

## SERVICE UPDATE ON EARLY YEARS & CHILDREN'S CENTRES

<b>Committee name</b>	Families, Health & Wellbeing Select Committee
<b>Officer reporting</b>	Claire Fry – Head of Child and Family Development Service
<b>Papers with report</b>	None
<b>Ward</b>	All wards

### HEADLINES

1. This report provides an update to the Committee following the BID review and subsequent staffing restructure of the Child and Family Development Service, incorporating the Council's directly managed Early Years provision and the Children's Centre programme.
2. The revised staffing restructure provides the required resources and leadership to modernise the Early Years and Children's Centre services, increase the capacity of the frontline teams and enabling the service to take a more commercial approach to Early Years provision.
3. Consultation with staff on the proposed re-structure commenced in January 2020; however due to the ensuing Coronavirus pandemic, the review process was put on hold. The consultations have subsequently concluded and work to recruit to the new structures is nearing conclusion.
4. The report also highlights the work underway to evolve the children's centres delivery offer in line with national agendas of The Best Start for Life and Family Hubs.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

**That the Committee note the update on the Council's Early years and Children's Centre provision.**

### SUPPORTING INFORMATION

#### EARLY YEARS PROVISION

1. The Council is responsible for directly providing early education and childcare, through 3 Early Years Centres located in Hayes, South Ruislip and Uxbridge. The centres provide places for 2, 3, and 4 year olds to access the government funded Early Education Entitlement scheme, as well as privately funded places for children aged 6 months to 5 years. The quality of the provision has been rated Good by Ofsted.

2. Running a commercially viable, high quality service is challenging and margins are small, even for private sector providers. As such, the service has struggled to evolve the culture from its original roots of an in-house non-income generating service, to an efficient, modern service. The re-structure supports resetting the culture of the service and establishing a team that delivers in a way that can begin to compete with private sector competitors.
3. The restructure has also standardised the capacity of each provision with a view to developing a sustainable business model that could be extended in future if required.

## **STAFFING AND RECRUITMENT**

4. As a regulated service, standard ratios of staff to children must be maintained, to ensure the safeguarding and welfare of the children in the service. The new staffing structure ensures these standards can be maintained at all times.
5. Long term uncertainty following an extended period of review has had an impact on the ability of the service to retain good quality staff. The review and subsequent restructure have enabled the service to create opportunities for career progression for existing staff and a more flexible delivery model has created more opportunities for staff at higher grades.
6. Nursery Managers are responsible for delivery of a commercially viable service, working alongside the wider Nursery Management team and the Nursery Service Manager, to ensure effective promotion, resourcing and practice to drive up occupancy levels. This involves driving change through day to day practice from establishing proactive management of placement enquires, through to setting and implementing effective policy and procedures.
7. A mix of qualified and unqualified workers are employed with a plan to introduce apprenticeship roles at each site to support workforce development and succession planning.
8. The Service Manager for the nurseries commenced in post in December 2020, joining the Council from a London-wide chain of social enterprise nurseries, where they were Area Manager for a cluster of 9 high performing nurseries. Thus, they bring a wealth of knowledge and expertise which the service has benefited from, in moving the business towards a more sustainable and financially viable operating model for the future.
9. External recruitment to positions within the structure is concluding, with the large majority of posts now filled; the final posts to be recruited to are those of the nursery apprentices once the current new starters have been onboarded.

## **IMPACT OF COVID**

10. During the first national Lockdown in March 2020, government guidance meant that the nurseries were required to close and only provide places for vulnerable children and children of keyworkers, where parents needed them to attend. This saw the occupancy of the nurseries reduce significantly, and all agency staff working in the nurseries at that time were stood down.

11. The additional capacity meant that the Council's Early Years provision was able to offer emergency placements to children of keyworkers or vulnerable children where their usual provision had closed, due to staff shortages or because it was not economically viable for them to remain open, resulting in support being provided for a further 10 or more families across the 3 sites.
12. In June 2020, nurseries were able to welcome back more children, with children phasing back in, commencing with the oldest children who were due to be starting primary school in September 2020.
13. All children were able to return since September 2020; however, whilst the nurseries remained open for business as usual in subsequent Lockdowns in November 2020 and January 2021 the sector experienced reduced parental demand for childcare, which has continued throughout 2021.
14. This has been borne out in the changing demands for childcare, with a reduced number of families seeking full-time care across the working week, as flexible working patterns and working from home continues to change demand within the sector.

## **PRACTICE HIGHLIGHTS**

15. The nurseries have a strong ethos on outdoor learning and play, offering children access to the outdoor learning environment all day, every day, all year round, and use this aspect of the provision to promote the nurseries to prospective families.
16. All three nurseries are participating in the Supervised Toothbrushing programme, delivered by the Community Oral Health Team, providing opportunities for children to engage in supervised toothbrushing as part of their nursery day. Training has been provided for staff and virtual workshops have been provided to parents to promote good oral health and enable them to understand the importance of regular toothbrushing snacks, reducing sugar intake, and fun activities that they can do at home to engage their child.
17. Positive relationships with children's centres has enabled the identification of children who would benefit from accessing a nursery place due to their own or their family circumstances, and supported their priority access for a place via the Families in Need funding panel.

## **CHILDREN'S CENTRES**

18. The children's centre programme provides information, advice and support to families with babies and young children, with a focus on the early years, i.e. pre-birth through to 5 years of age.
19. As an integral part of Hillingdon Council's Early Help offer, children's centres work with children and their families to ensure that they receive the right support at the right time. They enable families to support their children's health and well-being and learning and development needs to improve their outcomes and enhance their life chances.

20. They also help families develop the knowledge and skills to become effective parents, foster friendships, develop support networks and connect them with the wider communities in which they live.
21. Children's centres do this by making full use of the systems and tools available, including the new Early Help module in Protocol. The development of the Liquid Logic IT system to incorporate all aspects of early help will ensure visibility of all Council services engaged in supporting a child or young person and their family, and facilitate effective information sharing, enabling a more co-ordinated and timely response to any new presenting needs.
22. The programme continues to deliver a structured range of Universal and Targeted services across four key areas:
  - Health and Wellbeing,
  - Child Development and Early Learning,
  - Family Development and Support
  - Information and Advice
23. The programme uses gateway services such as universal health services provided at centres as the means to attract and engage those most in need, with a robust universal offer that reaches out to and proactively welcomes residents most likely to benefit from the service.
24. Universal services incorporate those provided by children's centres, nurseries, schools, libraries, youth centres, health and, voluntary and community groups that all children and families may draw upon at various stages in their lives for a variety of reasons. These services play an essential role, not only in providing families with the services they want, but also in identifying those who may benefit from additional or more targeted support to meet their needs.
25. Targeted services incorporate specialist support services and interventions, both individual and group, designed to respond to emerging and identified concerns and needs that cannot be met within the universal service offer, e.g. mental health needs, speech and language needs, parenting interventions.
26. The service is directly delivered and managed by the Council and operates across the borough via a network of centres and in the community, with the programme tailored to ensure activities are delivered in a way that best meets local need.

## **STAFFING AND RECRUITMENT**

27. The revised staffing structure is focused on delivering resident facing support and interventions, through enhanced co-ordination and planning of the delivery programme and development of more flexible roles. Improved alignment with wider Council resources, including SEND Advisory Services, Stronger Families Key Working services, alongside strengthening links with Health and the Voluntary Sector will further increase reach.
28. New roles have been created to give clear focus on programme development and community engagement and core delivery functions have been consolidated into more generic roles with an increased expectation that they will operate across a number of sites within a locality creating greater capacity through more effective use of the staff.

29. The Families Information Service and Portage Services are now centrally managed by the FIS Manager; however, operationally they will be integrated into the local delivery teams, increasing the accessibility of these services to residents as appropriate.
30. Locality Lead officers are responsible for shaping local services, ensuring sufficient delivery capacity and reach of the universal offer, engaging with key partners on the development, delivery, and monitoring of the local targeted offer, ensuring the outcomes of the programme are achieved.
31. The service manager for children's centres commenced in post in November providing an increase in leadership capacity to drive change through the structure. Their principal task has been to undertake the staffing restructure and support greater integration with the Council's Early Help/Stronger Families model of working.

## **IMPACT OF COVID**

32. The first national Lockdown in March 2020 saw the children's centre programme cease the face-to-face delivery offer, with 4 centres remaining operational to provide a base for Community Midwifery and Health services.
33. Staff worked from home and on socially distanced rotas to provide telephone advice and support, as well as providing remote family support sessions for the most vulnerable families. Staff showed their resilience and creativity, taking to Facebook Live to broadcast story times, song and rhyme times, deliver messy play and, arts and crafts activities.
34. The antenatal programme continued with parents-to-be offered telephone sessions with staff working flexibly including evenings, to provide the service at a time to suit the individual family.
35. Whilst some staff delivered foodbank parcels to those in greatest need, others were redeployed to support the Covid Community Hub, shopping for vulnerable residents, delivering PPE to Homecare providers and one staff member worked at the temporary morgue.
36. As Lockdown eased, centres reopened to support our Health partners to deliver pre-booked appointments in the community in a safe way. Families have access to Breast Feeding Clinics, Child Development Centre paediatric clinics, Children's Integrated Therapy Service advice sessions, Health Visitor-led well-baby clinics and Perinatal Mental Health services.
37. Individual family support sessions for the most vulnerable families were reinstated and the centres offered a safe space for Portage Home Visitors to engage with families of children with complex needs and disabilities. The service also worked with Homestart to engage with vulnerable families, whilst they are unable to carry out home visits.
38. The creativity of the staff was also been seen through the creation of a video promoting the key messages of Hands, Face, Space; with thanks to the families who shared video footage of their children, showing that even our youngest children can learn these key concepts! The video was shared on the children's centre page of the Council website.

39. Lessons learnt during the first Lockdown and the role out of the Council's new IT equipment and migration to Microsoft enabled the service to move many activities online. Courses and activities have been adapted to make them accessible on a virtual platform.
40. The service now offers a hybrid model, delivering face-to-face groups and activities in line with government guidance and, in addition, access to online groups and support services, such as parenting courses and antenatal classes.

## **PRACTICE HIGHLIGHTS**

41. A recent initiative has been to pilot the Hillingdon Neonatal clinic for pre-term babies in the community, delivered in partnership with Consultant Paediatricians and Health Visitors, at Colham Manor Children's Centre. This enables families to connect with the children's centre and engage with other families who have had similar experiences.
42. In response to the review led by Dame Andrea Leadsom, the government published 'The Best Start for Life: a vision for the 1001 critical days.' The review sets out 6 'action areas' for developing support for families in their child's earliest years. One such action is to develop a coherent joined up 'Start for Life' offer for all families, and work is underway with colleagues across the Council and in partnership with health and the third sector, to collate and articulate the offer in Hillingdon, in a way that is accessible to all families.
43. The development of Family Hubs, as a central access point for integrated services where families can access support, is another current area of development. The Council officially opened its first Family Hub in December 2020; located in the Mezzanine of the civic centre, the Uxbridge Family Hub brings together a range of services under one roof, making them accessible to children and families. Services include, Uxbridge Children's Centre, the Supervised Contact service, Multi-Agency Psychology service, Adolescent Development services and the Youth Justice service.
44. Work is in progress to develop the Family Hub model across the borough.

## **Implications on related Council policies**

A role of the Select Committees is to make recommendations on service changes and improvements to the Cabinet who are responsible for the Council's policy and direction.

## **How this report benefits Hillingdon residents**

The Early Years and Children's Centres enable children to get the best start in life.

## **Financial Implications**

As set out in the report.

## **Legal Implications**

None

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None