

## Derby City Council Children and Young People Commission



## The Development of Children's Centres in Derby

## Introduction

1. Following a consultative process among members of the Children and Young People Commission, Children's Centres emerged as the clear favourite to be the first area for focused scrutiny in this municipal year. The context had been the pending arrival of two external inspectorates and a wish by the Commission to make minimal call on the Department's time, so as not to deflect from its pre-inspection preparatory work. Further, the Corporate Director had suggested that Children's Centres could be worthy of a short review to check the progress made in rolling out this major public policy initiative.

2. Although the review was intended to be concise, it was decided that it should not be conducted as a 'committee room' exercise at the Council House. As well as seeing some of the Derby provision it was also considered essential to visit another authority in order to be able to compare and contrast. One other timely contribution was the attendance of the Vice Chair at a national conference, on 20 September, on harnessing the expertise of multi-sector partners to achieve sustainable children's centres.

3. On the morning of Monday 1 October the Commission visited the new Asterdale Children's Centre in Spondon. Members then visited the Osmaston/Allenton Children's Centre premises at Lord Street followed by 'First Steps' on Cockayne Street North. The latter then formed the afternoon venue for the formal review interviews.

4. To begin the afternoon session Rachel Dickinson and Sue Sanford gave a presentation which outlined the development of children's centres and the associated issues and then had a question-and answer dialogue with Members. The Commission then had the benefit of a comparison between Derby and the regional and national position from Karen Mackay, the regional adviser for Together With Children. Because of the importance of the NHS contribution in delivering the core offer Chris Tully, Derby City PCT, was interviewed. To conclude the afternoon Steve Baguley and Tina Derrick from the Area 1 Pilot – which includes Spondon - then explained the development of Children's Centres in the context of area and neighbourhood working.

5. Together With Children's Karen Mackay had earlier been asked to nominate a very good local authority for the Commission to visit. So on the morning of Friday 5 October the Commission visited two Children's Centres in Leicester: first at New Parks and then at Braunstone. In the afternoon there was a discussion with Deirdra Cusack who heads up the development of Children's Centre in that city.

6. Those members of the Commission involved on 1 and 5 October met again on 6 November to agree their findings which are transmitted through this report. But first it will help to explain how children's centres came about, what they offer and the attendant issues.

## **Background – The Evolution of SureStart into Children's Centres**

7. Soon after taking office in 1997 the Government launched a large Early Years action research project under a new brand called SureStart. As a key part of the government's anti-poverty strategy the aim was to deliver local services to families in deprived areas to provide child care, family support, child and family health services, promote parenting skills, adult learning and employment. The project was the subject of a longitudinal study to measure whether outcomes for children improved over time. Not long after the launch it was established that although the model looked promising it was too expensive to develop comprehensive coverage across the country as a whole. The original SureStart programmes were characterised by a significant measure of local autonomy; this was subsequently replaced with an increased level of direct management but a reduced level of national performance monitoring. SureStart remains the brand for Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) under 5's provision and the original Sure Start local programmes are now form part of the Children's Centres programme.

8. Children's centres are multi-purpose centres which bring together childcare, early education, health and family support services for use by families, parents and carers of children under five. They may be located in schools, health centres, community centres or have their own building. In children's centres public, private and voluntary organisations work together in order to provide a wide range of services from childcare to health visiting, employment advice, parenting advice and toy libraries. These services are for all young families, but there is a particular emphasis on improving the life chances of the most disadvantaged children. Delivery involves a mix of public, private and voluntary sector providers but responsibility and accountability for the programme has, since 2006, rested with the City Council,

9. The Children's Centres programme is being rolled out in three phases. Nationally there were approximately 1,000 centres in September 2006, and local authorities are responsible for raising this to 3,500 centres by 2010.

### **The range of services available.**

10. All Children's Centres, are required to have a 'core offer' of services. However, there are two kinds of core offer, dependent on whether area served is in the 30% most deprived on the index of multiple deprivation or in the 70% least deprived. There is scope for local flexibility as to *how* the core offer is delivered. There is also a requirement that parents/carers should be involved in the planning of services. The 'core offer' is:

11. Children's Centres in the 30% most disadvantaged areas will offer the following services:

- good quality early learning combined with full day care provision for children (minimum 10 hours a day, 5 days a week, 48 weeks a year)
- good quality teacher input to lead the development of learning within the centre
- child and family health services, including appointments with a midwife, health visitors, help to stop smoking, speech and language support
- parental outreach
- family support services
- a base for a childminder network
- support for children and parents with special needs, and
- effective links with Jobcentre Plus to support parents/carers who wish to consider training or employment.

12. There is a universal level of service - to be mainly built on existing private, voluntary, independent (PVI) or statutory services - that must be provided in Children's Centres serving families in the 70% less disadvantaged areas:

- appropriate support and outreach services to isolated parents/carers and children at risk of social exclusion
- information and advice to parents/carers on a range of subjects, including: local childcare, looking after babies and young children, local early years provision (childcare and early learning) education services for 3 & 4 year olds
- support to childminders via a quality assured, co-ordinated network
- drop-in sessions and other activities for children and parents/carers at the centre
- links to Jobcentre Plus services to encourage and support labour market participation
- access to specialist services, in particular for children with special needs and disabilities.

13. While these Centres may also offer a range of other services for parents and their children, based on local demand, the funding for those must come from other sources. The '70%' Centres are not required to provide integrated early learning and full daycare within the Centre, but they may do so where there is sufficient demand and inadequate existing PVI provision. They also have more flexibility over opening hours and are not bound by the 10 hours per day requirement where only sessional or drop-in activities for children are offered.

14. In each of the three phases the delivery of the core offer is not about the complete development of new services. The first step in any location has been to conduct an audit of existing needs and services, for example the local supply of day care places, what is available in the schools, in order to see how they can contribute to the core offer. If there was a sufficient quantity of good quality early years provision there would be no need to provide extra places directly through the Centre. The additional capacity has therefore been used to fill in identified gaps in service within the locality.

15. It is open to local authorities to make local additions to the core offer. Derby has chosen to add in Peer Early Education Partnership – PEEP- involving parents in understanding very early learning by children from babies up to the age of 3.

16. The Commission's review found that the activities observed in Derby - and Leicester - were all well co-ordinated and well managed. The staff from the different agencies worked well together. It is worth comparing that to the national picture found by the Select Committee on Public Accounts (38th report):

"Managers of children's centres work with very different organisations (providing services in their centres as wide ranging as family support, public health, childcare and employment advice) which have widely differing working practices and need to work together in a way they have not done before. Some partnerships, for example to provide children's centre-based health services through Primary Care Trusts and employment advice through Jobcentre Plus, have been slow to develop".

### **Roll out.**

17. The Govt believe the programme will meet its target of having 2,500 Children's Centres nationally by April 2008. When the programme is fully implemented by 2010 it is envisaged that every family with children under 5 will have local access to one of 3,500 centres. This is being achieved in three phases, with Phase 2 currently in progress. There is a requirement to have Children's Centres established in all the '30%' areas before rolling out to '70%' areas. The third and final stage - beginning in April 2008 - will complete the coverage in Derby. The evidence showed that Derby is on target – yet it is worth noting that this far from being the general position nationally. The Select Committee on Public Accounts report found:

"Local authorities reached the target for establishing the first phase of children's centres late, and setting up further centres by 2010 will stretch their capacity further".

The Children's Centre locations in Derby are set out below with a brief explanatory notes.

### **Selection of areas/locations for Children's Centres in Derby.**

18. The criteria for the first phase of Children's Centres, set by the Department for Children, Schools and Families, said that they had to be based in the most disadvantaged areas and build upon any existing Sure Start local programmes and, as far as possible, include maintained nursery schools. As a result the seven first phase areas in Derby were:

- Osmaston /Allenton
- Austin/ Sunnyhill
- Rosehill

- Mackworth/Morley

The above 4 were the original Sure Start areas, plus:

- Derwent - covering the New Deal for Communities area
- Spondon
- Becket - The Abbey/Stockbrook Street area

19. The criteria for the second phase were to prioritise the remaining 30% most disadvantaged areas and to use suitable school sites if possible. The second phase areas in Derby are:

- Alvaston
- Boulton
- Darley/Alleestree
- Mickleover/Littleover
- Normanton
- North Chaddesden and Breadsall Hilltop
- Sinfen

20. All the above involve school bases and partner sites, except Sinfen where the plans are for a stand alone building adjacent to the Redwood Schools. Furthermore, all except Mickleover/Littleover fall into the 30% category.

21. At the time of the review the Council was awaiting guidance from DCSF in relation to Phase 3.

22. The physical siting of Children's Centres may be said to fall into three categories:

- Dedicated single site
- School site
- Multi-site

and on a horses-for-courses basis this affects the finance and governance arrangements.

## **Finance & governance Issues**

23. Members had wished to establish whether the revenue costs associated with running a Children's Centre were shared fairly on school or other mixed sites. The review established that the clear intention is that costs should be fairly attributed so that locating a Children's Centre on the site will not come at a price for the 'host'. A financial formula was being developed to work out the additional costs of cleaning, utility bills, caretaking and maintenance. At the start of a new service a mutually agreed 'best guess' budget has to be used until the actual costs become apparent. The Commission had some concerns that these revenue costs could prove to be substantially more than the Department had envisaged. This would be a problem if the central budget gets soaked up leaving a shortfall for those yet to open.

24. There are at least four models of governance and these are marked A to D below. Two models, C & D, have not been proposed for any of Derby's Children's Centres but are included for the sake of completeness. All the models require an advisory board though, as the name indicates, they do not make decisions.

**Model A.** Sole management is by the Children and Young People Department, CYPD. This is only likely to apply in the case of a dedicated single site.

**Model B.** Negotiated split responsibilities between the CYPD and the School Governing Body governed by a Service Level Agreement. The Advisory Boards will be joint including head and/or governors but must also include users. This has been finalised for the Asterdale site and will apply to Becket. Mackworth/Morley will also have a similar model but the split of responsibilities shall include Ashgate Nursery School, the Mackworth/Morley Sure Start local programme and Step In Family Centre, run by NCH, as the latter also delivers some services.

**Model C.** Delivery through entirely private provision. This is likely to apply in areas where the 'core offer' can be delivered by existing private sector provision without requiring new resources. There would be a Service Level Agreement and the advisory board would include local authority representation.

**Model D.** School site but with no head or governor involvement. This is only likely to apply with a separate building on the school campus with separate metering. The main liaison would be regarding caretaking issues.

25. The Commission learnt that with a Children's Centre based wholly or mainly on a school site there can be a wish on the part of the head and governors to take on the direct management of the resource, effectively absorbed into the school. This appears a very simple-to-operate model and there is no legal impediment to it, save for the requirement to have an advisory board. The aspiration may arise from viewing the Centre users' children as forming a natural intake for the primary school. The view of the CYPD managers was that:

- there can be no presumption about future selection of primary school by parents;
- the Centre's management must remain focussed on making the link with the least engaged families, whose children would potentially benefit most from the core offer..
- but these children may be less than eagerly sought out by schools
- as accountability for the programme rests with the City Council, it needs to retain the levers of authority to ensure delivery

## Conclusions

- A. The activities observed in both Derby and Leicester were all well co-ordinated and well managed.
- B. It became clear that Derby is an exemplar in respect of the development of Children's Centres and the Commission congratulate all involved in that achievement.
- C. Part of the purpose in conducting the review had been to see whether there were any lessons from Phase 1 that could beneficially influence Phases 2 and 3; However each of the three phases proved to be very distinct, Phase 2 is nearly complete and Phase 3 will have its own unique issues.
- D. The enthusiasm and dedication of all the individuals involved – policy managers, staff on the ground, head teachers – was apparent. Persistence had been needed to deliver the new buildings and site usage agreements as these key players were all in uncharted territory - goodwill had provided the backbone for that.
- E. In fact, the main continuing thread between the three phases has been the goodwill between the key personalities of the agencies involved.
- F. The established links with private and voluntary day care providers suggest Derby is therefore well placed to gain the co-ordination and consolidation needed to deliver the core offer in the Phase 3 areas.
- G. At the drafting stage of this report the final Phase 3 information was still awaited from central government but the belief was that perhaps no capital would be provided. Small amounts may be essential for modest alterations to existing rooms to enable co-location, make an area private for interviews, and allow computer kit to be installed.
- H. The 'handover pack' for each Children's Centre is meant to ensure continuity of approach and effective good working for when the original key players move on: this is good future proofing.
- I. The City Council is fully embracing its responsibilities as the accountable body for the Children's Centres programme.
- J. The Council takes seriously the obligation to involve parents in planning and reviewing services but there can never be room for 'coasting' because new families start, parents change address and the needs of current users may alter.

**Explanatory Note:** Readers are asked to note that the context for the foregoing positive conclusions was an awareness by the Commission of just how variable the picture has been between different local authority areas. That was in part due to the report back by Cllr Rawson from the conference



attended on 20 September and also from the report of the House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts; the latter can be accessed via: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmselect/cmpubacc/261/26102.htm>

## **Recommendations**

1. With staff from different agencies increasingly being co-located, the need is to ensure IT compatibility so staff can access their own agency data and link with that of the partner agencies. In the interim this can be addressed using dial out broadband remote access.
2. Rather than being provided as a piece of kit to new post holders, the 'handover pack' needs to be provided to candidates for vacancies in those posts before the interview stage to ensure a commitment to the way we do things here
3. To successfully consolidate and integrate existing services in Phase 3 some capital may need to be budgeted for, if not provided by Whitehall, to finance essential modest alterations to existing accommodation to enable co-location, make an area private for interviews and allow computer kit to be installed.
4. With Derby seen as a Children's Centre exemplar, to maintain that standing the Best Value approach needs to be adopted with all the Children's Centre partners being committed to securing continuous improvement through a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.
5. To best discharge its obligations as the accountable body the Council should continue its current 'hands on' approach for the Children's Centres programme, as that:
  - minimises the risk of 'coasting' with a settled clientele receiving popular services but clogging up resources and not making progress
  - maximises the chance of identifying and engaging hard-to-reach families - a continuing process as new families have babies or change address
6. The Commission would wish to be consulted should future changes be proposed in how the Council discharges its obligations as accountable body
7. In keeping abreast of good practice in early years services there would be merit in looking at transferable good practice in European countries and, in particular, Germany because of ease of access to information through the Rolls Royce and Osnabruck connections.