

**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE – 20 JANUARY 2026**

**QUESTIONS ASKED BY AN ELECTED MEMBER UNDER  
STANDING ORDER 7**

**Question asked by Mrs Naomi Bottomley CC:**

“I wish to ask a question with regards to the consultation ‘Plans to provide more SEND nursery places in local communities’.

The consultation proposals assume that mainstream Early Years settings can absorb specialist SEN provision, despite significant funding constraints, specialist workforce shortages, and an existing loss of childcare and specialist capacity. The consultation materials also appear to give limited visibility of these operational realities and risks.

In this context, how will the consultation process ensure that the feedback gathered is genuinely informed, balanced and valid?”

**Reply by the Chairman:**

The Early Years service provided by the County Council has a strong track record of working closely with the sector to promote careers in childcare, encouraging and supporting new staff to join the sector. The Service also ensures that new staff are highly skilled and trained, working closely with the Stronger Practice Hub funded by DfE to support professional development for staff working with young children across the County.

As part of the proposals, Early Years settings would be supported with a new, higher band of funding which would enable children to receive a higher ratio of adult to child support, allowing providers to pay staff at an increased rate which would support them to recruit and retain staff. Additional staff within the Early Years team would also provide additional training and support to ensure mainstream settings can meet the needs of those Early Years children with more complex additional needs and work with families in their homes.

The consultation process is open for all interested stakeholders to submit their views on the proposals and all responses submitted will be considered in a report to the Cabinet on 24th March 2026. Officers will ensure that the responses submitted through the consultation are reported in a fair and balanced way which supports members to make an informed and evidence based decision on the proposals.

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