

**DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**  
**CABINET MEMBER FOR YOUNG PEOPLE**

**29 June 2018**

**Report of the Strategic Director for Children's Services**

**DERBYSHIRE INVOLVEMENT WITH THE EARLY YEARS CENTRE  
FOR DEAF CHILDREN, IN MACKWORTH, DERBY**

**1. Purpose of Report**

To give consideration to Derbyshire County Council's involvement in the Early Years Centre for Deaf Children in Mackworth, Derby, in the light of falling numbers of Derbyshire families in attendance at the Centre.

**2. Information and Analysis**

The Early Years Centre for Deaf Children in Mackworth, Derby, was established over 20 years ago as a multi-agency centre for supporting pre-school children and their families, particularly for developing communication and sign language skills of both hearing parents and their deaf/hearing-impaired children.

The Centre originally provided social care advice, educational activities and support from the health sector, with regular visits on site from Speech and Language Therapy and Audiologists, who provided advice in respect of the use and functionality of hearing aids. There was originally a programme of activities for 2 days per week. More recently, the health sector input has diminished as budgets and staffing availability has reduced.

The Centre was originally intended to be used by both Derby City and Derbyshire children. At the time, Derby City was commissioned to provide the social care support for children in southern Derbyshire. In 2011, Derbyshire brought its social care provision in-house. As part of the de-commissioning of Derby City support, there was concern at the time from all stakeholders (families, services and the National Deaf

Children's Society) that the Centre should be preserved. In 2010, a Quality Assurance audit by the New Born Hearing Screening Programme (an Ofsted-style inspection of local Health, Social Care and Education early help provision for deaf children) had described it as the 'jewel in the crown' of local provision. It was held in high esteem and highly valued by the service users.

Following negotiation between Derbyshire and Derby City commissioners, it was agreed that, to help preserve the Centre, Derbyshire would continue to fund 40% of the running costs of the Centre on the basis that it was used by Derbyshire families in sufficient numbers to justify the Council's ongoing involvement. Additionally, the Council committed to using some of its own staff within the Centre. At the time, 17 Derbyshire families were attending on a regular basis, making up 40% of the total of families attending. The oversight of this provision was taken by the Head of the Sensory and Physical Support Service for Derbyshire.

The number of Derbyshire families has fallen in recent years however, and by October 2015, there were only 6 families attending on a regular basis. Due to concern about the ongoing viability of the Centre a review was initiated to assess the impact of falling numbers.

A review took place in May 2016, confirming a further reduction in numbers with only one Derbyshire family at that point regularly attending. The projections indicated that numbers would continue to fall.

This analysis has proven to be correct and no Derbyshire families are now attending the Centre. Derby City numbers have also declined dramatically, although not to the same extent as county numbers.

#### Reasons for decline in numbers

A range of factors have contributed to the decline in numbers, including:

- Families being better supported by in-house Derbyshire social care provision
- Better availability of information about deafness on the internet and via social media networks
- Improved DCC mainstream pre-school provision, such as Children's Centres, 2 year-olds' funding, and other services enabling more local provision in each locality
- Declining need for sign language communication as cochlear implants and better hearing aid technology make access to the oral/aural world more effective.

- Less support from Audiology and Speech and Language being available on-site.

### Review of Support to the Centre

The Sensory and Physical Support Service (SPSS) currently commits £9,000 per annum to the daily running of the Centre and some Teacher of the Deaf (TOD) and Teaching Assistant (TA) time. This was originally 2 days a week for both members of staff but has reduced to a day a month TOD time and a day a week of TA time.

It is proposed to end staff input with immediate effect. This would enable the staff working there to be reallocated to work in the localities across Derbyshire, meeting need where it has been identified and requested. The number of children identified with a hearing loss continues to rise and this reallocation would help meet that rising demand.

It is further proposed that Derbyshire County Council continue its contribution to the funding of the centre to the end of July 2019. This short term ongoing funding is proposed to provide the Centre continuity and to provide a time-limited fail safe contingency should demand for resources change and access be required by Derbyshire families, immediate removal of funding would mean that the resource could not easily be reinstated if the current absence of demand proved to be temporary.

The demand for services will be re-examined in December 2018, and if there is no change in demand, notice will be given at that point that funding will cease in line with the date above. In the event that there has been a significant change, then a consideration of numbers of families attending will take place and be reported back to the Cabinet Member for Young People for a decision to be made.

### Risks and Risk Mitigation

1. A consultation took place in March 2017 and both Derby City Council and the National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) were asked for their views on the future of the centre, in the light of reduced attendance by Derbyshire families.

No response was received from Derby City Council through the consultation so it is not clear what the City Council view would be in regard to this.

The NDCS responded with the view that support needed to be targeted cost-effectively and that it was important that teams were managed efficiently and effectively. The NDCS did express concern

that the withdrawal of Derbyshire involvement could well affect the viability of the Centre if it became a Centre just for Derby City residents. A reply to the NDCS query was sent out in April 2017 reassuring the NDCS that the proposal was to ensure that teams were managed effectively and efficiently, and that we were unable to comment on Derby City's intentions as they had not responded to the consultation. No further response has since been received from the NDCS.

### **3. Financial Considerations**

Potential savings of up to £9,000 per annum are to be achieved from July 2019 if there is no change in attendance at the centre by December 2018, this being the Council's agreed contribution for the maintenance and use of the building in Derby City.

### **4. Human Resources Considerations**

There are no HR considerations; there is a DCC teacher and teaching assistant who have occasionally used the centre. However, they are employed on a peripatetic basis and will continue to work at areas of identified need in the county.

### **5. Other Considerations**

In preparing this report the relevance of the following factors has been considered: Legal and Human Rights, Equality of Opportunity, Health, Environmental, Transport, Property, Social Value and Prevention of Crime and Disorder Considerations. An Equalities Impact Assessment has also been completed. As no Derbyshire families were using the Centre at the time of the assessment, the outcome of this assessment was that there would not be an impact on any Derbyshire residents if involvement at the Centre was terminated

### **6. Key Decision**

No

### **7. Call-in**

Is it required that the Call-in period be waived in respect of the decisions being proposed within this report?      No

### **8. Strategic Director's Recommendation**

- a) That Derbyshire ends its staffing involvement at the EY Centre with immediate effect and these staff are deployed
- b) That time-limited ongoing funding be made available to the Early Years Centre for Deaf Children of £9,000 per annum until the end of July 2019 and that the City Council be advised of this.
- c) A further examination of Derbyshire families' attendance at the Centre to take place in December 2018.
- d) Subject to there being no change in demand, that Derbyshire County Council provide 6 months formal notice to the City Council in December 2018 then it will cease its funding of the Centre
- e) That the final decision on serving of notice be subject to further Cabinet Member decision-making processes.

**Jane Parfrement**  
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