



Task & Finish Group Report

Review of Early Years Services



Members of the task and finish group



Councillor Carole Gandy (Chair)



Councillor Emma Holton



Councillor Alan Seldon



Councillor David Summers

Review of Early Years services for young people and children's wellbeing - Review Report

Chairman's Foreword

- 1.1 The health and social care overview and scrutiny undertook to do a short, focussed review of the early years services for children and families in the county. This was intended to help determine what services are available throughout the county to meet the many demands in respect of service provision.
- 1.2 In carrying out the review, the task and finish group conducted face to face interviews and also visited a number of early years services throughout the county. Whilst the group understands that the council is currently assessing whether there are any gaps in the service provision in respect of early years options, it was felt that there needed to be a review of what is currently provided in order to meet our corporate plan objectives and child care needs.
- 1.3 It is hoped that this review will provide essential information to help inform the future plans for these services. These recommendations will hopefully prove useful in early service re-design that may follow the outcome of this review and can be implemented by the executive.
- 1.4 I would like to thank my elected member colleagues who made up the group, for their assistance and support in the completion of this task. Thanks also to the people we interviewed in undertaking this review including officers from Herefordshire Council, Homestart, Hope Centre Bromyard and other early years provision.
- 1.5 Finally, our sincerest thanks go to both Ruth Goldwater, Chris Jones and Gordon Murray for their support in undertaking this task and finish review.

Councillor Carole Gandy, May 2016
Chairman of the Task and Finish Group

2 Executive Summary

- 2.1 The Task and Finish Group (the 'Group') has considered a significant amount of evidence and this report summarises and focuses on those matters identified in the scoping statement for the review.
- 2.2 Early years services are intended to provide support to give children the best start in life and to meet the aims of the Children and Young People's Plan 2015-2018.
- 2.3 Early years services are part of a continuum of services which support children and their families. They include the provision of children centres, nurseries and other child care settings throughout the county.

3. Composition of the Group

- 3.1 Members of the Group were Councillors:
Cllr Carole Gandy
Cllr David Summers
Cllr Emma Holton
Cllr Alan Seldon
- 3.2 Lead Officers, Chris Jones and Gordon Murray
- 3.3 Democratic Services Officer, Ruth Goldwater

4 Context

Why did we set up the group?

- 4.1 The group was set up as a direct result of scrutiny recommending that there needed to be a holistic review of early years services to ensure that they meet the needs of the children and parents of the county. It was agreed by the chair and vice chair of the health and social care overview and scrutiny committee (HSCOSC) as part of the work programme for that meeting that a task and finish group be commissioned.
- 4.2 The group was established to review the current early years provision and determine whether this was meeting the needs of children and families as intended as well as reviewing the communications and plans for services.

What were we looking at?

- 4.3 The Health & Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered and adopted a scoping statement for the group. The scoping statement is attached as appendix A.

Who did we speak to?

4.4 During February and March 2016, the group convened meetings and visits to gather as much background information and to seek as many views as possible. In doing this, the group visited and spoke to staff and some parents at:

- Children's centres
 - Coningsby children's centre (Leominster)
 - Hope centre (Bromyard)
 - Ryefield children's centre (Ross on Wye)
 - Widemarsh children's centre (Hereford)
- Children's Nurseries
 - Holmer pre-school nursery (attached to primary school)
 - Little Leintwardine nursery (attached to primary school)
 - Wigmore pre-school nursery (attached to primary school)
- Homestart Herefordshire – Mandie Preece (scheme manager)
- Staff within Children's Wellbeing Directorate, Herefordshire Council
 - Andy Hough (head of educational development)
 - Gordon Murray (head of commissioning children and young people)

What did we read?

4.5 The group was provided with background information to undertake this review.

How did we engage with people?

4.6 The group conducted face to face interviews and also visited the centres and provision outlined above.

5. Key themes

5.1 The following key questions were identified:

- Uptake for under-5 parents of adult learning is very low – how do we increase/ publicise this for parents?
- What impact has the increase in 2 year olds had on your centre/ provision?
- Has there been an increase in the number of children with special educational needs? Is there any specific reason for this?
- Are we reaching and engaging with the parents and children we should be?
- Are centres achieving their core purpose?
- What activities are you promoting to overcome some of the significant issues highlighted as a priority (e.g. managing feelings and behaviour, and speech)?

5.2 Summary of visits and interviews

- 5.2.1 The group visited a number of different early years provisions throughout the county as listed above and found that in the majority of children centres that are run by the council whilst the sessions are provided are of good standard there appears to be a lack of utilisation of the time and space that is available.
- 5.2.2 The speech and language therapy service provision provided within the centres is finding that there is a demand on their services that they are not able to meet. The average wait for an appointment with a Speech Therapist at County Hospital is between 40 – 50 weeks. Urgent referrals can take 20 weeks. When asked if they felt there was a specific need for their service it was cited that modern societal norms are having an effect on speech development and consequently social skills; i.e. children being placed in front of modern technology.
- 5.2.3 The group observed that the services that are provided from the children's centres that the council owns often are delivered by an outreach model. This can cause issues in delivery of services within the rural areas of the county as not all areas are able to be covered within the limited resources available. It is also costly and time consuming whilst providing no opportunity for parent or child interaction with others.
- 5.2.4 The group found that the majority of services within the county appear to be aimed at the 0-2 years provision and feel that this is not meeting the needs of all children and parents of pre-school age 0-5 years.
- 5.2.5 On reflection following the visits to the children centres it is felt that the vast majority are under-utilised and in fact apart from the Hope Centre, the group saw very few children and feel that the physical buildings could be used in a more effective way. It is felt by the group that the services needed to be provided more flexibly to meet the demands of the children and young people of Herefordshire. One centre manager stated "we talk about hard to reach families when really we should be talking about hard to reach services".
- 5.2.6 Following the group meeting children centre staff, it is felt that the different groups that are run may not be reflective of the needs of the users of the centres. This could be as a result of the timing of activities or the location. Coningsby is in fact running some of its provision from Bridge Street Leisure Centre which it believes sets them more within the community.
- 5.2.7 The group felt that there are hidden costs that are associated within the services that are provided out of the children's centres that the council and other public services may be responsible for; e.g. child health, breastfeeding sessions and development clinics.
- 5.2.8 The visit to one centre in Bromyard was an interesting model that could be developed across the county; however, this would require additional resources. The centre provides activities that offers early years education, adult learning and family support. This appeared to be a more comprehensive provision; it offered a variety of activities throughout the week and weekends to meet demands of the demographic within the locality. Their philosophy was that when dealing with a child with emotional or physical needs it was important to support the whole family.
- 5.2.9 The group visited some nursery provision throughout the county and felt that these were providing a good level of service within the resources available.

6 Recommendations

Following all of the visits and interviews that we carried out the task and finish group would like to make the following recommendations to the executive; and that they are given appropriate consideration.

Recommendation	Details
1	Early years provision is considered and a strategy is written that outlines how this is going to be developed over the course of the current administration to meet the needs of the children and families of Herefordshire.
2	Consideration is given to the use of the building space that the council has direct responsibility for to ascertain how they could be better used.
3	A review into the use of children's centre buildings is completed to ensure that the services provided are offered in a more holistic manner for the whole age range (0-5) and meet the needs of the children and families.
4	Early years provision need not be tied to specific buildings; this could include the sustainable use of buildings for example being used by community groups during the evenings and weekends.
5	Early years provision should be explored within a variety of localities and consideration be given to utilising existing community spaces.
6	Further investigation needs to be completed to ensure that the council is not subsidising other services that are provided out of their buildings.
7	Consideration to be given to ensure that speech and language therapy services are further enhanced and waiting times kept to a minimum to meet the apparent underlying needs of young children to develop their language and social skills.
8	Consideration is given to ensure that we identify mental health and emotional wellbeing issues early and provide support to children, young people and families to access the help and services to meet their needs.

Appendix A

Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee scoping statement

TITLE OF REVIEW:	Early Years and Children's Centres
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Reason for Enquiry

To review the development and implementation of Herefordshire's Early Years offer.

Links to the Community Strategy

This review links to the Children and Young People's Plan which has been adopted by full council.

Summary of Review and Terms of Reference

Summary

The aim is to review the progress of the development and implementation of the Herefordshire Early Years offer across the county, what services are planned, available and integrated. The review will consider what the referral pathways and model of delivery of services are that are currently in place within the county.

Terms of Reference

The group will meet as required to review progress and delivery of the early years offer. We need to ensure that we review the multi-agency contribution.

What will NOT be included

Children's safeguarding and family support

Potential outcomes

Review current Early Years arrangements, and plans for the future Early Years provision.
Provide recommendations to improve service delivery and outcomes for children and families in Herefordshire.
Inform the development of the Early Years approach in Herefordshire in the context of the Herefordshire's Children and Young People's Plan.

Key questions

How are we developing Herefordshire's multi-agency Early Years approach, including health visitors, children centre services and other services including links with voluntary and community sectors and schools to provide a more integrated service that meets the needs of the community?

What are the links to the Troubled Families / Families First programme and the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub?

What is the role of children's centres with the early years offer and are they providing what is needed?

How would this approach contribute to the preventative/early years agenda in Herefordshire including reducing the need for high threshold services such as some of those provided by children's social care?

What are the referral pathways and model of delivery of services?

Are there any accessibility restrictions with regards to transport?

Cabinet Member (s)

Cllr Jonathan Lester – Young People and Childrens Services

Key Stakeholders/Consultees

Multi-agency partners including Health, Police and Voluntary sector

Children's social care, education and schools

Advisory board members of the children's centres

Early years settings

Potential Witnesses

Chris Baird – assistant director education and commissioning

Andy Hough – head of educational development

Anne Roberts – children's centre manager

Julia Stephens – early years policy and strategy manager

Alison Murphy – early years lead improvement advisor

Andrea Westlake – public health consultant

Gordon Murray – Head of commissioning, children and young people

Research Required

Review other LAs' early years strategies

Central government policies

National best practice in respect of early years

List of where the children centres are located in the county

Mapping of current early years provision

Potential Visits

To children centres to review current provision across the county.

Possible visit to another LA that is considered as a national benchmark for early years provision; subject to clarification with regards to having similar demographic characteristics.

Nurseries across the county to review their provision.

Outline Timetable (following decision by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to commission the Review)	
<i>Activity</i>	<i>Timescale</i>
Visits to selected Children's centres	February / March 2016
Review of the Early Help Strategy	February / March 2016
Review the overall levels of early years provision	February / March 2016
Review families access to resources and services in relation to transport arrangements	February / March 2016
Members	Support Officers
Councillors: Cllr CA Gandy (Chairman of the Group) Cllr D Summers Cllr A Seldon Cllr EL Holton	Lead Support Officer Gordon Murray – Interim head of children's commissioning Support Officer Chris Jones – Strategic business intelligence officer
	Democratic Services Representative Ruth Goldwater – Democratic services officer
Additional members of the Group	None identified