



HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD: 13 JUNE 2013

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG
PEOPLE'S SERVICE**

SCRUTINY REVIEW PANEL ON CHILDREN'S CENTRES

Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to present the findings of the County Council's Scrutiny Review Panel on Children's Centres and to draw the recommendations to the attention of the Health and Wellbeing Board

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. The provision of Children's Centres is a statutory duty of top tier local authorities, health and JobCentre Plus, regulated through the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006. While intended to be responsive to local need, they are subject to statutory government guidance and inspection by Ofsted.
3. There are approximately 35,000 children under five in Leicestershire, served by 39 Children's Centres. The County Council employs the team that forms the infrastructure for the Programme but the management is largely devolved to six Locality Partnership Groups (LPGs) (Blaby and Oadby and Wigston; Charnwood; Harborough; Hinckley and Bosworth; Melton; and North West Leicestershire).

Background

Scope of the Review

4. The Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a report on Children's Centres at its meeting on 21 November 2011, which included the outcomes of recent Ofsted Inspections. The Committee agreed to recommend that a Review Panel should be established and the Scoping Document was approved by the Committee on 11 June 2012.
5. A proposal was considered and approved in September by the Scrutiny Commissioners that the Review Panel should observe an Annual Conversation, in the expectation it would receive almost all the information and evidence it required in one day. The Panel therefore spent a day in Harborough District, visiting the Children's Centres at

Broughton Astley and Lutterworth and observing the Harborough LPG's Annual Conversation.

Membership of the Panel

6. The following members were appointed to serve on the Panel:

Mr M H Charlesworth CC	Mrs R Page CC
Mr D Jennings CC	Mrs C M Radford CC
Mrs H E Loydall CC	Mr R J Shepherd CC
Mr J Miah CC	

The Scrutiny Commissioner Mr Shepherd was appointed Chairman of the Panel.

Consideration by the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee

7. The Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the findings of the Scrutiny Review Panel at its meeting on 4 March 2012.
8. The Chairman of the Panel, Mr. R. J. Shepherd, introduced the report. He drew attention to his comments in the foreword regarding the two key groups of beneficiaries of the work of the Centres and commended the Panel's recommendations to the Committee. He also reported that the Panel had trialled a new review process, allowing it to complete its work more speedily. He suggested that the process would be suitable for use for future reviews, depending on the subject matter.
9. The following points arose from discussion at the Children and Young People's Service Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting -
 - In relation to the section on Supporting Leicestershire Families, it was noted that the aim was to work with a family until it became resilient: it would be important to manage this in such a way that the family did not become dependent upon SLF support.
 - Members were concerned that the funding for Children's Centres was not guaranteed beyond the coming year.
 - It was noted that only c. 60% of new births were made known to the Centres and this transfer of information relied heavily on local relationships. It was suggested that the problems of information sharing with health bodies was one that the Health and Wellbeing Board should be made aware of.
10. The Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee resolved:

- (a) That the report of the Review Panel on Children's Centres be supported and that the recommendations therein be referred to the Cabinet for consideration;
- (b) That the Chairman of the Committee write, on the Committee's behalf, to the Chairman of the Shadow Health and Wellbeing Board to ask that body to consider further the issues around data sharing between health bodies and partners.

Consideration by the County Council's Cabinet

11. The County Council's Cabinet considered the report on 9 April. It accepted the findings of the Review Panel and requested the Director of Children and Young People's Services to ensure that the recommendations of the Review Panel are acted upon, subject to the availability of resources.

Review Panel Findings

12. The recommendations which the Review Panel wishes specifically to draw to the attention of the Health and Wellbeing Board are as follows:-
- (c) That the benefits of the Children's Centres, in terms of preventing later more specialised interventions with children and young people be promoted to the two Leicestershire Commissioning Consortium [Clinical Commissioning Groups], the NHS Commissioning Consortium [now NHS England] and the Health and Wellbeing Board, with a view to requesting financial support for the Children's Centre programme from these bodies.
 - (d) That the benefits of the Children's Centres, in terms of improving the skillsets, confidence and employability of both the parents and the children that are engaged with it, be drawn to the attention of Leicestershire Together and its commissioning boards, to encourage those partnerships to identify resources that could be added to the Centres' programmes in recognition of the long-term economic benefits of a better educated workforce.
 - (e) That a protocol is drawn up with University Hospitals Leicester Midwifery Service and/or Leicestershire Partnership Trust Health Visiting Service that requires that/those service/s to ask all new parents to fill out a consent form allowing their details to be shared with the local Children's Centre.
13. It is required by statutory guidance that all families with new babies have early access to the Children's Centre Programme. The Panel found that current arrangements for notification and registration are highly inconsistent across the County, heavily reliant on individual relationships with Midwives and Health Visitors and are not systematically embedded into operational practice.

Resources Implications

14. The Children's Centres are currently funded through the Early Intervention Grant (EIG). However this grant has been subsumed into the County Council's settlement as from April 2013. The County Council has guaranteed the same level of funding for 2013/14 as was available in 2012/13. The Panel has therefore made a number of recommendations relating to funding to assure the sustainability of the programme in future years, including the suggestions that contributions from partner agencies should be sought.
15. The Director of Corporate Resources has been consulted on the contents of this report.

Recommendations

16. The Health and Wellbeing Board is recommended to
 - (a) Request that members of the Health and Wellbeing Board always take recommendations (c) and (d) into account when developing their commissioning intentions;
 - (b) Include the sharing of birth data with Children's Centres in the Health and Wellbeing Board Priorities Action List and set targets which will ensure that practice improves.

Background Papers

17. None

Equal Opportunities Implications

18. Whilst a range of universal service provision is made available through Children's Centres (e.g. 2 year old health checks), the service is targeted to those families who are most disadvantaged and vulnerable. Services in localities are focused on where children experience the poorest outcomes and where there are the highest numbers of children on the Child Protection Register and Children in Care.

Appendices

Appendix A – Final report of the Scrutiny Review Panel on Children's Centres.

Officer to Contact

Lesley Hagger
Acting Director, Children and Young People's Service,
Tel: 0116 305 6340
Email: lesley.hagger@leics.gov.uk