

# **MINUTES OF THE SCRUTINY REVIEW OF CHILDREN'S CENTRES**

**3 MARCH 2008**

Councillors \* Newton, \*Engert and \*Peacock

\* Members present

## **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were none

## **2. URGENT BUSINESS**

There was none

## **3. DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

Councillor Peacock was a Governor at Pembury Children's Centre.

## **4. SCRUTINY REVIEW OF CHILDREN'S CENTRES**

The Panel had a tour of Pembury's Baby Unit and the Children's Centre which was a Phase 1 centre. It was noted that the under 2's unit was full with 30 places, but there were vacancies for over 2's. The total capacity was 70 places. There were 30AM places, 30 PM places, 24 fee paying full time places and 16 community need funded places. A Full time place cost £175 per week. Although the centre was open 48 weeks of the year, there was an issue as to whether the Centre should be open at the weekends for community use. Pembury worked closely within its own cluster group and this had continued as the number of centres had grown. For example the Health visitor visited Pembury on a Thursday and Friday and other centres on different days. All Centre Managers met regularly to exchange ideas on good practice and discuss any problems.

The Director of Children and Young People's Services gave an overview of the development of Children's Centres in Haringey. The size of the six Network Learning Centres had been determined following discussions with the PCT around the deployment of services. The most important change was that services were being delivered with the whole family in mind and with a joined up approach. A paper had been prepared for presentation to Cabinet shortly addressing the whole agenda for 0-19 year olds outside of statutory schooling.

Key issues included:

- There was a good coverage to ensure that needs were met. Discussions took place with other service providers such as the Youth service, local primary schools and it was noted that the

Private Voluntary Independent providers had representation on the Early Childhood Forum.

- Whilst the Children's Networks were still in development and being embedded, it was noted that the single referral process was leading to looking at the family as a whole. Early intervention was crucial. Outcome measures for the short and longer term were being developed. A long term target would be to reduce the number of Looked After Children. The investment in Children's Centres should have an impact on the foundation stage.
- Details of the formula funding to be provided to Members.
- Work within Networks, by Family Support Workers and through community engagement was ongoing to identify the most disadvantaged groups. There was mapping and a constant reviewing of where the need was greatest. An analysis of the Foundation stage profiles showed where provision was good. Although all Phase 1 centres had outreach workers the majority of staff performed some outreach work in one way or another. Centres felt that they were getting better at being aware of areas of need and were working well within their cluster to develop it further.
- Work was in hand to develop output measures, to determine how the changes impacted on children's lives. It was proposed that an evaluation of 100 users be undertaken.
- In respect of Governance arrangement there was a need to look at flexing the Governing Body regulations for Children's Centres particularly as some operated from stand alone buildings, some from school sites and others from nursery school sites. Focus on working with parents and the local community was fundamental. Governance for all centres to include both care and education.

The Panel received information from the London Manager and the Local Programme Adviser for Together for Children, an organisation who were working in partnership with the Department for Children, Schools and Families to support local authorities in delivering Children's Centres across England. They stated that Haringey was ahead of many other Authorities with their provision. Together for Children were committed to working with local authorities to ensure that children and families got the provision that they needed when they needed it.

Issues raised included:

- Links with PCT and Health funding were major issues for many Authorities. Haringey gave the PCT just over £1/2m to provide specialist services such as speech therapy. Other core services such as health visitors and midwives were funded by the PCT
- Future funding for Children's Centres was not considered to be a concern provided that they could evidence their effectiveness in terms of both educational achievement and meeting families' needs. Together for Children agreed to send information on best practice regarding health services funding arrangements.

- There was a need to look at targets being embedded in LAA's and in local Children's Plans. Measuring of performance outputs was not a quick exercise and took time to show through as children grew up. It was suggested that indicators at 3 and 5 years were needed. Other targets could be how many parents were encouraged back into work, how much money was claimed from the benefits system.
- There was a target for narrowing the gap and a general target for improving the achievement of all children.
- Work with fathers was developing and a lot of centres were thinking creatively about how to engage with them. It was suggested that there should be a target for the number of fathers reached. A possible option was to employ fathers in the Centres, although it was felt that for many the pay was not sufficient.
- It was accepted that it was a universal challenge to reach the most vulnerable in the community. It was noted that 2 and a half percent of the population were very hard to reach and didn't want to be reached. Consequently sustained efforts and a different approach was needed. Provision of mental health services was a major element in the programme. The Panel noted that performance around domestic violence, mental health, and safeguarding children needed to be evaluated. Together for Children advised that they could facilitate regional learning and/or sharing of information with statistical neighbours on this and other issues. Also best practice was shared through the Children's Centre Portfolio Framework. An analysis of all London Boroughs was being undertaken, which would identify key themes and issues. This was likely to be available by end of April/May 2008.
- Noted that Together for Children offered advice on embedding performance management. A key feature was to learn together.
- It was noted that all phase 2 centres were now designated and the planning process for phase 3 centres was underway.

RESOLVED:

That arrangements be made for the Panel to be provided with:

- a) a briefing on the formula funding for centres and
- b) the reach figures for all Centres.

MARTIN NEWTON  
Chair