

Children's and Adults' Care and Education Committee

21 March 2019

Children's Centre Strategy

Report by the Interim Director of Children's Services

Relevant Portfolio Holder: Councillor Diane White

Purpose

To report on the outcomes of consultation on children's centre provision in Kingston upon Thames and recommend future delivery model of children's centre services in line with the Children's Centres Strategy and in response to the feedback from the public consultation.

Recommendations

To **resolve** that -

1. the results of the public consultation (as set out in paragraphs 12-15 and **Annex 1** of the report) on the future direction for children's centres provision in Kingston are noted and considered;
2. Norbiton and Surbiton Children's Centres are remodelled from June 2019 and the provision of services will be offered through outreach into the local communities; and
3. New Malden and North Kingston Children centres are remodelled from April 2020 with a phased reduction in children centre activity to target those most in need (as set out in paragraph 10 of the report).

Benefits to the Community:

The proposals aim to maximise available resources by targeting children's centre provision at the most vulnerable families in the most deprived areas through outreach, while ensuring children, young people and families continue to receive a high quality children's centre offer in Kingston.

Key Points

- A. This Committee approved the Children Centre Strategy on 20 September 2018, which set out to strengthen the outreach provision, maximise resources and target the most vulnerable families in the deprived communities in Kingston.
- B. Public consultation was undertaken to gather the views of service users with 744 responses received, representing approximately 15.0% of service users who are currently accessing children's centre provision.
- C. The key findings from the consultation are set out in paragraph 13 of the report. The detailed consultation findings can be found in **Annex 1** of the report.
- D. This report outlines a proposal on remodelling children centre provision, taking account of the required savings of £240,000 and wider council savings required of £12.1m.

- E. Members are to note the statutory definition of a children’s centre which is: A place or group of places:
- i) which is managed by or on behalf of, or under arrangements with, the local authority with a view to securing that early childhood services in the local authority’s area are made available in an integrated way.
 - ii) through which early childhood services are made available (either by providing the services on site, or by providing advice and assistance on gaining access to services elsewhere); and
 - iii) at which activities for young children are provided.

It follows from the statutory definition of a children’s centre that children’s centres are as much about making appropriate and integrated services available, as it is about providing premises in particular geographical areas.

Context

1. Local authorities have a statutory duty to ensure there are sufficient children’s centre services to meet the needs of children aged 0-4 and their families.
2. The core purpose of children’s centres is to improve outcomes for young children and their families and reduce inequalities between families in greatest need and their peers. This is achieved through a range of early childhood services.
3. Kingston has an outstanding track record in achieving excellent outcomes for children in early years through our network of childminders, nursery schools, early years’ providers and early years health services. This is particularly important for those children and their families who may need additional support in the early years because of their vulnerable circumstances.
4. The challenging financial situation, both nationally and locally, requires a new way of working to ensure that children’s centre provision is able to continue to deliver a high quality offer.
5. Recent research highlights that 1,000 children’s centres have ceased providing services since 2010.

Nationally the average reduction in children’s centre provision is 34.8%. The majority of Kingston’s statistical neighbours have already reduced or proposed a reduction in children’s centre provision. This is set out in the table below:

Local Authority	% children centres closures (2009-10 to 2018)
Barnet	7.7% reduction
Bracknell Forest	Reduction in hours
Oxfordshire	80.0% reduction (proposed)
Reading	69.2% reduction
Surrey	71.0% reduction (proposed)
Sutton	21.0% reduction

Consultation proposal

6. In the context of the financial position in Kingston, the continued occupation of eight main children's centre sites across the borough is unsustainable in terms of finances and the staff resource to offer a full range of services.
7. The public consultation proposed to:
- decommission four children's centres (Norbiton, Surbiton, New Malden; North Kingston);
 - provide a strengthened offer of services and outreach to local communities;
 - continue to provide a core offer of children's centre activities at the following sites: Chessington, Kingston Town, Old Malden and Tolworth Children's Centres.
8. The reasons for the proposed decommissioning of the four centres are set out in the table below:

Children's Centres			
Norbiton	Surbiton	North Kingston	New Malden
Lowest number of exclusive users	Smaller centre with no room for expansion	Not located in or near a deprived area	Limited activity programme- was reduced when children's centre services remodelled into clusters
Regular users mainly access health services that can be provided at alternative sites and close proximity to outreach e.g. Dickerage Lane Youth Centre less than 0.1 miles away	Outreach sites include nearby nursery which is less than 0.1 miles away from the current site	Regular users mainly access midwifery services which can be provided at nearby centres and clinical settings	1.6 miles to Old Malden Children's Centre which continues to offer a similar programme including access to health services and English as an Additional Language
Within 1.2 miles of Kingston Town Children's Centre	Within 0.9 miles of Tolworth Children's Centre	1.5 miles to Kingston Town Children's Centre	

9. The consultation responses highlighted that Children Centre activities are highly valued by residents, particularly in New Malden and North Kingston, as well as those centres which were not proposed for change.

Proposals

10. Following the public consultation, it is proposed to:
- (1) remodel the delivery of services from Norbiton and Surbiton Children's Centres by June 2019 and provide service delivery through an outreach approach within local communities at Dickerage Youth Centre and within the Surbiton area (see point (3) below).

- (2) remodel the delivery of services from North Kingston and New Malden Children's Centres by April 2020, using a phased approach to reducing children's centre activities to target those in most need, whilst taking account of the needs of the local communities to support the transition to a new model of delivery.
- (3) strengthen the outreach provision by providing children centre activities from the following locations :
 - Kingsnympton;
 - Dickerage Youth Centre;
 - Cambridge Road Estate; and
 - Surbiton area.

In developing this new model, the children's centre workforce will be redesigned into a borough based delivery model as set out in the strategy and the following key actions arising from the consultation feedback will be implemented:

- (a) prioritise the services identified as popular and important.
- (b) work with health partners, such as health visiting and midwifery, to ensure there continues to be a good offer of health services available to families. Health provision will continue under the new arrangements in different venues.
- (c) continue to explore the potential to extend the range of venues and sites to deliver children's centre activities.
- (d) pilot an extension of the range of provision for children aged 5-11 years old during school holidays.
- (e) work with the Parent Fora attached to children's centres to identify income generating opportunities.
- (f) rebrand the children's centres into children and family centres.

Next steps

11. Should the above proposals be resolved, the next steps would be to:
 - develop an implementation plan to deliver the agreed proposals;
 - publish consultation findings; and
 - implement a communications plan to inform key stakeholders.

Consultations

12. The public consultation ran for over seven weeks from 12 December 2018 to 4 February 2019. There were a total of 744 responses. A range of approaches were used to collect the responses. This included:
 - an initial email to all registered children's centre users to encourage them to take part and follow up email to remind them to complete the survey.
 - a printed link to the survey was given out to all service users across all sites including outreach sites throughout the consultation period.
 - staff in children's centres promoted the consultation and provided access to complete the online survey to users at the centres, as well as offering paper copies.
 - focused sessions were held in all eight sites and outreach venues.
 - where necessary, one to one support was provided to help users participate, offered translation services, and held targeted sessions with specific hard to

reach users e.g. in New Malden with families who have English as an additional language.

- publicising the consultation on the AfC Local Offer website, through social media and through key stakeholders and partners.

13. The detailed findings from the consultation are included in **Annex 1** and are summarised below:

Experience of using children's centres

- The children's centres most used by the respondents are North Kingston (18.8%); Tolworth (18.0%); Kingston Town (16.6%); and Chessington (14.3%). The least used centres are Surbiton (13.5%); New Malden (11.0%); Old Malden (6.1%); and Norbiton (1.7%). The percentage of respondents who use Norbiton was particularly low.
- In terms of which other children's centres are used, Surbiton (39.1%); Tolworth (32.9%); Kingston Town (28.9%); and Chessington (20.3%) are the most used. North Kingston (15.7%); New Malden (15.7%); Old Malden (15.5%); and Norbiton (13.6%) are the least used.
- Children's centres are well used- almost half of respondents (46.2%) stated they visited children's centres one or two times a week and a fifth (20.6%) said they attend two to four times per month.
- The most popular services delivered at the children's centres are Stay and Play (83.9%); health visitors (66.2%); Rhyme Time (56.3%); Messy Play (48.5%); and baby massage (40.9%). Other popular services noted included Baby, Junior and Mama Jammers, breastfeeding advice and support, and Crafty Tales.
- The most important services delivered were Stay and Play (97.6%); health visitors (93.4%); early years advice (91.9%); Messy Play (91.1%); and childcare advice (86.7%). Other services noted as important included the range of support on offer including breastfeeding support and Jammers.
- Respondents were keen to emphasise the importance of the support and help provided at the centres, the social and community aspects they provide and the play and development opportunities.
- The least popular services were domestic violence support (1.4%); English as an additional language sessions (1.7%); JobCentre Plus advice (1.7%); foodbank vouchers (2.5%); and benefit advice (4.2%). The services considered least important were English as an additional language (27.5%); foodbank vouchers (24.6%); JobCentre Plus advice (23.3%); benefit advice (21.4%); and family support worker support (18.8%).
- Although these services, which are more aimed at parents, were considered less important, 95.0% of respondents stated that they agreed they could ask for support advice relating to issues such as health, parenting skills or employment and training from a children's centre. Respondents praised the support and advice that is given and the helpful and approachable staff.
- In terms of getting to the centres, 86.7% of respondents stated that they walked, with 20.7% driving. Respondents emphasised the importance of being able to access local provision, ideally by foot.

Proposals for the future of children's centres in Kingston

- 64.5% of respondents do not agree with the proposals (strongly disagree/ disagree). 21.3% agree (strongly agree/ agree) and 14.2% neither agree nor disagree.
- Of the comments provided: 16.7% of respondents can understand the reasons for the proposals; 15.5% thought the proposals are unfair for those who cannot travel easily and may

lead to increased isolation for parents; 14.5% thought the Council should re-prioritise to find funding for the children's centres; and 10.0% expressed concern about remaining children's centre becoming too busy.

- Just under half of respondents (46.6%) stated the proposals would definitely make it more difficult to access children's centre services. 29.9% stated it would make it more difficult to some extent, 20.6% said it wouldn't make it more difficult, and 3.0% said they did not know. The main comments related to concerns about the capacity of remaining children's centres and the distance and time taken to travel to a children's centre.
- Just over half of the respondents (51.2%) stated that the changes would mean that they would not use the children's centres as much in the future and 15.7% stated they would not use children's centres at all. 17.0% of respondents the proposals said it would have no impact at all and 15.6% said they would use another children's centre in the future. Concerns raised related to the capacity of the remaining centres and the required travel.
- Respondents said they would stop using children's centres or use them less because of additional travel travel (60.5%); sessions being too full (44.6%); and 44.6% said they would be unable to travel to any other locations.
- Respondents were asked for comments about how else children's centre services could be sustained- responses included re-prioritising other council services (33.6%); seek voluntary contributions (22.4%); or fundraise (21.6%).

Enhancing the children's centre offer

- Just under half (49.4%) of respondents agreed with the proposals to redevelop the remaining children's centres to offer a wider range of services. 30.1% of respondents did not agree.
- The most popular name for the new centres was 'Children and Family Centres' (46.5%).
- If the offer was to be expanded, respondents stated they would like the following services to be delivered: activities for children aged five to 11 during school holidays (73.9%); postnatal support and advice (75.3%); expansion of support to children aged between 0 to 11 (rather than 0 to five) (61.9%); and family support drop in advice (58.9%).

14. It is worth noting that the consultation findings indicated lower preference for co-location with provision of other services (such as Benefits advice, English as an additional language; family support worker support, foodbank vouchers, and JobCentre Plus). However, caution needs to be exercised when drawing conclusions from this, as the consultation has engaged 15% of the registered children centre user population, so it is not possible to be completely satisfied that the findings are fully representative of the needs of hard-to-reach families.

15. Following the public consultation concluding, a petition was submitted at the Council meeting on 26 February 2019 which had received 345 eligible signatures online and 234 eligible signatures in hard copy which requested that the children's centres remain open. The wording of the petition was as follows:

"We strongly oppose the proposed closures of half of the children's centres within the borough of Kingston. We fervently believe that the changes in how the remainder operate, including the removal of sessions into the community will not be sufficient to meet local need and will raise serious safeguarding concerns. We insist that the children's centres remain open. In the event of closures, we demand financial investment ensuring that:

- *The remaining centres can be fully staffed;*
- *Each centre has a full time member of staff available to parents throughout the week;*
- *The remaining centres are able to meet the needs of a greater number of families;*
- *Sessions currently being held continue to run within the children's centre buildings;*

- Any sessions held in alternative local venues must guarantee that:
 - a. the general public cannot access families;
 - b. parents can converse with staff privately in a separate room; and
 - c. there is wheelchair access.

We ask that the Council seriously consider the detrimental impact that the proposed changes would have for many families and that the investment in our children and their futures should be a priority.”

16. As the petition received over 500 eligible signatures, it would be eligible for debate at full Council, which is likely to be at its meeting on 24 April. (This would not, however, prevent the Committee making a decision on the recommendations of this report at the meeting on 21 March 2019).

Timescale

17. If agreed, the decommissioning of Norbiton and Surbiton Children’s Centre will be implemented by June 2019 and North Kingston and New Malden Children’s Centres by April 2020.

Financial Implications

18. The original proposal was for a saving of £240,000 based on the decommissioning of four buildings and the rationalisation of staffing effective from 1 April 2019. The latest proposal following consultation, to review delivery of Surbiton and Norbiton in 2019/20 and New Malden and North Kingston in 2020/21, has impacted on the ability to meet the full year savings for next financial year.
19. This proposal is shown below and will meet the full required savings by 2020/21. The saving is not met in 19/20 due to the phased approach of decommissioning the four underutilised buildings as well as implementation of the 19/20 plan being scheduled for July 2019 (previously April 2019).

Financial Summary of Proposals 2019/20 onward			
Children’s Centre Proposal	Current Model	Original Proposal	New Proposal
Number of Children Centres	8	4	4 (Phased)
FTE	17	12	12
Salary Savings	n/a	167,689	167,689
Property Saving	n/a	35,000	35,000
Savings already achieved	n/a	35,000	35,000
TOTAL FULL YEAR SAVINGS		237,689	237,689
19/20 PART YEAR SAVINGS (from 1 July 2019)			135,142

20. The original efficiency saving, based on closure of four underutilised buildings, totalled £240,000 and was agreed as part of the budget setting process for 2019/20. Therefore the revised option creates a funding gap for 2019/20 of £104,858 within children’s services budgets for the upcoming financial year. The shortfall will need to be addressed in-year. In the first instance Achieving for Children will look to mitigate the gap in consultation with the Director of Corporate and Commercial.

21. The impact of the savings over the two financial years is shown below:

	Latest Proposal
19/20 Saving Target (Budget removed from AfC)	240,000
2019/20 saving	135,142
Full Year saving	237,689
2019/20 Budget shortfall	104,858
2020/21 onward Budget Shortfall	2,311

22. The Council has agreed a £50,000 investment budget to facilitate the development of the children's centre outreach model, to ensure better access to some communities who do not benefit from the current offer. This funding is for 2019/20 only and will assist with the transition to the new outreach based model during the next financial year. The outreach model underpins the Children's Centre Strategy and the ongoing additional resources will be a priority for consideration as part of next year's budget process.

Legal Implications

23. The Childcare Act 2006 (as amended) places the following duties on the Council:

- S1: general duty to improve the wellbeing of young children in its area and to reduce inequalities between young children;
- S3: duty to secure that early childhood services are provided in an integrated manner calculated to facilitate access and to maximise the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children.
- S5A: early childhood services must "so far as is reasonably practicable, include arrangements for sufficient provision of children's centre to meet local need".
- S5D: to undertake "such consultation as they think appropriate" before making any arrangements regarding early childhood services; before any significant change 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.

24. The Council must have regard to the DfE Sure Start statutory guidance 2013 and should not depart from it unless good reason to do so. Members attention is drawn to the following key points regarding the provision of sufficient children's centres to meet the needs of those in greatest need of support. The Council must:

- a) ensure that a network of children's centres is accessible to all families with young children in the area;
- b) ensure children's centres are within reasonable reach;
- c) target children's centres at young children and children and families in the area who are at risk of poor outcomes;
- d) ensure opening times and the availability of services meet the needs of families in the area;
- e) not close and existing family centre site in any reorganisation unless it can be demonstrated that the outcomes for children 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 be a presumption against the closure of children's centres.

25. In considering this matter, Members must satisfy themselves that the recommendations comply with the relevant statutory duties and guidance and that conscientious consideration has been given to the consultation responses in the formulation of the recommendations that the council is being asked to approve and that the decision is taken in a fair and balanced manner.

Risk Assessment

26. A detailed risk register will be prepared as part of the development of the implementation plan should the proposals be agreed.
27. There is a significant risk should the proposals not be agreed the children's centre model would be unsustainable.

Equalities Analysis

28. A full equality assessment has been completed. It has found that the proposals will have an impact on some children, young people and parents and carers from the protected characteristics groups. However, Achieving for Children will work with families to mitigate this impact. The aim would be to continue as much service delivery and activity as possible using alternative local venues with outreach teams. Each cluster already implements a comprehensive outreach plan into local communities with specific focus on areas of higher deprivation. This is already happening in a number of venues in the local area. For example, activities are currently being delivered in a number of local schools. This outreach model would enable us to make savings by no longer using the buildings proposed and no longer having the associated premises costs.
29. The full equality assessment can be found in **Annex 2** of the report.

Health Implications

30. An element of the children's centre offer relates to health services- specifically midwifery, health visiting services, and breastfeeding support and advice. Achieving for Children will work with health partners to ensure there is an alternative venue identified (either remaining children's centre or outreach site or clinical venue) to deliver any health services that may previously have been delivered in a children's centre due to be decommissioned.
31. The consultation responses highlighted the social and community aspect of children's centres as a means of preventing isolation and mental health issues.

Environmental, Air Quality and Road Network Implications

32. No implications arising from the specific recommendations of this report.

Background papers held by the author of the report - Sarah Reid, Head of Children, Youth and Partnerships, Phone: 07909883757, Email: sarah.reid@achievingforchildren.org.uk:

- None

Annexes to the report: Annex 1: Public Consultation Findings Annex 2: Equality Assessment