**Cumbria County Council**

**Early Years (Speech, Language and Communication)**

**Peer Challenge** 3rd – 6th December 2019

**Introduction**

At the end of 2019 Cumbria welcomed a team of eight senior colleagues who have significant experience of leading and managing Early Years services across the country, to conduct a Local Government Association Peer Challenge.

The Peer Team were asked to focus on Strategy and Leadership, Partnerships, Services and Interventions, Community Ownership and Information, Data and Outcomes. Over a four-day period, they met with families, visited early years settings, observed meetings and interviewed individuals and focus groups representing multi-agency partnerships. Thank you to everyone across the county who contributed and shared your experiences within Cumbria as part of this review.

Due to the impact of COVID-19, it has taken longer than anticipated to secure the necessary strategic and political meetings and agreement to release the report. We are very pleased to say that there is now significant will to take forward the recommendations of the review, and a collective commitment to report on the effectiveness of early years services through the Early Years Strategy at the Children’s Trust Board.

**Recommendations**

The Peer Team fed back that *“Cumbria has good partnership working at operational levels which aim to meet the needs of children in the early years. Staff are passionate about their work and aim to deliver services to provide the best start for the youngest children in Cumbria.”*

The key recommendations set out within the report are:

* Review the role of the Children’s Trust Board to take strategic oversight and responsibility for outcomes for young children in their first 1001 days utilising the Think Family model and principles
* Develop an action plan that will deliver strategic vision and goals through local implementation plans
* Ensure that health commissioners and providers have the capacity and availability to understand the effectiveness, impact and resource requirements for equity of provision in their area of responsibility
* Consider developing the Council’s Area Planning arrangements to engage and develop community ownership of communication, speech and language and its role as an indicator for longer term outcomes
* Develop system wide approaches to understanding of safeguarding issues in order to develop an understanding of the impact for the youngest and most vulnerable children
* Develop the analysis and presentation of data to provide a holistic view to identify risks and inform local gaps and issues
* Optimise the local childhood expertise to add value to the Social Work Academy and social work induction
* Consider how elected members are informed about the significance of early communication, speech and language and how these messages are promoted to them
* Recognise the uniqueness and features of Cumbria to create rich and strength-based stories that will stimulate positive communication and language
* Extend the successful examples of co-production to develop the strategy and successfully deliver implementation plans
* Seek the views of all partners regarding the Early Help assessment process
* Urgently understand the effectiveness and impact of maternity services, health visiting and school nursing in the early identification of need and the effective use of interventions and services to ensure children are healthy and safe
* Develop the use of early years data and childcare sufficiency assessment to influence strategic plans and ensure that there is stability in the market.

**Next steps**

Actions required in order to maximise and take forward learning from the Peer Challenge:

* Develop and embed a Peer Challenge action plan within the multi-agency Early Years Strategic plan, including building in COVID-19 recovery commitments
* Provide further briefings for Directorate Management Team/Corporate Management Team and Cabinet members as required
* Regularly report on progress to the Children’s Trust Board with a clear focus on outcomes for children