

Report of: Children’s Centre & Early Start Lead

Report to: Director of Children & Families

Date: 05 March 2021

Subject: The reduction of early learning and childcare places at Little Owls Firthfields nursery (LCC) and expansion of family services.



Are specific electoral wards affected? If yes, name(s) of ward(s):	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Has consultation been carried out?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Will the decision be open for call-in?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, access to information procedure rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Summary

1. Main issues

2. Family services provision in Garforth is limited by the availability of delivery space and lack of outdoor play. There is presently no prospect of co-location of 0-19 services and families find it difficult to access services currently located within Garforth Academy.
3. The space currently occupied by Little Owls Firthfield nursery would be ideal as a new space for delivery of family services, has good transport links and is in the middle of a large housing estate.
4. The nursery has been up for review for the last 6 years with demand for places reducing year on year as private and school provision has expanded rapidly in the area.
5. Due to Covid and a freeze on recruitment, the service has had to deploy staff to other settings where demand is greater, to support vacancies. In order to re-open Firthfields staff will need to be recruited to fill the vacancies at other sites.
6. During the time that the centre has closed all but one family have found places at other providers within the area or other Little Owls settings.
7. Operating ten hour days Monday to Friday at only 32% of capacity has meant that there has been a consistent deficit at this nursery of over £55,000 a year projecting to

£79,000 this year meaning each childcare place is subsidised by Leeds city council at the rate of £2,000 – 3,000 per year in an area where there are only very small pockets of deprivation.

8. The proposed changes will not affect sufficiency of early learning and child care in the area since there is plentiful provision within two miles of the Firthfields nursery. It will, however, allow the development of a wider range and reach of services to support families.

9. Best Council Plan Implications (click [here](#) for the latest version of the Best Council Plan)

- The proposal contributes to the City Best Council Plan in supporting families to give their children the best start in life, to maintain capacity to support vulnerable families, improve quality, effectiveness and value for money.
- This proposal also supports the Healthy Weight Strategy, ensuring the continued delivery of the very successful and nationally acclaimed Henry programme, which delivers family and parenting support and outreach services to support improved outcomes.
- Childrens Centres continue to support the Children and Young People’s Plan and the Best Start Strategy, delivering universal services in localities for all families and targeting those children with highest levels of need.

10. Resource Implications

- The posts currently assigned to Firthfields are as follows

Post	Grade	FTE
Day care Manager	PO1	1
Nursery Assistant	B1	3.19
Nursery Officer	B3	2

- There is also a Childrens centre Manager PO4 x 33% post assigned to this centre.
- There is currently an assistant manager vacancy.
- The cook (employed by catering) is leaving after Easter 2020
- The projected financial deficit for this centre in 2019/20 is £79,000

The nursery assistant and nursery officer posts can be absorbed across the city easily.

The Day Care Manager post would be surplus to requirements, however the service is aware of two posts which are currently open for recruitment.

Recommendations

- a) To expand childrens centre family services into the Firthfields building with room for Early Start offer co-located services.
- b) To remove childcare provision at this nursery which is surplus to demand for childcare in the area which is over provided by private sector nurseries.

1. Purpose of this report

1.1 This report seeks permission from the Director of Children & Families to reduce early learning and childcare places at Little Owls Firthfields nursery (LCC), relocate family services from Garforth Academy and develop a wider range and reach of 0-19 family services from the Firthfields (LCC) site.

2. Background information

2.1 Little Owls Firthfields formerly Firthfields Early Years Centre, was opened in the 1980's and was registered for 50 places.

2.2 When the children's centre developments were undertaken in 2005/2006 there was insufficient space to develop appropriate family services provision so the building remained an Early Years Centre until it was re-branded as a Little Owls Nursery in 2018.

2.3 All other Early Years centres were either converted to children's centres or closed.

2.4 The building adjoins a former Elderly Day centre which closed a number of years ago and is now used for adult services.

2.5 Family services were developed in Micklefield and Garforth high school, now an academy instead.

2.6 Since the development of the services, Micklefield primary have expanded two year old places occupying the family services building 50% of the time and the high school has changed to an academy. Both of these developments have to some extent restricted access to services for families in the reach area.

2.7 When the children's centres were developed there was no intention to co-locate health visiting and other services. Now co-location is anticipated, there is no space in Garforth to achieve this.

2.8 There are 5 full day care nurseries within 2 miles of Little Owls nursery and 3 primary schools which means that 0-5 places in Garforth are over provided for the number of children in the area

3. Main issues

3.1 There is extremely limited space currently available at Little Owls Firthfields for activities other than childcare. Family services for Garforth are therefore delivered from Garforth Academy within the main building. This causes barriers for the families needing to access the services and there is no outdoor provision there for stay and play. The space at the academy is tight and there is also no prospect for effective co-location of 0-19 services such as midwives or health visitors.

3.2 The nursery at the Firthfields site is registered for 50 children but has not reached that level since before 2009. The demand for childcare places provided by the nursery has been under review for the last 6 years.

- 3.3 Figures from the sufficiency report, shows a sustained increase in private provider places in Garforth whilst Firthfields Little Owls Nursery has showed a sustained decline in take up of places. The nursery was, delivering up to 78 places a day in the 1990's. The nursery is currently projecting an average of 25 places a day, the majority of which are full day care.
- 3.4 There are high levels of childminders and PVI provision in this area. In 2018 there were 250, 3-4 year olds and the 60% of these claimed in school nurseries, 33% in PVI and 6% at Little Owls Firthfields.
- 3.5 The nursery is operating at 32% of capacity, habitually presenting a deficit which has not been below £55,000 for the last 6 years and is projected to reach £79,000 this year.
- 3.6 This report proposes that the services in this building changes from full day care to family services.
- 3.7 This proposal will improve access to family services, provide space for co-location of services where required and release the space in Garforth Academy, There will be a consequent saving of £20,000 rental for this space and a reduction in the ongoing Little Owls deficit of £50,000 to £79,000 per year.

4. Corporate considerations

4.1 Consultation and engagement

- 4.1.1 Parents with children at the nursery have been consulted on the proposed changes and supported to secure child care at alternative provision and those accessing family services will also be consulted.
- 4.1.2 Consultation meetings have taken place with all staff and trade union colleagues.
- 4.1.3 Ward Members have been briefed and the proposal was accepted and approved by Exec Board in November 2020.

4.2 Equality and diversity / cohesion and integration

- 4.2.1 Little Owls Firthfields does not receive any free entitlement deprivation uplift, has no children with Early Years Funding for Inclusion and none with pupil premium. There are also no children in the centre with child protection issues.
- 4.2.2 The building will improve the reach of family services and improve the number of activities that can be provided from the building.

4.3 Council policies and the Best Council Plan

5. The proposal contributes to the City Best Council Plan in supporting families to give their children the best start in life, to maintain capacity to support vulnerable families, improve quality, effectiveness and value for money.
6. This proposal also supports the Healthy Weight Strategy, ensuring the continued delivery of the very successful and nationally acclaimed Henry programme, which

delivers family and parenting support and outreach services to support improved outcomes.

7. Childrens Centres continue to support the Children and Young People's Plan and the Best Start Strategy, delivering universal services in localities for all families and targeting those children with highest levels of need.

Climate Emergency

- 7.1.1 The building occupied by the full day care nursery is heated by an inefficient hot air system and it needs to be on constantly because of the young babies in the centre, The windows are single glazed and the heat exits from the windows and constantly open doors during free flow play.
- 7.1.2 The proposed changes will reduce the carbon foot print of the building by reducing the level to which the building needs to be heated and the amount of heat which leaves the building during the day
- 7.1.3 The kitchen will also be decommissioned which will save further energy costs and carbon emissions.

7.2 Resources, procurement and value for money

- 7.2.1 The staff employed at the centre will be redeployed into current vacancies across the city.
- 7.2.2 The change will reduce the costs to the day care deficit by up to £79,000 each year. Rental payments of £20,000 to the academy will no longer go out of the local authority. The remaining costs of the Firthfields building are currently only £3,000 more than the Garforth academy rent and will reduce due to the change of use.

7.3 Legal implications, access to information, and call-in

- 7.3.1 This is a key decision which is subject to call in.
- 7.3.2 There are no legal implications for the expansion of family services and the reduction of childcare places.

7.4 Risk management

- 7.4.1 There is a risk that there will be insufficient childcare places in the Garforth area to service the needs of families, however the expansion of places in the area has resulted in an overprovision of childcare which has impacted on demand for places at Firthfields. It is highly unlikely that demand will increase to a point where there are insufficient places
- 7.4.2 As the childcare staff will no longer be required at this location the majority of posts will be able to fill vacancies across the city. The day care manager post will no longer be required. At the time of writing this paper there is one vacancy for a day care manager in the city which is open to recruitment. HR advice is that the service will be challenged if this vacant post is permanently filled and the day care manager post at Firthfields is declared surplus to requirements. This challenge is likely to be upheld if a formal complaint is submitted.

7.4.3 There may be a reputational risk if the transfer of children to other providers is not managed well. However, as a result of the pandemic and the site being closed temporarily, the transition to other providers has taken place and ran smoothly.

8. Conclusions

8.1 The expansion of the family services at Firthfields will support better integrated services for families in the area.

8.2 The removal of day care places will not impact on the ability of families in the area to access sufficient childcare.

9. Recommendations

9.1 To expand childrens centre family services into the Firthfields building with room for Early Start offer co-located services.

9.2 To remove childcare provision at this nursery which is surplus to demand for childcare in the area which is over provided by private sector nurseries.

10. Background documents¹

None

¹ 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.