

Report to: Lead Member for Resources

Date of meeting: 28 January 2020

By: Director of Children's Services

Title: Future options for de-designating Children's Centres

Purpose: To seek the Lead Member for Resources' approval to enter into an agreement with Lewes District Council to take ownership of the Ringmer Children's Centre building, that supports the consolidation of the Children's Services Early Help Strategy and the plan, agreed by Lead Member for Children and Families, to De-designate Ringmer Children's Centre.

RECOMMENDATION: The Lead Member is recommended to:

- 1) declare the Ringmer Children's Centre building surplus to the County Council's operational requirements; and
 - 2) delegate authority to the Chief Operating Officer to enter into negotiations with Lewes District council for them to take over the management of the building.
 - 3) delegate authority to the Chief Operating Officer to secure best value terms for disposal or lease in accordance with S.123 of the Local Government Act 1972.
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1. Background information

1.1 The Ringmer Children's Centre is a purpose-built building sitting on the perimeter of the Kings Academy Site in Ringmer. It is held freehold by ESCC. The building has a separate entrance and parking away from the Academy site and can't be accessed from the Academy.

1.2 In exploring all options, Kings Academy have been spoken to regarding the building and have stated they do not wish to incorporate it into their lease.

1.3 After a public consultation, held in 2019 by ESCC Children's Services, the Lead Member for Children and Families approved the proposal to apply to de-designate the building before the 1st of April 2020, such that it will cease to be a statutory ESCC Children's Centre.

1.4 The building was built using a Surestart Capital Grant with the mandated expectation that it be used for 25 years subsequent to the grant giving for the purposes of Early Years (0-5) provision. The Department for Education (DfE) are responsible for overseeing centres funded by Surestart Capital Grants and agreeing which can be de-designated, and whether in their judgement the buildings are being used as intended.

1.5 The Lead Member for Children and Families agreed in principle to apply for the de-designation of the building on the basis that an ongoing use for the building could be made

by another party that matches the aim of the grant. If the aim of the grant is not met, the risk of clawback from the DfE applies.

1.6 It is within usual practice to de-designate specific Children's Centre buildings; a process which involves informing the DfE that the site will no longer be managed by ESCC, but that other parties will continue to use the building as intended within the grant, as per DfE: '*has continued to offer a sufficient level of early years services for children and their families from the building in question to meet the original aims of the grant. (Written question – 28205)*'. The DfE will decide whether to waive the threat of clawback based on evidence of ongoing early years activity.

1.7 Lewes District Council have expressed interest in taking on the management of the Children's Centre building with a plan to continue the early years offer. Lewes District Council will work in partnership with Ringmer Parish Council to ensure day to day operation. If agreed, both councils would welcome negotiating ongoing use of the building by community bodies, NHS and ESCC for the provision of groups and other interventions alongside their own use.

1.8 The proposition going forward is to:

- i) Declare the building surplus
- ii) Enter into discussions of heads of terms with Lewes District Council.
- iii) Delegate final terms to the Chief Operating Officer acting through the Director of Children's Services.
- iv) Request Dedesignation by written submission to the DfE.
- v) Support Lewes District to consolidate their early years activity offer.

1.9 As Ringmer Children's Centre sits independent of the Academy Site it has no impact on the Academy to sell or lease the building to a third party.

1.10 Entering into negotiations with Lewes District Council for the management of the building will include negotiations over the liability for clawback. This may be concluded by agreement to pass on liability, or may be concluded with ESCC retaining liability. This will be determined as being in the best interest in accordance with S.123 of the Local Government Act 1972. The terms of the grant do not mandate a clawback agreement between a Local Authority and a 3rd party receiving a capital asset:

"In circumstances where the funds received from the Department are allocated to third parties, it will be entirely up to each local authority, as the accounting body, to decide whether a clawback arrangement should be put in place as part of the agreement with the third party." Sure Start Early Years and Childcare Grant Capital Guidance

2. Supporting information

2.1 A plan of the Ringmer Children's Centre site is attached in Appendix 1.

2.2 All local members were notified during the consultation of the intention to dedesignate the Children's Centre. Lewes District Council and Ringmer Parish Council have been involved in planning to date.

2.4 The Children's Centre was designated in 2009 with 14 years remaining on the 25 year grant terms, ending 2034.

3 Conclusion and Reason for Recommendations

3.1 The revised early help strategy reduced the number of centres that the service required to deliver the strategy. As a result, a number of centres were identified for de-designation which includes Ringmer Children's Centre. This proposal has the potential of securing the continuation of the service whilst removing an ongoing duty on the County Council.

STUART GALLIMORE
Director of Children's Services.

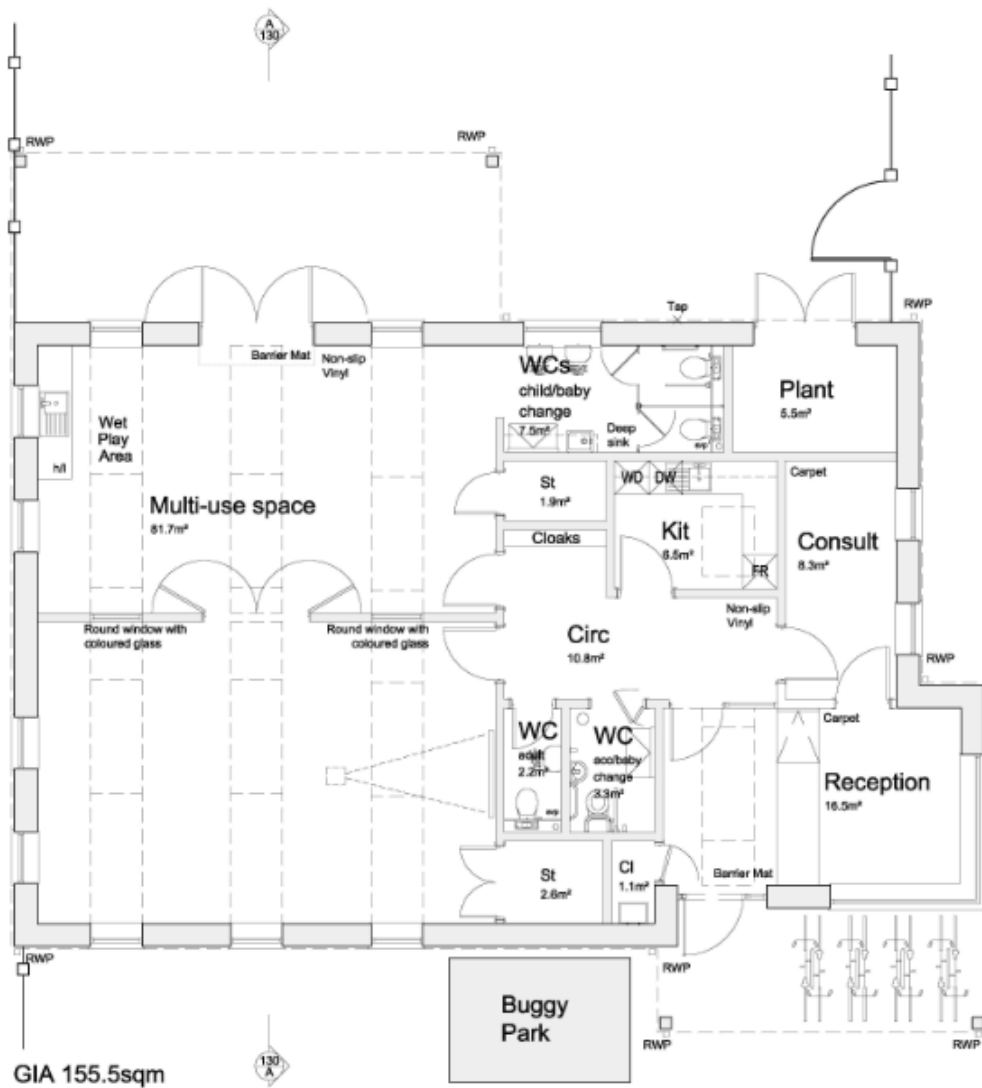
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Local Member: Councillor Philip Daniel

Background Documents: None

Appendix 1 The Building plan for Ringmer Children's Centre



2 Map of the Academy Site and Children's Centre

