

**CABINET
23 MARCH 2010**

Subject: COMMISSIONING OF SURE START CHILDREN'S CENTRES AND PROVISION FOR CHILDREN UNDER FIVE WITH DIFFICULTIES AND DISABILITIES IN WILTSHIRE FROM APRIL 2011

Cabinet member: Councillor Lionel Grundy, Children's Services

Executive Summary

Wiltshire has 30 Sure Start Children's Centres providing integrated services for children under five and their parents. The development of children's centres in phases between 2006 and 2010 has resulted in them being managed by a range of providers. Twenty are managed by voluntary sector organisations, 7 by school governing bodies and 3 by Wiltshire Council. The contracts all end on 31 March 2011, which provides an opportunity to rationalise the management of children's centres particularly in the main towns where there is more than one children's centre. This would enable economy of scale by reducing management costs and improve the integration between delivery partners, such as NHS Wiltshire, social care teams and Jobcentre Plus in providing the core offer of services. The location of the children's centres will not change and the jobs of present staff will be protected by TUPE regulations (Transfer of Undertaking Protection of Employment Regulations 2006).

Part of the core offer for children's centres is providing support services for children under five with difficulties and disabilities. There are presently 4 district specialist centres, 1 specialist maintained nursery and 3 Portage services providing for children under five with difficulties and disabilities. This provision is not consistent and equitable throughout the County. The existing specialist centres are already operating within the 4 Council hub areas, but they have different opening times during the week, are generally term time only, provide a limited choice of holiday provision and have differing eligibility criteria. These contracts also end on 31 March 2011.

Proposal

That through the commissioning process, contracts for Sure Start Children's Centres in Wiltshire from April 2011 will be offered on the following cluster basis through the tendering process, to provide best value within the available Sure Start Grant and a more cohesive service within the hub structure of the County:

- Cluster the three children's centres in Trowbridge under one contract
- Cluster the three children's centres in Salisbury under one contract
- Cluster the three children's centres in Chippenham under one contract
- Cluster the two children's centres in Melksham under one contract
- Cluster the two children's centres in Devizes under one contract
- Cluster Marlborough with Pewsey under one contract
- Cluster Mere, Tisbury and Wilton under one contract
- Cluster Wootton Bassett with Cricklade under one contract
- Cluster Amesbury with Bulford under one contract
- Offer Tidworth, Corsham, Malmesbury, Westbury, Warminster, Downton, Bradford-on-Avon and Calne as single sites, but through the selection process, commissioners will

look positively on proposals to combine individual sites and the named clusters together within a hub area of the County; Chippenham hub, Devizes hub, Salisbury hub and Trowbridge hub, in order to align services.

- to provide a co-ordinated specialist service for children under five with difficulties and disabilities based in the four Council hub areas of the County with outreach services delivered across the hub area, providing a range of support between 9am and 3 pm, Monday to Friday for at least 48 weeks of the year.

Reason for Proposal

The present management of the children's centres by a range of different providers within a geographical area is not delivering best value for money, and causing delivery partner organisations to work with a large number of different managers within an area. Clustering children's centres together will provide economy of scale and greater cohesion with partner agencies that work on a hub or County-wide basis.

The cluster model has been proposed to gain cohesion within the main towns with more than one children's centre. The single site option has been offered to enable smaller voluntary sector partners to participate. The Council prides itself on the involvement of the voluntary sector in Wiltshire and if only large clusters of children's centres are offered, which might be too challenging for small voluntary organisations to deliver, the Council may lose voluntary sector involvement.

The proposal to offer services for children under five with difficulties and disabilities based in the 4 Council hub areas, available between 9 am and 3 pm and for at least 48 weeks of the year, will allow for greater consistency of service and a wider choice and availability of support for young children with difficulties and disabilities. Any requirement by parents for increased hours of childcare may be provided by existing childcare settings as most children with difficulties and disabilities attend sessions at a mainstream childcare provider as well.

Carolyn Godfrey
Director for Children and Education

WILTSHIRE COUNCIL

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Subject: **COMMISSIONING OF SURE START CHILDREN'S CENTRES AND PROVISION FOR CHILDREN UNDER FIVE WITH DIFFICULTIES AND DISABILITIES IN WILTSHIRE FROM APRIL 2011**

Cabinet member: **Councillor Lionel Grundy, Children's Services**

Purpose of the Report

1. To gain Cabinet approval
 - For the proposal to cluster the management of Sure Start Children's Centres in Wiltshire from April 2011.
 - To extend the availability of specialist provision for children under five with difficulties and disabilities in each hub of the County, to provide wider choice for parents between 9 am and 3 pm, all year round.

Background

2. It was agreed by the Wiltshire County Council Cabinet meeting on 23 October 2008 that the management of Wiltshire's Sure Start Children's Centres would be opened to competitive tendering using the normal procurement process from April 2011. The present contracts end on 31 March 2011. The contracts for the provision of services for children under five with difficulties and disabilities also end on 31 March 2011.
3. The competitive tendering process is a requirement under European Union Procurement Directives and the Public Contracts Regulation 2006 to ensure open and fair competition amongst the member states of the European Union. Wiltshire Council is accountable to the HM Treasury to show that we are ensuring that the best value for money is obtained from public funds, and this is also an aim of Wiltshire Council.
4. It is the Government's strategy to have 3,500 Sure Start Children's Centres by 2010, one for every community. Wiltshire had a target to deliver 20 Sure Start Children's Centres by March 2008 and this was achieved.
5. In April 2008, Wiltshire Local Authority received a further target to deliver an additional 10 Sure Start Children's Centres, making 30 in total. The services must be designated by March 2010 with the capital programme completed by March 2011. Three major building projects are still being carried out, in Pewsey, Pewsham area of Chippenham and Longfield in Trowbridge. The existing services will operate from these new buildings as soon as they are ready.

6. All 30 children's centre 'reach' areas are delivering services. Twenty nine of these have passed their designation visit by Together for Children. The final children's centre on the Longfield Estate, Trowbridge will be designated by the end of March 2010, when full day-care has been established.
7. The Index of Multiple Deprivation 2007 was used to identify the locations for children's centres. Wiltshire has a children's centre in each community area with additional centres in areas of higher population of children under five. Details about their location, contact information and management are attached at **Appendix A**.
8. The aim of Sure Start Children's Centres for children under five and their parents is to:
 - Reduce inequalities and narrow the gap between the most and least disadvantaged children.
 - Support vulnerable groups.
 - Gain parental and community engagement.
 - Form multi-agency teams around the child.
 - Integrate the delivery of shared initiatives, for example to commission priorities in the Children and Young People's Plan; reducing childhood obesity, promoting resilience, improving achievement and tackling domestic abuse.
 - Make better use of human and capital resources.
9. The full core offer of children's centre services and performance indicators is attached at **Appendix B**. Children's centres are a one-stop-shop for all parents. The services are available to all families of children under five, but they are targeted at those children and families that are in most need.
10. In January 2010, The Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 recognised Sure Start Children's Centres in law for the first time. The requirements of this Act are explained in **Appendix C**.

Main considerations for the Cabinet

11. A consultation was carried out with stakeholders and present providers between 4 December 2009 and 26 February 2010, and the consultation paper with the timetable for the procurement process is attached at **Appendix D**. The paper shows a list of children's centres and the present contract holders and the present providers of the specialist provision for children with difficulties and disabilities on **page 2**. The paper provides various options for comment for the organisation of children's centres and specialist provision for children under five with difficulties and disabilities with the advantages and disadvantages for each option.
12. The children's centres have developed in phases. This has resulted in 15 different providers managing centres, often more than one provider in the same town. This has resulted in duplication of effort and resources in some areas and confusion for parents and delivery partners. One option therefore is to cluster the centres in the larger towns under one provider and twin centres that are already working closely together, or where numbers of children are small and the management costs outweigh the benefits to the community. Another option is to offer all the 30 centres as individual contracts but this runs the risk of a continuation of the present situation.

13. The provision for children under five with difficulties and disabilities is currently provided through district specialist centres and Portage. They generally have different opening times during the week, are mostly term time only, provide a limited choice of holiday provision and have differing eligibility criteria. In order to provide access to an equitable service for children under five and their parents or carers, these anomalies must be addressed. As the services for children with difficulties and disabilities are part of the children's centre core offer, the service specifications need to be aligned so that the availability of children's centres and the specialist provision is needs led for children and parents, evidenced by the analysis of data and local representation through Children's Centre Advisory Boards and Area Boards.

14. The responses to the consultation paper have been collated and included as **Appendix E**. There were 52 written responses to the children's centre proposals:

- Option 1 – Children's centres clustered with some stand alone sites - 18
- Option 2 – Stand alone children's centres all contracted individually – 30 (24 of these responses are attributable to Trowbridge Bellefield Children's Centre alone)
- Option 3 – Another approach - 4

They largely show support for the option to commission children's centres in clusters. Returns by partner organisations such as NHS Wiltshire and Jobcentre Plus, who work on a County-wide basis, support this option. However, in this situation it is inevitable that there will be robust local lobbying by current providers and users of the service in any given area and this shows in the responses. However, individual interests in specific areas should not outweigh the benefits to be gained by adopting the best value approach.

15. The responses to the consultation for children with difficulties and disabilities show a preference to continue to provide specialist services based in the 4 hub areas of the County. All respondents support building an enhanced and equitable service.

- There were 25 written responses:
- Option 1 – Four area hub-based approach – 16
 - Option 2 – One service provider for Wiltshire – 3
 - Option 3 – Other solutions - 6

Suggestions made in the consultation returns for ways of delivering the service to meet local needs, will be taken into account when the service specification is drawn up.

16. To gather parents' views about services for children with difficulties and disabilities, a survey was carried out in October 2009. One hundred and one surveys were returned; 87.3% of these parents said they would like to access specialist provision in the school holiday periods, 27.2% wanted longer opening hours in the district specialist centres and 77.1% said they currently had to travel to access services and that they would like specialist sessions closer to home. This information supports the proposal to provide increased availability and more flexible delivery of specialist services.

17. Two evening briefing sessions were held on 28 January and 2 February with 87 attendees across the two events. This gave present providers and stakeholders the opportunity to ask questions about the tendering process and voice any concerns. The major concern was about the perceived ability for voluntary sector organisations and school governing bodies to complete tender documentation and submit bids. Providers were invited to a one day training session, "Getting to Grips with the Commissioning Process and Collaborating for Success". On-going support at no cost has been offered by VAK (Voluntary Action Kennet) funded by the Children's Workforce Development Council.
18. The consultation paper was taken to the ExCCeS (Extended Services and Children's Centres) Board on 22 January 2010. This Board is chaired by the Service Director for Schools and Learning. It is a multi-agency board that reports to the Children and Young People's Trust Board. They agreed the timetable for the process, asked that the Area Boards are kept informed and requested that all schools should receive the consultation through Wisenet. This was carried out.
19. At the Children and Young People's Trust Board Executive meeting held on 10 February 2010, the members of the Executive also agreed the timetable for the procurement process. The Executive emphasised that this process offers an excellent opportunity to further integrate services for children under five and their parents. Council officers have met to co-ordinate the procurement process; the first formal meeting of the Procurement Board with multi-agency participation is planned for 12 March.

Environmental Impact of the Proposal

20. The children's centres are based in all 20 Wiltshire Community Areas, with more than one centre in the larger towns. The services are delivered locally within pram pushing distance of the communities they serve. Service colleagues go out to local venues such as village and community halls so that parents do not have to travel far. Outreach Workers also visit the homes of families referred by Health Visitors. This results in the avoidance of unnecessary journeys across Wiltshire.
21. It is proposed that the services for children under five with difficulties and disabilities are centred around the four hub areas of the County in; Trowbridge, Devizes, Salisbury and Chippenham. There will be a requirement for the services to be delivered in small group opportunities in venues across the hub area and in children's homes, if appropriate. This will reduce the need for parents of children with difficulties and disabilities to have to transport vulnerable children across County to the service hubs and children's centres.

Equality and Diversity Impact of the Proposal

22. The e-Start database used by all Wiltshire's children's centres records the involvement of every family that has accessed children's centre services, and the information that is gathered enables children's centre staff to identify priority groups of people. These are listed in the performance indicators in **Appendix B**. These records form the basis of the quarterly monitoring visits to ensure resources are being used effectively to support vulnerable children. The benefit of children's centre staff understanding the composition of the children in their 'reach' area, results in the services

being tailored to meet the needs of all children under five and their families in appropriate ways.

23. Children's centres and specialist provision for children under five with additional needs have carried out Equality Impact Assessments (EIA). They have been reviewed and they are considered to still be relevant. The corporate team for equality and diversity recommends a panel approach to updating any action plans. Presently the annual survey to gauge the use of children's centres and assess parental satisfaction is being collated. This survey captures ethnicity, gender, age, lone parent and work profiles on a postcode basis. The results from this survey will inform the EIA action plan to ensure no priority groups of people are being excluded from accessing services for young children.

Risk assessment

24. If the proposal to offer contracts for clusters of children's centres is not adopted, this would not improve the present situation of having more than one provider working in the same town, and not reap the benefits of economy of scale, greater alignment of services and reduced management costs. If it is agreed, any savings to the ring fenced grant, as a result of reduced management costs, could be spent for the benefit of children under five in need and contribute to the potential increased costs of enhancing the service for children with difficulties and disabilities.
25. If the proposal to change the service specification to require an enhanced service for children with difficulties and disabilities is not agreed, then the early year's provision for all children is not equitable. The enhanced availability of specialist services will allow parents greater opportunities to seek advice and gain access to advice, parental peer support, equipment and specialist facilities all year round.

Financial Implications

26. Children's centres are funded from ring-fenced Sure Start, Early Years & Childcare Grant (SSEYCG) from the Department for Children, Schools and Families. The value of these contracts for 2009-2010 is £4,164,850. The budget has not yet been set for 2010-2011 but it is anticipated that these contracts will increase by the cost of living.
27. The revenue budget allocation 2008-2011 is based on:
- Cost of running the centre
 - Salary of Leader plus on-costs, full time in disadvantaged areas, and 21 hours in less disadvantaged areas
 - 2 Outreach Workers x 21 hours in disadvantaged areas, 1 Outreach Worker x 21 hours in less disadvantaged areas
 - Allocation per child under 5
 - 30% Super Output Areas £35 per child under 5
 - 50% Super Output Areas £25 per child under 5
 - 70% Super Output Areas £15 per child under 5

Super Output Areas are based on smaller numbers of households than ward level data. Guidance distinguishes between 30% most deprived areas of England and the other 70% of areas. 30% most deprived areas should

receive more targeted and intensive support. In more advantaged areas local authorities have greater flexibility about which services they provide to meet local need. A 50% Super Output Area layer of funding has been included to support those children living in areas of higher need but do not live in the most disadvantaged areas of the County.

28. There are presently 4 district specialist centres, 1 specialist maintained nursery and 3 Portage services providing for children under five with difficulties and disabilities. This provision however, is not consistent and equitable throughout the County. District Specialist Centres and Portage are also funded through ring-fenced Sure Start, Early Years & Childcare Grant (SSEYCG) from the Department for Children, Schools and Families, a total contribution of £532,033 with an additional total contribution of £96,582 from NHS Wiltshire in 2009-2010.
29. The level of Sure Start, Early Years & Childcare Grant beyond March 2011 is unknown. There is a risk that the amount of Sure Start Grant will be reduced, although unconfirmed reports from each political party pledges to continue to fund Sure Start in line with inflation. The latest Comprehensive Spending Review should be released during autumn 2010. If future funding does not allow for the scale of delivery already offered, further negotiations will be arranged with potential contract holders to make savings.
30. The proposal to increase the availability of specialist services for children under five would require potential contract holders to show how they could achieve this. The multi-agency Procurement Board will discuss the composition of the service specification to ensure that the Sure Start Grant and NHS Wiltshire contributions can enable this enhanced service to be delivered.

Legal Implications

31. This proposal may result in some of the present providers being unsuccessful in continuing to manage their children's centre. Staff however will be protected by TUPE (Transfer of Undertaking Protection of Employment Regulations 2006) and would transfer to the new employer. Staff in children's centres that are presently employed under Wiltshire terms and conditions will need support and information from Wiltshire Council Human Resources Department and the implications for increased demand has been identified.

Options considered

32. One consideration was for Wiltshire Council to manage all the children's centres. This however was dismissed as it is not consistent with the Council's aim to be a commissioning authority, and it would eliminate the possibility of maintaining the valuable involvement of the voluntary sector.
33. It was also suggested that the children's centres should be grouped so that there would be one contract holder for all the children's centres within each hub area. This might result in small voluntary organisations that are strength of the diversity of provision in Wiltshire, to be unwilling to bid and take on such big commitments.

Conclusion

34. It is essential to take this opportunity to review the organisation of Wiltshire's Sure Start Children's Centres and specialist services for children under five with difficulties and disabilities. It will lead to greater efficiencies within the ring fenced grant and align the services to match the delivery patterns of partner agencies. The extension of the offer for children with additional needs will provide a wider choice of support by offering greater availability and outreach services to meet local needs.

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Background papers - none

Appendices

- Appendix A List of Sure Start Children's Centres in Wiltshire
 - Appendix B Children's Centre Core Offer and Performance Indicators
 - Appendix C Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009
 - Appendix D Consultation paper and timetable
 - Appendix E Collated responses to the consultation paper
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