

OPEN

Children & Families Committee

29 April 2024

Children's Centre Re-modelling into the Family Hub Model

Report of: Deborah Woodcock, Executive Director of Children's Services

Report Reference No: CF/57/22-23

Ward(s) Affected: Broken Cross, Crewe West, Knutsford, Hurdsfield, Nantwich, Sandbach, Poynton

Purpose of Report

- 1 To update the children and families committee on the development of the family hubs transformational programme as approved on the children and families committee on the 11 July 2022.
- 2 To brief committee on the future outreach delivery model for family hubs and seek permission to carry out a consultation to repurpose up to seven of the existing children's centre buildings to meet the MTFs savings, whilst continuing to deliver the services in a more flexible way.

Executive Summary

- 3 Cheshire East is currently undertaking a transformational change programme to improve the way we deliver services to children and families at the right time in the right place.
- 4 Since our bid for family hubs transformation funding in 2022 we have repurposed five of our former children's centres into family hubs expanding services at these sites from an offer for children and families under 5 to a 0-19 offer and up to 25 for our young people with SEND. We are now looking at the best ways to offer flexible outreach services

from our family hubs to respond quickly and effectively to changing needs and priorities across our borough, improving the reach to our most disadvantaged communities to improve outcomes.

- 5 Some of the current childrens centres are not big enough to extend the reach to a 0-19 cohort and by delivering all our services at fixed locations we are not reaching all our communities in our 0-30% most deprived local super output areas (LSOAS).
- 6 We are proposing to repurpose up to seven of our children's centres that we have not remodelled into family hubs and repurpose these buildings for education delivery purposes where possible.
- 7 All services currently offered will be delivered via a family hub outreach and home visiting model within the communities that our current children's centres are based and beyond. There are numerous options for the relocation of services within our local communities including schools, libraries, community centres and with our partners within the voluntary community and faith sector.
- 8 By having fewer physical buildings to staff daily we will have the flexibility to deliver services in a flexible way across a wider geography. As an example, Sandbach children's centre covers Sandbach, Middlewich and Alsager however most families we reach from this centre are from Sandbach which is only 1 of the 3 most deprived local super output areas the centre serves. Alsager has an LSOA with the highest deprivation out of the 3 and the families who reside in this area do not travel to access their local children's centre in Sandbach. We have recently trialled a partnership with the Wesley Place Church in Alsager who were seeing up to 45 children and families weekly at their food hub serving up to 80 people. We have since been attending the food hub to engage with the community in their preferred place. We have been able to take out and model play activities that can support children's development at home, we have supported the set up of a clothes bank, ran sessions on oral hygiene and delivered our HENRY Healthy Start Brighter Future course at Wesley place with 11 families starting and 10 fully completing the 8-week program with excellent evaluation feedback from participants.
- 9 Using the Sandbach example above if we repurposed Sandbach children's centre we could potentially deliver more early years childcare from this location to support local accessibility of the new childcare entitlements. We could deliver some of our start for life activities in partnership with Sandbach Library to reach our Sandbach residents, Wesley place activities could continue for our Alsager residents, and we would have increased capacity to look for a partnership delivery venue in Middlewich to sufficiently cover all 3 of our most disadvantaged

communities within the Sandbach, Alsager and Middlewich collaborative area.

- 10 A full consultation will take place to hear the views of people who use these services, including parents/carers, residents, partners, staff, local voluntary and community sector organisations and other stakeholders so we can be sure that the proposals will meet the needs of our communities now and into the future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Children & Families Committee is recommended to:

1. Approve the commencement of a formal consultation period to repurpose up to seven of the following existing children's centres for other education purposes, and a report back to the meeting in September on the results and final proposals. The centres in scope for consultation are:
 - Poynton Children's Centre
 - Knutsford Children's Centre
 - Nantwich Children's Centre
 - Hurdsfield Children's Centre
 - Broken Cross Children's Centre
 - Sandbach Children's Centre
 - The Brooks Children's Centre
2. To support the vision of a flexible outreach program from our family hubs to cover a wider geography with more flexibility to target resources.

Background

11. As we continue to recover from the pandemic, local authorities must invest in supporting vulnerable children back into education. They must also increase wellbeing support for families and increase focus on the way we support children in the early years from conception to age two. Implementing the recommendations from The Best Start for Life - The Early Years Healthy Development Review Report by Dame Andrea

Leadsom MP, the government spending review emphasised the need for local services to join to create 'family hubs' where families can access a broad range of advice and support.

12. Cheshire East was one of 12 local authorities that was successful in a bid for a share of the government's £12m Family Hubs Transformation Fund, announced on 23 May 2022. To transition to a family hub model by September 2024.
13. Since the bid we have repurposed five children's centres and developed and opened five family hubs offering a broad range of services for children of all ages. They are:
 - a. Oakenclough Family Hub (Wilmslow)
 - b. Ashgrove Family Hub (Macclesfield)
 - c. Congleton Family Hub
 - d. Oaktree Family Hub (Crewe)
 - e. Monks Coppenhall Family Hub & SEND centre of excellence. (Crewe)
14. With a 6th one in the planning stages for summer 2024 at Crewe Lifestyle Centre.
15. In addition to our newly established family hubs, we are proposing to create a network of outreach provision as satellite services from our designated family hubs across the borough to ensure equity of service delivery across all our communities that reside in the 0-30% most deprived Local Super Output Areas (LSOAS) across our borough.
16. The family hub delivery model will evolve into a hub and spoke model. The repurposing of up to seven further children's centres will allow us to deliver outreach services from our family hubs through a flexible offer of outreach services directly provided from the local authority and a wider partnership family hub connect offer through our family hub affiliation scheme.
17. Providing outreach services across a wider geography will ensure our delivery is as close to our target audience as possible mitigating against barriers that some of our families face in accessing the current children's centres particularly from rural communities.
18. The consultation will highlight where there may be better facilities in the area to relocate service delivery across a wider area. Where there are not suitable relocation opportunities the existing children's centre would become a family hub connect site.

19. The family hub affiliation scheme promotes the services of affiliated providers within Cheshire East that form part of our family hubs core offer alongside those we directly. Through our website we will advertise the wide variety of services available in one place that our children and families can access promoting choice for families and supporting other local partners to connect with families.
20. We are delivering our family hub services across two localities: north and south, locality working brings everyone who plays an active role in improving our communities together, including organisations, businesses, groups, and residents. We have divided the borough of Cheshire East into eight collaborative areas, four in the north and four in the south. Collaboratives bring together multi-disciplinary teams who work in specific geographies to improve the lives of children and young people.
21. Regular partnership meetings have been established within each of the eight areas and the partnership have identified the top three priorities for local children and families to develop joint delivery action plans this year, alongside our JSNA this will help us to target our family hub outreach service delivery in the right places to make an impact on children's outcomes where it is most needed.
22. Partnership working and co-location is essential for the success of the family hub model and work with the voluntary community and faith sector to identify opportunities in key areas of need will be explored alongside that of other corporate services such as libraries and leisure.
23. Through our collaborative working model and family hub affiliation scheme we will also increase partnership working in the delivery of our family hub model with our voluntary community and faith sector providers. Bringing the wide range of services available in Cheshire East together through the family hub web pages on live well and the new virtual offer.
24. Our current family hub journey services will continue to be delivered across the borough we are not proposing reductions to the number of services available; instead, we are looking to spread the delivery of those services more widely and in a targeted way across our most deprived local super output areas to effectively reach our families in our most disadvantaged communities. Relinquishing some of our buildings

will provide more flexibility to offer services in the right place at the right time.

25. Repurposing the childrens centre in a particular geography does not mean that the community the centre serves would no longer get access to services when the community needs them. Communities will have access to our family hubs and a range of new outreach services. It would mean in most cases a reduction to the number of services delivered in one geography over a week. However, an increase in the number of families who have access to an outreach offer which covers a wider geography. So instead of having 5 days delivery in one geography we can spread the delivery across numerous geographies over a week.
26. We will investigate the need to develop a family hub location in Macclesfield town centre should Hurdsfield and Broken Cross both be repurposed following the consultation, bringing together services from the family centre, early years teams and libraries.
27. The children's centre sites in scope for repurposing are all situated on a shared site with a primary school making them ideal for extended education purposes where required.
28. During the consultation the future of each site identified for repurposing will be explored with our school's organisation, childcare development and SEND teams. Individual schools will then be consulted with about the repurpose plans where they are identified to benefit the school.
29. Within the revised DSG management plan, following the DfE Safety Valve Intervention Programme, one of the key mitigations to address the increasing deficit position is to increase Cheshire East's own specialist provision and to reduce the over reliance on the independent special school sector.
30. This growth of specialist provision includes additional places for resource provisions and SEN units within in mainstream schools. The repurposing of children's centres will be considered within the SEN provision plan.
31. We want Cheshire East to be a great place to be young for all our children and young people and for the vast majority this is the case. Most children in Cheshire East have a level of wellbeing and attainment

that is equal and often higher than the national average. In Cheshire East we have 244 Local Super Output Areas (LSOAS). Of the 244 only 36 are classed by the index of multiple deprivation (IMD) as being in the 0-30% most deprived. The North locality has 12 LSOAS in the 0-30% most deprived across Wilmslow, Knutsford, and Macclesfield. The South locality has 24 of which 20 are in the Crewe area and the others across Alsager, Middlewich, Sandbach and Nantwich. This model will allow us more flexibility to target our offer to the families that most need our support across all 36 LSOAS. Our Tartan rug demonstrates that families who reside in our most disadvantaged areas have outcomes in numerous areas that are worse than peers who reside in our more affluent areas. Targeting our resources in this way will bring about the biggest impact in reducing inequalities.

Consultation and Engagement

32. Initial consultation will be with internal services and adjoining schools to scope out viable options for repurposing the buildings for education and childcare use – April 2024
33. The second stage of consultation will be with other service providers within the children centre reach area and those delivering from the centres to map existing provision in the local community and opportunities to deliver outreach provision from other venues- May 2024
34. The third stage will be to pull together the first 2 parts into a proposal that will go out to wider public consultation with an equality impact assessment - May 2024
35. A full consultation plan will be developed using the consultation toolkit, to hear the views of people who use these services and childrens centres, including parents/carers, residents, partners, staff, local voluntary and community sector organisations and other stakeholders so we can be sure that the proposals will meet the needs of our communities now and into the future. June – August 2024
36. The final recommendations on the individual options for each of the 7 centre proposals or alternative proposals to be brought back to committee in September 2024 for approval.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 32 To achieve the £250K MTFS savings target. The premises costs involved in keeping the buildings in this proposal for repurposing open for the financial year 2023/2024 was £128,000 after deducting the £20,000 rental income. The rental income of £20,000 would still be achieved by relocating the health services from 2 of these centres into our family hubs or other corporate assets making the total savings from premises costs alone £148,000. As part of our proposals, we will pursue other rental income opportunities for family hubs. The second part of the savings proposal will come from the Start for Life supplies and services budgets that resource and maintain the equipment within these premises.
- 33 Utilising other corporate buildings and developing partnerships with other organisations means we can make savings whilst maintaining service delivery and improving access to services for more children and families.
- 34 Developing the family hubs model and outreach services will allow us to focus our resources on those services that make the most difference to families by reducing spend on administration and the maintenance and management of our buildings and delivering services across a wider geography in a flexible way in the right place at the right time to improve our reach of families who experience the most disadvantage.
- 35 Outreach services will be delivered from our main family hub locations, other council assets, in families homes and through joint delivery with partner agencies. Most importantly, it is proposed that there are no reductions to the number of services available; instead, there will be fewer buildings in which they are based and more flexibility in where we deliver them.
- 36 The repurposing of the children's centres could provide vital space which could be used to support children with SEND and in turn, support the revised DSG management plan in achieving mitigations required with the aim of becoming financially sustainable in the future.

Other Options Considered

- 37 All seven children's centres could remain as they are structured currently, but this would offer limited opportunity for embedding family hub working across the borough for all age groups and would not provide the savings needed as agreed within the MTFS. If we continue to deliver in the current premises, we will continue to have an offer that isn't equitable for all our most disadvantaged communities. Delivering in one location across a week achieves a high volume of contacts with a small number of the population. Delivering services in multiple different locations within a week improves our reach of the Cheshire East population taking services to the people that need them the most.

Option	Impact	Risk
<p>Do nothing – Family hub outreach services for early years children would continue to be delivered in all our existing childrens centres.</p>	<p>MTFS savings would not be achieved, the council will continue to pay the same premises and administration costs.</p> <p>Outreach Service delivery is determined by building location rather than community need risking not being accessible for the children & families who need them the most.</p> <p>Delivering from a set number of buildings reduces the opportunity to cover a wider area of the borough so the children and families who currently struggle to access services will continue to do so.</p> <p>Limited options for partnership working with the voluntary community and faith sector to upskill a wider workforce.</p>	<p>High.</p>

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

- 38 The Council has a statutory duty to promote co-operation between local partners other councils, police and health services, to improve the wellbeing of children in the widest sense. The long-term vision within the proposals is aimed at meeting those obligations by the delivery of a family hubs model. This report provides an update as to progress to date on the family hubs model following receipt of grant funding.
- 39 As the proposals are supported by grant funding, the conditions of that funding must be kept under constant review to ensure compliance.
- 40 The consultation on the current proposals, must comply with the Gunning principles to ensure that any subsequent decision is legitimate. These require that;
- (a) Proposals are still at a formative stage
 - (b) There is sufficient information to give ‘intelligent consideration’ to what is being proposed
 - (c) There is adequate time for consideration and response
 - (d) ‘Conscientious consideration’ is given to responses before any decision is made.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

- 41 The council approved the 2024/25 MTF5 in February 2024, this included a Policy change item to “Deliver the Family Hub Model” with an associated saving of £250k.
- 42 As the work progresses, and consultations are carried out, the savings which could be delivered through each site repurpose will be calculated and measured against the £250k target.
- 43 The savings will be achieved on administrative and running costs of the buildings. This does not include any reduction in non-site-specific service that could be based in any site, for example family support. This will allow us to focus our reduced resources on delivering services that best meet the needs of families.

Policy

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<p>An open and enabling organisation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that there is transparency in all aspects of 	<p>A council which empowers and cares about people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work together with residents 	<p>A thriving and sustainable place</p>
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<p>council decision making</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen, learn and respond to our residents, promoting opportunities for a two-way conversation • Support a sustainable financial future for the council, through service development, improvement and transformation • Promote and develop the services of the council through regular communication and engagement with all residents 	<p>and partners to support people and communities to be strong and resilient</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce health inequalities across the borough • Protect and support our communities and safeguard children, adults at risk and families from abuse, neglect and exploitation • Be the best Corporate Parents to our children in care • Support all children to have the best start in life • Increase opportunities for all children and young adults with additional needs • Ensure all children have a high quality, enjoyable education that enables them to achieve their full potential 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A great place for people to live, work and visit • Reduce impact on the environment
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- 45 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed for the development of family hubs and will be updated prior to commencement of the formal public consultation.

Human Resources

- 46 Any staff who have a childrens centre as their current base that is repurposed would be relocated to the closest family hub. The relocation policy and procedure will apply.

Risk Management

- 47 There is a risk that stakeholders will view the repurposing of children's centres as them closing. We will develop a comprehensive communication and consultation plan, which includes coproduction with stakeholders to ensure that family hubs are recognised as a key vehicle to deliver services, including through outreach and digital options.
- 48 There is a risk that the committee does not agree to repurpose the existing children's centres. This will significantly impact on the delivery of family hubs outreach provision. It would also impact on the proposed savings set out within the MTFs and alternative savings from children's services would need to be identified.

Rural Communities

- 49 The family hubs virtual offer launched on the 1 April 2024 making it easier for families to find local services and access content online. The family hub connect outreach offer will broaden the geography that services can be delivered across.

Children and Young People including Cared for Children, care leavers and Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

- 50 Cared for children are classed as a vulnerable cohort of children and can access the targeted and core offer of services across the full age range of services. The outreach model gives more flexibility to deliver to vulnerable cohorts at the right place and the right time.

Public Health

- 51 The proposal for family hubs is to build upon our child health hubs to offer health services for families from pre-birth to age 19 (or 25 for SEND children). Any Health services operating from childrens centres that are repurposed would be relocated to a family hub or another suitable venue within the community as part of the consultation process with stakeholders.

Climate Change

- 52 The family hub virtual offer will allow families to access support and advice without the need to travel if this is their preference. A wider variety of outreach activities will bring services closer to our most disadvantaged communities. Travel may increase for families who prefer face to face interaction with universal services and live in the more affluent areas of the borough many of these families already travel from one centre to another across the borough to access a variety of activities.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Danielle Holdcroft, Head of service Early Years, Family Help & Prevention. danielle.holdcroft@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	N/A
Background Papers:	Family Hubs (cheshireeast.gov.uk) Locality working (cheshireeast.gov.uk) Family Hubs and Start for Life programme: local authority guide - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) Revised DSG Management Plan 2024/2025 to 2030/31 following the DfE Safety Valve Intervention Programme – Children and Families Committee 29 April 2024