

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**CABINET****6 May 2014****Report of the Strategic Director for Children & Younger Adults****CHILDREN'S CENTRE SERVICES – (Children and Young People)****1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To seek Cabinet approval for a review of Children's Centre services, which could potentially result in the closure of some Centres;
- 1.2 To seek Cabinet agreement to the methodology and timetable for the review. In particular, Cabinet approval is sought to consult on (a) options for reducing the Children's Centre budget and (b) criteria that would be applied to identify Children's Centres for more in-depth impact assessment work.

The review will inform further work to develop a long-term model for the delivery of Children's Centre services in Derbyshire, in order to maximise their impact and effectiveness. Any future proposal to close one or more Children's Centres will require full consultation in accordance with the specific legal requirements set out in the Childcare Act 2006 and associated guidance.

2. Information and Analysis**2.1 Background and Context**

Local Authorities across the country are facing unprecedented financial challenges, which for Derbyshire represents a cut to its budget of £157 million over the next 5 years. In order to meet this target, Cabinet will be invited to review all contracts and review every service when the opportunity arises to make sure that service is now affordable.

There are currently 54 Children's Centres across the six localities within Derbyshire. The locations of these Centres vary. Some are on school sites, others share buildings and some are in purpose-built venues. The

size of the buildings and functionality vary considerably, as do the communities they serve.

Sure Start Children's Centres are a part of a system of universal children's services, providing easy access to a range of health services, parenting and family support, early education and childcare and can provide links to employment and training opportunities to families with children under the age of five.

Through the provision of both universal groups such as Stay and Plays and more one-to-one targeted support they play a key part in improving outcomes for young children and addressing inequalities with a view to bringing an end to child poverty.

It has been highlighted that brain development of a child can be affected within the early years and therefore positive early interventions can shape and impact on a child's future well-being and development.

Traditionally, Sure Start Children's Centres are often viewed simply in terms of buildings but it is clear from the 2013 Statutory Guidance that "children's centres are as much about making appropriate and integrated services available, as it is about providing premises in particular geographical areas." The guidance makes clear that the Local Authorities duty is to "ensure there are sufficient children's centres, so far as reasonably practicable, to meet local need." It is now 14 years since the first children's centre was opened in Derbyshire, in that time "local need" may have changed whilst the resources available to the Authority to sustain what is reasonably practicable are reducing as a result of the budget cuts and so it is timely to review the current level of provision.

2.2 The Review

The Review will look at ways to continue to ensure that we are keeping children safe and supporting families with young children to be healthy and ready to learn. It will seek to make savings whilst developing a clearer, more effective Children's Centre model that will maximise the impact on narrowing the gaps between those children who achieve well at school and those who underachieve. In addition, the Coalition Government introduced revised statutory guidance for Sure Start children's centres in April 2013 and the review provides an opportunity for the Authority to ensure it still complies with the current legislative framework.

As the local authority cuts its budget to achieve the £157m in savings, it is as important as ever that it ensures that the remaining budget complies with government priorities of achieving value for money, especially for

families in greatest need of support, when determining local arrangements.

On 5th February 2014, Council considered the revenue budget for 2014/2015 which indicated proposed budget reductions. As detailed in Appendix 2 of this report, a reduction in the number of Children's Centres was identified as a potential area for future Member consideration, with a view to achieving a part year saving of £500,000 for the financial year 2004-15 (this would enable a full year saving of £1.1m per year from 2015-16 onwards).

Options to reduce the cost of Children's Centre services include:

i) Charging service users for some Children's Centre Services;

On its own, this option may not be a viable proposal as it would be unlikely to generate the required level of savings, and the administration costs would reduce any income generated. The Sure Start Children's Centre Statutory Guidance indicates that services should be targeted at those children and families with the highest level of need and aim to reduce child poverty. If there was a charge for services, it could reduce the engagement of these families who may be in need of the support offered by a Children's Centre.

ii) Charging organisations for using Children's Centre facilities

This may involve the introduction of charges for one off and regular bookings of rooms/facilities in Children's Centres

iii) Reducing the number of staff who work in each Children's Centre;

Currently, each Children's Centre is staffed by 2 Children's Centre workers, plus a Co-ordinator who oversees either a single Centre or a group of Centres. In targeting communities where support is needed, and where there are high levels of deprivation, the reduction of staffing levels attached to a Centre could cause concerns relating to the delivery of a safe practice. An alternative way to reduce staffing costs may be to redistribute available management and staffing time across centres with variable opening hours that reflect local need

iv) Closing some Children's Centres, thereby reducing building and staffing costs.

This would be the most realistic option to save £1.1 million and could mean the closure of a possible seven centres (dependent on the size and running costs). However at this stage in the review we would not make any assumptions about closure or identify a particular number of centres that might close without further detailed work and consultation.

- v) Taking notice of provision by the voluntary, community and independent (VCI) sector in determining what level of service to provide to a community.

Communities in which there is a high level of provision by the VCI sector (for example, parent and toddler groups or peer support services) may have less need for the full range of Children's Centre services.

The above options are not mutually exclusive.

2.3 Proposed Methodology and Timescales

The proposed process and timescales for the review are set out in Appendix 1. Initially, a period of consultation is proposed on the need to reduce the cost of Children's Centre services, and the options outlined above (charging, reducing staffing, closing some centres and taking notice of other local provision). The consultation would also seek views on the criteria that would be used to select Children's Centres for further detailed equality impact assessment work. Subject to consultation and the results of the impact assessment work, these criteria would also be used to inform decision-making including the potential closure of a smaller number of individual Centres.

Following this initial period of consultation, officers in the Public Health and Children and Younger Adults Departments would carry out detailed impact assessment work focusing on the reach, effectiveness and accessibility of any Children's Centre identified for further consideration as part of this review. In addition to this, work would be carried out to consider resource distribution across the County and consider job roles and grading. This would inform a further Cabinet report in the autumn seeking agreement to consult on specific proposals which could include closure of a smaller number of Centres. A full public consultation over a three-month period would then be required, following which final recommendations would be prepared for Cabinet.

Cabinet is asked to agree the process and timescales for carrying out the review. In particular, Cabinet is asked to agree to a period of consultation from 12th May to 17th June 2014.

2.4 Proposed Criteria for Consultation

The Sure Start Children's Centres statutory guidance (April 2013 Chapter 2) defines a number of factors to be considered to secure delivery of service and these will be used to form the criteria which will inform the decision-making:

2.4.1 Accessibility.

This would include consideration of whether the children's centre is accessible to all families with young children in its reach area, and that Centres in urban and rural areas can be accessed taking into account distance and availability of transport. Footfall in Centres would form part of this analysis to determine if the Centre is in a suitable location, which is accessible to the communities it is seeking to support.

2.4.2 Accessibility to other services

This would examine the accessibility of health and employment services in the local area. There would also be a consideration of the range of other children's services in the area that may be able to meet the local need of families.

2.4.3 Targeting services at young children and families who are in the area who are at risk of poor outcomes

This would examine local need using local data and Decile information. Further information would be gathered via the Impact Assessment on effective local outreach services and demonstrating that children and families can be reached effectively.

2.4.4 Ensuring that opening times and availability of services meet the needs of the families in the area

This would include consideration of Centre buildings for example their location, size, functionality and accessibility.

As part of this "fit for purpose" analysis, there would be a cost analysis to examine if the building would be cost efficient in the longer term.

The statutory guidance suggests that in determining the best arrangements to meet local needs, value for money and the ability to improve outcomes for all children - especially families in greatest need of support - should be important guiding considerations. These considerations will need to inform the preferred savings option.

2.5 Other Considerations

The Review will maintain close links with, and contribute to, other development work to ensure consistency of approach. In particular this will include the Supporting Families Review and the Early Help to Safeguarding Review.

3. Financial Considerations

As an Authority we currently spend approximately £8 million per year on the delivery of Children's Centre services. This equates to an average cost of £150,000 per Children's Centre and £322.00 per family accessing the service over the last year.

Although the report to Council on 5th February 2014 on the 2014-15 budget identified potential part year savings of £500,000 from the review of Children's Centres, it is now anticipated that any savings will be realised in 2015-16 and future years. Alternative options will be identified to achieve the 2014-15 savings target.

Much of the initial investment in Children's Centres was funded by Capital grants from Central Government and terms and conditions were attached to that funding. The grants had conditions relating to changes in future use of capital assets funded by the grant and the Authority will need to ensure that it continues to comply with these terms and conditions as far as is practicable.

4. Legal and Human Rights Considerations

The Childcare Act (2006) Section 5A places a duty on Local Authority *"to make arrangements so that there are sufficient Children's Centres, so far as is reasonably practicable, to meet local need"*

The Act (Section 5C) also places a *"duty on local authorities to ensure there is consultation before any significant changes are made to children's centre provision in their area"*

A Sure Start children's centre is defined in the Act as a place or group of places:

- Which is managed by or on behalf of, or under arrangements with the local authority with a view to securing that early childhood services in the local authority's area are made available in an integrated way;
- Through which early childhood services are made available (either by providing the services on site, or by providing advice and assistance on gaining access to services elsewhere); and
- At which activities for young children are provided.

The Sure Start Children's Centre statutory guidance states that local authorities *"should not close an existing children's centre site in any reorganisation of provision unless they can demonstrate that, where they decide to close a children's centre site, the outcomes for children, particularly the most disadvantaged, would not be adversely affected and will not compromise the duty to have sufficient children's centres to meet local need. The starting point should therefore be a presumption against the closure of children's centres"*

The Guidance also emphasizes that local authorities should allow adequate time for responses, actively encourage parents from disadvantaged groups to participate, and demonstrate in their decision how they have taken consultation responses into account.

An equality analysis will be required as a part of or additional to the impact assessment referred to in the report. Any safeguarding implications should also be fully considered and documented.

5. Human Resources Considerations

Informal consultation with staff affected, trade unions and workforce development will commence in line with the Supporting Families Review. Some of the staff involved in current service delivery will be asked to work closely with the commissioner and the HR representative in the development of job profiles for posts proposed. All those involved in this review will be invited to a series of informal briefings and information sharing sessions, giving staff the opportunity to contribute ideas to inform plans for future service delivery. A union representative is working with the core team.

Subject to Cabinet approval a further report will be submitted to Cabinet later this year, in line with the Supporting Families Review including any new proposals for a new structure.

6. Property Considerations

The review may identify opportunities to declare some buildings surplus to requirements.

7. Other Considerations

In preparing this report the relevance of the following factors has been considered: Prevention of Crime & Disorder, Equality of Opportunity; Environmental, Health, Legal & Human Rights, and Transport Considerations.

8. Key Decision

No

9. Call-In

A waiver of the call-in procedure will not be required for this report.

10. Background Papers

1. Council Paper- Revenue Budget 2014/15 - dated 5th February 2014
2. Department for Education Sure Start children's centres statutory guidance - April 2013.

11. Strategic Director's Recommendation

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- i) Agrees that a review of Children's Centre services is undertaken, which could potentially result in the closure of some Centres;
- ii) Agrees the proposed methodology and timetable for the review, including a period of initial consultation on (a) the options for reducing the Children's Centre budget and (b) criteria that would be applied to identify Children's Centres for more in-depth impact assessment work.

IAN THOMAS
Strategic Director for Children & Younger Adults

Appendix 1: Timescale

May – Report to Cabinet seeking permission to carry out review through a two stage process.

The report seeks permission for an initial 5-week consultation on the options for making savings and draft criteria for selecting Children's Centres to have more in-depth Equality and Health Impact Assessments (EIAs/HIAs). These criteria would also be used later in selecting possible Centres for closure.

Informal briefings continue with staff, Trade Unions and HR continue to look at revised Job Profiles

12th May to 17th June (5 weeks including 1 week school holidays) - Consultation on the options and criteria takes place

Focus Groups on revised Job Profiles to continue

June - Officers review consultation results and confirm or change the criteria with agreement of lead Elected Member.

Officers from Public Health and Children and Younger Adults Department start more focused impact assessment work with families/service users.

July – August - Completion of HIA/EIA work. Use results to inform recommendations for Cabinet on the preferred savings option.

Prepare Cabinet Report (deadline 22nd August)

30th September - report to Cabinet with detailed proposals for formal consultation.

This could include proposals to close a number of Children's Centres. It would also include proposals to re-structure job roles and the process and timescales that would be involved.

October- Formal consultation period (if relevant) starts