

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1.	Meeting:	Cabinet
2.	Date:	18th June 2014
3.	Title:	Early Years and Child Care Services including Children Centres – Consultation Feedback report
4.	Directorate:	CYPS

5. Summary

Cabinet on the 15th January 2014 approved a request to complete a statutory public consultation in relation to proposed changes to Rotherham’s 22 designated Children’s Centres. The proposals were to:

- Close 13 designated Children’s Centre buildings with a reduction to 9 Children’s Centre buildings across the Borough.
- The remaining 9 Children’s Centre buildings to be clustered to form 7 designated registered Children Centres across the Borough with an increased size of reach areas.
- The creation of a Foundation Years service across health, social care and education services.

The purpose of this report is to inform Cabinet of the outcomes from the statutory public consultation, which took place between 3rd Feb and 30th April 2014. The proposal would enable the Council to realise savings of £2.2 million in order to achieve the required Early Years and Child Care services revenue reductions (including Children Centres). The original budget for the Children’s Centres in 2011/12 was £5.045m. The removal of the Early Intervention Grant in June 2010 followed by a series of reductions in Central Government funding, has resulted in the Children’s Centre budget being reduced . The budget for Children’s Centre from April 2015/16 will be £2,025,474. This led to the proposals submitted to Cabinet on January 15th 2014 and detailed in this Cabinet paper.

6. Recommendations

Cabinet is asked to consider the following options in light of the recent public consultations and identify which option should be taken forward:-

Option 1

Accept the original proposal of retaining the 9 identified Children Centre buildings, and closing the remaining 13 identified Children Centre buildings.

This would be within the budget of 2.025m

OR

Option 2

To retain 3 additional Children Centre buildings in addition to the original proposal. These are Wath Victoria Children's Centre (Wentworth North); Dinnington Children's Centre (Rother Valley South) and Park View Children's Centre (Rotherham North)

The cost of retaining these 3 additional centre buildings and services will be £350K.

Children and families will receive an outreach service, which will continue to be delivered in their local communities, whichever option is agreed

7. Proposals and Details

Background

The Local Authority has a statutory duty (Childcare Act 2006) to ensure that sufficient Children's Centres are readily accessible to those most in need. Rotherham has 22 designated Sure Start Children Centres across the Borough. On 15th January 2014 Rotherham Borough Council gave approval for a public consultation to be undertaken on future proposals for Children's Centres in order to achieve a required budget reduction of £2.2m for the period 2014-16.

The proposals were:

- Closure of 13 registered Children's Centre buildings with a reduction to 9 Children's Centre buildings across the borough.
- These 9 Children's Centre buildings are then clustered to form 7 registered Children's Centres across the borough with an increased size of reach areas.
- The creation of a foundation years service across health, social care and education services.

Rationale used to underpin proposals

The Local Authority has a statutory duty to ensure that sufficient children's centres are readily accessible to those most in need. The GP data (as of 31st March 2013*) showing the number of children under five living in the most disadvantaged 30% super output areas (SOAs), (index of multiple deprivation 2010**), which was used to determine which Children's Centre buildings would be proposed to stay open and which would be proposed to close or given an alternative early years usage.

It is proposed to keep open the Children Centre buildings where there are more than 400 vulnerable children under 5 years of age living in the most disadvantaged areas. When evaluated, this equates to having 7 Children Centre areas (incorporating 9 buildings) across the Borough. It is proposed to extend the reach area of the Centres remaining open and to provide outreach services in those areas that do not have ready access to a main children's centre building. Outreach Services are delivered in other buildings within the local communities.

Children's Centre Buildings Proposed to Stay Open

Children's Centre	Number of children under 5* as at 31.3.13 in 30% SOA's**
Arnold Children's Centre	597
Aughton Early Years Centre	411
Coleridge Children's Centre	970
Maltby Stepping Stones	727
Rawmarsh Children's Centre	888
Rotherham Central	725
Swinton Brookfield Children's Centre	636
Thrybergh Dalton Children's Centre	610
Valley Children's Centre	524

Children's Centre Buildings proposed to Close/Alternative Usage Options

Children's Centre	Number of children under 5* as at 31.3.13 in 30% SOA's**
Cortonwood Children's Centre	211
Dinnington Children's Centre	352
Kimberworth Children's Centre	308
Marcliff Children's Centre	0
Meadows Children's Centre	206
Park View Children's Centre	345
Rockingham Children's Centre	261
Ryton Brook Children's Centre	67
Silver Birch Children's Centre	138
Sue Walker Children's Centre	0
Thorpe Hesley Children's Centre	0
Thurcroft Children's Centre	189
Wath Victoria Children's Centre	374

*Number of children under 5 years of age based on GP data as of the 31st March 2013

** Most disadvantaged 30% SOA areas as measured by the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2010(IMD)

Please note in the table above, Marcliffe, Thorpe Hesley and Sue Walker Children's Centres show zero children living in the 30% SOA. Please note that in these areas children under 5 accessing the centre are from outside of the 30% SOA areas.

Creation of a Foundation Years Service

It is proposed to create a Foundation Years Service with Children Centres working together with health partners, social care, voluntary sector, parents, schools and early education and child care providers, to continue to deliver services in local communities, which improves outcomes for all children under 5 and their families, particularly those in need of support. All partners will continue to deliver services for children aged 0-5 and their families within local communities. For example:

- Ante natal and post natal services
- Healthy Child Programme
- Free Early Education for 3 and 4 year olds
- Free early education for the vulnerable 2 year old

Outreach workers will continue to deliver services in those communities where buildings are proposed to close by using alternative venues and working in partnership with other service providers.

Consultation

Following Cabinet approval to consult on the proposals for Children's Centres, a Borough-wide public consultation exercise with parents, carers, the community and stakeholders was undertaken. The consultation was launched on the 3rd February 2014 and concluded on the 30th April 2014. Fourteen formal public consultation meetings were completed across the Borough, within this period of time. Views and comments at these meetings were received from a range of attendees. These included parents and children, members of the public and local community, staff, child care providers, unions, Headteachers, councillors; and other organisations.

In addition to the 14 public consultation meetings, people could access and complete the online questionnaire survey on the RMBC website. Completed hard copies of the questionnaire survey were also received, as well as comments via email and formal letters, reports and a powerpoint presentation. Three petitions against the closures of Children's Centres were received from 3 Children's Centres. People made their views known in person at a Children's Centre of their own choice. Press releases were issued and media interviews also took place. Articles were also published in a range of stakeholder newsletters in order to maximise publicity of the consultation and the proposals

As well as the 14 public consultation meetings, meetings were held with union representatives; Children Centre leaders; Children Centre executive Headteachers; chairs and vice chairs of school governing bodies; Children Centre lead teachers; Learning Community representatives; Health partners; Parish Councillors; RMBC Deprived Communities Team and school Effectiveness service.

A total of 1746 people responded to the on line consultation survey questionnaire. The majority of responses were from parents or carers (81.6%) and 82% are using a Children's Centre at least once a week. In addition 23 emails were also received and 5 letters.

One hundred and eighty six respondents said they would be willing to take on a centre building proposed to close, and deliver either childcare provision and/or Foundation Years services. One hundred and forty two respondents said they would be willing to take on childcare provision in a centre building proposed to close. However, it is important to note that only 101 of all respondents left contact details. In addition we received 31 emails/letters also expressing an interest in taking on a Children's Centre building and/or day care provision. Expressions of interest were made by a range of individuals, staff; schools and organisations expressing an initial interest in taking on a Children Centre buildings. A formal application process will be followed from the 1st July 2014.

Next steps – Expression of interest received to take over a Children's Centre building proposed to close

Depending on which option is agreed to go forward, the Council will directly provide funding for either 9 to 12 Centre buildings. The opportunity for other providers to take on the remaining 13 or 10 Children's Centre buildings will be explored as a

priority. **(Please refer to pages 10, 11 and 12 – Appendix 2 Interpretation of the analysis of the Children’s Centre public consultation.)**

For Children’s Centre buildings no longer directly provided by the Council we are offering an opportunity for other providers to operate these at no cost to the local authority.

The buildings proposals process agreed by Cabinet on the 19th May 2014 will be implemented. Formal applications will be considered from schools with a Children’s Centre building on site in the first instance. If an application from a school is not successful or no schools apply, applications will then be accepted from existing childcare staff for the continuation of the childcare delivery and potential organisations / individuals for the childcare / community services areas. It is anticipated that this process should be successful in identifying sufficient providers to take on the buildings/childcare provision where Centres are identified to close. However, if we are not successful the DfE will claw back the capital investment which has been spent on the Centre buildings which are proposed to close. The potential claw-back estimated cost to the Council is between £3.8 and £5.5 million, depending on the number of Centre buildings that close.

A full analysis and interpretation of the outcomes from the Children’s Centre public Consultation can be found in **Appendix 1 (Report on the data and themes from the Children’s Centre Closure public consultation)** and **Appendix 2 Interpretation of the analysis of the Children’s Centre public consultation.**

An interpretation of the analysis of the outcomes from the public consultation shows the following main recurring themes of concern from respondents:

Travel

- The most recurring theme is the additional travel required as a result of closing Centre buildings, and travel costs required to access services at the remaining Children Centre buildings. This could result in those in need not accessing Children Centre services in the future. Clearly concern has been expressed by respondents regarding travel.
- The Local Authority is not required to provide a Centre building in walking distance. However, they are required to provide access to services locally. The impact of this concern raised may be lessened by ensuring the continuation of early years outreach service delivery is maintained in each locality area.

Community/Social implications

- People want to keep a local Children’s Centre in order to maintain a central place to meet others in the local area, bring the community together, and support each other. Without a centre people will become isolated which could lead to increased levels of depression, isolation and loneliness for parents, families and children. Therefore this could lead longer term, to increased pressures on Health and Social Care services.

- The impact of the concerns raised will be minimised by ensuring communication is provided to children and families in each locality ensuring they are aware of the range of Foundation Years services that are continuing to be offered and how to access these at a local level

Impact on children

- Respondents stated that the future of their children will be affected if they do not have a local centre, including their child's long term attainment, attendance and education. There is a potential of an increase in 'missed' safeguarding issues for children, if there wasn't a local Children's Centre. People were also concerned about what might happen to the childcare service if the Children's Centre building closed. If the childcare was not available there would be a direct impact on the child and the employment of parents who depend on childcare.
- The impact of these concerns will be minimised by the Council ensuring that in a Centre building proposed to close, interests of expression to run the day care are secured as a priority, resulting in day care provision in these buildings remaining to be offered. That the day care provision being offered, including early education places for 2, 3 and 4 year old children is of good quality. In relation to concerns regarding 'missed safeguarding issues for children. Through the continuation of outreach support and delivery in the locality, including Health, referrals of any child at risk will continued to be made.

Children Centre buildings

- Respondents commented that Children Centre buildings are built for purpose, safe and secure, provide everything under one roof; and provide stability and familiarity for both children and families. The use of community buildings in local areas where Children Centre buildings are to close, may not be 'fit for purpose', could be unsafe; not secure and result in people not attending services at these buildings. Respondents stated that some areas of the Borough may not have suitable community buildings available.
- To minimise this risk of impact, expressions of interest received will be fully explored in order to secure other providers, individuals or organisations in running daycare provision/and or Foundation years services in any Centre proposed to close.

Summary of findings from the public consultation

- Respondents really value the quality of services, the support they and their children receive from experienced staff across Rotherham's Children Centres, especially the baby clinic service; stay and play and childcare.
- Respondents value that the Children Centre buildings are 'fit for purpose' and provide a welcoming community hub.
- Respondents consider that organisations/services work well in partnership to deliver services.
- The majority of respondents do not agree to the proposal to close Children's Centre buildings.

- Respondents are concerned about the impact of the proposed reduction in the number of Children's Centre buildings will have on their own and their children's ability to access the remaining centres proposed to stay open, including the most vulnerable children and families, fairness of geographical distribution; and communities feeling isolated.
- Respondents questioned the rationale used and felt that other criteria should also be considered to decide which centres are proposed to remain open and those proposed to close.
- The majority of respondents agree to the proposed outreach service, but have concerns about the effectiveness and quality of the service if delivered from other buildings in a local community.

Conclusion and recommendations

Consideration from information and views received from respondents as an outcome of the Children's Centre public consultation, appears to suggest further consideration should be given to the initial proposal. This is in terms of the number of centre buildings proposed to close, in order that a more even geographical distribution is achieved, enabling more children and families, including the most vulnerable, to more readily access a children's centre building.

On the basis of the rationale used throughout this public consultation; where Centre buildings are proposed to remain open (if they have more than 400 children living in the 30% most deprived SOA), the proposal should be reconsidered to include enabling a further 3 Children Centre buildings to remain open. This would support respondents' concerns regarding travel and equity of geographical spread of proposed centre buildings in some areas across the Borough

The additional proposed Centres to remain open are Wath Victoria Children's Centre building (374 children living in the most 30% SOA); Dinnington Children's Centre building (352 children living in the most 30% SOA) and Park View Children's Centre building (345 children living in the most 30% SOA. These three Children's Centres are the next Centres which have the highest number of children living in the 30% most deprived SOA.

This second option would cost an additional £350K. To address this shortfall a further report would be brought to Cabinet assessing the following options:-

Budget adjustment
 Service re-configuration
 Exploration of possible income generation

If **option 2** was chosen, this would result in one or more Children's Centre building being located in each of the individual 7 Health locality team areas, and 7 Area Assembly boundaries. This addresses some respondents' views regarding the need to align Children's Centre buildings to both Health and Area Assemblies. If Dinnington Children's Centre building remained open, this would mean that each of the 11 deprived neighbourhood communities would have a

Children Centre building. If Wath Children's Centre building remained open this would take into consideration the particularly high prevalence of disabled parents in the Wath area.

If Cabinet decide to increase the number of Centre buildings from 9 to 12, it would raise the number of families and children able to access a Children's Centre building in their locality, including the most vulnerable, as follows:-

In the period 1st April 2013 – 31st March 2014:

- 10,571 Rotherham children aged under 5 years accessed Children's Centre services in at least 1 Rotherham Children's Centre
 - 59% of those children seen accessed a Centre whose building is proposed to remain open. This would increase to 75% if the 3 additional centres were to remain open
- 6,278 Rotherham children aged under 5 years living in a 30% most disadvantaged SOA accessed at least 1 Rotherham Children's Centre
 - 74% of those children seen living in a 30% most disadvantaged SOA accessed a Centre whose building is proposed to remain open. This would increase to 88%
- 3,002 Rotherham children aged under 5 years and living in a household dependent on workless benefits accessed at least 1 Rotherham Children's Centre.
 - 71% of those children seen living in a household dependent on workless benefits accessed a Centre whose building is proposed to remain open. This would increase to 88%

The rationale is to keep Children Centre buildings open in the most disadvantaged areas

As of 1st April, 2013

- 80% of all BME children in Rotherham live in an area where a Children's Centre building is proposed to remain open. This would increase to 84%, if the 3 additional centres were to remain open.
- 61% of all children living in households dependent on workless benefits live in an area where a Children's Centre building is proposed to remain open. This would increase to 73%.
- 71% of all children living in a SOA within a 30% most disadvantaged nationally live in an area where a Children's Centre building is proposed to remain open. This would increase to 84%.
- 61% of disabled parents with at least 1 child under 5 years lives in an area where a Children's Centre building is proposed to remain open. This would increase to 74%.
- 61% of teenage mothers with at least 1 child under 5 years lives in an area where a Children's Centre building is proposed to remain open. This would increase to 72%.

- 58% of lone parents with at least 1 child under 5 years lives in an area where a Children's Centre building is proposed to remain open. This would increase to 71%.

A full analysis and interpretation of outcomes from the public consultation, has led to the proposed options being recommended below:-

Option 1

1. Accept the original proposals, of retaining the 9 identified Children's Centre buildings, and closing the remaining 13 identified Children Centre buildings.

OR

Option 2

In response to the outcomes from the recent public consultation.

2. To retain 3 additional Children Centre buildings in addition to the original proposal. These are Wath Victoria Children's Centre (Wentworth North); Dinnington Children's Centre (Rother Valley South) and Park View Children's Centre (Rotherham North)

8. Finance

Option 1 will cost £2,025,474 and will realise the Children's Centre budget savings of £2.2m. Option 2, on the basis of the current model of service provision, will cost an additional £350,000. If Members wish to follow Option 2 a further report will be brought to determine how the additional required funding of £350,000 would be met.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

Risks to both options

1. Cabinet will be aware of its statutory duty to ensure that sufficient children's centres are readily accessible to those most in need. Whilst Cabinet is assured that under both delivery models, the Council will continue to fulfil its statutory duty, it is clear that under Option 2 there will be a greater accessibility to early childhood services
2. It is likely that fewer children and families will have as ready access to a Children Centre building compared to the current provision.
3. Any potential Children's Centre building that closes, as a result of no suitable expression of interest, could result in a clawback of the capital funding for the building.
4. If the timescale of 31st March 2015 is not met for identified building closures, funding would need to be identified to cover the cost of slippage.

5. Those families who will not be able to easily access the remaining Children's Centre buildings will be offered targeted and universal services through the proposed Foundation Years outreach services.
6. Challenges in maintaining well established partnership relationships.
7. Possible increase in economic activity in the voluntary and independent child care provision (PVI) as parents access alternatives to council provision. This could lead a reduction in income for the Children's Centre

Risks to option 1

1. Fewer children and families will have as ready access to a Children Centre building than in Option 2.

Risks to option 2

1. The funding of the additional £350,000 required is, as at the date of the report, unidentified.

Legal Considerations

The steps to be taken regarding re-alignment of provision, support by way of an outreach service and the encouragement of provision by the private and voluntary services will ensure that the Council continues to meet its statutory duties.

The Childcare Act (2006) Section 5A places a duty on Local Authority "to make arrangements so that there are sufficient Children's Centres, so far as is reasonably practicable, to meet local need"

The Act (Section 5C) also places a "duty on local authorities to ensure there is consultation before any significant changes are made to children's centre provision in their area"

The Sure Start Children's Centre statutory guidance states that local authorities "should not close an existing children's centre site in any reorganisation of provision unless they can demonstrate that, where they decide to close a children's centre site, the outcomes for children, particularly the most disadvantaged, would not be adversely affected and will not compromise the duty to have sufficient children's centres to meet local need. The starting point should therefore be a presumption against the closure of children's centres"

The Council must, in accordance with the Equality Act 2010, pay due regard to the public sector equality duty. The Council must take account of the outcomes of the consultation, consider how any adverse impact may be ameliorated, and consider these factors against the need for the Council to make the required savings. In this regard an Equality Analysis has been completed and is at **Appendix 3. Members should consider the Equality analysis when determining which option to pursue.**

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

Children's Centres contribute to the priority outcomes identified in the following Council and Health strategy plans:

Rotherham Community Strategy 2012-15

The Rotherham Partnership set out a vision that "Everyone in Rotherham will have the opportunity to fulfil their potential." The vision was underpinned by three high level priorities for agencies working in the Borough. The Community Strategy also references the Partnership's intention to target the most deprived neighbourhoods. Priority 2 has very specific relevance for children's centres and Priority 3 has a more general relevance:

Priority 2: Ensuring the best start in life for children and families

Priority 3: Supporting those that are vulnerable in our communities

Priority 2 references the "Rotherham Babies" research in highlighting the need to improve the life chances of children from our most deprived areas. Children's centres are named as one of the services delivering support to vulnerable 0-3 year olds. The importance of early years is evident and the strategy states that the correct support will unlock children's potential to be successful in education and work, and to live healthy and happy lives

Rotherham MBC's Corporate Plan 2013-16

The Council's Corporate Plan prioritises early support for vulnerable people and families and giving children the best start in life to benefit from opportunities to improve their health and wellbeing. Two of the four priorities have particular relevance for children's centres:

Priority 2: Protecting our most vulnerable people and families, enabling them to maximise their independence: We will identify need and support children, young people and families at the earliest possible stage.

Priority 4: Helping people from all communities to have opportunities to improve their health and wellbeing: We will enable children to access opportunities to improve their health and wellbeing by having the best start in life.

Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2012-15

Rotherham's first Health and Wellbeing Strategy is the key partnership document setting out priorities for health, social care and wider wellbeing. The strategy covers early years as "starting well", one of four key lifestages identified in the Marmot Review "Fair Society, Health Lives" in 2010. Three of the six priorities have particular relevance to children's centres:

Priority 1 - Prevention and early intervention

Outcome: Rotherham people will get help early to stay healthy and increase their independence.

Priority 2 - Expectations and aspirations

Outcome: All Rotherham people will have high aspirations for their health and wellbeing and expect good quality services in their community, tailored to their personal circumstances.

Priority 6 - Poverty

Outcome: Reduce poverty in disadvantaged areas through policies that enable people to fully participate in everyday social activities and the creation of more opportunities to gain skills and employment.

The focus on addressing deprivation from Sure Start is reflected in Priority 6 which supports the continued emphasis on children from deprived areas in the provision of children's centres.

11. Background Papers and Consultation

- **Appendix 1 (Report on the data and themes from the Children's Centre Closure public consultation)**
- **Appendix 2 Interpretation of the analysis of the Children's Centre public consultation**
- Rewiring Public Services, Children's Services, LGA, 2013
- Evidence for the Frontline, Alliance for Useful Evidence, Dr. Jonathan Sharples, 2013
- Integrated Commissioning Strategy for Early Years services for children with additional needs 2008-2011, Devon County Council, 2008
- The Tail, How our schools fail one child in five: what can be done, Marshall, 2013
- Strategic toolkit for planning integrated working, 4 Children, 2010
- Bright Futures: local children local approaches, LGA, 2013
- Report of the Children and Young People's Health Outcomes Forum, The CYP Forum, 2012
- The State of the State 2013, In Search of Affordable Government, Deloitte and Reform, 2013
- Children and Families Bill, DfE, February 2013
- The Foundation Year: Preventing poor children becoming poor adults, Frank Field, Dec 2010
- Supporting Families in the Foundation Years, Frank Field, 2010
- Best Practice for Sure Start: The Way Forward for Children's Centres, Report from the all party parliamentary sure start group, July 2013
- Birth and Beyond, Department of Health, 2011
- Sure Start Children's Centres Statutory Guidance, Department for education, April 2013.

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