

## **Part 1 Children centres – proposal to consult on future service delivery**

In 1996 the Labour government set up an inquiry group to develop the concept of fully integrated centres for children and families. This was followed by an intensive period of experimentation with different models and programmes:

- Early Excellence Centres (1997),
- Surestart Local Programmes (1999)
- Neighbourhood Nursery Initiative (2001).

Surestart children's centres emerged in 2004, and in the first and second phase of this programme many of the 'new' centres built on what had gone before; subsuming Surestart local programmes into new structures, extending the work of existing Early Excellence Centres or Nursery Schools.

In 2006 local authorities were given the statutory duty to provide children centre services under Section 5A of the Childcare Act 2006 and more recently the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 (ASCL) states that " *local authorities must, so far as is reasonably practicable, include arrangements for sufficient provision of children's centres to meet local need.*"

The development of the programme was in 3 phases (2004 – 2010), with local authorities given a target for each phase:

**Phase 1** – (2004-06) centres to be developed in the 20% most disadvantaged wards, using existing models wherever possible.

**Phase 2** – (2006-08) centres rolled out across the 30% most disadvantaged wards and starting to develop into the 70% wards. (2,500 in England by March 2008)

**Phase 3** – (2008 -10) centres in every community (3,500 in England by March 2010)

The children centre delivery programme for Herefordshire created 11 children centres:

<b>Phase 1</b>	Greencroft (South city)	Coningsby (Leominster)	Springfield (south city )
<b>Phase 2</b>	HOPE (Bromyard)	Ryefield (Ross)	Ledbury
	Widemarsh (north city)	Kington	Golden Valley
<b>Phase 3</b>	Southmeadow( south city)	Broadlands (north city)	

Ten of the eleven are currently run by the local authority, The Bromyard children centre service is currently commissioned to a third sector agency (HOPE family centre) and under procurement rules a new tender for these services will be commencing in December.

### Core offer

Children's centres were expected to deliver a core offer of services in every community:

- Information and advice to parents on a range of subjects including looking

after babies and young children, the availability of local services such as childcare;

- Drop-in sessions and activities for parents, carers and children;
- Outreach and family support services, including visits to all families within two months of a child's birth;
- Child and family health services, including access to specialist services for those who need them;
- Links with Jobcentre Plus for training and employment advice; and
- Support for local childminders and a childminding network.

Although local authorities have the statutory duty for children centres, the model of delivery was always expected to be delivered in an integrated way, with a wide range of agencies including health, job centre plus, family learning and third sector organisations to deliver a "one stop shop" for families with children under 5.

Section 5e of the Childcare Act 2006 places the duty on local authorities, Primary Care Trusts and Jobcentre Plus to consider providing their early childhood services through children's centres and Ofsted inspections of children's centres assess the effectiveness of partnership working and its impact on the outcomes being achieved for children and families.

There has been mixed success with the children centre development in Herefordshire, engagement of partners especially health has relied on local practitioner relationships rather than a strategic approach to integrated services. Each centre was encouraged to develop individually with an emphasis on providing universal services and less focus on reaching out to the most vulnerable.

The restructure of children's services during 2010 saw the children centres becoming part of the new North and South locality teams with line management of centre managers being transferred to the Heads of Localities from January 2011 with a new strategic direction, increasing the focus on ensuring families who need the most help are targeted and given help.

### **New national picture**

The coalition government wants to see children centres change and develop in line with their thinking on early intervention and is committed to ensuring that centres working alongside partners become the hub for services for children aged 0-5 years. The Department of Education and the Department of Health has recently published the "Foundation Years Policy Statement which sets out the vision for the families with children 0-5 years.

New children centre statutory guidance is due in the New Year and it is expected that local authorities and partners will have the duty to:

- Retain a network of children centres, but focused much more effectively on targeting resources on those families who need them most, identifying, reaching and providing targeted help to the most disadvantaged.
- Ensure there is a mixed economy of providers of children centre services.

- Ensure consistent midwifery and health visiting services are provided through children centres

Since January 2011, the Department for Education has been discussing with children's centre leaders, local authorities and voluntary sector organisations on the development of a "core purpose" for children centres, alongside the need to reduce spending and focus on services for the most vulnerable. Children's Centres should play a crucial role in early intervention; tackling issues early and helping to prevent costly problems from emerging later on.

### Core purpose

The core purpose is intended to move beyond the concept of a full core offer which all children centres were required to deliver to date. The Government wants to see a greater focus on:

- 1. Improving outcomes for young children and their families, with a particular focus on the most disadvantaged families, in order to reduce inequalities**
- 2. Assessing strengths and need across the area to inform local commissioning of services**
- 3. Providing access to high quality universal (available to all families who wish to use them) services in the area.**
- 4. Using evidence-based approaches to deliver targeted, family-centred support.**
- 5. Acting as a hub for the local community, building social capital and cohesion.**
- 6. Sharing expertise with other early year's settings to improve quality.**
- 7. Respecting and engaging parents**
- 8. Partnership working**

The core purpose puts an onus on a cross-sector approach and effective local partnerships, particularly between social workers, health visitors, midwives and children's centre outreach workers, so that vulnerable families are supported into appropriate interventions. It is expected that some of the above will be delivered through a "payments by results" model.

In line with the proposed national change, it is timely that a consultation is undertaken to determine what is needed from Herefordshire's children centres, and how services should be delivered.

### Herefordshire Children's Centre Core Purpose

Taking into consideration the governments expectations and early indications on the vision of the children centre core purpose together with the need to have a joint vision for Herefordshire, a draft framework has been developed to ensure a consistent outcome focused quality approach to service delivery.

The framework underpins the recommendations from the Allen, Field and Tickell reviews, and is an outcome based approach delivering evidence based interventions. Further work is now needed to identify if this is the right framework for Herefordshire and if years, how these interventions will be delivered to ensure outcomes are achieved.

<b>Framework for Herefordshire Children's Centres Core Purpose</b>			
<b>Outcomes for children and families</b>	<b>Child development -</b> Capable, confident, creative children	<b>Parenting capacity –</b> Capable, confident, creative parents/carers	<b>Health and well-being-</b> Narrowing the gap, addressing inequalities.
<b>Integrated Support</b>	Early childhood education and childcare.	Relationship support. Parenting and family support.	Child and family health Public health Family learning and employment support.
	Outreach and information for families		
<b>Evidence based interventions for families in greatest need.</b>	Lets Talk with Under Fives Early Bird Programme	Triple P Solihull Approach Getting Started	Healthy Child Programme Early Support Programme (for families with disabled children)
<b>Underpinning activities</b>	Local integrated offer of support to children and families. Engagement of third sector. Support for early years settings. Common Assessment Framework (CAF)		

### Next steps

Taking into account the national changes, the financial challenges and the proposed new statutory guidance it is the right time to undertake a consultation exercise to understand what is needed, what works well now, what is required from partners and how services should be delivered in the future in Herefordshire to inform a commissioning service specification.

The current legislation requires that local authorities consult before making a 'significant change' to services offered through existing children's centres.

### Consultation

If approved the consultation would take place between January and March 2012, involving parents and carers, children centre staff, professional partners, commissioned services, schools, voluntary organisations and members with the following aim:

**To identify a sustainable model for the delivery of Herefordshire Children Centres Core Purpose that takes full account of the changing national policy.**

The consultation will use various formats:

Online questionnaires  
Children centre parent forums

Stakeholder forums  
User groups

The findings will be collated and reported to lead members and cabinet during May with the aim to publish a final service delivery model / service specification by June 2012