



## **CHILDREN AND LEARNING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE 23 JANUARY 2020**

<b>Subject Heading:</b>	Children's Centre Redesign Proposal
<b>SLT Lead:</b>	Robert South, Director of Children's Services
<b>Report Author and contact details:</b>	Helen Harding, Head of Early Help Service
<b>Policy context:</b>	This report proposes changes to the delivery of children's centre services following a public consultation
<b>Financial summary:</b>	This report contains proposals which, if agreed, would contribute to Havering's Medium Term Financial Strategy

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

Communities making Havering	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Places making Havering	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Opportunities making Havering	<input type="checkbox"/>
Connections making Havering	<input type="checkbox"/>

## **SUMMARY**

This item is being presented to the Children and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee following a Councillor Call for Action on 17<sup>th</sup> December.

This report contains proposals on the redesign of children's centre services in Havering. A public consultation on the proposed changes was undertaken between June and September 2019 and the responses to the consultation are summarised as part of this report. Under the Childcare Act 2006 the Local Authority has a duty to ensure that there are sufficient children's centres, so far as reasonably practicable, to meet local need. We know that outcomes for children and families are best when needs are identified, and support is provided, at the earliest opportunity. Working with families at a time when the issues they face are less complex provides a greater opportunity for building resilience and helping families find their own solutions. Our Universal Offer and targeted services provided by our centres play a valuable role in ensuring residents can access support in a timely way to prevent needs escalating to statutory services.

The proposals in this report have been made with careful consideration to sufficiency and our response to local need and demand.

The proposals made in this report enable us to;

- Retain the current level of service delivery and increase opportunities to access services through variance in locations.
- Retain co-location with key health partners and develop new relationships with education partners.
- Ensure that key areas of need within the borough retain access to services in a dedicated space.
- Redirect funds spent on children's centre buildings to ensure continuation of service delivery and increased use of community venues.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee notes the proposals contained in this report and draft a reference report to Cabinet, if deemed appropriate.

## **REPORT DETAIL**

**1.1** Children's Services proposes to redesign our children's centre offer to ensure we are responding to the changing and growing demand for services within Havering. The population of children under four year olds increased by 23% between 2010 and 2017 with the cohort projected to continue to grow. Centre registration rates and data returns demonstrate that a large number of residents

already benefit from children's centre services. However, it is apparent that a very specific drive is required to reach the children living in areas of deprivation in the borough, who are potentially at the greatest risk of poorer life outcomes.

- 1.2** Data collected by Children's Services tells us that, in 2017/18, 60% of the children who are resident in areas of deprivation in the borough did not access children's centre services. In turn, these children are less likely to access pre-school provision in a timely manner which typically leads to children being at risk of poorer life outcomes including a lack of school readiness.
- 1.3** We aim to create efficiencies within the budget for children's centres to ensure services are agile and responsive to need. By doing this we will also support the Medium Term Financial Strategy agreed by the Local Authority in February 2019.
- 1.4** The proposal consulted on with the public between June and September 2019 proposed that three children's centres be retained (Elm Park, Collier Row and St Kilda's) and the others be repurposed with the services being moved to alternative venues. The detail of the public response to this proposal can be viewed as an appendix to this report. Residents were able to share their views via an online survey as well as 35 public consultation meetings that were held across libraries, children's centres and other community venues. There were over 200 attendees at the consultation meetings.
- 1.5** As part of the consultation we also engaged with elected members and providers who are currently delivering services out of the centres affected.
- 1.6** The response to the consultation showed that 52% of 624 respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the proposals, 29% agreed or strongly agreed and 18% were neutral.
- 1.7** The public response to the proposal of using community venues was agreed with by 50% of those who responded. Some respondents commented that it would be better to have more options for accessing services and would make them more accessible across the community. There were some concerns expressed regarding the loss of services in key areas of the borough (particularly Harold Hill and Rainham) and that other services (particularly libraries) would be replaced with services for children. These concerns have been acknowledged and considered when drafting our proposals.
- 1.8** Feedback from the consultation has been considered and have informed proposals. The most significant change in response to the consultation is a proposal to retain five children's centres, as opposed to three in the consultation. This is taking into consideration the responses from residents that they would find it difficult to access services if only three centres remained. The paper copies of the survey's, an analysis of all survey responses and minutes of the consultation meetings are available by arrangement with Democratic Services.
- 1.9** The majority of alternative venues considered are within one mile of current locations (approx. 20 minute walking time). Within Rainham an alternative venue

which is 1.6 miles away from the centre is currently in use, which enables us to increase our presence in the wider area of Rainham. All of the proposed locations are served by bus routes.

- 1.10** The alternative locations from which we have already trialled delivering services have been well attended. For example a Stay and Play session delivered from Orchard Village Community Centre (Rainham) has seen 19 families attending who have never previously accessed a children's centre.
- 1.11** As part of the consultation, residents also suggested over 50 venues within the community that we should consider using for service delivery going forward. These are currently being explored and will be utilised where possible.
- 1.12** Greater use of our community resources will enable us to build upon the community-led initiatives we already deliver. Our existing cohort of community volunteers are a significant support to the delivery of our services and we will continue to build upon this. Our volunteer led parenting programmes have also been highly successful and support the development of community networks.
- 1.13** We anticipate that in the future we will be able to add value to our children's centre offer via the introduction of further integration of services when opportunities arise.
- 1.14** We will also link in with the joint ventures regeneration programme to ensure we make best use of the new community venues that are developed as part of the work undertaken.
- 1.15** Consultation responses reiterated that Midwifery and Health Visiting services are valuable in venues where they are delivered. Our proposal is to retain these services within the centres they currently deliver from and seek a financial contribution from the provider for the spaces used to deliver these services. Some services delivered by Health Visiting may also be delivered from community venues in the future, alongside children's centre services, where appropriate and safe to do so.
- 1.16** It is our proposal that Ingrebourne Children's Centre is retained as a children's centre and financial contributions are sought from providers using the centres for service delivery. We propose that Ingrebourne Children's Centre becomes the central point of service delivery for the Harold Hill area, with services also being delivered from community venues being coordinated from this centre.
- 1.17** We are recommending to keep Ingrebourne Children's Centre in Harold Hill, as opposed to Hildene Children's Centre or Chippenham Road Children's Centre as it is the largest of the centres in Harold Hill and enables us to retain and enhance our level of service delivery in this area. In comparison, Ingrebourne Children Centre has a floor plan coverage of 456 sqm, where Hildene Children Centre is 120 sqm and Chippenham Road Children Centre is 155 sqm.
- 1.18** We are mindful of the concern that consultees considered that accessibility under the original proposals would be more difficult. In the case of the Harold Hill

area nobody should need to travel more than 1 mile of the current location for the majority of the alternative venues. (approximately 20 minutes walking time).

**1.19** Whilst not forming part of the reasoning for retention of Ingrebourne as a Children’s Centre if it is retained it will have the added benefit that it can continue to be used as a polling station. The Polling District and Station review was unable to locate a suitable venue within the polling district to use an alternative. The recommendation to keep Ingrebourne Children’s Centre as a polling station was agreed by Cabinet in August 2019.

**1.20** Our proposal for each of the centres is outlined in the below table;

<b><i>Name of Centre</i></b>	<b><i>Proposal</i></b>
Collier Row Children’s Centre	<b>Keep</b> ; current service delivery to continue
Elm Park Children’s Centre	<b>Keep</b> ; current service delivery to continue
St Kilda’s Children’s Centre	<b>Keep</b> ; current service delivery to continue
Hilldene Children’s Centre	<b>Cease</b> ; move all services to Ingrebourne Children’s Centre and/or community venues in the North of the borough
Chippenham Road Children’s Centre	<b>Cease</b> ; move all services to Ingrebourne Children’s Centre and/or community venues in the North of the borough
Rainham Village Children’s Centre	<b>Keep</b> ; we will retain services at this centre and explore options of other partners (alongside health) delivering from the centre.
Ingrebourne Children’s Centre	<b>Keep</b> ; this centre will become the hub of service delivery for the Harold Hill area, with services being delivered from community venues coordinated out of this centre.

**1.21** The process for the re-location of services from one site to another will be planned and a phased approach will be adopted. We will ensure that timely and robust communications are in place to inform residents of new locations for services using a wide variety of formats.

**1.22** It is not intended to change the staffing organisational structure or reduce the number of established posts as a result of these proposals. The staff that deliver the children’s centre early help offer will continue to cross borough work at any of the locations where services are delivered as per current practice. All staff have been informed and regularly updated with regards to the proposed changes, opportunity for discussion with managers has been made available and no adverse comments have been received.

**RESPONSE TO COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION**

In this section, a response is provided to the specific concerns raised in the Call for Action;

**1.1** Residents and I are concerned by the proposals which will close children’s centres in deprived areas where they are urgently needed. A review by the Council found that 60% of children who live in the most deprived areas were not seen at children’s centres in 2017/18.

*Response;* following the consultation we have reviewed our proposals and are now proposing to keep five centres as opposed to three. This will ensure that there is a fair distribution of centres across the borough and in key areas of need.

- 1.2** Dispersing activities across the borough will mean that many lower and working-class families will be unable/struggle to access services, due to low pay, insecure work, changes to their benefit, health issues, time and travel constraints

*Response;* we know from our analysis that children and families residing in areas of deprivation in the borough are less likely to access children's centre services. This may be due to lack of awareness or preferring not to access services provided by the Council. Where we have trialled delivering services from community venues we have seen families that have not previously accessed a children's centre. Some respondents to the consultation survey commented that they would prefer to have more options with regards to accessing services and that this would make services more accessible. We believe that delivering services from community venues will enhance the offer from the five centres in the borough and result in greater outreach.

- 1.3** I believe that early intervention and prevention are always cheaper than a cure

*Response;* we wholeheartedly agree with this, which is why we want to ensure that as many residents as possible can access our services. By introducing flexibility into our offer we believe we are providing more opportunities for this. We also want to enhance our cohesion with the community by working in partnership with community groups and partner agencies.

- 1.4** We must review this proposal and ensure that children living in Harold Hill and Rainham are not adversely affected by the changes

*Response;* Following the consultation we are proposing that Rainham Village Children's Centre and Ingrebourne Children's Centre remain. We aim to further enhance our offer in these areas (and across the borough) by utilising community venues and education establishments to deliver services.

## IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

**Financial implications and risks:** A savings requirement was approved for the Children's Centre redesign of £440k in 2019/20 as part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy. Due to delays in implementation of the Consultation on the Children's Centre redesign, this savings target will be unrealised in 2019/20. However, further savings will be achieved in 2020/21 through a reduction in

expenditure on buildings and income generation via the remaining assets. A full financial analysis will be provided in the Cabinet Report for March 2020.

### **Legal implications and risks:**

The Authority has various duties under the Childcare Act 2006

To improve the wellbeing of young children in the area and to reduce inequalities between young children in their area in relation to their wellbeing (section 1)

To secure that early childhood services in their area are provided in an integrated manner which is calculated to—(a) facilitate access to those services, and (b) maximise the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children. (Section 3)

To make arrangements, so far as is reasonably practicable, for sufficient provision of children's centres to meet local need. (Section 5A)

Before making a decision to make a significant change to a children's centre or to close a children's centre the Local Authority must conduct such consultation as they think is appropriate.

They must also act under the general guidance of the Secretary of State. The relevant Guidance states:

“The core purpose of children's centres is to improve outcomes for young children and their families and reduce inequalities between families in greatest need and their peers in:

- child development and school readiness;
- parenting aspirations and parenting skills; and
- child and family health and life chances.”

“Local authorities should:

- ensure that a network of children's centres is accessible to all families with young children in their area;
- ensure that children's centres and their services are within reasonable reach of all families with young children in urban and rural areas, taking into account distance and availability of transport;
- target children's centres services at young children and families in the area who are at risk of poor outcomes through, for example, effective outreach services, based on the analysis of local need;
- demonstrate that all children and families can be reached effectively;
- not close an existing children's centre site in any reorganisation of provision unless they can demonstrate that, where they decide to close a children's centre site, the outcomes for children, particularly the most disadvantaged, would not be adversely affected and will not compromise the duty to have sufficient children's centres to meet local need. The starting point should therefore be a presumption against the closure of children's centres;
- take into account the views of local families and communities in deciding what is sufficient children's centre provision;

Consultation. An extensive consultation has been undertaken. The key aspects of a lawful consultation are that the consultees have sufficient information and time to respond meaningfully and that the decision maker then takes the consultation comments conscientiously into account before making a final decision.

The consultation proposed the closure of four children's centres but that services would be provided from alternative venues within the community which would be identified through the consultation process. It did not set out where the services would be transferred to, therefore it could be argued that consultees could not comment meaningfully because they would not know where the service they were interested in would be transferred to, if at all and how they might be able to access this.

**Sufficiency of Children's Centres.** The analysis does not clearly state whether or not there will be sufficient numbers of children's centres within the Borough after the proposals have been implemented to satisfy the need. Therefore further analysis may be required to establish this point before the matter is referred to Cabinet.

**Clawback.** When Children's Centres were setup they often received grant funding from Government which could be clawed back in the event that the Centre ceased to be a Children's centre or to provide childcare activities. There is therefore a potential for clawback of the original grant funding if the proposal for closure of Chippenham Road goes ahead. Hilldene will continue to be used for childcare activities.

**Human Resources implications and risks:** The recommendations made in this report do not give rise to any identifiable HR risks or implications that would affect either the Council or its workforce.

**Equalities implications and risks:** An Equality and Health Impact Assessment has been completed and can be viewed at appendix 2 to this report.