

<b>MEETING:</b>	<b>CABINET</b>
<b>DATE:</b>	<b>14 JUNE 2012</b>
<b>TITLE OF REPORT:</b>	<b>CHILDREN CENTRE SERVICES REVIEW</b>
<b>PORTFOLIO AREA:</b>	<b>HEALTH AND WELL BEING</b>

**CLASSIFICATION:** Open

### **Wards Affected**

County-wide

### **Purpose**

For Cabinet to be informed of the findings from the children centre services consultation and agree a course of action to determine the future delivery model.

### **Key Decision**

This is a Key Decision because it is likely to be significant in terms of its effect on communities living or working in an area comprising one or more wards in the County.

It was included in the Forward Plan.

### **Recommendation(s)**

**THAT:**

- (a) taking account of the views expressed through the consultation, a ‘mixed market’ model of children centre services delivery be adopted;**
- (b) the core purpose specification for services for families with young children be developed through the forthcoming root & branch review using the results of this consultation; and**
- (c) a south city children’s centre is re-designated to a nursery to meet increased demand, and the Director for People’s Services be delegated authority to determine which centre is re-designated taking account of the outcome of ongoing feasibility work.**

### **Key Points Summary**

- Children centre services provide a wide range of support to families with young children (0-5) across a geographical area, delivered in children centre buildings, families’ homes and

community venues.

- A 12 week consultation has been undertaken involving parents/carers, children centre staff, service providers and local stakeholders in the nine localities to help identify an affordable model for the delivery of Herefordshire children centre services that will help all children achieve their potential and takes full account of the changing national policy, the financial challenges and Herefordshire Council and NHS Herefordshire's desire to commission services based on the needs of families.
- There was a positive response to Herefordshire having a mixed market of providers running children centre services; a core purpose specification will no need to be developed in order to commission these services.
- The government has recently announced an increase in the number of free nursery places for two year old children who live in deprived areas. There has been support to re-designate one of the three South Wye Children Centres as a nursery to meet the shortfall in places for two year old children, with children centre services being consolidated in the other two centres in that area.
- Phase 2 of the Root and Branch Review between October 2012 and March 2103 will be focusing on children and young people in Herefordshire.
- This report should be seen, alongside reports elsewhere on Cabinet's agenda today, as an integral element of the overall focus on prevention and early intervention, supporting disadvantaged or vulnerable children and their families by intervening early and giving children the best start in life.

## **Alternative Options**

- 1 It is a statutory requirement to provide children centre services; however the delivery model is a matter for local determination.
- 2 The provision of additional nursery places could be left to the local market to respond to; however demand based on provision for 3-4 year olds already exceeds supply and it is therefore unlikely that an increase in demand will be met.

## **Reasons for Recommendations**

- 3 These recommendations are the result of the findings of a detailed consultation, which will enable the council to fulfil its duty to provide children centre services within the budget available, and in a way which best meets service user needs. It takes into consideration the current government thinking around the delivery of the core purpose and future statutory guidance due later this year.

## **Introduction and Background**

- 4 Local authorities have a statutory duty to provide children centre services under Section 5A of the Childcare Act 2006, and 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."
- 5 Children centre services provide a wide range of support to families with young children (0-5) across a geographical area. The services may be delivered in children centre buildings, families' homes and community venues, with a view to ensuring that early childhood services in an area are made available in an integrated manner There are currently 11 children centres across

Herefordshire delivering a “core service” including:

- 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;
- Support for local childminders and a child-minding network.

6 The government is committed to ensuring that centres become the hub for services, from a range of partners, for children aged 0-5 years. The Department for Education and the Department of Health have recently published the “Foundation Years Policy Statement” which sets out the vision for the families with children 0-5 years. The government believes that children centre services should have a clear core purpose, focused on improving outcomes for young children and their families, with a particular focus on the most disadvantaged families, in order to reduce inequalities in child development and school readiness; supported by improved:

- parenting aspirations, self-esteem and parenting skills
- child and family health and life chances.

7 The government has worked with sector leaders to consider evidence and good practice, resulting in a co-produced description of how the core purpose can be achieved, by:

- Assessing need across the local community
- Providing access to universal early years services in the local area including high quality and affordable early years education and childcare
- Providing targeted evidence based early interventions for families in greatest need, in the context of integrated services
- Acting as a hub for the local community, building social capital and cohesion.
- Sharing expertise with other early year’s settings to improve quality.

8 In order to develop the core purpose in Herefordshire and to identify an affordable model for the delivery of Herefordshire children centre services that will help all children achieve their potential, meet identified need, and take full account of the changing national policy and the financial challenges HPSLT and lead members agreed to undertake a consultation to inform the future delivery of children centre services.

9 The consultation also included re-designation to a nursery of one of the three Children Centres in the South Wye area. In line with the new national policy to provide free nursery places for 2 year old children in deprived areas, the Department for Education has informed Herefordshire that 300 places for disadvantaged two year olds of 15 hours per week will be required from September 2013. Currently the offer in Herefordshire is 60 places at 10 hours per week.

## **Key Considerations**

10 Between 9th January and 30th March 2012, parents, carers, children centre staff, professionals

and members across Herefordshire, were invited to take part in a county wide consultation to inform a review of children's centre services. Two different opportunities were provided:

- On line questionnaires with paper versions if required
- Locality events for professionals, members and parish councils.

11 The consultation, and particularly the online consultation, proved to be a powerful tool which provided a range of useful information to inform the future. In total we received 914 responses from parent and carers, 37 from children centre staff, 50 from professionals, and 46 people attended the locality events.

12 The consultation was an opportunity for us to understand what works well, what could work better and what we should be prioritising to ensure the families that need the most support receive it.

13 The full findings from the consultation are available as a background paper, however the key headlines are:

- Families would like to see centres open at weekends.
- More publicity is needed to reach families who are unaware of the centre services
- Universal groups, such as stay and play are valued most by families followed by a range of universal health services (health visitor and midwife clinics, ante and post natal groups). Parents also valued support in getting their child ready for nursery and/or school.
- Children centre staff and service providers also ranked universal health services as important but also recognised the importance of delivering targeted services such as one to one family support, parenting support, portage support for disabled children and speech and language clinics and groups.
- Counselling services, mental health services and debt management were some of the targeted services identified that would be welcome alongside universal services such as family activity days and family learning. There was also a need identified for more services in rural areas.
- There was a positive response to charging for universal services.
- A higher percentage of respondents agreed that children centre services should be more targeted to the most vulnerable, whilst universal services were also valued.
- The results of a group of questions based on who should run children centres has shown a positive response to having a mixed market of providers running children centres, made up of council, charities, parents and community groups.
- All respondents agreed that parents could become more involved in running children centre services in a variety of ways.
- There was an overall positive response to the option of re designating a south city children's centre to become a childcare nursery, although there was no clear preference on which centre would be the preferred option. A feasibility study is currently being undertaken by the Sufficiency and Capital Commissioning Team.

14 The consultation results have shown the demand for additional services and what services the children centres need to focus on, children provider services will look at how these can be adapted and delivered through 2012-13.

15 The development of a core purpose specification for the longer term provision of Children Centre will be part of the focus of the Root and Branch review between October 2012 and March 2013

which will give the local authority the scope to understand the services needed by families with young children to ensure that families who need early help are supported to prevent further escalation and risk of negative outcomes later in life.

## **Community Impact**

- 16 Section 5A of the Childcare Act 2006 and more recently the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 (ASCL) requires that local authorities consult before making a 'significant change' to services offered through existing children's centres..
- 17 The consultation included families, children centre staff, service providers, children centre advisory boards and local stakeholders, including Wye Valley NHS Trust, GPs, third sector agencies, local and parish members, early years settings and schools.
- 18 The recommendations and consultation is a common theme running through the Child Poverty Strategy and highlighted in the Director of Peoples Services Delivery Plan:
  - 3.3 To improve outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and primary schools so that overall education achievement indicators are in the top quartile nationally within 5 years
  - 3.4 To reduce the impact of child poverty on children in Herefordshire.
  - 3.6 Reduce health inequalities for children and young people
- 19 Children Centre Services for the whole South Wye area will continue to be provided, consolidated through the remaining two centres.

## **Equality and Human Rights**

- 20 The proposal pays due regard to our public sector equality duty. An equality impact assessment will be used to inform decision making as part of the root and branch review and as part of the feasibility work on deciding which centre is to be re-designated.

## **Financial Implications**

- 21 The Council is facing significant challenges in financial terms and through the national settlement and reductions in funding. The Council's five year financial strategy includes an estimated 29.7% reduction in government formula grant. Budget decisions have been based on a set of core principles that include Supporting the Vulnerable. The process also includes fundamentally challenging what the council does to ensure appropriate use of public funding and quality of service.
- 22 The budget for children centre services for 2012/13 is £1.9m.
- 23 The re designation of a south city children centre could deliver savings of between £32,000 and £44,000 per year depending on which centre is chosen. There will also be an income from the chosen provider based on property services calculations.
- 24 In order to make the chosen centre fit for purpose there will need to be some refurbishment costs, which will need to be incurred in this financial year, a feasibility study is currently being undertaken by the Sufficiency and Capital Commissioning Team.

## **Legal Implications**

- 25 Local authorities have a 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) that states that "local authorities must, so far as is reasonably practicable, include arrangements for sufficient provision of children's centres to meet local need."
- 26 New statutory guidance for children centre services is expected in the autumn.

## **Risk Management**

- 27 There are some risks attached to the re designation of a south city children centre to create a childcare nursery:
- Unable to afford the refurbishment costs
  - Unable to secure a provider to deliver the service.

The risks identified above will be taken into consideration as part of the feasibility study, any costs for refurbishment will link to long term savings due to reduced running costs and increased income as rent from a local provider.

## **Consultees**

- 28 Under the Herefordshire Compact Agreement Code of practice - Informing, Consulting and Partnership the principles and standards of consultation (10.1 & 10.2) were adhered to.
- 29 Between 9th January and 30th March 2012, parents, carers, children centre staff, professionals and members across Herefordshire, were invited to take part in a county wide consultation to inform a review of children's centre services. Two different opportunities were provided:
- On line questionnaires with paper versions if required
  - Locality events for professionals, members and parish councils.

## **Appendices**

None

## **Background Papers**

- Findings of consultation exercise.