

# hemp'sall's

We've been supporting equality, social mobility and best practice in children's services since 1999



## Annual Report 2020-2021

Training, research, consultancy and business support for the early years and childcare sector

## An overview of Hemsall's work during 2020-2021:

- Responding to COVID-19.
- Two-year-old take-up for DfE.
- DfE business support for providers and LAs.
- Moving to online delivery of events, training and information giving.
- Adapting approaches to childcare sufficiency assessments and planning.

Thank you to our clients. And to our partners including Mott MacDonald, Local Government Association, Coram Family and Childcare, DWP, Institute of Health Visiting, HMRC, PACEY, Out of School Alliance, NCB and others.

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*Winners of the 2020 SME-News Best Preschool Education & Childcare Training Consultancy, UK Enterprise Awards.*

*Corporate LiveWire Global Awards: Childcare Training Consultancy of the Year 2020.*

*Registered and accredited by ISO 9001:2015.*



## Foreword: James Hemsall OBE

Accessible and affordable childcare supports families to work or train, and good quality pre-school experiences support children's cognitive and emotional development, aiding transition between home and school, supporting community cohesion, delivering anti-discriminatory practice, and improving school readiness<sup>1</sup>, and social mobility. It always has and always will. That's why we do it. And what's more, it is all our privilege to do so.

Fortunately, there is a large and growing body of evidence demonstrating the lasting impact of good quality early years childcare, and the savings in future expenditure that can be made by investing in children aged under five years old (e.g. Field 2010)<sup>2</sup>. This is useful when convincing others of the merits of the sector. Because there is much we can offer to support all local areas respond to and recover from the ravages of COVID-19.

In 2008, a Joseph Rowntree Trust report concluded appropriate childcare could move between a sixth and a half of children out of poverty. A 2012 DfE research report<sup>3</sup> evidenced learning or education starting at an early age had a direct impact on the attainment of children. Other studies have found a quality pre-school experience can boost children's all-round development and is particularly beneficial for least advantaged children, which has been the basis of funding least advantaged two-year-olds for 15 hours per week since 2013. A key national programme we helped implement in 2012-2016.

To achieve these many ambitions, we all rely upon an early years and childcare sector, made up of all types of provider and practitioner. All of whom need to be supported and valued and enabled to change in response to changing needs, demands and preferences. The sector is at a critical moment and needs to adapt to emerging and new government policy, and a completely different marketplace. The business of sustaining settings whilst balancing quality, the workforce and such change becomes more and more complex every year.

**This is why we are here. It is what drives us.**

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<sup>1</sup> Effective Pre-school Education, Institute of Education (2004)

<sup>2</sup> Field (2010) 'The Foundation Years – preventing poor children becoming poor adults':

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110120090128/http://povertyreview.independent.gov.uk/media/20254/poverty-report.pdf> Accessed July 2018

<sup>3</sup> DfE (2012) 'Achievement of Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile':

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/achievement-of-children-in-the-early-years-foundation-stage-profile> Accessed August 2018

## **1 A year like no other.**

### **What COVID-19 did to early years.**

In some ways this year has been like many others. Early years and childcare has continued to be under the policy and public spotlight over the past year. The challenges and changes the sector experience are well-documented. However, in 2021, these were exacerbated further by the unexpected and profound effects of COVID-19. These effects have been felt significantly on all aspects of supply, need, demand and parental preferences. Settings have been required to open only to the children of keyworkers and vulnerable children, to partially and gradually open, reduce capacity to deliver whilst supporting the workforce, and to respond to the national lockdown and new family routines and working patterns.

All of these challenges have required everyone (early years and childcare providers, local authority early years teams, stakeholder partners, and Hemsall's) to consider and reconsider additional and emerging needs to change, develop new business models, and redesign and deploy sector support. It has been a huge challenge for all. Throughout, the sector has been found to be an essential, trusted and respected service benefiting families and local communities, socially, educationally, and economically.

### **Changes to funding and income.**

Throughout this unique and unparalleled experience, we found providers receiving entitlement funding have seen their funded income largely protected. Many have benefited from furloughing and self-employment grants (SEIS). However, income derived from parents' fees has dropped significantly, in some cases has disappeared altogether. This reduction of revenue was likely to be adversely affecting private day nurseries, smaller providers, those with highly qualified staff, or based in disadvantaged areas<sup>4</sup>. It is certainly, in our view, an existential threat to out of school providers across term-time and school holidays.

Closures due to self-isolation have added pressure. Wraparound care/pre-schools who relied on collaborations and out of school (OOS) settings offering services for older children may be lost as parents reduce the hours they need, or seek out a single provider, or as schools set policies that adversely affect the sector.

### **Term-by-term.**

Providers remaining open during summer 2020 reported higher occupancy levels. The autumn term experienced a gradually increasing confidence, growing take-up and more reopening. Spring term 2021, with its national lockdown, reversed some of those trends, with schools closed. Early years and childcare providers were allowed to remain open, but take-up, we believe, took a national dip. Throughout the year, there have been closures, many of which LAs report were part of the natural change in the market experienced in most years. Concurrently, it has been interesting to see new market entries, new childminder registrations, takeovers and new group-care openings. Possibly showing local demand patterns shifting to different provider types and geographical locations.

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<sup>4</sup> institute for Fiscal Studies - IFS (2020) Challenges for the childcare market: the implications of COVID-19 for childcare providers in England [Challenges for the childcare market: the implications of COVID-19 for childcare providers in England - Institute For Fiscal Studies - IFS](#)

### **What Hemsall’s did in response to COVID-19.**

As a business we weren’t immune to the dramatic effects of the year. March 2020 was time for a plan – and then another one, and others revisited regularly. The world had started to shut down. Events, training and projects were postponed or cancelled with no clear plan about what might happen next. We needed to switch delivery models as the world went online. Projects like TALK Derby [www.hempsalls.com/talk-derby](http://www.hempsalls.com/talk-derby) continued until the end of August 2020. After which our coordination role returned to the local authority.

12 months after the start of COVID-19 and work has changed immeasurably. We now do so much online and our connections with clients which were already strong have only got better. We have pivoted, reviewed, become smaller and leaner, remained business-focused, and ensured our sustainability and scalability (as much as we can) – all of which followed our own advice to others.

April	Lockdown began, we got to grips with the early impact, guidance and funding
May	Worked with LAs on the COVID-19 response, research and development
June	Launched Finding Your Way Through business support packages
July	Started our Local Government Association webinar programme
August	Hempsall’s Coffee Breaks began and our coordination of TALK Derby ended
September	Our new approaches to childcare sufficiency assessments began to roll out
October	Ann Van Dyke was awarded the MBE
November	Launched our DfE Business Map and Two-Year-Old Take-Up projects
December	Jo Pringle was awarded the MBE
January	Three national Business Map webinars for providers and LAs delivered
February	National Changing Lives Through Childcare webinar and regional webinars
March	Hempsall’s/Childcare Works awarded DfE’s national support contract for HAF

### **Working online.**

We converted our training offer to online delivery. We were determined to be ready, willing and able for when the enquiries started again. And we were. All our safeguarding, EYFS, leadership and management and other training is now delivered via Teams and Zoom [find-a-list-of-our-training-here](#)

### **Making sense of government guidance – and sharing our analysis.**

Then we started noticing the reams of guidance issued by government. And we took the time to read and scrutinise it. We know from experience that having this time whilst having to do the day job would be a real challenge for local authority early years teams. This was especially the case as they were also at home, adjusting their delivery and supporting the sector. So this is when we spent our own time producing analysis and summaries of guidance. We were reading it, so others didn’t have to. We were able to highlight the key points, the pertinent actions, the updates and revisions, and shared our views and opinions to guide actions.

### **Building Hemsall’s briefings, ideas and models for all to use.**

We also developed briefings and ideas. All for free and sent out to our mailing list. We also developed models and tools. Things to help with structuring strategy, business planning, and change management. We published helpful summaries of COVID-19 funding for

settings and documented trends as we saw them affecting needs, demands and market preferences.

I particularly like the briefings and tools. The updates are really useful as they are succinct and to the point helping to determine what one needs to focus on... as one does not have to re-invent the wheel and also it reduces the time spent on formulating these.

LA Officer

Alongside this work, we wrote constantly, including our thoughts about business reviews and restructures. Subjects included reducing business capacity to support growth later [get-smaller-now-so-you-can-grow-again](#) and [bigger-is-not-always-better](#) and the processes and pace of recovery after such dramatic events [recovery-will-not-be-quick](#)

### **A community together.**

All this investment promoted a massive response. Our inboxes and phonedlines were full of gratitude, requests, questions and we have to say quite a bit of reaching out just to unite on a personal, social and community level. Not since we set up the business 20 years ago had we experienced such energy and connection. The sense of community and comradeship was very strong. It started to feel natural being online with colleagues and clients. Suddenly a 'phone call didn't seem enough.

I like the sharing or practical ideas we are all really busy and it helps to focus and balance priorities for the short, medium and long term.

LA Officer

Our early adopter clients started talking to us about what we could do to help their work through this. We workshopped the context and challenges and revisited what traditional support might look like, and what must change this time around. It was a creative process. We also started bringing together clusters of 6-8 LAs together for online idea sharing and updates. We were in this together and it showed. As a result, we developed the '**Finding Your Way Through**' programme of information sessions, business workshops and one-to-one support – all online for LAs.

### **Hempsall's Coffee Breaks.**

By June and July 2020, we had held 30 online LA early years meetings, clusters and networks. As we all got used to them they were starting feeling like a regular feature of the week. Attendance was steadily growing and requests were coming in thick and fast. In July we launched Hempsall's Coffee Breaks. These one-hour free sessions choose a topic (things like health and wellbeing, provider business support, business sustainability, sufficiency

planning) and hear short input from Hempsall's, LAs or other partners. The remainder of the 60 minutes allows for discussion and questions.

**It was a good event, and through the discussions I think some interesting thoughts about current and future trends are beginning to emerge.**  
Bath & North East Somerset Council

Now, Coffee Breaks easily attract up to 120 attendees each time. They have become an invaluable and unique opportunity to get together and focus on the day's issues, with other people also tasked with the same challenges. Coffee Breaks have become one of most favourite achievements this year. They have been held every 1-2 weeks throughout the year, topics have included:

- wellbeing and selfcare
- local lockdowns/reopening
- latest reports and research
- provider business support
- changes in need, demand and parental preferences
- provider sustainability grants and strategies
- provider contracts
- LA strategy – early years and COVID-19 response
- planning for autumn and spring terms
- out of school sector challenges
- migration and retention strategies for the workforce
- Holiday activities and food (HAF) programme
- two-year-old take-up
- BAME, reach and engagement.

## **2 Policy for children and families.**

We have continued to do what we can to inform and shape policy and help others to play their part. We busied ourselves sharing information, writing sector press articles, giving comments and responses, blogging and using our social media accounts @hempalls.

### **Thinking about children processing the effects of COVID-19.**

At front of mind for all of us working with families and especially disadvantaged children, has been the focus on learning and wellbeing. All children need to be supported to make sense of this year's events, and take the positives from it, whilst processing their emotional responses and taking time to carefully recover socially, emotionally and educationally. We have written about and shared our policy view in blogs and in the sector press extensively. We believe there is great importance on emphasising what children have gained and learned this year, rather than the narrative about a lost year, or the need to catch up. That

can only add extra emotional and educational pressure. Our children need different support to that. Read our thought pieces on the effects of the year on children here: [tuning-in-to-children's-needs](#) and [Focus-on-what-children-have-learned](#) as well as [school-readiness](#)

### **The importance of investment in children's services.**

With government spending at high levels throughout COVID-19 and a growing focus on post pandemic economic and learning recovery, there is a need to ensure funds and public spending on early years to support providers, children and families alike. We think that there is a strong argument to invest in this human potential and opportunity, read more here: [Invest-in-human-potential](#)

### **Early years needs to speak with one positive evidenced based voice.**

Our strength in early years and childcare is our diversity. It is also a vulnerability. With settings ranging from home-based childminders with annual turnovers less than £30,000, and voluntary managed community settings, to private-sector run super-chains of nurseries employing thousands of staff in dozens of sites across the country, and internationally. Delivery models, capability and capacity is hugely varied. It makes developing a collective voice tricky to put it mildly and it gets in the way of working up solutions that help everyone – whether that be business support/models, policy and guidance, or curriculum and funding. This year we have called for a more equal, considered and collective body to bring all these issues together. One that focuses on what brings us together, not what separates us [Diversity is our strength](#) Read more here: [Are-we-trapped-in-a-toxic-cycle](#) And we highlighted the unnecessary and unhelpful divisions between early years and childcare [Proud-of-the-word-childcare](#)

### **Racism and prejudice in 2020.**

The year has included a necessary focus on issues of race and prejudice. National and international events have prompted a growing awareness, and stimulated organisations of all types to consider their institutional responses. Anti-discriminatory practice has always been core to Hemsall's ethos and approach. We take seriously the responsibility to support children and families to feel supported and have equal opportunities. We have taken the opportunity to review and reflect upon our equalities training programmes, and include new emphasis and discussion on unconscious bias. This is driven by the requirements of the Children Act (1989) and something we have commented on here: [Tackle-racism-early](#) [Equality in management and leadership](#)

## **3 Services and projects.**

The year saw us continue with our usual mix of training, research and consultancy. The year brought a tremendous amount of change and innovation to all parts of the business. Supporting the sector with business responses across providers and LAs was a big story, as was adapting our approaches to childcare sufficiency assessments and EYFS and safeguarding training.

## Business Support

Our business support services offer the additional capacity or skills you need or provides an independent and objective approach. Whether it be a proactive approach, information sharing, networking, business health checking or in-depth reviews, problem solving, or new implementing ideas or policy, we are pleased to help. There's been no doubt that the year has provided a new and keen focus on the business aspects of the sector. There is a strong need to change [Change is a constant](#) [Moving faster](#)

Over the years, we've developed thousands of childcare places, supported and challenged the implementation of the Childcare Act (2006) childcare sufficiency duties, shaped the delivery of Sure Start local programmes and children's centres, and supported the national implementation of early learning for two-year-olds and childcare for 30 hours.

Throughout this work, we have found:

- **Providers range widely.** From large highly sophisticated organisations through to small provision with little or no business acumen. This presents all sorts of challenges in how such support is approached.
- **Approaches vary.** It is common for some providers not to have up-to-date business or marketing plans, cashflow forecasts or understand their breakeven points. And settings often do not dedicate sufficient time to these aspects of their businesses. Others do.
- **Business confidence and skills are wide-ranging** as is the appetite and motivation to access business support and apply it and trust others to help.
- **Providers have much to manage.** They must achieve a balance of matching supply with demand, delivery of funded entitlements, other income and charging for additional services, quality and legal requirements (Ofsted, HR, H&S).



## Finding Your Way Through

In June 2020, we launched a full programme of support to knit into LA market management and business support strategies. The Finding Your Way Through programme was born and offered a range of online information sessions via zoom, and workshops and training that offered the chance to explore shared information in more detail and test and try the various tools and models. The programme also included online confidential one-to-one business support for settings needing something more intensive, urgent or in-depth. [Route map for recovery](#)

## Nursery and MNS reviews

Our confidential one-to-one business support service extended to include some full service reviews of whole settings including maintained nursery schools and local authority nurseries. The common presenting problem being high delivery costs compared to available budgets and the need to re-examine delivery models, staff deployment and local need and demand.

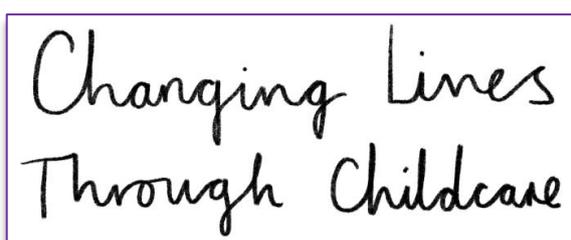


## Business Map

In November 2020, DfE commissioned us to develop additional resources to support the sector's business planning and management. We decided what was needed was a tool to help navigate the way through the processes and stages of business planning, whilst taking best advantage of the tools and resources already available generally and for early years and childcare specifically. We launched the [Hempsalls Business Map](#) at three national webinars in January 2021. Two sessions were held for providers, and one for LA officers. An amazing 1,561 providers attended with 89.5% stating on their post-event survey they were likely or very likely to apply any of the learning to their business.

## Two-Year-Old Take-Up

Also in November 2020, DfE commissioned us to run a national programme focusing on two-year-old take-up. We developed a What Works tool that helped 20 target LAs (where take-up was lowest or dropping) to review their strategies for take-up. This helped audit current arrangements and identify elements of an action plan. We were also able to deliver direct support such as local family-facing professional briefings, resources to support BAME communities, and strategic planning capacity building.



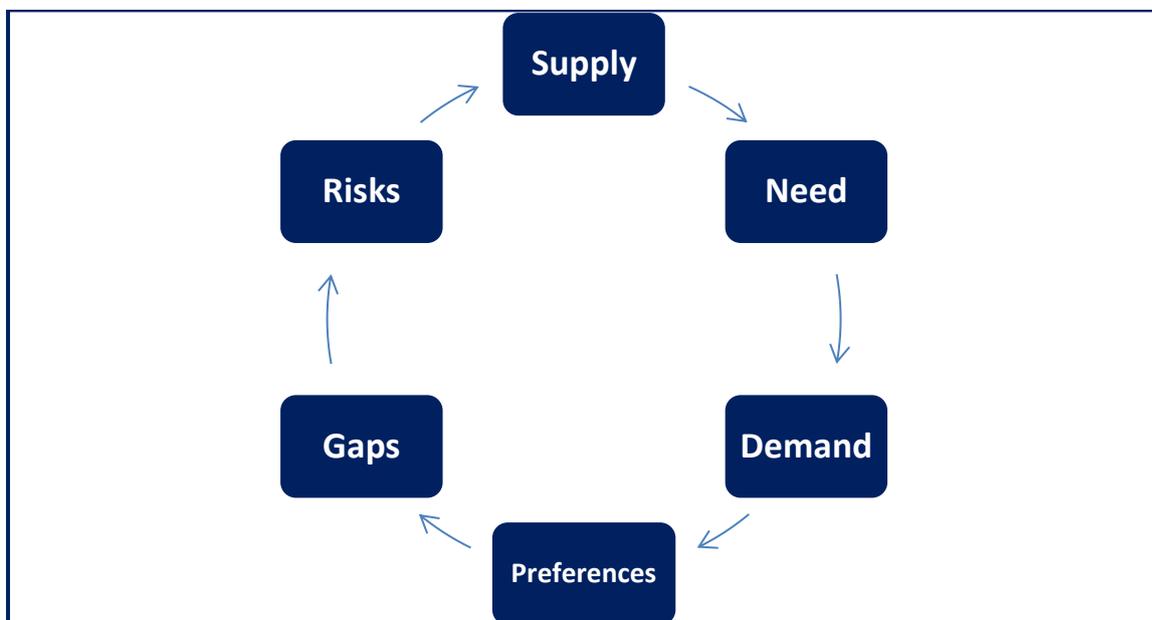
In addition, we held regional webinars for all LAs where we explored the principles and processes for take-up. These were followed up with a huge suite of resources including the What Works tool, Changing Lives Through Childcare programme materials, slides and briefings as well as connecting LAs to Jobcentre Plus childcare champions. A national webinar for 900+ family facing professionals who come into regular contact with eligible families was held in February 2021, the recording and materials of this can be found here: [Changing Lives Through Childcare](#)

## Childcare Sufficiency Assessments

One of the first things we did in the year was to issue guidance and suggested models to LAs for how CSAs should or could be adapted and most useful within the context of COVID-19. We encouraged everyone to take a fresh look at sufficiency assessment, gap and risk analysis and the action planning that followed. We delivered a comprehensive programme of online sessions through Hemsall's and the Local Government Association.

In project work, we delivered our usual range of varied services. Starting with full service whole CSA projects, planning and delivering from start to finish. This year, we saw a growing demand for mentoring and coaching LA officers and teams through the process. We delivered this through one-to-one work and series of workshops.

We changed and adapted our models and tools, including online reference or focus groups, online questionnaire surveys and new frameworks for planning. One consideration that grew in significance was the notion of parental preferences of childcare use as family routines and employment shifted significantly throughout the year.



## LGA webinars and action learning sets

Throughout the year we have worked alongside the Local Government Association to develop and deliver an extensive programme of topical webinars and linked action learning sets. Delivered online these sessions have been available free to LAs and have address various topics including:

- COVID-19 response
- Rethinking and planning childcare sufficiency assessments (CSAs)
- Hemsall's EYPP, DAF, SENIF research findings and recommendations
- Business support and sustainability
- Wellbeing and resilience

## **4 Awards and honours.**

We have had cause for celebration this year. The Queen awarded MBEs for both Ann Van Dyke and Jo Pringle who have been key in delivering some of our key programmes in recent years, particularly Achieving Two Year Olds and Childcare Works (30 hours).

Hempsall's also were winners of the 2020 SME-News Best Preschool Education & Childcare Training Consultancy, in the UK Enterprise Awards. And the Corporate LiveWire Global Awards: Childcare Training Consultancy of the Year 2020. Well done to the team!

## **5 Our back story.**

We were founded in 1999 by our Director, James Hemsall OBE. It's our mission to support everyone to make a success out of the challenges of early years and childcare policy. We are committed to the best quality practice and outcomes for children, delivered by a professional, resourced and sustainable sector and workforce. Our employed team of five is based in our offices in Leicester, and we have a thriving network of associate trainers and consultants across the UK.

We work with: all 151 top-tier local authorities in England; central and regional governments; many small businesses and voluntary groups, charities, and children's centres; and some major high street brands, national charities, and international and global businesses. What we like though, is to stay small and deliver big, with a focus on quality and equality. That means we have been at the forefront of lots of different strategies and policies, including:

- Childcare places creation and development
- Early learning entitlements: increasing hours, flexibility and quality
- Two- three- and four-year-old early years entitlement: places, pilots, trials and early implementation
- Childcare Sufficiency Assessments, Childcare Audits
- Out of school childcare development, places creation and business planning
- DfE Early Support trainers and capacity building consultants for SEND children
- Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) consultants
- Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships members and consultants
- Sure Start local programmes and children centres independent evaluators and service providers
- Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative (NNI) business planning consultants
- Safeguarding and child protection trainers and consultants
- Apprenticeships trainers and policy/safeguarding consultants
- Workforce development and continuous professional development training
- Childcare recruitment and volunteering campaigns; BME staff and volunteers, and men in childcare
- Business support for early years and childcare providers
- Early Learning Childcare (ELC) in Scotland and internationally

## National programme leadership.

We have occupied a unique position in the national roll-out of early years and childcare entitlements over the past 15 years. We've been alongside local authorities (LAs) and all types of provider in making sense of the implications and requirements of several high-profile programmes, through DfE commissions:

- Network facilitation, training and consultancy support for **Childcare Act (2006) duties** for childcare market management, childcare sufficiency, information and access to training and support (2007-2010).
- **Achieving Two-Year-Olds (2012-2016)** supporting and challenging LAs and providers in the implementation of up to 15 hours free early learning for the 40% least advantaged two-year-olds. This remains a key objective of the Government's social mobility and childcare policies and offers. [www.hempsalls.com/a2yo](http://www.hempsalls.com/a2yo)
- **Childcare Works (2016-2020)** national support contract working with providers and LAs on the implementation of the extended entitlement to 30-hours for working parents. [www.hempsalls.com/childcare-works](http://www.hempsalls.com/childcare-works)
- **Business Map and increasing two-year-old take-up (2020-2021)**. With changes to the childcare market and the effects of COVID-19, DfE commissioned us to develop and deliver provider business support through our new Business Map tool, and to work with all LAs on refreshing two-year-old take-up across the country, and in 20 target areas specifically.

...and breaking news!

- From April 2021, we will apply our Childcare Works approach to the national **Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme (2021-2022)** through leadership, support and challenge working with LAs on behalf of DfE. This is an invaluable response to provide holiday activities and food for children eligible for free school meals during school holidays.

## 6 We'd like to hear from you

James Hempsall OBE

Over 20 years of training, research and consultancy:  
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## 7 Find out more.

Visit [www.hempsalls.com](http://www.hempsalls.com) Ask for a copy of our services guides to childcare sufficiency assessments, business support, or training for early years and childcare [info@hempsalls.com](mailto:info@hempsalls.com)

