

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Cabinet Member for Children and Family Services

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| Date of Meeting: | 22 nd December 2009 |
| Report of: | John Weeks, Strategic Director, People |
| Subject/Title: | Reshaping of Children Centre Footprints |
| Portfolio Holder: | Councillor Paul Findlow |

1.0 Report Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise the Cabinet Member of the progress to date in implementing the Sure Start Children Centre programme in Cheshire East and to request approval for changes to the children centre footprints in order that they align with the new Local Area Partnership boundaries. The changes will result in a reduction in the number of footprints and total number of designated centres from 20 to 19 and will support a more sustainable model of children centre delivery in the authority.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 That

(1) the Cabinet Member for Children and Family Services approve:

- the reshaping of the children centre footprints so that they are as coterminous as possible with Local Area Partnerships boundaries;
- the removal of the current Holmes Chapel footprint and integration with the current Middlewich footprint to create a new Middlewich and Holmes Chapel footprint / phase 3 centre; and
- the establishment of a linked/satellite site within the children centre footprint which has a population above the recommended limit of 1200 children aged 0-5; and

(2) the Cabinet Member note that a service delivery model for rural areas will be further developed specifically to support Crewe Rural Children's Centre (which is to be renamed Nantwich Rural Children's Centre).

3.0 Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1 The recommendations will ensure that the Local Authority children centre footprints are aligned with the Local Area Partnerships which will assist with partnership development and future service planning, delivery and monitoring.

The recommendations also support a more sustainable model by reducing the management and administrative tasks related to each centre and maximising the resource available for direct service delivery.

It is believed that with the adoption of these changes, the children centre programme will be sustainable for the foreseeable future, therefore ensuring that the authority does not have to consult on any major changes in provision as legislation comes into force which places children's centres on a statutory basis.

4.0 Wards Affected

4.1 All

5.0 Local Ward Members

5.1 All

6.0 Policy Implications including - Climate change - Health

6.1 None

7.0 Financial Implications for Transition Costs (Authorised by the Borough Treasurer)

7.1 None

8.0 Financial Implications 2009/10 and beyond (Authorised by the Borough Treasurer)

8.1 Children's Centres are funded through the Sure Start Early Years and Childcare revenue grant. Grant allocations have been confirmed to March 2011. The 2008-2011 allocation was calculated per capita (not per children's centre) and based on child benefit data. Reduction in the number of children's centres should therefore have no impact. Future funding from April 2011 is currently unknown and will be confirmed following the next Government Comprehensive Spending Review.

9.0 Legal Implications (Authorised by the Borough Solicitor)

9.1 The Children's Centre Programme is the mechanism adopted by the Authority and endorsed by the Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) to meet the statutory duties placed on local authorities now contained in Sections 1-5 of the Childcare Act 2006. These Sections require local authorities to ensure that early childhood services meet the needs of all children and families, and are provided on an integrated basis (through work with key delivery partners e.g. health trusts and Jobcentre Plus). Children's Centres are a key mechanism for improving outcomes for young children and are viewed

as the new universal and mainstream front line service (alongside schools) providing accessible support to all families and their young children age 0-5. Increasing emphasis is being placed on reaching out to the more vulnerable children and families. This is underpinned by the new duty under the Childcare Act 2006 to improve the outcomes for all children under 5 and to close the gap between the most disadvantaged children and their peers

- 9.2 The Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Bill includes four clauses giving Sure Start Children's Centres a statutory legal basis and introducing a duty for Ofsted to inspect centres. Subject to parliamentary approval the legislation could come into force by January 2010. The Bill seeks to ensure that children's centres are an established part of the infrastructure of support available to young children and their parents. Once legislation is in place and centres are statutory, any changes in status will be more complex, eg local authorities will be required to consult where they are considering opening, closing or making a significant change to the services offered by a centre.

10.0 Risk Management

- 10.1 The proposed changes carry no significant risks and are a reshaping of the current programme. However, it will be important to keep under review the annual population data figures to ensure that there are no significant shifts in the under 5 population and that allocated resources are sufficient to deliver the programme and reach figures remain within DCSF guidelines.

11.0 Background and Options

National context

- 11.1 The Children's Centre programme has a seven year period of development which commenced in 2004. The programme began as a highly targeted initiative, but since 2005 has had the objective of establishing the infrastructure for universal provision to deliver services to all children under 5 and their families. Funding was made available by Government in three phases

Phase 1: 2004-2006

Phase 2: 2006-2008

Phase 3: 2008-2011

- 11.2 Children's Centres are designed to lie at the heart of the community serving a population of approximately 800 children age 0-5 years and their families. This is known as the '**reach figure**'. and is significant in relation to children centre planning and monitoring. In the Phase 3 Planning and Delivery Guidance (DCSF 2007) local authorities are advised that children's centres in the first two phases should serve on average 800 children under 5 years old. In phase 3 centres, in rural or less densely populated areas they may serve smaller numbers, say 600, while in more affluent areas with less intensive need numbers may be larger, say 1200. More recent advice from TfC is that if the

reach figure is over 1200 there should be a linked/satellite premise identified in the footprint.

- 11.3 All centres go through a **designation process** in order to secure funding and approval from the DCSF. All centres are designated as either 30% centres (where the majority of children in the footprint live in the 30% most disadvantaged super output areas) or 70% centres (where the majority of children live in the 70% more advantaged areas) with different requirements in relation to the core offer of services.
- 11.4 Following designation all centres have up to two years to provide easy access to a full range of services known as the **‘full core offer’**. Services include
- Early education integrated with child care (on site for the designated 30% centres or available locally)
 - Family support and outreach home visits
 - Child and family health services
 - Childminding support
 - Training and back to work support for parents/carers
 - Specialist support for children with additional needs
 - Accessible information, advice and guidance for families
- 11.5 Local authorities have greater flexibility in deciding what services should be provided in the more affluent areas outside of the 30% most disadvantaged areas and this must be based on an assessment of local needs. There is however a universal level of service that must be provided and it is important that families, no matter what their situation feel the benefit of better integrated and accessible services delivered through children’s centres

Current local position

- 11.6 At the early stages of programme planning in 2005 Cheshire County Council (CCC) was divided into geographical footprints with a children centre planned for each footprint. The guiding principles for mapping footprints at that time included congruence with super output areas, recognising local features and transport routes, synergy with the Transforming Learning Communities agenda and respecting District Council and Primary Care Trust boundaries. At Local Government Reorganisation in April 2009 the division of the County programme resulted in 20 footprints in Cheshire East.
- 11.7 There are 12 centres designated across Cheshire East which were developed in phase 1 and 2 of the programme with an additional 8 centres currently under development in phase 3. The completion of phase 3 was planned to give a total of 20 centres across the authority. Appendix 1 identifies the 20 planned centres. Only one of the 20 planned centres is a 30% centre (Underwood West in Crewe), the remainder of the centres in the authority are 70% centres

11.8 Two of the designated phase 2 centres (Crewe Rural and Henbury, Prestbury and Upton) have no identified children centre building. These centre footprints cover large rural areas. The model for these centres was based on identifying a number of delivery points with the same named signage across the rural area with the management of the two centres being coordinated from Nantwich Children's Centre (at Wyche Primary School) and Broken Cross Children's Centre (at Broken Cross Primary School) respectively. This model of service delivery is in the early stages of development and has proved to be challenging. Although children's centres are fundamentally about service coordination and delivery and not buildings, establishing identity and engagement is more challenging where no central identified children's centre building exists.

11.9 Elected members of CCC have approved key decisions throughout the implementation of the programme to date.
On 1 July 2005 Children's Services Executive agreed the priorities and principles for the development of the Phase 2 Children Centre Strategy for 2006-2008.

On 6 December 2006 full Council received a paper which detailed the challenges facing delivery of the Phase 2 capital programme and approval was given to the implementation of strategies to meet those challenges. This included a reduction in the total number of centres to be built. In relation to Cheshire East the implication was that a discrete stand alone centre would not be developed in the Crewe Rural and Henbury, Prestbury and Upton footprints and that a more appropriate rural service model would be developed as described under 11.8

On 23 July 2008 Children's Services Executive approved the methodology and implementation of the third phase of the Children's Centre programme based on the existing strategic priorities and principles and DCSF Guidance for Phase 3

11.10 Appendix 2 maps the current 20 children centre footprints. The footprints are based upon clusters of Lower Level Super Output Areas (LLSOA) which create geographical areas which can be monitored and reported on. The footprints are overlain on the map with the boundaries of the new Cheshire East Local Area Partnerships. The footprints precede Local Government Reorganisation and are therefore not congruent with these Partnerships

Proposed position

11.11 There have been a number of changes in government guidance across the three phases. The Phase 3 guidance advised that local authorities may need to consider some of their earlier plans as they seek to deliver a children's centre for every community, giving careful thought to the most effective use of resources. Recently Together for Children (TfC) the government's delivery agent reinforced this position and advised authorities to review their programme to ensure that it is sustainable. The purpose of the local review is to

- Consider the viability of reshaping the footprints so that they are co terminus with the new Local Area Partnership boundaries where possible
- Ensure appropriate reach figures for each centre
- Ensure a sustainable model of universal delivery

11.12 Appendix 3 maps the revised 19 footprints.

11.13 Two of the footprints (Holmes Chapel and Leighton) have reach figures of under 600 which is the lowest recommended reach figure. Holmes Chapel is a proposed Phase 3 centre which is still in the planning stage and has not yet been designated. This footprint serves a well established community with a falling number of under 5's (a reduction from 590 in 2003 to 540 in 2007). It is proposed that this footprint is removed and the super output areas contained in the footprint absorbed within Middlewich (footprint no 8), Sandbach (footprint no 9) and Alsager (footprint no 10) It is still intended that an information and advice point will be provided at Holmes Chapel library but this site will not be identified as a children centre in its own right but will operate as a linked site to Middlewich Children's Centre which will be renamed Middlewich and Holmes Chapel Children's Centre.

This recommendation will result in a reduction of one in the number of centres to be created in phase 3 ie from 8 to 7.

11.14 The removal of the Holmes Chapel footprint still leaves one footprint (no. 1 Leighton)) with a small reach number of 540. This footprint cannot be increased as the adjacent SOA's within the Crewe Local Area Partnership contain Monks Coppenhall (footprint no. 7) and Underwood West (footprint no.6) centres. Significant capital investment is taking place under the Phase 3 capital programme at Mablins Lane Primary School in the Leighton footprint. It is proposed that this footprint remains and the centre, when designated, will work closely with Underwood West Children's Centre in the neighbouring footprint which is the only 30% footprint in the authority and covers an area of significant disadvantage from very small premises.

11.15 The proposed changes will not result in any decrease in services to children and families. Detailed resource modelling has been undertaken to create the staffing establishment for the centres designated to date based on deprivation weightings, reach figures and models of delivery. In addition a cluster model has been developed which supports effective and flexible working across geographic areas and maximises the use of the staffing resource.

11.16 A summary of the proposed changes is attached at Appendix 4 with 19 footprints identified. A comparison of the 2006 and the most recent 2007 population data identifies that there has been a small increase (310) in the total number of children under 5 in the authority

12.0 Overview of Year One and Term One Issues

12.1 None

13.0 Access to Information

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

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Attachments:

Appendix 1 – Current operational centres and planned phase 3 centres

Appendix 2 – Current children centre footprints overlain with LAP boundaries

Appendix 3 – Proposed children centre footprints aligned with LAP boundaries