

Report to	Lead Member for Resources
Date:	11 March 2020
Title of Report:	Ringmer Children's Centre
By:	Director of Children's Services
Purpose of Report:	Declare the Ringmer Children's Centre building surplus to the County Council's operational requirements to support the Children's Services Early Help Strategy but with a proposal to pursue occupational terms with public sector key stakeholders

RECOMMENDATION: The Lead Member is recommended to:

- 1) declare the Ringmer Children's Centre building surplus to the County Council's operational requirements;**
 - 2) delegate authority to the Chief Operating Officer to enter into negotiations with appropriate parties to agree occupational and management arrangements for the Children's Centre to enable its formal de designation; and**
 - 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.

1.2 The building was built using a Surestart Capital Grant with the mandated expectation that it be used for 25 years following the award of the grant for the purposes of early years (0-5) provision.

1.3 The Department for Education (DfE) are responsible for overseeing centres funded by Surestart Capital Grants and for approving their usage or de-designation.

1.4 On 7 October 2019 the Lead Member for Children and Families agreed to apply for the de-designation of the building on the basis that ongoing use of the building could be made by another party that complies with the terms of the grant.

The DfE decide whether to waive a request for clawback of grants based on evidence of ongoing early years activity.

1.5 In exploring future use options, initial discussions were held with the Kings Academy but they declined any further interest.

1.6 Discussions have been held with key public sector stakeholders on them possibly taking over the management of the Centre with the aim to continue the early years offer. Terms are not yet finalised and further stakeholder consultations are in hand, which include with District and Parish Councils, the NHS and with other community bodies for the provision of groups and other interventions. These uses are, we understand, able to ensure compliance with the original grant and mitigate risks of clawback for ESCC.

1.7 The proposition going forward is to:

- i) Declare the building surplus to the County Council's operational needs
- ii) Enter into discussions on occupational and service management arrangements with one or more public sector lead partners.
- iii) Delegate final terms to the Chief Operating Officer acting with the Director of Children's Services.
- iv) Subject to the above to seek de-designation of the Centre by written submission to the DfE.

2. Supporting information

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

2.2 Local members were notified during the consultation of the intention to de-designate the Children's Centre.

2.3 The Children's Centre was originally designated in 2009. The original grant was £461k under a 25 year arrangement and thus 14 years remain. If the DfE assess that the aim of the grant is not being met there is a risk to ESCC of some clawback, so it is sensible for ESCC to outline to the DfE's satisfaction what ongoing early years activity will look like in the building and thus mitigate the risk of clawback.

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 service going forward. This was agreed by the Lead Member for Children and Families on 7 October 2019. As a result, a number of Children's Centres, including Ringmer, were identified for de-designation. The outline proposal noted above has the potential of securing the continuation of the service whilst removing an ongoing duty on the County Council.

3.2 The Lead Member for Resources is asked to support this proposition to secure best value outcomes

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