

MAYOR OF LONDON

Krupesh Hirani AM

Chair of the London Assembly Health Committee
C/o Diane.Richards@london.gov.uk

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Date: 8 February 2023

Dear Krupesh,

Thank you for your letter. I am grateful to the Health Committee for its investigation into early years development and support services in London, and I welcome your recommendations. These have been considered carefully, and you can find responses to each in the annex to this letter.

I share your belief in the importance of a strong early years sector in London and your concerns about the challenges facing the sector. As you know, access to high-quality early education and childcare is essential to give children the best possible start in life. The sector also supports social cohesion and underpins our city's economic success by enabling parents (especially mothers) to work.

Unfortunately, because of years of underfunding by central government, the vital work done by our nurseries and childminders is under threat. The sector is currently facing a workforce crisis, which has been exacerbated by the ongoing effects of the pandemic, and now the soaring cost of living.

Although I have no statutory powers in this area, I will continue to do all I can to support the sector as part of my efforts to build a better, fairer and more prosperous London for everyone.

I would like to take this opportunity to once again thank the Health Committee for its work and recommendations.

If you would like further information about the work referenced in the annex, please contact Alex Godbold (Alex.Godbold@london.gov.uk), Senior Policy Officer in the Children and Young Londoners Team.

Yours sincerely,



Sadiq Khan

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Annex

Mayor of London's response to the recommendations of the London Assembly Health Committee's investigation into early years development and support services in London

Recommendation 1

The long-term impact on the development of those who were aged 0-5 during the pandemic is unclear. The Mayor should work with the NHS and other partners through the London Health Board to conduct necessary research to understand this long-term impact on young children in London and determine whether ongoing targeted support is required to address developmental delay for this cohort.

The [Public Health England report from June 2021](#) that you reference gives a useful initial insight into the impact of the pandemic on young Londoners – including in terms of the development of under fives. The Mayor welcomes your recommendation and is pleased to report that the Greater London Authority (GLA) is already working closely with the NHS and other partners through the London Health Board to access the most recent data and deepen our understanding of this impact.

The London Health Board conducted a deep dive into children and young people's physical and mental health as part of its July 2022 meeting. This included discussion on the increase in children and young people with an Education, Health and Care Plan, and concerns about disrupted early education during the pandemic leading to an increase in developmental delays for under fives, and late intervention to support children and families with more acute needs. Plans were also set out for a new strategy, being led by the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID), to tackle an increase in infant mortality in London. The Board took away a number of actions, which were published as part of the full minutes from this meeting. The deep dive report can also be viewed online:

- [Agenda and minutes - London Health Board - 6 July 2022](#)
- [Babies, children and young people's physical and mental health](#)

The latest [Health Profile for London](#) (produced by OHID) also provides useful insights into the impact of the pandemic on young Londoners; for example:

- Due to the pandemic, data on child development at the end of the Reception year was not reported for the latest academic year September 2019 to July 2020 and early years settings were closed to most children. However, it is acknowledged that young children may have experienced a lack of social activities and interactions that would normally help to prepare them to start school.
- Children's education has been severely disrupted during the pandemic. From March until June 2020, most schools in England were closed to children other than those with parents who were key workers or classed as vulnerable. Whilst the full impact of the pandemic on child health and development will not be known for some time, studies suggest that children who started school in the autumn 2020 term needed additional support when compared with children in previous academic years. There are also indications that learning has suffered to some degree for most pupils and year groups, particularly for more disadvantaged students.

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- The 2019/20 data on child obesity is less robust than previous years as fewer measurements were taken due to school closures. Findings from the National Child Measurement Programme suggest that obesity increased across all regions in both reception-age children and Year 6. Closure of schools, sporting and leisure facilities, parks and recreational areas, together with an increase in screen time over the pandemic period, has led to a reduction in physical activity in children and young people.

The Mayor will continue to work with partners and use these insights and the latest intelligence available to help shape his approach to supporting young Londoners in the wake of the pandemic.

Recommendation 2

The Mayor, in consultation with the GLA's early years stakeholder group, should identify where the main skills gaps are in the early years sector and target Adult Education Budget funding in these areas.

The Mayor is pleased to confirm that a meeting of the GLA's London Early Years Stakeholder Group took place last July which focussed exclusively on the workforce crisis within the sector. Chaired by Joanne McCartney, Deputy Mayor for Children and Families, this was a good opportunity to bring together and hear more on the crisis from key stakeholders, including Neil Leitch, Chief Executive of the Early Years Alliance, who presented concerning findings from their [Breaking Point report](#).

Amongst those based in London, there was a strong appetite to work together to support the sector at a regional level. Officers from the GLA's Children and Young Londoners and Skills and Employment teams are now part of a working group coordinated by London's Heads of Early Years Network, which aims to bring regional coordination to tackling the workforce crisis.

The Adult Education Budget (AEB), devolved to London in 2019, delivers skills training for adults across multiple sectors. This includes support for Londoners to enter and progress in the early years sector. As an update to the figures you have referenced, in the academic year 2021-22, 5,340 learners were funded across 6,920 courses in child development and wellbeing, and 5,050 learners were funded across 5,970 courses in education and training more broadly.

Since the devolution of the AEB, the Mayor has worked to make adult education more accessible, helping more Londoners access learning and upskilling them to enter into good work. Steps have included widening access to more Londoners by fully funding the learning of those in low paid work, removing previous long residency requirements for migrant Londoners, and uplifting the funding per learner in courses at level two and below to help those with lower skills to progress in life and work.

Furthermore, the Mayor continues to support and broker relationships with the early years sector and Job Centre Plus to support the delivery of sector-based work academies. The sector-based work academies help prepare those receiving unemployment benefits to apply for jobs in a different area of work through placements and training courses. This training element is funded by the AEB.

Recommendation 3

The Mayor, in consultation with the GLA's early years stakeholder group, should carry out a London-wide campaign to encourage more people, particularly young men, to work in the early years sector.

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The need to encourage more people, particularly men, to work in the early years sector, was discussed at the London's Early Years Stakeholder's Group's special meeting on workforce last July.

It was acknowledged that there are already some fantastic campaigns, led for and by the sector, including #ChangedALife (PACEY), #FirstFiveYearsCount (NDNA) and #WeAreEducators (Early Years Alliance) – all of which highlight the vital importance of careers in early education, as well as how rewarding they can be. The Mayor has urged the government to take urgent action to address the workforce crisis within the sector, including by bolstering these campaigns and taking longer-term action to ensure that early education and childcare is seen as a viable and rewarding career path for the next generation.

The Mayor has also consistently called on the government to provide better, long-term funding to the early years sector. This is vital in the debate around workforce, since we know that low pay is a key barrier to many entering the sector – especially men.

GLA officers will follow up with colleagues at the Department for Education for an update on its plans to address the ongoing workforce crisis. Meanwhile, they will continue to explore these issues at a regional level as part of the working group led by London's Heads of Early Years Network.

They have, for example, ensured the group is connected with [London's Careers Hubs](#), to promote career pathways into the early years – particularly looking at interventions that will attract a more diverse workforce to this sector. London has a Career Hub in each sub region, supporting 95% of London's secondary schools and colleges to offer comprehensive careers programmes that meet the needs of London's future workforce. The Mayor welcomes further engagement with the wider early years sector, supporting them to engage with young Londoners through our London-wide Career Hubs.

Recommendation 4

Recommendation 4: The Mayor should extend the Strong Early Years London programme. This should build on the successes of the first iteration of the programme and make changes based on the areas for improvement identified in the evaluation report.

The Mayor's Strong Early Years London programme was commissioned in direct response to [research into the business support needs of London's early years sector](#) (February 2021) and aimed to support nurseries and childminders at a particular point in time – as London emerged from the pandemic. By extending his funding for the programme from March 2022 to November 2022, the Mayor has gone beyond the original recommendation from this research for a one-year support package.

The funding extension allowed extra time to explore feedback from the programme's impact report and (where possible) make improvements to the one-stop-shop for early years business support. This one-stop-shop attracted over 1,780 unique page views during the programme's initial funding period (May 2020 to March 2022). It continues to be hosted on the London Business Hub and is the legacy of the programme.

It was important to the Mayor that Strong Early Years London was delivered in collaboration with London boroughs, all of whom have their own business support offers for local early years settings. The one-stop-shop signposts early years settings to these local offers, as well as archived materials created through the programme and wider support, and we are continuing to promote this.

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Recommendation 5

The Mayor should carry out a full evaluation of the Healthy Early Years London programme, in order to understand what impact it is having and how it can be improved.

The Mayor fully supports the Committee's desire to understand what impact his Healthy Early Years London (HEYL) programme is having and how it can be improved. Much of this work has already happened or is underway.

As you know, in 2019 HEYL was externally evaluated after its first year. This evaluation was comprehensive and combined surveys of stakeholders and early years settings, one-to-one interviews and focus groups, ethnographic visits to settings and analysis of existing routine data. It showed the positive impact HEYL is having across London and the importance of working in partnership with boroughs and settings to reduce child health inequalities.

In early 2022, the GLA also commissioned a review of both HEYL and Healthy Schools London (HSL) to help inform a refresh of both programmes and ensure they better align with the Mayor's child health priorities, as well as national guidelines such as the Ofsted inspection framework. This work included interviews and workshops with borough leads, schools, early years settings and education and public health experts – ultimately leading to recommendations for aligning HEYL and HSL and reducing some of the paperwork that can be difficult for childminders and smaller settings.

We are in the process of moving to a commissioned model for both HEYL and HSL, with an external delivery partner managing the day-to-day running of the programmes and leading the refresh and relaunch. We intend the refreshed programmes to be launched in September, and in future will consider further evaluation options.

It has been encouraging to see engagement with HEYL continue to increase since 2019, despite the ongoing challenges the sector is facing and the pandemic. A total of 1,582 early years settings across London have received an award, with every borough involved.