



## EXECUTIVE 8<sup>th</sup> June 2023

<b>Report Title</b>	<b>Start Well Research Project</b>
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<b>Lead Member</b>	Cllr Scott Edwards – Executive Member for Children, Families, Education and Skills

<b>Key Decision</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<b>Is the decision eligible for call-in by Scrutiny?</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<b>Are there public sector equality duty implications?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
<b>Does the report contain confidential or exempt information (whether in appendices or not)?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
<b>Applicable paragraph number/s for exemption from publication under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972</b>	

### List of Appendices

**Appendix A** – Start Well Initial Findings Report

**Appendix B** – Start Well Research Proposal

#### **1. Purpose of Report**

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- 1.1 To inform the Executive of the Start Well Research Project which links to Family Hubs.
- 1.2 To inform the Executive of the initial findings from the Start Well Research Project.
- 1.3 To seek approval from the Executive to approve the dissemination of research outcomes with partners.

#### **2. Executive Summary**

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- 2.1 To ensure the best outcomes for children the rationale for the Start Well Research Project is based upon ‘good level of development’ (GLD) data from

July 2022. The project will address the particularly low data for the Wellingborough locality area.

- 2.2 The report provides a summary of the initial findings from the Start Well Research Project.

### **3. Recommendations**

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- 3.1. It is recommended that the Executive:
- a) Note the research project; and
  - b) Approve dissemination of research outcomes with partners
- 3.2 Reason for Recommendation: To support children and young people and their families to access high quality sustainable education that facilitates the achievement of best outcomes.
- 3.3 Alternative Options Considered: Not undertaking the Start Well Research project. This would have been a missed opportunity to gather valuable data in relation to Early Years provision in North Northamptonshire.

### **4. Report Background**

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- 4.1 This report follows the analysis of initial findings gathered from the Start Well Research Project. The findings are based on evidence collected during a period from January to March 2023. The initial findings have been drawn together from a small-scale study involving early years settings within the Wellingborough locality area.
- 4.2 Information was collected from 33 early years settings, those offering based provision and those based within school provision. In total, there were 33 (89%) respondents out of a possible 37.
- 4.3 Evidence has been gathered from questionnaires and on-site advisory visits to show:
- structural quality - building a picture of the children accessing early years provision in the locality, their backgrounds, the workforce, and business concerns
  - process quality - capturing information on the curriculum, teaching, learning, and environments
- 4.4 Early years education and childcare (EEC) advisors and school improvement partners (SIPs) held face to face discussions with setting leaders to collect this initial information. This included a tour of each provision during the on-site visits.

- 4.5 The long-term aim is to pilot the Start Well Research Project in the Wellingborough locality area, creating a successful research model which can be replicated in the other locality areas. This does not mean that other areas will not benefit in the meantime as training will be offered in the interim.
- 4.6 This research aims to explore how indoor and outdoor play and learning spaces impact on young children's communication and language development. Participants will assess children's baseline skills within this area, then undertake improvements to their environments through the use of an audit tool. After the improvements have been implemented and embedded, children will be re-assessed. Adults' views will also be sought on the perceived benefits of the intervention.
- 4.7 Through a qualitative approach and the use of observations, questionnaires and focus groups, both before and after the intervention, it is the intention that the effectiveness of this environmental project is assessed.
- 4.8 North Northamptonshire Council School Effectiveness team (SET) has shared the findings with the settings that participated in the initial activity through a detailed report. The report analysis provides depth and detail. The report can be viewed in full alongside this Executive paper and can be found in the background papers section of this report.

## **5. Issues and Choices**

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- 5.1. It cannot be assumed that the findings are representative of the whole sector. However, the findings do provide a picture of what is working well in the locality and the challenges that some settings and children are facing.
- 5.2. In summary, there were four areas selected by setting leaders as those that were perceived as challenges. These areas were identified for staff development and training. Leaders reported that receiving training in these key areas would enable them to improve outcomes for children. The top four areas are:
- SEND/SENCo
  - Speech and language
  - Safeguarding refresher
  - Communication approaches
- 5.3 Speech and language has been identified as an area of need by setting leaders. Early communication and engagement are central to learning, interaction, well-being, and life chances.
- 5.4 It is widely known that the pandemic had an impact on children in many ways. Evidence has shown that for some children learning has been lost or forgotten as a result of time out of school.

- 5.5 Arguably, however, the biggest impact appears to have been on our very youngest children, as captured a Government Document '*Education Recovery in Early Years Providers: Summer 2022*'. The document identifies that communication and language continues to be affected as a result of the pandemic. This corresponds with the initial findings of the Start Well Research Project.
- 5.6 The percentage of pupils assessed at 'expected' by the end of their reception year in July 2022 in communication and language in the Wellingborough locality area is 6.2% lower than national. It is also the locality area with the biggest gap to national in this area of learning.
- 5.7 As a result, the SET are proposing that the next stage of the Start Well Research Project is a research task centred around communication and language.
- 5.8 The research proposal links to the Home Learning workstream of the Family Hubs model programme. Therefore, work with parents/carers and families will form part of the remit within the research proposal.
- 5.9 The overall Start Well Research Project is designed to be a collaborative piece of work in partnership with the University of Northampton (UoN). The research proposal is as follows: How does the quality of the environment impact on the quality of children's communication and language?

## **6. Next Steps**

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- 6.1 The research-based part of the Start Well Research Project is very much in the planning phase with a view to starting in July 2023. SET officers will be working with Dr Tanya Richardson, Principal Investigator and Senior Lecturer in Education (Early Years) at UoN. The information below is an early indication of the research proposal and the proposed study objective.
- 6.2 The aim of this study is to ascertain how factors in play and learning environments of Early Years settings, for children aged 0-5 years, are associated with the quality of their communication and language and if so, the nature and effects of those factors.
- 6.3 The study objectives are:
1. To establish whether enhancing the quality of the environment impacts on the quality of young children's communication and language;
  2. To implement an ongoing approach to allow settings to self-audit and make changes to their environments with communication and language as a focus.
- 6.4 By collecting the data as described above this will allow the research team to assess and show impact in the following areas:

- Practitioner confidence in providing supportive environments for communication and language (assessed through questionnaires and focus groups – before and after the intervention)
- Children’s levels of communication and language (through checklist observations and anecdotal evidence from focus groups and parent surveys – before, during and after the intervention)
- Further enhancement of the indoor and outdoor environments (evidenced through focus group – after the intervention).

6.5 Through the planned interventions and associated data collection it is hoped that it will be possible to evidence benefits of enhancing the environment to support communication and language and then to communicate that to the wider education field. This will then have a wider impact through the dissemination of the evidence. Important consideration will be given to child poverty and levelling up as part of the research project.

6.6 It is hoped that through working with UoN, and with the approval of the Executive, this study will meet the requirements of BERA (2018) Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research and will comply with UoN ethical requirements and therefore be able to be disseminated in the following ways:

- Share case studies through social media and the media team from the Changemaker Incubator Hub at UoN.
- Attend a national Early Years conference to share project and outcomes (BECERA or Nursery World Conference – depending on timing)
- Attend as guest speaker on Early Years podcasts.
- Write article for Nursery World/Early Years Educator
- Co-write a journal article

## **7. Implications (including financial implications)**

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### **7.1. Resources, Financial and Transformation**

7.1.1. An allocation of up to £8500 will need to be made by NNC to support the delivery of this research proposal.

7.1.2. There are sufficient funds within the Family Hubs financial envelope. Specifically, this will come from the Home Learning Environment Services (HLES) Family Hubs programme area, of which 9.60% of the overall grant received for Family Hubs has been allocated. There is a total of £95,616 in the HLES allocation.

7.1.3. The evaluation of the questionnaires used in the Start Well introduction work will contribute to evidence needed for the wider remit of the Family Hubs Model Programme in demonstrating whether this approach, under the HLES programme area, has longer term beneficial impact on children and families.

## 7.2. Legal and Governance

- 7.2.1 It was agreed by Executive in June 2022 that the development of the Family Hubs Model be overseen by a board established by the Lead Member for Children, Families, Education and Skills in consultation with the Executive Director of Children's Services. The Family Hub & Start for Life Board was launched on 7<sup>th</sup> March 2023 and will oversee the implementation of Family Hubs and Start for Life Offer by receiving reports and updates from the four identified workstreams which will report into an Implementation Board that will mobilise in May 2023.
- 7.2.2 The governance for the Family Hubs programme is through NNC as the risks and liabilities lie here. Reporting will be through Corporate Leadership team, the EAP and Executive.
- 7.2.3 The Start Well Research project sits within the Family Hub programme and specifically within the HLES programme therefore will be subject to the same legal and governance arrangements as set out above.

## 7.3. Relevant Policies and Plans

- 7.3.1 Within the NNC's corporate plan, vision, values and key commitments there are a number of priorities that align with the development of the Family Hub model, these include:
- Active, fulfilled lives
  - Better, Brighter Futures
  - Connected Communities
  - Modern Public Services
- 7.3.2 Other plans and strategies include:
- Community Hubs development
  - PLACE agenda
  - "Well" Northants
  - Early Years Review
  - Integrated Care Systems
  - SEND Improvement plan
  - Children and Young Peoples Plan
  - Early Help Strategy
  - Early Childhood Services Strategy
  - Parenting Strategy

## 7.4. Risk

- 7.4.1. There are no significant risks arising from the proposed recommendations in this report.

## **7.5. Consultation**

7.5.1. Settings involved in the initial findings for the project have already undertaken two questionnaires as part of the Start Well initiative. The findings from the questionnaires are provided in significant details in the Start Well Initial Findings Report.

7.5.2. For the purposes of the Start Well Research Project, communication will be carefully planned with a range of groups including children, parents/carers, families, practitioners, leaders and managers.

7.5.3. Any communication with regard to evidence required for the research project will be treated as follows:

- Meaningful and have a clear purpose;
- Timely, take place when there is opportunity to influence the decision and allow people a reasonable amount of time to respond;
- Visible so that reasonable and practicable steps are taken to ensure people are made reasonably aware of what they will be contributing to and what this information will be used for;
- Accessible, easy to understand and targeted to those participants that the project needs to include and facilitate a positive impact on;
- Analysed and used effectively to inform decision making;
- Responsive with clear feedback given to participants and stakeholders;
- Be evaluated and used to improve future projects.

## **7.6. Consideration by Executive Advisory Panel**

7.6.1 Bi-monthly updates on the development and delivery of the programme will be provided.

## **7.7. Consideration by Scrutiny**

7.7.1. Not considered at this stage.

## **7.8. Equality Implications**

7.8.1. NNC is committed to treating people fairly. This section should inform members and senior officers of the equality implications of the Council's functions, services, policies or procedures. This is particularly important when there is a change to, or review of, existing practice and where a decision is required, or a recommendation made.

7.8.2. NNC are committed to embedding Social Value (SV) and will contain a requirement to demonstrate social value including development training and work opportunities and providing a holistic offer of support for parents / carers

to be closer to the job market etc. Officers will also work to ensure the workforce is representative of the communities it serves.

## **7.9. Climate and Environment Impact**

7.9.1 The Council, having declared a climate change emergency in June 2021, is committed to reducing its climate impact both within its own Council buildings and in working with businesses and the wider community to achieve net zero energy emissions.

7.9.2 The importance of both place-based services and people being able to access universal services through outreach as well as a strong virtual offer of support will be important considerations as the Family Hubs and Start for Life programme is developed. This will help to reduce the carbon footprint. The Hubs with associated spoke sites will also provide places for professionals to deliver locally based services for children, young people and their families from and thereby reducing travel across the Borough. The virtual offer will be developed to support those that find services hard to access.

7.9.3 The Start Well Research Project is part of the Family Hubs work programme and therefore adheres to the statements above.

## **7.10 Community Impact**

7.10.1 This will become clearer as Start Well Research Project work progresses and will be addressed through the evaluation of impact. The Start Well Research Project is linked to the Family Hubs programme which is a positive approach to developing community-based partnerships and services that are accessible, either virtually or physically, by all. The approach will also include outreach which will provide access to pathways and support for families that find services hard to access.

## **7.11 Crime and Disorder Impact**

7.11.1 No Impact

## **8. Background Papers**

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8.1 [Education recovery in early years providers: summer 2022 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/113422/education-recovery-early-years-providers-summer-2022.pdf) This briefing draws on inspection evidence gathered in the summer term in 2022, and discussions with early years inspectors.

8.2 Family Hubs Programme Update – Annual [Report](#) 2022/2023

8.3 Start Well Research Project Plan – Dr T Richardson

8.4 Start Well Project Letter (Sent to Settings in November 2022)