

5 JANUARY, 2016

Children's Centres and Locality Working model

Ward(s) All

Portfolios: Councillor E Hughes – Care and Safeguarding

Executive Summary

This report provides an update on the Children's Centre Service. It includes details of the primary purpose of this service, changes to and the development of the service and associated impact, the Governance arrangements and future plans within the council's current financial context.

Reason for scrutiny

Members of the Education and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee requested an update on the plans for Children's Centres and the impact these plans will have, the impact of the changes already implemented and details of the Children's Centre Governance arrangements

Recommendation

That the panel notes the contents of this report scrutinises and challenges the report and provides feedback on behalf of Walsall residents.

Background papers

Cabinet report 4th February 2015: Children Centre Redesign

Resources and legal considerations

The Council has a statutory duty to provide sufficient Children's Centres to meet local needs and is required to conduct consultation when planning any significant changes to Children Centre services.

There are no immediate financial considerations arising from this report

Citizen Impact

Children's Centre services play a vital role in early support and intervention – reaching those who might otherwise escalate into more serious problems and deliver crucial preventative support. They are also increasingly supporting statutory services to respond to more urgent and acute forms of need. Children Centre services directly link to the Corporate Priority to improve Health and Well Being and the Children's Services priority that all children and young people in Walsall are safe and supported and given the best start in life.

Environmental impact

There is no environmental impact

Performance management

Children Centre services are monitored and overseen by the Advisory Groups for each Children Centre and Childrens Services Performance Board

Equality implications

The co-ordinated provision of Early Years services delivered through Children's Centres is designed to help and support children and their families and close the gap in attainment at Early Years Foundation Stage between children from low income families and eligible for free school meals, children who are looked after and/or children who have development needs or disability, as compared to Walsall and National average attainment levels.

Consultation

There is no consultation directly arising from this report. Comprehensive consultation about the future redesign of Children's Centre services was carried out between November 2014 and January 2015. It influenced the decision making and was used to inform the shape of service delivery

Introduction

Children's Centre Services: primary purpose and definition

A 'Children's Centre' is a place or group of places where parents with children under five years old can access universal and targeted early childhood services. Such services include early education and childcare, early support and statutory services for young children and parents, health services and training and employment services to assist parents.

Changes to and the development of Walsall's Children's Centre services

In response to budget reductions and following comprehensive consultation with service users and stakeholders in 2014/15, Walsall has changed how Children Centre support to families is delivered, streamlining staffing structures and buildings, to ensure resources are focussed on the front line and children and families who are most in need of help.

With effect from 1st September 2015, a borough wide service operates across four areas (appendix 1: map) replacing the previous model which comprised 18 individual Children Centres located across the borough.

Family Support workers are now based in buildings at Blakenall, Birchills, Darlaston and Palfrey and outreach service delivery, where support is delivered to children and families in the home and through outreach venues across the Borough, is an important element of the work undertaken. The types of support offered in local areas include Play and Stay, Speech and Language Groups, Parenting Programmes and Baby Clinics

Family Support workers provide more targeted support to families in greatest need and lead on Early Help Assessments for all 0- 5's. This includes assessing the needs of a child and putting a plan in place to reduce risk and improve outcomes. It also includes coordinating work and interventions delivered by partners to meet, target need and to ensure that families only tell their story once. Where needs are identified, Children Centre Family Support workers provide direct support including strategies to stay safe and reduce risk, help with routines, parenting advice and support and budgeting.

Child Intervention workers work alongside Family Support workers to support children affected by domestic abuse, neglect and/or who have development delay.

A SEND Family Support worker provides expertise to ensure that families with children with a development delay or disability are supported and able to access appropriate services.

The Families Information Service (FIS) , a central advice, information and support service is accessible to all parents and professionals and provides information about local groups, services and activities for children aged 0-5's and their families including Play and Stay groups, Parenting Programmes and Childcare provision. Families can access information, advice and guidance in a variety of ways: the face to face service based at the Children's Library in the town centre, via a telephone helpline and email service as well as the comprehensive website: <http://www.mywalsall.org/fis/> Trained advisors have handled over 2100 enquiries since Children centre services were redesigned in September 2015 including enquiries such as ' help me to find childcare', ' help me to understand my payment options for childcare', 'where can I get a free early education place for my 2,3 and 4 year old?', ' I have a child with a disability and want to know about short breaks', ' I'm struggling to cope with the behaviour of my child and would like to attend a parenting course' as well as other enquiries relating to health issues and access to training. The Family Information website has had 11,844 users in the last 3 months.

A workforce development plan is being implemented to enhance the skills of Family Support staff to step up the delivery of evidence based programmes so that levels of engagement with children and families can be increased, impact better understood and maximised and outcomes for children and their families improved.

Understanding the changes to Children's Centre services and the impact?

- **Reaching families in the greatest need**

Children Centre services focus on under 5's but support and services are also provided to primary age siblings and staff work with other professionals to ensure older children's needs are met. As locality working develops, so too will our approach to whole family working.

Children Centre staff work with children in particular 'target groups 'including children from low income backgrounds, 'children in need 'or on child protection plans, children living with domestic violence, substance abuse, parental mental ill health and teenage parents to address parenting and social issues. They work increasingly with Health Visitors to address health and development issues and with the voluntary sector to offer befriending and support to families that are isolated.

Children Centre services are particularly important given that policy makers now place a very significant focus on the period between conception and the age of 2. It is now widely recognised that delivering positive interventions at this crucial stage is key to giving children the best start in life and ultimately improving life chances, especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds

Referrals from Social Care for support to families as part of 'child in need' or 'child protection plans now specify the help and interventions a family need which ensures support is better targeted.. Family Support staff offer continuity to families who step up to and down from statutory intervention and the service encourages continued engagement with families throughout the process by providing direct parenting support and interventions to address need and facilitating links with other partners including Homestart volunteers to provide additional help and support.

The new model of delivery for Children Centre services has only been fully operational since September 2015 so it is too early to report formally on the impact this change has had on children and families which is monitored and overseen by the Advisory Groups for each Children Centre, Childrens Services Performance Board and 0-5 Strategic Oversight Group but early indications suggest that the number of Early Help assessments led by Children's Centres have increased since the 1st September 2015 redesign in response to the complexity of cases increasing. A greater proportion of cases supported are those children requiring multi agency interventions to manage risk and improve outcomes and children that have reached the threshold for Social Care statutory intervention. In the year Between April 2014 and March 2015 Children's Centres were lead professional on 73% of all Early Help Assessments undertaken in Walsall – 1151 children in total.

In July 2015, the Children's Centre covering the south of the Borough, managed by Palfrey Community Centre, was inspected by Ofsted and judged to be outstanding. This inspection followed a reduction in value of the contract in April 2015 and a change to cover a larger population area and is indicative that high quality services impacting positively on the development and attainment of children and families can still be delivered with less resource. The positive feedback from Ofsted in relation to Local Authority leadership and oversight provided assurance and endorsement that the redesign is delivering 'fit for purpose' provision in regulatory terms.

Childcare in Children's Centres

Children's Centres continue to play an important role in the delivery of childcare. Childcare continues to be provided directly by the Authority at Birchills, Alumwell and Edgar Stammers sites on a sessional basis for children eligible for 2 year old funded places.

Primary schools (including those now operating childcare from former childcare buildings – Greenfield, Brownhills, Leighswood, Pheasey Park Farm, Fibbersley Park, Bentley West, Lighthouse and Bloxwich) have been supported in this transition term in order to maintain provision on all sites. In addition new provision in former Children Centre buildings in Hatherton, Pelsall and Streetly will open in January 2016.

Ofsted recently (Nov 2015) inspected Valley Nursery School integrated childcare provision from Sure Start Blakenall and observed that, *' the number of places for 2,3 and 4 year olds have increased whilst maintaining outstanding quality: the children receive only the highest-quality experience of learning and care, and they continue to be at the heart of the school's work'*.

These developments have been part of a wider programme across the borough to increase early education places which has resulted in sufficient places being available for all eligible 2 year olds.60% of eligible 2 year olds are currently accessing their free early education.

Partnerships in Children's Centre: Registration and Engagement 2015

Children's Centres continue to have strong partnerships with a range of statutory and non statutory agencies post redesign and continue to work closely with them to bring together and integrate support.

Children Centre services work across the borough, and are embedded in a broad network of local partnerships including partnerships with health and childcare providers, to deliver advice and support to all families and to engage families in local services and activities. The number of registrations of new births with Children's Centres services has been maintained at the same rate since redesign and despite a reduction in resources in this area, we continue to engage with target groups families reasonably well overall. Universal (open to all) Play and Stay sessions continue to operate across the borough and 545 children have attended sessions since 1st September 2015. They play a crucial role in supporting parents to engage proactively with their children's learning and development and in helping establish a positive home learning environment. Partnership work is developing with Health Visitors, evidenced by the distribution of 793 Bookstart packs to parents of children aged 0-4 months since September 1st 2015

Overall there has been a reduction in the number of families accessing Children's Centre services between 2013 and 2015 (appendix 2). Work is ongoing to understand the reasons and action plans are in place to focus on areas of low engagement. Officers will develop system level monitoring with Public Health colleagues to better understand the extent to which families are increasing contacts with Health Visiting and other services. As teams settle and new processes and pathways embed and evolve it is envisaged that the target of at least 65% engagement (based on Ofsted requirements) will be achieved for 0 – 5s and target groups and this will be monitored.

Governance arrangements for Children's Centre services

Prior to the redesign, Children's Centres were registered with Ofsted as 18 separate centres managed through 6 clusters, with each area governed by an Advisory Board including representation from each individual centre in their cluster. The Authority monitored governance arrangements through an 'Annual Conversation' with Centre Managers and Leadership teams to review performance and impact, as required by the Statutory Framework for Children's Centres, which was underpinned by a quarterly monitoring process. Governance arrangements and Local Authority oversight were tested in a number of Ofsted inspections over the last 18

months which were all judged Good or Outstanding. Centres inspected in 2014/15 were Streetly, Edgar Stammers, Pelsall and Palfrey.

The Department of Education has announced a suspension of Children Centres inspections, pending consultation about the future Statutory Framework and Regulatory requirements for Children Centre Inspections. The rationale for review reflects changing landscape that Walsall and other Local Authority's have taken account of in local redesign; increase in early education and Health Visiting services that reduce demand for children centre provision across 0 – 5 age range. This means no Children's Centre inspections will take place until after the conclusion of the consultation.

Walsall Children's Centres are now registered with Ofsted for the four areas identified in Appendix 1 and Children's Centres are expected to continue their work as usual during this pause, including collecting and monitoring of data in preparation for inspection and quarterly monitoring and Annual Conversation process will continue. Ofsted will continue inspection of Early Years provision on the site of Children's Centres as part of the new Common Inspection Framework, and will also continue to respond swiftly to any complaints or safeguarding concerns in Children's Centres.

Future Plans for Children's Centre services

In recognition of the value and potential to deliver a range of services at a time when resources are stretched, the Children's Centre service existing infrastructure and workforce will be integrated into the emerging 0-19 Early Help Locality arrangements, aligned to school clusters. Not only will this approach be more effective- breaking down silos and avoiding duplication, it will crucially be more cost effective, making the best use of reducing council and the wider partnership resources. Existing partnerships and joint working will be built upon to enhance local service delivery and family support.

The Health Visiting Services now has increased contacts with families and are working with Public Health and Children's Centre Managers to develop pathways to improve how we provide services. Also over the next year the Authority is investing to build the capacity of the voluntary sector (Homestart and Safe Families for Children) to increase support to families universally that need low level support and help.

Schools have extended their role in the delivery of Early Years services and we anticipate that Play and Stay and childcare provision will continue to expand at school based sites, providing greater opportunity for children and families to access support and early learning.

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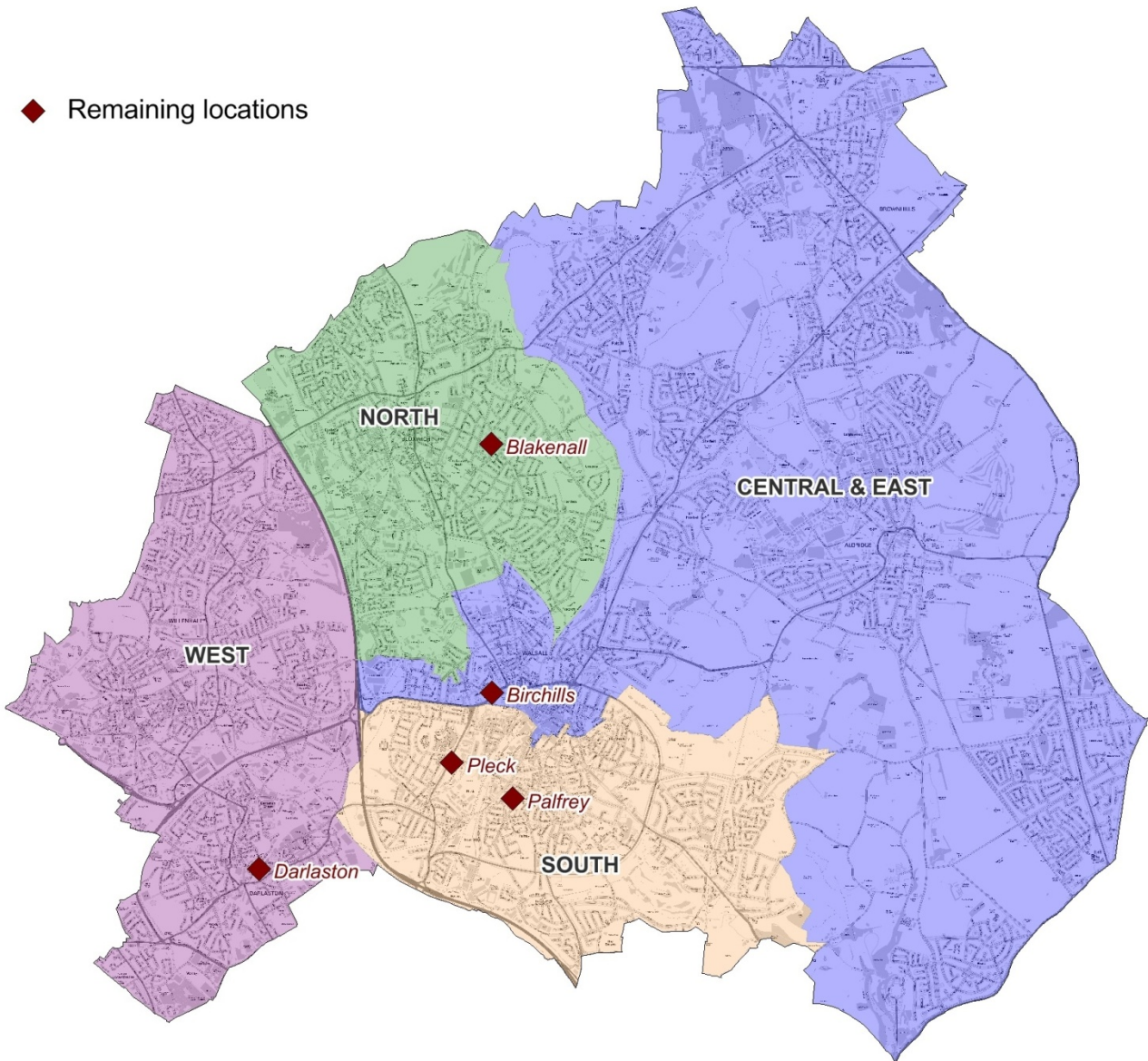
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Children's Centre Reach Areas, 2015



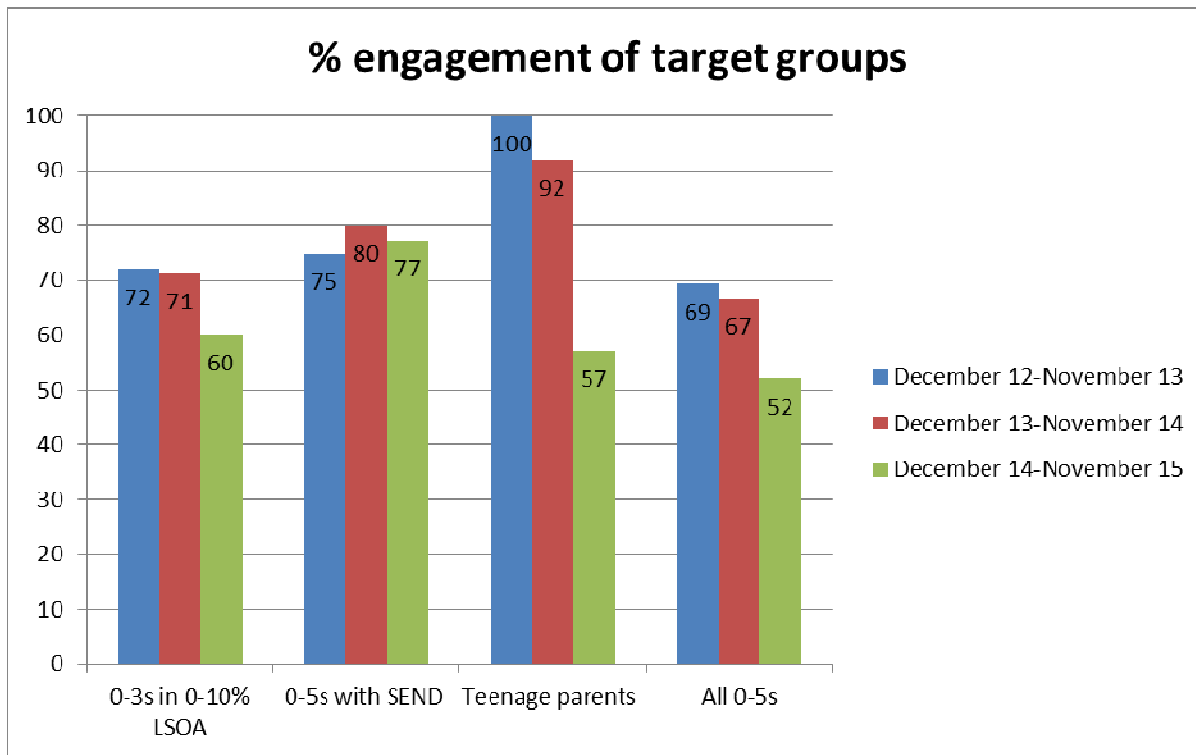
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E Connolly: 07/04/15

Appendix 2: Engagement with target groups by Children's Centres

Overall and Target Group Annual Engagement Data for last three years

Figure 1



* LSOA : Lowest Super Output Area

* SEND: Special Educational Need and Disability