



CABINET

13th December 2023

Subject Heading:

Proposed De-Designation and Closure of Chippenham Road Children's Centre

Cabinet Member:

Councillor Oscar Ford

SLT Lead:

Tara Geere
Director of Starting Well

Report Author and contact details:

Helen Harding
Strategic Head of Service for Early Help, Targeted Support, MASH and Youth Justice

Policy context:

This report pertains to the delivery of savings proposals as outlined in the 2023/24 Council budget setting report

Financial summary:

This will result in an annual reduction in Children's Social Care spend of approximately £46,500 in a full year.

However, as this is an LBH Commercial Property, there will be a corresponding reduction of £38,500 in rental income to Property Services, and a transfer of £4,000 NNDR costs, which will represent a pressure on their budgets unless they are able to re-let the site. External expenditure relating to the property is currently £4,000.

There may be some one off costs to Children's Services associated with returning the building to Property Services, which will be determined at the time.

Is this a Key Decision?

Yes

Significant effect on two or more Wards

When should this matter be reviewed? N/A

Reviewing OSC: N/A

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

X People - Things that matter for residents

Place - A great place to live, work and enjoy

Resources - A well run Council that delivers for People and Place.

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to recommend the permanent closure and de-designation of Chippenham Road Children's Centre, as outlined in the 2023-24 Council budget setting report.

Service delivery at the site stopped in March 2020 due to restrictions created by the Covid-19 pandemic and the centre has not reopened. All services previously delivered from Chippenham Road Children's Centre are now delivered from Ingrebourne Children's Centre (approx. one mile away), where we have seen a sustained increase in footfall over the last three years.

When a decision is taken to de-designate or repurpose a Children's Centre, the local authority is required to notify the Department for Education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Cabinet agrees the permanent closure and de-designation of Chippenham Road Children's Centre (Heaton Ward).

REPORT DETAIL

1.1 An fundamental analysis of the use of Children's Centres was undertaken in 2018 and this is attached as Appendix 1 and between June and September 2019 a public consultation was undertaken, proposing to reduce the number of children's centres in the borough and relocate the services delivered to other nearby venues. The analysis of the responses to the consultation can be seen in Appendix 2.

Cabinet, 13th December 2023

- 1.2 In March 2020 Covid-19 pandemic restrictions were introduced meaning face to face service delivery was restricted and, in some instances, temporarily moved to a virtual offer. In the subsequent two years that followed, until all restrictions were lifted in April 2022, many adaptations were made to children's centre service delivery, including utilising the most spacious and fit for purpose sites where social distancing regulations could be adhered to.
- 1.3 It was planned that Cabinet would be recommended to close the Chippenham Road Children's Centre in 2020. Before Cabinet was to take the decision the Report was considered by the Scrutiny Committee on 23rd January 2020, the minutes of which can be viewed [here](#). However given the Covid pandemic no decision was taken at the time by Cabinet, nor since.
- 1.4 Since all Covid restrictions were lifted, services previously located at Chippenham Road Children's Centre were, and remain, well embedded into the offer at Ingrebourne Children's Centre (Gooshays Ward). Ingrebourne is located approximately one mile from Chippenham Road and offers a wide range of services delivered by both the local authority and partner agency services. We have evidenced a sustained increase in footfall at Ingrebourne Children's Centre since the return to full face to face service delivery, as evidenced in Appendix A. We are projecting a 16% increase in footfall at Ingrebourne Children's Centre in this financial year, compared to the previous year, based on actual footfall data up to Q2 2023-24.
- 1.5 There was no benefit identified to further disrupting services and as such, Chippenham Road Children's Centre has not been used for service delivery since its enforced closure in March 2020. Furthermore, Chippenham Road is within a location earmarked for future regeneration activity in the borough meaning if service delivery was to return to this site, it is likely that there would be further disruption or relocation of the service delivery in the near future.
- 1.6 The proposal to permanently close Chippenham Road Children's Centre was further consulted upon between October and December 2022 as part of the Council's 2023-24 budget consultation. Question 8 of the consultation asked residents to identify how the individual proposals affected them. 9% of respondents identified that the proposals to rationalise early help services negatively affected them, and 10% said that the proposals 'somewhat affected them'. 69% stated that the proposals did not affect them and 9% said that they didn't know.
- 1.7 A risk has previously been identified in de-designating children's centres with regards to central government clawing back funding that was previously allocated through the Sure Start Capital Grant Funding. Based on the information sourced from the [Children's Centre Cabinet Report \(haverinq.gov.uk\)](#) when centres were previously closed in 2013, there was no Sure Start Capital Grant funding allocated to Chippenham Road Children's Centre. Therefore, assuming this information is correct, we should not be at risk of any clawback by the Department for Education by de-designating this site.
- 1.8 Should this decision be agreed, Children's Services will return responsibility for the site to the corporate landlord, thus reducing the overspend in the Children's Services budget by £46,500.

REASONS AND OPTIONS

Reasons for the decision:

Chippenham Road has not been operation since March 2020. All services previously delivered at this site are successfully running from Ingrebourne Children's Centre approximately one mile away, alongside complementary services delivered by partner agencies. The Harold Hill Community Hub is also operational as a delivery site and we are working in partnership with a Community Development Officer to develop more footfall from families with children in to the hub. We have seen steady and sustained increase in footfall at Ingrebourne Children's Centre where all services are successfully running.

Other options considered:

Re-open Chippenham Road Children's Centre as a site for service delivery. This option has been rejected for the following reasons;

- The site has not been operational since March 2020. All services previously delivered at this site have been successfully relocated to a nearby children's centre.
- Chippenham Road Children's Centre was previously one of the highest costing centres and least utilised, so therefore it is not considered financially viable to reopen the centre.
- Chippenham Road Children's Centre is a small site, and therefore the services which can be delivered from there are limited.
- The staff available to cover an additional site is limited, meaning we would have to stop or limit services at another site in order to provide sufficient cover.

IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

Financial Implications and Risks:

Chippenham Road Children's Centre occupies commercial property premises belonging to the Council. Therefore, the decision to de-designate Chippenham Road Children's Centre may in the longer term result in additional commercial property income as and when the premises in question are re-let to commercial tenants at market rates.

In the shorter term there is minimal financial impact resulting from the de-designation from a council wide perspective. Children's Social Care spend will reduce by approximately £46,500 in a full year, however, this will be offset by a corresponding reduction of £38,500 in recharged rental income to Property Services, and a transfer of £4,000 NNDR costs, which will represent a pressure on Commercial Property budgets until such time the premises are re-let. External expenditure relating to the property is currently £4,000.

There may be some one off costs to Children's Services associated with returning the building to Property Services, which will be determined at the time.

Legal Implications and Risks:

Cabinet, 13th December 2023

Section 5A Childcare Act 2006 requires the Local Authority to include arrangements for sufficient provision of children's centres to meet local need, so far as is reasonably practicable.

Section 5D Childcare Act 2006 requires the Local Authority to secure that such consultation as they think appropriate is carried out before anything is done that would result in a relevant children's centre ceasing to be a children's centre.

An analysis of the use of Children's Centres was conducted in 2018 and this is attached.

A Cabinet Report was planned in 2020 which is exhibited as an appendix the consultation responses to a consultation carried out into the overall plans and use of the Children's Centres. That Consultation Report is attached.

Cabinet must be satisfied that with the closure of Chippenham Road Children's Centre that there is, so far as practicable, sufficient provision remaining to meet local need.

In respect of the consultation it is a requirement that consultees must be given sufficient time and information to comment meaningfully and then for their responses to be conscientiously considered before a final decision is taken.

Cabinet must therefore also carefully consider whether the consultation was appropriate and is still valid even though it is now four years old and if so satisfied also carefully consider the responses set out in the Appendix as well as the recommendations from the Scrutiny committee before taking their decision.

Human Resources Implications and Risks:

There are no staff members currently working at Chippenham Road Children's Centre and there is no direct or indirect impact to any staff member as a result of the de-designation of the site as a Children's Centre.

Equalities Implications and Risks:

An Equality and Health Impact Assessment has been drafted alongside this report.

Health and Wellbeing Implications and Risks

The proposed decision will have a neutral impact on health and wellbeing as current service delivery will not be implicated. As services have not been provided out of this centre since March 2020, the impact of the relocation of services would have already been experienced, and so no additional impacts would occur with the ultimate closure of this site.

ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

There are no Environment and Climate change implications or risks for this decision

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Cabinet, 13th December 2023

Appendix 1; Children's Centre Analysis 2018

Appendix 2; Analysis of 2019 Children's Centre Consultation Survey Response

Appendix 3; Equalities and Health Impact Assessment January 2023