

Early Years Collaborations A Guide for Potential Leaders

Background

Kent's refreshed Early Years and Childcare Strategy was introduced in 2014 against a backdrop of a revised statutory role for local authorities in quality improvement as well as a range of Kent County Council priorities and plans affecting children, families and young people. The Early Years and Childcare Strategy included, as part of a system-wide approach to continuous improvement, the following priority:

- *the introduction of and support for early years and childcare provider collaborations, designed to build capacity and drive further improvement.*

In this context and with this aim in mind, early years collaborations began to be developed in 2014.

Why Collaborations?

In Kent we have the same aspirations and expectations for every child and young person to make good progress in their development and learning from birth to achieve well and to have the best opportunities in life as they become young adults. Every child and young person has, the right to go to a good or outstanding early years and childcare setting and school and to have access to the best support for their learning and achievement. They should also benefit from all providers working in partnership with each other to share best practice as they continue to improve together. No child should be disadvantaged by not being able to attend a good quality early years and childcare setting or school.

In fulfilling this vision, we aspire to achieve the following:

- to mitigate the effects of poverty, inequality and disadvantage through the provision of high-quality early education and childcare, more effective support for parents and narrowing of the early development achievement gaps for all disadvantaged children
- to ensure increasing numbers of children are '**ready for the next stage**' at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and make a successful transition to school
- to embed an integrated, multi-agency approach to early years and childcare provision and services

- to ensure better continuity of provision and multi-agency services from pre-birth, throughout the EYFS and into and beyond Key Stage One
- to embed a system-wide approach to continuous improvement in early education and childcare provision that includes more collaborative networks of providers and the use of a comprehensive range of chargeable and centrally funded services.

Defining a Collaboration

A possible definition for an early year's collaboration is:

a group of early years providers, working together in proactive, respectful and equal partnership for the greater good of, and best outcomes for, all the children and families they collectively serve.

Forming Collaborations

The majority of existing collaborations are formed by locality. Providers are not constrained by district boundaries and collaborations are free to set their own limits on how many providers are involved but between six and eight is considered a manageable number.

Where there are several leaders within a close geographical area or where collaborations become too large to be effective The Education People's Early Years & Childcare Service will arrange to meet face to face with the leaders to discuss how the split might take place and how the local collaborations may be formed. There is absolutely no reason why a collaboration cannot have more than one leader.

Agreeing Ways of Working

To agree exactly how the collaboration will work and to ensure staff behave in a respectful way towards others it is important to set out 'terms of reference' in advance. The length and content of this document is entirely down to the individual collaboration to decide. To assist with discussions, the Early Years & Childcare Service has produced a *Collaborative Ways of Working Proforma* which can be adapted to suit the needs of individual collaborations. This includes agreeing what happens when a provider leaves the collaboration and/or when someone acts outside of the agreed 'code of conduct'. A copy of the Proforma is included as Appendix 1.

If new providers set up in area of an existing collaboration it is up to the collaboration to decide whether or not to allow the new provider to join. If other local providers who haven't previously engaged also want to join, then the group

must decide at what point the collaboration divides into two or more further collaborations and who will lead the new ones.

Being part of a collaboration should not be an onerous task and everyone should feel they have an equal share of the responsibility for its success.

Since the purpose of collaborations is to support continuous improvement in the sector, there is an expectation that collaborations will not confine their membership to only those settings with a Good or Outstanding judgement.

Supporting the Delivery of 30 Hours of Free Childcare

Collaborations may be able to support the delivery of 30 Hours of Free Childcare to parents. For example, if the member settings are in close proximity they may wish to work together more formally to provide delivery partnerships through the use of the [Family and Childcare Trust's Mixed Model Partnership Toolkit](#). Any such partnership should also be reflected in the Collaboration's Terms of Reference document. Alternatively, they may wish for example to set up a system whereby they are able to signpost parents to settings within the collaboration who have vacancies.

Leading a Collaboration

Being a collaboration leader does not mean being 'in charge' or taking responsibility for all the work of the collaboration. The position of collaboration leader is intended to be one of influence and inspiration. Excellent knowledge of good practice in early years and strong leadership skills are required to ensure that the whole collaboration can display the following characteristics of an effective collaboration which have been agreed by existing early years collaboration leaders:

- the collaboration leader or leaders have strong leadership skills and use a cooperative and empowering approach to leading
- all members of the collaboration are engaged in its life and work
- the collaboration shares a firm understanding of the characteristics of a good quality early years setting
- collaboration members have developed good relationships such that they feel able to provide feedback and challenge to each other or share their own challenges such as the receipt of an Ofsted judgement of Requires Improvement or Inadequate
- collaboration members share best practice such as via meetings and peer visits

- the collaboration co-operates to organise training and other forms of professional development for its members
- where funding has been held by the collaboration, all members have been involved in deciding how this has been spent
- the collaboration has or is undertaking meaningful evaluation of its activity which relates to teaching and learning within member settings
- the collaboration bases its development on the use of this and other data to identify the future direction of travel
- the collaboration is open to inviting other professionals to their meetings to facilitate partnership working
- all members participate in driving the collaboration forwards taking responsibility for tasks and actions
- members of staff within each member setting are aware of the collaboration membership and its aims
- the collaboration is effectively organised with procedures and paperwork in place such as terms of reference and development plans.

Support is offered to collaboration leaders through:

- the facilitation of initial meetings to set up a new collaboration
- the offer of The Education People staff attendance at collaboration meetings by invitation to assist in the development of a collaboration plan or to address issues
- the provision of three Leaders' Days throughout the year – the content of these sessions will enable the development of leadership skills and support the development of the collaborations, for example, through the analysis of data or support in working in partnership with others
- the signposting of other settings to the collaboration.

There is an expectation that all collaboration leaders, whether an individual or joint leader, have an Ofsted judgement of Good or better for their own setting. There is also an expectation that any leader whose setting receives a judgement of less than good steps down from the position of collaboration leader.

Acknowledging that this may be a difficult time for the setting leader, the process for supporting leaders in the position of having received an Ofsted Inadequate or Requires Improvement judgement is as follows:

- the Early Years & Childcare Service will identify a member of staff who will sensitively approach the leader and agree on how the issues regarding the collaboration leadership will be addressed
- initial discussions will identify with the collaboration leader how they would prefer to manage their resignation with the collaboration members, offering support to do so. If the leader is a lone collaboration leader, it may be possible to identify potential leaders during this discussion. The

Partnership & Integration Team can offer support to the leader through visiting the leader's setting or attending a collaboration meeting

- once the initial discussion with the leader has taken place, the Partnership and Integration Team will follow up in writing regarding the expectation to resign from the position and offering support to do so if required
- once the Ofsted judgement becomes public and in discussion with the leaving collaboration leader, the Partnership & Integration Team will formally contact potential new leaders.

Where a collaboration leader chooses not to resign from the position or where the collaboration members are not in agreement with the decision, The Education People is not able to continue to support the collaboration through the Leaders' Events and signposting of other settings to the collaboration.

Following a positive re-inspection for the exiting leader's setting, the Early Years & Childcare Service will support discussions for the reinstatement of the leader to individual or joint leader status.

System Leadership Supplement

In 2017 early years providers were consulted on the Early Education funding formula proposed by KCC. During the consultation a large proportion of providers expressed an interest in receiving a supplement for system leadership based on collaborations.

The National College for School Leadership defines system leaders as "leaders who work within and beyond their individual organisations; sharing and harnessing the best resources that the system can offer to bring about improvement in their own and other organisations; and influencing thinking, policy and practice so as to have a positive impact on the lives and life chances of all children and young people."

Following consultation with Collaboration Leaders in June 2017 the criteria and processes surrounding the Supplement were introduced. This information is available in a document called Proposals for the Payment of Early Years Education Entitlement System Leadership Supplement. This document detailed the criteria that must be met for collaborations and their member settings to receive the Supplement. Criteria has been reviewed and updated annually in consultation with Collaboration Leaders. The current System Leadership Supplement Criteria is available by emailing eycollaborations@theeducationpeople.org

Appendix 1

Early Years and Childcare Collaboration Ways of Working

1.1 Nature of Collaboration

1.2 Purpose

In this section include details of when the collaboration was set up and include a few bullet points on what the aims of the group are, for example:

- *to identify, discuss and address issues of common concern*
- *to facilitate access to support and resources that are available from KCC and other training providers*
- *to exchange ideas, strengthen skills and knowledge and share examples of good practice*
- *to facilitate a shared understanding of the children and families within the local community – promote partnership working to narrow achievement gaps, improve standards and meet the needs of children and families.*

1.3 Leadership

- 1.4 Consider the various options for leading the collaboration, for example, is it to be joint or rotated?

Where leadership is to be undertaken by one person, consider how it will be managed should this leader have need to resign the position.

1.5

1.6 Membership

Membership of the Group is open to those who XXXXX

Include details of who can and cannot be a member of the group and the reasons for this.

Include details of who will Chair the meetings and what the election process for this will be.

Include details of who will support the administration of the group and how this will be decided.

1.7

1.8 Meeting Management

The Group will determine the frequency, dates and venues for its meetings, but it would be good to consider at least once a quarter.

The Group will determine how action points/minutes will be distributed to group members and how the Group will communicate between meetings.

This could include:

- *at least three meetings will be held each year organised and chaired by XXX*
- *items for the agenda will be generated by members of the group*

- *meeting papers will be circulated by email at least one week in advance of the meetings*
- *meetings may include small group discussions to share experiences and learning*
- *non-members may be invited to join the group on a one-off basis to aid discussion of a particular topic*
- *administration of the group will be provided by XXXX*

1.9 Behaviours

The collaboration must decide what is expected of each member of the group, for example:

- *every provider will have their voice heard and their views will be respected by the whole group*
- *members must attend at least 80%? of meetings to remain in the group.*

Other points to note are:

- *what happens when a member of the collaboration leaves?*
- *what happens when a new member wants to join?*
- *what is the optimum size of the collaboration before it needs to split into smaller groups?*
- *who will lead the newly formed collaboration?*
- *how the collaboration will manage safeguarding issues. The collaboration should discuss and agree how any disclosure of safeguarding issues at a collaboration meeting or via other forms of collaboration communication will be managed. The Collaboration Leader may, for example, be the person responsible for reporting any safeguarding concerns to the Designated Safeguarding Lead within the Local Authority.*

1.10

1.11 Review

For example, The Group will review the relevance and value of its work on an annual basis.

Decide how often you will review:

- *the work of the collaboration*
- *the Terms of Reference/Ways of Working*
- *the Membership*
- *election of Chair/Administrator.*

1.12 Sharing of Information and Resources Including Confidential Materials

In this section include how you will share information and resources; whose responsibility it is to ensure items are confidential and remain within the Group; what happens to documents that are shared including any copyright; whether there will be a web-based forum with password protection.

1.13

1.14 Decision Making

In this section include how decisions will be made ensuring details such as voting, majority rule, etc are clearly outlined.

1.15

1.16 System Leadership Supplement/Budget Issues

If money is available for the Group to spend jointly include details of how this will be managed; how decisions of spend will be decided; what happens in the event of a disagreement, etc.

You should include a statement about the use of the System Leadership Supplement. A suggested statement is:

The collaboration could receive a System Leadership Supplement which will be based upon the number of staff employed to work with children in active member settings including childminders. The collaboration has agreed that the payments will be paid to (name of setting/childminder).

As the funding is to be used to further the work of the whole collaboration as identified in its (Development Plan), all members of the collaboration will be involved in the decisions on how the funds should be spent and the decision making will be made on a (add here how – for example, on a simple majority basis or according to the collaboration terms of reference).

Should a collaboration member leave the collaboration between Supplement payments, the collaboration has decided that (insert here what decision the collaboration makes about the transfer of funding).

Collaborations may also choose to include a statement on how any disagreements over the spending of the supplement will be dealt with.