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| 11 October 2011 | | ITEM 5 |
| Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee | | |
| Children's Centres | | |
| Report of: Sue Green, Strategic Lead, Early Years, Families and Communities | | |
| Wards and communities affected: All | Key Decision: Key | |
| Accountable Head of Service: Carmel Littleton, Head of Learning and Universal Outcomes | | |
| Accountable Director: Jo Olsson, Director of Children, Education and Families | | |
| This report is public | | |
| <p>Purpose of Report:</p> <p>To report on the consultation on proposals for changes to children's centres agreed by Cabinet in March 2011.</p> <p>To make recommendations on the future delivery of children's centres following the consultation.</p> | | |

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Consultation on proposals agreed by Cabinet in March 2011 has taken place with 503 responses.
- 1.2 The proposals locally are in line with national changes being proposed to improve outcomes for young children and their families with a particular focus on those most at risk of poorer outcomes.
- 1.3 There was strong support for changes to the services offered to ensure additional support and an early offer of help was provided to those who need it most.
- 1.4 The changes to childrens centres will enable investment in the development of the Early Offer of Help Strategy to secure support for families facing complex and multiple disadvantage, however if the centres are based solely in areas of disadvantage the opportunity to deliver the borough wide Early Offer of Help Strategy is limited.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 Recommendation One: That the Early Offer of Help Strategy is developed to provide support through Children's Centres including to ensure some universal services are retained to support access to targeted services in a non-stigmatising way but to note not all of these will be funded by the Local Authority Early Intervention Grant.

2.2 Recommendation two: That Model A is agreed to support the delivery and resourcing of the Early Offer of Help Strategy, borough wide, including:

2.2.1 Agreement for the following centres to be run by the local authority:

- Tilbury
- Thameside
- Aveley
- Ockendon
- Stanford

2.2.2 Agreement for service delivery in the following centres to be commissioned out:

- Chadwell
- West Thurrock (to cover delivery across West Thurrock & South Stifford ward)
- Chafford Hundred
- East Tilbury

2.3 Recommendation three: That the following centres are changed to early education and childcare/information delivery only (subject to zero capital claw-back agreement from Department for Education):

- South Stifford
- Abbots Hall
- Horndon
- Purfleet

2.4 Recommendation four: That alternative use is agreed for the following centres:

- Little Thurrock (Deneholm)- early education or schools development
- Grays Thurrock (Quarry Hill) – school development

2.5 That members note that the maximum capital claw-back is £300,000 but that officers will negotiate with the Department for Education with the aim of reducing / removing this cost.

3. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Childcare Act 2006 sets out the key duties on local authorities and their partners with regard to children's centres including the core offer of services that should be delivered. It also sets out the requirement to consult on changes to children's centres.
- 3.2 In March 2011, Cabinet agreed to consult on proposals to close six children's centres, consider commissioning out four children's centres and to review the services offered. This report sets out the feedback from the consultation and background analysis that has been completed and makes recommendations for the future delivery of children's centres in Thurrock. Whilst it is linked to services it is mainly concerned with the delivery points as the service delivery offer is being developed as a part of the wider Early Offer of Help Strategy being developed.
- 3.3 Originally, the key driver for the changes to children's centre delivery was the need to generate savings due to a reduction in the funding available. Since April 2011 however, there have been a number of national drivers that mean that a key focus, whilst still retaining the need to achieve savings, is the delivery of targeted early offer of help services to those most at risk of poorer outcomes.
- 3.4 The consultation has run for twelve weeks and has provided a range of opportunities for parents, the public and professionals to comment on the proposed changes. Opportunities were provided in each locality across the borough and information was provided for key groups to share with their members and encourage a wide response. A summary of the consultation is included in appendix one.
- 3.5 Whilst a consultation plan set out the activities to be undertaken, officers also responded to feedback during the consultation, attended community events and met with stakeholders who identified that a further discussion would be beneficial.
- 3.6 In addition to the consultation, a data analysis has also been completed for each of the current centres including data on education and skills, deprivation, the number of child protection cases and the number of teenage parents.
- 3.7 The Department for Education has consulted on the core purpose of children's centres with proposals to ensure that the aim of a Sure Start Children's Centre is to improve outcomes for young children and their families, with a particular focus on the most disadvantaged, so children are equipped for life and ready for school, no matter what their background or family circumstances. The intention behind the core purpose is to enable greater flexibility for local authorities and children's centres to commission services based on an assessment of local need and to use universal services as an access point for targeted support for those in the greatest need.

- 3.8 The Department for Education states that:
‘The core purpose is intended to move beyond the concept of a full core offer which all Sure Start Children’s Centre were required to deliver as the network was being established. The concept of a full core offer played an important role when the network of children’s centres was being established, but many in the early years sector have said it doesn’t necessarily reflect what the best children’s centres are doing, or leave room for local innovation. The Government wants to see a greater focus on local leadership of services to improve outcomes for families in greatest need’.
- 3.9 In the report ‘The Foundation Years: preventing poor children becoming poor adults’ Frank Field highlights the overwhelming evidence that children’s life chances are most heavily predicated on their development on the first five years of life. The review recommends that as Government funding is gradually moved towards the early years and this funding is weighted towards the most disadvantaged children. It recommends that Children’s Centres re focus on their original purpose and identify, reach and provide targeted help to the most disadvantaged families whilst maintaining some universal services so that centres are welcoming, inclusive, socially mixed and non-stigmatising. The report also recommends that local authorities should open up the commissioning of Children’s Centres or services within them.
- 3.10 This focus also links directly to the findings of the Munro Review of Child Protection particularly the recommendation that local authorities should secure sufficient provision of early help services for children, young people and families, leading to better identification of the help that is needed and resulting in an offer of early help.
- 3.11 Many local authorities are planning changes and/or closures to children’s centres to better focus resources on those who at risk of poorer outcomes within the reduced local budgets.
- 3.12 To ensure synergy with other work across localities, officers have also met with the Corporate Assets Manager and have taken account of the proposed Community Engagement Strategy preferred options for area based working. As these strategies have yet to be developed fully, close links are in place to ensure that any changes made do not have a negative impact on the developing strategies.

4. ISSUES AND/OR OPTIONS

- 4.1 In total, 503 consultation responses were received plus more detailed feedback from professional groups from a range of sectors. This was a high response rate compared to other consultations held locally and compares favourably to consultations in other local authority areas.

- 4.2 Officers were proactive in ensuring that a range of opportunities were provided across the borough and through local organisations. Many partners also supported the consultation by promoting it with their users and in some cases supporting parents to complete the consultation. A full breakdown of the consultation responses is included in appendix one.
- 4.3 As agreed by Cabinet in March 2011, the key changes being consulted on were:
- **Changes to the service offered to ensure that it supports those who need it most**
 - **The closure or change of use of up to six centres**
 - **The option to commission / change the management of four centres**
- 4.4 The consultation response was predominantly from parents (65%), 73% of the respondents already used one or more of the centres with the majority using them once per week (59%). It was encouraging that targeted work meant that 27% of the respondents were those who did not regularly use a children's centre as this was one of the priorities for the consultation.
- 4.5 **Changes to the Service Offered.**
- 4.5.1 There was strong support for proposals to:
- Make changes to our outreach programme to provide a greater emphasis on supporting families who need additional support
 - Increase the services we offer to provide additional support to families that are experiencing particular difficulties by reducing some of the more general groups we offer
 - Offer intensive structured parenting support through a range of programmes such as outreach and home visiting
 - Provide access to specialist services such as counselling, family therapy and services to safeguard children from harm and neglect
- 4.6 Over 90% of respondents agreed to changes to services to provide intensive support to those who needed it most as well as additional support for families. The discussion with professional groups such as the Children's Partnership Stakeholder Board and team managers from the Safeguarding Team supported these changes however it was with caution to ensure that services were linked to a universal access point rather than being just targeted. This was to avoid any stigma attached to accessing the services.
- 4.7 If agreed, this element of the work will be included in the development of the Early Offer of Help Strategy and will form the basis of the service offer that will shape staffing, commissioning and service delivery from September 2012 onwards. Feedback from the Children's Partnership Stakeholder Board also highlighted the need for targeted work to provide support at an early stage and to provide outreach services to those who need it most.

4.8 The national consultation on the core purpose of children's centres focuses on improving outcomes and reducing inequalities; assessing the strengths and need across the area to inform commissioning of services and providing access to high quality universal services in the area.

4.9 The closure/change of use of up to six children's centres

4.9.1 With regard to closures or change of use, respondents were asked if they agreed with the proposal to focus resources on fewer centres to enable us to develop services for families who need additional support. Understandably this proposal had the least support with 42% supporting this, the need for effective outreach was highlighted by the limited number of respondents who felt able to travel to alternative venues.

4.10 The consultation looked at the centres most likely to be used in each area and the results were as follows:

- Ockendon Childrens Centre
- Tilbury Children's Centre
- Stanford Children's Centre
- Thameside Children's Centre

4.11 There are other factors such as access to services that need to be considered and some wards could be considered isolated due to limited public transport links or a lack of services and this should also be considered. It should also be noted that it is a key risk that capital grants used to build the centres may have to be repaid if centres are closed. The latest advice is that, subject to agreement, as long as some of the original purpose such as early education and childcare provision are retained then repayment may not be required. If a centre closed or changed use completely then repayment is likely to be required. Local authorities have been advised that they should operate on the presumption that clawback will be enforced. However, guidance states that, subject to prior approval from the Department, clawback may be waived or deferred where an asset is sold and the proceeds are reinvested in another asset for a similar purpose consistent with the aims of the grant, this includes the delivery of early education and childcare.

4.12 If agreement is given to close a centre or a full service is not offered, outreach provision from a nearby centre will ensure that families in need of targeted support will still receive it.

4.13 To commission/change the management of four centres.

4.13.1 The response to proposals to change the management of four centres across Thurrock showed that 27% of respondents disagreed with the proposal 73% either agreed, felt that would be little change to the centres or did not express a view. A number of professionals commented on the benefits of this model to bring additional expertise and the opportunity of additional funding to the centres. If this change is agreed by members then clear

information should be provided to parents in particular to ensure that the changes are understood.

4.14 Data Analysis

4.14.1 Research has shown that there are a number of measures that can be used to gain an indication of outcomes for children and families (reference: A New Approach to Child Poverty: Tackling the Causes of Disadvantage and Transforming Families Lives; April 2011). These indicators include child poverty data, health inequalities data, and education and skills information. Local priorities such as the reduction in teenage pregnancy and the reduction in the number of cases open to social care provide a further range of data to analyse and also the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) gives an overview of a wide range of outcomes in each ward. Indicators that have been used in this report are as follows:

- Index of Multiple Deprivation
- Child poverty
- Health & Disability Deprivation
- Child protection cases
- Teenage pregnancy
- Education and skills

4.14.2 Using this data, the wards that show the greatest need across all six indicators are:

- Belhus
- Chadwell St Mary
- Tilbury Riverside and Thurrock Park
- Tilbury St Chads
- West Thurrock and South Stifford

4.14.3 The following wards score high in four or five out of the six outcome areas:

- Aveley and Uplands
- Grays Riverside
- Ockendon

4.14.4 Of the remaining wards the need varied by type or level but they did not experience high levels of need across multiple outcome areas. A full summary of the data analysis can be found in appendix two.

4.15 The existing centres that currently serve the areas identified are as follows:

| Centre | Wards served |
|---------------|-------------------------------------|
| Ockendon | Belhus Ockendon |
| Chadwell | Chadwell St Mary |
| Tilbury | Tilbury Riverside and Thurrock Park |

| | |
|---|----------------------------------|
| | Tilbury St Chads |
| West Thurrock; Purfleet; South Stifford | West Thurrock and South Stifford |
| Aveley | Aveley and Uplands |
| Thameside | Grays Riverside |

4.16 In addition to these centres there are two areas where the Children’s Centre is the main delivery point for under fives services including health visiting provision such as baby weigh clinics. These are East Tilbury and Chafford Hundred.

4.17 **Options for delivery points** - All options below are based on the original consultation purpose agreed by Cabinet in March 2011:

To reduce the number of local authority run centres to five and to consider alternative models of provision for a further four by commissioning third party providers.

4.18 All options target the areas with the highest need as a minimum.

4.19 **Delivery Model A**

4.19.1 This model secures delivery by the local authority and commissioned organisations. It secures delivery in the areas of greatest need but also has regard to access to wider services in East Tilbury and Chafford Hundred where there is a lower level of need but limited access to basic services. It also maintains geographical coverage for multi agency delivery. In West Thurrock and South Stifford this model moves all children’s centre services into one hub with effective outreach and partner delivery rather than having three smaller centres with limited service access.

4.19.2 This model seeks alternative use for the centres that is still in line with the conditions of grant and therefore minimises the risk of capital claw-back (subject to Dept for Education approval). It also secures the childcare provision already in place and ensures that the local authority continues to meet the childcare sufficiency duties included in the Childcare Act 2010. Where families in need of targeted support live in areas where there are no longer children’s centres, outreach provision will be available from nearby centres.

| Retained by LA | Commissioned | Childcare delivery / information centre only | Alternative use |
|--|---|---|--|
| Tilbury (incl early years and childcare) | Chadwell | South Stifford | Little Thurrock – Deneholm (change from children’s centre to early years/ childcare or school provision) |
| Thameside | West Thurrock (services to cover whole of West Thurrock and South Stifford Ward including Purfleet) | Abbots Hall | Grays Thurrock – Quarry Hill (change |
| Aveley | | Horndon | |
| Stanford | | Purfleet – currently delivered by LA (incl youth provision) | |

| | | | |
|---|--|--|--|
| Ockendon | Chafford Hundred East Tilbury | | from children's centre to school provision) |
| Rationale | Rationale | Rationale | Rationale |
| Highest levels of need in most centres except Stanford but this option would provide a good spread over borough and range of multi-purpose delivery points with office space and multiple delivery rooms / health provision | Mix of need with some high levels and others isolated or with limited levels of service provision. Also some centres are the delivery point for health services in the area alongside other support. | Lower levels of need, limited existing delivery. Change to early education and childcare alongside signposting and linked outreach for those in most need of support would reduce risk of capital clawback as this is clearly in line with Surestart Early Years and Childcare Grant Purpose (subject to agreement by DfE) | Limited use and /or lower levels of need that could be met through effective outreach from Thameside Centre which is in close proximity. Minimal capital cost repayment: £150,000 per centre if DfE do not agree to change of use. |

4.19.3 Cost: Estimated revenue cost = £3,064,955

4.19.4 Risks:

- Capital claw-back (subject to agreement from DfE)
- Mitigated by keeping maximum number of centres in line with Surestart Early Years and Childcare Grant whilst reducing revenue expenditure
- Reduced service access mitigated by development of an effective targeted outreach programme

4.19.5 Advantages:

- Maintains services in areas of greatest need
- Maintains geographical coverage across Borough with bases delivery of the Early Offer of Help Strategy
- Takes account of areas where closure would remove access to other services
- Maintains early years and childcare delivery points across Borough and reduces risk of capital clawback

4.19.6 Disadvantages

- Some risk of capital claw-back
- Some areas will have limited access to services

4.20 Delivery Model B

4.20.1 This model has less of a focus on a geographical spread of services and the centres to be commissioned include those where the local authority delivers childcare on site. For Tilbury, this would mean the local authority would lose use of the largest children's centre in one of the most disadvantaged areas and this would reduce the capacity for a multi agency base in this area. It would also mean that there was very limited provision in the North East locality.

4.20.2 The model also secures delivery by the local authority and commissioned organisations. It secures delivery in the areas of greatest need but also still has regard to access to wider services in East Tilbury and Chafford Hundred where there is a lower level of need but limited access to basic services. In West Thurrock and South Stifford this model retains children’s centre services in two hubs with effective outreach and partner delivery rather than having three smaller centres with limited service access.

4.20.3 This model seeks alternative use for the centres that is still in line with the conditions of grant and therefore minimises the risk of capital clawback (subject to Dept for Education approval). It also ensures that the local authority continues to meet the childcare sufficiency duties included in the Childcare Act 2010. Where families in need of targeted support live in areas where there are no longer children’s centres, outreach provision will be available from nearby centres.

| Retained by LA | Commissioned | Childcare delivery / information centre | Alternative Use |
|--|--|---|--|
| Thameside Aveley Ockendon Chadwell Purfleet (space secured for youth provision delivery) | Tilbury West Thurrock Chafford Hundred East Tilbury | South Stifford Abbots Hall Horndon Stanford | Little Thurrock – Deneholm (change from children’s centre to early years/ childcare or school provision) Grays Thurrock – Quarry Hill (change from children’s centre to school provision) |
| Rationale | Rationale | Rationale | Rationale |
| The LA delivery of childcare would not be retained. High levels of need in all centres. | Commissioning of childcare. Mix of need with some high levels and others isolated or with limited levels of service provision. Also some centres are the delivery point for health services in the area alongside other support. | Lower levels of need, limited existing delivery. Change to early education and childcare alongside signposting and linked outreach for those in most need of support would reduce capital clawback. | Limited use and /or lower levels of need that could be met through effective outreach from Thameside Centre which is in close proximity. Minimal capital cost repayment: £150,000 per centre if DfE do not agree to change of use. |

4.20.4 Cost: Estimated revenue cost = £3,064,955

4.20.5 Risks:

- Capital claw-back (subject to agreement from DfE)
- Mitigated by keeping maximum number of centres in line with Surestart Early Years and Childcare Grant whilst reducing revenue expenditure

4.20.6 Advantages:

- Maintains services in areas of greatest need
- Takes account of areas where closure would remove access to other services
- Removes responsibility for childcare delivery from local authority
- Maintains early years and childcare delivery points across Borough and reduces risk of capital claw-back

4.20.7 Disadvantages

- Some risk of capital clawback
- Limited geographical coverage across Borough with bases for delivery of the Early Offer of Help Strategy
- Limited access to services in north east of Borough
- Limits delivery by local authority and option to provide targeted specialist support in areas of greatest need
- Will mean the duty to secure sufficient early childhood services across the Borough is difficult to secure

5. **CONSULTATION (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)**

- 5.1 There has been wide consultation as detailed above. In addition, the Children's Partnership Stakeholder Board held a workshop to discuss the future of children's centres and a task and finish group of elected members has met to ensure members are aware of the feedback from the consultation and the data analysis.

6. **IMPACT ON CORPORATE POLICIES, PRIORITIES, PERFORMANCE AND COMMUNITY IMPACT**

- 6.1 These changes will improve the local authority's ability to meet the following priorities:
- Improve the education and skills of local people
 - Ensure a safe, clean and green environment
 - Provide and commission high quality and accessible services that meet, wherever possible, individual needs

7. **IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 **Financial**

Implications verified by: **Kay Goodacre**
 Telephone and email: **01375 652466**
kgoodacre@thurrock.gov.uk

The funding for surestart centres is no longer ringfenced, and has been replaced by the new Early Intervention grant.

The refocusing of government funding will have a significant impact on the

delivery of Children's Centres. The duty on the local authority to deliver and maintain children's centres is statutory so identifying delivery options that focus on the delivery of specialist services to those who need them most is imperative.

If reductions in current fixed costs such as buildings and staffing are not achieved then the investment of resources on services for those who need them most cannot be made.

If buildings are leased to private and voluntary providers, we will need to ensure that the Local Authority does not incur unplanned costs for developing locality based working, for example office space rental.

The risk of capital clawback could impact on the Council's capital programme, at a time of limited available capital.

7.2 **Legal**

Implications verified by: Kar-Yee Chan
Telephone and email: 01375 652938
kchan@thurrock.gov.uk

The current legislation requires that local authorities consult before making significant changes to services offered through children's centres and consultation has taken place. Additionally, if services are outsourced to other service providers then a clear commissioning strategy and sound contracts will need to be in place in accordance with the Council's Constitution and legislation. The risks on capital clawback have been considered and are set out in the body of the Report. Any agreement with the DfE concerning zero capital claw-back or waiver of grant conditions will require formal documentation.

Legal Services are available to provide ongoing advice and assistance to ensure compliance with the Council's Constitution and legislation.

7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Samson DeAlyn**
Telephone and email: **01375 652472**
sdealyn@thurrock.gov.uk

These proposals have been subject to a full Equality Impact Analysis (EqIA). A full three month consultation has been held, which fed into the EqIA, along with data analysis of centre usage. This targeted key groups who were likely to face an adverse impact as a result of the changes. Evidence suggests the centres do not currently provide good access to key groups such as fathers, disabled parents and families with complex and multiple needs, the changes will support improved access and a more focused outreach programme will increase access to support and services.

7.4 **Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Section 17, Risk Assessment, Health Impact Assessment, Sustainability, IT, Environmental**

Asset Management

Implications verified by: **Ian Rydings, Corporate Asset Manager**
Telephone and email: **01365 652238**
irydings@thurrock.gov.uk

This departmental service review has significant asset management implications, and is being managed in parallel with the corporate asset review programme; Making Our Assets Work. It will be important to integrate these two initiatives as far as is possible in order both to take advantage of potential synergies and to avoid perverse asset decisions.

Making Our Assets Work is looking particularly at rationalising local asset provision, and as both reviews progress it may be desirable for Children Centre provision in priority areas of the Borough to be provided from wider multi use buildings. Communication channels between central and departmental property management will remain open to ensure this will happen where appropriate in the interests of efficient and effective asset use.

The Department of Community and Local Government are championing public sector asset review and are aware of the potential disincentive to change represented by the Department of Education capital claw back provisions. Their advice is that such conditions are unlikely to continue in the long term as being contrary to the spirit of the localism agenda. In the meantime authorities should be prepared to evidence the efficiency and general well-being and service improvement aspects of review and hope to demonstrate in this way that it is rational for the Department of Education to waive clawback requirements on a case by case basis.

8. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 Consultation on proposals agreed by cabinet in March 2011 has taken place with a good response.
- 8.2 The proposals locally are in line with national changes being proposed to improve outcomes for young children and their families with a particular focus on those most at risk of poorer outcomes.
- 8.3 There was strong support for changes to the services offered to ensure additional support and an early offer of help was provided to those who need it most.
- 8.4 The changes to childrens centres will enable investment in the development of the Early Offer of Help Strategy to secure support for families facing complex and multiple disadvantage, however if the centres are based solely in areas of disadvantage the opportunity to deliver the borough wide Early Offer of Help Strategy is limited.

8.5 Therefore the following recommendations are made:

8.5.1 Recommendation one: That services to provide an early offer of help are developed as a part of the Early Offer of Help Strategy to provide support through Children’s Centres including to ensure some universal services are retained to support access to targeted services in a non stigmatising way but to note not all of these will be funded by the local authority Early Intervention Grant.

8.5.2 Recommendation two: That Model A is agreed to support the delivery and resourcing of the Early Offer of help Strategy, including:

8.5.3 Agreement for the following centres to be run by the local authority:

- Tilbury
- Thameside
- Aveley
- Ockendon
- Stanford

8.5.4 Agreement for service delivery in the following centres to be commissioned out:

- Chadwell
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- Chafford Hundred
- East Tilbury

8.5.4 Recommendation three: That the following centres are changed to childcare/information delivery only (subject to zero capital clawback agreement from Department for Education):

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8.5.5 Recommendation four: That alternative use is agreed for the following centres:

- Little Thurrock (Deneholm)- early education or schools development
- Grays Thurrock (Quarry Hill) – school development

8.5.6 That members note that the maximum capital clawback is £300,000 but that officers will negotiate with the Department for Education with the aim of reducing/removing this cost.

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS USED IN PREPARING THIS REPORT:

- Munro Review of Child Protection
- The Foundation Years: preventing poor children becoming poor adults’ Frank Field

- A New Approach to Child Poverty: Tackling the Causes of Disadvantage and Transforming Families Lives (Dept Work and Pensions / Dept for Education April 2011)

10. APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT:

- Appendix one – Consultation summary
- Appendix two - Data analysis summary
- Appendix three – Equality Impact Assessment

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