

OPTION: CHILDREN'S CENTRES AND SURE START

**BUDGET SAVING: Children's Centres - £1,096,000
Sure Start - £1,076,000**

DESCRIPTION OF OPTION

Children's Centres and Sure Start has a combined budget of £8,246,000 and from this area total savings of £2,172,000 are proposed.

Children's Centres - £1,096,000

This option would:

Reduce universal services in children's centres, retaining those covered by charges.

Early support for some families could be missed, but universal services would remain available and affordable.

Reduce early literacy support to families by removing the Bookstart scheme from Children's Centres

Bookstart is a nationwide scheme, run by the national charity Booktrust, and managed in Wirral by the Council's Library Service. Removing the programme from Children's Centres would save money and mean that the young people would still be able to access the programme through their local library.

Stop providing bilingual support for children aged under 5 years, where English is an additional language

Children with English as an Additional Language would not get the early support and help to address language and communication difficulties through their local children's centre, and would instead have to seek the support through the voluntary, community or faith sectors. Support would still be available from the Council's Minority Ethnic Achievement Team.

Relocate staff based at Bidston St James Children's Centre to Brassey Gardens Children's Centre

A proportion of the Children's Centre budget is currently spent on renting the top floor of Bidston St James Children's Centre. Moving the staff and stopping paying the rent in the St James Centre building will make savings while allowing the service to continue from the Brassey Gardens site, which is nearby.

Release of the Children's Centre Satellite bases at schools

The transfer of these facilities would result in a saving in operating costs. The Council will retain the option to continue to provide services through room rentals.

Cease the current counselling service available at Children's Centres, and the counselling service for domestic violence provided at the Zero Centre.

Early identification and prevention work with vulnerable families may be reduced and referrals to specialist services, such as mental health and debt counsellors may increase, resulting in an impact on voluntary sector partners.

Outsource day care provision across a number of Children's Centres

The private and voluntary sectors have expressed an interest in taking over provision at these centres. This would result in a budget saving for the Council and a new enterprise for the voluntary sector. Day care provision at these locations will continue to be available. Close monitoring of the service will be put in place to ensure the quality and affordability of the service does not reduce.

Sure Start - £1,076,000

The Sure Start Service contributes to a range of different services and projects and helps families to find suitable services to meet their needs.

The options relating to Sure Start are to reduce the budget of the service through reconfiguring the Family Information Service, stopping funding of the Play Council and Toy Library, removing a contribution to schools for early years foundation stage training, removing a contract with the National Childminding Association, reducing the number of consultants for foundation stage work, reducing the number of child care development workers and reducing funding for special educational needs practice grants.

This will impact in a number of ways, including opportunities for children with complex special needs being less available and less support for child minders, breakfast clubs and after school clubs.

It will also mean a reduction in the quality of summer play schemes. Information about the services available for people to access will be provided through electronic kiosks within children centres and a redeveloped website.

Removing funding from the Play Council and Toy Library would not necessarily mean that the provision could not continue.

RATIONALE FOR SAVINGS

The Statutory Duties within the Childcare Act 2006 states that the local authority should:

- Make arrangements for integrated working; work with health and employment services (Section 3 & 4);
- Secure sufficient Children's Centres to meet local need (Section 5a);
- Consider whether early childhood services should be delivered through Children's Centres;
- Ensure there are sufficient childcare places;
- Provide pre registration training for childminders.

Proposals for spending reductions are based around the following principles for change:

- Protecting front line delivery for children and families;
- Refocusing provision into the areas of greatest need;
- Allowing children's centres to generate income by charging for universal services in some areas of the borough;
- Removing layers of management;
- Protecting provision by transferring the risk and responsibility to other providers such as schools, the voluntary sector etc.

DFE benchmarking data for 2012/13 indicates that this is an area where spend is above average compared to statistical neighbours - £106 per head, compared to an average of £89.

The percentage of children registered in the 30% most deprived wards is 84.98% which is higher than the national average. The percentage of children registered in the 70% most deprived wards is 74.4%.

The percentage of pupils attaining at least 78 points in the Early Years Foundation Stage with at least 6 points in PSE and CLL is 61% the highest percentage ever achieved. Improvement since 2009 is in line with the other North West local authorities and better than 3 of our neighbouring authorities.

For attainment of children in receipt of free school meals Wirral is top of the North West table with the narrowest gap.

As a result of the health promoting activities within the children centres Wirral has the lowest obesity rates in the North West.

As a result of support for parents with safety in the home hospital emergency admission rates have decreased year on year for the last 3 years.

IMPACT

Six children's centre satellite buildings could potentially be taken over by schools or closed.

There will be no provision for children under 5 years of age who have English as an additional language so language development could be affected. Families where English is an additional language, may not be able to access services at children centres due to the language barrier being problematic.

There is the potential that the reduction in support for Private Voluntary and Independent settings could result in provision being compromised resulting in children not accessing quality provision.

Removing the Children Centre satellites from LA control could result in families not being able to access services in the locality (pram pushing distance).

Lack of support for breakfast and after school clubs could result in a decline in the quality and quantity of provision

The majority of posts to go under the restructure are currently held by women.

As a result of implementing the proposed budget savings staffing would be reduced by:

- 2 bilingual workers
- 6 (FTE) Foundation Stage Consultants
- 6 (FTE) Childcare workers
- 2 (FTE) administrative workers
- 1 (FTE) caretaker
- 4 (FTE) children centre managers
- 1 (FTE) senior manager either quality assurance manager or children centre team leader
- 0.5 (FTE) Principal Manager
- TUPE of 81 childcare staff

If, when the day care is tendered no schools or private sector providers come forward to take over the provision, a decision may need to be taken to close.

Ceasing to commission some services will impact on the voluntary sector though there may be opportunities for a different range of services to be commissioned.

Where no private providers come forward to take over childcare in wards where there is no other provision (Rockferry) there will need to be discussion around whether to close the provision.

Some childcare settings may not be as popular for private providers to take over. This may be the case in areas such as Birkenhead and Rockferry.

Maintaining the quality of childcare provision across the borough will be more problematic when there are less Foundation Stage Consultants to support this process resulting in poorer outcomes in Ofsted inspections.

Maintaining the delivery and quality of the core offer for children's centres which could result in lower Ofsted judgements.

Schools may not want to take on the responsibility of the children's centre satellite buildings so resulting in closure.

MITIGATION

Consultation will be required with Governing Bodies (Leasowe, Ganney's Meadow and the schools who have satellites on their sites); the local community; parents; childcare providers and staff.

The Local Authority has a required to undertake a childcare sufficiency audit to ensure there are enough places available for parents. There is currently a mixed economy where childcare in children's centres is provided by external providers and staff employed directly

by the local authority. Schools and the private sector could take over the childcare offer currently provided the local authority.

Ceasing to provide specialist services such as Bookstart, Bi-lingual support and domestic violence counselling may provide an opportunity for the private and voluntary sector to apply for funding to provide these services.

This might give schools that have satellites the option to take over the buildings with the proviso that outreach services from the children centres can book designated times to deliver services.

As a result of the restructure of the Family Support Worker provision and the proposed move to 4 localities with a single gateway in each locality there is the potential for further savings on staffing of children centre manager posts, 0.5 principal manager post and a further senior post.