

Simon Dennison

Background

Simon Dennison is currently a Team Manager Children & Family Centres Southampton City. He is developing and leading Sure Start Children's Centres in the city. He previously managed a social services city Family Centre.

Before working for Southampton City Council, Simon worked with Hampshire County Council as a Children's then Child Protection Social Worker.

Simon has managed ten Children's Centres in the city and led Southampton's successful Child Poverty Pilot and the Two Year Old Childcare Pilot. Ofsted inspections of the city's Children's Centres to date include five 'Outstanding' and two 'Good' judgements.

He studied at both Aston University in Birmingham and Southampton University achieving a BSc and CQSW. In 2011 Simon achieved a NPQICL with the National College for School Leadership.

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Speech Notes

1. Children's Centres

- Public sector intervention in family life – 'Breaking the Cycle of Deprivation'.
- Midwifery (case-loading) and health visiting re-configured around Sure Start neighbourhoods.
- Community Development model identified local need & resources and stimulated parental involvement.
- Piggy-backing under-used Private, Voluntary & Independent childcare sector rather than direct provision.
- Focus on adult learning and employability – Child Poverty Pilot with Dept for Work & Pensions.
- Sure Start Children's Centres leading, coordinating and commissioning Early Years services at local level.

2. The importance of early years

- Modern Neuroscience clearly linking secure attachment (with primary carers) to healthy infant brain development leading to successful learning and social outcomes in older children. Secure attachment is dependent on parenting capacity & bonding with the baby including environment and support ('Family Functioning' – **National Evaluation of Sure Start**)
- National & local evidence of impact of childcare on learning outcomes – particularly the most disadvantaged children (**Effective Provision of Pre-School Education**).
- Southampton evidence that the more involvement with children's centres has led to significantly better the **Foundation Stage Profile** outcomes for children in areas highest deprivation (bottom 10% & 30%).
- FSP outcomes have improved in Southampton closing the gap with national from 10% in 2006 to just 1% 2013). Although, similar to countrywide, outcomes in Southampton have been mixed - Sure Start Central (Black & Minority Ethnic) where FSP outcomes have tripled and continued into Key Stage 1 where a 15% gap has been closed. 'Children in Need' & 'Children on a Child Protection Plan' rates pegged in spite of doubling population.

3. Early Learning for Two-Year Olds

- Southampton was part of the national pilot for two year old funding.
- Broadly, Southampton has been able to match new 2YO eligibility to capacity in 2013/14 although locally there are many challenges – settings versus childminders, registered places not matching spaces, settings selective, children on waiting lists for popular providers, Ofsted quality standards versus LA quality requirements (NVQ Level 3 etc), publicity and parents' concern that children are too young, 2014 entitlement.
- Working with Children's Centres, so that the CC speak to the families direct has led to a higher take up of places (120 applications) as CC staff were able to make contact explain what the offer was, to help the parent to find a provider and to discuss the advantages of using different types of childcare.
- Direct and commissioned provision of childcare (half-time) in Children's Centres from 2013.
- Funding is challenging – the 1:4 ratio for 2YO is not reflected in the funding compared to 3 & 4 yr olds where the ratio 1:8. Funding to

support children with additional needs/challenging behaviour is an issue. Funding is available only for those children who would be eligible for an Education, Health and Care Plan, which is around 2% of the population. Providers are struggling to support the other children with additional needs.

- As well as the challenges providers report that it makes them 'reflect on their practice'. The 2 year olds learn from the older children and start socialising at an earlier age and are developing their communication skills. The older children like to 'look out' for the younger ones. Good attendance at age 2, 3 and 4 is shown to lead to good school attendance.

4. Other early years programmes in Southampton

Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), 0-4 Early Help Team & Children's Centres

- Reduced LA funding and the removal of the 'ring-fence' on funding has led to squeezing of Children's Centres while DfE & OFSTED guidance have narrowed the remit and provided a focus on 'target groups', evidence-based interventions and case-tracking.
- Need to improve outcomes for Looked After Children.
- Lack clear accountability and poor join-up between Social Care and other public and third sector service providers leading to 'revolving door' of children in need.
- The new Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) is designed to include an 'Early Years Navigator' alongside Health, Police, Housing, Social Care & Vol. sector. The Navigator will work with Children's Centres as well as 400+ providers in the city sharing information, risk assessing and feeding back on plans for vulnerable children.
- The new 'Early Help Team' (0-4) will also have a multi-agency staff compliment and will work with 300 children (including pre-birth). Plans will include input from the Children's Centres and 'step-down' of cases will depend on a more robust case management and 'lead professional' process in the Children's Centres.

5. Good practice

- Case-loading midwifery – ‘Rolls Royce Service’.
- One Stop Shop – co-location of services – Midwives, Health Visitors, Jobcentre Plus Advisors, Speech & Language Therapists, Portage, Community Development Workers, Training Providers, Childcare etc.
- Cross-checking client/patient record systems