

Children's Services Committee

Report title:	Children Centre Service Re-Design Update
Date of meeting:	10 July 2018
Responsible Chief Officer:	Sara Tough Executive Director of Children's Services
Strategic impact The re-design of children's centre services is taking place with full regard to the council's Norfolk Futures Strategy to transform how council services are delivered, by modernising them and making them fit for purpose. Through offering a blend of support to develop community and peer led support for families with young children, alongside universal access to digital online information and advice, and targeted support for vulnerable families with additional and complex needs, the future service model will reflect the four guiding principles of Norfolk Futures: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Offering our help early to prevent and reduce demand for specialist services;• Joining up our work so that similar activities and services are easily accessible, done once and done well;• Being business-like making best use of digital technology to ensure value for money;• Using evidence and data to target our work where it can make the most difference.	

Executive summary

This report provides an update to Children's Services Committee on the timeline for the re-design of children centre services.

In February 2018 Norfolk County Council ratified its budget and confirmed that annually up to £5m would be made available for the provision of early family support from April 2019. This remains a substantial investment in children and families when compared to some statistical neighbouring authorities and more broadly across England. This investment must also be seen within the wider context of resources currently committed by the County Council to support families, including our Early Help Family Focus teams, our focus on improving outcomes for children through Early Years education, home learning, Family Information, libraries and the Healthy Child Programme.

We are working on ambitious proposals to create a new early childhood and family service that will aim to bring services for families together and target those in the greatest need.

As part of our strategy to deliver fully integrated and join up public services, we have an opportunity to develop a service that brings together children's centre services the Healthy Child Programme; community health provision; our work to ensure childcare sufficiency and community development activity.

As such the service redesign work is extremely important and has a great many dependencies. It is a very large and complicated project and it is vital that we get it right. For this reason, we are working with our providers to extend children's centre contracts for a further six months. This will give us the time we need to re-design services for children and families and put forward proposals which can help to reduce demand on other services, helps to keep families together and lead us towards an integrated early

childhood and family system.

We have a comprehensive stakeholder engagement plan in place and we are meeting with all providers and a range of other stakeholders as we continue to shape proposals for a new service model. We intend to consult publicly on these proposals in the autumn. We will present Children's Services Committee in January for a decision on any future model for supporting families with young children.

Recommendations:

To note the updated timeline for children centre services re-design

1. Proposal (or options)

- 1.1 We will work with providers, partner agencies and families in developing proposals to deliver our vision that:

Early childhood and family services will collectively support Norfolk's children to get the best start in life, targeting those in greatest need and supporting families to be resourceful and resilient so that their children can thrive.

- 1.2 By offering a blend of support to develop community and peer led support for families with young children, alongside universal access to digital online information and advice, and targeted support for vulnerable families with additional and complex needs reflecting the four guiding principles of Norfolk Futures:

- Offering our help early to prevent and reduce demand for specialist services;
- Joining up our work so that similar activities and services are easily accessible, done once and done well;
- Being business-like making best use of digital technology to ensure value for money;
- Using evidence and data to target our work where it can make the most difference.

- 1.3 As part of a phased approach that builds an integrated Early Childhood and Family System, the recommissioning of children centres provides an ideal opportunity to design and deliver an early childhood and family service that engages effectively with vulnerable families with additional and complex needs, at the earliest point, and provides appropriately targeted responses to meet their needs.

- 1.4 We have an opportunity to secure a refreshed approach that draws together universal and targeted support for families with young children and therefore improve outcomes for children, through integration with the Healthy Child Programme, community health provision, our work to ensure high quality, sufficient early years provision, support for home learning, family information, community development activity and the council's ambition for flexible and agile use of community assets, as part of delivering fully integrated and joined up public services.

- 1.5 We have a comprehensive stakeholder engagement plan in place and are meeting and working with providers and a range of other stakeholders including the Voluntary Sector, Education, Health and District Councils, as we shape proposals for an innovative service model. We intend to consult publicly on these proposals in

the autumn, to inform decision making by Children's Services Committee in January 2019 on any future service model for supporting families with young children.

2. Background and Policy Context

2.1 Children's centres were first established in Norfolk in 2000, with the first centre opening in Norwich under the national Sure Start programme. Their aim was to offer support to families in the most disadvantaged areas of the county, offering a variety of services. Over time the focus of children's centre provision has changed, with an increasing focus on targeted support for families with specific vulnerabilities and disadvantages.

2.2 There are currently 53 designated children centres across Norfolk, operating from a variety of settings including schools, libraries and purpose-built buildings, outreach venues and directly to some families in their own homes.

2.3 The services are delivered through contracts with 12 different providers including a national charity, a local charity, an NHS Trust, and schools including academies.

2.4 Services currently include:

- Antenatal and postnatal programmes and support
- Parenting advice and programmes
- Individual support for parents experiencing difficulties such as mental health, drugs and alcohol use and domestic abuse
- Advice about early years education and childcare
- Support, information and advice on a range of topics from healthy eating to employment and training
- Drop-in play sessions
- A place to meet and talk to other parents/carers

2.5 The current children's centre service model was constructed more than seven years ago and contracts with existing providers are coming to an end in 2019. This is the right time to review, redesign and deliver a consultation about proposed the new ways the service could delivered, to reflect the change in needs and how families access services, and to seek views on how these services can be provided in the future.

2.6 Since the initial establishment of the Children's Centre programme there have also been major policy changes and recommendations, including:

- The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum became statutory in 2008, setting standards in learning and welfare for any provider caring for children from birth to five years old
- Responsibility for public health transferred to councils on 1 October 2015, including the commissioning of a Healthy Child Programme for 0-19s
- An entitlement of 15 hours free childcare for three and four-year olds was introduced in 2010, extended to 30 hours for children of working parents in 2017
- 15 hours free childcare for disadvantaged 2 year olds was introduced in 2014
- Recommendations from "Unlocking, talent, fulfilling potential: A plan for improving social mobility through education" including improving early language development. Department of Education, December 2017.
- Recommendations from "State of the Nation 2017: Social Mobility in Great Britain, Social Mobility Commission, November 2017 - Every local authority should develop an integrated strategy for improving disadvantaged children's

outcomes to include improved support for early education settings, collaborative working groups, tailored advice and comprehensive training for early year's teachers.

2.7 Norfolk County Council is required to have regard to the statutory guidance issued by the Department for Education in 2013, when carrying out duties relating to children's centre services under the Childcare Act 2006. This places a duty on the Council to improve the wellbeing of children from birth to age five in Norfolk and to reduce inequalities between them. The Act makes clear that we so far as is reasonably practicable, we must make sufficient provision of children's centres to meet local need. We must also work together with relevant partners and ensure that early childhood services are provided in an integrated manner.

2.8 A children's centre is defined in the Act as a place or a group of places:

- which is managed by or on behalf of, or under arrangements with, the local authority with a view to securing that early childhood services in the local authority's area are made available in an integrated way;
- through which early childhood services are made available (either by providing the services on site, or by providing advice and assistance on gaining access to services elsewhere); and
- at which activities for young children are provided.

2.9 From the statutory definition children's centres should make appropriate and integrated services available. There is no specified model for how this should be achieved.

2.10 As well as responding to this sufficiency requirement we will be designing the new service model to respond specifically to the needs of local communities in Norfolk and the evidence about which families we should particularly be prioritising for support. As part of the consultation we will be publishing a data and evidence pack showing how the new service design has been informed by our understanding of local needs. We will also be using the consultation to gather additional evidence directly from families and communities about local needs and local priorities.

3. Financial Implications

3.1 As part of this redesign, careful consideration will be given to ensure that every penny of public service money is spent well as the overall council budget reduces. Our proposal will seek to maximize all the funding spent on early years provision. This means that whilst the agreed annual budget is £5m, instead of the current £10m, in future years this will be joined together with wider investment in services for young children to form a larger total pot, so we can deliver an appropriate range of services in accordance with need and our statutory responsibilities.

3.2 The service design work is extremely complex and has a great many dependencies. It is a very large and complicated project and it is clearly vital that we get it right. For this reason, we are working with our providers to extend children's centre contracts for a further six months.

3.3 The contract extension does not affect the level of savings to be delivered through this redesign work but it does require a re-profiling of the timeline for their delivery and will result in a one-off budget pressure in 2019/20 of £1.7m

4. Issues, risks and innovation

- 4.1 Given the scope and complexity of this project detailed work is being undertaken to understand any risks to the local authority in delivery and to understand the impact to communities and wider stakeholders.
- 4.2 A community and equality impact assessment will be completed as part of the preparatory work and will be presented to Children's Services Committee at the end of the consultation period along with the analysis of any risks for the local authority.
- 4.3 Informed by national evidence, we now have a positive opportunity to jointly commission and better integrate services for the benefit of children and families, transforming and modernising our early years and children's centre services, to deliver joined-up provision that better meet the needs of families, informed by their perspective.

Officer Contact

If you have any questions about matters contained or want to see copies of any assessments, eg equality impact assessment, please get in touch with:

If you have any questions about matters contained in this paper please get in touch with:

Officer Name: Sarah Jones

Email address: sarah.jones2@norfolk.gov.uk



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