

DATE: 23 July 2009

Title: Children's Centre Briefing Paper

Ward(s) All

Portfolios: Cllr R Walker – Children and Young People

Summary of report:

The report provides an overview of the current situation in relation to the development of Children's Centres across Walsall identifying their location and associated costs and provides some examples of achievements across the Centres.

Background papers:

Cabinet Report July 2008 Phase Three Children's Centre Location and Funding

Reason for scrutiny:

Following a specific request from the Chair, this report outlines the background to the development of Children's Centres across Walsall, their locations, associated capital and revenue costs, the statutory core offer, and some examples of their achievements.

Resource and legal considerations:

The funding for Children's Centres is provided through the ring-fenced Sure Start and Early Years Childcare Grant.

All Children's Centres are accountable to Walsall Council through legal agreements to ensure the delivery of services in line with the DCSF requirements.

Citizen impact:

The provision of Children's Centres impacts on the learning, health and social care of children, young people and their families.

Environmental impact:

The delivery of the Children's Centres strategy supplements current progress on community needs analyses.

Performance management:

The first Annual Conversation with the Children's Centres was conducted in January 2009. This is the mechanism for challenge and support to centres, with individual priorities identified and baselines set for future evaluation. The self evaluation and performance management of Children's Centres is a continual process and is addressed at the monthly meetings of the Centre Managers' Network. The Government has commissioned Together for Children to support and challenge Local Authorities in the development of Children's Centres. To date all the centres visited and sampled by Together for Children within Walsall have been confirmed as meeting the full core offer of services.


Equality Implications:

No specific Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out. However as part of their core delivery and annual self evaluation, each Children's Centre is required to identify which are their "hard to reach" groups of families and identify how they will work to engage these groups in accessing the services provided by the Centre and its partners.

Consultation:

The development stage of each Children's Centre requires consultation with the local community and service providers, including health providers, schools and other child care settings, parents and carers.

Contact Officer:

Carol Boughton
Head of Early Years and Disability Services
Walsall Children's Services Serco
 01922 686406
carol.boughton@walsallcs.serco.com

Report

1. What have we Achieved and for whom

1.1 The development of children's centres nationally, and within Walsall, was based on a three phased approach. The first phase was based on providing support services for the most disadvantaged areas and then widening this to cover the 30% most disadvantaged areas in Phase 2. The third and final phase is to ensure that all communities in Walsall have access to children's centre services.

1.2 Walsall has successfully developed and opened 15 children's centres providing access to services for 16,418 children under the age of 5 years, meeting the Government's target for March 2008.

To achieve universal coverage of Children's Centre services, Cabinet has agreed a target of 3 further centres under the third and final phase of development. This will enable access to services for a further 2,528 children under the age of 5.

1.3 The Children's Centre programme is a 10 Year programme, and due to the phased nature of its implementation and the significant differences across the communities within which the Centres are located each Centre has achieved differently. Some examples of Children's Centre achievements are presented in Appendix 1.

2. Children's Centres - Location and Costs

2.1 The capital and revenue costs for the phase 1 and 2 are presented in Appendix 2. The funding for Children's Centres is provided through the ring-fenced Sure Start and Early Years Childcare Grant. Individual Centre budgets are based on a formula approach that takes in account levels of deprivation, numbers of children to be reached and factors to fund the core offer of services.

2.2 The phase 3 children's centre areas are: Paddock / Chuckery, Pelsall and Streetly.

3. Children's Centre Core Offer of Services

3.1 All Children's Centres are required to provide a set of core services against which they are measured. Provision of the service does not necessarily mean they are the direct provider and in relation to early education they will be working in partnership with other local providers, including nursery schools, childminders and the voluntary and private day care settings.

3.2 The core offer consists of the following elements:

- **Early education** - Access to nursery education integrated with daycare for babies and children until they reach school age
- **Childcare** - Access to day care suitable for working parents, minimum of 5 days a week 48 weeks a year, 10 hours a day; support for childminders
- **Support for Parents**- Parenting support and information as well as specific support for families in need and 'hard to reach' families

- **Access to Specialist Services** - Early identification of children with special needs and disabilities with inclusive services and support for their families
- **Information** - Visits to all children in the reach area within two months of birth; links with school, Children's Information Services (CIS) and Jobcentre Plus; information and guidance on breast feeding, hygiene, nutrition and safety.

4. Performance Monitoring / Service Improvement

4.1 The first Annual Conversation with the Children's Centres was conducted in January 2009. This is the mechanism for challenge and support to centres, with individual priorities identified and baselines set for future evaluation. The self evaluation and performance management of Children's Centres is a continual process and is addressed at the monthly meetings of the Centre Managers' Network. The Government has commissioned Together for Children to support and challenge Local Authorities in the development of Children's Centres. To date all the centres visited and sampled by Together for Children in Walsall have been confirmed as meeting the full core offer of services.

Appendix 1 Examples of Children's Centre Achievements

- 1. Bloxwich West Children's Centre:** The Centre has piloted the Healthy Child programme with Walsall NHS and recently Ofsted judged how children are helped to be healthy as outstanding. The overall Ofsted judgement was good.
- 2. Bentley West:** The Centre is in its third year of delivering a transition programme called Foundation for Learning to assist both children & parents with the transition from day care to school nursery. This operates 5 mornings a week from April to July. The planning is produced in conjunction with the Early Years co-ordinators from 2 local schools and identifies children's individual needs e.g. speech & language delay. Nursery teachers have an opportunity to meet their future nursery children prior to their start date.

The Early Year's coordinator has tracked children using the Children's Centre and has shown that their baseline outputs are higher than those children who enter school nursery without having attended the Children's Centre. This progress has been maintained throughout reception and year 1.

- 3. Darlaston:** Ofsted Inspection 2006 judged the provision under helping children achieve well & enjoy what they do to be good:

"Children achieve well because staff plan effective activities & have a good understanding of the Birth to Three framework, they use this well to help support the children's development"

- 4. Alumwell/Pleck:** Family Support Case Study:

Richard came to the Centre when he left the family home following domestic violence from his partner who had stabbed him; he was living in a one bedroom hotel room with his two children aged 2 years and 4 months. His partner was later sectioned under the Mental Health Act. Richard arrived at the hotel with one bin bag of clothes for himself and his children. Richard very emotional and very upset about what had happened and just needed to talk about his partner, money worries, benefits and how he was going to cope. The Centre organised for the two children to have nursery provision while they sorted Richard's housing and benefits situation out. The Centre were concerned over the older child because she had been a witness to her mother stabbing her dad, so having her in nursery would help with observations of her emotional well being as well as providing a safe place to play, explore and learn.

The most pressing concern for Richard was that all the benefits for the children were in his partner's name and due to her illness she was unable to communicate with Richard. An appointment for Richard to meet with the lone parent's advisor, supported by a Centre worker was made and support provided to get Richard and children re-housed nearer family members.

- 5. The Children's Centre's ethos is to employ local people many offer Modern Day Apprenticeships where possible, e.g. each of the Walsall Children's Services Serco Centres has two such apprenticeships. In Bentley West 70% of the staff are local and this has taken families out of poverty; an indicator of this is a drop in the free school meals at Bentley West School.**

Appendix 2 Children's Centre Cost information

Children's Centre	Date Services Commenced	Date Building was Operational	Capital Cost Sure Start Grant	Revenue Budget 2009/10
Alumwell / Pleck *	August 2004	August 2004	£1,000,000 – Sure Start grant allocation	£521,598
Bentley West	April 2005	April 2005	£546,900	£385,525
Birchills and North Walsall*	November 2002	April 2005	£1,000,000 initial Sure Start grant allocation £222,970 extension	£574,701
Blakenall*	February 2001	May 2004	£1,000,000 Sure Start Grant allocation	£559,023
Bloxwich West	September 2006			£368,579
Mossley site		March 2007	£1,021,694	
Busill Jones site		Sept 2006	£413,347	
Brownhills	March 2008	April 2008	£510,247	£294,119
Darlaston*	September 2003	December 2006	£1,597,439 (includes ERDF funding)	£609,485
Edgar Stammers	January 2007	December 2007	£879,597	£294,088
Fibbersley Park	October 2007	September 2007	£871,000 Sure Start Grant Contribution	£323,974
Greenfield	September 2006	October 2006	£662,316	£270,383
Hatherton	March 2008	May 2009	£783,231	£309,405
Leighswood	July 2006	Sept 2006	£755,896	£269,127
Lighthouse (Beacon)	March 2008	June 2008	£444,754	£251,224
Palfrey*	July 2002	November 2005	£1,000,000 Sure Start Grant allocation	£631,711
Pheasey Park Farm	February 2007	January 2007	£1,085,674	£192,469

*Original Sure Start Local Programmes were awarded £1,000,000 of capital funding directly to each programme. Revenue funding for these programmes is set to reduce in 2010/11 in line with Government funding allocations.

Budgets for all other Children's Centres are set to increase in 2010/11 in line with Government funding allocations.