Children, Youth and Leisure Committee
10 February 2015

Reconfiguration of Kingston Hill and West Chessington Children’s Centres

Report by Chief Executive AfC

**Purpose**

To agree cessation of children’s centre activities at Kingston Hill Children’s Centre (KHCC) and West Chessington Children’s Centre (WCCC) which will secure required budget savings for 2014/15.

**Recommendation of the Lead Member for Children, Youth and Adult Learning**

To RESOLVE that it be approved that there is cessation of children’s centre services at Kingston Hill Children’s Centre (KHCC) and at West Chessington Children’s Centre (WCCC) and that, where possible, a limited programme is offered within the locality and that the buildings be transferred back to the respective schools.

**Key Points**

A. A proposal to save £60k in 2014/15 from Children’s Centres (“recommissioning reduction including refocus of 2 locations as centres for 2 year olds”) was included as one of the AfC savings which were considered by the People’s Services Committee on 6 February 2014 and included as part of the budget approved by Budget Council on 27 February 2014.

B. At the beginning of 2014 Kingston had ten designated children’s centres, organised into four localities. The size and capacity of each of the children’s centres varies; as a result, each locality has a hub centre which hosts the majority of activities including health provision. In 2014 all four localities were inspected under the 2014 Ofsted children’s centre inspection framework and were judged to have secured ‘good’ outcomes for children. In recent years, the children’s centre budget has received significant reductions and is unable to secure any further savings from the existing model of delivery.

C. In response, to secure further cost reductions in 2014/15, the cessation of children’s centre activity at Kingston Hill Children’s Centre (KHCC) and West Chessington Children’s Centre (WCCC) was proposed, as this would secure the required savings whilst not impacting significantly on service delivery. KHCC and WCCC children’s centres were established as part of phase 3 development and offered a limited timetable; neither centre hosted health provision. Phase 3 was the final stage of children’s centre development and established centres in areas with less significant deprivation. Current attendance and access data indicated that use of the centres was not extensive and the most popular activities could be sustained elsewhere in the locality.

D. Full consultation, focus groups, meetings with parents and online/paper consultation took place across summer 2014 with all parents, carers and service users of KHCC and WCCC. This identified which activities they wished to retain in the locality and that could be hosted at other children’s centres.

E. A new programme has been established in each locality which includes the activities identified in the consultation. The revised programme ensures that key universal and targeted services for families have been retained wherever possible. This change will help to achieve the required savings in a way that is least
disruptive to the children and families who use WCCC and KHCC.

F. KHCC and WCCC buildings will be retained by their host school and provision will continue to support local children and families. In KHCC (Alexandra Infant School) this involves the proposal to establish a new Early Years provision for 2 year olds to support the new early education entitlement in this locality. At WCCC (Lovelace Primary School), it will involve the development of existing pre-school provision and new out of school and holiday provision. Both buildings received Sure Start grant funding to establish children’s centre activity and this will need to be reimbursed, unless buildings continue to be used to deliver services supporting young children and their families.

Context

1. A proposal to save £60k in 2014/15 from Children’s Centres (“recommissioning reduction including refocus of 2 locations as centres for 2 year olds”) was included as one of the AfC savings which were considered by the People’s Services Committee on 6 February 2014 and included as part of the budget approved by Budget Council on 27 February 2014.

Proposal

2. This proposal seeks to reconfigure the existing provision and activities in two children’s centres and secure a number of additional activities in other children’s centres based in the locality. This would not impact significantly on the range and number of services offered to children and families. Under the proposal, the existing children’s centre buildings would be transferred to their respective host schools so that the buildings continue to be used for services which support young children and their families.

3. Considerable savings need to be made in the face of reduced Government funding and the serious financial challenges facing the Council over the coming years. If agreed, cessation of children’s centre activities at KHCC and WCCC will secure agreed savings of £30,740 (6/12 of the year) and £24,697 (5/12 of the year) for 2014/15.

Options

4. A second option would be to identify alternative savings for 2014/15.

Consultations

5. Full consultation with key stakeholders, as required under the Childcare Act 2006, has already taken place with service users, children’s centre staff and ward councillors. The consultation results were shared and published in September 2014. The Council’s Assets Working Group agreed to the transfer of the children’s centres back to their respective host schools in September 2014. Advice has been taken from the Council’s Legal Services at all stages to ensure that the required consultation process has been followed. Correspondence with parents at both centres is attached at ANNEX 2 of the report.

Timescale

6. Cessation of children’s centre services at KHCC took effect from 1 November 2014; a new locality programme of activities was also in place from 1 November 2014.
7. Cessation of the majority of children’s centre services at WCCC took effect from 1 October 2014; a new programme of activities was also in place from 1 October 2014 which included three outreach sessions from Chessington Children’s Centre.

8. Children’s centre buildings will be returned to their host schools by 1 April 2015.

9. The resulting efficiency savings will be secured by 31 March 2015.

Resource Implications

10. Efficiency savings secured for 2014/15 (part year) are £55,437.

11. Efficiency savings secured for 2015/16 (full year) are £61,481 per annum for WCCC and £55,274 per annum for KHCC.

12. Additional resources to deliver outreach services within the locality are £5,000 per annum for KHCC and £10,000 per annum for WCCC. These additional costs have been included in the efficiency savings set out above.

Legal Implications

13. The Council has a statutory duty under section 5A of the Childcare Act 2006 to make arrangements, so far as is reasonably practicable, for sufficient provision of children’s centres to meet local need. Under section 5D, the Council must consult before any significant change is made in the services provided through a children’s centre and before anything is done that would result in a relevant children’s centre ceasing to be a children’s centre.

14. In discharging their duties in relation to children’s centres, the Council is required to have regard to any guidance given from time to time by the Secretary of State. The statutory guidance says that local authorities should:
   • ensure that a network of children’s centres is accessible to all families with young children in their area;
   • ensure that children’s centres and their services are within reasonable reach of all families with young children in urban and rural areas, taking into account distance and availability of transport;
   • together with local commissioners of health services and employment services, consider how best to ensure that the families who need services can be supported to access them;
   • target children’s centres services at young children and families in the area who are at risk of poor outcomes through, for example, effective outreach services, based on the analysis of local need;
   • demonstrate that all children and families can be reached effectively;
   • ensure that opening times and availability of services meet the needs of families in their area;
   • 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;
   • take into account the views of local families and communities in deciding what is sufficient children’s centre provision;
• take account of families crossing local authority borders to use children’s centres in their authority. Families and carers are free to access early childhood services where it suits them best; and
• take into account wider duties under section 17 of the Childcare Act 1989 and under the Child Poverty Act 2010.

15. The view of senior officers within Achieving for Children is that the proposals for KHCC and WCCC will not adversely affect young children and their families, or compromise the Council’s duty to have sufficient children’s centres to meet local need as key activities can be retained at one of the other children’s centres in the locality.

16. Children’s Centre development was funded by the government Sure Start programme with clear criteria for devolved funding. Under the Sure Start Early Years and Childcare Grant conditions, the local authority must consult the Secretary of State if it proposes to dispose of, or change the use of, a tangible asset (such as land, buildings or equipment) which has been financed wholly with this grant funding, or which has been substantially improved by the use of these funds. If the changed use of the asset is consistent with the aims of the Sure Start Early Years and Childcare Grant, the grant guidance indicates that the Department for Education will be likely to approve the changed use without clawing back the funding. If agreed, the local authority will need to notify the Department for Education about its planned change of use of the two children’s centres and seek approval for their alternative use.

Risk Assessment

17. Legal risk - The Council’s statutory duty under the Childcare Act 2006 remains fulfilled as children and families are still able to access children’s centre services within their locality. The consultation has ensured that activities which are most frequently used by families are sustained and their preferred alternative venue within the locality has been used for these activities wherever possible.

18. The revised children’s centre timetables and outreach provision has been carefully planned to ensure that consultation responses and activities for the hardest to reach families have been sustained wherever possible.

19. Reputational risk – this has been managed through focus groups held in the children’s centres and providing individual responses and meetings with families who needed reassurance. Both the Lead Member for children’s services and Associate Director of Early Help within Achieving for Children have been involved in face to face meetings with key stakeholders.

20. Financial risk – there is a financial risk for the 2014/15 budget if this proposal is not accepted as the required efficiency savings figure will need to be secured from elsewhere. There is a potential risk that the Sure Start grant funding used for the development of the two children’s centres will need to be returned if the Department for Education do not agree with the Council’s view that the changed use of the buildings continues to meet the conditions of the Sure Start Early Years and Childcare Grant.

Equalities Impact Assessment

21. Please see separate Equalities Impact Assessment attached as ANNEX 1
Environmental Implications - none

Background papers – held by the author of the report, Charis Penfold, Associate Director of Early Help, Achieving for Children, email charis.penfold@achievingforchildren.org.uk
tel 0208 547 5250

List of reports/documents
• Consultation reports – WCCC and KHCC – September 2014
• Assets Working Group report – 1/9/14
• EQUIA – completed January 2015