

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee
Wednesday 20 September 2006

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN'S CENTRES 2006 - 2008

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide an update on the development of Children's Centres in Wiltshire.

Background

2. Sure Start Children's Centres form a key part of the delivery of early years services by local authorities. They are crucial to the implementation of the Government's Ten Year Childcare Strategy, "Choice for parents, the best start for children", and contribute to improving the outcomes for children set out in Every Child Matters. It is the Government's strategy to develop 2,500 Sure Start Children's Centres by 2008, with the longer term aim of 3,500 Children's Centres by 2010, one for every community. Wiltshire has a target to deliver 20 centres by March 2008.
3. Sure Start Children's Centres provide a range of services depending on local need and parental choice. The aim is for a network of centres across the country, offering information, advice and support to parents/carers of children 0-5 years and their families as well as early years provision, health services, family support, parental outreach and employment advice for disadvantaged families. The Government's intention is that children's centre services become permanent mainstream community services, which are developed and delivered with the active involvement of parents/carers and local communities.
4. The total amount of money available to the Local Authority to develop 20 Children's Centres between 2006 and 2008 is £10,302,747. This is made up as follows:

Capital Funding (for buildings)

Children's Centre capital	£4, 014, 660
Extended Schools capital	£1, 020, 596
General Sure Start Grant to improve 3 and 4 year old offer	£1, 453, 256

Total capital **£ 6,488,512**

Total revenue funding **£ 3,814,235**

What Services will Children's Centres in Wiltshire Offer?

5. The full core offer of services required for the centres in the 30% most deprived Super Output Areas in England, identified using the Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2004, is attached at **Appendix A**. Super Output Areas are based on smaller numbers of households than ward level data. In more advantaged areas Local Authorities have greater flexibility about which services they provide to meet local need, however, all Sure Start Children's Centres have to provide a minimum range of services including:
 - appropriate support and outreach services to parents/carers and children who have been identified as in need of them;
 - information and advice to parents/carers on a range of subjects, including: local childcare, looking after babies and young children,

- local early years provision (childcare and early learning) education services for 3 and 4 year olds;
 - support to childminders;
 - drop-in sessions and other activities for children and carers at the centre;
 - links to Jobcentre Plus services.
6. The DfES, in a letter released on 27 July 2006, sets out the likely performance criteria for centres. (These Performance Indicators are not yet confirmed).
- Accessing hard to reach groups - % of face to face encounters in the reach area with teenage mothers, lone parents, workless households, refugee or asylum seeking families, parents of disabled children, fathers and any other group identified locally as being in need
 - Parental satisfaction
 - Learning and development outcomes at the end of the Foundation Stage
 - Child poverty outcomes - % of children of parents in receipt of out of work benefits (links with Jobcentre Plus)
 - Health outcomes - % reduction of children in reception year who are obese
 - The best start in life – improvements in % of mothers initiating breastfeeding, % of pregnant women smoking at birth of child, % of babies with low birth weight
 - To support work to prevent accident and illness - % of children 0-4 years admitted to hospital for gastro-enteritis, lower respiratory infections or severe injury, % of 0-4 years attending Accident and Emergency, % of children receiving their first Measles, Mumps and Rubella vaccination and booster.
 - Outcomes for teenage mothers - % of teenage mothers entering education, employment or training.
 - Emotional well-being. Sure Start is unsure at present how they will measure this.

How many Children's Centres will Wiltshire accommodate and where will they be?

- 7 The committee has requested a comprehensive description of the proposed sites and this is attached at **Appendix B**
8. Each centre is being developed on an individual basis to ensure that the capital build improves and enhances the chosen site. The Sure Start guidance requires that children's centres placed in the 30% most disadvantaged areas should be within one building or in 2 or 3 buildings very close together. We have applied this urban model beyond the most disadvantaged areas wherever possible. For less disadvantaged areas services can be delivered from separate buildings that are within pram pushing distance of one another.
9. The rural nature of Wiltshire requires a different approach in some areas. The community areas of Downton, Malmesbury and Marlborough with Pewsey have been identified as requiring a rural model. This provides a hub in the most densely populated place within the community area, for central meetings and staff training. In particular, Downton, Malmesbury and Marlborough have widespread clusters of small villages across large geographical areas. These centres must provide extensive outreach services, taking the required activities and support out to families across these community areas who find access to services particularly difficult. Investigations are taking place to plot the routes of existing services such as mobile libraries to exploit the opportunity to dovetail services.

Methodology adopted in developing Children's Centres in Wiltshire

10. Development through to designation for 20 centres is a project of some complexity. The Local Authority is required to use the EC Harris monitoring system that enables plans and data to be entered into a secure on-line database. This information is then monitored and analysed regionally by Sure Start and nationally by the DfES. Required deadlines at specific stages have all been met and the Local Authority has been commended for this. Each capital project must be entered onto the system and projects over £150,000 must be submitted for approval by regional Sure Start and assessed by the Government's appointed architectural consultants before being taken any further. A Capital Project Manager, from Wiltshire's Environmental Services Department has been enlisted from the start of the project and he is managing the capital plan. The preliminary capital figure has been identified against each site in Appendix B – grid of sites. As part of the architect's brief the construction costs are reviewed at RIBA stage D (submission of planning application).
11. During the planning stage, from September 05 until the present time the Strategic Manager for Children's Centres has been reporting to the Assistant Director (Schools), the Head of Sure Start and to the Cabinet Member for Education and Youth Development. An Extended Service in and around School/Children's Centres Strategic Board (ExCCeS) has now been set up to include partners across County Council departments and health services to monitor progress, ascertain the effectiveness of the co-ordination and delivery of services and to monitor the capital and revenue budgets. For internal project management monitoring a spreadsheet tracks month by month progress against the implementation plan. An example is included in **Appendix C** and the capital project checklist is attached at **Appendix D**
12. The South West cluster of Local Authorities has met once and it provided a useful exchange of ideas and advice. In particular:
 - Enlist a capital projects manager – in place since September 2005
 - Parents respond more positively to a welcoming and homely environment and some new builds have been seen as too clinical
 - Planning of childcare places should look towards sustainability
 - Storage is often forgotten
 - Engaging Headteachers for one day a week during term time to manage centres with administrative staff covering the other days was found to be detrimental to both schools and the children's centre.
 - The use of combining funding streams such as the Big Lottery Fund for the capital works has resulted in serious delays
 - The use of touch screen kiosks for parents to access childcare information when centres are not open is being trialled
 - Compatible children's centre management software is being investigated
13. Since early autumn 2005 there has been an embargo on travel out of county and severe restrictions on attendance at training and conferences due to County Council budgetary constraints and so the main exchange of ideas has proved to be e mails and the Internet. E-mails between Local Authorities and the DfES has resulted in the change to the capital funding allocation described in paragraph 25.

A Partnership Approach

14. Listed in paragraph 6 are the expected performance indicators for centres. Meeting these criteria will require centres to adopt a multi-agency approach and include a range of partners, particularly in the PCT in order to meet the criteria. The Assistant Director for North, West and Kennet PCT has agreed to become a member of the strategic board. Health visitor district team leaders attend children's centres district meetings and local health visitors, school nurses and speech and language therapists attend the centre steering groups. The recent release of the proposed performance indicators will require discussions with the PCT about what data they already gather and what joint activities can be organised to meet the health based criteria set out for children's centres.
15. A number of activities are already in operation that will help to meet these outcomes:
 - Health Visitors are involved in drop-in sessions at the centres already in operation.
 - Health Visitors have been carrying out 'Ready, Steady, Cook' events to encourage healthy eating, the budgeting and preparation of simple meals and providing nutritious lunchboxes.
 - Children's Centres, the Teenage Pregnancy Board and Connexions are jointly funding a post to support pregnant teenagers and young parents under 25 years.
 - Mums2be courses are being delivered to young parents to enable them to access a qualification and begin on the progression route towards employment and further training.
 - Voluntary Action Kennet is leading on the development of parental satisfaction groups.
 - The Early Support Project is working to support parents of disabled children 0-5 years.
 - The Early Learning and Development Team monitors the data from The Foundation Stage Profile. Graduated support for settings and schools is assigned accordingly.
 - Centre staff have received training from Jobcentre Plus about helping families access benefits.
 - A children's services multi-agency directory for centres to use with parents is being developed by 'ASK' which will include, for each community area, information about local support groups, county and national organisations. The directory will be piloted in Calne and Westbury from November 2006.
16. Other initiatives developing in the County such as the LIFT Project in Salisbury offer opportunities to co-ordinate support for families beyond 2008. It was not possible however to develop these initiatives simultaneously as the planned location for the LIFT project at Fountain Way, Salisbury is not within the most deprived Super Output Area in Salisbury and the timescales are not compatible.
17. Wherever possible, children's centres have complemented the Council's strategy for securing the long term future of the County's primary schools. For example a children's centre will be built on the site of the amalgamated Infant and junior schools at Amesbury to create a primary school and community facility to support families with children from 0-11 years. A further children's centre is planned in Trowbridge as part of the potential amalgamation of Margaret Stancomb Infant and Parochial Junior Schools.
18. The centre at Wootton Bassett plans to build on the co-location pilot at Manor House, Lime Kiln. Health visitors, school nurses and speech and language therapists currently carry out clinics. The children's centre will extend and enhance this work by providing a comprehensive information service for parents, stay and play sessions, access to a range of child health professionals and family support workers.

How the Risks are being Managed

19. **Sources of funding:**

The revenue budget of £3,814,235 has been allocated for children's centre development 2006-2008 as a ring fenced amount within the General Sure Start Grant. It includes, £610,000 in 07-08 for start up costs. The costs of ICT infrastructure, hardware and software, telephone installation, furniture and fittings will be paid for from this amount. There has been no indication of the level of revenue funding beyond the Government's current spending review period due to end in March 2008. According to HM Treasury the Government will report on the next three-year Spending Review covering 2008 - 2011 in 2007.

20. **Action to minimise risk:**

The Childcare Act 2006 places children's centres as a front line delivery service to ensure that 'Every Child Matters'. It would therefore seem safe to assume that **some** level of funding will continue beyond 2008. This is supported by a letter sent on 27 July 2006 to the Directors of Children's Services that sets out the process by which Local Authorities should manage the performance of children's centres from April 2008, indicating their continuation into the future.

21. Management and staffing of the centres has only been agreed until March 2008. The centres will be managed in two different ways. In eight of the twenty centres the school governors will take the responsibility for the delivery of services through a Children's Centre Manager. In the remaining 12 centres the management is the responsibility of local voluntary providers, under contract until March 2008. This was agreed in the cabinet paper of 24 February 2006. The buildings belong to the DfES for 25 years. If the revenue ceases after 2008, provided the buildings are used for facilities for young children they could be leased to existing providers to deliver the services the Local Authority requires.

22. During 2007 the Local Authority will evaluate the intensity of services needed in each community area and prepare to issue tender documents to provide these services within the available budget. Sustainability of the childcare element of the core offer has been addressed by engaging successful private and voluntary businesses already operating on the intended sites to provide the childcare. They will remain as discreet services without causing an impact on the children's centre budget.

23. Monitoring the expenditure and impact of the use of centre budgets on a quarterly basis during the development phase from 2006-2008 will enable the Local Authority to determine the amount of funding necessary to provide the required services into the future. If we are to be truly responsive to the needs of parents on a community basis we cannot provide detailed analysis of funding needs for the next five years until the centres are open and delivering services. The expenditure is monitored monthly by WCC accountant attached to the Early Years and Childcare Team. A budget for the development phase 2006-2008 is attached at **Appendix E**.

24. **Maintenance of the buildings:**

The children's centre project has increased the County Council's stock of buildings to maintain.

25. **Action to minimise risk:**

For the period of 2006-2008 £75,000 will be paid to create a children's centre maintenance pool scheme. This amount will be monitored to determine average costs, and it must be factored into on-going revenue implications for the General Sure Start Grant beyond 2008.

26. **The capital project plan falling behind schedule:**
There are a number of factors that could cause the programme to slip such as intervention by local residents or communities or the ecologist finding protected species on site. An example of this is the decision by governors to pull out of a project in Salisbury just as the plans were ready to go for planning permission.
27. **Action to minimise risk:**
The capital allocation was divided into two, one year amounts. Originally Local Authorities were unable to carry over any amount from year one to year two. Not only has this restriction been relaxed, but an August 2006 directive has responded to Local Authority demands to address this barrier and the capital has been re-profiled, now requiring a spend of 1/3 in 2006-07 and 2/3 in 2007-08. This eases the timescale factor considerably. Where problems have arisen, suitable sites that had been destined for later in the programme have been brought forward to ensure the target for 2008 is met.
28. **Integration of services** relies on the Local Authority working with other partners to provide co-ordinated services.
29. **Action to minimise risk:**
This current phase of children's centres does not attract sufficient capital to be able to relocate a range of services so that education, health and family support could all function from the same building. Where possible, hot desk facilities and/or office space is being provided and each centre has the facility of a meeting room and consulting space for use by a range of people supporting young children and their families.
30. **Transport links:**
Centres have been placed carefully to provide facilities within pram pushing distance of the communities they serve. Increased traffic, therefore, should be kept to a minimum.
31. **Action to minimise risk:**
The potential risk for each site is being assessed on an individual basis. A number of local councillors have been particularly helpful in providing insights into the travel habits of their local community. The appointed architects are seeking advice from WCC planners and the Travelwise team at every step to maximise the potential to improve access to the sites and provide a minimum number of parking places for centre staff. The development of the Amesbury site is a good example of this co-operation in action.
32. Walking to the centre will be actively encouraged and a secure buggy store has been provided at each centre. However in the more rural areas of the County the children's centres will provide outreach services to small communities thus reducing the number of people coming onto the site

Action Required

33. The Committee is requested to consider and comment on this report

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