



**Strategic Plan and Corporate
Balanced Scorecard 2009-2012**

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Chairperson's Foreword

Strategic Plan and Corporate Balanced Scorecard 2009-2012 sets out an ambitious and challenging path for Early Years – the organisation for young children over the next three years. The Early Years Board, staff and members have been engaged in an extensive process to redefine and shape the corporate objectives of the organisation. This work has been undertaken so our efforts are fully focused on the achievement of the four outcomes we hope to deliver:

Young children are:

- **Strong, competent and visible in their communities**
- **Physically and emotionally healthy**
- **Eager and able to learn**
- **Respectful of difference**

Over the past few years we have grown as an organisation in terms of numbers and range of membership, numbers of staff and in the scope of our operations. We have embarked on a groundbreaking work plan which seeks a strong and robust evidence base for the interventions we provide in the lives of young children.

This excellent work builds upon the significant body of evidence we have already amassed which underpins our services in Early Years Specialist support and mentoring, Sure Start and Toybox projects and our Respecting Difference programme. We have also built excellent relationships with a range of funder organisations which share our vision for enhancing outcomes for young children. We will continue to work closely with our partners to ensure we realise our mutual vision for children.

This Plan builds on a strong value base and a culture of effective and efficient service provision. Early Years has a proud tradition as a voluntary sector organisation. We spent considerable time and resources refining and updating our value base as part of the work on this plan. This process will ground our work for the next three years in a framework which underpins our voluntary sector ethos, our belief in children, sound financial objectives and good governance.

Clive Harper
Chairperson



Chief Executive's Foreword

I am proud to present the Strategic Plan for the organisation for the period 2009-2012. This plan builds on the work of the organisation over the past 45 years, learning from our past achievements but adjusting as a result of the new opportunities and challenges which are present in the current internal and external environments. In late 2007 we launched our new identity and a bold new image. This was more than a change of name – it was recognition that, as a grassroots movement, we had grown in the scope and range of our activity built on the solid foundation of a proud past and optimistically embracing the future. Our new name strongly establishes our commitment to be a leading voice for young children.

The plan is ambitious but achievable and sets out a number of key strategic and operational objectives for the period. It is a plan which has a focus on outcomes for children, families and communities but which also pays attention to the important inputs and processes needed to achieve measurable change. In particular we have paid attention to internal structural realignment, evidence and best practice, communication and policy influence and the mobilisation of our significant grassroots membership. The partnership with and participation of children, families, members, staff and key stakeholders in government, the voluntary, community and private sectors will be of critical importance for the delivery of the plan.

In terms of strategic goals we plan to be bold and courageous. However we also know that “strategic planning is typically fragmented, evolutionary and largely intuitive” (James Quinn). We have therefore not attempted to create a perfect plan but a focus and direction that provide vision, unifying themes, attention to culture and a motivation for our activities now and for the next number of years. In a period of great uncertainty and change in the global markets we have also built in possibilities for agility and flexibility.

Over the next three years we plan to achieve the following:

- To become the lead organisation for young children in Northern Ireland and a leading voice for young children in the Republic of Ireland and internationally.

- To ensure long-term sustainability in terms of finance, human, technological, social capital, governance and democratic participation across the organisation.
- To manage excellent services for our membership and to provide excellent services for all young children and families.
- To build and use the evidence base to deliver innovative services and bring about change in policy for young children and families.

Critical to our ongoing success are attention and commitment to the training and ongoing professional development of staff and volunteers working in the early years sector. We believe that creating a high quality training and professional development programme with a substantial international partnership, so that we might learn from best practice throughout the world, will be a necessary focus of our work if we are to achieve our ambitious agenda for change and further development in our sector. Over the strategic planning period we will also ensure that the Board of Directors, staff and members have access to high quality, relevant development opportunities. In particular we will continue to advocate for an investment in a Transformation Fund for the Early Years workforce.

I look forward to working with the Early Years Board, volunteers, staff members and partners over the next three years and am confident that together we can deliver our ambitious plan.

Siobhan Fitzpatrick
Chief Executive Officer



Our Vision and Values

Our Vision

Young children are:

- Strong, competent and visible in their communities
- Physically and emotionally healthy
- Eager and able to learn
- Respectful of difference

These four outcome statements represent for us our core belief in children and childhood, parents and parenting.

Our vision is dynamic; we seek fundamental change to improve the lives of children and we recognise their strength and competence in our society.

The Values of Early Years

Our values as a voluntary sector organisation underpin our work and everything we do. We believe these values create a framework for us to provide services consistent with our positive vision of and for children. We believe we need to continually refine and challenge ourselves to identify and promote the behaviours that best animate these beliefs and values and we commit ourselves to doing so over the lifetime of this plan.

We believe in:

- Childhood – in its own right
- Listening to children – and those who care for them
- A strong voice for children
- Play, fun and creativity

- Parenting
- Participation
- Community
- Partnership
- Inclusion and diversity

- Excellence and evidence-based innovation
- Effective stewardship and governance
- A professional, committed and recognised workforce
- Valuing staff, members and their commitment

Children's Rights

Early Years supports and endorses the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to which both the UK and Irish governments are signatories. We will continue to use the Convention and the Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) as a basis for our work with young children.

In particular we will work towards implementing the UNCRC's position on young children known as General Comment No 7. Periodically the Committee on the Rights of the Child publishes reports (termed General Comments) which detail, for specific circumstances or groups of children, how the committee wishes to see the Articles of the Convention interpreted and implemented.

General Comment No 7 sets out how the rights enshrined in the convention must be fully implemented for young children and how in doing so governments and civic society can provide a clear framework for young children to realise their rights under the convention.

In Northern Ireland the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission's advice on a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland was presented to government on International Human Rights Day, 10 December 2008. Early Years hopes to see the Bill of Rights take full account of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and lend support to the established legislative structures and institutions designed to protect and enhance the rights of children and young people. We will also continue to support these structures and institutions in the Republic of Ireland.



Our Environment

There are many factors influencing how we will direct our resources as an organisation in the forthcoming years. Society and the economy are fast-changing. Early Years has demonstrated its responsiveness to these changes and our willingness and aptitude to help shape events affecting early care and education. We reviewed the factors we believe will impact upon Early Years over the lifetime of this plan.

Below we set out a short résumé of some of the key issues we believe will impact upon our work in the next three years.

Political

Perhaps the single biggest external influence on Early Years in the past year, and looking forward to the lifetime of this plan, has been the resurgence of the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive.

Early Years' links with local MLAs and political parties, Councils and local Councillors have always been strong and we will continue to invest time and resources in ensuring decision-makers at Stormont and in local councils are well briefed and knowledgeable about early care and education. A recent survey of stakeholders at the Northern Ireland Assembly carried out on behalf of Early Years shows we are well regarded by Ministers and MLAs, and that we have been influential in shaping policy and strategy with regard to early childhood care and education.

We know from our direct work and our stakeholder analysis that the work of Professor James Heckman has been of significant influence in the debates on investing in children's early years. We will, over the lifetime of this plan, pay significant attention to promoting this work. The growing evidence

base we have from both local research and the already significant body of international research confirms the need for strengthening, expanding and sustaining support for services for young children and families.

Our research work on Respecting Difference will assist us in providing a solid evidence base for policy makers in both statutory and non-statutory sectors to develop new and effective approaches to inclusion and a shared future. The Eager and Able to Learn research programme we believe will contribute significantly to the debate on the future shape of early education and care policy.

The landscape for our work continues to expand on an all island basis, with partners in Great Britain, Europe and internationally, and has brought a significant dimension to the evidence for our work and has very positively influenced our practice. Our plans seek to copper-fasten these partnerships in an increasingly global environment and to continue to learn from and share our expertise with others.

The Review of Public Administration (RPA) continues to have a significant impact on Early Years. The development of new Health and Social Care Trusts, changes to the commissioning role and the structure of Health and Social Care Boards and the movement of policy responsibility for early years to the Department of Education together with the development of the Education and Skills Authority (replacing the Education and Library Board structure) will continue to have a significant impact on both service delivery and commissioning of early years care and education services.

Whilst we welcome changes that simplify bureaucratic structures, we are also concerned the merger of existing bodies does not mean services are reduced to the lowest common denominator. Early Years has begun to respond by creating a new internal structure designed to match the changes in the external environment that we might maximise our impact as an organisation. These changes will be kept under review over the lifetime of this plan. A critical issue for the next planning phase will be the empowerment of the membership to work as strong advocates for young children.

Financial issues

As we head into economic recession in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and globally, we recognise that funding from statutory bodies will increasingly be squeezed by restrictions on public spending. We also realise there will be less corporate sponsorship available.

The fiscal environment is therefore likely to be more difficult over the lifetime of this plan and we recognise we will need to be flexible and responsive to the demands of funders. We will also need to ensure we control, even more rigorously, our costs and improve how we

provide and demonstrate the value we bring to the money invested in us. We however see real opportunities for an organisation like Early Years which has always had the capacity to deliver services in a competitive and value added manner.

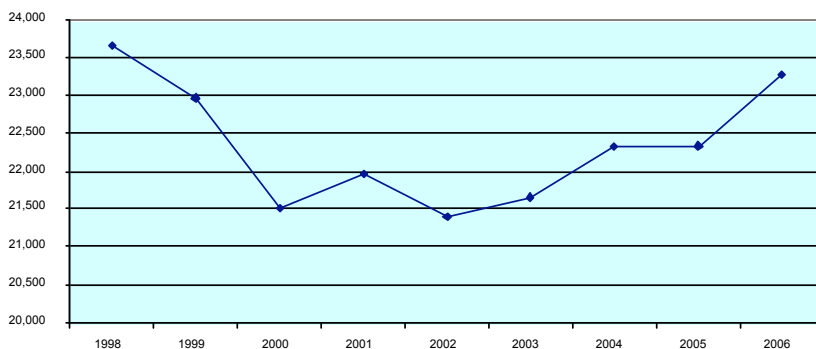
Social and demographic changes

Over recent years society in Northern Ireland has become more diverse with an influx of mainly Eastern European and EU accession states' immigrants. We know from 2004-2007, the number of people coming into Northern Ireland exceeded the number leaving by 26,000 and 3,500 primary school children's first language was other than English. Children from immigrant backgrounds have posed challenges for a sector which traditionally was more mono-cultural underlining the need for our Respecting Difference programme. With changed economic circumstances this immigration trend may reverse and we believe we need to be able to respond appropriately and in a culturally sensitive manner.

In addition the number of live births has begun to show an upward trend following a low in 2002. Chart One below shows the trend in the eight years to 2006¹.

¹ Source Annual Birth Rates NISRA 2008.

Chart One



Our international work over the past 10 years, particularly our partnerships and strategic alliances in Eastern Europe and our relationship with the World Forum on Early Care and Education, the High Scope Research Foundation and with ISSA - the International Step by Step Association, provides us with particular strengths in meeting the needs of a growing diverse membership at home and further afield.

We also know that despite significant efforts made across the statutory and voluntary sectors, child poverty remains a key issue in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The Children's Charity, Barnardos, in its report 'It doesn't happen here' estimates there are 44,000 children in severe poverty and more than 100,000 children will go without the material things most of their peers and friends take for granted in Northern Ireland. The End Child Poverty Coalition in the Republic of Ireland states that one in nine children in the Republic live in consistent poverty today.

Policy and legislative change

In 2006 responsibility for early years policy moved from the Department of Health and Social Services and Public Safety to the Department of Education (DE). This has brought coherence to the policy environment given the sector's key role in the education of children and DE's involvement in the Sure Start initiatives. However there has also been a need for the development of a strategic overview of Early Years.

DE will shortly publish for consultation its strategy for 0-6 year old children. Early Years has sought to influence the development of the strategy as a means to address significant anomalies in the sector:

- Reception Class and its impact on pre-school enrolment.
- Funding for the Pre-school Education Expansion Programme.
- The need for a graduate workforce.
- Diversity and the shared future agenda in pre-school settings.
- Quality and ongoing improvement.
- Physical infrastructure issues.
- Children with special and additional needs.

Early Years eagerly anticipates the publication of the strategy and will engage with the membership to respond to it.

We hope the policy lead by the Department of Education will provide an opportunity for others such as the Department of Health and Social Services, Department of Employment and Learning, Department for Social Development and Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, to add value to the new policy and therefore deliver a more seamless early years policy for young children, families and communities.

The 10 Year Strategy for Children with its focus on improving outcomes and embedding an evidence-based culture in the delivery of services for children presents a number of opportunities for the organisation. Coupled with the Lifetime Opportunities framework – the government's Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy – we believe there is now a strong commitment to the development of a comprehensive child care policy. Early Years is well positioned to support the development of a robust, high quality, affordable and accessible child care programme.

Work is also progressing on the development of a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. Early Years welcomes this development and hopes

the rights of the child are at the heart of the Bill of Rights. We will work with partners in the voluntary and statutory sectors to advocate on behalf of young children in the development of the Bill.

Northern Ireland will also have a new Charities Commission established in 2009. This body will ensure that charitable bodies such as Early Years are better regulated. Early Years welcomes this development and believes the new Commission will bring rigour and high standards to the governance of the voluntary sector in Northern Ireland.



Why do we need a Strategic Plan?

We need a Strategic Plan to:

- Provide direction for our work and a framework to provide children and their families with excellent services.
- Confirm our commitment to our values and our belief in children.
- Influence others, particularly policy makers, to improve services for children.
- Enable staff to achieve their best.

Our Services

In furtherance of our aims, objectives, values and principles, Early Years will provide the following services for the early years sector:

- A team of highly qualified Senior Early Years Specialists working with a range of settings and supporting key Early Years projects, research and practice.
- A team of highly qualified Early Years Advisers working with playgroups, nursery schools and units, parent and toddler groups, full day care groups and after schools.
- High/Scope Training and Development staff who will support early years services in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland implement the High/Scope approach.
- An information, research, communication and publication service supporting policy influence and information dissemination.
- A lead role in Sure Start Projects across Northern Ireland.
- A specialist service working with Traveller families – Toybox.

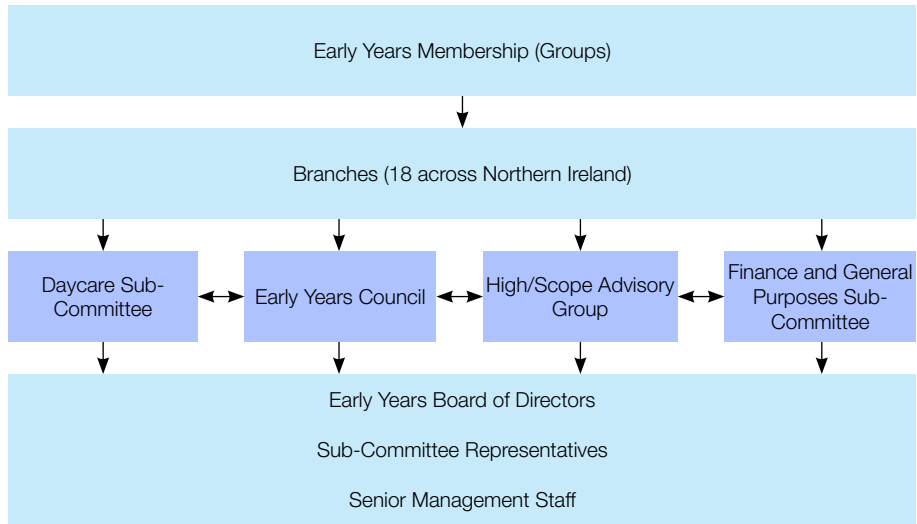
- Community Development/Business Support and Early Years Advisor staff who will support management committees to develop sound community development and social economy approaches.
- A team of Early Years Trainers who will provide a range of training and professional development.
- A Fund Management Team which disperses funding to the sector coupled with financial back office support.
- A consultancy service providing advice and training support on a range of early years issues in Northern Ireland and internationally.

Internal Organisational Review

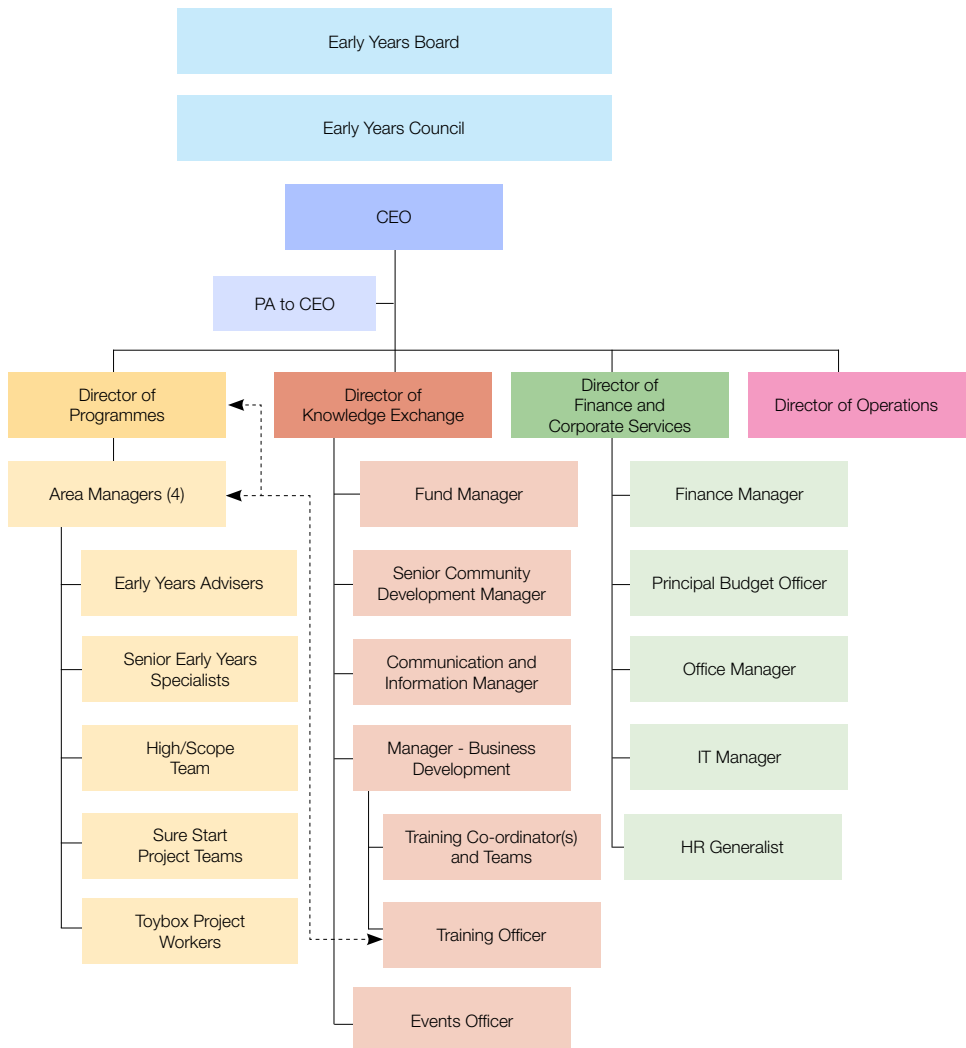
During the process of developing this plan Early Years identified change was required to the internal structure of the organisation to deliver the range of services outlined above. Following extensive staff consultation the structure was changed to ensure an integrated approach to the delivery of high quality services for children. The revised structure to take forward our corporate objectives for Early Years is set out below.

During the planning period (2009-12) we hope to create a new post at senior management level of Director of Training and Research. We believe this will ensure a continuous link between evidence, service and professional development.

Volunteer Structure



Staff Structure



Quality

The review process has allowed us to reflect on the considerable progress made within our membership as a result of the Pre-school Education Expansion Programme. However it also highlighted for us the need to support a rigorous approach to quality improvement in all our member groups. Over the planning period we will pay attention to:

- Growing accreditation numbers in Early Years, High/Scope and in the All Ireland Centre of Excellence Awards.
- Growing the percentage of the membership reaching the highest level of Health and Education inspection standards.
- Developing evidence-based programmes within Sure Start and the Programme for Two Year Olds.
- Providing excellent support services to Full Day Care Nurseries and Parent and Toddler Groups not within Sure Start or the Pre-School Expansion Programme.

Physical Infrastructure

In 2009 the organisation was able to pay off the mortgage on our current headquarters; we were given a 50 year lease on a new regional support centre in Fermanagh and have been able to consolidate our presence in Cullybackey, Lurgan and Derry. Over the planning period it is recognised that we need to focus on developing a long-term strategy to meet our physical infrastructure requirements including the possibility of developing a rural outreach centre with partners in the Rural Development Council and options in relation to our physical presence in the Republic of Ireland.

Community Development

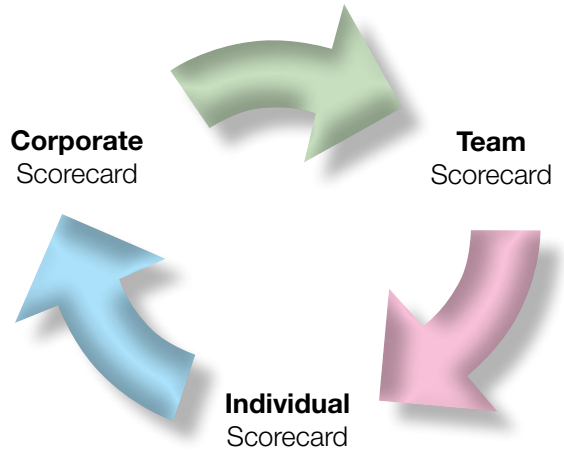
Early Years history and development has been based on a commitment to community development principles and practices. Over recent years a focus on curriculum improvements has meant a reduced focus on this element of our work. Over this planning period we will put principles of community development at the heart of all we do. In particular we will focus on developing strong leadership and governance in committees and better linkages within communities. We will seek support from others in the voluntary and community sector who can support this work.



Our Strategic Objectives

The Balanced Scorecard

Early Years uses the Balanced Scorecard as a business tool to clarify and communicate our objectives. We have ensured that, in addition to the Corporate Scorecard set out below, staff have an agreed scorecard for each team within the organisation supporting and complementing the corporate objectives. In turn individual staff members develop their own individual scorecard to ensure there is clarity between work they undertake and how this supports both their team's and the corporate objectives of Early Years. In doing so we believe we will all have a clearer sense of purpose and a close understanding of how our individual work shapes that of Early Years as an organisation.



In addition, both corporately and on a team basis, we have set out initiatives and actions we intend to take to ensure we fulfil our objectives, clearly identifying targets for completion and how we intend to measure our success. These processes will form the basis for our performance management processes and will be reviewed every six months to revise and amend in light of changing circumstances.



Financial Plan for 2009 to 2012

Early Years has considered the financial plan for the period 2009-2012 within the context of a challenging financial and economic climate. In considering the Financial Plan, we have developed a Financial Strategy for the same period. The overall aim of the financial strategy is to ensure resources are used efficiently and effectively to contribute to improving levels of reserves, to meet targets as set out in the organisation's Balanced Scorecard, and to achieve the priorities as set out in the Corporate Plan.

A significant proportion of Early Years' funding comes from statutory bodies. In the current economic climate, and with the ongoing implementation of the Review of Public Administration, we recognise funding from statutory bodies will increasingly be squeezed by restrictions on public spending. We also realise there will be less corporate sponsorship available, as a result of reduced availability of commercial funds and potentially less funding available from grant-giving trusts, arising from the weakened stock market performance. Early Years must ensure its funding base is diverse and is based upon the key principle of sustainability.

As well as the consideration of income growth, Early Years must continue to control costs, ensure effective cost recovery processes and provide and demonstrate the value we bring to the money invested in us. Whilst the current climate is challenging, we believe we can channel our energies in a positive way to deliver competitive and value-added services that meet the needs of our stakeholders and the children in Northern Ireland.

To this end, our Financial Strategy sets out a number of key financial targets for Early Years, as follows:

To increase growth in income by 5% per annum for the three years to 31 March 2012.

- To reduce by 2% on prior years the cost base of relevant funding streams.
- To develop and sustain an Unrestricted Reserves position to cover 20 weeks of unrestricted running costs.
- To ensure 100% of identified re-investment is covered by Designated Funds.

These targets are supported by a number of objectives and associated initiatives, which we believe will support the attainment of the objectives set out in the Corporate Plan:

1. To obtain and manage the resources to deliver the strategic objectives.
2. To generate annual revenue surpluses on Unrestricted Funds to increase the levels of Unrestricted Reserves to provide for future strategic sustainability and investment.
3. To grow income and develop a wide range of income sources.
4. To review pricing structures across trading products and resources.
5. To improve financial control, monitoring and reporting, particularly in relation to the new management structure.
6. To improve the financial skills and knowledge of managers and staff.
7. To develop the risk management processes within the organisation.

Annual Reserves

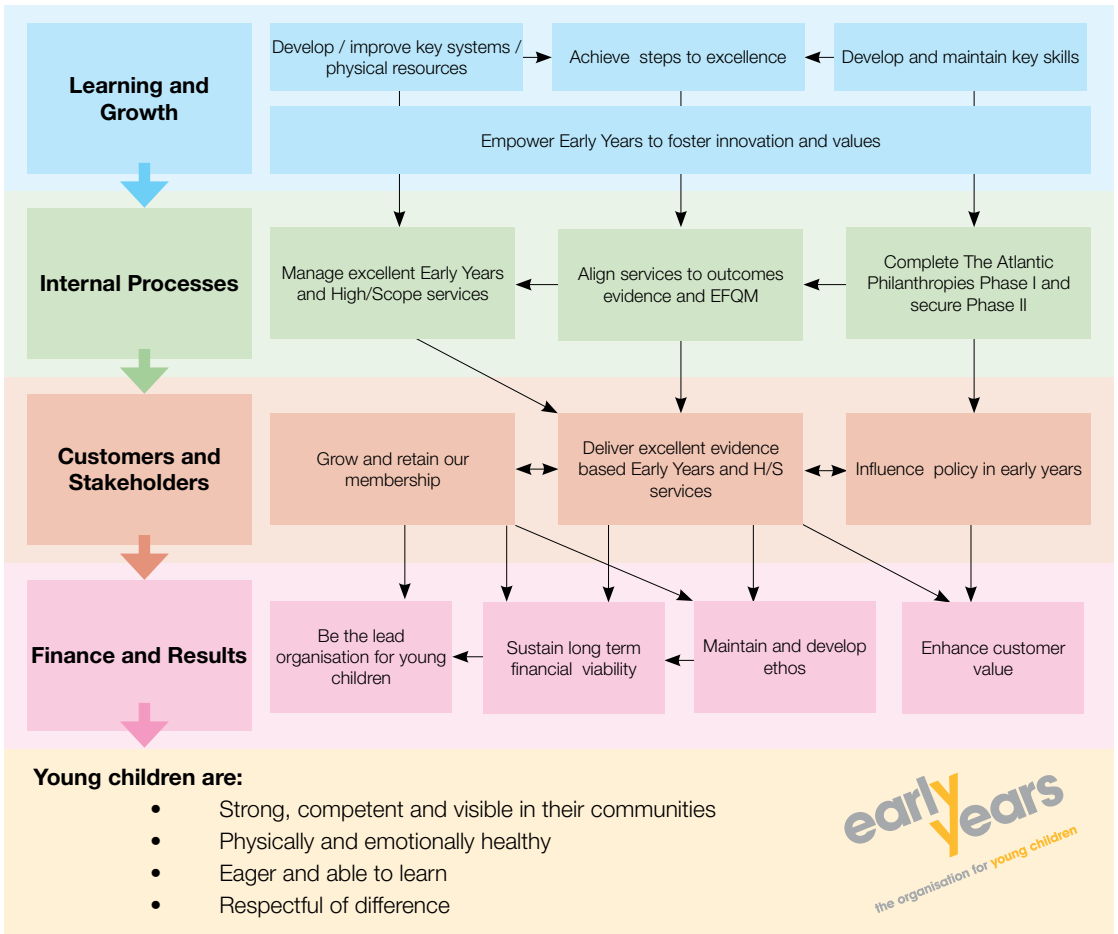
The level of Unrestricted Reserves is extremely important to voluntary organisations, particularly given the current economic climate and future predictions on the health of the economy. There has been a significant increase in our level of Unrestricted Reserves in the past two years. This positive trend is forecast to continue during this planning period, with a target growth of £150k for each year of the planning period.

Income Growth

In the past few years Early Years income has remained around the ratio of 20% unrestricted income and 80% restricted income.

Early Years maintains a grant tracker with a target of securing £500k of new funds each year. In previous years the amount of funds secured has exceeded this target, and the current grant tracker shows a significant number of submissions currently awaiting response.

Our target therefore is to grow total income by 5% per annum within each year of the planning period. The grant tracker income target will increase from £500k to £600k per annum.





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