

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL CONSULTATION – CLOSURE OF CHILDREN’S CENTRE

Executive Summary

This is a short report from Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chairman for the Executive/Council including recommendations for consideration following scrutiny of the proposed changes to the provision for children after SCC consultation.

Recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Committee is requested to:

RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL That

- (i) O&S review how the transition embeds later in the municipal year (assuming that the Council agrees to WBC managing the new service. This is apparently the first time the service will be provided in this way so no precedent to refer to.**
- (ii) a review of the funding envelope is undertaken by WBC at a later date, and that a flexible approach is made to the provision of funds. A 43% cut in funding is reported by the Children’s Centres in this borough and it is uncertain whether the funding allocated will be sufficient.**
- (iii) any impact on social isolation is considered due to the cut to the universal offer and the move to a more targeted approach.**
- (iv) a self-entry point to the service be considered for those families with on-going needs.**
- (v) there is some monitoring of the group for which there is no formal provision (tier 1); concern expressed that the preventative element of the existing universal offer will be lost and that there could be an increase in late referrals and interventions. Also additional pressure on stretched school and other services could be felt.**
- (vi) there is robust liaison with the voluntary and faith sectors who may be asked to fill this early gap. Also a monitoring of issues presented at schools where children are not in the Family service, but would previously have been accessing the universal offer.**
- (vii) support and training be provided to the voluntary and faith sectors to assist in the identification of needy families with referral routes into the targeted services.**
- (viii) matching of the areas of need to local provision we understand is feasible. It will be interesting to see how this will work in practice. Concern had been raised about the specific closure of local centres. The flexibility discussed in the meeting was**

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positive, where areas of specific need could be provided within localities where a centre is not permanently provided.

The items above will need to be dealt with by way of a recommendation to Council.

Background Papers: None.

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The recent consultation on the future of the Children’s Centres in Surrey has been concluded and the changes put forward in a future design specification. The Executive discussed a proposal for WBC to be the lead provider for the new Woking Family Centres in its meeting on the 6th of June with the resultant recommendation for this proposal to go to full Council on the 25th of July for approval.

2.0 Summary of the Changes

- 2.1 Four of the present six Children’s Centres to close in Woking
- 2.2 A targeted family resilience model to be implemented
- 2.3 Restructuring of the workforce
- 2.4 Reduction in funding by 40% over Surrey
- 2.5 The offer to be extended from 0-5 to 0-11 years
- 2.6 Cessation of the universal offer by the Council

3.0 Key documents considered were;

- 3.1 Agenda item 8 of the Executive papers in which there is a recommendation to Council that ‘Woking Borough Council will be the lead provider for Woking Family Centres in a partnership arrangement with Surrey County Council.
- 3.2 The ‘Helping you..’ Surrey Family Centres’ specification, Feb. 2019
- 3.3 SCC. Family Resilience Consultation: Phase 1, Children’s Centres in which almost 4000 residents participated.
- 3.4 This was supported by member informal visits and discussions with the staff at local Children’s Centres.

4.0 Overview and Scrutiny Committee Review

- 4.1 This has been a topic on the agenda for O&S for a while and has been awaiting the outcome of the consultation. As this was now published this came to the committee on the 17th of June for scrutiny.
- 4.2 It was determined that as rounded a view of the changes which will result from SCC decision to promote an alternative model of service provision was required. Hence we invited our Family Support Team Manager; our Portfolio holder and managers from the existing Children’s Centres to take part in the discussion with members.

5.0 Areas of Note

- 5.1 The Brookwood and Pirbright Centre closed a week prior to the meeting and the staff have already been typed to Guildford.
- 5.2 The Children’s Centre staff are themselves under a consultation for their own posts and this process is not yet concluded. However concern expressed that as the process has been a protracted one many excellent staff have already left and gained other positions out of the Borough.

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- 5.3 At present there are no waiting lists for our services in the Borough which is a good place from which to make the transition.
- 5.4 An Ofsted paper indicating that the present service was not working was not available to the committee.
- 5.5 It is anticipated that the new service will have better access to CAMHs mental health services and that there will be continuity of training between the services.
- 5.6 Feedback from families and staff is planned to be collected under the new service specification.
- 5.7 A question relating to possible charging for some services/ families was not followed through in the specification, with no intention for charging to be introduced. A voluntary contribution is sometimes requested in the Centres to assist with refreshments etc.

6.0 Conclusions

- 6.1 The meeting concluded with an acknowledgement that the recommendation of the executive for WBC to run the new Family Service was broadly welcomed by all parties. The recommendations above may already be considered in the Councils’ plans, this paper would only support such proposals and would seek to review the implementation of the new service against the planned KPIs and the recommendations above in a future meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

REPORT ENDS