

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Children and Families Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting:	12 April 2011
Report of:	Lorraine Butcher, Director of Children's Services
Subject/Title:	Children's Centre Programme Re-shaping
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Hilda Gaddum

1.0 Report Summary

1.1 This report:

- provides a brief background to the children's centre programme
- outlines the proposals and reasons for re-shaping the programme
- summarises the outcome of the consultation that has taken place during February and March

2.0 Decision Requested

- 2.1 Members note the contents of report outlining the proposed changes to the children's centre programme which will result in a reduction in the number of designated centres from 19 to 13, with no changes to services for children and no impact on families. The proposals are detailed in Appendix 1.

3.0 Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1 To ensure that the children's centre programme delivers value for money, makes best use of limited resources and remains sustainable in the medium term.

4.0 Wards Affected

All

5.0 Local Ward Members

All

6.0 Policy Implications including

- 6.1 The Coalition Government has set out its continued commitment to Sure Start children's centres recognising their crucial role in early intervention by ensuring that families get help early thereby helping to prevent costly problems from emerging later on. This commitment is endorsed by a number of recently commissioned government reviews¹ which place an increased emphasis on early intervention, particularly the first three years of life.
(¹ Graham Allen, Frank Field, Eileen Monroe)
- 6.2 The Government wants the network of children's centres to be retained but focused much more effectively on those families who need them most. They see children's centres as part of the local system of universal children's services; a key mechanism for improving outcomes and reducing inequalities between the poorest children and their peers. The Government also wants to allow LAs a greater degree of flexibility to determine local provision but within the context of their statutory duties.
- 6.3 Within this context, the children's centre programme in Cheshire East has been reviewed to ensure that it is best placed to respond to the opportunities and challenges ahead and that it continues to deliver effective, high quality, value for money services.

7.0 Financial Implications (Authorised by the Borough Treasurer)

All costs are contained within the budget for the Children and Families Directorate.

8.0 Legal Implications (Authorised by the Borough Solicitor)

- 8.1 Local Authorities continue to have duties under the Childcare Act 2006 to make sufficient provision of children's centres to meet local need and to consult before making any significant changes. However, what determines sufficiency and the appropriate level of consultation are not prescribed; they are for the LA to determine.
- 8.2 The proposed changes do not represent a significant change to the services provided as outlined in the statutory guidance. On this basis, the consultation process has been proportionate to the level of change. This is outlined in Appendix 1 and a summary of the consultation feedback is detailed in Appendix 2.

9.0 Risk Management

- 9.1 Four of the six centres being merged are a 'virtual' model which is a more challenging service delivery model to deliver, particularly in relation to the expectations that the Ofsted inspection framework place

on children's centres. Removing these centres and linking them to another phase 2 centre removes the risk of receiving a poor Ofsted outcome and makes better use of resources, supporting longer term sustainability.

10.0 Background and Options

- 10.1 The programme of 19 centres will be re-shaped and some children's centre footprints will be merged resulting in a reduction of 'designated' centres to 13. The re-shaped footprints are detailed in Appendices 3 and 4.

11.0 Access to Information

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report writer:

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