

# Remodelling Childrens Centres - Consultation results

## Briefing for Scrutiny, October 2013

### 1. Summary

1.1 This report summarises the consultation response to proposed changes to the way in which the Council manages and operates children's centres. The key changes consulted on during May to July were;

- grouping children's centres with shared management ('hub and spoke' type model)
- targeting services to families who need them most
- childcare provision managed through children's centres.

This report summarises the outcomes from that consultation and the recommendations from the joint review with Public Health.

1.2 Officers are exploring how community hubs and co-location of children's centres in neighbourhoods can be enhanced further with particular emphasis on both the proposed role of hubs in the delivery of Walsall's Early Help Strategy, and the provision of sufficient childcare places for 2 year olds with greatest need. Due to the existing contracts for the management of currently outsourced Children's Centres expiring at the end of March 2014, a new procurement exercise will be undertaken for the three affected centres reflecting the proposed hub and spoke model.

### 2. Background

2.1 Walsall has 18 children's centres of which:

- 8 are directly managed by Walsall Council Children's Services
- 7 are managed through schools with annual SLAs with the host schools
- 3 are managed through service contracts with 2 different external providers

Each centre has individual management, governance and budgetary arrangements.

### 3. 'Hub and spoke' approach

3.1 A recent national evaluation report (*The Evaluation of Children's Centres in England (ECCE) Strand 3 "Delivery of Family Services by Children's Centre" Research Report July 2013*) notes that the prototype model of a "one stop shop" has shifted dramatically to one of networks and clusters where parents and children access services at a range of sites and highlights the importance of centre staff working closely with other services on behalf of families rather than a focus on co-location of services.

3.2 Consultation found that overall all groups support protecting frontline services by sharing management and other support services. Headteachers, school governors, centre managers and other staff had mixed feelings and expressed concern about the size of the groupings. However, for parents over two thirds (68%) agreed that children's centres should protect services by sharing resources and working together in groups. Just 4% disagreed, with 16% saying neither agree nor disagree.

#### **4. Targeting**

4.1 Children's centres funding and priorities nationally and locally have always reflected a significant degree of targeting towards the most disadvantaged children and families. Further focussing the targeting of children's centres on those most in need may help to reduce the need for children to become looked after in future by effective early intervention. This will assist the council in addressing the rising demand for children to be 'Looked After' and associated budget pressures and reducing inequalities between the most disadvantaged children and their better off peers.

4.2 Most respondents agreed that services should be prioritised on those in greatest need. For parents the majority (60%) agreed that children's centre services should be prioritised for those in greatest need, although conversely, 16% disagree and 19% say neither agree nor disagree. The majority of Headteachers, school governors, centre managers and other staff, 72%, agreed that services should be prioritised in this way.

#### **5. Joint Review with Health**

5.1 Children's Services and Public Health have completed a joint review of children's centres contribution to improving health and will be reporting the outcomes to the Health and Wellbeing Board. The key outcomes of the review that will inform the new commissioning specification for children's centres are;

- more effective and co-ordinated area based needs assessment with clear targets for individual centres in terms of health delivery.
- more joint working between health practitioners and centre staff where appropriate (e.g. joint visits during pregnancy)
- more effective data collection management and sharing across health and children's services, (including sharing of information with centres earlier in pregnancy)
- Use of effective monitoring and performance management tools to review health and other core purpose outputs and outcomes quarterly.

#### **6. Community Hubs and Neighbourhood Co-location**

6.1 Council run children's centres allow opportunities to co-locate council facilities such as children's centres, libraries and community centres – and possibly services of other organisations including health clinics, police and social housing. In the community hub pilot project areas the local children's centres (Darlaston and Blakenall) are providing support by targeting families who have not traditionally had

the confidence to travel to access services. This will be built upon in the remodelling to ensure local partnerships are robust and work with families in most need.

## **7. Consultation**

7.1 Consultation with parents, centre users, centre staff, schools and partners took place between 1<sup>st</sup> May and 31 July 2013. Analysis of the responses to the consultation has been undertaken and a summary report is in Appendix 1. Feedback and a summary of findings will be provided to all groups consulted by mid October 2013.

7.2 The main points emerging from the survey results show that overall, respondents supported the prioritisation of services for the young children and families in most need and agreed that children's centres services should be protected by centres sharing resources and working together with nearby centres.

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**Consultation summary report**

**Children's centres Consultation May – July 2013**

**Consultation Method**

A large scale consultation exercise took place between May and July. The aim was to obtain the views of a range of stakeholders about Walsall's:

- Plans to target support for those who need it most
- The proposal to group children's centres together
- Provision of childcare in children's centres

Qualitative and quantitative information was gathered from a broad range of respondents. The views of both users and non users were sought, including views on how people currently, or would like to, access children's centres in the future. Views on opportunities they have to influence the planning and defining of services were also sought.

Three surveys were distributed;

1. Head teachers and school staff, governors and children's centre managers and staff (64 responses)
2. Stakeholders and partners (23 responses)
3. Parents and families (560 responses)

All surveys were available to complete online, with surveys 1 and 2 emailed directly to respondents to complete. The survey for parents and families was available to complete online and via paper questionnaires which were distributed to children's centres and other community venues.

Users of children's centres were also invited to leave comments on 'comment trees' displayed in each centre, answering the question 'Why do you use this Children's Centre?'

In addition surveys were distributed and conversations had with target groups at various children's centre and events around the borough. Topline findings drawn from the three surveys are summarised here, with qualitative information in the form of detailed comments being reviewed as part of the development of the specification.

Please note due to the low number of responses from Headteachers and school staff, governors and children's centre managers and staff and stakeholders and partners, results, in particular interpretation of percentages, should be treated with caution. In addition this is not a random sample survey therefore generalisations about the data may not be made.

Lead Officers also conducted a number of meetings with key stakeholders to discuss the consultation process. A number of specific consultation sessions were held at particular children's centres to try and target key groups. These included:

- A dad's group at Palfrey Children's Centre
- A group of young mums at the Hothouse in Aldridge linked to Leighswood Children's Centre
- A group at the Lighthouse Children's Centre
- Headteachers and school staff, governors and children's centre managers

# **1. Summary of findings from Headteachers, school governors, centre managers and other staff survey (64)**

- Collaboration amongst children's centres is already commonplace with many respondents stating that they currently work closely with other children's centres.
- Parenting under 5's advice and support is considered to have the greatest positive impact on children and their families. The top five things identified as having the greatest positive impact on children and families were:
 

1. Parenting under 5s advice and support	75%
2. Preparing children to start pre-school, nursery or school	56%
3. Access to health visitors / professionals	40%
4. Healthy lifestyles and well-being advice	37%
5. Mental well-being (i.e. coping with stress, depression, anxiety, phobias, OCD and other mental health conditions)	35%
- Opinion is divided on the cluster management proposal, just under a quarter (24%) agree with the proposal to have one cluster lead manager supported by local operational managers, however over a third (34%) disagreed with this proposal. 31% neither agreed nor disagreed and 11% did not know.
- Clusters of two or three are preferred, but some say there should be no clustering. Whilst 23% of respondents felt that children's centres should not be clustered at all, most respondents (33%) felt that there should be no more than two children's centres per cluster and 28% said no more than three. Far fewer respondents felt that clusters should contain four, five or six children's centres.
- Almost equal proportions support as oppose a single advisory board arrangement. A total of 39% agree that a single advisory board will improve working and enable better engagement from partners, however conversely 38% disagreed. Almost a fifth (19%) neither agreed nor disagreed and 5% did not know.
- Representation on advisory boards by invitation or application was the preferred way to involve other schools on the delivery of children's centre

services. Regular joint meetings were also highly favoured, followed by the least preferred way being through meetings with Headteacher/s nominated by local schools clusters.

- There is strong agreement that services should be prioritised for children and families who are in greatest need. The majority, 72%, agree that services should be prioritised in this way. A total of 11% disagreed and 17% said neither agree nor disagree.
- Most respondents (69%) agree that children's centres should protect services for children and families by sharing resources and working together with nearby children's centres. A quarter neither agreed nor disagreed and 5% disagreed.
- Needs, deprivation and family circumstances are seen a top priorities when deciding how children's centres should be developed and clustered. The top three factors respondents feel should be taken into account when deciding how to develop and cluster children's centres were:
  1. The needs of local communities (76%)
  2. The number of children living in low-income households in the area (72%)
  3. The areas of Walsall where children's health or development is more likely to be affected by their circumstances (72%)

## **2. Summary of findings from stakeholders and partners survey (22)**

- Awareness of what services children's centres deliver was high amongst respondents, perhaps unsurprisingly as most (18) describe their relationship with their local children's centre as very good or OK.
- Children's centres are well regarded. All aspects of children's centres were highly rated, with 90% saying the range of services is very good or good, followed by 79% saying the quality of staff was very good and information about services. 77% said that the opening hours were good or very good. No one rated any of the listed aspects as poor or very poor.
- The vast majority of respondents rated children's centres in Walsall as very good or good.
- Many respondents already work with children's centres in helping deliver services and deciding what services to deliver. Some are involved in a governing / advisory capacity. Many of those who are not currently involved in these ways indicate a desire to be more involved, particularly in deciding what services to deliver and being involved in a governing / advisory capacity.

- Almost two thirds of respondents say that some of the services they deliver could be delivered at a children's centre, four thought that this might be possible and three said it would not be possible. Services respondents thought they could deliver included a range of advice, guidance and support, dance and activity sessions and home safety advice.
- Whilst 10 respondents agreed that children's centre services should be prioritised for those in greatest need, a notable number (8) disagreed with this, with several commenting that all families should be supported whatever their circumstances, "*every child matters*". By prioritising based on need, some were concerned that the service might become stigmatised.
- 16 out of 22 respondents agree that children's centres should protect services by sharing resources and working together in groups. 3 respondents disagreed with this.
- 9 respondents fully support the proposal to cluster centres to make better use of resources and allow for more efficient management, 9 support it but have concerns. 1 respondent did not support the proposal and 3 did not know.

### **3. Summary of findings from parents survey (560)**

- Of the 560 people who responded to this survey, 38% attend a children's centre about once a week and 45% visit almost every day or every day it is open. A small proportion (21 people) had used the centre longer ago or never used it.
- Over three quarters of respondents who use a children's centre (within the last six months) say they are given an opportunity to have their say on what services are delivered and 66% say they are given the opportunity to say how the centre is run. Notable proportions (20% and 23%) did not know how to have their say on these aspects. A small proportion felt they were not given opportunities to have their say.
- The most commonly used service was 'groups' including stay and play and family learning, with 58% saying they use these services, followed by 43% who use childcare services. Around a fifth use child and family health services and family support.
- Over half of all respondents (56%) say there is no reason / nothing puts them off or prevents them using their local children's centre. Between 4 and 5% of respondents identified cost, child's illness / disability and lack of information / don't know what children's centres, do as barriers to visiting or using their local children's centre. Other factors were mentioned by less than 5%.

- Three quarters of respondents want to access services both during and outside term time, with the majority of respondents (81%) preferring to access services at children's centres between 9am and 5pm. A quarter would like to access services on weekday evenings and Saturdays. Demand on Sundays was much less (10%) where as 18% say accessing services between 7am and 9am would be preferable.
- The services respondents do or would find most useful included;
  - Preparing children to start pre-school, nursery or school (53%)
  - Childcare (45%)
  - Baby groups (41%)
  - Holiday activities (40%)

Notable proportions also mentioned parenting under 5s advice and support (38%), nursery education (35%), first aid (29%) and access to health visitors / professionals (25%).

- Face to face is by far the most popular way to get support and advice (86%), followed by leaflets (33%) and the internet (26%). Accessing services in children's centres (91%) was most popular, followed by schools (33%), libraries (25%) and community centres (22%).
- In terms of parenting, in times of difficulty or crisis, the vast majority of respondents (86%) say they would turn to family for support, followed by friends (65%), health professionals (49%) and their children's centre (47%).
- Most respondents (60%) agree that children's centre services should be prioritised for those in greatest need, although conversely, 16% disagree and 19% say neither agree nor disagree.
- Over two thirds (68%) agree that children's centres should protect services by sharing resources and working together in groups. Just 4% disagreed, with 16% saying neither agree nor disagree.

Findings collated by the Performance Management Team, Business Change

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