



## **'Right from the Start': putting children first**

### **Dismantling barriers to childcare and support for families**

By Katie Crompton, Early Years and Childcare Strategic Lead

West Sussex's Children, Young People and Learning directorate launched 'Right from the Start: Early Years and Childcare Strategy 2024-2027' last year. One of the key priorities of the Strategy is:

*'All children and their families will have equal access to high quality provision and services which are local, where barriers to that access are removed, diversity is celebrated, and children are enabled to reach their full potential.'*



Through multiple initiatives, the Early Years and Childcare Team is helping to deliver on the Council's priority to help families and communities fulfil their potential by breaking down barriers, increasing childcare availability, and supporting high quality provision. The team works to ensure children and their families have the support they need to thrive.

High quality childcare has an immeasurably positive impact on children's development, and enables parents and carers to pursue careers, training, or caring responsibilities. Children who have experienced high quality pre-school education are better equipped to make good progress in their learning in school than those who have not. To help families struggling to find suitable childcare, the Family Information Service (FIS) provides an 'Extra Help to Find Childcare' service. The FIS Specialist Team works closely with parents and carers to find a provider that meets their child's individual needs. Parents and carers may [refer themselves](#) to the brokerage service, or professionals supporting families can [refer them](#).

The FIS and Local Offer directories support families to improve outcomes for children and young people, helping them to easily find support and activities. The [FIS Directory](#) offers information for families on:

- Childcare and education
- Family activities and support services
- Local Family Hubs
- Activities and support services for young people aged 11-25
- Services available from conception, throughout pregnancy, and up to the age of 2 (Start for Life)
- Food and baby banks, energy and debt support and warm spaces



The [Local Offer West Sussex](#) helps parents/carers and their children aged 0 to 25 years who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) find information and services. The directory features over 460 organisations, offering inclusive opportunities. These include accessible sports, bowling alleys, swimming pools, inclusive education and accessible transportation.

### **Increasing childcare capacity**

In Autumn 2024, West Sussex County Council launched funding initiatives intended to support the expansion of childcare across the county. These initiatives align with the UK government's transformative reforms to childcare, as outlined in the Spring Budget 2023, which sought to make childcare more accessible, affordable, and responsive to the needs of working families. These reforms include:

- The introduction of **30 hours of free childcare for children over the age of nine months**. This is being introduced in phases, with qualifying working parents of 2 year olds able to access up to 15 hours a week from April 2024, qualifying working parents of children aged 9 months up to 3 years old able to access up to 15 hours a week from September 2024, and qualifying working parents from 9 months to 3 years old able to access up to 30 hours a week from September 2025.
- Investing £289 million in start-up funding to **increase the supply of wraparound care in primary schools** – tackling the barriers to working caused by limited availability of wraparound care. This programme will enable providers (including schools) and local authorities to test flexible ways of providing childcare and gather evidence of what works.

Early Years and Childcare providers, including schools in West Sussex, are able to apply for [Childcare Expansion Capital Funding](#) and/or [Wraparound Childcare Programme Funding](#) which aims to increase the availability of early years and wraparound childcare in areas where demand is expected to exceed current provision. Wraparound childcare, which typically includes before and after school services, plays a critical role for working parents by extending support beyond conventional school hours. This may involve creating new childcare provision or expanding existing provision to accommodate more children. By addressing these needs, the funding helps parents and carers maintain their employment patterns or re-enter the workforce with greater ease.

Please visit the web pages linked above for further information on each funding initiative.

### **Promoting awareness and choice**

The FIS and Early Years Funding teams help breakdown financial barriers to childcare. They keep childcare providers and families informed about available [funding entitlements](#). They have also provided training to key partners and stakeholders who work directly with families, such as the council's customer service centre, Jobcentre Plus and Family Hubs. This ensures families receive accurate information and support. As a result, in summer 2024, over 4000 families benefitted from the 2 year old Early Years Funded Entitlement for Working Families in West Sussex.

### **Supporting high-quality provision**

They help with matters such as:

- Reviewing the quality of provision and impact for children
- Business support
- Addressing Ofsted actions
- Support to children with delay in their learning and development (including those with SEND)
- Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment requests
- Inclusion funding

## How can you support?

We know that for our strategy to make the biggest difference, we need to work in partnership with colleagues and families in West Sussex. We will share opportunities to get involved via upcoming communications and on our Facebook pages. Please take the time to familiarise yourself with the strategy, which you can find [here](#).

For more information on the work of the Early Years and Childcare team, or if you have any questions, please email [family.info.service@westsussex.gov.uk](mailto:family.info.service@westsussex.gov.uk).