

CHILDREN'S CENTRE PROGRAMME DELIVERY MODEL

Cabinet Member	Councillor David Simmonds CBE
Cabinet Portfolios	Deputy Leader of the Council Education and Children's Services
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Papers with report	Consultation Report Petition Hearing Minutes Equalities Impact Assessment

HEADLINE INFORMATION

Summary	This report provides a summary of proposed changes to the Children's Centre programme delivery model following a BID Review of 0-19 Family Support services commissioned by the council. It includes an overview of the outcomes of a consultation exercise that was undertaken in relation to the proposed changes.
Putting our Residents First	This report supports the following Council objective of: <i>Our People.</i>
Financial Cost	The proposed new delivery model set out in this report will enable the service to contribute towards a part year Medium Term Financial Forecast budget saving of £404k (£215k of which is in the 2016/17 base budget, with a further £189k identified in 2017/18), increasing by a further £95k in 2018/19 reflecting the full year effect of this proposal.
Relevant Policy Overview Committee	Children, Young People and Learning
Ward(s) affected	All

RECOMMENDATION

That Cabinet:

1. Notes the outcome of the Children's Centres consultation report; the views given by residents at the Petition Hearing of 1 February 2017; and the outcome of the completed Equalities and Human Rights Impact Assessment and has full regard to them in deciding whether to implement the proposals.
2. Ratifies a decision taken by the Leader of the Council and Deputy Chief Executive and Corporate Director of Residents Services on 2 March 2017 to agree that Hillside and Uxbridge College Children's Centres be no longer operational as delivery sites from 1 April 2017 in support of the wider BID transformation Children's Centres project; and

/continued...

3. Notes that the Children's Centre programme will be delivered in-house with effect from 1 April 2017 and agrees to the subsequent reshaping of services into a localities model with a number of hub centres and linked satellite provision.

Reasons for recommendations

Hillingdon Council currently has 18 children's centres. Under the current delivery model, each centre is registered as a standalone centre and has its own distinct leadership and management arrangements. The provision is resourced by providing each individual centre with a budget allocation to employ a range of staff to deliver the core programme offer.

The recommendations concern remodelling the children's centre programme as part of a wider transformation process relating to family support services commissioned by the Council. The proposal will create five distinct geographical service delivery areas across the Borough. Each area will be served by a lead children's centre 'hub' and a number of linked sites with shared leadership and management across all sites. The lead 'hub' centre will be responsible for coordinating the delivery of early childhood services and managing the distribution of activity and staff within their area according to need.

The recommended new model supports the concept as outlined in the Statutory Guidance for Children's Centres 2013, that children's centres are as much about making appropriate and integrated services available, as they are about providing premises in particular geographical areas. In practical terms, this means that only the lead centres will be registered as standalone children's centres with Ofsted. The remaining centres will be listed as linked sites and will no longer be subject to individual inspections.

The proposed changes will further strengthen the current approach to the planning and delivery of integrated and flexible family support to residents, in accordance with the findings of the BID Review of 0-19 services. It will also improve the efficiency of the programme by moving away from the historic approach of providing standard core funding to 18 centres by introducing a model which will enable a more focused and targeted approach to meeting resident needs and priorities.

Alternative options considered

The option to continue with current arrangements was considered. It is not recommended as the commissioning of the programme via 11 separate external providers alongside arrangements for managing seven centres directly does not enable the Council to secure consistency of service across the programme. Moreover, the ambition of the proposed model is to develop a new approach to providing family support services based on feedback offered by parents during the 0-19 BID Review process. The approach of separately commissioning services limits the scope for developing a more coherent and consistently commissioned service with the scope to extend beyond the current 0-5 remit of the Children's Centre programme.

Alternative approaches to managing and organising provision were also considered, including variations in localities and arrangements for leading and managing services. It is considered that the five locality model offered the best solution in terms of creating manageable areas to coordinate and plan services within.

Policy Overview Committee comments

None at this stage. Policy Overview Committees were consulted on Cabinet's budget proposals prior to adoption of the budget by Council on 23 February 2017.

INFORMATION

1. The Local Authority has a duty to improve the wellbeing of young children in their area and reduce inequalities between them, as well as a duty to make arrangements to ensure that early childhood services in their area are provided in an integrated manner; in order to facilitate access and maximise the benefits of those services to young children and their parents.
2. Early childhood services are defined as:
 - early years provision (early education and childcare);
 - social services functions of the local authority relating to young children, parents and prospective parents;
 - health services relating to young children, parents and prospective parents;
 - training and employment services to assist parents or prospective parents; and
 - information and advice services for parents and prospective parents.
3. Sure Start Children's Centres are currently one of the mechanisms for ensuring this provision and in Hillingdon there are eighteen such centres in operation across the Borough.

THE CURRENT SERVICE DELIVERY MODEL

4. Ensuring the provision of early childhood services in the area is the responsibility of the Director of Children's Services and within Hillingdon the service with responsibility for delivery is the Early Intervention and Prevention Service.
5. Of the Borough's eighteen Children's Centres:
 - seven centres are directly managed by the Council,
 - nine centres are run by schools,
 - one is provided by a local charity and
 - one run by a local FE College located on their campus in Hayes.
6. All 18 centres are individually registered and managed, however, following a programme restructure in 2013, the centres were reorganised into three locality groups, with a lead centre identified for each locality, to enable the delivery of improved, and more joined up services to residents through collaborative working. The table below sets these out in more detail.

Locality Group	Children's Centre	Operated by
GROUP 1 North	Harefield Children's Centre (lead)	Harefield Infant School
	Coteford Children's Centre	Coteford Infant School
	Hillside Children's Centre	Hillside Infant School

	South Ruislip Early Years & Children's Centre	Local Authority
GROUP 2 South East	Uxbridge College Children's Centre (Hayes) (Lead)	Uxbridge College
	Barra Hall Children's Centre	Local Authority
	Belmore Children's Centre	Local Authority
	Charville Children's Centre	Charville Primary School
	McMillan Children's Centre	McMillan Early Childhood Centre
	Nestles Avenue Children's Centre	Local Authority
	Pinkwell Children's Centre	Local Authority
	Yeading Children's Centre	Yeading Infant School
GROUP 3 South West	Oak Farm Children's Centre (Lead)	Oak Farm Infant School
	Cherry Lane Children's Centre	Cherry Lane Primary School
	Colham Manor Children's Centre	Colham Manor Primary School
	Cowley Children's Centre	Local Authority
	Uxbridge Children's Centre	Local Authority
	Yiewsley Cornerstone Centre	Cornerstone Centre (Charity linked to Yiewsley Baptist Church)

7. Children's Centres provide a wide range of universal family support services for parents and young children. From the earliest start parents-to-be can access centres for their antenatal care provided by the Community Midwifery team and attend antenatal classes provided collaboratively by centre staff, Health Visiting and Midwifery. Continued health support for parents is available in the form of breastfeeding advice and support, weaning workshops, child health clinics and baby weighing clinics. Centres also offer a wide range of sessions for parents and children to attend together, from music and movement, to story and rhyme and stay and play, helping to connect families, reduce isolation and support children's early learning and development.

8. Targeted services for vulnerable children and families provide access to specialist support and include services such as Attention Hillingdon, Language for Life, Speech and Language Therapy, Talking Therapies and targeted family support. Centres also provide access to employment and benefits advice, and adult learning opportunities.

9. New families continue to register with the children's centre programme; January 2017 saw 404 children and 551 adults registering to use services. Current registration for the population of children aged 0-5 stands at 92.9% across the Borough.

10. The most current participation data shows that in January 2017, 36% of all participants at all

Children's Centres were from vulnerable families. This is broken down as 27% in the centres in the North of the Borough, 44% in the centres in the South East of the Borough and 33% in the South West.

11. It is of note that participation rates for families with children aged 3, 4 and 5 years is lower than for families with very young children, due to children accessing early education provision. The current uptake for the 3 and 4 year old free entitlement stands at 98%.

12. Externally commissioned Children's Centre services have been historically managed via a Service Level Agreement, however, it has been a challenge in recent years to agree these with all providers concerned.

BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DELIVERY REVIEW OF 0-19 SERVICES

13. Between March and June 2016 extensive stakeholder engagement with over 850 people took place as part of a longer-term internal review of a number of the London Borough of Hillingdon (LBH) commissioned services for 0-19's. The review concerned a number of services with a broad intent to improve outcomes and opportunities for children and young people and their families. It covered:

- The Healthy Child Programme comprising of The Health Visiting Service, and The School Nursing Service;
- The Children's Centre Programme; and
- Parenting Programmes.

14. The opportunity to look at early intervention and prevention services in this way, was in part informed by the transfer to the Council of commissioning responsibility for public health services in 2013 and 2015, for School Nursing and Health Visiting Services respectively, and the forthcoming expiry of novated contracts for these services in March 2017.

15. Conversations with stakeholders covered all aspects of service delivery including the strengths and weaknesses of current arrangements, the individual experiences of service users, providers and staff and what they considered key priorities for these services, and views on how services could be delivered differently in what is a challenging financial climate for local authorities. Opportunities to further engage, cooperate with, and even jointly commission with partners such as the NHS, the voluntary and community sector, and parents and carers, were also explored.

16. The review engaged 646 parents and carers using services, 45 children and young people using services, 86 service providers including governors, trustees, managers and staff and 81 representatives of 29 partner organisations, agencies and schools.

17. Considered as a whole, the main points of learning from the engagement process were that generally stakeholders who took part valued:

- Local and accessible services;
- Trusted, non-judgemental places that are 'on our side' where families 'feel safe';
- A single point of access for family support;
- Consistency of service and personnel;
- Integrated services from a whole family perspective;
- Partnership working across services;
- Raising the profile of services in the community;
- Parenting support;

- Making the best use of local assets – both people and places;
- Post age five support; and
- Outcome focused emphasis for services.

18. This engagement activity provided valuable resident insight into the services within scope and how they might be strengthened. The views offered during the review process have been considered alongside other information gathered at earlier stages of the review, including models employed by other local authorities to design and develop proposals for the future delivery of the services in scope.

19. Learning from the review is informing the development of a new ‘family network’ approach to the commissioning of family support services. This in turn has led to the commissioning of a new integrated 0-19 Healthy Child Service through a single contract and specification, (formally separate Health Visiting and School Nursing contracts), informed by the views offered by residents during the review process. The specification includes reference to the requirement to deliver services in an integrated and collaborative manner in conjunction with other related services, including those delivered via the Children's Centre Programme.

20. The new joint Health Visiting and School Nursing Service will commence on 1 April 2017 and constitutes Phase 1 of the overall 0-19 Service development process. Phase 2 of the transformation process relates to the Children's Centre Programme, which pending Cabinet's approval, will also commence on 1 April 2017.

THE PROPOSED CHILDREN'S CENTRE SERVICE DELIVERY MODEL

21. Within the context of the wider 0-19 Review and informed by the learning gained during the review process, the Council proposed the introduction of a ‘hub and spoke’ model for the delivery of children's centre services. Providers were advised of the proposed changes at a briefing on 9 December 2016. Formal consultation on the proposed changes commenced on 14 December 2016 and closed on 25 January 2017.

22. As part of the process of advising on proposed changes to the current delivery model, external providers were also informed of the Council's decision to discontinue current external commissioning arrangements and assume direct management of all staff employed to deliver the Children's Centre Programme as of 1 April 2017. In addition, two current external providers, Hillside Infant School and Uxbridge College, were further advised of the Council's decision that due to their failure to progress lease arrangements, services from these sites will be discontinued.

23. It is envisaged that the revised delivery model will establish a more effective and efficient delivery model through reconfiguring the current provision into 5 localities with shared leadership and management, directing the staff and resources within each area in response to need and demand. Each of the 5 localities would have a hub centre, connected to a number of link centres (11 in total) to support the programme delivery in the wider locality. If agreed, the new model would essentially form the ‘backbone’ of a new ‘family network’ approach to delivering and coordinating family support services. The introduction of the new model will enable ongoing evaluation of the benefits of an approach that seeks to make best use of the full range of community assets available to support families and not be primarily reliant of a Children's Centre based approach.

24. Each locality would have a distinct geographical reach area arranged by Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs); the size of the reach areas is determined by population levels of children under five, levels of deprivation, socio-economic factors, and practical factors including

transport links.

25. The role of the hub centre is to lead and coordinate services within the defined geographical area, ensuring distribution of directly delivered activity and staff according to need. Whilst it is essential for staff to have a base centre enabling clear lines of supervision and accountability, there would be an expectation that staff would be deployed flexibly across the locality, making best use of their skills and expertise and the wider range of community assets available to them.

26. The proposed hub sites are informed by a number of factors including the size of building and location within the locality. It is envisaged that over time the hubs will seek to provide accommodation for professionals from related services such as Health Visiting, enabling a more integrated and efficient service. The following table illustrates the proposed new model.

27. The proposed model, predicated on a 'Hub and Spoke' arrangement, is a delivery model recognised by Ofsted both in respect of registration and inspection arrangements. The revised Children's Centre Inspection Framework 2013, recognised a number of different centre management arrangements in place across the country and provided the means by which these centres would be inspected. The model proposed for Hillingdon Children's Centres has been implemented by many local authorities across London and larger county councils, including Hillingdon's geographical neighbours in Ealing and Harrow.

28. Prior to consultation, the Hub centre for the North locality was designated as South Ruislip. Following feedback received as part of the consultation process, this element of the proposal has been reconsidered and Harefield has now been identified as the proposed lead for this area.

	Locality	Hub	Satellite Sites	Wards Services	Total Population Aged 0-5
1	North	Harefield	Coteford South Ruislip	Cavendish Eastcote & East Ruislip Manor Harefield Northwood Northwood Hills South Ruislip West Ruislip	6,978
2	Uxbridge & Cowley	Oak Farm	Cowley Uxbridge	Brunel Hillingdon East Ickenham Uxbridge North Uxbridge South	4,416
3	Yeading & Hayes Park	Yeading	Belmore Charville	Barnhill Charville Yeading	4,451
4	West Drayton & Yiewsley	Yiewsley	Cherry Lane Colham Manor	Heathrow Villages Yiewsley West Drayton	4,612

5	Hayes Town	Barra Hall	McMillan Nestles Avenue Pinkwell	Botwell Pinkwell Townfield	5,425
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THE BUSINESS CASE FOR CHANGE

29. Consideration has been given to potential changes to the Children's Centre delivery model, to ensure that it aligns to the Hillingdon context whilst also agreeing with statutory guidance which states: " A Sure Start children's centre is defined 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 "

30. The guidance goes on to state:

"It follows from the statutory definition of a children's centre that children's centres are as much about making appropriate and integrated services available, as it is about providing premises in particular geographical areas".

31. The proposed changes have been informed by the view that as currently delivered, the children's centre programme is too narrowly focused on delivery from existing premises and locations. It does not reflect the views of residents shared during the Business Improvement Delivery (BID) review, that whilst they value the current programme, they also value flexible services with the ability to serve communities creatively using a wide range of community assets.

32. Whilst individually each Children's Centre is delivering a diverse range of services within the overall programme they are resource intensive, with each centre being operated individually and incurring a full range of staffing and other associated costs. The current model does not afford the scope to use resources more creatively and flexibly across the whole programme and is limited in its capacity to coordinate services and develop wider networks of family support.

33. The proposed changes are concerned with developing synergies across the children's centre programme and with associated services such as the newly commissioned Healthy Child Service to make better use of resources across the breadth of services commissioned by LBH. It will enable a more integrated approach to service coordination and resource deployment.

34. A key message that came through the review conversations with families was the value they placed on being supported, when required, across the 0-19 age range. There was recognition of the strengths of the Children's Centre Programme and elements of the service that could be translated into a 0-19 model. The proposed changes seek to build on the strengths of the service to be evolved across the 5-19 age range to support families. Progress has been made in this regard through the commissioning of the 5-9 school nursing component of the healthy child service which will be aligned to the proposed hub and spoke model if agreed.

OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION PROCESS AND PETITION HEARINGS

35. The proposed changes to the children's centre delivery model have generated a broad range of views from residents and other stakeholders. These have been expressed through the formal consultation process, but also by means of direct correspondence to the Council and through a number of petitions which were heard by the Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services. In total 618 responses were received through the formal consultation route, 11 responses were received via other forms of communication and 9 petitions were made against the proposed changes. The detail of these views are summarised in the Consultation Report and Petition Hearing minutes attached to this report. The following information summarises the main issues raised during the consultation process:

Improving consistency by delivering a more coordinated and flexible service

36. A significant number of residents questioned whether the proposed new model would deliver an improvement in consistency, coordination and flexibility of services. The views offered can be categorised in the following themes:

- Children's Centres are already working well, they don't need to change.
- Services will no longer be tailored to the needs of the local community.
- There will be less choice of services.

37. The responses suggest that there is a significant level of satisfaction with the existing children's centre service and that children's centres are highly valued by families in Hillingdon. Consequently the majority of respondents do not see the need for change or improvement. There also appears to be a view that an increase in coordination and flexibility could lead to a reduction of staffing and loss of responsiveness to local need.

38. Resident satisfaction with the service provided have been noted as have the reservations in relation to how the proposed model might affect staffing levels and responsiveness to need.

Strengthening the offer by redesigning the children's centre service into 5 hubs and 11 linked centres

39. A number of residents question the value of the proposed 'hub and spoke' model. The views offered can be categorised in the following themes:

- Good relationships between parents and staff will be lost;
- Children's Centres will no longer be able to respond to local need and
- Services will be diluted, of poorer quality and harder to access.

40. The individual response in this area were similar to that of the previous point with concerns primarily relating to the assumption that the proposed changes would lead to an end of current positive working relationships.

Developing alternative ways in which families can be supported in the areas currently serviced by Hillside and Uxbridge College (Hayes) Children's centres

41. A significant number of residents, particularly current users of Hillside Children's Centre, raised concerns at the discontinuation of the Children's centre programme from the premises in question. Views on alternative ways residents might be supported were:

- Don't close these children's centres;
- Find another venue in the local area; and
- Provide free transport to other centres.

Views in relation to the disadvantaging of any residents as a consequence of the proposed changes

42. Consultation respondents, including current users of Hillside and Uxbridge College Children's Centres also expressed concern that residents could be disadvantaged as a consequence of the proposals. Key concerns were:

- That reducing the number of centres will mean there will no longer be sufficient capacity to meet individual needs; and
- That families will find services harder to access due to having to travel further which in turn could lead to isolation and financial hardship for the most vulnerable families.

Views in relation to how the Council can continue to improve children's centre services in the future

43. Respondents offered a range of views on how the Council can continue to improve children's centre services. They may be summarised as follows:

- Keep the children's centres as they are;
- Keep centres closely linked with schools to support children with transition to school;
- Maintain current levels of services and staff;
- Invest more funding into children's centre services to be able to offer a wider range of services;
- Consider working parents by offering more flexible services in the evenings and at weekends;
- Increase the number of places available at sessions/at popular sessions;
- Offer activities for a wider age range for parents with more than one child; and
- Improve the booking system, offer bookings online.

Conclusion

44. The views offered by residents and other stakeholders during the consultation process have been noted.

45. Service users expressed concerns that valued relationships with staff would be lost as a consequence of the proposed changes. It should be noted that the majority of the staff currently working on the programme are already employed by the Council and for the most part will be maintained in their current delivery locations pending further consideration of how the overall staffing establishment aligns with the proposed hub and spoke model should it be agreed.

46. There were also concerns that the breadth and quality of services would be reduced and that they would be harder to access. Whilst recognising the concern, it should be noted that the locality approach to assessing need and planning and prioritising services is intended to ensure services are more effectively targeted to those most in need. The range of service offered will be tailored to identified and prioritised needs in each locality.

47. Residents have also expressed concern about the impact of discontinuation of programme delivery via Hillside and Uxbridge College due to potential increases in travelling time to access other delivery points, and increased demand placed on those centres. Residents concerns are understood. Residents and stakeholders have been advised that services are being discontinued from the sites in question as a consequence of lease negotiations with the two providers not being concluded because of their failure to agree terms. As a consequence the Council does not have the surety of access required to plan for the delivery of services going forward. The views of residents in relation to alternative delivery locations have been noted and are being pursued. Work continues to develop and introduce alternative support arrangements given the loss of the two sites in question from the programme.

48. It should also be noted that the proposed model is predicated on an approach that is informed by the need to enable family access to support and as a consequence does not limit its planning and delivery to the current children's centre estate. The planned intention is to assess need in each given locality and develop a creative and flexible service in response, which includes targeting the most vulnerable and in need of support.

49. In conclusion, it is recommended that the proposed children's centre delivery model is approved as proposed. Should the proposal be agreed officers will continue to work with residents and stakeholders to allay any outstanding concerns raised through the consultation during the implementation process. Having considered the views offered during both the 0 - 19 BID review process and the consultation process, the identified benefits of the proposed changes remain and are summarised as follows:

- The scope to build on the effectiveness of current arrangements for planning and coordinating services on a locality basis;
- Increased flexibility in use of staffing and resources to meet needs of defined localities;
- Improved coordination of related services such as the Healthy Child Programme;
- The consolidate and develop the structure that's already in place;
- More effective and efficient use programme resources by moving away from deployment via a standardised 'centre by centre' arrangement to a locality needs and priorities based approach; and
- The introduction a locally and nationally well-regarded approach that will provide the basis from which to develop the wider 0 -19 offer.

Financial Implications

The consequence of this change will result in the transfer of all staff currently employed by the externally commissioned Children's Centres to the line management of the Council with effect from 1 April 2017, the funding for which will no longer be provided to the organisation, but instead will be managed directly by the Council.

These changes will also result in the discontinuation of the programme at Hillside Infants and Uxbridge College.

The subsequent move to a hub and spoke model later in 2017, will enable the service to contribute to a Medium Term Financial Forecast part year saving of £404k (£215k of which is already included in the 2016/17 base budget, with a further £189k identified in 2017/18), increasing by a further £95k in 2018/19 reflecting the full year effect of the proposed implementation of the new hub and spoke delivery model.

It should be noted that the Children's Centre programme was developed using Sure Start Grant funding; as such, any changes that result in the closure of a centre, could invoke a clawback of

capital funds by the Department for Education. The clawback clause exists for a period of 25 years, with the value diminishing over that period.

EFFECT ON RESIDENTS, SERVICE USERS & COMMUNITIES

What will be the effect of the recommendation?

If approved the recommendations will lead to the introduction of a locality based model for the provision of children's centre services. The proposed model will result in the planning, coordination and targeting of services to residents in the proposed locality area based on need. Service users currently accessing services from Hillside and Uxbridge College will be supported to access services from alternative delivery sites.

An Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) has been completed in order to consider any potential impacts of the proposed new model should it be approved. A further assessment will be completed as part of the process of considering potential workforce changes should they be required post TUPE transfer.

As part of the changes an element of re-provisioning of services will be required in the areas affected by the discontinuation of services for Hillside and Uxbridge College locations. The needs of existing users of these locations, including vulnerable children and families will be considered and responded to as part of the transition process.

Consultation Carried Out or Required

A six week public consultation was carried out from 14 December 2016 - 25 January 2017 which outlined the proposed changes to the children's centre delivery model and what this would mean for service-users. The consultation received 614 responses. A summary of the responses and full survey results are contained within the consultation report attached, and referenced within the main body of this report.

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Corporate Finance

Corporate Finance has reviewed this report, noting that the introduction of a hub and spoke delivery model for Children's Centres during 2017 is expected to contribute towards delivery of MTF savings within the service as outlined above. New structures for in-house operation are yet to be fully determined and will be implemented following completion of relevant internal processes and consultation with the staff group as required. Implementation costs associated with the roll out of the new model are expected to be financed from a combination of capital receipts and earmarked reserves in line with the Council's broader funding strategy for service transformation.

The financial implications note that there remains a risk of historic Department for Education capital funding becoming repayable if buildings are no longer used for Children's Centre delivery. While the Council will seek to engage with the awarding body to avoid any such repayment of grant monies, it should be noted that any cost ultimately borne by the Council will be met from capital resources, reflecting that the assets created remain in public ownership and available to delivery of services to the public.

Legal comments

The Childcare Act 2006 places a duty upon local authorities to make arrangements for early childhood services in their area. In complying with this duty local authorities must ensure there are sufficient children's centres, so far as reasonably practicable to meet local need. Cabinet will need to be satisfied on the evidence before it that the proposed service delivery model is sufficient to meet local need.

A statutory duty to consult arises before closing a children's centre or making significant changes as how services are delivered, including through linked sites. The local authority conducted a formal consultation on its proposed changes between 14 December 2016 and 25 January 2017. The consultation appears to have been conducted lawfully having been undertaken at a time when the proposals were still at a formative stage; provided sufficient information as to the proposals; and provided adequate time for response. With regard to the Hillside and Uxbridge College sites, landlords failed to agree leases and therefore the consultation focused on alternative ways in which families can be supported in the areas currently serviced by Hillside and Uxbridge Children's Centres. The outcome of the consultation must be conscientiously taken into account before a decision is made.

The local authority, as a public body, is subject to the Human Rights Act and also to the Public Sector Equality Duty which is contained in the Equality Act 2010. The local authority must therefore have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those without it. The protected characteristics, in summary, are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

An Equalities and Human Rights assessment has been prepared and is attached to this report. The assessment takes into account the consultation responses the Council received and has regard to data obtained from registrations at the children's centre. The report analyses the potential negative and positive impacts upon residents. The report concludes negative impacts to residents can be mitigated through the provision of other local services. There is no suggestion in the report that the human rights of residents will be violated. Due regard must be had to the report before any decision is made.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

NIL.