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**Children & Families Committee**

**11 November 2024**

**Children's Centre re-modelling into the  
Family Hub Model**

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**Report of: Theresa Leavy, Executive Director of Children's Services**

**Report Reference No: CF/21/24-25**

**Ward(s) Affected: All.**

**Purpose of Report**

- 1 To seek authority to repurpose up to 6 of the 7 remaining Children's Centres for alternative education purposes. This involves the Council exiting the current arrangements and the buildings. The individual schools are seeking authority from the Department for Education (DfE) to deliver early years provision or additional provision for children with special educational needs and disabilities. In some cases, relationships with the NHS will continue, they will deliver services from the schools via separate occupational agreements.
- 2 To seek approval to transfer the majority of the Council run Start for Life activities from these 6 Children's Centres to alternative venues, delivering an outreach model targeted towards our most disadvantaged communities from our 6 family hubs.
- 3 The proposal will support the Cheshire East Council Plan Aim 2 - A Council which empowers and cares about people

**Executive Summary**

- 4 The Council is currently undertaking a transformational change programme which includes the improvement of how services are delivered to children and families by ensuring that they are delivered at the right time and in the right place.

- 5 Since 2022, when the Council bid for family hub transformation funding, five of our former children's centres have been repurposed to family hubs. The effect of this has meant that the services offered have been expanded to cater for children and families 0-19 and up to 25 for our young people with SEND, whereas the previous facilities only catered for children and families with a child under 5. A sixth family hub is due to open by the end of 2024 at Crewe Lifestyle Centre. As part of the transformation programme, the Council is now considering ways in which it can offer flexible outreach services from the family hubs to enable the services provided to respond quickly and effectively to the changing needs and priorities across the borough. By enabling this approach it will improve the availability of services to the most disadvantaged communities, which will assist in improving outcomes.
- 6 The committee is being asked to consider the repurposing of up to 6 children's centres that have not been remodelled into family hubs for additional early years and primary childcare and education. This will support the Council with its childcare sufficiency statutory duties and the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) management plan to create more SEND places within Cheshire East.
- 7 All services currently offered within the Childrens Centres will be delivered via a family hub outreach and home visiting model. No services will be cut, but it will involve relocating existing services into libraries and other community venues. (please see appendix 2 and 3 for details).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Children and Families Committee is recommended to:

1. Approve the commercial transfer of the childrens centres listed below back to the onsite primary schools for alternative education purposes:
  - 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
2. To endorse the relocation of the Council run early years start for life services to a flexible outreach program to be provided from family hubs, libraries, and other community venues.

## Background

42. 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.
43. 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.
44. 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 and SEND centre of excellence. (Crewe)
45. A sixth family hub is due to open by the end of 2024 at Crewe Lifestyle Centre.
46. In addition to the services operating from our newly established family hubs, we are recommending the creation of family hubs outreach provision as satellite services from our designated family hubs across the borough. The outreach provision will 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. Increasing the reach of communities who reside in our areas of deprivation and who face the biggest barriers to access.
47. The family hubs outreach model will be a mixture of putting in new services in areas where need is identified without current local services to meet it. It will also be enhancing partnerships with other service

providers in Cheshire East and wrapping support around them to meet the needs of their communities.

48. Our current reach of families through the early years start for life offer in Childrens Centres from our targeted local super output areas (those classed as the 0-30% most deprived) is historically poor. In 2021/2022, before the family hub transformation, 22% of our targeted population were registered with a childrens centre. The roll out of family hubs in 2022/2023 supported an increase to 40% registered. In 2023/2024 we started outreach pilots in Alsager and Middlewich and our targeted registrations rose again to 59%. We don't have a Children's Centre or family hub in all our targeted communities; however, our outreach provision removes access barriers.
49. We have successfully piloted an outreach approach in partnership with the Wesley Place Church in Alsager to increase access to family hub services by a community that hadn't previously accessed the best start for life or wider family hub offer. The church had contact with 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.
42. In Cheshire East the majority of our children achieve a Good Level of Development (GLD) at the end of the early years foundation stage. Our children from disadvantaged areas however do worse in Cheshire East than they do nationally and on average in the North West region. If we don't target our early years services towards our most disadvantaged and improve the barriers to access, we can't change this trajectory.
43. Consultation has taken place with the onsite primary schools headteachers re utilising the children centre spaces for alternative education purposes. All headteachers identified potential options to deliver enhanced education services from their sites whilst maintaining an offer for early years children under 5.
44. The headteachers in Nantwich, Sandbach and Hurdsfield identified unmet demand for early years places for 2 and 3 year olds and are keen to use the children's centre space to extend their early years

provision. This aligns with the current government agenda to have nursery provision within all primary schools and supports our childcare sufficiency as we continue to roll out the extended childcare entitlements for working families. The public consultation analysis shows there is support for increased childcare. Subject to any necessary consultations required by the school, we recommend that these childrens centres are transferred to the control of the primary schools with lease and licence arrangements to protect the delivery of health services currently onsite.

45. Poynton Children's Centre is integral to Vernon Primary School's main building and has access issues for wider community use. The headteacher at Poynton will continue to work with the onsite provider of childcare and utilise the space for its current early years and childcare provision and other school activities. We recommend the transfer of control of the children centre to the primary school with conditions to ensure the continued provision of services for children under 5 for at least 51% of the time.
46. Headteachers from Broken Cross, Manor Park and Pebble Brook were keen to explore the use of the onsite children's centres (Broken cross, Knutsford and the Brooks) to develop additional places for children with SEND. A review of SEND provision took place by the local authority in line with this consultation. Broken Cross currently operates an Enhanced Mainstream Provision (EMP) within their school, for pupils who attend the school specifically for children with speech, language and communication needs. The school have had several success stories, whereby children who they have supported have achieved their outcomes and, where possible, have reintegrated back into mainstream provision. Prior to the Children's Centre being an option for expansion of the school, the school expressed interest in operating a DfE recognised specialist provision, either a Resource Provision or a SEN unit, which will enable the school to provide specialist support to more children in their wider community. The public consultation analysis supports the provision of more SEND places. This aligns with our DSG Management Plan and our strategic aim of growing local specialist provision within Cheshire East. The intention would be for the existing EMP to close and be replaced with a larger SEND provision which would operate from the site of the children's centre. In accordance with the DfE Guidance " Making significant changes (prescribed alterations) to maintained schools" or "Making significant changes to an academy" the local authority/academy are required to conduct a public consultation. Cheshire East will work with Broken Cross on this exercise

and, if approved, we recommend transfer of the control of the children's centre to the primary school with lease and licence agreements to continue the delivery of onsite health services. Broken Cross will also maintain its early years health service and welcome some outreach provision on site from Ashgrove family hub to maintain early years use of the site for 51% of the time.

47. Both Manor Park and Pebble brook sites posed challenges regarding access and configuration to suit a SEND provision. The detail behind the number of additional SEND provisions within the DSG Management Plan, including the educational phase (primary/secondary), has also been taken into account. Both sites would not be suitable for SEND provisions operating as a satellite site of a mainstream secondary school or special school. There is a requirement within the plan to increase SEND provision for children aged 11-16 year old. For this reason we are not recommending a transfer of control of the Brooks Children's Centre for extended education provision. We will seek to maximise the use of this site across children's services and through booking out rooms to community partners who deliver services to children and families in Cheshire East.
48. Manor Park Primary are still considering alternative uses to enhance existing educational provision and community activities alongside the existing early years health offer the scope of this is still being worked through by the school leadership team.
49. With the exception of Poynton the rest of the children's centre sites will be branded as family hub connect sites as they will still deliver early years services in the community as outreach venues from our family hub regardless of who has control of the premises.
50. 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. We will bring the wide range of services available in Cheshire East together through the family hub web pages on live well and the new virtual offer.
51. 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. Transferring the control of some of our buildings will provide more flexibility to offer services in the right place at the right time.

52. It is clear from the consultation responses that Children's Centre and Family Hub services are valued by those who use them. The map of responses (Appendix 1 P17) demonstrates that current service users live in close proximity of the centres or are part of our current outreach pilot sites (Alsager & Middlewich). It is clear from the responses that those living further away have not engaged in the consultation as they are likely not to have experienced our early years best start for life or family hub services. Those engaging in the majority support an increase in childcare and SEND provision and they support the development of an outreach model. However, for some Childrens Centres the majority of service users also want to retain their Children Centre building. We don't have the resources to deliver outreach across all our targeted areas and to maintain all 7 childrens centres alongside the 6 family hubs within our budget, so this would lead to a reduction in services to meet the MTFs proposals. It would also be poor value for money to maintain buildings that were not being used often.
53. 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**

54. Consultation has taken place with all the onsite primary school head teachers of the 7 childrens centres. All Headteachers supported the proposals and came up with ideas to utilise the childrens centre spaces

for alternative education purposes alongside the early years health offer.

55. Consultation has taken place with our internal staff and multi-agency partners through the family hub steering and task and finish groups. All were in support of the proposals.
56. The family hub Start for Life leads in the north and south localities engaged with local councillors in affected wards to share the proposals for their respective areas. Local councillors on the whole supported the proposals to deliver outreach provision across a wider area of their geographies.
57. Face to face discussions with families took place in our family hubs and children's centres, led by our local community engagement officers. The feedback from the families in our pre consultation exercise featured in the 'you said we did' section of our consultation proposal that went out online and with printed copies in all of our family hubs and libraries
58. A full public consultation ran in line with the consultation plan (July to September). The consultation analysis can be found in Appendix 1.
59. We will continue to engage with parents and carers to review and track the impact of the family hub performance through our locality engagement officers, parent forums and regular customer surveys and family learning journeys. As we develop our Early Help Partnership Board we will identify parent leader roles from our 8 collaborative areas to join the board as members representing their parent forum community.

## **Reasons for Recommendations**

64. 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. This is 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.
65. This proposal will achieve the £250,000 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.

- 66 Outreach services will be delivered from our main family hub locations and 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.
- 67 The repurposing of the children’s centres also provides vital space to increase our childcare provision and maintain a good level of childcare sufficiency across cheshire east as our free early years entitlements continue to expand. The proposal for Broken Cross to develop a SEND unit and increase spaces in Cheshire East for Children with SEND supports the revised DSG management plan in achieving mitigations required with the aim of becoming financially sustainable in the future.

### Other Options Considered

- 68 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. If the majority of the savings are not achieved through building costs we will have to meet them through a reduction in services or not achieve any savings.

Option	Impact	Risk
Do nothing – Family hub outreach services for early years children would continue to be delivered in all our existing childrens centres.	MTFS savings would not be achieved, the council will continue to pay the same premises and administration costs.  Outreach Service delivery is determined by building location rather than community	High.

	<p>need risking not being accessible for the children &amp; 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. Limited options for partnership working with the voluntary community and faith sector to upskill a wider workforce.</p>	
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## Implications and Comments

### *Monitoring Officer/Legal*

- 69 The Children’s Centres currently occupy the sites of primary schools by a Transfer of Control Agreement (TOCA) as a licence to occupy the site was not appropriate. Due to the fact that a TOCA was entered into with the school, as soon as the site is no longer used as a children’s centre the TOCA will end. This will leave the school with the premises; they will need make the necessary arrangements with the NHS for the occupation of their premises.
- 70 Children’s centres were originally set up using grant funding from the DfE and the terms are such that the grant funding can be clawed back within 25 years of the date of the opening of the children’s centre. We understand that in most cases the centres have been opened since early 2000s and this means that the majority of the grant period has expired. The DfE has agreed to allow the Council to withdraw from the clawback on condition that the early years provision continues to be delivered from the premises for 51% of the time.

71 However, the Council will remain liable for the grant until this has expired and should the provision not continue within the schools after the closure of the Children’s Centre the DfE could clawback any remaining grant funding from the Council.

72 Legal advice is that the exit arrangements with each school should acknowledge that early years provision will be provided and that they will indemnify the council in the event of clawback.

*Section 151 Officer/Finance*

73 The council approved the 2024/25 MTFs in February 2024, this included a policy change item to “Deliver the Family Hub Model” with an associated saving of £250,000.

74 It was recognised that these savings would not be achievable for 2024/25 and alternative in-year savings have been identified/delivered.

75 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 £250,000 target.

76 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*

77

<b>An open and enabling organisation</b>	<b>A council which empowers and cares about people</b>	<b>A thriving and sustainable place</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that there is transparency in all aspects of council decision making</li> <li>• Listen, learn and respond to our residents, promoting opportunities for a two-way conversation</li> <li>• Support a sustainable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work together with residents and partners to support people and communities to be strong and resilient</li> <li>• Reduce health inequalities across the borough</li> <li>• Protect and support our communities and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A great place for people to live, work and visit</li> <li>• Reduce impact on the environment</li> </ul>

<p>financial future for the council, through service development, improvement and transformation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote and develop the services of the council through regular communication and engagement with all residents</li> </ul>	<p>safeguard children, adults at risk and families from abuse, neglect and exploitation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Be the best Corporate Parents to our children in care</li> <li>Support all children to have the best start in life</li> <li>Increase opportunities for all children and young adults with additional needs</li> <li>Ensure all children have a high quality, enjoyable education that enables them to achieve their full potential</li> </ul>	
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*Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*

78 An Equality Impact Assessment has been produced and published for the family hubs model.

*Human Resources*

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

80 There are no other changes for staffing teams as the early help restructure in 2023 addressed the workforce requirements of the family hub model.

*Risk Management*

81 There is a risk that stakeholders will view the repurposing of children’s centres as them closing and losing services. If approved and once the

schools have gone through any legal processes to transfer the control of the buildings, we will work closely with our communications offer to issue press releases.

- 82 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*

- 83 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.
- 84 We currently have no children's centres in our most rural communities. Any rural communities identified in our needs analysis as having unmet needs for early years provision would benefit from this model through our outreach offer.

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

- 85 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*

- 86 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). Early Years Health services with lease and licence agreements to deliver from the Children's Centres will maintain their onsite delivery if the buildings transfer control to the onsite school. This is with the exception of Poynton which will transfer to Poynton library for better community accessibility.

### *Climate Change*

- 87 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.

<b>Access to Information</b>	
Contact Officer:	Danielle Holdcroft Head of service Early Years, Family Help & Prevention.  danielle.holdcroft@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	Appendix 1 Consultation Analysis  Appendix 2 North locality map of proposed changes to Childrens Centre Provision.  Appendix 3 South locality map of proposed changes to Childrens Centre provision.
Background Papers:	<a href="http://cheshireeast.gov.uk">Family Hubs (cheshireeast.gov.uk)</a>  <a href="http://cheshireeast.gov.uk">Locality working (cheshireeast.gov.uk)</a>  <a href="http://www.gov.uk">Family Hubs and Start for Life programme: local authority guide - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)</a>