

## **Safe and Strong Communities Select Committee – 4 March 2019**

### **Early Years – follow up visits to Children's Centres**

#### **Recommendation/s**

1. That the Select Committee considers the final report of the Committees' Early Years – follow up visits to Children's Centres and endorses the report prior to it being submitted to the Cabinet Member for his comment(s).

#### **Report of Scrutiny and Support Manager**

#### **Summary**

##### **What is the Select Committee being asked to do and why?**

2. The Select Committee is asked to consider the findings of Members following visits to Children's Centres in September/October 2018. Following this consideration, the report will be forwarded to the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People for his comment(s).

#### **Report**

##### **Background**

3. In September 2014, Members of the Select Committee agreed to undertake visits in June/July 2014 to 41 of the 52 Children's Centres in Staffordshire and fed back their findings and made several recommendations to the Cabinet Member.

##### **Summary**

4. Members of the Safe and Strong Communities Select Committee visited Children's Centres in Staffordshire during September/October 2018 to see what changes had been made since the review of Children's Centres in 2014.

5. Members were pleased to see that there was now a clear Strategy for Early Years and that Children's Centres were being well-used

6. There were two key findings from the visits, one relating to the provision of Wi-Fi in the Centres, that was immediately responded to by the Cabinet Member; and secondly, regarding a request for an update on the operation of the 0-19 Health Visiting contract, a presentation on which is scheduled to take place immediately following this agenda item on 4 March.

## **Next Steps**

7. The report is presented to the Committee for endorsement. Having responded to the two main key findings the Cabinet Member is invited to update Members and comment on any other issues raised in the report

## **Link to the Strategic Plan**

8. Ensuring that Staffordshire's children and young people feel safer, happier and more supported in and by their community.

## **Implications**

9. The equalities and legal; resource and value for money; and risk implications are set out in the attached report.

## **Contact Officer**

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|----------------|--|
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## **Appendices/Background papers**

- Final Report of the Working Group

## **Final Report of the Safe and Strong Communities Select Committee - Early Years – follow up visits to Children's Centres**

### **Background**

A report of the Committee's findings was made to the Safe and Strong Communities Select Committee on 29 September 2014. The key findings from visits were that the Cabinet Member should: -

1. Define a clear vision and strategy for Early Years in Staffordshire, in conjunction with partners, which is focussed on empowering communities to deliver Early Years' support with support from professionals.
2. Ensure there are clear commissioning arrangements in place with access to information to assist commissioners in understanding and analysing the needs in their areas, and marketing of early years' activities.
3. Agree a long term Joint Commissioning budget for Early Years with partners.
4. Implement a framework for monitoring the effectiveness of commissioned services and ensure that this is written into all contracts.
5. Review the current provision of Phase 1 and Children's Centres on school sites in Staffordshire and evaluates alternative community settings for the provision of Children's Centre services.
6. Reassure the Committee that any changes regarding other services, such as youth services and libraries, will be factored into any changes that might be considered regarding Children's Centres.
7. Consult the Committee on any proposed future changes.

Following the public consultation, the Cabinet took a decision on 21 January 2015 to endorse a new way of working based on an integrated model of commissioning and delivery with partners. The decision also included proposals to transfer Health Visiting responsibility to the Council in October 2015.

The number of designated children's centres in Staffordshire was reduced to eleven, with some children's centres based on school sites being reconfigured and transferring to the management of schools (27 sites), some being transferred back to the Culture and Library Service (8 sites) and others being referred to the Strategic Property Board for review (11 sites). The following sites were retained as designated Children's Centres:

- Cannock Chase Children's Centre, Cannock
- East Staffordshire Children's Centre (including car park and storage facilities), Burton on Trent
- Hill Street Health and Wellbeing Centre, Burton on Trent
- Newcastle-under-Lyme Children's Centre, Newcastle
- Staffordshire Moorlands Children's Centre, Biddulph
- Glascote Children's Centre, Tamworth
- Charnwood Children's Centre (Charnwood Primary School), Lichfield
- Landywood (Landywood Primary School), Great Wyrley
- Leyfields Children's Centre, Tamworth
- Maryhill Children's Centre (University Primary Academy, Kidsgrove),

- Stafford Children's Centre (Silkmore Primary Academy, Stafford)

All local authorities have the responsibility to have *sufficient* Children's Centres to meet the needs of families.

The significance of the early years offer is that what happens in pregnancy and early childhood impacts on the child into their adulthood. Positive early experience is therefore vital to ensure that children are ready to learn, ready for school and have good life chances. Parents have the biggest influence on their child's early learning.

At the beginning of 2014 the Commissioner for Children and Families was asked to undertake a review of the effectiveness and efficiency of Children's Centres and related services prior to the Council going out to public consultation on the consultation known then as Best Start in Life (later referred to as Early Years).

### **Early Years – follow up visits to Children's Centres – September/October 2018**

In 2017 the Chairman of the Select Committee suggested that Members might wish to revisit Children's Centres to see what changes had been made. In preparation a presentation updating Members on the changes that had been made over the last four years was made to the Committee on 8 June 2018.

Children's Centres are now hubs for the community to access.

A range of services and activities are offered in the family home, using outreach venues and through a partnership approach with others.

The current centres are now utilised by a range of partners who seek to ensure that children and families are healthy, happy and safe and are getting the best start in life.

Members were informed that the percentage of families accessing children's centres since the review had improved: -

| District             | Global Reach<br>2014/15 | Global Reach<br>2017/18 | 0-30% LSOA reach<br>2014/15 | 0-30% LSOA reach<br>2017/18 |
|----------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Cannock              | 47.3%                   | 67.6%                   | 46.4%                       | 70.2%                       |
| East Staffordshire   | 39.3%                   | 64.0%                   | 46.1%                       | 74.8%                       |
| Lichfield            | 39.3%                   | 64.3%                   | 53.4%                       | 80.4%                       |
| Newcastle-under-Lyme | 45.0%                   | 75.3%                   | 49.6%                       | 83.1%                       |

|                                |              |              |              |              |
|--------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| <b>South Staffordshire</b>     | 38.8%        | 47.5%        | 50.9%        | 69.7%        |
| <b>Stafford</b>                | 39.4%        | 56.3%        | 49.5%        | 78.1%        |
| <b>Staffordshire Moorlands</b> | 45.3%        | 64.8%        | 51.6%        | 87.8%        |
| <b>Tamworth</b>                | 44.1%        | 83.3%        | 45.5%        | 83.8%        |
| <b>Staffordshire</b>           | <b>42.2%</b> | <b>65.3%</b> | <b>48.0%</b> | <b>78.0%</b> |

The Chairman asked that all Members be invited to visit a Children's Centre in their own district, and if possible, a Children's Centre outside their district. A series of questions were developed and agreed by Members and used as a focus for the visits. The visits took place during September/October 2018. This report summarises the findings from these visits.

## Findings

### Leadership, Management and Governance

In each of the 8 Districts Staffordshire Early Years is governed by a Family Improvement Board (FIB). This Board reports to the Early Years' Advisory Board that meets four times a year in Stafford and reports to the Staffordshire Family Strategic Partnership Board.

The FIBs are chaired as follows:

Cannock – Matt Biggs, Childcare and Sufficiency Manager  
 East Staffordshire – Ian North, Harvey Girls  
 Lichfield – Deb Nash, Children's Commissioning Officer  
 Newcastle – Sarah Moore, Partnerships Officer, Newcastle Borough Council  
 South Staffordshire – Councillor Mike Davies, Staffordshire County Council  
 Stafford – Narinder Reehal, Commissioning Officer  
 Staffordshire Moorlands – Barbara Hine, Building Resilient Families Coordinator (BRFC)  
 Tamworth – Tim Leese, Strategic Delivery Manager.

The FIBs involve a range of partners including voluntary organisations, schools, representatives from the health service and local providers. If partners fail to attend meetings more than twice this is escalated to the Early Years Board that meets four times a year. Substitute members are allowed and encouraged.

The FIBs meet every quarter to set the priorities for the district using data that is available. The service is performance managed by a central team headed up by Natasha Moody, Early Years' Commissioning Manager, supported by Tracey Barnacle, Senior Commissioning Officer. Each Children's Centre has an Early Years

Co-ordinator who is responsible for managing, organising and marketing activities in the Centre. Each Centre has a timetable of activities that was shared with Members.

Every year the Children's Centres have a Local Authority Annual Conversation with their key partners where they review the districts' data and set the targets and priorities for the following year. Within the Local Authority Annual Conversation, the partnership also grades their performance against the Ofsted areas of: -

- Access to services by young people and families
- Quality of practice and services
- Leadership and Management

The targets and priorities are then fed into the Performance Management Framework and a partnership development plan is produced to deliver against these. The Early Years Co-ordinator meets regularly with the partners to ensure that actions are being carried out and any barriers identified. This document is then reviewed at the Family Improvement Boards to provide challenge and support as required. Data to enable the partnership to demonstrate impact and provide challenge is also included such as the Early Years reach data and centre usage. Children's Centre Free Pass Cards are available in all Children's Centres and allow families to access services free of charge (subject to criteria being met).

### **Schedule of Visits**

| <b>Date</b> | <b>Venue</b>                       | <b>Committee Member</b>   |
|-------------|------------------------------------|---|
| 11.9.18     | Staffordshire Moorlands - Biddulph | Councillor Beech  |
| 12.9.18     | Stafford - Silkmore                | Councillors Francis and Snape                                       |
| 14.9.18     | South Staffordshire, Landywood     | Councillor Davies (County Councillor Victoria Wilson in attendance) |
| 18.10.18    | East Staffordshire                 | Councillors Wileman and Hussain                                     |
| 21.9.18     | Tamworth, Glascote                 | Councillors Wileman, Hussain, Jones and Pullen                      |
| 27.9.18     | Cannock                            | Councillor Francis  |
| 24.9.18     | Lichfield, Charnwood               | Councillors Francis, Jones and Pullen                               |
| 28.9.18     | Newcastle, Knutton and Maryhill    | Councillor Beech  |

The Scrutiny and Support Manager and Early Years' Commissioning Manager/Co-ordinator accompanied Members on most visits. Zach Simister, Member and Democratic Services Support Officer accompanied Members on the visit to Knutton and Maryhill.

### **Staffordshire Moorlands Children's Centre, Biddulph – 11 September 2018**

The Centre is a large purpose-built two storey facility. Members met the Early Years Co-ordinator and had the opportunity to walk around the Centre and meet staff and parents and carers including the Milk Breastfeeding Group that was being run voluntarily by a qualified breastfeeding consultant. One mother had travelled from

Trentham as she has no group locally and found the Group supportive. Tiny Toez nursery rent the building and is based on the site and has access to outside space.

Councillor Beech met a Speech and Language Therapist who carried out targeted clinics within the Children's Centres. This service provides early intervention for children with speech and language delay.

The Centre has a family room that has been designed to replicate the family home. It has a kitchen, bathroom with shower facilities and a crèche area to be used for contact visits. A contact visit was taking place within the room and Councillor Beech met with a family support worker who was looking after a young child while this visit was taking place. This prompted a conversation about ensuring that a whole family approach is embedded through all professionals to ensure early help is implemented when required. This has been identified as an issue that requires improvement.

A volunteer at the Centre asked to meet Councillor Beech to explain how volunteering at the Centre had helped her. This volunteer was known to the safeguarding team and had a key worker who had signposted her to attend the targeted parenting courses. Once these had been completed she then registered her interest in becoming a centre volunteer to help her gain confidence and provide some experience within early years. She hoped that this would help her to gain paid employment in the future.

## **Successes**

Free venues had been secured in Biddulph East and Cheadle to deliver services which has led to an increase in families accessing services in these areas.

A healthy lifestyle and wellbeing course was being run at the Bishop Rawle Primary School and Let's Cook Together courses were run in conjunction with the Adult Community Learning Service.

A large majority of sessions are delivered by the community using volunteers.

The services provided within the centres are all delivered by partners, volunteers and private providers at no cost to the local authority.

## **Issues**

There were issues with lack of WIFI access at the Centre for partners when hot-desking and working within the centre.

The rural nature of Staffordshire Moorlands and the need for additional community partnership to deliver services in areas of need.

## **Silkmore Children's Centre – 12 September 2018**

The Children's Centre is co-located on the site of the Reach2 Academy (formerly Silkmore Primary School). The location of the Children's Centre had caused some safeguarding concerns and had been relocated within the footprint of the school.

The Centre has a crèche room, clinic room, training room, office and an outside play area.

Members met the Early Years Co-ordinator and the Reach2 Academy Office Manager. Members had a tour of the Centre meeting women who were attending a Mellow Bumps session run by Families First staff. Mellow Bumps offers a six week ante natal programme. Access to the course was by self-referral or referrals from professionals. Subjects covered include wellbeing, attachment, support, family debts, home conditions and parenting skills. The Community Midwife was in attendance and did in-reach work at the Centre. Parentcraft classes were also offered covering such subjects as labour, breast feeding, post-natal care and midwifery support.

Members met members of the Stafford Childminders' Network, a support group of local childminders and the children they were caring for. The group had access to the crèche and outdoor space.

Members toured the schools' grounds and a wooded area where outdoor activities took place.

There are attendees at the FIB from a wide variety of voluntary organisations and Head Teachers of local schools.

## **Issues**

Members were told that there was a shortage of health visitors since the introduction of the new 0-19 contract and there appeared to be some confusion as to what the new health visiting contract offered. Concerns were expressed that vulnerable families would not be accessing the services they needed.

The issue regarding the lack of availability of WIFI was raised. This would enable the Centres to be used more effectively by professionals and service users.

When a child is identified as needing additional support following the 2-year check, information sharing between the childcare settings and Health Visitors is required. This is an area that was identified as requiring improvement.

## **Successes**

The relationship between the school and the Children's Centre was very good and parental engagement with the Children's Centre offer had improved. Involvement of families had been encouraged by promotion of children's centre activities on social media. Services were available all year round and events were held at week-ends, encouraging parents to get involved with the school and Children's Centre.

The Centre had built up a network of providers and volunteers. Members met with a volunteer at the Centre who had benefitted from volunteering at the Centre. All sessions being delivered at the centre were operated by private providers, partners or volunteers.



There was a greater variety of services offered. The Early Years Co-ordinator works with providers to shape their service to meet the needs of families locally as well as helping them deliver against their priorities e.g. if a district had a priority around combatting obesity, the Co-ordinator would work with providers to make sure that they deliver key messages and incorporate physical activity into their sessions. This had led to services being more flexible and at little cost to the Council. The Council funded the Co-ordinator's post and some administrative support.

Members were shown details of the Family Action, Family, Food and Fun Programme that had resulted from a successful application to the Holiday Hunger Fund for funding. The project had been run to combat holiday hunger during the school holidays. Many families rely on school meals and can find it difficult to feed their children outside term time. Members were shown a scrap book that had been created by a volunteer and the attendees at the group, that illustrated sessions on promoting healthy eating, developing food knowledge and skills, Cook and Eat (teaching parents how to cook a nutritious meal on a budget). Fifteen free sessions had been held during the summer of 2018 with 185 individual attendances. The Programme had been supported by others including Stafford Rangers Soccer School who had run football training sessions, and Stafford Castle Rotary Club who had funded a visit to the Staffordshire Wildlife Trust. Activities had also helped reduce learning loss during the summer holidays.

### **South Staffordshire Children's Centre – 14 September 2018**

The Children's Centre was a small, purpose-built building situated next to a private nursery and on the same site as Landywood Primary School. The Children's Centre comprised one large room (that could be divided into two), an office, toilets and storage cupboard, but no outdoor space. The Early Years Co-ordinator had been appointed in July and worked part-time. She had established a good working relationship with the private nursery next door and they had offered the use of their outside space, when not in use, for use by the Children's Centre. At the time of the visit there were plans to open the Centre on Saturday mornings.

Members were shown the facilities and had the opportunity to see a local child and toddler group run by volunteers, Little Gems, Stay and Play, and to talk to parents and the service providers. The Group was very busy, and parents and carers were very happy with the service provided and could see no room for improvement.

### **Successes**

The Early Years Co-ordinator had made an immediate impact on the Centre usage, with a full timetable of activities including Saturdays.

The membership of the FIB was growing and there was good information sharing and discussion about how to address issues in the area between partners. All South Staffordshire County Councillors had made a financial contribution from their Local Members' Community Fund to create a Community Crate, a large box full of everyday household items to deliver an activity that would help a child to reach their developmental milestones. The activity would help parents understand the

impact they can have on their child's learning and the importance of becoming school ready.

Adult and Community Learning deliver targeted parenting courses within the district for families to be referred into.

## **Issues**

The Children's Centre is in Landywood, Great Wyrley and parents and carers from other areas e.g. Lichfield attend the Centre. The Early Years Co-ordinator is currently mapping the area to link into other services delivered within other parts of South Staffordshire.

Work was ongoing to improve links with local communities.

## **East Staffordshire Children's Centre, Burton upon Trent - 18 September 2018**

The Centre is a large purpose-built centre conveniently situated in the centre of Burton. It was considered very beneficial to have a range of professional staff based at the Centre. GPs, physiotherapist, health visitors, midwives, paediatric dietician and a speech and language therapist were based at the Centre. The Centre also had a kitchen/seating area where assessments could be made, and contact visits held.

Members met the Early Years Co-ordinator and Administrator and walked around the Children's Centre and watched a Pram to Primary Care Parenting course run by the Child and Family Engagement Worker from the Adult and Community Learning Service. The course was offering parenting support to parents and carers. Participants could self-refer to the course. Other referrals are received from health visitors and the Court Care Planning Team. Participants told Members how they were benefitting from attending the course. There was a Midwives Active Birth session taking place and a Moo Music session run by a private provider.

## **Issues**

The Children's Centre offers services in – Burton, but Members asked what services were offered in other parts of East Staffordshire e.g. Uttoxeter. There were few attendances from Uttoxeter residents.

## **Successes**

The Centre is well situated to respond to the diverse community that it serves and to address their needs. The Centre is highly valued by people who attend, and the annual satisfaction survey produced a high number of positive responses. The Early Years Co-ordination Service provided a volunteer programme delivered at the Centre. Staffordshire Council for Voluntary Youth Services help promote and signpost volunteers to the programme. The programme was very successful. There were ten active volunteers working within the Centre who helped deliver sessions, support existing groups and undertake administrative tasks. This volunteer programme has been successfully replicated across the county. Volunteers had

been recruited from the Time4U Parenting Programme and 25 volunteers have been engaged in supporting different activities at the Centre to date. Volunteers had started their own support group.

Members asked about services for children with mental health needs and were informed that Innovating Minds offered a service from the Centre. There was a free 8-week service for single parent families funded by the National Lottery until December 2019.

There was a healthy eating course that ran four times per week with food and menus on a budget to reflect the diverse population in Burton.

The Love Inspire Foundation delivered services within the local community. The project offers emotional and practice advice and support on a wide range of issues including debt, food/fuel poverty, homelessness and bereavement. They attend the FIB and use the Centre as a drop off point and collect stop for the recycling of school uniforms for example.

## **Issues**

At the time of our visit the 0-19 contract had recently been reviewed and recommissioned. Concerns were expressed to Members regarding the operation of this contract. There appeared to be some confusion about whether health visitors (and midwives) were undertaking home visits and that some families, likely to be those in greatest need, were not receiving the help and support they needed.

There was no outside play space for the sessions to access.

## **Glascote Children's Centre, Tamworth – 21 September 2018**

Governance arrangements in Tamworth were being reviewed at the time of our visit with a view to merging the Building Resilient Families and Communities governance, Family Improvement Boards and the Place based approach to ensure that key partners are attending and that there is greater family engagement in decision making.

## **Successes**

Members observed that the Centre was being well used. There was a busy midwifery clinic taking place. The midwife was based at the Centre and undertook home visits if required. Members viewed the sensory room.

Members met the owner of Milk Fairies Community Interest Company (Milc), a breast-feeding support group run on a voluntary basis. This service had been funded by Staffordshire County Council, when funding ceased, and Milc had continued to run the service. The service is financially supported by grants and donations. A grant application had been made from Award for All. There was a stand in the main reception with information about support offered. Leaflets and information about the service were available. Home visits were offered. Members had the opportunity to speak to a mother who had problems breast feeding her baby and had been offered advice and support regarding the feeding position of the baby

from Milk Fairies. She explained that one of the major advantages of the service was that advice and support was available throughout the night via social media and she had also benefitted from meeting other breast-feeding mothers and sharing experiences.

Members went on to see a Musical Babies with Sensory Play session with a volunteer, who was herself a Mum who had previously attended the group. This activity was previously a commissioned service but is now run three times a week at the Centre on a private basis. The room was offered free of charge. Children's Centre Free Pass Cards are available (subject to criteria being met) and were popular in this area. In such instances, the Council was invoiced, and Musical Babies was reimbursed for these attendances. The service worked closely with family support workers to attract families who did not use the Centre. The take up of these sessions had increased since they had transferred from the Council to the private provider and there was a waiting list. Sessions were being run in school holidays. Members received copies of testimonies from Mothers who had attended the Musical Babies session stating that it was a very friendly group and was a great way for mothers to socialise and for babies to learn.

Members were informed that Catch 22 were offering excellent support in the area for young people with mental health needs. (This service is offered countywide).

## **Issues**

At the time of our visit the 0-19 contract had recently been reviewed and recommissioned. Concerns were expressed to Members regarding the operation of this contract. There appeared to be some confusion about whether health visitors (and midwives) were undertaking home visits and that some families, likely to be those in greatest need, were not receiving the help and support they needed. Members wanted to learn more about how the new 0-19 contract was operating and to seek reassurance that families were receiving timely help and support. It was agreed to bring a presentation to a future meeting of the Safe and Strong Communities Select Committee.

Members were also informed that data sharing between health, family support housing and the Police could be a challenge.

Access to WIFI was an issue at several centres and was a deterrent from local providers using the Centre and staff hot desking. (Since visiting the Centres and raising this issue with the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, funding has been identified to address this).

We received feedback that the waiting time for First Response to answer calls was excessive. However, Members were assured that additional staff were being recruited to help alleviate this situation and once trained, the time taken to answer calls should be resolved.

Details of how the service can be accessed and the thresholds for intervention are detailed on the Council's website.

<https://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/education/childcare/families/ccentres/providers/SSCBThresholdsforInterventionGuidance.pdf>

Members were informed that there had been staff recruitment difficulties, but that staff had now been recruited and trained.

## **Successes**

Members were informed that the County Council not commissioning services had led to more flexible arrangements with private providers. There was a greater variety of services offered locally and greater engagement with local people. Some of this may be down to the perception that services were not now run by the Council or 'social services'. We were told that there had been a 'step change' in the perception by local people of the services offered at the Centre.

The volunteer programme is continuing to be a success and as at March 2018 140 volunteers have engaged with the programme and worked in Children's Centres across the county supporting groups, co-ordination communication, undertaking administrative work and marketing. In many cases this has proven beneficial to both the volunteer and the service.

Social media had been embraced and each Children's Centre now had a Facebook page. This was the main form of communication with families.

Members were informed that there were plans to engage with more community groups in the area to increase the visibility of services offered at the Children's Centre.

The Community Crate Fund was going to be rolled out with the support of local Councillors.

## **Knutton Children's Centre – 28 September 2018**

The Centre is a large purpose two storey Centre located on the outskirts of Knutton. A private nursery is based in the building. There was a plan to base midwives at the Centre.

Councillor Beech was shown round the building and observed a Mellow Bumps session in progress. Intensive family support programmes are offered. There was purpose built sensory room that parents pay £5.50 per hour to use. The room can hold a maximum of 8 and the cost can be shared between attendees. The room was also used by adults with special education needs.

There was a fully functional family room that replicates a home environment with a bathroom, kitchen, dining area and sitting area that is used for contact visits.

Organisations were now contacting the Early Years Co-ordination Service to attend the Family Improvement Board to inform partners about the services they offer.

## **Successes**

On their previous visit Members were concerned about the lack of use of space at this Centre. The Centre is now better used.

The Centre has worked in partnership with the New Vic Theatre on two projects, one to promote healthy eating and the other to give families the opportunity to engage with the arts. The programmes have been funded using the Arts Funding and was initially targeted at vulnerable families. As part of the arts programme, families were given the chance to go to the theatre and attend a pantomime.

A Family Support Worker from the Family Support Provider, Homestart, met with Councillor Beech to explain how they target parents who are reluctant to visit the Centre. Homestart undertake home visits, providing these parents with information, guidance, advice and support. One parent explained how she had overcome her anxiety, with the help of Homestart, and was now able to cope and support her family. Another volunteer explained how she had been a victim of domestic violence and had received help and support from Homestart and had now become a volunteer for the organisation.

## **Issues**

Lack of WIFI was a problem at this Centre.

## **Maryhill, Kidsgrove.**

Councillor Beech met with parents who were accessing sessions at the Centre. Most of the children attending the nursery were Think2 or children in need. Councillor Beech went into the crèche to meet families accessing the sessions. A parent was in attendance who explained that her child was disabled and by coming to the centre his mobility had greatly improved and she could let him move around in a child friendly, safe environment. She added that without the Centre she would find it difficult to socialise with her child as taking him out into community settings could be difficult.

## **Charnwood Children's Centre, Lichfield - 28 September 2018**

The Children's Centre is a large purpose-built Centre on the site of Charnwood Primary Academy. There is good attendance at the FIB from a range of professionals including the Police.

## **Successes**

Members were shown around the Centre and had the opportunity to speak to the service provider who runs Catkins Nursery. The nursery was open to all families in the area and offered a service to vulnerable families in the area. There had been an increase in Centre usage from families in lower super output areas. The Centre was a useful location to bring isolated families together.

Members also met a therapist from YES (Youth Emotional Support and Wellbeing) who operated a service from the Centre specifically for people who did not meet the threshold for referral to the Child and Mental Health Service.

The Hokey Cokey Club was also taking place. A parent explained how the service had benefitted her daughter who had suffered from severe post-natal depression. Another mother explained how she had come along to the group as a nervous newcomer and was now helping run the group and encouraging others to attend. Members also witnessed a young family attending for the first time who needed help and support.

The Centre also had a kitchen/seating area where assessments and contact visits could take place.

Members went on to meet a Local Support Team Family Support Worker who explained that the Centre was a good place for her to meet families as it was welcoming, child friendly and had easy access. Following an initial assessment of a family's needs, following referral into First Response, families were referred to the services offered at the Children's Centre. Meetings after school could be arranged.

Having so many professionals in one location was helpful.

Information and data about early years had improved and was being shared with others.

Members learned about the Pathway Project that had collected 160 bags of groceries for local families in need. The bags would include recipes for meals.

Although the numbers of health visitors had been reduced it was beneficial to have them on the same site at the Children's Centre, as some families were introduced to the services that the Centre could offer.

The Centre was open during school holidays and the local college had operated courses from the Centre.

## **Issues**

Three main priorities in the area had been identified: supporting families in debt or in rent arrears; low level emotional health and well-being and reducing the number of children missing school and school exclusions.

There were issues regarding domestic violence and low-level neglect being identified and families had been signposted to the Family Support Service and wrap around nursery care.

There is a need to forge a partnership with all schools in the area and to facilitate the transition from nursery to school.

There is a time lag for children who have received a diagnosis e.g. of autism through a EHCP and provision of help.

WIFI was again seen as an issue and had deterred some voluntary groups, foster carers and staff from working at the Centre.

## **Cannock Chase Children's Centre - 27 September 2018**

The Centre is a large purpose-built facility. Councillor Francis met the Early Years Co-ordinator and had the opportunity to walk around the Centre and meet staff and parents and carers.

The Vice Chair of the FIB, Angela Schulp, Strategic Delivery Manager, was present for the visit.

Councillor Francis walked around the building and met the provider of TOTally Kids Stay and Play and the organisers of Sensory Space @ Cannock Chase, a service for children and families of children with developmental delay who required additional support. Parents described the service as "a lifeline". TOTally Kids had previously been run by a commissioned provider who had decided not to continue with the service. It was now being run by a Mum who is now a Children's Centre volunteer.

The Adult and Community Learning Service deliver targeted parenting courses from the Centre and was supported by Children's Centre volunteers.

Councillor Francis met the providers of the Family Support Service Sickle Cell and Thalassaemia. The service was funded using Children's Centre funding, BRFC funding and a financial allocation from schools through the Direct Schools Grant and provided a service to 150 families in the area. The DSG element of the contract had been more popular with primary schools than secondary schools, but there were plans to tackle this. The service was referral based and a home visiting or nursery visiting service was offered. Support workers helped signpost families to services that could help them e.g. to complete assessments.

The YES Service operated from the Centre on an ad hoc basis.

### **Successes**

Inspiring Healthy Lifestyles had taken over the contract for the provision of culture and leisure services at Cannock (and Lichfield) Councils. A new website "Grow up Great", currently aimed at Early Years, had been developed with plans to expand to cover 0-11-year olds. The site has 2,500 users and covered healthy lifestyles, physical activity and nutrition. The Children's Centre had been contacted to discuss how Inspiring Healthy Lifestyles could support their work. Next steps were to link with schools through school nurses. GPs in the area could refer into the Healthy Lifestyles scheme for services such as gym and swim, mindfulness and resilience training. Moving forward there were plans to link the performance data collected at the Children's Centre to the data collected by Inspiring Healthy Lifestyles.

The FIB Chair and Vice Chair had also met with the Police, Crime and Fire Commissioner's office to discuss delivering a consistent approach to PSHE (Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education). It was planned to pilot a scheme in areas of Stoke and Staffordshire that had been identified as having the greatest need. Links would be made to the Healthy Lifestyles website mentioned above.



Details and pictures of a Fun Day that had been held annually for the last three years bringing together 350 individuals (including all local County Councillors) and 45 providers were shared with Councillor Francis.

The district had gained additional funding through the Earned Autonomy Funding and had developed a District Investment Plan that included offering a health and wellbeing service at a lower threshold. It was hoped that this early intervention would lead to reduced demand on services at a higher level.

Members were shown a pack of information that local County Councillors had funded from their Local Member Community Fund, called Grow up Great. This information was also available electronically and was targeted to areas where there were high levels of childhood obesity.

The children's centre volunteer programme was working well with 17 volunteers recruited since 2015.

Social media continued to be a popular way to engage with families in the area.

Members heard about a local school who use a digital tool to flag up concerns that they may have regarding a child. If this became a significant concern, the matter could be referred to First Response (the initial point of contact for safeguarding concerns).

## **Issues**

Weight management had been identified as an issue and school nurses in the area planned to undertake a more targeted approach to this challenging issue.

It could take over two years to complete SEN assessments. This was a difficult issue to tackle as it can take time to offer an accurate diagnosis of some medical conditions.

There were many parents in the area who suffered from anxiety and/or depression. Workshops had been organised with the offer of smaller groups.

Lack of WIFI was an issue.

## **Conclusions**

In general feedback on the leadership, management and governance arrangements that had now been put in place was positive. The overall view was that the FIBs were working well. There was a good range of partners involved and a spirit of co-operation. A question was raised regarding the number of meetings regarding Early Years and Members were pleased to hear that the governance arrangements for Building Resilient Families and the Family Improvement Boards were being merged.

Having professional staff either based or hot desking at the Children's Centres was seen to be very beneficial to the sharing of information.

Any concerns that Members may have had that the review of Children's Centres would lead to a diminution in services to children and families were dispelled. Now that services are run by local providers they have the freedom to increase the hours that they offered, including sessions being run at more flexible times to suit the needs of local people, including during school holidays. Providers told us that there was less bureaucracy, and administration had been simplified. The perception of Children's Centres had changed from that of being seen by some as a 'social work building' to a community resource with services run by local people for local people. As demonstrated by the figures in the table at the beginning of this report, the changes had had a significant positive impact on the take up of services for vulnerable children and families.

The new model of service has led to an increase in volunteering at the Centres. This has been beneficial both to the services and to the volunteers themselves. At the time of our visits 140 volunteers had engaged with the programme and worked in Children's Centres across Staffordshire.

In several of the Centres we visited WIFI was a problem and this was discouraging new service providers such as local colleges to offer courses, and professional staff to 'hot desk'. It was important for Children's Centres to attract usage by a wide range of professionals as sharing of information was crucial to support some families. It was estimated that the cost of introducing WIFI, to those Children's Centres that required it, would be £40,000. We were pleased to hear that following our visits a meeting was held with the Cabinet Member for Children and Families and this money has been identified and the need would be addressed.

Some concerns were expressed regarding the operation of the new 0-19 health visiting contract which was in its early stages of operation. There were concerns that some vulnerable families who did not interact with services could be missed. At the time of our visits the management of this contract had recently been taken on by the Early Years Commissioning Manager, who said that she would be monitoring the contract monthly. It was agreed to update the Committee on the operation of the contract so that they could be reassured that there were no safeguarding issues.

In Tamworth we were told that it was taking too long for responses to calls to the First Response service. We were informed that there had been some confusion regarding the understanding of the thresholds for intervention and that staff training had taken place and was ongoing to ensure that staff understood the thresholds.

The Committee would like to thank Natasha Moody, Early Years Commissioning Manager and Sarah Edgerton, Commissioning and Development Officer for their help and advice in arranging and attending visits.

**Link to Strategic Plan** – This work links to the Council's priority 'Ensure Children and Families have a network of support to help manage their own problems and stay safe and well'.

**Link to Other Overview and Scrutiny Activity** – Executive response to the final report and recommendations of Committee member findings from visits to Children's Centres June-July 2014.

**Link to Background Documents:** None.

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**Appendices/Background papers**

None.