

WIRRAL BOROUGH COUNCIL

Briefing Note	
Title:	Early Years and Children's Centres
Date:	23.03.2015
To:	Policy and Performance Committee
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Executive Summary

This report will summarise the rationale for change for the early years and children's centre service that is currently progressing through a review.

It will also serve as an opening to invite additional scrutiny against pending decisions (following public consultation) for the service and as changes to the current delivery model are implemented.

Rationale for Change

There are a number of considerations pertinent to the rationale for change against for the early years and children's centre service; these can be summarised as:

- A review of the service has not been undertaken since the roll out and implementation of children's centres (circa 2002).
- Whilst there are savings this has not been the only driver in the process.
- Previous changes have been managed internally and have resulted in some disparity across the service, this further reinforces the need for a whole service review
- The service has not reflected national developments well enough, in particular changes to statutory guidance (2013).
- A presumption of no closure has been a focus throughout the review; however it is anticipated that children's centres will be used differently and will depend more heavily on a collaborative delivery model.

National Context

It is important to approach our position in the context of issues facing early years nationally. The HMCI Early Years Sector Report (2012/13 – issued in April 2014) noted that: there is ongoing debate (nationally) about the purpose of children's centres: The report goes on to cite that '*recent inspections of children's centres have found a sector that is characterised by turbulence and volatility*'

The amount of available funding for early years has reduced, and ring-fenced arrangements and former grant monies no longer exist; despite this there remains a statutory duty on local authorities to deliver sufficient children's centres (Childcare Act 2006)

The Ambition and Aspiration of the Review

The overarching approach and purpose of the review has been to ensure that the resultant services on offer and the providers of those services, for our youngest children and their families, remain not only fit for purpose but progressive.

Integral to the ethos is how we target a future offer as a fundamental component of the wider early help approach.

It has reflected available and current research and will make explicit evidence based practice, and practice that is influenced by evidence and research

It has considered statutory partnership requirements and the wider stakeholder offer that are interdependent to making the wider offer effective and efficient. The review is keen to realise more robust arrangements going forward.

An overarching aspiration for the review is to realise an ambition that will ensure future delivery and approach is understood by service users, communities and professionals irrespective of who provides the service.

The review explored and made explicit, the long term view that early childhood and those services that impact on outcomes for children and families in the earliest years should be joined up.

Integration and collaboration is a key and prominent feature of the review recognising it as the most ambitious approach for increasing support and collectively improving outcomes for the most vulnerable young children and their families.

The review has placed a strong emphasis on outcomes for children and has detailed an outcomes framework to support an alignment of service delivery. This is consistent with regional developments but currently remains somewhat untested.

A further ambition is to continue to develop and position the multi-agency advisory boards (as leadership and governance) well, to ensure that the children's centres can effectively and efficiently carry out their required functions that rely heavily on partnership contributions and collaboration.

Conclusion

The review is aspirational and ambitious both in terms of achieving improving outcomes for children and families and in continuing to deliver sufficient children's centres across the Borough. However it is reflected that the review has been somewhat conservative recognising the need to consolidate its position and establish a delivery approach that can meet local need well, and take into account government guidance and the requirements of Ofsted.

It is anticipated that the outcome of the review will give direction and focus and provide a platform to shape strategic priorities of the local authority and its partners.

This will support a more viable position and is expected to ensure that a more resilient and robust service emerges that is well placed to influence the future agenda.