

Appendix A: Draft Response to Early Years Special Educational Needs Consultation

XX May 2018

Early Years SEN Framework
Maydown House
1 Maydown Road
Derry/Londonderry
BT47 6UF

Ref: Consultation on Early Years Special Educational Needs – Response

Dear Sir/ Madam

Mid Ulster District Council would like to take this opportunity to put forward its views in relation to the consultation on Early Years Special Educational Needs. Whilst Council agrees with the aim of developing an integrated framework that offers children the best start in life through early intervention, flexibility and parental involvement and support there are some aspects of the proposals that Council would encourage the Education Authority to implement any review with a focus on delivering equitable access to services and curriculum choices across Northern Ireland. With this in mind each of the six specific themes relating to the proposed framework have been examined in turn:

1. Communication

In line with good practice Council would encourage the Education Authority to ensure that the final strategic review outcomes are a product of co-design and co-production with parents, the children themselves and the professionals who support them both. This process will benefit all stakeholders in terms of the development of a final framework.

2. Partnerships

Council strongly supports the proposal of partnership working and would suggest that within the Mid Ulster District Council area that the Council led Community Plan could be utilised as a mechanism to benefit SEN Schools based within the District. As referenced within the Communication section of this response, the use of a co-design and co-production system would ensure that the any proposals have the ability to implemented, including considerations of interventions prior to nursery and external to the school settings.

3. Support for Younger Children (0-3)

In relation to 'Support for Younger Children (0-3)' Council would encourage that support is provided on a practical basis with consideration given to the family as a whole. The support should aim to provide a smooth transition from the home setting into a nursery school setting therefore placing a strong foundation for primary one and beyond. It would also be recommended that any measures taken to tackle isolation and accessibility issues for parents of children who are diagnosed with SEN at an early age should be carried out in a meaningful practical way and made as accessible as possible.

4. Additional Support for Mainstream Pre-school Settings

Council agrees with the suggestions for provision of Additional Support for Mainstream Pre-school Settings. Encouraging meaningful links between the parents of children with SEN and the provision of needs led support for parents would be a very worthwhile use of resources. Also, supporting children when they move from mainstream pre-school to Primary 1 is also a significant area of importance. This process can prove a daunting experience for both parents and children. Again consistency of provision should provide equitable access to Additional Support for Mainstream Pre-school Settings.

5. Extended Mainstream Provision (for children in their pre-school year)

Council welcomes the suggestion of the provision of a consistent 'programme of offer' in relation to the development of this area of support. However it is noted that the 'minimum of 15 hours' represents a reduction in current provision. It is suggested that in some instances this is a reduction from a current provision of 22.5 hours per week. The implications of this for parents and children in relation would have a negative impact which should be mitigated against should it become part of the final framework. Council would also suggest that the piloting of Early Years SEN Centres should be carried out in various locations throughout Northern Ireland, including within Mid Ulster District Council area.

6. Special School Provision

Council believes it is imperative that every young person with SEN or a disability should be offered effective transition guidance and support to ensure they are adequately prepared to progress to the next stage in their education. Council are aware that the number of children presenting with SEN is increasing, however each child needs to be provided the opportunity to achieve the best outcome for them regardless of their levels of ability. Children and parents should be able to expect a consistent model of delivery regardless of other factors. This familiarity with service provision could remove some of the pressure and anxiety experienced by parents of children with SEN in their preschool year.

Council, overall, supports the aim of establishing consistent access arrangements for children with SEN in their preschool year. It is imperative that any proposed programme of offer is made available across education settings and that equitable delivery will meet the needs of children, including the most complex cases, in their pre-school year.

Finally, Council recognises that while the Education Authority has to operate within restricted financial resources, a commitment to continuous improvement to its service delivery has been made. Therefore, it is hoped that any proposed reduction in services takes this commitment into account. Quality education is paramount for all children if they are to achieve their best outcomes within school settings and beyond.

Yours faithfully