

---

**Children's Services Scrutiny Committee – 21<sup>st</sup> January 2015**

**Report of the Interim Director of Children's Services**

**Children's Centres**

**Purpose of Report**

1. To update Children's Services Scrutiny Committee of the progress of the Children's Centres remodelling.

**Background**

2. The provision of Children's Centres is a statutory requirement under The Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009. The Children's Centres offer is also underpinned by law in the Childcare Act 2006.
3. The Local Authority is the accountable body responsible for the delivery of the Children's Centres offer.
4. The latest statutory guidance was issued to local authorities in April 2013. The guidance requires Children's Centres to focus much more effectively on those families in greatest need.
5. The core purpose of children's centres is to improve outcomes for young children and their families and reduce inequalities between families in greatest need and their peers in:
  - a) child development and school readiness;
  - b) parenting aspirations and parenting skills; and
  - c) child and family health and life chances.
6. In Dudley the twenty Children's Centres have been directly managed by the Local Authority since 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013.
7. The overall aim of remodelling was for Children's Centres to continue to identify, reach and help the families in greatest need of support by providing a range of both universal and targeted Early Help services to those children and families most in need, in partnership with both statutory and voluntary agencies within a context of achieving £2.3 million saving against the revenue budget for 2015/16.
8. A Public Consultation was launched in October 2013 on the redesign of the children's centre offer. The proposals contained within the consultation were based on the redesign of the Management of the twenty children's centres into a five Cluster Model ensuring the continuation of access to children's centre services across the borough.
9. An implementation process followed staff consultation with the first phase remodelled service becoming fully operational by 1<sup>st</sup> September 2014. Staff reductions were kept

to a minimal level supported by voluntary redundancies and redeployment. A total of 9 employees were made compulsory redundant during the remodelling. The final phase of the remodelling process involving the cleaning and caretaking staff is under current review for implementation by the end of the Summer term 2015.

10. All children's centres have remained open and offer some basic accommodation but vary considerably 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
11. The centres offer the opportunity to provide services from the buildings and these facilities are increasingly being used by a range of agencies for the delivery of activities and core business for example health visitor and GP clinics are held in some centres.
12. Increasingly Children's Centres staff deliver their services in a variety of different places which allows greater opportunities for families to access services in other community venues. Much of the one to one family support is provided through outreach in the families' own homes and some services such as Stay and Play sessions are delivered in primary schools sited within their Reach areas.
13. Each of our Children's Centres has a defined 'reach area' which is made up of a cluster of 'super output areas' (SOAs) containing around 900 children under 5. 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.
14. The numbers of under 5's are rising in the borough year on year and there are currently 15,095 families registered and activity engaged with children's centres.
15. Children's Centres provide significant support to children who are subject to Child Protection Plans and who are assessed as Children in Need. Family Support services within Children's Centres are developing skills and knowledge in order to offer targeted effective Early Help and Step Down support to families to enable them to meet their child(ren's) previously unmet need and where possible safely divert these children away from the need for protective action by the Local Authority in order to safeguard them.
16. Children's Centres have been established with the principle of Working Together with partner agencies to ensure that a 'joined up' approach is taken to meet the needs of the children and families with whom they work and maximise efficiencies. 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 that partners are delivering in Children's Centres e.g. Health Visitor clinics.

17. The commissioning of health visiting services for 0-5 year olds will transfer to the Local Authority in October 2015. This affords a significant opportunity for the consolidation of health visitor and children's centre services to promote even greater integration, reduce duplication and ensure that the resources have maximum impact for children and families in the borough.
18. The recruitment of volunteers is of significant importance to the work of the Children's Centres and all of the centres have a thriving volunteer network.
19. Children's Centres are required to evaluate the impact of the services they are providing. They are performance managed against the Local Authority service specification and Ofsted's framework.

In Dudley there have been 20 Ofsted inspections to date. Two were judged to be **Outstanding**, fourteen were judged to be **Good**, one was judged to be **Satisfactory** and three judged to be **Requiring Improvement**.

20. The early indications from the remodelling exercise indicate that the numbers of families accessing children's centre services has been maintained. The impact of the changed arrangements is already enabling the Local Authority to deliver a more consistent service across the borough and allowing greater opportunities to compare service delivery and assess the impact of specific activities on outcomes for children. As a result the service will be more flexible to local and developing needs and enable us to have a more robust commissioning process to deliver value for money and improved outcomes.
21. The Local Authority recognises that rising 5's population, demand for services in the current economic climate and a need to provide services at the earliest opportunity will be challenging. Children's centres will remain a key component of our integrated family support and early help offer.

## **Finance**

22. The Children's Centre controllable budget for 2014/15 is £4.163m, included within this is income from the Dedicated Schools Grant/Public Health of £0.640m. The controllable budget for 2015/16 is £3.293m, including income from the Dedicated Schools Grant/Public Health of £0.992m. The 2015/16 budget includes a budget reduction of £0.800m as agreed as part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

## **Law**

23. The provision of Children's Centres is a statutory requirement under the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009. Children's Centres service delivery is also underpinned by the Childcare Act 2006.
24. Section 5D(1) of the Childcare Act 2006 stipulates that the Local Authority must conduct appropriate consultation.

## **Equality Impact**

25. 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**

26. Children's Services Scrutiny Committee receive and comment on the report.



.....  
**Pauline Sharratt**  
**Interim Director of Children's Services**

Contact Officer: Annette Callear  
Divisional Lead – Family Support  
Telephone: 01384 81 4292  
Email: [annette.callear@dudley.gov.uk](mailto:annette.callear@dudley.gov.uk)