Havering
LONDON BOROUGH

CABINET **13 February 2013**	
Subject Heading:	**Review of Children's Centres**
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Paul Rochford
CMT Lead:	Joy Hollister, Group Director, Social Care & Learning
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Policy context:	These proposals will enable Children's Centre resources to be targeted where they are most needed, to support vulnerable children and families, particularly in areas of higher deprivation. These proposals will take forward the practical delivery of the council's offer for early help and support for troubled families, whilst saving on building running costs.
Financial summary:	Beyond the anticipated service benefits. these proposals are forecast to contribute £138,000 per annum to MTFS Savings. The issue of clawback has been explored with DfE and feedback is that it is unlikely that these proposals will attract a claw back of Surestart capital grant.
Is this a Key Decision?	Yes

Is this a Strategic Decision?	Yes
When should this matter be reviewed?	February 2014
Reviewing OSC:	Children's Services

The subject matter of this report deals with the following Council Objectives

Ensuring a clean, safe and green borough	[]
Championing education and learning for all	[x]
Providing economic, social and cultural activity in thriving towns and villages	[]
Valuing and enhancing the lives of our residents	[x]
Delivering high customer satisfaction and a stable council tax	[]

SUMMARY

This report presents the findings from the recent consultation on a review of Children Centres, which proposed the merger of Children Centre activities around 6 hub sites that took place between 15th October 2012 and 4th January 2013. Alternative operators (such as Schools and Libraries) would run and maintain the other smaller and less-used sites, which would be decommissioned as Children Centres, but continue to provide early years services such as pre-school provision.

Overall, the consultation responses received are supportive of the proposals which Cabinet are asked to approve.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are asked to:

I. Note the comments received and the overall findings from the consultation on the review of Children's Centres.

II. Approve the decommissioning of the following Children's Centres and the services currently provided within them to be transferred to the remaining hub sites by 2nd April 2013, subject to receiving final approval from the Department for Education:
- Airfield
- Harold Court
- Hilldene
- Pyrgo
- South Hornchurch
- Thistledene

- Upminster

III. Approve the continued provision of services from the following larger hub centres:
- Collier Row
- Chippenham Road
- Elm Park
- Ingrebourne
- St Kildas
- Rainham Village

REPORT DETAIL

1. Introduction

1.1 Following an Executive Decision by Cllr Rochford on 8th October 2012, a 12 week extensive public consultation took place between 15th October 2012 and 4th January 2013 on proposals to change how Children's Centre services will be delivered, with particular focus on changes to Children's Centre sites.

1.2 The consultation proposed to reduce the number of Children's Centre sites from 13 to 6 hub centres from April 2013, transferring all staff and services to hub sites. The following larger hub Centres would remain open:
- Collier Row
- Chippenham Road or Hilldene (to be determined)
- Elm Park
- Ingrebourne
- St Kildas
- Rainham Village

1.3 The proposals would enable the Children's Centres Service to:

- Reduce the amount of time staff (administrators, managers and professionals) spend staffing and running multiple sites.
- Deliver all services from the more widely-used Children's Centres Hubs by transferring operations from smaller and less-used sites.
- Redirect more staff time towards more targeted front-line work, supporting vulnerable families and children.
- Increase outreach work with children and families throughout the Borough.
- Emphasise preventative working and early help (delivering the Council's Prevention Strategy) through an integrated multi-agency approach.
- Continue to offer wider universal advice, support and guidance, focused in areas of higher deprivation and need, primarily via volunteer groups being set up across the borough.
- Contribute to meeting the Council's MTFS savings.

1.4 The consultation sought views from the public and stakeholders on whether to deregister the following smaller and less-used sites:
- Airfield
- Harold Court
- South Hornchurch

- Thistledene
- Upminster Library
- Either Chippenham Road or Hilldene

1.5 The consultation was advertised widely in the local press and Children's Services. Staff also actively encouraged Service Users to complete a survey and share their views. A wider range of Stakeholders were also consulted, both at formal consultation events and other meetings. Consultees included: Health, Police, Job Centre Plus, local charities, schools, faith organisations, all Council services and the Department for Education.

2. Background Evidence

2.1 The decision to consult was based upon the following body of evidence as detailed in the October 2012 Executive Key Decision report, which was approved by Councillor Rochford on 8th October.

3. 2012 Children's Centre Needs Analysis

3.1 This was a comprehensive and in-depth examination of Children Centres in Spring 2012, which included demographic and performance data, alongside consideration of customer feedback. This concluded that:

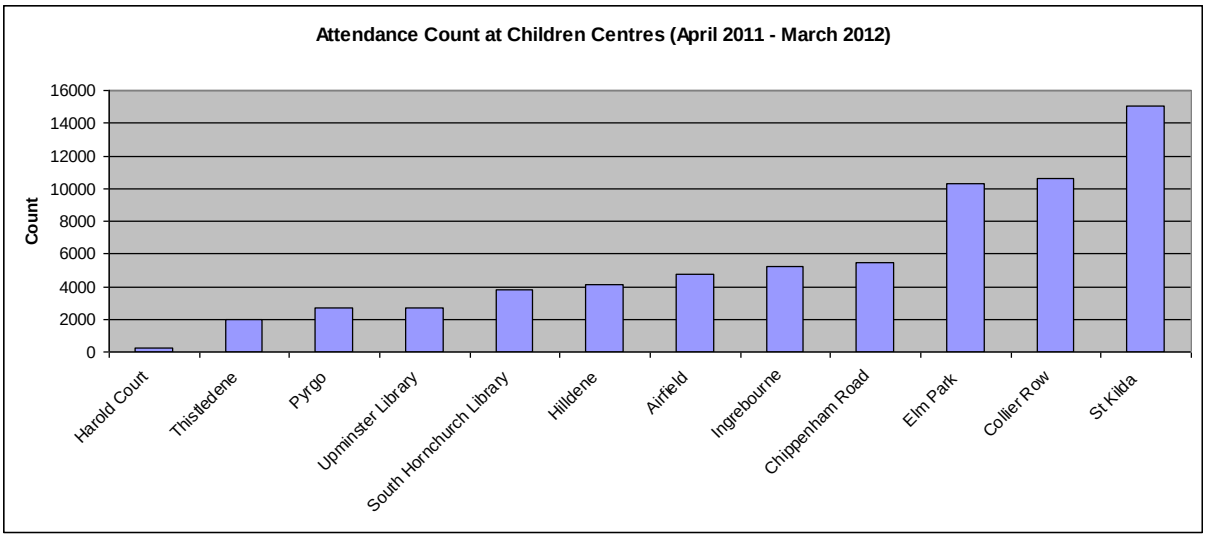
- Some Children's Centres were used more than others.
- Not all families used their closest Centre – they shop around.
- Some Children's Centres are located in areas of higher deprivation and family need, whereas others are not.
- Some areas have multiple centres (for example around Harold Hill) close by, whereas in other areas, residents may have to travel further to access a centre.
- Customer feedback is highly positive about the services received.
- Children's Centres undertake a significant amount of targeted work and received 550 referrals in 2011, mainly from Social Care and Health services.

4. Examination of Children's Centre Service User Demand

4.1 The conclusions of the Needs Analysis are supported by more research into Children Centre usage data from the Children's Centre database, E-Start. This shows, as detailed in the chart below, that some smaller sites have significantly lower overall attendance counts, namely: Harold Court, Thistledene, Hilldene, Pyrgo, Upminster Library, South Hornchurch Library and Airfield.

4.2 These proposals therefore focus on the amalgamation of these less popular sites into the larger hubs. In making the decision as to which sites should be amalgamated, factors other than attendance have also been considered, in particular the cost of running a site alongside the size and quality of building and facilities.

Chart 1. Attendance Count at Havering Children's Centres



5. Consideration of new Children Centre Guidance

5.1 These proposals will ensure the Council is in line with recent guidance (Department for Education, Government's Vision for Children's Centres, 2012) for Children's Centres. This can be most effectively achieved with fewer sites, as staff will spend less time staffing smaller and lesser-used sites. Instead they will have more time to deliver front-line services.

5.2 The guidance also states Children's Centres will:

- Provide access to universal early years services in the local area including high quality and affordable early years education and childcare
- Provide targeted evidence based early interventions for families in greatest need, in the context of integrated services
- Act as a hub for the local community, building social capital and cohesion.
- Share expertise with other early years settings to improve quality.

5.3 Changes to Children's Centre funding also allow Havering greater flexibility in how Children's Centre services are delivered on the ground. Funds were originally ring fenced but now local authorities have discretion on how they are spent.

6. Supporting Other Government Policies

6.1The proposals will also support the delivery of other Government Polices, most notably:

6.2The Troubled Families Programme. As key service centres within local communities, Children's Centre Staff will become increasingly involved in working with troubled families. The new Children's Centre teams, working over six hub sites, will bring together local partner agencies to identify and better meet the needs of families with multiple and complex needs.

6.3The Munro Review of Child Protection. The proposals will enable greater multi-agency working with social care to support the taking forward of Munro's aspiration of getting the right help to the right child at the right time: the child's journey, from

needing to receiving help. Children's Centres will help deliver the Munro recommendations through delivering a service to families in the greatest need which exceeds minimum requirements.

6.4Field's "Independent Review on Poverty and Life Chances" (2011), alongside Allen's reports on Early Intervention (2011). These highlight the importance of early help within early years as absolutely essential to tackling problems of child poverty later in life. In practice in communities, Havering Children Centres and their staff, alongside families will continue to play a role in addressing Child Poverty. These proposals support ongoing work in this area by siting hub Centres and their respective interventions in areas of high material deprivation.

7. Service mapping

7.1 The proposals will not result in a reduction of universal or targeted services. Service mapping of alternative health and early years provision undertaken affirms this and concluded that in areas where a smaller Children's Centre site is proposed to close, a wide range of alternative early years and health services are available. Consequently closure of a site will not disadvantage families.

8. Contribution to Council Savings

8.1 By reducing the number of sites, the proposals will enable staff resources to do more work with children and families, and contribute to the Council's MTFS savings target. In the main this will be achieved by transferring operations to schools, libraries and other services thereby reducing building rent and utilities.

9. Consultation Approach

9.1 The consultation took place between 15th October 2012 and 4th January 2013. The consultation included a variety of consultation approaches, to ensure it was as comprehensive, far-reaching and inclusive as possible.

9.2 Approaches included a survey, developed to capture the views and opinions of Havering's residents and especially those who are connected with Children's Centres. The survey was advertised widely in the local press and via posters at Children's Centres. Staff also actively encouraged Service Users to complete the surveys and share their views, either via a paper version or online survey.

9.3 To ensure the consultation included the views of all relevant partner agencies, in particular those working with Children's Centres, a briefing was held on the 15th November 2012 for Children Centre Local Area Groups (CCLAG) to give them an opportunity to feedback and ask questions about the proposal. Consultation also took place with partner agencies at the Children, Families and Learning Transformation Board meetings (September and October 2012) and via other informal briefings and meetings.

9.4 Staff were also consulted, encouraged to offer feedback and also encourage Children's Centre Service Users to do the same. Two staff briefings were held on the

10th October 2012. The briefings gave children centre staff an opportunity to feedback their views and to ask any questions they had.

9.5 Consultation meetings were also held with other stakeholders, including the PCT and Clinical Commissioning Group, East London NHS, Job Centre Plus, Havering Voluntary Community Sector representatives, Local Members of Parliament, other Council departments and the Department for Education.

10. Key Survey Findings

10.1 Whilst the consultation was widely advertised, the number of responses received was lower than expected. Feedback from Staff suggested that a reason for the low response could be that Service Users did not appear particularly interested in the survey and proposals, because they typically did not use the centres proposed for merger. A total of 69 survey responses (58 in hard copy format and 11 online) were received. Where indicated, 83% of respondents were female. The key points which have been identified from the consultation are as follows:

- 46% of those responding indicated that they either strongly agreed or agreed with the proposed changes to centres
- According to the responses received, the most commonly used Children's Centres were Collier Row, St Kildas and Hilldene. However, this may be unrepresentative due to the low response number.
- The most commonly used services mentioned were midwifery and ante-natal support, one-to-one meetings and health visitor sessions.

10.2 A number of comments were received during the public consultation. Most were positive, as detailed in comments detailed in the consultation report and many respondents understood why there was a need to reduce the number of Children's Centres and to merge the services into 6 main hubs.

10.3 A small number of comments raised queries on whether services would be affected by the changes and requested more detail on this. The consultation document attached at Appendix 3 was designed to be short, accessible and in plain English, and gave adequate information in the circumstances and did assure that services would not be reduced as a result of these proposals.

10.4 Some responses requested Council support (most commonly in terms of training and funding) to establish parent-led groups and activities at Children's Centres.

10.5 In conclusion, whilst the number of responses was low and indicated a degree of public disinterest in the proposals, those individuals that did respond were supportive overall.

11. Key Stakeholder Consultation Findings

11.1 Consultation of local partners via formal consultation and other meetings identified wide-ranging support for the proposals to go ahead. The following detailed points are also noted:

- There was a general consensus that Chippenham Road Children Centre should remain open as it is well used and has a good foot fall as demonstrated in Chart 1.
- One respondent queried whether the proposals would increase room booking demand at the remaining 6 hubs. Centre Managers have also subsequently examined this and consider the site of the larger centres will be sufficient to meet demand and assure there is space available, however, if any issues arise this will be addressed at local Children Centre Stakeholder Meetings.
- One Stakeholder raised concern that families who have children with disabilities, may find it harder to access Children's Centres in the future due to longer travel distances, particularly by public transport. Centre Managers assured that a solution was already in place to avoid this scenario. Outreach work has already been identified and utilised as a way to reach families who are unable to travel to the hubs. It is anticipated that Children's Centre staff will meet with families at a building which is more accessible to them.

11.2 Over 50 hours consultation has also taken place with schools and libraries affected to develop detailed proposals for individual sites to be decommissioned and transferred to their operation. Affected schools and libraries have indicated that they are highly supportive of the proposals. A legal agreement (covering future use of the buildings and maintenance) has also been drafted with schools.

11.3 Detailed site-specific proposals are listed as background papers. A summary of these proposals are detailed in the table below.

Table 1. Summary of Proposals

Centre to Merge	Received Sure Start Grant?	Future Proposal
Airfield (22528)	Yes	Expansion to the Bridge Nursery Offer for children with additional needs.
South Hornchurch (22766)	Yes	Alternative provision will be provided at the Library.
Harold Court (21381)	Yes	To be used by the school to offer pre school provision.
Pyrgo (22439)	Yes	To be used by the school to offer pre school provision.
Hilldene (21499)	Yes	To be used by the school for early years and pre-school provision.
*****Thistledene (22381)	No	To be used by Pinewood School to provide new classrooms.
*Upminster Library (23383)	No	Currently looking into the possibility of using the site to offer pre school provision.

**Sure Start grant was not spent on these two sites. Therefore the future use of these sites is more flexible and does not need to focus predominantly on early years services.*

11.4 Discussions with schools continue on technical details, such as confirming the precise assets to transfer including ICT equipment, finalising lease agreements and undertaking building condition surveys. It is anticipated that these discussions will have been finalised by the time Cabinet meets to consider this report.

11.5 In conclusion, the findings of the survey and stakeholder consultations overall indicate support for the progression of the proposals.

REASONS AND OPTIONS

Reasons for the decision

Alongside the background evidence base, feedback from the consultation suggests support for the merger of Centres as indicated. Consultation feedback as detailed in stakeholder consultation minutes attached also indicates that Chippenham Road should remain open as a Children's Centre.

The implementation of this proposal will continue the delivery of service provision to a high standard without affecting current staffing levels and allow for closer co-location of staff to deliver targeted and preventative services for families.

Children's Centres will still offer free services to all, although resources will be mainly focused on more targeted and specialist work with families. Wherever possible, the voluntary sector and parent volunteers will continue to be encouraged to deliver these services, supported with training where necessary or families signposted to other opportunities in the area.

The proposals will ensure:

- Havering still meets its statutory duty to have sufficient centres to meet local need
- (demand at the larger Hub Centres is far higher as detailed in the evidence section, and positive infomal feedback has been received from Department for Education on initial proposals).
- That the impact on local communities will be minimal, due to the provision of alternative early years services from former sites. Increased outreach provision will also ensure that services are accessible and all communities can be served.
- Provision of local childcare, particularly given significant recent increases in the early years population in Havering are likely to increase placement demand[1]. The proposals will also help the Council implement its Childcare Sufficiency Audit Objectives[2] and provide additional free places for two year olds from vulnerable families.[3]

[1]Havering Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2011/12, Demographics Update. Available online at http://www.haveringdata.net/resource/view?resourceId=JSNAtwentytwelveDemographicsUpdate.
[2]Havering Childcare Sufficiency Review 2011/12. Available online at: http://www.havering.gov.uk/Documents/London_Borough_of_Havering_Childcare_Sufficiency_Review_2010-11.pdf
[3]Further information on the new Two year old offer and eligibility criteria are available at http://www.havering.gov.uk/Pages/Services/Education-early-years-grant.aspx

Table 2. Proposed Timeline

Date	Activity
Friday 15th February, or as soon as possible if the report is called in	Cabinet considers and approves proposals.. Proposals are sent formally to Department for Education for sign off. Building condition surveys completed and all other technical queries asked by schools are answered. Following any Cabinet approval, consultation feedback, alongside final proposals are distributed at Children Centres and on-line.
Friday 1st March	Legal agreements with schools/libraries are finalised and transfer preparations commence. Any amendments are made based on Department for Education's formal response to site-specific proposals.
Tuesday 2nd April	Centres are deregistered and formerly transfer to new operators.
Summer term / holiday	Schools begin commence early years activities from sites, modify buildings as needed, and develop a variety pre-school offers to open from September 2013.

Other options considered

Alternative options considered have included:

1. Keeping all centres open - this is not a long-term option. It would mean staff resources remain over-stretched across multiple sites and are unable to deliver a new targeted and early help service. In addition, this option would not allow the Service to make financial savings.

2. Keeping Hilldene Children's Centre rather Chippenham Road open. This would be unattractive because
    - Consultation findings and background evidence reveal the Chippenham Centre is well use, popular and should remain open.
    - It is in a central and densely populated area.
    - Due to the high rent costs, alternative early years provision (such as pre-school provision) is not financial. Without alternative early years provision from the site, DfE would be entitled to claw back Sure Start capital grant.
    - In comparison, Hilldene Primary School is interested in using Hilldene Children's Centre for pre-school provision and family activities.

IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

Legal implications and risks

Local authorities have a duty under the Childcare Act 2006 to provide sufficient children's centres in order to meet local need.

In the event that authorities propose changes such as opening, closing or merging centres they have a statutory duty to consult all those likely to be affected by the proposed changes. Guidance indicates that there is a presumption against the closure of children's centres and therefore a strong case must be established to justify closure.

Where Children's Centre projects were originally funded by the Sure Start and Early Years Capital Grant, a subsequent change of use may no longer fulfil the original grant conditions and therefore trigger a claw back of the original grant funding. Claw back can only be avoided by a specific consent for waiver or deferral from the Department for Education (DfE).

DfE have advised formal application can only be made following a consultation period, report and final sign off by Cabinet. However initial informal consultation with DfE on draft proposals indicates that clawback can be deferred for up to the balance of 25 years since the grant was given where a former children's centre continues to be used predominantly for early years provision.

In so far as new proposals may involve changes of use of the Children's Centre buildings it will be necessary to also ensure that such changes do not contravene the provisions of any applicable leases or other occupation agreements.

It has been previously advised that the Council draws up agreements with Schools to agree the details of future use of former Centre sites located on school premises, where Sure Start capital grant has been spent. This would also ensure that any change of use does not prejudice the Council to be liable to claw back, and that the School does ensure buildings are maintained in good condition. Schools have also requested condition surveys are undertaken, to ensure any pre-existing structural issues are identified before any such agreements are signed – problems arising are unlikely however, given these are newly constructed buildings.

Cabinet Members are reminded that, when considering what decision to make, they are under a personal duty pursuant to section 149 Equality Act 2010 to have due regard to the need to—
(a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act;
(b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
(c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

Having had careful regard to the Equality Analysis, and also the Consultation responses, Cabinet members are under a personal duty to have due (that is, proportionate) regard to

the matters set out above and (i) to consider and analyse how the decision is likely to affect those with protected characteristics, in practical terms, (ii) to remove any unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other prohibited conduct, (iii) to consider whether practical steps should be taken to mitigate or avoid any adverse consequences that the decision is likely to have, for persons with protected characteristics, and, indeed, to consider whether the decision should not be taken at all, in the interests of persons with protected characteristics, (iv) to consider whether steps should be taken to advance equality, foster good relations and generally promote the interests of persons with protected characteristics, either by varying the recommended decision or by taking some other decision.

However, whilst Cabinet Members are under a duty to have serious regard to the need to protect and promote the interests of persons with protected characteristics, in the ways just described, in reaching their decision, they may also take into account other considerations, such as the desirability of providing cost-effective and good quality services and, in particular in the current climate, the need to make budgetary savings. They may decide that those types of considerations ultimately justify their decision.

Consultation on the Children's Centre proposals has been undertaken. In order to be lawful it must be meaningful. In other words the consultees must have received sufficient information and time to respond meaningfully. The decision maker must then take all the consultation comments conscientiously into account before taking its decision. Cabinet members are therefore requested to carefully consider the responses to the consultation contained in the Report.

Financial implications and risks:

The proposals outlined within this report would contribute towards a Children and Young Peoples (CYPS) MTFS target of £1m from April 2013. The projected savings to be achieved are per the table below, totalling £137,640 in a full financial year. These savings are in the form of running costs budgets that would no longer be needed once services merge into fewer hub sites.

Table 3. MTFS Savings:

Children's Centre	**Savings**
Thistledene	£9,760
Upminster Library	£15,700
Pyrgo	£22,700
Hilldene	£20,700
Airfield	£27,720
South Hornchurch	£20,700
Harold Court	£20,360
Total	**£137,640**

A considerable risk around these proposals is the potential for the Department for Education (DfE) to claw back the equivalent sum of Sure Start capital grant that funded the development of these centres. In total the relevant capital grant totalled £1,931,855 per the table below:

Table 4. Sure Start Capital Grant Funding

Children's Centre	Sure Start Grant Capital Funding
Upminster Library	£0
Thistledene	£0
South Hornchurch	£202,688
Airfield	£372,254
Pyrgo	£435,056
Hilldene	£447,991
Harold Court	£473,896
Total	**£1,931,855**

Similar exercises undertaken in Bromley, Haringey and Brent have shown that negotiated agreement to defer claw back can be achieved if alternative early years use for the premises can be agreed. The process involves identification and drawing up of site-specific proposals, which are then discussed directly with DfE.

Therefore the proposed mitigation against this key risk of grant claw back is to agree with DfE alternative early years use of the centres. It should be noted that although other councils have made such agreements, the DfE deferral period is up to twenty five years, so there will be some risk of claw back during whatever period DfE stipulate the deferral shall be in place for.

When considering whether claw back should apply to an asset funded by Sure Start capital funding, DfE consider whether the changes to the asset cause the asset to no longer satisfy the conditions of the grant. The conditions for Sure Start funded assets are that they are predominantly used to provide services for 0-5 year olds and their parents and carers. If an authority transfers or leases the asset to a school or private provider DfE will still hold the local authority responsible for the asset (for the life of the asset).

DfE have been sent pro-forma proposals for all the sites although no formal decisions on claw back have as yet been made.

Although some centres will transfer to schools (or libraries), the buildings will remain owned by the Council. A legal agreement will be put in place to underpin the arrangement, this will include a clause that maintenance of the building and site will fall to the third party. The Council would remain liable for any pre-existing structural condition.

Decommissioning costs have not yet been fully scoped but would include condition surveys for the three sites on school premises to be run by schools (Pyrgo, Hilldene and Harold Court).The one off cost of this is estimated to be £6,000 to be met from transformation budgets. There will also be some ICT related cost such as the removal of network connections (an ICT survey is to be conducted) and removal costs. All one off costs will need to be met from within existing resources; until these are fully scoped there is the risk that a funding source may not be available.

There will be the need for ongoing maintenance of the hub buildings, which would be the case if the current position were to be maintained. The need for any capital expenditure should be assessed and a funding source identified as necessary (as part of the Councils Capital Programme if applicable).

The Upminster Library site saving to CYPS would be in the form of rent paid, meaning there would be a corresponding reduction in income to be absorbed by the Culture and Leisure Directorate.

There will be changes to the management structure to reflect changes to Children's Centre provision, these are being managed through the Councils Organisational Change policy.

Children's Centres revenue budgets were formerly Sure Start grant funded. This was superseded from 2011/12 by the Early Intervention Grant. From April 2013 this grant will be rolled up as part of the Councils' annual Revenue Support Grant settlement. This has transposed as a funding reduction that the Council is currently addressing as part of the overall budget strategy. Children's Centre budgets will be included within an overall review of former EIG funded services.

HR implications and risks:

This proposal focuses on how services are delivered to the community and from where. The direct impact on front-line staffing in implementing the recommendation in this report is expected to be minimal, in that the majority of staff work at the larger centres already. All of the affected staff have mobility clauses in their contracts of employment, which require them to work across sites within the borough. The overall intention is for a 'transformation', rather than a reduction, of services. Reviews of services will continue to take place across Havering Council. Therefore, this proposal does not mean that the structure of this service is excluded from any future scrutiny that made be required in order to ensure the effective and efficient delivery of services to the Havering community in line with national and local policy frameworks.

Equalities implications and risks:

A full Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken and is attached.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Attached

1. Consultation Report
2. Equality Impact Assessment
3. Consultation Document
4. Stakeholder and Staff Consultation Minutes
5. Other Meeting Minutes of Relevance

Other

6. In-depth evidence background report (August 2012)
7. Children's Centre Needs Assessment

8. E-mail correspondence with Department for Education (October 2012 to January 2013)
9. Site specific proposals (draft) for:
    - Airfield Children's Centre
    - Harold Court Children's Centre
    - Hilldene Children's Centre
    - Pyrgo Children's Centre
    - South Hornchurch Children's Centre
    - Thistledene Children's Centre
    - Upminster Children's Centre