

## **Cabinet – 24 April 2013**

### **Giving children an even better start in life: Consultation on models of delivery of early help and family support services through children's centres**

**Portfolio:** Councillor Rachel Andrew

**Service:** Children's Services

**Wards:** All

**Key decision:** No

**Forward plan:** No

#### **1. Summary**

1.1 In the context of Cabinet's commitment to Walsall's 18 children centres, this report seeks approval to commence statutory consultation during May to June 2013 to explore options to review the organisation and delivery of early help, early years and family support services, including childcare, through children's centres to:

- ensure we give every child in Walsall the very best start in life as defined in Walsall's Joint Strategic Needs Analysis ( 2012) , and
- contribute to the delivery of an effective, co-ordinated early help strategy across the borough to improve outcomes and efficiency

#### **2. Recommendations**

2.1 Cabinet approves a statutory consultation throughout May and June 2013 with children's centres, their users and partners, including schools and a wide range of stakeholders to explore potential delivery options for children's centres and the existing onsite childcare provision currently managed, commissioned or funded by the authority.

2.2 That a further report is brought to Cabinet in September 2013 summarising responses to the consultation and making recommendations for the proposed model of children's centre delivery and childcare options in order to put appropriate management, commissioning and contract arrangements in place for the effective and co-ordinated delivery of early help, early years and family support services through children's centres from April 2014.

### **3. Report detail**

- 3.1 Walsall has 18 children's centres, managed through a mixed economy of providers consisting of the authority itself, schools and community organisations. There is now a requirement to review commissioning as some existing contracts expired in March 2013 and spot contracts were awarded to March 2014 to allow commissioning and the award of contracts to take place.
- 3.2 The national context for children's centre, including the specifications for what must be provided on site and how, has changed significantly since the inception of Sure Start Children's Centres 13 years ago. There is a growing body of evidence showing that greater impact can be had on outcomes and life chances for children by enabling services to focus on a more defined "core purpose" to improve outcomes for young children and their families with a particular focus on the most disadvantaged, so that children are equipped for life and ready for school regardless of their background or family circumstances.
- 3.3 Changes in the national statutory and inspection frameworks covering children's centres from April 2013 support the reconfiguration of children's centres in groups or clusters to deliver services most effectively to the families who need them most, and to work more effectively in partnership with other agencies and services working with children and families, schools, community organisations and preventative, targeted and specialist services, and public health within the authority and other health services.
- 3.4 Many local authorities have moved away from commissioning a single centre to serve one community and now group their centres across a number of communities, usually linked geographically and designed to work closely with locality based services from 0-19. This enables centres in groups to offer a wider range of services and pool resources within a strong mixed economy of provision.
- 3.5 Childcare provision in children's centres managed directly through the authority requires, in most cases, increasing levels of subsidy as a direct result of the outcome of pay and grading reviews. This cost pressure, together with; changes to statutory guidance to local authorities on their duties relating to early education and childcare proposed in March 2013, the duty to ensure sufficient free entitlement to early years provision for disadvantaged two year olds by 2014 and the wider consultation on delivery models for children's centres creates an opportunity to consult on options for the commissioning and delivery of childcare on children's centre sites at the same time.
- 3.6 Consultation will take place throughout May and June asking for views of families and stakeholders (staff, other services, schools, health, and other delivery partners) on a range of options for both:
  - delivery through children's centres of the children's centres core purpose and
  - onsite childcare currently managed directly through children's centres.

This will be undertaken in the context of the wider review of early help currently underway

#### **4. Council priorities**

Early help and Childrens Centres make an important contribution to Council priorities to improve educational attainment and help families into work.

#### **5. Risk management**

Consulting on the future role of early help and Childrens Centres needs to be managed carefully to avoid unfounded concerns that key services will be reduced. In addition consulting on the future of onsite childcare provision will ensure high quality and financially viable services are sustained.

#### **6. Financial Implications**

The costs of consultation to be met from within existing budgets, any financial consequences arising from the preferred options following consultation will be reported to Cabinet in September.

#### **7. Legal implications**

This consultation is required under ChildCare Act 2006 (as amended by Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009) and as specified by Childrens Centres Statutory Guidance 2010.

#### **8. Property implications**

None at this stage.

#### **9. Staffing implications**

None at this stage.

#### **10. Equality implications**

Early help and Children's Centres support inclusion by promoting community cohesion and reduce inequality by delivering both universal and targeted services for children across the Borough. An Equality Impact Assessment will be undertaken on the options being consulted on.

## 11. Consultation

Officers in legal services and corporate procurement were consulted in preparing this report. A communications strategy will support the consultation process to engage all relevant stakeholders

### Background papers

Presentation to CMT/Cabinet meeting on 6 March 2013

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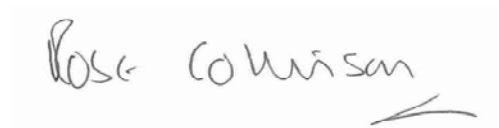
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