

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Agenda
Item No.

Report of Corporate Director for People

to
Cabinet

on
18th June 2013

Report prepared by: Darren McAughtrie, Group Manager
Strategic Commissioning & Early Years and Sue Hadley,
Head of Children's Services

Redesign of Children's Centre Provision

People Scrutiny Committee – Executive Councillor: Cllr. James Courtenay

A Part 1 Public Agenda Item

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To present the outcome of the public consultation on the proposed redesign of Children's Centre provision and make recommendations on the next stage of the Children's Centre redesign.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 **That the Leigh and Blenheim Children's Centres are merged into one Children's Centre based at the Blenheim site.**
- 2.2 **That the Friars and Shoebury Children's Centres are merged into one children's centre based at the Friars site.**
- 2.3 **To note that further consultation will be undertaken on the possible merger of the Hamstel and Temple Sutton Children's Centres.**
- 2.4 **To note that no changes are recommended to any other Children's Centre.**

3. Background

- 3.1 The approved 2013/14 Council budget requires a saving of £55k for that year in respect of Children's Centres. There is also a need to deliver further savings of £169k to contribute to the 2014/15 budget savings from the Children's Centre budget.
- 3.2 Changes to Children's Centre provision are subject to statutory public consultation as laid down in The Childcare Act 2006.

- 3.3 Discussions were held with current providers and schools linked to Children's Centres to seek their views on how the required savings could be achieved.
- 3.4 The proposals developed from these discussions with providers were discussed at an all Member Briefing on 26th March 2013 attended by 12 Members.
- 3.5 The proposals then went out to public consultation. The consultation closed on 5th May 2013. In addition to the on-line consultation form, five face to-face question and answer sessions have been held in the Children's Centres directly affected by the proposals. Section 4 below summarises the responses.
- 3.6 An all Member Briefing, by way of pre-Cabinet scrutiny was held on 29th May 2013 and 31 Members attended. Section 4.10 below summarises the feedback from this Briefing.

4. Public Consultation responses

- 4.1 In total 460 people accessed the on-line consultation, of which 307 completed the entire questionnaire and 153 partially completed the questionnaire.
- 4.2 The majority of people responding (312) are parents or guardians of a child currently using a Children's Centre and over 80% stated they use a Children's Centre on a weekly basis. When asked which Children's Centres they are currently using a total of 312 people recorded 416 counts; some users use more than one centre:-.

	Number	%
Blenheim Children's Centre	69	23.71%
Cambridge Road Children's Centre	10	3.44%
Centre Place Children's Centre	10	3.44%
Hamstel Children and Family Centre	90	30.39%
Leigh Children's Centre	64	21.99%
Prince Avenue Children and Family Centre	31	10.65%
Friars Children's Centre	7	2.41%
Shoebury Children's Centre	15	5.15%
Summercourt Children's Centre	20	6.87%
Sunnydays Children's Centre	59	20.27%
Temple Sutton Children's Centre	41	14.09%

- 4.3 The 312 respondents who identified themselves as currently using a Children's Centre is 4.4% of the total adult users (7129) of Children's Centres in 2012/13.
- 4.4 Summary of responses to the consultation:

Do you agree with the principle of reducing building costs? (394)	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Yes	220	55.84%
No	174	44.16%

Do you agree with the proposal to make no changes to the Cambridge Road, Centre Place and Summercourt Children's Centre shared budget? (368)	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Yes	306	83.15%
No	62	16.85%
Do you agree with the proposal to merge Friars and Shoebury Children's Centres? (362)	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Yes	214	59.12%
No	148	40.88%

Do you agree with the proposal to merge Blenheim and Leigh Children's Centres? (338)	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Yes	185	54.73%
No	153	45.27%

Do you agree with the proposal to merge Temple Sutton and Hamstel Centres? (331)	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Yes	170	51.36%
No	161	48.64%

Do you agree with the proposal to make no changes to Prince Avenue Children's Centres? (321)	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Yes	287	89.41%
No	34	10.59%

Do you agree with the proposal to make no changes to Sunnydays Children's Centre? (319)	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Yes	282	88.4%
No	37	11.6%

4.5 The most frequent themes arising in the freestyle comments section of the consultation are:

- Not to close any Children's Centres (59 respondents).
- To make the saving through income generation (62 respondents).
- To save money on other Council expenditure instead – some examples given were Bins, Beaches, City Bids, salaries and expenses (85 respondents).
- Concern about the size of the areas that will be covered by the merged centres (135 respondents).
- The benefits of Leigh being health-led should be retained (10 respondents).
- It would be better to keep Hamstel instead of Temple Sutton Children's Centre (22).

4.6 In the five face-to-face consultation events, it was evident that parents are all very supportive of the Children's Centre they use. There was also a strong view that restructuring the Children's Centre provision each year causes some anxiety and that users would like a period of stability. The themes emerging in the face-to-face meeting were broadly the same as in the written consultation.

4.7 The full findings of the consultation are attached as **Appendix 1**.

4.8 The parents using Hamstel Children's Centre also collected a 439 signature petition supporting the following:

"We, the undersigned, petition Southend Borough Council not to carry out the proposed merger of Hamstel Children's and Temple Sutton Children's Centre and to keep Hamstel Children and Families Centre open, maintaining its current level of funding."

The cover sheet of the petition is attached as **Appendix 2**.

4.9 Member consultation, scrutiny or involvement comprised the following:

- The commitment to a saving of £224k from the Children's Centres was agreed as part of the formal budget setting process for the 2013/14 budget.
- An All Member Briefing was held on 26th March 2013, attended by 12 Members.
- The Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee considered a report on 8th April 2013 regarding the review process. The Committee noted the timeline and the opportunities for Members to participate in the review process.
- Some Members attended the face-to-face sessions at the Children's Centres.
- Some Members asked for individual discussions with senior officers on the proposals.
- Some Members have arranged visits to individual Children's Centres.
- The Executive Councillor for Children and Learning and senior officers met with the Group Spokespersons on 23rd May 2013.
- An all Member Briefing was held on 29th May 2013 and was attended by 31 Members.
- The following information was sent to all Members as part of the process:
 - A copy of the presentation to the Member workshop on 26 March 2013.
 - A table showing usage across all Children's Centres.
 - The process for the public consultation.
 - The Consultation document.
 - The Consultation questions.

- A snapshot of activity in each children centre.
- The data on children under 5 with child protection plans by Children's Centre areas.
- Costs of the consultation.
- Information about comparative levels of outreach between Temple Sutton and Hamstel

4.10 The key issues raised by Members at the all Member Briefing on 29th May 2013 were:-:

- Concern about any reduction in the Children's Centre budget.
- Concern about the reduction of Children's Centres provision in the Hamstel and Temple Sutton reach areas.
- Concern about the proposal to merge Hamstel and Temple Sutton at the Temple Sutton site, specifically in terms of space and accessibility.
- Strong views that the plans for Hamstel and Temple Sutton need more consultation with Members and the public.
- Concern about the size of the reach areas of a merged Leigh and Blenheim Children's Centre and a request for more information about potential additional venues for delivery.
- Reassurance is needed that some of the good work happening in the Centres, especially Blenheim, will not be lost in the mergers.
- The need to sustain health input in the centres.

4.11 These key issues were also raised by Members in individual conversations and at the meeting with group spokespersons on 23rd May 2013

4.12 As part of the consultation process discussions with the Department for Education have led to the following initial response on the proposals.

The proposal to decrease the Children's Centre services at these three centres in favour of increasing 2 year old places is unlikely to incur claw back as the conditions of the original grant would still be met by the delivery of 2 year old places. A formal decision on claw back could not be given until after the consultation and the decision to make the changes has been agreed. At that time new pro-formas will be required to confirm the changes.

5. Proposals

5.1 A full and careful assessment has been undertaken on the proposed redesign of Children's Centres provision taking account of all material considerations, including the responses received in the consultation exercise set out in section 4.

5.2 In terms of the Leigh and Blenheim Children's Centres it is recommended that these are merged into a single Children's Centre at the Blenheim site.

5.3 In terms of the Friars and Shoebury Children's Centres it is recommended that these are merged into a single Children's Centre at the Friars site.

5.4 In terms of the Hamstel and Temple Sutton Children's Centres it is considered necessary to undertake a further round of public consultation before a

recommendation can be made and for further consideration at the People Scrutiny Committee. This approach has been agreed by the four Group Leaders and authorised by S046 action.

The further consultation will commence on 14th June 2013 and once completed a further report will come back to Cabinet in September 2013.

5.5 In terms of the other Children's Centres there is no case to make any changes at this time.

5.6 Further details of the reasons for these proposals are set out in Section 7.

6. Other Options

6.1 The option to make no savings from the Children's Centre budget has previously been considered in the approval of the Council's 2013/14 budget and a saving of 224k in 2013-15 has already been set.

6.2 The option to keep all the Children's Centres and apportion the savings across them all has been considered. However this would make each Children's Centre's budget insufficient to deliver the required service offer and put them at risk of failing Ofsted inspections.

6.3 The option to find the saving by setting a required income target for the Children's Centres was considered. Whilst all Centres do ask for voluntary contributions and seek to fund raise in a variety of ways, the income from this will not underwrite the savings. Means testing for services may deter some of our most vulnerable families from accessing the service.

6.3 The option to implement all the proposals in the consultation document was considered. However given the level of concern raised by users and Members there is a need for further consideration in relation to future delivery in the Hamstel/Temple Sutton areas before a firm recommendation can be made.

7. Reasons for Recommendations

7.1 Merging Children's Centres with the consequent savings on premises and management costs is the most effective way to make the savings required and minimise service reduction.

7.2 Slightly more respondents support the merger of Friars and Shoebury Children's Centres than oppose in the on-line consultation. The Shoebury building can be more easily reused to expand funded 2- year old child care places and so meet an alternative need and prevent the risk of capital claw back. It will also be possible to continue to host some Children's Centre provision. The two current Centres already have one management and an integrated offer.

7.3 Slightly more respondents support the merger of Leigh and Blenheim Children's Centres than oppose it in the on-line consultation. The space vacated at Darlington School can be used to house the nursery provision and assist in freeing up space in the school for additional primary places which is a significant issue for the Council to address. This will also prevent the risk of capital claw back. The size of the reach areas for the merged Centres is of concern and this will be mitigated by providing services from satellite locations in the Leigh area.

We are currently in discussion with Leigh Community Centre, Leigh Road Baptist Church and Highlands Church. The merged Centre will be required to develop a new integrated offer to ensure that existing valued services are continued and that outreach services are expanded. Further work will be undertaken with the current providers to identify who the formal commissioned provider of the merged Centre should be.

7.4 Whilst a few more respondents support the merger than oppose it in the on-line consultation, there has been significant concern about the proposed merger of Temple Sutton and Hamstel from the user meetings, the petition and from Members. It is therefore recommended that further public consultation takes place before a decision is taken.

7.5 There is no case to make changes to other Children's Centres at this point.

8. Corporate Implications

8.1 Contribution to Council's Vision & Corporate Priorities

Children's Centre provision will continue to be available across the Borough in line with the corporate priorities of continuing to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and delivering targeted services that meet the identified need of the community.

8.2 Financial Implications

The proposals in this report will deliver the 55k savings required for 2013/14 and a further £114k in 2014/15. A further report in September 2013 will bring recommendations as to how to deliver the remaining £65k.

8.3 Legal Implications

The Childcare Act 2006 and supporting Sure Start Children's Centre statutory guidance require Local Authorities to ensure there are sufficient Children's Centres to meet local need. The Act also requires Local Authorities to consult on any changes to Children's Centre provision.

8.4 People Implications

There are no direct implications for Southend-on-Sea Borough Council staff as these services are commissioned. However there may be changes of role or possible redundancies in the provider services.

8.5 Property Implications

The buildings identified in the proposals would continue to be used for early year's provision.

8.6 Consultation

See section 4.1 to 4.12 above

8.7 Equalities and Diversity Implications

Children's Centres are required to target services for defined vulnerable groups including families from low income households. The impact of these changes has been considered and it assessed that there will not be disproportionate impact in relation to race and disability. The specialist services for disabled children and their families delivered through Sunnydays Children's Centre remain unchanged. Some parents, mainly women, will have the Children's Centre base further from home. Additional outreach services and satellite bases will be put in place to mitigate this impact. The performance of Children's Centres in reaching families from our most deprived areas will continue to be reported to Members in the monthly performance report.

8.8 Risk Assessment

These mergers, whilst reducing the number of formal Centres, will still meet our statutory requirements and mitigate the risk of poor Ofsted outcomes. They also minimise the risk of being required to return any past Children's Centre capital allocation. There is a risk that some vulnerable users will find it more difficult to access a Children's Centre base and this will be mitigated through outreach and satellite delivery points.

8.9 Value for Money

The recommendations achieve best value for the resources available by managing the savings as far as possible through infrastructure efficiencies and management efficiencies.

8.10 Community Safety Implications

None

8.11 Environmental Impact

None

9. Background Papers

None

10. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Consultation response document
Appendix 2 – Covering pages of petitions