

Case Study: Structuring Early Years Teams in Doncaster

This case study provides insight into how Doncaster Council structures its early years team. This is what they told us.

Where does the early years team sit?

Our early years team sits embedded within the **early intervention and prevention portfolio**. This is strategic, as it allows us to take a preventative approach to child development and family support. We have developed strong partnerships with the **education and skills** teams, allowing the team to work across multiple departments including funding teams, place planning officers, and the Family Information Service.

These connections aren't just administrative - they represent active working relationships that enable us to deliver more comprehensive and effective services. The structure allows for easy communication between different departments, ensuring early years provision remains a priority across all relevant service areas. Regular joint meetings with these teams means that decision-making is informed by multiple perspectives.

What do the structure and roles of the team look like?

Our key roles include:

- At the top level, we have our **Head of Service and Locality Service Manager** providing strategic direction and oversight. Under them, we have four **Early Years Inclusion Officers**, each bringing distinct strengths and specialisms to our work. They work closely with our SEND support team, which consists of 4.6 FTE **Area SEN Coordinators** and five **Area SENCOs** who work within our specialist provision.
- We have 3.6 FTE **Portage home visitors** who provide home-visiting educational service for children 0-4 years with Special Educational Needs and or Disabilities (SEND) and their families. Doncaster's Portage service is 5 star gold service awarded from the National Portage Association (NPA).
- Our **Sufficiency and Wraparound Manager** oversees capacity planning and extended hours provision, working with our **Place Planning Officer** who focuses on long-term provision mapping.
- Our **Training Officer** ensures our early years providers remain current and skilled.
- Our **Business Support Officer** supports our providers in keeping operations running sustainably.
- Our **Sufficiency Officer** focuses specifically on entitlements and wraparound, ensuring we meet statutory obligations while supporting providers to offer childcare solutions for children of all ages.

As shown from our structure, Doncaster's early years team is designed to combine strategic oversight with operational efficiency.

The structure at a glance:

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| <p>Leadership:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head of Service: overarching strategic direction. • Locality Service Manager: day-to-day operations, coordination with other departments. | <p>Specialist officers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four Early Years Inclusion Officers: targeted expertise, curriculum guidance, quality improvement, SEND. • 4.6 FTE Area SENCOs: working with specialist provisions, tailored support for children with additional needs. • 3.6 FTE Portage Home Visitors: home-based support for families with children with SEND. |
| <p>Operations and planning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sufficiency and Wraparound Manager: capacity planning, ensuring provision meets demand. • Place Planning Officer: long-term strategic planning. • Training Officer: workforce development. | <p>Administrative and funding support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sufficiency Officer: overseeing funding entitlements and wraparound. • Business Support Officer: administrative and operational functions. |

What makes this approach a success?

For us it is all about the way we work together, relationships and understanding you cannot do it all on your own. Everybody needs to recognise the part they play and put resource into that, not necessarily finances but time and acknowledging the importance of their role.

In Doncaster, early years has always been high on the agenda. We have strategic buy-in right from our senior leadership about the importance of early years and what that means to Doncaster as a whole. It's about making sure that everybody understands the importance of early years and is able to reflect on their roles and the part they can play in that journey.

In sum, the team's collaborative culture encourages feedback and continuous improvement, ensuring that the services offered remain dynamic and fit for purpose.