



Cabinet Meeting on 21st January 2015

Best Start

Michael Lawrence, Cabinet Member for Children and Community Safety said,

“We know the quality of a child’s development up to the age of five has a huge bearing on all aspects of the rest of their life, therefore we owe it to every child to do all we can to ensure they have the best start possible.

Most parents do a good job taking care of their children and do not need our assistance beyond help accessing the right information to make positive choices for their families. However, despite intensive effort and investment by many different agencies in recent years, we are not reaching all the young families who need us most.

We need a new approach to early years, including how we work with schools and other partners, which involves providing the right information and advice, refocusing our resources on those in need and reconfiguring how we use our Children’s Centres in future.

We are proposing to change the philosophy of how we deliver services for maximum impact to benefit those most in need of support and to ensure every Staffordshire child is safe, healthy and ready to take advantage of all that a good education has to offer.”

Report Summary

There is an overwhelming amount of evidence that shows the profound importance of the first five years of a child’s life to their emotional, social and cognitive development and their ability to do well in school and lead happy and healthy adult lives¹.

¹ Department for Education, 2012. *Supporting families in the foundation years*. <http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/earlylearningandchildcare/early/a00192398/supporting-families-in-the-foundation-years>

¹ Allen MP, G (2011) *Early Intervention: Smart Investment, Massive Savings – The Second Independent Report to Her Majesty’s Government*

¹ Tickell, C (2011) *The Early Years: Foundations for Life, Health and Learning*. An Independent Report on the Early Years Foundation Stage to Her Majesty’s Government

¹ Munro, E (2011) *The Munro Review of Child Protection: Final Report – A child-centred system*

¹ Marmot, Sir Michael, 2010. *Fair Society, Healthy Lives*.

Ensuring that families therefore have the opportunity to provide their children with the best start in life is critical, particularly to the development of prosperous and safe communities and making Staffordshire a great place to live.

In September 2014, Cabinet agreed to consult with residents, individuals, partners, interested organisations and other key stakeholders in order to help shape a new approach to ensuring that all young children in Staffordshire will have the opportunity to get the best start in life.

This report brings back to Cabinet for approval a summary of the findings of the 8 week consultation and the final proposals for a new approach to giving children the best start in life. The report outlines our plans which are built upon what we consider to be the key components to the best start in life and are based on an integrated model of commissioning and delivery with partners in the future. The report also makes recommendations relating to the future configuration of Children's Centre premises.

It should be noted that this phase of work contributes to the County Council's longer-term Best Start Strategy as part of the Council's Business Plan for 2015/16 and which will include the transfer of the Health Visitor commissioning responsibility to the Council in October 2015.

Should the recommendations be agreed by Cabinet then it is planned that the new arrangements will be put in place for 1 April 2015.

Recommendations

1. I recommend that Cabinet:
 - a. Endorses the content of the report and the proposal for a new way of working for under-5s in Staffordshire.
 - b. Notes the contents of the Public Consultation Report and Community Impact Assessments for each district.
 - c. Gives authority to the Director for People, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children and Community Safety, to take all such steps, decisions and actions as are necessary to give effect to the proposals as set out in paragraphs 25-45 of the Cabinet report.

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| Local Members Interest |
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N/A

<http://www.instituteofhealthequity.org/projects/fair-society-healthy-lives-the-marmot-review>

¹ A Cross Party Manifesto: *The 1001 Critical Days*

¹HMCIP Education, Children's Services and Skills *Early Years* Ofsted (2014)

Cabinet – 21st January 2015

Best Start

Recommendations of the Cabinet Member for Children and Community Safety

2. I recommend that Cabinet:
 - a. Endorses the content of the report and the proposal for a new way of working for under-5s in Staffordshire.
 - b. Notes the contents of the Public Consultation Report and Community Impact Assessments for each district.
 - c. Gives authority to the Director for People, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children and Community Safety, to take all such steps, decisions and actions as are necessary to give effect to the proposals as set out in paragraphs 25-45 of the Cabinet report.

Report of the Director for People and Deputy Chief Executive

Introduction

3. Staffordshire County Council has three priority outcomes to build a better Staffordshire. These priorities are that the people of Staffordshire will:
 - a. Be able to access more good jobs and feel the benefits of economic growth;
 - b. Be healthier and more independent; and
 - c. Feel safer, happier and more supported in and by their community.
4. The first five years of every child's life are critical for positive future health and development. Evidence strongly suggests that high quality support for pregnant women and new mothers, as well as good parenting skills and growing up in a caring environment, has a profound influence on virtually all aspects of development, including educational attainment, future achievement and wellbeing. Ensuring that families are able to give their children the best start in life is fundamental to the County Council's priority outcomes.
5. At the beginning of 2014 the Commissioner for Families and Safety was asked by Cabinet to undertake a review of the efficiency and effectiveness of Children's Centres and related services. This review suggested that the current system is not functioning well and, despite considerable investment by the County Council

and its partners, we are not making enough of a difference to the lives of vulnerable families.

6. This included a first phase of engagement which commenced in April 2014 and began the conversation with communities and stakeholders as to how we can change the way we commission early years services to better serve the needs of our most vulnerable families. The findings from this exercise contributed to the development of initial proposals.
7. As a result, a report was brought to Cabinet in September 2014, suggesting a new model which includes a more integrated approach for under 5s: connecting all families to what they need in the community and bringing together our resources with those of other organisations to increase efficiency, reduce waste and improve outcomes for children and families based upon two key principles:

A quality offer for all accessed through:

- a. Information, advice and guidance
- b. Good universal services

Extra support for those who need it by providing:

- c. Effective early help for those at risk
 - d. Protection for the most vulnerable families
8. The Cabinet agreed to a full countywide public consultation taking place on these proposals running between 8th October 2014 and 3rd December 2014. It was agreed that the findings of this consultation would be used to inform a final set of proposals that would be brought back to Cabinet in January 2015. This report brings back to Cabinet:
 - a. A full and summary analysis of the findings of the county-wide consultation.
 - b. Final proposals for a new early years' delivery model, including future commissioning intentions, for approval by Cabinet.
 - c. Property proposals based upon the proposed delivery model; and
 - d. Eight Community Impact Assessments (CIAs) outlining the potential impacts on each district and proposed actions to mitigate any potentially negative implications on any particular groups.

Context:

9. There are approximately 46,099 children under five years of age living in Staffordshire today. The majority of these children will live in families that provide them with the best start in life, needing only information, advice and guidance and

access to the universal services that everyone receives such as GPs, Midwives, Health Visitors, and quality childcare, and good schools.

10. However, a small number of families need extra support. The following are some key headlines for Staffordshire:
 - a. As of the end of June 2014, 569 children under 5 were subject to a Common Assessment Framework (now termed an Early Help Assessment). There were also 1,237 under 5's with an open case with a social worker².
 - b. Between October 2013 and September 2014, on average there were 228 children under-five subject to a Child Protection Plan (CPP) across the County³.
 - c. Between October 2013 and September 2014, there were on 87 Looked After Children aged under-five⁴.
 - d. Analysis of Child Protection Conferences and Reviews held for under-fives between September 2013 and February 2014 identifies the top three predisposing factors as domestic violence, mental health of carer and substance misuse, including alcohol.
 - e. Despite improvements in levels of development and school readiness (an increase of 10% from 54% to 64% from 2013 to 2014) this still leaves 36% of children in the County who are not considered to be school ready by age 5.
 - f. There is also inequality, with a gap of 22 percentage point in levels of attainment between those children who are eligible for free school meals and those that are not⁵.

Legislative and Policy Drivers

11. Staffordshire County Council has a number of statutory duties regarding early years, in particular childcare, early education and safeguarding. A list of these duties can be found as Appendix A to this report. We believe that these proposals fulfil the County Council's Statutory Duties in relation to Early Years and have made a submission to the Department for Education.
12. The Government has set out its vision for early years⁶ which includes greater focus on early intervention, emphasizes the critical importance of early years in

² Staffordshire Early Years Performance Dashboard (October 2014)

³ Data obtained from Families First – 08/05/14

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Staffordshire Early Years Performance Dashboard (October 2014)

⁶ Department for Education, 2012. *Supporting families in the foundation years.*

<http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/earlylearningandchildcare/early/a00192398/sup>

the development of the child and the importance of the role of the family. Recent policy initiatives have focused on the importance of good quality childcare to enable parents to work and help to identify children's needs earlier to reduce gaps in educational attainment, the increased role of schools and the introduction of the Early Years Pupil Premium for disadvantaged families.

Ofsted

13. The Children's Centre Ofsted Framework changed significantly from April 2013 and there is now a much greater emphasis placed on the impact of children's centres on targeted young children and their families. They make three key judgments that contribute to a judgment on the overall effectiveness of the centre. The three key judgments are:
 - a. Access to services by young children and their families
 - b. The quality and impact of practice and services
 - c. The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management.
14. However, the four recent inspections of Children's Centres by Ofsted have shown that the current model of delivery is fragmented and complex and that we are not reaching those families who are in need and that there is an absence of robust performance management. Going forward local authorities will be inspected on the basis of their 'Early Years Offer' rather than individual Children's Centres.

Findings of the public consultation

15. The public consultation took place between 8th October and the 3rd December 2014. The approach undertaken was based on a consultation plan that included multiple methods, targeting different groups of interest in different ways in order to reach the widest audience and secure maximum involvement. This approach has delivered successful results, achieving a total of 1,605 responses to the survey and over 400 also engaging in a wide variety of public meetings and organised events. In addition feedback was also received via letters, emails, stakeholder meetings and social media.
16. As part of the consultation a third-party market-research company was also commissioned to determine the views of the parent population at large, in order to help ensure the views of parents who do not use children centres are reflected in the findings. A total of 400 surveys were secured through this exercise and are included in the total response of 1605.
17. Respondents almost unanimously supported the vision and priorities for the early years offer set out in the consultation, which included focusing on early help for

families that need it, ensuring children are ready for school and promoting positive parenting.

18. In terms of the proposals 32% of respondents agreed that the proposals would help to ensure that all children get the best start in life, while 36% disagreed, 24% neither agreed nor disagreed and 9% did not know.
19. Accessibility was a key concern, particularly in relation to residents of rural areas and low income families, and the need to ensure that parents who cannot travel to other venues are not isolated.
20. When asked what types of information parents of a child under 5 would need and when they would need it, comments reflected the importance of specific information at key milestones. Information, advice and guidance on raising a baby and how to cope was regarded as important, as well as information on child health over time. As children continue to grow, advice on how they could be best supported to learn and develop was critical, followed by information on preparing for and choosing a nursery or school.
21. Respondents were also asked how they would prefer to access information and advice on children and family services, with 53% stating that they would prefer to access information via the Staffordshire County Council Website. Future plans for a robust online information, advice and guidance system to signpost parents to local and universal services is a key priority for the County Council.
22. As part of the consultation the County Council engaged with Ofsted, the Department of Education, and 4Children (who are funded by the DfE to support local authorities around early years), as well as local stakeholders including Schools, SSOTP and Families First, to gauge the impact of the proposals. The DfE has written back to the Local Authority, acknowledged our proposals and indicated that if the proposals are approved then they will work with Staffordshire following the Cabinet decision to help ensure that premises continue to predominantly provide early years service.
23. Undertaking a full consultation has provided a meaningful mechanism for individuals, communities, members/scrutiny, employees, partners, interested organisations and other key stakeholders to consider and comment on the proposals prior to any decisions being made.
24. As a result we have amended the original proposals to take account of issues raised in relation to rurality and outreach support, property and premise management, which are outlined within the proposed new model.
25. A full analysis and summary report on the findings of the public consultation can be found in Appendix B.

Proposed Best Start Offer

26. Taking the consultation findings, current performance and MTFs pressures into account, it is clear that we need to make changes in order to ensure that every child in Staffordshire is being given the opportunity to get the best start in life. This needs to be done in a way which makes best use of resources, delivers a universal offer alongside targeted support for those who need it most, and can demonstrate improved outcomes.
27. As part of its work programme Safer and Stronger Communities Select Committee undertook a review into the Council's early years offer and the its findings and recommendations were endorsed by the Committee on 8 September 2014. The key recommendations, which have been taken into full account in the final proposals, included:
 - a. Creation of a clear vision and strategy for early years
 - b. A focus on empowering communities
 - c. Robust and integrated commissioning arrangements
 - d. A new framework for monitoring and evaluation
 - e. A review of Children's Centre facilities
 - f. Continued consultation with the Committee
28. As part of the consultation process we have also worked closely with partners across the Children's Strategic Partnership, including commissioners and providers, who are committed to delivering an integrated 'Best Start' offer for Staffordshire's families (See Appendix C and D).
29. As part of our contribution to that integrated offer Staffordshire County Council will:
 - a. Promote access to information, advice and guidance (IAG) to all families across Staffordshire using a combination of applications, including telephone, web links, and the Staffordshire E-Marketplace.
 - b. Ensure there are sufficient, high quality childcare places for all parents through our partnership with Entrust, and delivery of the Think 2 Programme.
 - c. Work with learning providers, including schools, to ensure that Staffordshire parents can access what they need to provide their children with early learning and family learning opportunities.
 - d. Continue to work with NHS England to manage the Health Visitor Transition programme, and ensure that all children receive development

health checks, and that vulnerable families are flagged for additional support within the new arrangements.

- e. Ensure that the use of the Early Help Assessment is embedded across Staffordshire and used appropriately to flag individual families in need of additional help before problems escalate within the new arrangements.
- f. Target support towards those families in localities of need and deliver a co-ordinated range of activities including family support, parenting programmes and early learning where our data is telling us there are significant gaps in attainment and there is high demand on the children's social care system.
- g. Continue to commission Families First to deliver assessment and support to meet the needs of complex and vulnerable young families in each district, as part of the Best Start offer.

Proposed Governance, Leadership and Management

- 30. As noted by Ofsted, the current governance arrangements for Children's Centres in Staffordshire is complex with both a County Children's Centre Board, Management Advisory Boards and Locality Groups in existence which vary in quality and attendance and appear to fulfil the same legal functions. Moving forward we need to ensure that there is a more robust governance structure engaging partners to deliver an integrated Best Start offer for Staffordshire in line with our statutory duties.
- 31. It is therefore proposed that the County Children's Centre Partnership Board is dissolved and replaced with a County Early Years Advisory Board, chaired by the Lead Member for Children, which reports into both the County Council Children's Improvement Board and the Children's Strategic Partnership, as well as linking to the Staffordshire Safeguarding Children's Board. This Board would broaden out its agenda beyond the Children's Centre Core Purpose and include a broader range of key topics including childcare sufficiency, health visitor transition, performance, safeguarding and commissioning. Its role would be to set SMART targets and to provide challenge, support and scrutiny performance at a county level.
- 32. The existing District Management Advisory Boards should be rationalised and merged with other district forums where appropriate. This could be taken forward by the District Commissioning Leads, supported by the Commissioning Delivery Hub, to ensure it is handled effectively and that there is clarity in the terms of reference to ensure compliance with statutory duties and the Ofsted framework.
- 33. With effect from 1 April 2015 Families First would no longer be commissioned to take on the Leadership and Management role of the Children's Centre Core Purpose. The accountability would transfer to the Commissioner for Families and Safety and be delivered at an operational level by contracted providers within each district, overseen by the Commissioning Delivery Hub. Families First would

retain premise management responsibility for those buildings where this is the current arrangement.

34. The Commissioner for Families and Safety will become the accountable officer for Ofsted inspections, supported by the Commissioning Delivery Hub. In line with statutory guidance each Children's Centre will need to have a named registered Centre Leader. It is proposed that this is the commissioned District Co-ordinator on behalf of the Commissioner for Families and Safety.

Proposals in relation to efficiency savings

35. Like most Local Authorities the County Council is facing funding reductions which inevitably mean that services are asked to achieve efficiencies, and as part of the 2014/15 MTFs, a savings target of £1.5m in 2014/15 rising to £3m in 2015/16 was agreed.
36. A full review of all areas of expenditure has been undertaken and to date on-going savings of approximately £1m have been realised. The balance of savings to achieve the MTFs target for 2015/16 will be achieved through a combination of additional premises savings and a further review of services that are commissioned in order to target those Children and Families most in need. In addition, in order to deliver a more coordinated approach to the delivery of Early Years services and achieve even better value for money, it is planned to align available resources with other key early year's activity such as Think 2 and Building Resilient Families and Communities.
37. Within the new model we will continue to commission key activities, as part of our statutory duties, and we intend to commission key services using the Children's Centre Service Framework until April 2016. The priority for the Commissioner for Families will be early learning and family support, including parenting programmes. In addition, we will continue with the current arrangements for the spot purchase of co-ordination to include some premise management.
38. These changes, along with the reconfiguration of premises, aligned commissioning intentions and budgets will allow us to achieve MTFs targets for 2015/16. Moving forward, as part of the development of the overall Best Start Strategy we will seek to further align commissioning intentions with partner agencies to further develop the district offer as part of the commissioning arrangements for 2016/17.

Proposals in relation to Property

39. Our initial review showed that not enough families, including those who are most vulnerable, are accessing the facilities we are currently using to provide early years services from. There are currently 26 designated Children's Centres grouped into clusters with additional 'link sites'. We propose to reconfigure our premises in order to deliver what is required in a different way, allowing others to take on the management of the resources and releasing capacity to focus upon delivery where it is needed most.

40. These proposals are based on a rigorous analysis of indices of multiple deprivation, the number of 0-5s reached (including those in the areas of highest deprivation), the running cost, the viability of partnership working and the outcomes achieved. For a full list of the final proposals for how our buildings will be used in the early years offer moving forward see Appendix E.
41. In summary we are proposing the following changes:
 - a. In the majority of cases, schools to take on the management of facilities on their site and, subject to a transfer agreement, use the resources to support Best Start agenda and contribute to school readiness, for example through the Think 2 programme.
 - b. Retain 11 facilities as Family Hubs with a broader remit to promote integrated working and deliver the local 'Best Start' offer but aligned to the broader Building Resilient Families and Communities agenda, and provide a facility for multi-agency co-location, programme delivery and co-ordination functions.
 - c. Transfer the management of facilities within library buildings to the Culture and Library Service to use for the benefit of the community, as part of their contribution to family learning as part of our Best Start agenda.
 - d. Retain two designated Mobile Centres for deployment in rural locations to address concern raised during the consultation.
42. The 11 retained sites would provide a facility for co-located Family Teams and a venue for delivery and co-ordination functions and provide a presence in key localities, as well as meet our statutory duties in line with the Core Purpose for Children's Centres.
43. It is proposed that partners will continue to have access to the buildings, including Families First and SSOTP, although dialogue regarding access will need to be managed locally in accordance with the needs of users. Families First will continue to be resourced to manage those premises which are retained including caretaking, reception and health and safety.

Staffing

44. The County Council employ 4 staff (2.95 full time equivalent), that work within the South Staffordshire District, that are directly affected by the proposals. Subject to the decision, the proposal would have an impact on the post holders currently providing the service. If the proposal is approved by cabinet, formal consultation with relevant Trade Unions would be undertaken by the service lead, supported by HR in respect of staff employed within the establishment.

Community Impact Assessment

45. Eight Community Impact Assessments (CIAs) have been completed on the proposals outlined in this report. These assessments consider the impacts of these proposals on residents in each district and the needs based on demographic trends, in line with the protected characteristics defined by the Equality Act 2010. These reports can be found as appendix F to this report.

Next Steps

46. If approved by Cabinet, the Director for People and the Commissioner for Families will be given authority, in conjunction with the Cabinet Member for Children and Community Safety, to begin to work with our partners to put in place the early year's model as set out in this report.

List of Background Documents:

- Appendix A – Local Authority Statutory Duties
- Appendix B – Best Start Consultation Report
- Appendix C – Best Start Pathway Model
- Appendix D – Best Start Commissioning Plan
- Appendix E – Property Plan
- Appendix F – Community Impact Assessments

Report Commissioner:

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