

Family and Childcare Trust response to consultation on *A City for all Londoners*

The Family and Childcare Trust welcome the opportunity to respond to the plans set out in *A City for all Londoners*. The Family and Childcare Trust aims to make the UK a better place for families. We are a leading national family charity in the field of policy, research and advocacy on childcare and family issues, with over 40 years' experience. Our on-the-ground work with parents and providers informs our research and campaigns. Our focus is on the early years because they are crucial to children's futures, and on childcare because of its dual role in enabling parents to work and boosting children's development.

The cost and availability of high quality childcare causes problems for too many Londoners. We are pleased that the strategy recognises that a lack of affordable, high quality childcare can act as a barrier to work for parents, particularly mothers, and shows commitment to addressing the supply and costs of childcare. We particularly welcome the commitment to embed childcare and early education provision within city planning. This will help to make sure that the number of childcare spaces grows as the population grows, and can help to tackle affordability if low or no rent childcare premises are included within planning requirements.

We know that London families are less likely to take up their free entitlements to childcare and early education. Addressing this is one piece of the puzzle to making childcare more affordable and accessible for Londoners, and so we welcome the commitment to work to increase take up. We look forward to seeing further detail on both of these commitments and would be pleased to offer further support on this.

However, the issues with childcare are wide ranging and further action will be needed to make sure that it does not act as a barrier to work for parents or a barrier to achievement for children. Some of these issues are:

- **Cost** A nursery place in London is around a third more expensive than England average, and prices are rising faster than the rest of the country.
- **Gaps in supply** Half of London's boroughs do not have enough free early education places which could mean children missing out on vital early learning. There also are also significant shortages for: after-school clubs, provision for disabled children, and parents with atypical work patterns.
- **Low uptake of free entitlement** Uptake of free early education for two, three and four year olds is below average in London and in some London local authorities, significant proportions of children are receiving their free early education in provision that has been judged to 'require improvement' or be inadequate
- **Lack of childcare to support atypical working patterns** Informal childcare from friends and family is often used to support atypical or irregular working hours, but London families are far less likely to use informal childcare compared to the UK average. Childminders can often offer greater flexibility of hours, but numbers are on the decrease in London
- **Information** There has been, and will be further, substantial changes to provision, and parents will need information to help them make the best of what's on offer, but some local authorities no longer have a Family Information Service, instead relying on generic phone lines and websites

- **Quality** in London is generally above the national average, but there is a tail end of low quality provision. These providers are more likely to have vacancies, so addressing quality could have the effect of increasing supply.

To address these issues, the Mayor should:

- **Help to ensure there is enough childcare to meet families' need by:**
 - Supporting local authorities to fulfil their duties under the Childcare Act 2006. This should include drives to increase supply of certain types of childcare, including for children with disabilities, across London where supply is not meeting demand.
 - Supporting providers by
 - Considering a small grant scheme for childminders to cover items such as training, registration fees, insurance and equipment
 - Providing start-up grants to increase supply in areas which have been identified as having a lack of places
 - Looking for opportunities to use public buildings to provide childcare, helping to reduce costs. This could include using school buildings more effectively out of school hours, on-site crèches for employees within the GLA family, or using GLA owned land, for example, former police stations, for childcare
- **Provide information for families by:**
 - Undertaking a pan-London or targeted information campaign about early education and help with childcare costs. This should include supporting local authorities in their role providing information to parents, as well as considering other ways to provide information, such as peer-to-peer.
 - Creating a pan-London childcare brokerage service that helps parents to find suitable childcare. This service should monitor areas where demand outstrips supply

We also welcome the Mayor's commitment to creating an integrated London. Addressing segregation in the early years is an effective way to do this as it supports parents and children to mix together. Our [recent research](#) for the GLA found that there were significant patterns of attendance to early years setting by ethnicity, deprivation and SEND status. The GLA should work with local authorities to encourage social mixing in the early years, share best practice when this is being done and monitor attendance patterns.