

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

**Report of Corporate Director for People
to
Cabinet
on
17th September 2013**

**Agenda
Item No.**

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Children's Centre Provision

People Scrutiny Committee – Executive Councillor: Cllr. James Courtenay

Part 1 Public Agenda Item

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1** To present the outcome of the second public consultation on the proposed changes to Hamstel and Temple Sutton Children's Centres and make recommendations for the future provision.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1** That the Temple Sutton and Hamstel Children's Centres are merged into one children's centre with the main base on the Temple Sutton site.
- 2.2** That the services are co-ordinated from the Temple Sutton site utilising other satellite sites including the St Lukes Centre and Hamstel schools.
- 2.3** That Officers continue to support the development of a provider partnership model for the new children's centre provision.
- 2.4** That the provider partnership develops a plan to deliver the 2015/16 element of the savings that seeks to minimise the impact on service delivery.
- 2.5** That the savings are re-profiled to deliver £20k in 2014/15 and £44.5k in 2015/16.

3. Background

- 3.1** The approved 2013/14 Council budget requires a saving of £224k over 2 years from the children's centre budget. The original full proposal would have delivered £55k in 2013/14 and £169k in 2014/15 with £64.5k of a saving resulting from the Hamstel and Temple Sutton merger.
- 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 in February 2013 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 workshop on 26th March 2013.
- 3.5 The proposals then went out to public consultation. The consultation closed on 5th May 2013.
- 3.6 The Executive Councillor for Children and Learning, in consultation with the four group leaders, authorised a SO46 action to undertake a second consultation specifically in relation to the proposals for Hamstel and Temple Sutton Children's Centres seeking further views on which of the two buildings should be retained in any merger of the two centres.
- 3.7 The full findings from the first public consultation were presented to Cabinet on 18th June 2013. Cabinet resolved:-

"That the Leigh and Blenheim Children's Centres are merged into one children's centre based at the Blenheim site with services being provided from satellite locations, to be determined, in the Leigh area.

That the Friars and Shoebury Children's Centres are merged into one children's centre based at the Friars site with the Shoebury Centre providing services as a satellite centre.

That it be noted that further consultation will be undertaken on the possible merger of the Hamstel and Temple Sutton Children's Centres.

That it be noted that no changes are recommended to any other children's centre."

- 3.8 The matter was called in to the People Scrutiny Committee and the committee resolved:-

"That the matter be referred back to Cabinet for reconsideration."

- 3.9 This paper relates only to the original proposal for the merger of Temple Sutton and Hamstel Children's Centres and the second consultation in relation to this proposal.
- 3.10 The second consultation opened on 18th June 2013 and closed on the 23rd July 2013. The consultation asked respondents to select one of two options.
- 3.10.1 **Option A:** The Temple Sutton Children's Centre is retained and Children's Centre services would be co-ordinated by Temple Sutton School (as the lead body for the children's centre) and would be delivered from a range of venues in addition to the Temple Sutton Children's Centre building. These would include the St Luke's Centre, Hamstel Infant School and Whittingham Church Hall. The Hamstel Children's Centre building would be used to house the school's early year's provision which would allow the school to provide class room space within the school for the increasing numbers of local children going to Hamstel Infant school.
- 3.10.2 **Option B:** The Hamstel Children's Centre is retained and children's centre services would be co-ordinated by South Essex Partnership Trust - SEPT (as the lead body for the children's centre) and would be delivered from a range of venues in addition to the Hamstel Children's Centre building. These would include the St Luke's Centre, St Edmonds Church Hall and Whittingham Church Hall. The Temple Sutton Children's Centre building could be used to increase childcare places.

- 3.11 There was a slight change to the descriptions of the alternate usage of the Hamstel building in option A and the alternate delivery venues in option B in the first week of the consultation period. Legal advice confirmed this would not alter the validity of the consultation as the consultation was seeking views on what building should be retained and not on the supporting details.

4. Consultation responses

- 4.1 In total 592 people accessed the consultation, of which 466 made a selection from options A and B.
- 4.2 Just under half of the respondents stated they were parents or guardians currently using children's centres. 11% stated they were parents or guardians currently not using children's centres and 23% stated they were a Southend on Sea resident.
- 4.3 Of the respondents that stated they are current users of children's centres, 76% stated they use the centres weekly. The vast majority of respondents were users of Hamstel or Temple Sutton Children's Centres.
- 4.4 The responses to the consultation:

All respondents	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
I prefer option A (retaining Temple Sutton)	285	61.16%
I prefer option B (retaining Hamstel)	181	38.84%

Parents or guardians currently using children's centres only Option A or B	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
I prefer option A (retaining Temple Sutton)	133	52.17%
I prefer option B (retaining Hamstel)	122	47.84%

Parents or guardians not currently using children's centres only Option A or B	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
I prefer option A (retaining Temple Sutton)	40	80%
I prefer option B (retaining Hamstel)	10	20%

Other Southend on Sea residents only Option A or B	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
I prefer option A (retaining Temple Sutton)	80	74.77%
I prefer option B (retaining Hamstel)	27	25.23%

- 4.5 The table below show the ward in which respondents live.

Ward	I prefer Option A	I prefer option B
Belfairs	1	3
Blenheim Park	1	2
Chalkwell	1	3
Eastwood Park	2	20

Kursaal	13	2
Milton	5	6
Prittlewell	5	2
Shoeburyness	8	3
Southchurch	29	28
St Laurence	5	2
St. Luke's	77	36
Thorpe	8	18
Victoria	18	15
West Leigh	1	1
West Shoebury	7	2
Westborough	5	1

- 4.6 In addition to selecting their preferred option, respondents were asked what services they would like to see maintained in a merged centre. This information will be used by children's centre managers to assist in their planning of services. Baby clinics/baby weighing and keeping all services was a theme from users of both centres. Users of Hamstel Children's Centre also expressed views to ensure breastfeeding and midwifery services are retained. Users of Temple Sutton Children's Centre also expressed views to ensure MOTO (support groups for single mothers) and other parenting support services are retained. The full consultation outturn report is attached as appendix 1.
- 4.7 In addition to the online consultation, a face to face meeting for families using the Children's Centres was held in each of Hamstel and Temple Sutton Centres on 16th July 2013. Parents were given the opportunity to include any comments they had in their own words in addition to the online form. These are included as appendix 2.
- 4.8 Temple Sutton Children's Centre collected 2440 signatures on the following petition:
- `The local authority is going out to further consultation with the provision of Children's Centres in Southend-on-Sea, which may result in the closure of our Children's Centre which is used by many families in the area.
Please sign below if you wish to register your support to keep our `outstanding` Children's Centre open.`*
- 4.9 The school also provided 295 letters written by children from years 1 through to 6 in support of the Temple Sutton Children's Centre.
- 4.10 Hamstel Children's Centre collected 350 signatures on the following petition:
- `We, the undersigned, petition Southend Borough Council to keep Hamstel Children and Families Centre open, maintaining its current level of funding.`*
- 4.11 We received as their consultation response a joint proposal from the Head Teachers of Hamstel Infant School and Nursery, Hamstel Junior School and Temple Sutton Primary School. This is attached as appendix 4. This proposes delivering children centre services from the Temple Sutton Primary School site, using the St. Luke's Centre for health services and using the facilities at the Hamstel Schools site to accommodate the future additional pupils but also accommodating some children's centre services.

- 4.12 Early discussions have taken place with providers to look at a partnership delivery model (suggested by providers) across the areas currently covered by the 4 Children's Centres (Blenheim, Leigh, and Hamstel & Temple Sutton). This would see three providers (Blenheim Primary School, Temple Sutton Primary School and South Essex Partnership Trust (SEPT)) working together across two merged Children's Centre areas in a partnership model that would retain the expertise and added value brought by each provider and enable the delivery of an integrated children's centre service. The detailed proposals of the Head Teachers are being taken forward in these discussions.
- 4.13 The findings of the public consultation were presented to the People Scrutiny Committee as a pre-cabinet scrutiny item on 2nd September 2013. Members expressed a range of views which can broadly be grouped into the following themes:
- There was a strong view from several Members that no saving should be applied to the children's centre Budget.
 - A suggestion was made that an alternate saving could be achieved through reduced borrowing costs.
 - Some Members expressed a view that making this saving to children's centres would have longer term cost implications for more complex or acute services.
 - Some members also expressed a view that some vulnerable families either be unable to, or may choose not to, continue to access the services they do now.
 - Members also had a view that there should be more detail on how services would be planned and co-ordinated using satellite buildings and how the proposals of the Head Teachers was being taken forward.

5. Officers recommendations to Cabinet

- 5.1 That the merger of Hamstel and Temple Sutton Children's Centres goes ahead, retaining the Temple Sutton building as the main centre site
- 5.2 That the services are co-ordinated from the Temple Sutton site utilising other satellite sites, including the St Lukes Centre and the Hamstel school site. The centre manager will plan which services are delivered through which venues in the area to best meet the needs of children and families, in consultation with users.
- 5.3 That we continue to support discussions with the providers in developing a partnership in the same way that the Council has with the partnership in the south centre of the town (Centre Place, Summercourt and Cambridge Road).
- 5.4 That the savings are re-profiled to deliver £20k in 2014/15 and £44.5k in 2015/16.
- 5.5 That the provider partnership develops a work plan to deliver the 2015/16 element of the savings that seeks to minimise the impact on service delivery.

6. Other Options

- 6.1 The option to make no savings from the children's centre budget was considered in the approval of the Council's 2013/14 budget and a saving of 224k in 2013-15 been set. It was further considered at Cabinet in June 2013.
- 6.2 The option to apportion the savings across the two centres 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 Members in the Pre-Cabinet Scrutiny meeting the recommendation progresses the merger over an incremental period to give more time for the detail of the partnership model and the service re-design to be finalised.

7. Reasons for Recommendation

- 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 The partnership model gives the best possibility of minimising the impact on services of the required saving.
- 7.2 A longer implementation period will allow time for more detailed work on establishing the provider partnership and for a new delivery model to be established before the full savings need to be delivered.
- 7.3 We have consulted with the S151 Officer who confirms that the development of a robust, sustainable budget requires that financial savings are based on similarly robust service delivery plans. Undefined savings or fortuitous temporary underspends are not a robust basis on which to build a sustainable budget going forward; unless and until such time that they crystallize into a permanent service change. The proposal to continue to deliver the planned savings, albeit over a slightly extended timescale, is still robust. The temporary shortfall in achievable savings can be bridged by use of the business transformation earmarked reserve, which amongst other things is held to fund the temporary costs of transition for the Council to a lower sustainable cost base going forward.

8. Corporate Implications

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.

Financial Implications

This revised proposal will still deliver the planned £64.5k savings from the merging of Hamstel and Temple Sutton Children's Centres. However the delivery of the savings will be delayed. Instead of a saving of £16.125k in 2013/14 and £48.375k in 2014/15, the saving will be £20k in 2014/15 and £44.5k in 2015/16. The delayed saving of £16.125k in the current year and £44.5k in 2014/15 can be bridged by the use of the Business Transformation Reserve

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

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 as they review staff levels affordable within the reduced budget.

Property Implications

The buildings identified in the proposals would continue to be used for early years provision as required by the Department for Education.

Consultation

See 4. above

Equalities and Diversity Implications

Children's centres are required to target services for defined vulnerable groups including families from low income households. All children's centres collect data on families accessing the centre to ensure they are engaging with the diverse populations within their reach areas. An equality analysis has been undertaken on the proposed changes. The main impact identified in the analysis is the possibility some centre users may need to travel further to access some particulate elements of services. The action identified to mitigate this is to ensure all children's centre managers work collectively in planning the services across the children's centre network to best meet the needs of children and families.

Risk Assessment

This merger will militate against the risk to poor Ofsted outcomes that would be the likely result of a straight reduction in each centres budget and avoids any risk of being required to return any past children centre capital allocation through continued use of the buildings for early year's services.

There is also a risk that due to greater distances or changes in the way services are delivered, some families may be unable or may choose to no longer access the services they need. Retaining all current providers in a partnership model will work towards mitigating this. Centres will continue to be set targets and will be inspected by Ofsted against how well they are reaching the most vulnerable families and we will implement a system to identify if current users cease to use services and follow them up.

Value for Money

The recommendations achieve best value for the resources available by managing the reduction through infrastructure efficiencies and collaborative working.

Community Safety Implications

None

Environmental Impact

None

7. Background Papers

Cabinet Paper 16th June 2013 Children's Centre Provision

8. Appendices

- 8.1 Appendix 1 – Consultation response document
- 8.2 Appendix 2 – Additional views of centre users
- 8.3 Appendix 3 – Covering pages of petitions
- 8.4 Appendix 4 – Joint proposal from Headteachers