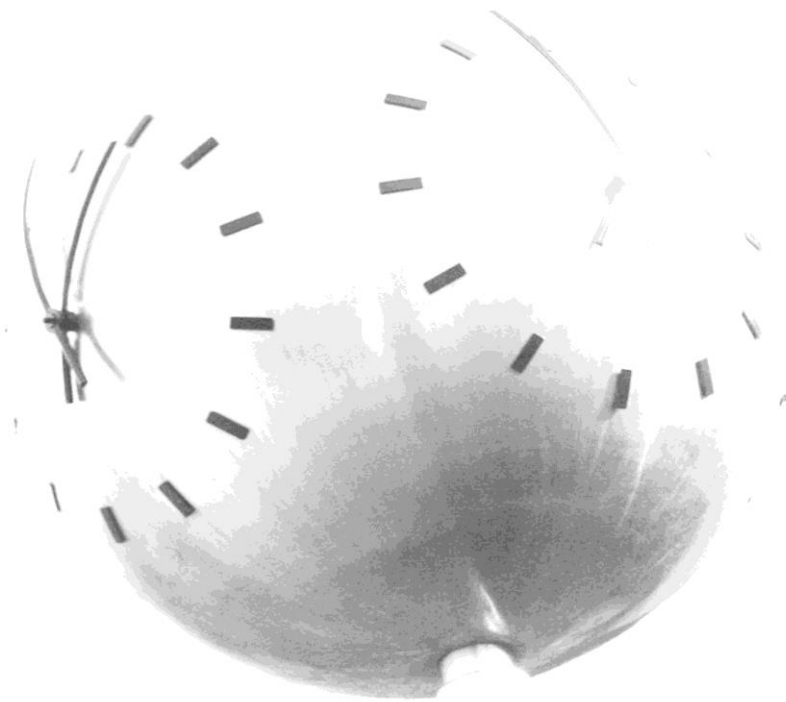


Early Years Policy 2021-24

Basildon Borough Council



Key Information (To correspond with Pentana)

Author:	Strategy, Insights and Partnerships Team
Section/Directorate:	Strategy, Insights and Partnerships
Service Impact Assessment:	Yes
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1. Introduction

Basildon Council recognises the fundamental role it can play in ensuring that children living in the borough achieve the best possible start in life and fulfil their potential. An Early Years policy for Basildon will enable a more localised response to the Early Years sector, exploring approaches that can be taken in partnership with Essex County Council and other agencies, to sustain a high quality service to children and families in the borough. This is in line with Basildon council's Corporate Plan commitment to 'ensure there is Early Years provision of the quality and quantity that meets the need across the borough'¹.

This has become even more important as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and will continue to be the case as the borough enters recovery, where the value of local thinking will be necessary to mitigate any negative impact on the borough's early years and childcare sector.

As an upper-tier local authority, Essex County Council Early Years and Childcare Service has statutory duties under the Childcare Act 2006 for ensuring high quality provision of early education and childcare across the county. It is intended that this policy will complement the proposed Essex County Council Early Years strategy, expected in Summer 2021.

2. Policy Statement

Basildon Council recognises the fundamental role that access to quality early childhood education and care can play in supporting children to be school-ready, achieve long-term school attainment and positive lifelong outcomes. We will work with partners to influence the quality and quantity of provision in the borough to ensure all families have access to the best start in life.

3. Policy Context

As identified in the 'Fair Society, Healthy Lives' Marmot Review (2010)²:

'the foundations for virtually every aspect of human development – physical, intellectual and emotional – are laid in early childhood'.

This policy is intended as an enabler for action. Basildon Council recognises that access to Early Years education and learning is critical to the fundamental growth of children, helping them to transition from nursery to primary school, and then to long-term educational attainment. Furthermore, the council believes that good quality Early Years development for children in the borough can contribute to its long-term economic growth, providing an important foundation for quality skills and employment opportunities and improving community safety. We will use this policy as a catalyst, to initiate dialogue and action, bringing about positive change in the quality and quantity of early years and childcare provision available in the borough.

As of January 2021, there are 65 childcare providers within the borough.³ This includes 44 registered childminders, 1 family hub, 4 day nurseries, 4 holiday clubs, 8 pre-schools and 4 primary school nurseries.

¹ Believe in Basildon: Corporate Plan 2019 -2022

² <https://www.parliament.uk/documents/fair-society-healthy-lives-full-report.pdf>

³ Essex Family Information Service: Find a Childcare Provider

3.1 National context

The government published its statutory guidance on Early Education and Childcare in September 2017⁴ placing 'duty of care' on local authorities to ensure that the equivalent of 30 hours of free childcare, over 38 weeks of the year, was received for qualifying children in England. This means an additional 15 hours a week for working parents of three and four year olds (on top of the universal entitlement of 15 hours a week for all three and four year olds). Eligibility for the additional hours will be determined by HMRC. The national guidance needs to be considered alongside the Early Years Foundations Stage (EYFS) Statutory Framework, which is mandatory for all Early Years providers in England. The guidance highlights the need for local authorities to work in partnership with providers to ensure free places are of high quality, flexible and accessible to parents. Securing better outcomes also involves ensuring that Early Years and childcare establishments have good quality workforces who are supported consistently with sufficient development and training.

In addition, national guidance⁵ has been issued by the Department for Education to local planning authorities and other stakeholders involved in the delivery of schools, to ensure that developer contributions are secured, as required, to support housing growth. There is an opportunity to work with Essex County Council in determining how much of the contribution is required for Early Years provision, including workplace nurseries in new developments within the borough. Basildon Council Planning Service already engages with the county council on provision planning and this is published in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan, which forms part of the Local Plan. This process includes identifying areas where there is a shortfall in provision and assesses the suitability of proposed locations, including availability of sufficient outside space and safe access. We will continue to work proactively with Essex County Council to ensure planned growth in the borough, as set out in the Local Plan, is supported by additional Early Years and Childcare settings.

3.2 Local Context

The percentage of children in Basildon achieving a good level of development has generally improved since 2015 with 73% of children achieving this in 2018, an increase of 6% compared to 2015⁶. The latest (2019) Early Years Foundation Stage report shows 74.1%⁷ of children achieving Good Level of Development (GLD), the sixth best in Essex. However, 18.2% of children live in low-income households, the second highest in Essex, and higher than the rate for England (16.6%). There is also a reduction in GCSE attainment, with 62.2% of pupils achieving grade 9-4 in English and Maths (a good pass) in 2018 (slightly lower than the Essex average (63.3%)⁸. Social mobility continues to be impacted by the year-on-year reduction in participation in post-16 further education and skills since 2014/15⁹.

Figures from the LGA reveal that more than 69,000 early years providers nationally have temporarily closed during the Covid-19 pandemic, most of them due to financial pressures¹⁰. The Council has already taken steps to alleviate this through, for example, the Basildon School

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/718179/Early_education_and_childcare-statutory_guidance.pdf

⁵ Dept of Education Developer Contributions guidance update Nov 2019

⁶ Basildon District Profile JSNA 2019

⁷ EYFS report 2019

⁸ Basildon JSNA District profile 2019

⁹ Evidence Base District Profile 2019

¹⁰ Coronavirus: future of early years providers uncertain without funding commitment – LGA briefing May 2020

Holidays Programme. As the borough enters the Covid-19 recovery stage, it will be essential to capture emerging challenges and impact on the educational, social and emotional development of children in Basildon. Basildon Council will develop a greater understanding of the impact on and needs of households where there is a prevalence of child poverty, in order to flag where appropriate Early Years and childcare interventions are required.

The latest (2019) Early Years Foundation Report also shows that Basildon has the highest number of disadvantaged pupils in Essex with 369 – or 15.4% of Basildon pupils compared to the Essex average of 11%¹¹. There are factors that impact on children's school readiness such as financial stability, anti-social behaviour and being known to social care¹². By capturing these local impacts, we can develop local strategy to better advocate for appropriate, holistic support for children and parents. Factors such as poor housing and health inequalities and their effect on early child development can be better assessed at local level. Exploring early intervention strategies that can support cognitive development, which includes gaining vital speech and language skills and the ability to read and write, will help to bridge inequality gaps in school readiness and Good Learning Development (GLD) for children. Research has shown that children's cognitive development is strongly linked with success in school and entry into the workforce. We will work with partners on intervention strategies to deliver this.¹³

Corporate Theme: A place where everyone prospers

*'Ensuring that every child attends a good school and is successful in learning'*¹⁴ is a key outcome of the council's Corporate Plan. This commitment is also a response to the Breakthrough Basildon Borough Commission key recommendation to create a strong and 'attractive narrative' for Basildon as 'a place founded on the promise of a good home, good job and opportunity for [your] children'.

This policy will enable the council to encourage and facilitate opportunities to enhance Early Years and childcare provision across the borough, in particular where such provision is affiliated to an infant or primary school, thereby allowing a smooth transition into the early years of school life.

Basildon council has an important part to play in ensuring the conditions to facilitate high quality Early Years provision is adequately provided and maintained. It can do this by utilising its services and assets differently so that added benefit is created, for example in the provision of housing developments, community assets and leisure facilities.

At an internal stakeholder workshop held in May 2019, key priorities identified for a local policy included working strategically toward increased access to quality Early Years' services and reducing inequalities, for example in housing and health, seen by participants as barriers to child development in the borough. A lack of transport was identified as a key barrier to accessing early years services/facilities, particularly for the Traveller community in Basildon. Influencing the direction of travel on Early Years and childcare development in the borough, working in related areas such as health and wellbeing, and developing initiatives to tackle inequalities were all seen as important to explore at our local level.

Basildon Council will seek to maintain a local evidence base that promotes greater understanding of the Early Years sector in the borough and the needs of borough children. It will ensure that

¹¹ Early Years Foundation Stage Report 2019.

¹² Basildon Insight Pack 2019

¹³ 'Realising the Potential of Early Intervention' – Early Intervention Foundation report 2018.

¹⁴ Believe in Basildon Corporate Plan 2019 - 2022

opportunities to work in partnership and collaborate with the County Council and other key partners is maximised to address local issues and deliver positive outcomes for children.

4. Outcomes and Priorities

This policy seeks to achieve the following Outcomes and Priorities:

Outcomes

- The quantity of Early Years and Childcare places available in Basildon borough is sufficient to meet the demand for places.
- The quality of Early Years and Childcare provision in Basildon borough allows all children to be successful in learning.
- Improved access to early help and support for families.
- Early Years and Childcare provision in Basildon borough meets the changing needs of children and their families.

Priorities

- Ensure opportunities to work in partnership and collaborate with Essex County Council and key partners are maximised to address local issues and deliver positive outcomes for children.
- Continue to work with Essex County Council to ensure planned growth in the borough, as set out in the Local Plan, is supported by additional Early Years and Childcare settings.
- Maintain a local evidence base that promotes greater understanding of the Early Years sector in the borough and the needs of our children.
- Work with partners on intervention strategies that seek to support good cognitive development to improve school readiness and Good Learning Development (GLD).
- Develop a greater understanding of the impact on and needs of households where there is a prevalence of child poverty, which may have increased due to the Covid-19 pandemic, in order to flag where appropriate Early Years and childcare interventions are required.

Council Promises

Corporate promises	Levels of Impact			
	High	Medium	Low	None
1. A place for everyone to call home		•		
2. A place where everyone prospers	•			
3. A place to be proud of	•			

5. Links to other Corporate Policies, Strategies or Partner Documents.

Listed overleaf are a number of existing Council policies and strategies that have specific links to this policy:

- Corporate Plan 2019-22 – Believe in Basildon

- Health and Wellbeing Policy
- Economic Development Strategy
- Employment and Skills Strategy
- Safer Basildon Partnership Strategy
- Consultation and Engagement Policy
- Safeguarding Policy
- Play Strategy

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