



Leicester  
City Council

**WARDS AFFECTED**  
Citywide

**Overview & Scrutiny Management Board**  
**Cabinet**

**18 September 2008**  
**1 October 2008**

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## **Early Years Communication Strategy**

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### **Report of the Corporate Director, Children & Young People's Services**

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

- 1.1 To inform Cabinet and OSMB of the multi-agency strategy that has been developed to address children's early communication needs.

#### **2. Summary**

- 2.1 Research carried out by ICAN has heightened awareness of the great social and economic costs resulting from poor communication skills.
- 2.2 The foundation stage profile, a universal assessment conducted just prior to admission to key stage 1 (September after a child's 5<sup>th</sup> birthday) would indicate that almost 70% of the children in Leicester are experiencing language delay. Some children learning English as an additional language perform as well as children whose first language is English, but a large proportion of these children still do less well than the national averages.
- 2.3 Much of the language screening and workforce skills training has been developed without recognition for the need to have single, consistent, city-wide message that can be easily understood and shared across communities.
- 2.4 It is vital that all who come into contact with young children in Leicester understand the significance of, and share responsibility for, promoting good communication skills for our youngest children.
- 2.5 Promoting good communication skills is an essential foundation for achieving One Leicester's aims for confident and prosperous citizens.

#### **3. Recommendations (or OPTIONS)**

- 3.1 Cabinet and OSMB to note and approve the strategy and work streams.

#### **4. Report**

- 4.1 A multi-agency group with representatives from various agencies have worked with a Regional Advisor to develop the attached strategy
- 4.2 Research carried out by ICAN has heightened awareness of the great social and economic costs resulting from poor communication skills.
- 4.3 The foundation stage profile, a universal assessment conducted just prior to admission to key stage 1 (September after a child's 5<sup>th</sup> birthday) would indicate that almost 70% of the children in Leicester are experiencing language delay. Some children learning English as an additional language perform as well as children whose first language is English, but a large proportion of these children still do less well than the national averages.
- 4.4 Much of the language screening and workforce skills training has been developed without recognition for the need to have single, consistent, city-wide message that can be easily understood and shared across communities.
- 4.5 It is vital that all who come into contact with young children in Leicester understand the significance of, and share responsibility for, promoting good communication skills for our youngest citizens.
- 4.6 The Early Years Communication Strategy aims to promote positive early outcomes for children and families by ensuring that children have every opportunity to become confident and skilful communicators.
- 4.7 It is a plan that empowers parents, and all other adults who nurture and educate young children in Leicester. It also ensures that the agencies that provide training programmes for parents and other carers and educators, develop a shared understanding about, and accept a shared responsibility for young children in Leicester becoming confident and skilful communicators.
- 4.8 The purpose of the Early Years Communication Strategy is to develop a cohesive, city-wide framework for support, intervention and training that is common across all agencies who have contact with young children (0-5 years) and their families
- 4.9 There is a single, clear message that can be shared with parents and all practitioners in the children's workforce who nurture and educate young children in Leicester.
- 4.10 The message is 'branded', so that it can be referred to and recognised by all who live and work in the city.
- 4.11 Everyone recognises that Leicester's children will only become confident and skilful communicators, when the adults who nurture them during pregnancy, and throughout early childhood, listen to, communicate with, and respond positively to them.
- 4.12 We all acknowledge that the opportunity for becoming a communicator begins very early in a child's life when the child is held close to a caring and responsive adult.

- 4.13 The message for all parents and childcare practitioners highlights the essential link connecting early interactions between a child and his/her care-giver and the secure attachments essential to emotional well-being.
- 4.14 Everyone in the children's workforce, and beyond, has ownership of both the problem of language delay and its solutions.
- 4.15 We need to maximise the effectiveness of professional time by incorporating local and national examples of best practice into a city-wide strategy (e.g. 'Turn off the Telly', 'Ditch the Dummy', 'Talk to your Baby', 'Before words'.)
- 4.16 The advice for parents is positive and reaffirming, and builds on their strengths. The delivery style focuses on finding solutions and takes account of evidence from best practice in supporting parents. Support and training for parents will be delivered at those times in their parenthood when they are likely to be most receptive to advice.
- 4.17 We pay particular attention to the augmented communication needs of young disabled children.
- 4.18 Whilst this work predates the Transforming Leicester's Learning Plan it is now an integral part of the Early Years and Foundation Stage theme.
- 4.19 The strategy will require a range of agencies and divisions to work in a more systematic and collaborative way to deliver the change required.
- 4.20 The success of the strategy will be measured by using the Foundation Stage Profile.
- 4.21 Resources

The work of the strategy will be funded through a number of routes including the Sure Start grant, Transforming Leicester's Learning Plan and base budget staffs existing contribution

## **5. FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

### **5.1. Financial Implications**

"The strategy will involve a number of agencies and many staff in the workforce to deliver a city-wide message. Particular costs that have been identified include an Information Officer (£32k) and communication activities (£15k). Oversight will be provided by the Service Improvement Manager. There is provision within the TLL Budget Plan for Early Years and Foundation Block (lines A5 and A16) for the Service Improvement Manager and the communications activity. The costs of the Information Officer will be shared between the TLL (A16) and the Surestart Grant. It will be important to ensure that an exit or continuation strategy is in place for post-August 2009 when the current TLL cost and funding projections come to an end.

- Colin Sharpe, Head of Finance and Efficiency, ext. 29 7750."

## 5.2 Legal Implications

There are no legal implications arising from this report

- Kamal Adatia, Team Leader Community Services, Legal Services

## 6. Other Implications

OTHER IMPLICATIONS	YES/NO	Paragraph Within Supporting information	References
Equal Opportunities			
Policy			
Sustainable and Environmental			
Crime and Disorder			
Human Rights Act			
Elderly/People on Low Income	No		

## 7. Background Papers – Local Government Act 1972

## 8. Consultations

### Report Author/Officer to contact:

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<b>Key Decision</b>	Yes
<b>Reason</b>	Significant in its effects on communities in one or more wards
<b>Appeared in Forward Plan</b>	Yes
<b>Executive or Council Decision</b>	Executive (Cabinet)

# **Leicester City**

## **Early Years Communication Strategy**

**Children are a reflection of the world in which they develop. If that world is safe, full of strong relationships, predictable and enriched by conversation and good experiences, the child will grow up to be a self regulating, thoughtful and productive member of society. If on the other hand, the child's world is chaotic and threatening, devoid of close relationships, stimulation and supportive words, the child is much more likely to be impulsive, violent, inattentive and have difficulties with relationships.**

**Alan Sinclair, 0-5: How Small Children Make a Big Difference,  
Provocation Series Volume 3 Number 1  
the work foundation  
January 2007**

# Early Years Communication Strategy

## Vision for Leicester's Children

We believe that good communication skills are essential to improving the life chances of Leicester's children. Being a skilled communicator supports the development of social and interpersonal skills, and literacy skills, leads to success in learning, and increases opportunities for employment. A life enriched by conversation and good experiences will also enable the child to grow up to be a reflective and productive member of society. We all must invest in their future prosperity and well-being.

We want our children to be able to:

- Be able to make friends and form relationships with the adults that care for them in all settings
- Express feelings and emotions fluently
- Understand and take the views of others into account and use language to solve problems and express their views
- Understand and use language to work out and clarify ideas
- Enjoy choosing and reading books
- Make use of their knowledge of language to write effectively

To achieve this vision, our strategy needs to operate at three levels.

### **Level 1-Community**

The community a child grows up in influences their communication development. To ensure that every community supports positive communication development we will:

- Raise awareness in wider community of importance of interacting with children to support their communication and language development
- Ensure that all providers and practitioners working in a community have the appropriate training and resources to support the children's developing communication skills.
- Conduct a range of community development activities that support them to provide language-rich environments for their children, (e.g. 'Dump the dummy', 'Turn off the Telly', 'Talk to your Baby'), and provide a preventative level of intervention.

### **Level 2-Family**

A child's family has the biggest impact on how a child communicates. We will ensure that all families:

- Receive good information and guidance during pregnancy and early childhood on how they can promote their child's communication skills from birth so that every child has support to develop their potential as a communicator.
- Understand the stages of communication development and are encouraged to engage in all areas of their child's learning so that their child is happy and successful at school

- Have access to resources in their community that promote good communication
- Know where to get help early if they think their child needs it

### **Level 3 –The Child**

Every child will:

- Have timely assessments of their communication development at 9 months and 24 months through the Children’s Centre networks
- Receive the earliest possible intervention once a communication development difficulty has been identified.
- Have access to language rich environments from
  - Birth to 1 year
  - 1-2 years
  - 2-4 years
  - 4-5 years
- Experience positive interactions daily with a caregiver, if they attend a Leicester childcare or early education setting.

### **Introduction to the strategy**

1. The Early Years Communication Strategy aims to promote positive early outcomes for children and families by ensuring that children have every opportunity to become confident and skilful communicators.
2. It is a plan that empowers parents, and all other adults who nurture and educate young children in Leicester. It also ensures that the agencies that provide training programmes for parents and other carers and educators, develop a shared understanding about, and accept a shared responsibility for young children in Leicester becoming confident and skilful communicators.
3. The purpose of the Early Years Communication Strategy is to develop a cohesive, city-wide framework for support, intervention and training that is common across all agencies who have contact with young children (0-5 years) and their families



## **The intended outcomes of the Early Years Communication Strategy are to:**

1. Establish a shared understanding amongst parents and the children's workforce of the relevance of communication skills to good outcomes for all children.
2. Improve outcomes in Communication, Language and Literacy, and Personal, Social and Emotional Development as measured by the foundation stage profile, for all children in Leicester.
3. Reduce the gap between children living in areas of high disadvantage and other children in Leicester in their attainments in Communication, Language and Literacy, and Personal, Social and Emotional Development.
4. Understand better the key factors which put children at risk of failing to develop good communication skills in order to provide early targeted support.
5. Develop a better understanding of the prevalence of early language delay.
6. Address identified speech and language difficulties within an agreed framework of intervention and support
7. Create a single, consistent message that is easy for everyone to understand and follow that will ensure that young children will become good communicators.
8. Establish a training framework to empower parents and support a skilled workforce
9. Develop a preventative pathway.
10. Promote the essential pre-literacy skills identified by Jim Rose in his Review of the teaching of early reading: i.e. 'Speaking and listening skills to make sure that children build a good stock of words, learn to listen attentively and speak clearly and confidently'. Rose report, March 2006, p. 3.

## **Principles**

The Early Years Communication Strategy is built on the following principles:

1. There is a single, clear message that can be shared with parents and all practitioners in the children's workforce who nurture and educate young children in Leicester.
2. The message is 'branded', so that it can be referred to and recognised by all who live and work in the city.
3. Everyone recognises that Leicester's children will only become confident and skilful communicators, when the adults who nurture them during pregnancy, and throughout early childhood, listen to, communicate with, and respond positively to them.

4. We all acknowledge that the opportunity for becoming a communicator begins very early in a child's life when the child is held close to a caring and responsive adult.
5. The message for all parents and childcare practitioners highlights the essential link connecting early interactions between a child and his/her care-giver and the secure attachments essential to emotional well-being.
6. Everyone in the children's workforce, and beyond, has ownership of both the problem of language delay and its solutions.
7. We need to maximise the effectiveness of professional time by incorporating local and national examples of best practice into a city-wide strategy (e.g. 'Turn off the Telly', 'Ditch the Dummy', 'Talk to your Baby', 'Before words'.)
8. The advice for parents is positive and reaffirming, and builds on their strengths. The delivery style focuses on finding solutions and takes account of evidence from best practice in supporting parents. Support and training for parents will be delivered at those times in their parenthood when they are likely to be most receptive to advice.
9. We pay particular attention to the augmented communication needs of young disabled children.

## **Local Context**

1. Foundation stage profile results indicate very low levels in communication, language and literacy, and levels in personal, social and emotional development of our 5-year olds is well below the national average. It would appear that as many as 70% are experiencing language delay, as measured by the foundation stage profile.
2. Not only is the median score on the foundation stage profile of all children in Leicester significantly lower than the national median, but there is also an unacceptably large gap between the median of the children rated in the bottom 20% of the foundation stage profile and the median of all children in the city.
3. Contrary to popular belief, some children in Leicester who are learning English as an additional language score on average more highly than children whose first language is English, but a very large proportion of these children still do less well than the national averages.
4. A multi-agency screening tool has been devised to identify children with developmental (including language) delays at age 2, but is not being used systematically across the city and its application is variable according to availability of key professionals.
5. Language training is offered by a variety of agencies but lacks coherence and the consistency that could be offered by a more strategic approach. Sometimes new training is offered without a clear link to a strategic plan, or consideration of the extent to which it replicates existing programmes.

## **National Context**

In October 2006 I CAN, a national charity that support children with communication disabilities released a report that identifies 'The cost to the nation of Children's Poor Communication'. The paper summarises the research relating to communication skills and outcomes for children. The following key issues have been extracted from the report have implications for children's services in both health and education sectors.

### **Risks of poor outcomes**

1. Children with a communication disability are more likely than their peers to have difficulty with peer interactions and forming real friendships. (p. 7)
2. Many children with a communication disability go on to struggle academically. (p. 6)
3. Children with an early diagnosis of language or communication difficulties are more likely to develop associated behavioural difficulties than their peers. (p. 7)
4. Parents report increased emotional and financial burdens consequent to having a child with language difficulties. (p. 8)
5. Poor communication skills can be a major contributing factor in a child becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment and Training at 16-18). (p. 9)
6. Compared to their siblings, young people with language difficulties have unsatisfactory employment histories including more breaks in employment, interpersonal difficulties at work, and more instances of redundancy. (p. 8)
7. Around 35% of offenders have speaking and listening skills at a basic level. (p. 7)
8. There is evidence that the social class distinction for communication skills identified at pre-school can continue into adult life. Children living in deprived communities are more likely to achieve only basic literacy and numeracy levels. (p. 6)

### **Protective factors**

1. Strong parental involvement has a significant impact on children's rate of progress in language development. (p.11)
2. Focused parent training programmes makes carers feel more confident as well as improving outcomes for children's communication. (p. 11)
3. The EPPE (Effective provision of pre-school education) study highlighted the importance of the interactions between carers and their children. (p. 10)

4. There is a positive association between high quality provision which has a focus on encouraging interaction and children's intellectual, social and behavioural developments. (p.5)
5. Competence in oral language and the resulting transition to literacy is seen as crucial as a protective factor in ensuring later academic success, positive self-esteem and improved life chances. ( p. 6)

## **The seven main work streams of the Early Years Communication Strategy will:**

1. Define a preventative pathway that describes the kinds of language-facilitating environments and activities that will build resilience to language delay and enable both parents and childcare practitioners to provide the opportunities young children need to develop the skills to communicate and build relationships
2. Improve the skills of the children's workforce by developing a training framework that takes into account the differing skill needs of practitioners who
  - work in direct contact with, and support the language development of young children
  - lead teams in settings and schools and are responsible for planning language enabling environments
  - work with children experiencing language delay
  - support the parents of vulnerable children

There will also be a training programme for raising awareness in the wider communities of Children's Centre neighbourhoods of the importance of early communication skills.

3. Work with professionals in Children's Centres networks to establish a system of universal screening for language delay at 9 and 24 months.
4. Establish prevalence of language delay amongst three-year olds in the city by developing a baseline assessment to be used with all three year old children in Leicester as they enter the foundation stage. This should enable us to establish a baseline of communication difficulties and provide both qualitative and quantitative evidence of changes in the incidence of language difficulties in the city
5. Develop and implement a communication campaign in conjunction with C&YPS Communications Policy Officer. This campaign will
  - raise awareness amongst the wider community of the relationship between communication and achievement
  - engage the key stakeholders in Children's Centre networks who are in a good position to make a difference to communication environments of young children
  - support workforce development activities by keeping the workforce aware of training opportunities.

6. Provide improved communication environments for all children in EYFS settings by motivating early years providers to achieve accreditation by I CAN (a national charity for language-impaired children) to provide a supportive environment for children learning to communicate.
7. Establish a multi-agency/sector steering group to measure the success of the implementation of the strategy and widen participation in the strategy. This group will report to the overarching Transforming Leicester's Learning (Early Years and Foundation Stage).

## **Links to other Strategies**

- The Early Years Communication Strategy clearly links to the parenting strategy as it will contribute to providing necessary life experiences that develop social, intellectual, language skills and help parents provide an environment where there can be open and trusting communication.
- The Early Years Communication Strategy will have links with Bookstart strategy as a way of motivating parents to engage with local services and use books to support communication development
- As part of the 'Closing the Gap' strategy the Early Years Communication Strategy will link with other work streams in the early years theme group for Transforming Leicester's Learning.

## **Measuring Impact**

1. Monitor the % of 3 year-olds assessed as having language delay, during the programme's existence. This would be available by comparing the results of an annual baseline assessment.
2. Monitor the % of children achieving 78 points or above across the foundation stage profile with at least 6 points in PSED and CCL.
3. Monitor the number of settings achieving and maintaining recognition by I CAN .
4. Monitor the numbers of children at risk of language delay identified by the screening programme.
5. Monitor the uptake of language training programmes, and identify those achieving accreditation at level 3, level 5 and post-graduate levels.
6. Monitoring referral rates to Speech and Language Therapy Service.
7. Monitor awareness of the strategy, and its key messages.