

To: Cabinet Members  
From: Rosalind Turner  
Date: 16 November 2009  
Subject: Children's Centres: Review

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Sure Start Children's Centres are service hubs where children under five-years-old and their families can receive seamless integrated services and information. The Children's Centres bring together childcare, early education, health and family support services, with the aim of improving outcomes for all children under five, but particularly for those children and families whose needs are greatest. The Government's vision, set out most recently in the Children and Young People's Plan, is that every child and young person should have the opportunity to fulfil their potential. Children's Centres are seen to be at the forefront of transforming the way services are delivered for babies and young children and their families. By 2010, there will be 3,500 centres nationally and every child and their family will have access to children's centre services.
- 1.2 Local authorities have been given strategic responsibility for the delivery of Children's Centres and have been tasked with planning the location and development of centres to meet the needs of local communities. Kent County Council's (KCC's) Early Years and Childcare Strategy, approved by Cabinet in September 2008, recognises the development of Children's Centres as a key priority in improving services for children and young people.
- 1.3 The Children's Centre programme has been delivered nationally in three phases or 'rounds': Round One (2004-2006); Round Two (2006-2008) and Round Three (2008-2010). The range and extent of services offered by children's centres delivered in each phase varies according to need. In Kent:
- in Round One, 20 Children's Centres were developed where the need was greatest, focusing on providing services for children under fives and their families living in wards that were amongst the most 20% most disadvantaged in the country;
  - in Round Two, KCC had a target to deliver an additional 52 centres, ensuring that all children living in the 30% most disadvantaged Super Output Areas had access to the full level of children's centres services. Also beginning to work towards universal coverage by developing centres offering a less intensive range of services, in communities of greater overall affluence. (details of Rounds One and Two Children's Centres are attached as Appendix One)
  - in Round Three, local authorities are asked to continue the roll out of Children's Centres to areas not served by Rounds One and Two, thereby ensuring that all under fives and their families have access to an appropriate level of services. To achieve this, KCC was given an original target of 30 Round Three centres.

## 1.4. Children's Centre Milestones

There are two key milestones in the development of a children's centre, the achievement of which for each centre is assessed by an organisation called Together for Children, with which the Government contracts to ensure the delivery of the programme. The first milestone is Designation, achieved when Together for Children is satisfied that the location of and plans for the delivery of a centre are in place and robust. The second, which can follow as much as two years after Designation, is the achievement of Full Core Offer status, i.e. when the centre is fully operational. Designation and Full Core Offer status information for Kent's Round One and Two centres is also included in Appendix One. In carrying out Full Core Offer assessments, Together for Children have been/are being highly complimentary about the quality of Children's Centres in Kent.

## **2. Round Three Background**

- 2.1 Round Three Children's Centres will provide improved access to services generally for those living in more affluent areas. Services will be provided in partnership with private voluntary, independent and statutory agencies and will include outreach services, information and advice for mothers, fathers and carers on a range of subjects for young children, support for childminders via a quality assured co-ordinated network, activities for parents and carers and children at the centre and links to Job Centre Plus on advice on training and employment opportunities for parents. While many of these services may not be on site, there still needs to be strong coordination of delivery. In the main, Round Three services will build on existing services and not seek to create new services.
- 2.2 While Round Three centres provide services in areas that are deemed to be more affluent, there may be small pockets of deprivation, particularly in very rural areas and children and families in these areas may be at risk of greater social exclusion because of their isolation. These children and their families must be able to access an appropriate level of children's centre services and children's centre staff will play a key role in ensuring this happens. There is a universal level of service that must be provided in Children's Centres and it is important that families, no matter what their situation, feel the benefit of better integrated, accessible services delivered through the children's centre in their community.
- 2.3 To achieve universal coverage across Kent through Round Three, further Children's Centre development is required to varying degrees in the following 14 Local Children's Services Partnerships (LCSPS)
- :
- Ashford One
  - Ashford Rural
  - Canterbury City and Coastal
  - Cranbrook and Paddock Wood
  - Dartford East
  - Deal and Sandwich
  - Gravesham
  - Maidstone One

- Maidstone Two
- Malling
- Sevenoaks
- Swanley
- Tonbridge
- Tunbridge Wells

Extensive local consultation has already been undertaken on this through the LCSPs and with local members, resulting in an original 30 proposals for the location of the final phase of centres. This list of original proposals (attached as Appendix Two) is made up of 20 new builds and 10 Children's Centres to be developed within existing community facilities.

### **3 Round Three Review:**

3.1 In line with many other local authorities across the country, KCC now wishes to take stock of its overall Children's Centres portfolio and services, as part of an on-going commitment to ensure that:

- resources, both capital and revenue, are appropriately levelled at the children and families who need them most;
- all Kent Children's Centres and the services they offer are sustainable.

Additionally, the Government is in the process of carrying out a Select Committee Inquiry into Children's Centres nationally in order to ascertain if they are fulfilling their original purpose. (Kent did submit a response to this which was agreed at the Children's Trust Board)

Initial investigations indicated that there may be different ways of delivering the Round Three children's centre service offer in some areas. In particular, the number of new build centres could potentially be reduced, with more services delivered in existing facilities.

In this context, Cabinet Members agreed on 28 September 2009 to carry out a Review of Children's Centres, with a particular focus on Round Three. In order to achieve this, KCC's Children's Centre Project Team has undertaken work with Area Children's Services Officers (ACSOS) and LCSPs to review those proposals outlined in Appendix A.

#### **3.2 Objectives:**

The objectives of this Review include:

- minimising the number of new builds as far as possible;
- maximising of the number of centres delivered in existing facilities;
- further exploration as to whether some centres might be delivered and managed through contractual arrangements with relevant voluntary or private organisations;
- identifying the potential to provide universal coverage for the children and families of Kent through fewer centres.

### 3.3 Timescales

<b>Timescales</b>	<b>Activity</b>
September	CFE SMT and Cabinet agreement to the Review
October	Review carried out, as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inform stakeholders of the purpose and methodology of project.</li> <li>• Implement a revised consultation process for new proposals</li> <li>• Identify risks associated with the project</li> <li>• Re-align children centre coverage where appropriate</li> <li>• Identify opportunities to deliver required services through fewer centres</li> <li>• Review the existing build programmes, minimising the number of 'new builds' and identifying opportunities for placing centres in existing facilities ('non builds')</li> <li>• Identify other potential opportunities for delivering centres (commissioned)</li> <li>• Prepare proposals for a revised Round Three programme, including budget implications</li> </ul>
26 October – 6 November	Consultation with local members
10 November	Report to CFE SMT
16 November	Report to Cabinet Members
19 November	Report to Policy Overview Committee (Resources)
30 November	Final report to Full Cabinet
December and onwards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secure agreement for revised programme with DCSF.</li> <li>• Revise the General Sure Start Grant Children's Centre Capital Profile for monitoring</li> <li>• Agree revised Designation and Full Core Offer Schedule with relevant LCSP and Children's Centre Managers.</li> <li>• Submit plans for approval where required and implement build programme</li> <li>• Implement lease/rental arrangements where needed for 'non builds'</li> <li>• Implement funding arrangements/contracts for commissioned centres</li> </ul>

### 3.4 Methodology

The methodology has been, working with ACSOs and LCSPs, to review the number of Children's Centres needed to ensure universal children's centre coverage in the 14 LCSPs listed in paragraph 2.3, for each one considering:

- whether existing Round One and Two centres serve too many/too few children? Is there scope to adjust the reach area? For example, where an existing centre serves a relatively small number of families, it may make sense to extend the reach to include nearby less disadvantaged families, especially if that makes the centre more viable in the future
- how many Round Three centres are required to ensure universal coverage? If fewer than proposed, how can centre reach areas be revised without jeopardising access to services for those families that need them most?
- if there are new opportunities to deliver centres in existing community facilities.
- If there are any existing voluntary or private sector organisations that deliver children’s centre related services, so that a commissioning arrangement might be considered.

### 3.5 Review Recommendations

Specific recommendations arising from the Review will be shared initially with CFE SMT on 10 November, and then circulated as appropriate to Cabinet Members ahead of 16 November and similarly to Policy Overview Committee (Resources) members ahead of 19 November. The final report will then be prepared ahead of Full Cabinet on 30 November.

### 3.6 Risk Assessment and Management

<b>Area</b>	<b>Risk</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Risk Management</b>
Delivering required services through fewer centres	May be harder for families to reach children’s centre services	High	Ensure effective mapping of services and robust outreach systems
	Children and families living in rural areas may be more isolated from services	High	Ensure effective mapping of services and robust outreach systems
Placing more Round 3 centres in existing facilities (‘non builds’)	May be difficult and time consuming to identify potential locations in the relevant areas	Med	Manage the risk within the overall timescales
	May be complex and time consuming lease arrangements	High	Manage the risk within the overall timescales
	Unknown costs associated with DDA requirements – may be significant	High	Manage the risk within the overall budget
	Sharing facilities may initially ‘dilute’ the Sure Start message	Med	Ensure SureStart facilities are clearly badged and marketed.
Increase delivery through	Expensive revenue option	High	Manage the risk within the overall budget
	Performance may be harder	Low -	Strong accountability mechanisms

commissioning other organisations to run centres on behalf of KCC	to manage	med	
	Tender process, where applicable, may be time consuming	High	Manage the risk within the overall timescales
Minimising the number of capital projects ('new builds')	Employers Agents and contractors appointed for existing capital programme – potential for implied costs of termination	High	Manage the risk within the overall budget
Timescales	Potential/unforeseen delays in revised build programme	High	Manage the risk within the overall timescales
	Potential/unforeseen delays in revised 'non build' programme	High	Manage the risk within the overall timescales
Stakeholders	Stakeholders may lose confidence in the programme	Low - med	Implement strong communication processes with clear lines or responsibility

#### 4. Recommendations

Cabinet members are recommended to

- receive this report and note its content,
- receive, comment on and agree the recommendations arising from the Review to be circulated following CFE SMT on 10 November

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