

# **Cherwell District Council**

## **Executive**

**4 January 2016**

<p><b>Response to Oxfordshire County Council's Proposed Changes to Children Centres and Early Intervention Hubs</b></p>
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### **Report of Director of Community and Environment**

This report is public

#### **Purpose of report**

To consider the Council's response to Oxfordshire County Council's (OCC) proposal to close all its children centres and create a small number of family centres.

#### **1.0 Recommendations**

The meeting is recommended:

- 1.1 To instruct officers to respond to the OCC consultation process as outlined in paragraphs 3.8 and 3.9 of the report.

#### **2.0 Introduction and Background**

- 2.1 When OCC set its budget in February 2015, it was agreed that children's centres and the Early Intervention Service would have to make £6m of savings on a total budget of £16m, to meet the council's saving target. This represents part of the council's on-going savings of £290m from 2010 to 2018.
- 2.2 Through various measures, a total of £1m of this is being saved during the 2015/16 financial year. However, OCC believes it will need to make significant additional savings over the next three years, on top of the £290m figure as a result of a further round of cuts to the public purse by the Treasury. That is why the proposal to Cabinet is for an £8m saving rather than £6m.
- 2.3 OCC are formally consulting until 10 January 2016 on its proposal to adopt a new model of children's services in Oxfordshire for children aged 0-19 to save £8 million from the budget by 2016-17. Its proposal is to create a new service for families and their children aged 0-19 years old, or up to 25 if the child has additional needs.
- 2.4 The plan is to open up to eight new Children and Family Centres across Oxfordshire. These centres would support children and their families who need help and will integrate the work of the Children's Centres, the Early Intervention Hubs and

Children's Social Care. OCC state that unless a new way of working can be found, the current 44 Children's Centres which support families with children aged 0-5, and the seven Early Intervention Hubs currently providing support to children aged up to 19, or 25 if the child has additional needs will close.

- 2.5 As well as the new Children and Family Centres, OCC proposes to provide an outreach service so it can support children and families close to where they live. It would also work with schools, health and other services to ensure that children and families get the help that they need.
- 2.6 As part of the consultation process, it would like to identify any potential impact of this proposal on individuals, groups and communities. OCC would also like to identify options for the future use of the Children's Centres and Early Intervention Hub buildings and how universal services could continue to be run without financial support from OCC.

### **3.0 Report Details**

#### **Consultation Proposals**

- 3.1 The full consultation summary details are contained in Appendix 1. Under this, there are three options being considered.

**Option 1:** The OCC preferred option is that eight Family and Resource Centres at various locations be developed with the full focus on the most vulnerable and the council ceasing to provide/commission universal services (such as stay and play or open access youth sessions). These centres would be the base for significant outreach work to all Oxfordshire communities – not just those communities in which the centres would be based.

The focus would be on maximising staff numbers in order to provide wide service coverage - including at outreach locations beyond the eight centres - based upon the current configuration of children's centres and early intervention hubs. Locations of the centres will be subject to consultation but criteria for judging these matters would be based on travel times and areas of greatest need - including levels of child deprivation in different parts of Oxfordshire.

It is envisaged that some universal services funded by other organisations would also be delivered from these centres – for instance health visiting, child and adolescent mental health services and activities run by the voluntary and community sector. Discussions are on going about the nature and extent of this provision.

**Option 2:** Again there would be eight centres. However, the council would continue to provide or commission limited universal services. The resource to do this would come from an increase in caseloads within the Family Support Service and a reduction in the amount of outreach provided by the Family Support Service.

**Option 3:** Under this option there would only be six centres. This would release £1m per year for grant funding to the voluntary and community sector to deliver services for families across Oxfordshire.

- 3.2 Under all three options a new Locality and Community Support Service would be set up to support and work with those agencies who continue to provide universal services – such as schools and health and community based services. The service would build on the current established model of locality support. Under this model social workers link with universal services enabling concerns to be shared and advice and guidance given in relation to children and young people where there may be child protection issues. Three teams (for the north, south and centre of Oxfordshire) will make up the Locality and Community Support Service.

### **Key Issues**

- 3.3 Of the 44 children's centres, 10 are in Cherwell and of the 7 early intervention hubs, 2 are in Cherwell. They are;

Woodgreen Early Intervention Hub  
Courtyard Bicester Early Intervention Hub  
East Street Children's Centre, Banbury  
Sunshine Children's Centre, Banbury  
Brittania Road Children's Centre, Banbury  
North Banbury Children's Centre  
Bloxham Children's Centre  
Heyford Children's Centre  
Brookside Children's Centre, Bicester  
Glory Farm Children's Centre, Bicester  
Kaleidoscope Children's Centre, Kidlington  
Ambrosden Children's Centre

- 3.4 The proposal to cut the early years and early intervention services and in some cases close children centres and replace these with a much smaller number of family centres is of real concern to Cherwell District Council. The investment and foresight of providing children centres and early intervention hubs relatively recently has resulted in much valued and needed services for local people many of whom are our most vulnerable and needy.

- 3.5 In relation to the effect in Cherwell, the following are relevant;

- The Banbury facilities and services are the most relevant in relation to the specialist and multi agency support they provide local people many of whom suffer from some form of disadvantage and/or deprivation. In this respect, OCC's recognition of this as a key factor in determining the scale and nature of future service provision is welcomed. In fact, much of the success of the **Brighter Futures in Banbury** Programme is down to the reliance on the services provided by Banbury's children's centres and the Woodgreen early intervention hub.
- Children's centres are used most by young parents and many single parents needing support. The long term value of the services provided to these users is so important in addressing deprivation and breaking its cycle of generational influence. In this respect, the OCC proposal is short sighted in relation the **provision of the best start in life for early years children** and is counter to the principles of the Brighter Futures in Banbury programme.
- It may be possible that through a thorough analysis of the effectiveness of current services and centres and relevance to local need, that **a rationalisation of**

**centres could be delivered** but not a whole scale closure of all children's centres. Those on or adjacent to junior school sites should be targeted for developing alternative service delivery models with an appropriate level of OCC facilitation as these stand a greater chance of developing alternative models for service continuity given their synergy with local junior schools. This applies to five children's centres in Cherwell.

- In relation to specific centres, those in Banbury are most relevant particularly the **Sunshine Centre, East Street and Britannia Road children's centres and the Woodgreen Early Intervention Hub** as these are central to the delivery of the Brighter Futures in Banbury multi agency activities in those wards. Closing and reducing services in any of these sites will have a significant effect on this Programme. This Council is the landowner of the Sunshine Centre site and could support OCC in using its landlord status and asset in finding an alternative service delivery model if that would help.
- Given the planned growth in **Banbury and Bicester** and the fact that some Banbury neighbourhoods have some of the worst deprivation in the county, it is advocated that a greater emphasis should be placed on these factors to future proof services to support our changing population. Whatever alternative service solution is developed, these two towns should be given some priority of provision.
- The centre in **Bloxham** is a key facility that is used in order to reduce, as far as possible, the impact of rural deprivation and is a fundamental service to those living in and around the area.

3.6 In addition to the interface with the Brighter Futures in Banbury Programme, there are many services provided at children's centres and the early intervention hubs which are delivered by the Council and/or its partners eg sports and arts activities, job clubs, benefits advice, employment and training opportunities, health improvement activities etc. They therefore play an important role in service delivery and community resources.

### **The Council's Response**

3.7 It is clear that the current children's centres and early intervention hubs play a key role in delivering important local services, most of which are County Council related. It is also clear, that the scale of the required budget cuts require substantial change and result in little chance of retaining all current services and premises.

3.8 The Council in its response to the consultation requests OCC consider the following;

- a) Ensures that a sufficient facilitation resource is made available to explore alternative service delivery models for each of the current service sites
- b) Recognise that some emphasis should be placed on Bicester given its planned growth and therefore Option 3 is not supported by this Council
- c) Incorporate some universal services in its future service as a means of maintaining some preventative and early intervention focus
- d) That every effort be made to maintain the strong link between schools and children's centres as a means of the most beneficial service continuity model
- e) Option 2 is the Cherwell District Council's favoured solution to meet b) and c) above

3.9 Whilst the Council would want to see the retention of the majority of the current service provision, it is not in a position financially or organisationally to intervene directly to do this. It is however in a position to consider a number of opportunities to assist OCC in the process of finding the best alternative overall service provision.

These include;

- to consider this Council's freehold title of the Sunshine Centre with OCC and the Sunshine Centre management organisation as a means of determining whether this will assist in identifying an alternative service delivery model – this is consistent with the Council's emerging asset management strategy;
- to use its community network in relation to the community and voluntary sectors to assist OCC in identifying alternative service delivery models at each of the affected locations;
- to offer officer support to consider how current Council services can contribute to the viability of alternative service delivery models on a site by site basis;
- to use the Brighter Futures in Banbury Programme and its multi agency basis as a means of reviewing an alternative service delivery model for the town of Banbury which is based on identified service need and builds on the current service strengths.

## **4.0 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations**

4.1 The proposal to cut the early years and early intervention services and in some cases close children centres and replace these with a much smaller number of family centres is of real concern to Cherwell District Council. The investment and foresight of providing children centres and early intervention hubs relatively recently has resulted in much valued and needed services for local people many of whom are our most vulnerable and needy.

4.2 It is clear that the current children's centres and early intervention hubs play a key role in delivering important local services, most of which are County Council related. It is however also clear, that the scale of the required budget cuts require substantial change and result in little chance of retaining all current services and premises.

4.3 The Council wishes to support the search for alternative delivery solutions for each of the ten children's centres and two early intervention hubs in the District, is prepared to play its part in this process and urges OCC to ensure effective facilitation resources are put in place to enable this to happen.

## **5.0 Consultation**

OCC officers

Sunshine Centre representatives

## 6.0 Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

6.1 The following alternative option have been identified and rejected for the reasons as set out below.

Option 1: to respond in a different way to that outlined in the report

## 7.0 Implications

### Financial and Resource Implications

7.1 There are no immediate financial implications arising from this report as the subject is about OCC service and budget cuts. However, there may arise from alternative service delivery models increased service requests and budget pressure on the Council which it will need to consider along with other Council priorities

Comments checked by Paul Sutton, Head of Finance & Procurement, 030000 30106, paul.sutton@cherwellandsouthnorthants.gov.uk

### Legal Implications

7.2 There are few legal implications arising from this report. There may be some property consideration required for the Sunshine Centre where the Council has a freeholder interest.

Comments checked by:

[Insert name], [Insert job title] [Insert phone number] [Insert E-mail]

## 8.0 Decision Information

### Key Decision

**Financial Threshold Met: No**

**Community Impact Threshold Met: No**

### Wards Affected

All Banbury, Bicester and Kidlington wards, Bloxham & Bodicote, the Astons & Heyfords Ambrosden & Chesterton

### Links to Corporate Plan and Policy Framework

Delivery of the Brighter Futures in Banbury programme to provide opportunities in some of the District's most disadvantaged people.

## Lead Councillor

There are a number of services of different Lead Members which are influenced by this. They are;

Councillor Kieron Mallon, Lead Member for Banbury Futures

Councillor Tony Illot, Lead Member for Public Protection, Community Partnerships and Recreation

Councillor Norman Bolster, Lead Member for Economic Development and Regeneration

## Document Information

Appendix No	Title
1	Oxfordshire Children's Services Consultation Summary
<b>Background Papers</b>	
None	
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