

**Report of Director of Childrens and Family Services**

**Report to Scrutiny Board (Children and Families)**

**Date: 25<sup>th</sup> January 2018**

**Subject: Directors Response to the Scrutiny Inquiry Report:  
Children's Centres**



Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

**Summary of main issues**

This inquiry was undertaken with a significant focus on how services provided through children's centres:

- a) impact on the lives of children, particularly in their early years (pre- school age),
- b) improve the lives of their associated family,
- c) deliver wider economic and social benefits.

The purpose of the inquiry was to make an assessment of and, where appropriate, make recommendations on the following areas:

- The strategic and operational approach to making a positive difference in the lives of children and their families through the provision of children's centres

- The roles and responsibilities of Leeds City Council and Partners in the provision and resourcing of children's centres and the effectiveness of those partnerships.
- The range, quality and impact of services provided by children's centres, including the recognition and sharing of good practice,
- Aspirations for the development of children's centres and exploring opportunities to secure a sustainable future.

## **Recommendations**

The Scrutiny Board is requested to note the responses to the recommendations based on their findings and endorse the approach being taken.

## **1. Purpose of this report**

- 1.1 This report sets out the formal response of the Director for Children and Families to the recommendations from Scrutiny Board (Children and Families) inquiry into Children's Centres.

## **2 Background information**

- 2.1 Sure Start Children's Centres were established nationally from 2010 as the cornerstone of early support and advice for families with young children. The services provided were intended to be targeted at families with greatest need, and available in all communities. The intention for Sure Start Children's Centres was to be:

“ the key mechanism for improving outcomes for young children, reducing inequality in outcomes between the most disadvantaged and the rest, and help bring an end to poverty.” (DfES 2006).

- 2.2 The fifty six children's centres in Leeds have 96% of families in Leeds with children under 5 registered, which is approximately 25,304 families. A total of 13,581 families are in identified target groups for support. Presently around 7,443 families in target groups (70%) regularly engage with children centres.
- 2.3 The Children's Centre-Early Start Service recognises the importance of early help and giving every child the best start in life. This service includes health visitor service practitioners and children's centre practitioners working in integrated teams which are aligned to Cluster Partnerships.

## **3. Main issues**

- 3.1 The 56 Children's Centre's provide a cornerstone for the Leeds Best Start Plan, which is a preventative programme from conception to age 2 years. This programme aims to ensure a good start in life for every baby, with early identification and targeted support for vulnerable families.
- 3.2 On 16 of June 2016, Children and Families Scrutiny Board resolved to undertake an inquiry which would consider the value of children's centres and how they deliver the aspirations defined in the Best Start Plan and the CYPP.
- 3.3 A key objective for this inquiry was to identify how the services provided through children's centres impact on the lives of children, particularly in their early years, and improve the lives of their associated family. We also wanted to identify how austerity measures within the Council and wider partnerships are impacting on children's centres and the strategic and operational intention for sustaining children's centres now and in the future.

**Desired Outcome – To promote and enhance parental voice and influence.**

### **Recommendation 1**

That the Director of Children and Families undertakes a review of Children's Centre Advisory Boards to assess the strength of governance arrangements and parental inclusion. Where action is required the Director is requested to provide the necessary support to secure improvement.

The Director of Children and Families accepts this recommendation. A review of Children's Centre Advisory Boards will be undertaken in April 2018 through the Annual Conversation Review process which quality assurances the delivery of services. This will ensure a thorough review of governance arrangements and the involvement and voice of parents in service delivery and development. The Director will report on progress in September 2018.

**Desired Outcome – To provide better informed and integrated support to vulnerable children and families.**

### **Recommendation 2**

That the Director of Children and Families investigates the strength of partnership and information sharing between each Children's Centre and local GP services, and where required facilitate support to build up partnership arrangements to provide better support for families who require targeted services.

The Director of Children and Families accepts this recommendation. We will continue to develop collaborative links with the CCG in terms of integrating services for example maternity and mental health services. We will look at the potential to become part of the social prescribing model for Leeds, similar to the neighbourhood Networks model for older communities.

**Desired Outcome – To ensure full Cluster support is maintained to all Children's Centres across Leeds to provide identified targeted support.**

### **Recommendation 3**

That the Director of Children and Families investigates the impact of changing Cluster Partnership structures on the support available to Children's Centres and ensures that full support services are restored and maintained.

The Director of Children and Families accepts this recommendation and will ensure that Children's Centres and the new RES teams become closely aligned. We will also maintain and further develop the existing links with cluster teams through Guidance and Support JCC, Family of Schools meetings.

**Desired Outcome – To better engage with the public by facilitating clear and up to date information to families and to promote the benefits of Children's Centres.**

### **Recommendation 4**

That the Director of Children and Families undertakes a review of electronic media, website

and social media provision for all Leeds Local Authority Children's Centres to enhance the provision of information to families and facilitate engagement digitally.

The Director of Children and Families accepts this recommendation. A programme of work has begun with the Communications team to consult with parents and stakeholders around service branding, 'kerb' appeal, electronic media, website and social media. We will also use new Public Health initiatives launched in the city for example Baby Boxes, loaning breast pumps, home safety checks, book bags to further publicise Childrens Centre services.

**Desired Outcome – To improve communication skills during early year's development.**

### **Recommendation 5**

That the Director of Children and Families:

a) investigates the level of needs led demand for communication and language development support, including the support required at each Children's Centre, and works in collaboration with Health Partners to address the deficits in support identified

b) investigates the possibility of commissioning and provision of adult learning courses in Makato in Children's Centres, to aid parents who wish to support the development of their child's communication skills.

a) The Director of Children and Families accepts this recommendation and will review the funding and support for communication and language needs with regard to the new requirements around the Early Years Dedicated Schools Grant.

The Childrens centre communication and language named lead in every Children's Centre will undertake an audit of need. We will work collaboratively with Health Partners to identify collaborative ways to address demand.

b) The Director of Children and Families accepts this recommendation will review the existing programme of Family Learning by Leeds City College and consider parent demand for specific areas of training and development.

**Desired Outcome – To secure the future financial sustainability of all Children's Centres in Leeds.**

### **Recommendation 6**

That the Director of Children and Families explores how further funding reductions can be prevented in order to support the continued sustainability and prosperity of all Leeds Children's Centres by:

. a) working in collaboration with partner organisations to secure sufficient funding which will support continued integrated practice.

. b) working in collaboration with the Director of Resources and Housing to attain sufficient Local Authority funding in accordance with the Council's Budget and Policy Framework

. c) bringing a detailed report regarding Children's Centre funding proposals for 2018/19 to the Scrutiny Board in December 2017.

The Director of Children and Families accepts this recommendation and will explore how further funding reductions can be prevented in order to support the continued sustainability and prosperity of all Leeds Children's Centres by working with health, school and voluntary sector partners and the new RES teams to better integrate services for families in their communities.

Whilst LCC budget pressures are challenging it is noteworthy that Children's Services have taken an active decision to protect funding for Children's Centres by cross directorate investment across Children's and Public Health services and innovative work with other partners, recognised nationally as good practice. The inquiry has highlighted that nationally spending in Children's Centre services fell significantly over the past few years in most other authorities. National Sure Start and early years investment fell by nearly £700m, or 44%, with one in three centres closing since 2010. The preventative work of the Children's centres is recognised and highly valued and will be a part of the overall offer for children and families in Leeds in the future.

**Desired Outcome – To promote financial planning, the building of aspirations and delivery of longer term programmes.**

#### **Recommendation 7**

*That the Director of Children and Families provides additional stability by supporting the planning of services in the longer term and by investigating the feasibility of budget allocation to all Children's Centres that extends beyond the current 12 month annual settlement. The outcome of this investigation to be reported to this Scrutiny Board in December 2017.*

The Director of Children and Families forwarded a one page financial update to scrutiny in December. He will further investigate this recommendation as part of the council's aspiration to develop a three year budget strategy. However this will be dependent on the overall budget settlement figure and wider directorate pressures and changing needs.

**Desired Outcome – To ensure that the physical infrastructure of Children's Centres is fit for purpose currently and in the future.**

#### **Recommendation 8**

*That the Director of Children and Families undertakes a review of buildings and facilities to ensure that the infrastructure and space available facilitates the provision of support services currently, and the aspirations of the early years services in the longer term.*

The Director of Children and Families accepts this recommendation and will continue to review the Children's Centre assets. This will facilitate more effective use of space, more collaborative work with partners and where possible generate opportunities for additional income by December 2018.

**Desired Outcome – To secure the future sustainability of Children's Centres in Leeds.**

#### **Recommendation 9**

That the Director of Children and Families provides the Scrutiny Board (Children and Families) with a sustainability and development plan for Leeds Children's Centres

a) which reflects the recommendations made in this report, and

b) explores the merits and risks of the family hub model, and

c) supports the review of asset utilisation so that the most effective use of Children's Centre

buildings in Council ownership is achieved in order to generate additional income or reduce expenditure.

The Director of Children and Families accepts this recommendation and will develop a sustainability and development plan for Leeds Children's Centres which reflects the recommendations of this report, gives consideration to the Family Hub model; and gives consideration to asset utilisation and income generating potential.

## **4. Corporate Considerations**

### **4.1 Consultation and Engagement**

4.1.1 Between January and April 2016 the Scrutiny Board (Children and Families) visited four Children's Centres to speak to professionals, parents and children. Their contribution was informative and highlighted a high level of positive support for the work in the community. Visits were made to Bankside, New Bewerley, Boston Spa and Burley offer a diverse view of services across the city of Leeds. A key focus for the inquiry was the views of parents and carers. The visits confirmed the strong connection that parents have with the practitioners based in the centres.

### **4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration**

4.2.1 Equality and diversity issues have been considered throughout this Scrutiny Inquiry. The evidence submitted and the topics debated in this inquiry have highlighted that young children who have English as an additional language and/or live in an area of high deprivation face additional challenges that can hinder their early development. We identified that the Childcare Act 2006 places a duty on Local Authorities to improve outcomes for young children and their families and reduce inequalities between families in greatest need and their peers.

### **4.3 Council policies and the Best Council Plan**

4.3.1 The scope of the inquiry fulfils some of the best council objectives and priorities as defined in the Best Council plan for 2015 to 2020, particularly supporting children to do well at all levels of learning and have the skills they need for life, keeping children safe, supporting families, and raising aspirations and educational attainment.

### **4.4 Resources and value for money**

4.4.1 The inquiry established the value and impact of Leeds children's centres why they are different to other early years provision available in Leeds. Scrutiny established that whilst most, if not all, private provision focuses on traditional child care, children's centres provide a package of services, that have developed over a number of years, which provides targeted support for families including those with very complex needs.

4.4.2 The cost benefit analysis undertaken around the Leeds children's centre model suggests that investment in the earliest years is already adding value to the Leeds pound. This suggests that reducing investment could have a detrimental impact on services and ultimately lead to increased costs to Leeds City Council and Partners in the future.

#### **4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In**

4.5.1 None

#### **4.6 Risk Management**

4.6.1 None

#### **5. Conclusions**

5.1 The Director of Children and Family Services welcomes the recommendations of the scrutiny inquiry and undertakes to ensure the co-ordination of their implementation as outlines in this response.

#### **6. Recommendations**

6.1 The Scrutiny Board is requested to note the responses to the recommendations based on their findings and endorse the approach being taken.

#### **7. Background documents<sup>1</sup>**

7.1 None

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<sup>1</sup> The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.