

Case Study: Structuring Early Years Teams in Hillingdon

This case study provides insights into how the London Borough of Hillingdon structures its early years team. This is what they told us.

Where does the early years team sit?

The early years team does not sit in one directorate or department, but is spread across multiple areas of the council.

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

Early years is integrated within Hillingdon council's public health and education teams. This includes:

- **Public health and adult social care:** Certain early years services, including family hubs, portage service, children's centres, and maintained nurseries, fall under the adult social care and public health directorate. The Portage team offers home visits for children with complex needs, helping families prepare for transitioning into formal early education settings. This helps to ensure that early years services are focused on the school readiness agenda, an important strategic aim for the borough.
- **Early Years Quality Team** has a **team lead and three advisors** and sits within the school improvement service. The team supports the quality of early education in schools, PVI providers, and childminders, through training and action plans. They work with providers from pre-registration through to post-inspection improvement and support new providers by helping them design their indoor and outdoor spaces thoughtfully.
- **Early Years Inclusion Team** has a **team lead and four advisors** and sit under the SEND and inclusion team. They provide targeted support for pre-school children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The team manages SEND funding and works closely with settings to provide training for Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs).
- Hillingdon has nine staff members in the **Family Information Service**. However, not all of them are full time.

What makes this approach a success?

With our teams spread across multiple departments, coordination can sometimes be difficult, but we've ensured its success through:

- Holding **regular half-termly cross-departmental meetings** where all services come together to ensure everyone is working towards common goals. These meetings have been particularly effective in supporting settings that are encountering challenges, such as those with poor Ofsted inspections or a rise in the number of children with SEND. For example, if a nursery's Ofsted rating drops, our quality and inclusion teams collaborate to deliver both targeted training for staff and interventions for children. This multidisciplinary

approach ensures that our early years services remain consistent and effective across the borough.

- Our governance structure, which includes the **Director for Children's Services, Children and Family Select Committee**, the **Children and Young People's Transformation Board**, and the **Cabinet Member for Children and Families**. Regular reporting to these bodies ensures accountability and alignment with strategic priorities.
- Having an **early years and childcare strategic group**. The makeup of this strategic group reflects a diverse range of contributors, including representatives from local authority departments such as adult social care, public health, and education improvement. It also incorporates members from the quality and inclusion teams and family information services ensuring alignment across different areas of service provision. Additionally, the group includes external stakeholders, such as representatives from private, voluntary, and independent (PVI) settings, childminders, and schools, to ensure broad sector input. The strategic group has been a space for open discussion and feedback during the rollout of wraparound care and EY entitlements expansion.

In sum, this decentralised structure encourages collaboration across departments, ensuring that our early years services remain flexible and responsive to local needs.