

CHILDREN'S CENTRES IN LEEDS: A BACKGROUND PAPER ON ISSUES THAT HAVE ARISEN DURING THE DEVELOPMENT OF PHASE 1 AND 2 OF THE CHILDREN'S CENTRE PROGRAMME

This paper aims to update officers and members on the progress to date with phase one and two of the children's centre programme. It will offer a general context and show progress against the four main workstreams for the programme:

- Construction
- Governance
- Funding allocations and sustainability
- Outreach services

This paper supports and provides a background to the Executive Board report on the final phase of the children's centre programme.

CONTEXT

The origins of the national children's centre programme can be found in the government report "Delivering services to children and families: an inter departmental review of childcare" published by the Social Exclusion Unit in November 2002. The findings of this report informed the comprehensive spending review 2004- 06, the publication by HM Treasury of "Choice for parents, the best start for children: a ten year strategy for childcare" in December 2004 and the subsequent Childcare Act 2006. The reports and the statute place a children's centre in every community by 2010 to provide universal, integrated services for children and families with more services provided from those centres located in areas of greatest disadvantage.

Leeds had already opened six children's centres prior to this point, three of which were part of the Early Excellence Centre pilot programme and five of these centres were in the first wave of children's centre designations.

The statutory responsibility for ensuring the development and operation of the children's centre programme rests with the Local Authority under the Childcare Act 2006 and is monitored as a Public Service Agreement. The children's centre programme has been developed in 3 phases:

- Phase 1 was completed in April 2006 providing 23 centres and covering the most disadvantaged areas. 21 of the 23 centres are within SOA in the lowest 10%.
- Phase 2 will be completed in summer 2008 delivering a further 26 centres. These are all within SOA in the 10 – 30 % most disadvantaged localities except for three centres developed in the localities in the lowest 10% not covered by phase 1 of the programme.
- Phase 3 will be developed from 2008- 11 in more advantaged localities and a further 9 or 10 centres will be developed

The core offer of services that must be delivered from phase 1 and 2 children's centres is as follows:

- Integrated early education and childcare for children aged 0 -5 (3- 5 phase 2)
- Outreach services to 'reach' a given number of children aged 0-5
- Family support services including health and social care
- Parenting courses that promote family involvement in children's learning, growth and development

- Access to information, advice and guidance on all issues of parenting
- Access to information / training that will promote families entering training and employment

Phase 3 centres will deliver a reduced offer and are not required to provide integrated early education and care unless needed in the locality, but will include outreach and information services and spaces for the delivery of family support and activity.

CONSTRUCTION

Phase One

The phase one children's centre capital allocation for phase 1 in 2004- 06 was £5.6 million. The criteria for location were based on wards within the lowest 20 % on the ODPM index of multiple deprivation. Twenty one of the twenty three centres built are also within the 10% lowest Super Output Areas (SOAs) across the nation. In phase one the capital programme was able to combine funding streams such as LCC capital and asset release, SRB, ESF and Sure Start local programme capital. In total £13.8 million was spent on phase one centres. All centres built within the programme were completed within timescales and budget allocation.

The centres were designed and constructed by a range of agencies and across a wide partnership and contained:

- 10 new builds
- 10 refurbishments
- 3 centres that were a mix of refurbishment and extension
- 13 centres were constructed on school sites
- 6 centres stand alone within a locality
- 1 is located within a family learning centre
- 1 in an NHS LIFT complex
- 2 centres combine school and stand alone sites
- 5 phase one centres are SILC partnership centres
- 3 have been deemed outstanding by Ofsted inspection.

Phase 1 centres are detailed in appendix 1 of the Executive Board Report.

Phase two

The phase two children's centre programme has run from 2006/08 and has spent £7.6 million in the construction or refurbishment of 26 centres. The criteria for location of phase two centres were SOAs in the lowest 30 % across the nation. Three centres completed as part of the phase two programme are located within the lowest 10% across the nation and are more closely aligned to the phase one centre programme.

The programme coincided with a policy emphasis on Extended Schools and Local Authorities were steered towards location on school sites. This had been a priority for Leeds in phase one of the programme.

The construction has been achieved through a working partnership of Education Leeds, Early Years, Learning and Leisure Property Services and the Strategic Design Alliance. There have been few opportunities to combine capital streams in the second phase of the programme and most of the 'quick wins' had been achieved in phase one where the city exceeded targets set in the plan, building an additional 4 centres.

As a result there have been fewer new builds, more refurbishments and small extensions and the centres are smaller overall. The indicative allocation for each centre was £300K, although actual contracts varied across the programme from £34K to £930K. Phase two includes:

- 1 BSF PFI build
 - 17 builds on school sites
 - linked stand alone and school sites
 - 5 stand alone sites
 - 1 centre is located in a family learning centre
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- 3 phase two centres are full new builds
 - 8 are refurbishments
 - 5 are extensions
 - 4 are refurbishments with small extensions
 - 5 centres are modular builds.
 - 1 centre required no work

The Phase two centres are detailed in appendix 2 of the Executive Board report.

GOVERNANCE.

The Governance of extended services and children's centres has proved to be a complex issue. Guidance from the Government was promised and delayed on three occasions. That guidance was finally issued in October 2007 by which time 38 clusters of extended schools were in place and more than 30 children's centres open and designated.

To progress this complicated issue the Early Years Service has funded a post within Education Leeds Governors Unit since 2006 to work ahead of Government guidance and offer schools and centres options for sensible and developmental governance.

All children's centres will develop a board of some kind to provide governance and support to children's centre services. The remit of those boards will vary from full delegated powers to acting in an advisory capacity. It is expected that parent users will always form a large proportion of the advisory board and that key local partners from other children's services will play active roles. It is expected that board will mature and assume more responsibilities over time. At this time it is unlikely the boards will have legal status like a governing body.

There are four main governance options for children's centres:

1. Stand alone centres that are self governed

Stand alone children's centres that are separate from schools will have constituted advisory boards, a defined accountable body and partnership links to the cluster of extended services the centre sits within.

Chapeltown Children's Centre is an example of this. The centre has an Advisory Board including all local partners, those that work on the site and parents who use the centre. LCC Early Years Service is the accountable body. The centre works as part of two clusters of extended schools and very closely with Holy Rosary and St Anne's Primary School.

2. Children’s centres on school sites that are not managed and governed by the school governing body but by a third party.

Schools may indicate a preference for a partner to develop and manage children’s centre services on the school site. The third party will establish an advisory board or management committee as above with school representation ex officio. A change will be sought to the statutory notice for the school if there is a nursery class on site and the school will be re-designated as a 4 to 11 primary site. The third party will accept responsibility for the early education of children aged 3 and 4. In most cases where this has occurred the school and children’s centre share the same building and a partnership agreement shares the cost.

Parklands Children’s Centre is an example of this. The centre is located on the Primary School site. The school is designated as a 4 to 11 primary School and the Children’s centre integrates all services for children aged 0 to 5. The Head teacher and chair of the Governing Body support the children’s centre Advisory Board. The children’s centre manager is a co-opted member to the Governing Body. The school and centre work together to ensure transitions are smooth and extended services are developed across both sites. The children’s centre is run by the Early Years Service and has been deemed outstanding by Ofsted.

Ireland Wood is another example of this. The centre is located on the school site. The school did not have a nursery class. A private provider has come into children’s centre premises to integrate services for children aged 0 to 5. The children’s centre is managed by a Management Committee and the head teacher sits on that committee. The school and centre work together to ensure transitions are smooth and extended services are developed across both sites. The school and children’s centre provision has been deemed by Ofsted as outstanding.

3. Children’s centres on school sites where management and governance is retained by the school either using the community facilities powers or through a partnership arrangement with another body. The school is commissioned by the Local Authority to deliver children’s centre services through a partnership agreement.

Whenever the school retains management of the children’s centre the governance of the centre is incorporated into the school governing body in some way that is responsible to the Local Authority for the delivery of children’s centre services. Schools and their partners have a number of options that would secure robust governance for the children’s centre on their site and the extended services it will deliver:

- The governing body absorbs the whole responsibility within its existing core role and is accountable to the Local Authority for outcomes
- A children’s centre advisory board is established from the wider stakeholder group but is separate from the school governing body. The advisory board advises and recommends to the governing body on specific responsibilities.
- A children’s centre advisory board is established and integrated into the school governing body
- Children’s centre governance is delegated to a governing body committee.
- Children’s centre governance is delegated to a governing body committee formed through the collaboration of two or more schools in a locality.

- Children's centre governance could be integrated into a federated governing body
- A company limited by guarantee can be established to undertake some or all activities related to the centre. Governors would sit on the Board along with other partners
- Trusts can be commissioned to deliver children's centre services.

Detailed guidance is available to schools on the structures each of these options would require. Support is available from Education Leeds Governors Unit to implement preferred options. We have no current functioning examples of children's centres managed in this way. Most schools operating children's centres from April 2008 will assume responsibility for the development of the children's centre and have indicated preferences for most of the above. No schools are seeking to establish a school company at this time.

4. Children's centres on school sites where management and governance is shared. The school retains the responsibility for early education provision and a partner assumes responsibility for childcare, outreach and family support services

In partnership centres governance is shared and a partnership agreement apportions the roles and responsibilities of each provider. This is often considered as a first stage in the development of governance and was the way many centres were established whilst waiting for more definitive guidance and governance options. They function on the good will and common purpose of providers and staff teams. After a period of operation this is reviewed and a more straightforward governance option is selected. As a model it does promote close relationships and partnership and the major disadvantage is around the complexity of funding streams and registers. However in the changing world of school governance the number of centres working in this way is likely to decrease.

Shakespeare Children's Centre is an example of this. The school retain the responsibility for the provision of early education places and provide the leadership for the centre through a children's centre manager who is on the school staff team. The early years service provide integrated childcare and family support services on the site and provide leadership through the appointment of a children's centre daycare manager and family outreach workers. The provision is seamless and the staff teams integrated. The centre is developing a joint Advisory Board with parent users. The centre is busy and represents a successful phase one centre.

FUNDING ALLOCATIONS AND SUSTAINABILITY

The funding streams to support the running costs of children's centres are multiple and complex:

- Early education is funded for 2, 3- 4 year olds through age weighted pupil units (AWPU) in schools or Nursery Education Grant in all other settings
- Family support and outreach services are supported through a dedicated children's centre revenue allocation
- More specialist family support, including health and social care services are funded through the core budgets of other agencies/ services or provided through their commissioned services or through other commissioned services
- Childcare is expected to be self supporting with childcare tax credits available for families on modest or low incomes. The current childcare element of Working Tax

Credit (WTC) provides parents up to 80% of all childcare charges up to £175 per week for the first child or £300 per week if there are two or more children.

Head teachers and children's centre managers have agreed a mechanism for the allocation of the dedicated children's centre revenue grant to phase 1 and 2 children's centres which will be paid through the General Sure Start grant and will be reviewed annually. The allocation system has been modelled to be in line with Education Leeds systems and give some resource to all centres and the residue weighted by factors relating to size and locality. Allocations vary from £89K to £144 K per annum in 2008/09.

This ring fenced revenue grant can be used to provide:

- A vulnerable child allowance
- A management allowance
- A quality premium
- A family support allowance

How this funding is spent will be at the discretion of the schools and children's centres, dependent upon local needs but subject to the conditions of the General Sure Start Grant.

OUTREACH SERVICES IN CHILDREN'S CENTRES.

The development of outreach services is part of the core offer of a children's centre. The roles and responsibilities of an outreach worker and how these differ from a more traditional family worker were explored by the 8 Sure Start local programmes over a period of two years in preparation for the integration of the programmes into the children's centres in April 2007.

The family support process recommended by the programmes and adopted in the first 23 children's centres is known as the LOGIC approach. Data is collected against each element. The approach identifies the elements of family work as:

- Leafleting and information- including systematic door knocking in localities
- Outreach- working in homes and other community based venues
- Group work- drop ins, focused sessions, toddler groups to events
- Individual work- support to families where risk is escalating- advocacy
- Courses- parenting courses or courses that support the development of adults including ESOL/ basic skills etc. Increasingly courses provided from children's centres are accredited with the Open College Network by the central Quality Assurance team to support parents to level 2 and 3 qualifications.

Government dedicated funding for this element of the children's centre core offer has doubled for 2008- 11 allowing 2 outreach workers per centre. Thirty three children's centres have opted into the wedge based outreach teams that have developed from the former Sure Start local programmes. Eight centres have chosen to commission voluntary sector agencies to deliver the services. Eight phase two centres on school sites have opted to deliver the service themselves. These numbers may change.

All centres have committed to a joint induction and training process for family outreach workers and a city wide forum to disseminate best practice. The quality assurance of outreach services will be the responsibility of the Local Authority.

PHASE THREE CHILDREN'S CENTRES.

Leeds has an allocation of £3.3 million to construct at least 9 additional children's centres between 2008 /11 in the remaining localities not 'reached' by phases 1 and 2 of the programme.

Sure Start Children's Centre phase three guidance was issued by the DCSF in the summer of 2007. The phase three centres will operate to a reduced core offer. There is no requirement to provide flexible early education or childcare places in the centre and a less proactive family support service role. The centres will provide spaces for the delivery of family support services and activities for families and more of a signpost to services role. However, they will deliver outreach services and be expected to develop as hub extended services sites with staffing to person the centres during core hours. The guidance suggests that a wider range of sites should be considered, including health centres and clinics.

The Early Years Service has worked with Education Leeds to carefully identify the reach of the current children's centres, the localities not served at this time and the numbers of children aged 0 to 5 within those localities.

A full stakeholder consultation process is still underway to identify the best locations for the remaining children's centres and the range of services the community will seek to develop. A timetable is in place that will bring recommendations to Executive Board in May 2008. The report will outline the process, the proposed localities in which centres will be built and the order in which they will be constructed. This briefing paper has sought to provide a wider understanding of the whole programme and how it will provide early intervention and preventative services to all young children and families in Leeds by 2011.