

CABINET	AGENDA ITEM No. 4
18 November 2013	PUBLIC REPORT

Cabinet Member(s) responsible:	<i>Cllr Sheila Scott OBE – Cabinet Member for Children’s Services</i>		
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EARLY YEARS’ SERVICE, INCLUDING CHILDREN’S CENTRES

R E C O M M E N D A T I O N S	
FROM : Cabinet Member for Children’s Services	Deadline date : N/A
<p>It is recommended that Cabinet:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Approve the proposals to begin consultation on the proposed changes to early years services including the consultation document ‘New Vision for Early Years Services Including Children’s Centres’; and (2) Cabinet agrees to receive a further report on the outcome of the consultation prior to making any decision on the delivery of the early years service including children’s centres. 	

1. ORIGIN OF REPORT

1.1 This report is submitted to Cabinet to seek its approval to go out to public consultation on a set of proposals on how early years services are provided in the future including children’s centres. It follows a review of the early years services provided by Peterborough City Council and other organisations following changes to Central Government policy on how it funds services and supports families with children aged from birth to five-years-old.

2. PURPOSE AND REASON FOR REPORT

2.1 The purpose of this report is to outline to Cabinet the key changes that are proposed within the consultation document ‘New Vision for Early Years Services including Children’s Centres’ and how the council is proposing to consult with the public and key stakeholders and to ask for the Cabinet’s approval to go out to consultation on these proposals.

2.2 This report is for Cabinet to consider under its authority to collectively deliver all strategic executive functions and lead the Council’s overall improvement programmes to deliver excellent services (*paragraph 3.2.1 part 3 section 3 Constitution*) and to take a leading role in promoting the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area (*paragraph 3.2.3 part 3 section 3 Constitution*)

3. TIMESCALE (*If this is not a Major Policy item, answer NO and delete second line of boxes*).

Is this a Major Policy Item/Statutory Plan?	NO	If Yes, date for relevant Cabinet Meeting	
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4. STRATEGY OF CHILDREN’S CENTRES DELIVERY

4.1 The first children’s centres were opened in Peterborough in 2002 with the aim of helping families in more deprived areas to give their children the best start in life.

Over the past decade a total of 15 centres have opened across the city, offering a range of services from toy libraries to parenting classes, information on health issues and healthy eating to helping parents get into work, education or training.

The centres have played a vital role in delivering effective early childhood services to families and young children, bringing together key services such as child care, health visiting, midwifery, employment and adult learning into one place.

However since the first children's centres opened, Government policy on early year's services has changed dramatically. The Government no longer gives the council a specific pot of money to pay for children's centres, nor provides any funding for new ones. However the Government has introduced a large number of new programmes to support parents with free childcare provision, by doubling the number of health visitors in Peterborough and through other targeted programmes outlined below.

- Funding to support 15 hours free child care for two year olds in low income families (this is to be extended next year);
- Funding to support 15 hours free child care for all three and four year olds;
- Family Nurse Partnership delivering a home visiting programme for first time mothers under the age of nineteen (and dads);
- Public Health Healthy Child Programme for children, young people and families, which focuses on early intervention and prevention. It offers a programme of screening tests, immunisations, developmental reviews, information and guidance on parenting and healthy choices. It aims to identify families who need additional support or who are at risk of poor health outcomes;
- More funding directly to schools to provide before and after school activities for children;
- More funding for health visitors to support new parents (in Peterborough the number of health visitors is doubling);
- More funding for work with families who have lots of difficulties they need help with, in Peterborough our programme of work is called Connecting Families.

Alongside these service changes, in the five years to 2015/16, the Council will see a reduction in the funding we receive from Central Government of some £38m, over 46% of our grant funding. . This means that we have to look at all the services we provide to see how we can do things differently to ensure the services we are responsible for providing are having the biggest impact on improving the lives of children and families in Peterborough.

Therefore, in light of the changes in Government policy and funding and programmes for young children we have reviewed the services that all of our children's centres provide, and are proposing to consult the public on how we want to change the way they operate in the future.

Public views on these proposals are essential so we can be confident that we are moving forward in the best possible way, whilst recognising the very different and difficult financial climate we now face.

We are committed to making sure that there are a range of services that support children to have the best start in life, these includes:

- Helping children be prepared and ready for starting school;
- Offering support for parents to improve their ability to meet their parental responsibilities;
- Providing parents with opportunities to develop personal skills, access education and improve their ability to get work;
- Encouraging children and their families to develop healthy lifestyles, in order to enable children to meet their full potential and reduce health inequalities;

- Improving parent's abilities to keep their children safe.

The consultation paper outlines three key proposals which, if approved and implemented, will enable us to deliver much more targeted services to those in the greatest need of support and complementing the other newly funded services and programmes in the City.

4.2 We are seeking agreement to engage in a public consultation on the following package of proposals:-

Proposal 1: to work with partner agencies, such as health, police and housing to create a network of Super Centre Hubs across the city to serve the most deprived areas. Super Centre Hubs will offer a wider range of services to a much larger catchment area than currently provided by the existing children's centre on that site. This will enable the council to offer a collaborative approach to the delivery of services, which will in turn reduce the duplication of services and administrative functions by different agencies, as well as provide more seamless joined up services to children and families.

Proposal 2: to use some of the existing children's centres as outreach bases, these will not be open all the time and would be used for specific group work or individual targeted programmes.

Proposal 3: to change the use of or- 're-designate' the remaining centres which are serving communities where there is less need (i.e. those in areas which are less deprived). This could mean using children's centre buildings to expand schools to increase the number of school places or it could mean awarding buildings to local childcare providers to increase the number of nursery and pre-school places available.

By taking this approach we will be able to secure effective early years services for the most vulnerable children and families within the most deprived areas in Peterborough. In addition, through the creation of Super Centre Hubs we will be able to work with a range of partners both statutory agencies such as health and the police and charity and not-for-profit organisations to offer a one-stop-shop for families by bringing services together under one roof.

This in turn will reduce duplication of activity and children and families will experience more seamless service delivery. These Super Centre Hub teams will predominantly work within the given reach areas of the Super Centre but will also have the flexibility to move to other areas where additional need might be identified.

5. CONSULTATION

We have organised three public consultation events – one in each of the three localities – north, west and rural, central and east and south - as outlined in the consultation paper. There will be two sessions in each venue, one in the afternoon and one in the evening to ensure working and non-working parents can attend if they want to.

People can also take part in the consultation via the council's website and paper copies will be available from the Town Hall Reception, Bridge Street, Peterborough, the Customer Service Centre at Bayard Place, Broadway, Peterborough, at the children's centres and through GP surgeries. Copies will also be made available through pre-schools and schools.

There is also a dedicated email address childrenscentres@peterborough.gov.uk where people can send their comments.

We will also be consulting with partner organisations including, health, housing and the police as well as the Parent Adviser Groups in Children's Centres.

We will be also offering ward and parish councillors one-to-one meetings to discuss the proposals.

6. ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES

Once the consultation is over and all the responses have been considered and any amendments made, proposals will go to Cabinet for approval.

7. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendation to consult on the proposals will ensure that we provide our residents with the opportunity to comment on the proposals, which may in turn result in us amending these prior to Cabinet on January 20 2014.

8. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

The alternative option is to do nothing. This was rejected because the council needs to ensure the services it provides are delivering value-for-money and the review found that current provision is not targeted to those in the greatest need but are more universal services that are open to all families across the city. The proposals outlined would also enable the council to deliver more cost effective services while ensuring that vulnerable families have access to services they need for themselves and their children aged up to five-years-old.

9. IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Financial – The proposals outlined will enable the council to deliver more cost effective services while ensuring that vulnerable families have access to services they need for themselves and their children aged up to five-years-old. It is currently estimated that the proposals would save £1.2m per year. This level will need to be refined depending on consultation feedback and the final proposals considered by Cabinet, as well meeting any costs of delivering the changes.

9.2 Legal - Children's Centres are provided under section 5A Childcare Act 2006. The Council provides sufficient childcare to meet local need. What is deemed to be sufficient to meet local need is dependent upon a number of factors including the resources available to the Council. In approving these recommendations the Council is consulting on an alternative means of meeting current early years need.

Duty to consult: Under section 5D of the Childcare Act 2006 the City Council must consult before making any changes to the services provided through existing children's centres. The consultation document must set out clearly what the proposals are and must be for a reasonable period. A 6 week consultation period is broadly in line with other Councils' consultation on similar proposals. Consultation is not a negotiation or an issues paper but a process within which the City Council at a formative stage in the decision-making process, invites representations on one or more possible courses of action. The decision being asked of the Cabinet is to begin consultation, the outcome of which is to be considered by Cabinet following closure of the consultation to decide if these proposals meet the Council's statutory responsibilities.

Equality Impact Assessment: Peterborough City Council must consider and comply with the Equality Act 2010, and when making decisions of a strategic nature about how it exercises its functions and must have due regard to the desirability of exercising its functions in a way that is designed to reduce the inequalities of outcomes. The Council has considered the possible impact of the proposals as set out in the consultation document and has carried out an Equality Impact Assessment which has provided an analysis of all the potential effects and possible impacts on the relevant community. The conclusions of the Equality Impact Assessment has led to the proposed consultation. The Council is therefore seeking

to ensure that it complies with the Act. Equality issues will also be considered prior to a final decision being taken.

The Council operates the Children's Centres through contracts and leases with various providers. Two contracts are held externally by Spurgeons (North West and Rural Locality and South Locality) and one is held by Barnardos (Central Locality). These contracts are financed by non-ring fenced external grants. These providers will be consulted as part of the process. There are a further three internal agreements for services operated by staff who will also be consulted on the proposals. Any impacts upon persons arising out of these proposals can be addressed once the outcome of the consultation is known.

10. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Consultation Documents

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