
Children's Services Scrutiny Committee –23rd September 2013

Report of the Director of Children's Services

Children's Centres in Dudley MBC

Purpose of Report

1. To advise Children's Services Scrutiny Committee members of the purpose of Children's Centres service delivery, the legal framework under which they are delivered and the impact that they have made.

Background

2. The report is intended to explain the background to the development of Children's Centres in Dudley and to explain how they support the communities in which they are sited. The overall aim of Children's Centres is to identify, reach and help the families in greatest need of support. This should be achieved by providing a range of both universal and targeted services in partnership with both statutory and voluntary agencies.
3. The Local Authority is the accountable body responsible for the delivery of Children's Centres provision.
4. The provision of Children's Centres is a statutory requirement under The Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 Children Centres service delivery are also underpinned by law in the Childcare Act 2006, and more specifically the Early Years Outcomes Duty placed upon Local Authorities, along with the Primary Care Trust, Strategic Health Authorities and Jobcentre Plus.
5. In Dudley there are twenty Children's Centres. Up until 2013, all of the Centres were commissioned and contracts were issued and performance managed by the Local Authority.
6. The decision was taken to bring back direct responsibility for all of the Children's Centres service delivery into the Local Authority when contracts ended on 31st March 2013. This decision was made in order to meet the changing agenda and to deliver services within reduced budgets.
7. The process has enabled management structures and service delivery to be reviewed and support changes which will be necessary to ensure the longer term viability and sustainability of the provision and to ensure integration with the Council's Early Intervention Strategy.
8. An immediate saving was made by bringing the direct management of Children's Centres back in-house. This was due to the removal of the additional management costs paid to the organisations which were commissioned to provide the services i.e.

Action for Children and School Governing Bodies. The savings enabled the Directorate to meet the Medium Term Financial Strategy target for Children's Centres savings of £390,000 for the financial year 2013/2014.

9. External legal advice had been sought and the procurement process which would have been necessary to follow to re-commission the Centres from 2013 onwards would have been very costly and time consuming.

Children's Centre Provision in Dudley

10. There are twenty Children's Centres which were developed over a 6 year period, in 3 different Phases, following government guidance and utilising government funding ring-fenced to Children's Centres.
11. Phase 1 centres (2002-2008) were developed in the areas of greatest disadvantage, Phase 2(2008-2009) in areas with a mix of both disadvantaged and more advantaged areas and Phase 3 (2010) in the remaining areas of the borough. Therefore, Children's Centres were not providing services to the whole borough until 2010.

See Appendix 1 for list of Children's Centres and background details of every Centre including staffing and budgets

12. Reach area

- a. Each of our Children Centres has a defined 'reach area' which is made up of a cluster of 'super output areas' (SOAs) containing around 900 children under 5. The numbers of Under 5's in the borough is rising year on year currently.
- b. These areas are not intended to restrict access of parents and children to services. Parents are able to access services at a location which is most appropriate to their needs. However, priority is given to children and families living within the Reach area and also family support/outreach workers are allocated according to Reach.

Core Purpose

13. The remit of Children's Centres has changed considerably since their inception. Initially they were targeted at those in greatest need but then their focus became universal provision for all children under 5 and their families. In addition, Centres developed within Phase 1 had to provide full day childcare. This requirement impacted considerably on these centres service delivery and financial viability.
14. The current government issued revised guidance to Local Authorities in September 2011 about the Core Purpose of Children's Centres. There is now a requirement for children's Centres to focus much more effectively on those families that need them most. This is a clear policy shift towards targeted services. The expectation is that Centres will identify, reach and help the families in greatest need of support with an emphasis on:
 - a) Child development and school readiness
 - b) Parenting aspirations and parenting skills

c) Child and family Health and life chances

15. The focus of work within Children's Centres is now family support. This includes one to one family support in families own homes or through group activities within the centre.

These activities may include:

- Parenting Support including the delivery of Family Links Nurturing Programme
 - Every Child a Talker programme (Programme supporting speech and language development)
 - Time for Twos- the 2 year old childcare/ free education pilot
 - Parents Early Education Partnership(PEEP) and Time together
16. There is a continual demand for Children's Centre support from social care and health and referrals for support are increasing. Children's Centres provide significant support to children who are subject to Child Protection Plans and who are in the category of Children in Need.

See Appendix 2 for list of services provided in Children's Centres and Appendix 3 – Sample Timetable and Newsletter

Capital Build/Accommodation

17. All centres offer some basic accommodation but do vary in size. The 3 initial Sure Start local programme buildings (Brierley Hill, Kates Hill and Sledmere and Butterfly) are the most extensive as their funding was the most generous. Phase 1 Centres offer additional accommodation in the form of full day care provision. Standard accommodation for all centres includes:
- Defined entrance and reception area
 - Multi-purpose room (for training, meetings etc)
 - Interview room (with facilities for health staff and others to do 1:1 work)
 - Small office
 - Kitchen
18. **Facilities** at centres can be used by staff from a range of agencies, for delivery of services and activities. Some examples that already exist include:
- Health Visitor baby clinics
 - Midwife clinics
 - GP surgery
 - Oral Health promotion
 - Specialist Early Years physiotherapy
 - Speech and language
 - Educational psychology support
 - Voluntary organisations services e.g. Dudley MIND, National Childbirth Trust.
 - Citizens Advice Bureau
 - Foster carers, childminding networks, Respect (Teenage Parents)
 - Young carers
 - Social care contact visits
 - Family learning/adult education
 - Library services

Partnership Working

19. Children's Centres have been established with the principle of Working Together with partner agencies to ensure that a holistic approach is taken to meet the needs of the children and families with whom they work. Due to the re-focussing of service delivery towards more targeted work with vulnerable families partnerships have become even more important as a means of identifying and engaging with these families through the universal services partners are delivering in Children's Centres e.g. Health Visitor clinics.

See Appendix 4 – Paper giving details of the partnership working with Health

Consultation

20. Every centre consults regularly with the children and families who access the centre and those who have not accessed services.
21. It is a requirement that an annual parental satisfaction survey is completed and the results of this together with ongoing consultation activity also informs the service delivery.
22. If any significant change to service delivery is proposed extensive consultation with local communities, service users and staff is required

See Appendix 5 – Example of report from parental satisfaction survey. (Gornal)

Volunteers

23. The recruitment of volunteers is of significant importance to the work of the Children's Centres.
24. A volunteer policy is in place and all centres have volunteers recruited to support the work undertaken. Some volunteers have gone on to do training and then progressed into employment due to increased confidence and self esteem.
25. A significant borough wide volunteer initiative is the breast feeding buddies project. This scheme has been developed in conjunction with Public Health who provide training and support. Breast feeding rates in Dudley are low and Obesity levels are rising.

External Regulation and DfE guidance

26. Children's Centres need to evaluate the impact of the services they are providing. From April 2010 Children's Centres have been Ofsted inspected. In Dudley there have been 14 Ofsted inspections to date. One of them was judged to be Outstanding, eleven were judged to be Good and two judged to be Satisfactory.
27. The council needs to be mindful that the DfE guidance which relates to Capital expenditure states that:
"Clawback of funding is triggered where an asset funded wholly or partly by the Department is disposed of or the asset is no longer used to meet the aims and objectives consistent with the SSEYCG or AHDC grant."

Impact Measurement

28. All Centres evaluate the impact of their service provision and the outcomes for the children and families with whom they are working.

See Appendix 6 for Data and Case Studies

Finance

29. Each centre is allocated a revenue budget. This is based on a formula which takes account of the following:
- Core budget (related to the running costs of the building and core staff costs)
- and a variable amount depending on:
- Numbers of children in the 'reach area'
 - Level of disadvantage as indicated from selected factors in the Index for Multiple Deprivation
30. Dudley's funding formula has been replicated and used as an example of good practice in the audit office report (December 2009) submitted to the Scrutiny Committee reporting to Government.
31. Since their inception until the end of March 2011 funding for Children's Centre provision was ring fenced within the Sure Start Grant.
32. However from April 2011, funding was no longer ring fenced but funding was allocated from the DfE's Early Intervention Grant to maintain service provision at all 20 Children's Centres in Dudley. The level of funding from government reduced from April 2011; so every Children's Centre received a reduced budget from April 2011. At that stage the total budget to support the provision of Children's Centres was £6,353,600 with £5,850,000 being earmarked directly to the Children's Centres.
33. For 2013/14 the revenue budget to support the provision of Children's Centres is £5,613,300 with £5,229,050 being earmarked directly for Dudley's 20 Children's Centres.
34. Since 2011/12 the overall Children's Centre budget has reduced by £740,300 as a result of either savings required to meet the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy or Central Government Early Intervention Grant budget reductions.

Law

35. The provision of Children's Centres is a statutory requirement under the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 Children Centres service delivery is also underpinned by the Childcare Act 2006.

Equality Impact

36. Children's Centres provide a range of services to every child under 5 and their family. The needs of the local community are clearly identified through consultation and partnership engagement and central analysis of data and ongoing needs assessment.

Recommendation

That Children's Services Scrutiny Committee:

- Receives, discusses and reviews the report relating to Children's Centres service delivery in Dudley and interviews witnesses. This will be set in the context of visits which members have taken part in.
- Requests further evidence if required.
- Uses the Committee's findings to make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services.



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Jane Porter
Director of Children's Services

Contact Officer:

Christine Russell
Divisional Lead – Family Support
Telephone: 01384 814292
Email: Christine.russell@dudley.gov.uk

Appendix 1 – List of Centres and details of every centre

Appendix 2 - List of some typical services available at a Children's Centre

Appendix 3 – Timetable and Newsletter

Appendix 4 – Partnership working

Appendix 5 – Parental satisfaction survey

Appendix 6 – Data and Case Studies

Other background information to be provided:

Map of borough with centres highlighted – TO BE TABLED

Photographs of centres and groups etc attending services at centres – TO BE TABLED

Plans of 2 Children's Centre – TO BE TABLED

1 example of Ofsted report