

Title of report: Update on Solid Roots Programme

Meeting: Herefordshire Schools Forum

Meeting date: Friday 19 March 2021

Report by: Lindsay MacHardy, Public Health Specialist

Classification

Open

Decision type

This is not an executive decision

Wards affected

County wide

Purpose

To review delivery of projects under the Solid Roots Programme.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- a) **Schools Forum review the progress on delivery of projects under the Solid Roots Programme; and**
- b) **The Budget Working Group be asked to consider proposals for allocation of any surplus funding that may be available at the end of the current contracts and make appropriate recommendations.**

Alternative options

- 1. Schools forum may recommend actions to be considered to ensure performance against the programme objectives or to enhance delivery of the programme.

Key considerations

Background

2. When the national policy for two year old nursery places was launched, funding was provided to an anticipated take up level. Actual take up was less than this. This resulted in an underspend of £890k.
3. Officers worked with early years and school representatives to consider the most effective way of using the underspend to support improvement in early years outcomes and, following consultation, Schools Forum supported the use of the underspend to address three issues for 0-5 years olds:
 - a. Speech and language support;
 - b. Emerging concerns of maternal mental health;
 - c. Training for parents and professionals.
4. On 6 March 2018 the cabinet member young people and children's wellbeing approved the allocation of the underspend as follows:
 - i. an early years speech and language service for children aged 2 to 5 to be commissioned for a period of up to three years at a total cost of £590,000 with effect from April 1st 2018
 - ii. a one-off fund of £200,000 to be established to support early years training and conferences for parents and practitioners;
 - iii. the Solihull approach to be delivered across multi-disciplinary teams and online Solihull training for parents be offered at a cost of £70k and birth resolution trauma training for professionals be delivered at a cost of £30k.
5. The full report and decision notice are available at: [Decision - Allocation of 2 year Nursery Education Fund spend - Herefordshire Council](#). The three projects were collectively identified as the Solid Roots Programme.
6. Whilst the original terms of delivery and expenditure were expected to cover the period from 1st April 2018 to 31st March 2021, the coronavirus pandemic has had a significant, negative impact on delivery of each element of the programme: an [extension of 6 months](#) to the contractual element has been made in order to meet the agreed specification. This is in line with other contracts across the council, where face-face delivery of services has been impacted by COVID-19. In view of this, final reporting on the programme will also be delayed by 6 months. This paper, therefore, highlights progress to date and any planned developments/consolidation. Appendix 1 sets out the targets and milestones that were proposed for the Solid Roots Programme.

Solid Roots Progress Update

Speech and Language Development Contract

7. The primary outcomes that the service aims to achieve are to:
 - enable the Early Years workforce to effectively support parents to understand how to develop their child's communication skills;
 - develop and strengthen the skills and capabilities across Herefordshire's Early Years offer and workforce so that the speech, language and communication needs of children aged under five years are better identified and supported;
 - ensure that those skills capabilities are embedded and sustained across the Early Years offer and workforce beyond the lifetime of the contract.
8. The contract was awarded to Elklan Limited to deliver an Early Years Workforce Development Speech and Language Support service at a total cost of £462,272 to run from 1st January 2019 to 31 March 2021. Contract management fees and a contingency fund were identified as additional areas of spend.
9. Whilst progress had been made in line with expectations up to March 2020, the current coronavirus pandemic has had a significant impact on Early Years settings, with a large proportion being subject to temporary closure, resulting in some staff becoming furloughed during periods of this financial year. Whilst this was a temporary situation and has improved over time, delivery of workforce training through the Elklan contract has had to be considered carefully in light of existing and potential future restrictions.
10. In addition, whilst some elements of the service can be delivered online, a large part of the planned training requires face-to-face observation with parent groups and is reliant on staff availability.
11. Due to these factors, the Early Years and Commissioning teams, together with the provider, have worked to re-scope delivery to ensure that the overarching outcomes of the service can still be achieved despite the ongoing challenges for early years settings.
12. Some aspects have been delayed, giving rise to an extension of the contract up to September 2021 (at no additional cost). Other aspects of delivery have been re-designed or re-focussed towards training approaches that can be effectively delivered without reliance on face-to-face delivery. Whilst establishment of new plans has been challenging, there is now a clear plan in place for the final 6 months of the contract.
13. The Early Years Team has also worked to ensure that the type and content of the training delivered by Elklan enhances the local approach to supporting families and supports sustainability beyond the lifetime of the contract - small group interventions no longer make up an element of contract delivery. Investment has shifted towards supporting a greater number and range of settings accessing 'Lead Communication Practitioner' training (Levels 2 and 3); ensuring commitment to reaching

‘Communication Friendly Settings’ (CFS); and implementing a new form of training targeted towards childminders covering ‘Communication Friendly Home Learning Environments’ (CHFLe) – see table below.

Elklan contract	Original target	Revised target	Completed/ doing training/ enrolled
<i>No of Learners achieving Level 2/Level 3</i>	105	205	169
<i>Settings achieving CFS</i>	85	76	58
<i>Childminders achieving CFHLe</i>	0	18	0

NB: above revisions to be formally adopted through the Solid Roots Project Board

14. A further aspect of delivery is the development and launch of both parents’ and professionals’ Speech and Language Toolkits. Supported by the Early Years Team and WISH, both toolkits are now live and can be accessed through the following link: <https://www.wisherefordshire.org/children-and-families/child-development/speech-and-language-toolkit/>
15. Usage will be monitored and feedback sought after 6 months to determine any further developments needed in relation to the toolkits (expected May 2021).
16. A specific challenge relating to the delivery of the training is being able to measure the wider impact on speech and language development locally. Whilst regular feedback is received from those undertaking the training, illustrating increased knowledge and confidence in supporting the development of speech and language skills, given the unprecedented challenges faced this year a more global measurement of impact has been difficult to achieve.
17. Upon inception of the project, measures relating to pupils reaching good levels of development and reaching early learning goals related to speech and language development were identified as overarching impact measurements. Given the level of disruption both to service delivery and recording of child progress over this year, further consideration is required alongside the Early Years team to consider the most appropriate wider measures of impact for the project. There will be a specific focus on actions necessary to support sustainability of learning in Herefordshire.

Early Years Training and Development (up to December 2020)

18. There are a number of distinct elements to this strand of work supporting professionals working in early years' settings:

Supporting children's early maths (number and shape, space and measure)

19. Training was completed in July 2020, with the last 2 sessions running virtually. 16 participants attended in 2 groups for 5 days each group across the academic year. There are gap tasks between sessions to embed practice and a final resource pack was produced by the participants in order to share widely across the settings; to embed the approach; and ensure continuation of outstanding practice across the county.
20. Another course is due to be run during 2021, expanding the number of participants to 12 per session.
21. Evaluations to date: Positive verbal feedback from participants, confidence levels have risen in teaching maths and there has been an increase in shared sustained thinking.

Home learning Environment (HLE)/engaging with parents

22. Bursary awards provided up to the beginning of 2020 but due to the pressures of Covid there have not been any more bursary applications.
23. Signalong training was completed in February 2020. Parents are signposted to the Speech and Language team who independently run the course.

Providing for children's learning outdoors

24. There are a further 25 Forest School applications for March 2021. The importance of providing and using outdoor space, in part because of Covid has seen an increase in settings wanting to offer Forest School. The benefits include helping children develop self-regulation, assess risk and develop an understanding of and respect for nature, the environment and the interdependence of humans, animals, plants and lifecycles. They learn to collaborate, take turns, develop their thinking and problem-solve and develop communication and language, as well as extending both their fine and gross motor physical skills. Feedback indicates that children show improved self-esteem and self-confidence. This training is essential.

Supporting children with English as an additional language (EAL)

25. EAL in the Early Years is a new course is to be delivered by the authority's EAL team during 2021
26. To boost the 2 year old NEF uptake, the Golden Ticket and accompanying letter have been translated into Romanian, Bulgarian, Portuguese, Polish and Arabic.
27. The next step is to have translations available on the council's parent information pages.

My First Library Card (MFLC)

Year	Total 'active' under 5's with library loans
March 2017- April 2018	180
March 2018 - April 2019	339
March 2019 - April 2020	834

28. Covid has impacted on the library services but there will be a relaunch of MFLC in time for the Easter holidays 2021. These may not be physical events but the aim is for libraries to open and welcome families (subject or restrictions) or to provide a click and collect system – see Appendix 2: My First Library Card relaunch.

Children's and practitioners' health and wellbeing;

29. It has been recognised by the Government that Covid has had an impact on children and staff wellbeing and to this end, discussions are ongoing with a Community Paediatrician to identify actions that we can undertake, potentially using the remaining funding for this strand of work, to reduce this impact and support wellbeing within early years settings in Herefordshire. Lack of opportunity for socialisation and developing key physical, cognitive and emotional milestones for children under 5 is a major concern.

Solihull

30. The Solihull Approach is a UK evidence-based training programme, developed with professionals and parents to support infant/parent mental health 0-5 years. Herefordshire has rolled out this approach in three stages:

- initial training for professionals working with families & children (0-5 years) to support improved emotional health, attachment and well-being;
- the establishment of a network of Solihull champions and Trainers to cascade beyond the project end;
- the purchase of a licence to cascade FREE online training for parents, carers, grandparents etc across the county for at least 3 years.

31. Features of the approach include:

- Workforce development to increase skills and consistency
- Early intervention and prevention in the early years

- Usual practice for everyone in a multiagency team to ensure a consistent approach
- Extended parenting programmes from conception through to adolescence
- Emphasis on including fathers
- Increasing the accessibility of parenting programmes through online courses
- Framework for working with emotional and behaviour difficulties
- Strong and growing evidence base
- In addition, the approach is to be seen as 'normal' and universal, rather than for parents with problems or children with behavioural issues.

32. The Solihull work took 6 months to set up, in order to get the IT, personalised free licence for Herefordshire and commitment from the Solihull national team to include the county in Wave 3 of their national pilot programme. Whilst time-consuming, this has been a major benefit in terms of accessing routine take-up and monitoring data – see Appendix 3: Solihull Summary Report for 2020.

33. To date, 200 staff from a range of disciplines and organisations have received initial training; 65 staff have been trained as trainers (to provide a pool of trainers for in-county sustainability); a minimum of 3 training courses are planned for the remainder of this calendar year. In addition, courses have been undertaken to work with parents with children with special educational needs or disabilities and discussions are underway to offer Solihull courses for parents whose children have had to be taken into care. Training has been delivered to staff from social care, early years' settings, schools, health visiting, school nursing, midwifery, psychiatric nursing and HR.

34. Covid disrupted the ability to offer training between April 2020 and January 2021, whilst the course was adapted to be suitable for online delivery. Since January, 2 courses have been delivered and future course can be delivered either face-to-face or online.

35. Below is a snapshot of the number of people who have accessed the direct parenting course modules since January 2019:



Community impact

36. The projects under the Solid Roots Programme were designed to support the Herefordshire Corporate Plan 2016-2020 key priority to keep children and young people safe and give them the best start in life.
37. The allocation of any surplus funding at the end of the current contracts will need to take account of priorities in the new County Plan 2020 – 2024 and the Children and Young People's Plan 2019-2024 and will be subject to a separate decision report.

Environmental Impact

38. The development of these projects has sought to minimise any adverse environmental impact and will actively seek opportunities to improve and enhance environmental performance, including provision through online/electronic means, where appropriate.

Equality duty

39. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to –

- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;

- b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

40. The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services. The projects within the programme were designed to support vulnerable children and parents in need of support. Providers were made aware of their contractual requirements in regards to equality legislation.

Resource implications

41. No additional resource requirements are sought. The table below provides an update on expenditure on the Solid Roots Programme. Figures will be confirmed and finalised on 31 March 2021.

	Elklan (£590k)	Early Years Training & Development (£200k)	Solihull (100k*)
2018/21	£489,743	£179,151	£75,135*
2021/22	-	£12,000	-
Remaining	£100,743	£8,849	£24,865 tbc

* Includes £30k allocated for midwifery training on Birth Trauma, completed 2018/19

42. It is anticipated that there will be a surplus remaining at the end of the extended contract period. It is proposed that options be brought to the Budget Working Group for consideration and to shape recommendations on how the local authority should allocate the remaining funds once the final figures are known.

Legal implications

43. Relevant considerations were set out in the original decision report. There are no legal implications arising from this update report. Any subsequent proposals for allocation of surplus funds at the end of the current contracts will be subject to a separate decision and appropriate guidance will be offered based on relevant regulations at that time.

Risk management

44. A risk register for the Solid Roots programme has been recorded and updated as appropriate. Risks are managed by the lead officers for each strand of work within the

Solid Roots programme and reported through a Sponsor Board, chaired by the Assistant Director for Education, Children and Families Directorate.

45. There are no specific risks associated with this update report.

Consultees

46. Consultation on the options for the projects was originally undertaken through the Early Years Policy and Strategy group (EYSG), part of the children and young people's partnership. The Schools Forum was also consulted.

47. No consultation is required on this update report. Any options for allocation of remaining funds will be subject to further discussion and appropriate consultation.

Appendices

Appendix 1: the Solid Roots Programme slide presentation

Appendix 2: My First Library Card relaunch

Appendix 3: Solihull 2020 Summary Report

Background papers

None.