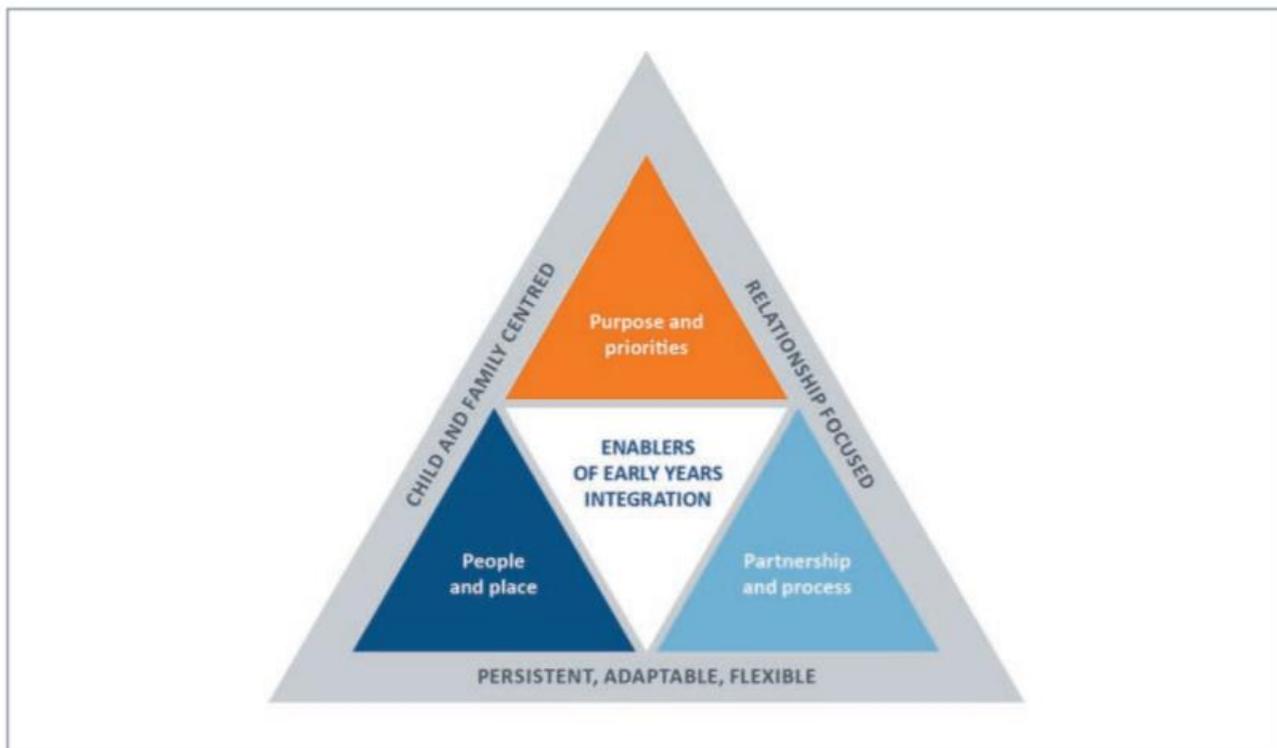
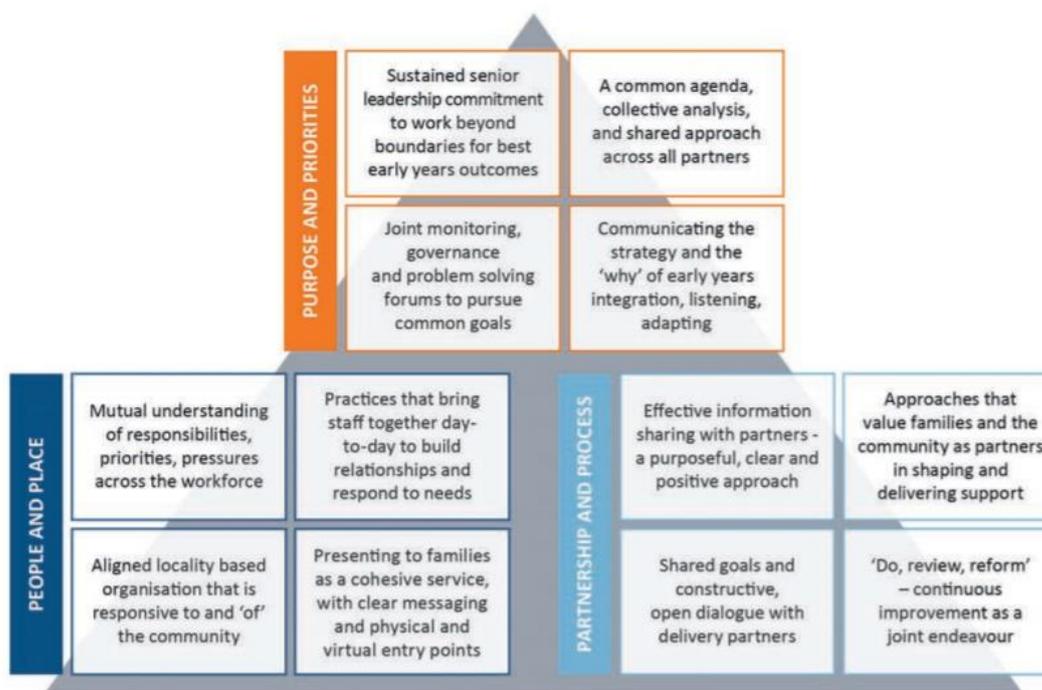


Figure 10: Twelve enablers of early years integration



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