

Committee:	Children's Services Scrutiny Committee
Date:	12 November 2012
Title of Report:	Children's Centres Strategy
By:	Director of Children's Services
Purpose of Report:	To inform Committee Members on the performance of Children's Centres and the proposals for changes to the service following review.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Committee is recommended to consider the performance of Children Centres and the outcomes from the service review.

1. Financial Appraisal

1.1 The Children's Centres have had a budget allocation in 2012/13 of £7,310,900. The financial forecasts for the Authority are challenging and significant savings are being profiled across the Department through the Medium Term Financial Planning exercise. Children's Centres, along with other front line services, are profiling a 15% decrease in funds which together with the implementation of recommendations from the recent service review (see below) is resulting in proposals for a re-shaped service with new priorities.

2. Supporting information

2.1 A fundamental service review of Children's Centres has just concluded, (attached as **appendix 1**). The review focused on 2 lines of enquiry, firstly, how effective the current service is in meeting its objectives, and secondly, are the current delivery arrangements appropriate to ensure the Centres are as efficient as possible in meeting the objectives?

2.2 Following the publication of revised Government guidance on the "core purpose" for Children's Centres, and taking into the "THRIVE" local strategic change programme, the Review Board has agreed the "core purpose" for Children's Centre in East Sussex as: *"To improve outcomes for young children and their families, with a particular focus on the most disadvantaged families, by:"*

- o *effectively identifying and supporting those families in need of early help*
- o *reducing inequalities in child health,*
- o *reducing inequalities in child development and school readiness*
- o *providing Adult Learning and Employment Support*

2.3 Evidence collected in the review process indicated that the Centres were performing fairly well against current performance criteria. Performance in Ofsted Inspections exceeds the national average (summary attached as **appendix 2**), and feedback from service users is very positive with 78% of respondents to the "Snap Shot" survey reporting that "Things have changed for the better as a result of contact with the service".

2.4 The success of the service in reaching "Hard to Reach" families and narrowing the gap in achievement is crucial. 10,986 different children attended services in 2011/12, totaling 171,680 attendances. The Annual "Snap Shot" conducted in the first week of October every year gives us some more detailed information about service users. Data for 2012 is not yet available but in 2011 72% of children attending were from target groups. The Centres are provided with detailed data about children's performance in their Foundation Stage Profile broken down by vulnerable groups. This information can be matched with Children's Centre attendance and services planned to respond to the evidenced needs of local children attending.

2.5 The performance of Children's Centres in supporting those children at risk of statutory social care intervention was also investigated as part of the review. A detailed analysis of data and a review of case studies indicated that the Family Outreach Service achieved the objectives

agreed with families in their support plan in the majority of cases. The number of referrals to social care that progressed to initial assessment was also comparatively high indicating that referrals were appropriate and timely. However, the research did identify that a significant number of children under 5 who do get referred to social care have not accessed Children's Centre services. In view of the overall objectives of the "THRIVE" programme to decrease the number of Children who have child protection plans and who are "looked after" by the Authority the principal recommendation from the Children Centre review is to prioritise the early identification and support of children who need targeted early help. This will be achieved by increasing the proportion of investment and activity devoted to this objective.

2.6 The review also noted the increased potential that the service has in identifying and supporting children early through closer integration with Health Visiting and Midwifery services. Early evidence from a pilot of integrated approaches in Bexhill has shown some potential benefits and a second recommendation is therefore to defer the consideration of alternative models of delivery while energies are focused on effective implementation of early help.

2.7 The strengthening of the Family Outreach Service (FOS) to deliver more effective targeted early help will, within the challenging economic context, necessitate a decrease in resources available to deliver other strands of the "core purpose" such as "school readiness". The support provided to the most vulnerable families by the FOS will address all the needs of the children in those families, including school readiness, but the capacity of Centres to take a universal approach to preparing children for school providing activities open to everyone, will decrease. We plan to try to increase the number of local volunteers to supporting these activities, as a way of mitigating the reduction in local authority funding.

2.8 A third and final recommendation from the review is to seek to address the weakest area of Children's Centre delivery (as reported by Ofsted and mirrored nationally) which is the provision of adult education and employability support. The impact of poverty on children is clearly evidenced and activity to improve family economic wellbeing can have a positive impact on children's outcomes.

2.9 In July 2012, following a formal consultation exercise, 4 pairs of Children's Centres were merged. The de-designated Centres have been re-classified as "linked sites" and continue to host some Children's Centre services. There has been little negative feedback about these changes and monitoring data shows that attendance of children under 5 has increased in all merged Centres.

3. Conclusion and Reason for Recommendations

3.1 The recommendations following the review of Children's Centres, the "THRIVE" transformation programme and the financial challenge being addressed through the Medium Term Financial Plan all have to be addressed in the planning of the service for next three years.

3.2 Re-focusing the service on defined priorities will require significant change including a re-organisation of Children's Centre management structures. Closer integration with Health services will require teams to be aligned geographically and early discussions with health managers have led to a recommended model of 9 clusters of Children's Centres in place of the existing 5 programme Areas. Structural change alone will not deliver the more effective provision of early help and appropriate training will need to be delivered to Family Outreach teams to enable them to work more effectively with families with complex needs. The workforce development needs of the service are being considered as part of the wider workforce development strategy attached to "THRIVE".

MATT DUNKLEY

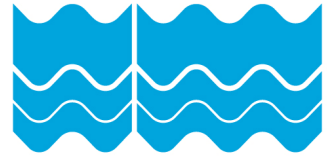
Director of Children's Services

Contact Officer: Debbie Adams, Head of Children's Centres
Tel: 01323 747431

Local Members: All

Background Documents

None



Children's Centre Service Review

Executive Summary

October 2012

Introduction

Children's Centres work with partners to deliver a range of services aiming to improve outcomes for all children but with a particular focus on the most disadvantaged. East Sussex currently has 31 separately designated Centres currently organised into 5 programme areas each with an Area Co-ordinator who is responsible for the planning and delivery of services.

This report briefly describes the methodology and summarises the conclusions of a review of the ESCC Children's Centre service, carried out in accordance with a corporate service review framework developed in 2011 and completed in August 2012. The process has been steered by a review board that includes significant partners, members of Children's Services SMT and an "Internal Peer" from Adult Services. The services of 2 "External Peers" were also used, however, to review the use of data by the service and to facilitate focus groups.

The principal questions that the review sought to answer were:-

- How effective is the service in meeting its objectives?
- Are the current delivery arrangements appropriate to ensure the Centres are as efficient as possible in meeting its objectives?

Methodology

A range of methods were used to investigate the performance of the current service.

Data analysis

A range of data was collected and analysed including high level performance indicator data but also statistics on Centre usage and tracking information about the engagement of the most vulnerable families with Children's Centres. 2 external peers were asked to comment on the quality of data available and its relevance to Children's centre performance and forthcoming "Payment by Results" implementation.

Case Study Audit

A sample of 25 case studies of families supported by the Family Outreach Service was scrutinised to assess the effectiveness of the service in enabling families to return to universal services.

Engagement

An engagement strategy was developed by planning and performance colleagues to gain feedback from those that use the services, choose not to use them or are partners in delivery. A range of methods were used to capture views; a county wide satisfaction survey of service users, a non user telephone survey, focus groups and visits to other Authorities all contributed to the findings and recommendations of this review.

Financial Analysis

A breakdown of the allocation of funds to different strands of delivery was produced and attempts were made to produce a comparative financial analysis with statistically similar Authorities.

Policy framework

Key to determining the effectiveness of the service is clarity on the objectives it is trying to deliver. Early in the review process the Department for Education published a new “core purpose” for Children’s Centres. The review Board considered the proposed core purpose and, amending the DFE proposal slightly, agreed that the “core purpose” for Children’s Centres in East Sussex should be:-

To improve outcomes for young children and their families, with a particular focus on the most disadvantaged families, by:-

- **effectively identifying and supporting those families in need of early help**
- **reducing inequalities in child health,**
- **reducing inequalities in child development and school readiness**
- **providing Adult Learning and Employment Support**

The agreement of a revised “core purpose” coincided with the launch of the County Council’s “Thrive” change management programme. This programme is designed to secure changes in the nature and pattern of investment in children’s services with the aim of achieving financially sustainable services looking forward. It includes a focus on more effective early support for families so as to minimise the need for expensive statutory social care intervention. The review Board felt, from an early stage in the review, that a principle objective of the service in future should be to effectively identify and support those families in need of targeted early help to prevent the need for social care intervention. The review focused therefore not just on the performance of the current service but how the service might need to respond and change to effectively deliver against the new “core purpose” and this clear principle objective.

Findings

Key findings of the review were:

- (i) East Sussex Children’s Centres are generally performing well against the current national inspection framework, compared to those in other areas
- (ii) There are a wide range of different models of children’s centre delivery across the country with no correlation between any one model and inspection success

- (iii) Children's Centres have the capacity, with appropriate support and development, to provide effective targeted early help and should continue to make a significant contribution to early help services in the county. While there were some examples of very good practice, overall the Family Outreach Service needed to be strengthened and developed to enable staff to identify and work safely with the most vulnerable families. A higher proportion of service funding needs to be devoted to this work.
- (iv) Useful comparative financial information was impossible to secure because of significant variation in Local Authority funding arrangements.

Recommendations

The following recommendations from the review have been agreed as the basis for future service development. The review Board recognised that the recommendations indicated a broad direction of travel and that the service would need to continue to develop in response to both strategic programmes such as Thrive and the budget constraints and choices affecting all public services.

Recommendation 1

A key priority for Children's Centres should be the effective identification and support of children and families who need targeted early help, with the aim of safely decreasing the number of children referred to social care, a key objective of the "Thrive" programme. Across the Children's Centre service the proportion of investment and activity devoted to this objective should be increased.

In principle the most promising strategy for identifying and increasing support for the most vulnerable young children and their families is to do so through an integrated approach with local NHS services. A mechanism for securing an integrated approach to identifying families and allocating support - the "Good Start" programme - is already being piloted in the Bexhill area. Early evaluation of the Good Start pilot has highlighted some benefits to the more integrated approach, particularly "Team Around the Family (TAF)" procedures. It is too early for this to be evidenced through high level performance data. There is however a clear indication that the approach has the potential to improve services for vulnerable children. There are currently formal joint commissioning partnership arrangements between the County Council and the NHS in relation to health visiting and children's centre services, and the Partnership Board which oversees this joint commissioning has agreed in principle that plans should be drawn up to roll out the Good Start approach across East Sussex. It will not be possible to replicate the service offer currently being delivered in Bexhill in all parts of the County as resources will need to be focus on areas or particular need. A "graduated model" is therefore being developed. For these arrangements to work effectively Children's Centre and Health Visiting areas need to be aligned and be appropriately

sized so that the teams can come together to support a community. This will necessitate a re-clustering of Children's Centres and a re-organisation of current team arrangement in the NHS.

Recommendation 2

Consideration of alternative models of delivery either specifically for targeted early help support or for overall management of Children's Centres should be deferred for at least 12 months while energies are focussed on effective implementation of integrated early help support with the NHS.

Stakeholders were clear in the review that integration of the delivery of Children's Centres Family Outreach services with health services would be more challenging to achieve if we tried at the same time to diversify or outsource either the targeted Family Outreach Service or the management of Children's Centres overall.

It is however possible to further strengthen the commissioning approach and the proposed development of a commissioning specification for the "Good Start" service will be done in a way that can provide a sound platform for a tender exercise in future if that is appropriate.

Recommendation 3

The provision of Adult education and employment support should be a further key area for development for the Children's Centre service in East Sussex, as far as resources allow.

The analysis of performance data, particularly the results of Ofsted inspections of Children's Centres, highlighted a particular challenge in the delivery of adult education and employability support. Published inspection reports show that this is an issue for many children's centres across the country, and decreasing funding for adult education adds to the challenge. Where possible, however, the review Board felt that this aspect of the service should be strengthened, as part of helping parents to enter employment and improve family economic wellbeing.

Next steps

Implementing the first recommendation will require a re-organisation of Children's Centre management structures. Closer integration with health services and the implementation of "Team around the Family" processes will require teams to be aligned geographically. Early discussions have led to a recommended model of 9 Clusters; this is being considered as part of the County Councils medium term financial planning process. Detailed budget planning for children's centres in 2013-2014 and the three year medium term financial plan period will take into account the full findings from the review.

The proposed changes in management arrangements will be subject to the County Councils managing change policy and staff impacted by changes will be fully engaged in the process. It is envisaged that the new arrangements will be in place for April 2013.

More information

The full version of the Children's Centre review options appraisal is available from childrens.centres@eastsussex.gov.uk

DRAFT

APPENDIX 2

Children's Centre Area	Centre Name	Date of Ofsted Inspection	Outcome	Report	Recommendations	Summary for centre users	Date uploaded on to ESCC website
Eastbourne	Devonshire	15-16 August 2012	Good	Devonshire Report			
Eastbourne	Hampden Park	11-12 July 2012	Satisfactory	Hampden Park Report			
Eastbourne	Langney	16-17 May 2012	Good	Langney Report			
Eastbourne	Old Town						
Eastbourne	West Rise and Shinewater						
Eastbourne	Willington Trees	20-21 October 2010	Good	Willington Trees Report			
Hastings & St Leonards	Churchwood	20-21 January 2011	Good	Churchwood Report			
Hastings & St Leonards	East Hastings	2-3 November 2011	Outstanding	East Hastings Report			
Hastings & St Leonards	Hastings Town						
Hastings & St Leonards	Red Lake						
Hastings & St Leonards	Robsack	27-28 July 2011	Good	Robsack Report			
Hastings & St Leonards	Silverdale						
Hastings & St Leonards	St Leonards	24-25 May 2012	Good	St Leonards Report			
Hastings & St Leonards	The Bridge	14-15 June 2012	Good	The Bridge Report			
Hastings & St Leonards	West St Leonards	26-27 September 2012	Satisfactory	West St Leonards Report			
Hastings & St Leonards	NURSERY - Maplehurst	28 March 2011	Good				
Lewes District	Challey						
Lewes District	Lewes	17-18 May 2012	Good	Lewes Report			
Lewes District	Newhaven	21-22 June 2011	Good	Newhaven Report			
Lewes District	Peacehaven						
Lewes District	Ringmer						
Lewes District	Seaford						
Rother	Battle & Robertsbridge (Battle)	29 February - 1 March 2012	Good	Battle Report			
Rother	Robertsbridge (Robertsbridge)	26-27 April 2012	Good	Robertsbridge Report			
Rother	Egerton Park	17-18 November 2010	Good	Egerton Park Report			
Rother	Rye	24-25 September 2012	Good	Rye Report	RYE - recommendations	RYE summary for centre users	
Rother	Sidley & Pebsham	8-9 February 2012	Good	Sidley Report			
Rother Nursery	NURSERY - Cygnets	12 February 2009	Good	Cygnets Nursery Report			
Rother Nursery	NURSERY - Pugwash	08 April 2011	Good	Pugwash Report			
Rother Nursery	NURSERY - Rainbow	10 December 2009	Good	Rainbow Nursery Report			
Wealden	Crowborough						
Wealden	Hailsham East and Dunbar Drive	9-10 February 2011	Good	Hailsham East Report			
Wealden	Heathfield						
Wealden	High Weald						
Wealden	Polegate						
Wealden	Uckfield						
Wealden Nursery	NURSERY - Hailsham East	09 February 2011	Good	Hailsham Nursery Report			

