



Haringey Council

Scrutiny Review of Children's Centres

**A REVIEW BY THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
OCTOBER 2008**

Panel Members:- Councillors Newton (Chair), Engert and Peacock

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Scrutiny Review of Children's Centres in Haringey

1. Executive Summary

- 1.0 The review panel was set up to build on the work undertaken in scrutinising extended schools by looking at children's centres. These two areas are closely related, especially as most of the children's centres are now run by schools. Children's centres are also an essential element in the Council performing its statutory duty of securing "so far as is reasonably practicable sufficient childcare to allow parents to work or undertake education or training"
- 1.1 In carrying out this review the Panel looked at what had been done so far and what was planned in the future to establish children's centres which were models of excellence and provided the first step in improving the outcomes for young people by early intervention where there are problems. During the course of the review the Panel spoke to the Director of Children and Young People's Service and her staff, children's centre managers, and their staff, the Primary Care Trust, childcare providers, national experts, other service providers and parents and other users of centres.
- 1.2 It was clear from the Scrutiny that the Council had made a useful start in developing children's centres and had positive plans for the development of this service. Whilst the Panel were impressed with the work at many of the centres they did identify a number of areas which might be further developed and these are outlined in the recommendations in Section 12.

2. Background to the review

- 2.0 It is imperative that the Council has well run children's centres which are models of excellence because they:
- Are an early and vital link in the provision of services for children and young people under the age of 19 which "provide support for children and their families through a child's life stages"
 - Allow early targeted intervention of children and families who do not meet statutory thresholds for specialist services but who need help and support to prevent them becoming more vulnerable
 - Assist compliance with the duty placed on the Council under Section 6 of the Childcare Act 2006 to "secure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that the provision of childcare (whether or not by them) is sufficient to meet the requirements of parents" to enable them to work or undertake education or training.

Because of the importance of developing well-run children's centres, the Review Panel was established to look at:

- The range and quality of the provision provided at the Council's children's centres including ancillary issues such as family support
- Health services etc and the contributions made by users. In particular whether this provision enabled "early intervention" and specific action to be taken to narrow the gap in achievement between the lowest achieving children and the rest
- The manner in which children's centres worked with other local providers of childcare
- The processes for measuring performance including self-evaluation
- The processes for identifying best practice and ensuring its disseminated elsewhere.

2.1 It was decided at the outset of this review that it would not look at best management models as the Council had already carried out a consultation exercise on this issue and the results were being publicly considered. As a result of the consultation, the Council agreed in principle that three of the five Council-run children's centres should be managed by local primary schools. As will be clear from the Panel's comments elsewhere in this report this is an approach it would not disagree with.

2.2 The members of the Panel Councillor Newton (Chair), Engert and Peacock had three meetings and information about who they talked to are set out in Appendix I. As part of the review members visited Pembury House, Triangle and Campsbourne Children's centres. The Panel would like to thank all those who they meet during the review for their invaluable contributions.

3. The Current Position regarding Children's centres in the Borough

3.0 The Childcare Act 2006 provides Local Authorities with a statutory duty, working together with their NHS and Jobcentre Plus partners, to reduce inequalities and improve the Every Child Matters outcomes for all young children in their area. This is to be done by planning and delivering early childhood services which are integrated in order to maximise access and benefits to services users. The Government, therefore, want to see more co-located, multi-disciplinary services that provide personalised support to children and their families. Children's centres are a key building block towards this goal. The intention is that children's centre services become permanent mainstream community services, which are developed and delivered with the active involvement of parents/carers and the local community and available to all.

- 3.1 There are currently 18 designated Children's Centres mainly in wards with high levels of deprivation enabling young children and their families to have access to the following core services:
- Some provision for early education integrated with day care nursery provision -10 hours a day, 5 days a week, 48 weeks a year - plus links to local childminders for additional hours.
 - Family support and parental outreach – including visits to all children in the area within 2 months of birth, work on parenting skills, outreach for hard to reach groups and links to more specialist services.
 - Child and family health service – including ante-natal support, support for breast-feeding and post natal depression, speech and language therapy and smoking cessation.
 - Links with Jobcentre Plus to help parents and carers access training and employment
- 3.2 As of February 2008, approximately 5,804 children and families have some sort of contact with children centres out of the Council's "reach" target of 16,080. The first ten centres were founded between 2004/6 and built on existing provision including early excellence centres, local sure start programmes, under 5 centres and school-based nurseries.
- 3.3 The remaining 7 centres, which are opening this year, will provide children and families living in Haringey's 30% most deprived areas access to a similar range of services. However, in line with the national picture they have been created within school campuses. A further phase will be developed which is intended to deliver Children's Centre services to all children and families.

The Panel's Views

- 4.0 Generally speaking the Panel support the approach being taken by the Council to develop its children's centres. In particular it agreed that;
- Children's centres are an integral part of the council's 0 to 19 provision (outside statutory schooling) for children, young people and their families
 - The Three Children Networks each with their two Networked Learning Communities of Schools informed the development and evolution of targeted services to meet perceived demand in the area
 - That, unless there was an attractive alternative option to pursue, the Children's centres run by the Council should be managed by local primary schools.
 - Some or all of the Council run play centres should be managed by local schools as part of their extended schools programme.
 - The action being taken by the Council in carrying out Childcare Sufficiency Assessments, introducing a self-assessment

process and developing sustainable childcare was laying down the foundations for a well-run service for providing excellent services to young people and support and help for their families.

- 4.1 So far the Council has responded positively to the children's centre initiative, but it is early days and much remains to be done. Whilst it is too early to undertake a major scrutiny of this area the Panel have identified a number of areas where the Council needs to take particular care to ensure that theirs and the government's targets are met. It must be emphasised that the Council's Officers are already taking action on most of these issues which are detailed in the remainder of this report.

5. Targeting services to the most vulnerable

- 5.0 The Council has a statutory duty to improve the outcomes for all children under 5 and to close the gap between the most disadvantaged children and their peers. One of the ways of reaching excluded and disadvantaged groups and providing additional services to non-statemented children with special needs is by targeting them through children's centres. This does mean that such children have to be identified and their parents encouraged to access children's centre services. Given the relatively small number and very high quality of childcare places at the children's centres, demand outstrips supply This shortage is exasperated because, as to be expected, informed parents who want their children to have the best facilities available also try to send their children to children's centres.

- 5.1 In order to identify need and the services required the Council has commissioned a childcare sufficiency audit which contains a statistical profile for the area and identifies short falls in service. This is of necessity very general and does not identify specific cases. The cost of a comprehensive survey which might do this would be costly and soon out of date. The considerable expenditure involved in producing such detailed information would, in the Panel's view, better be spent on providing services.

- 5.2 The Panel had evidence from parents that, in certain parts of the borough, there was an acute shortage of affordable high-quality childcare for those on average incomes and this needs to be addressed by the Council.

- 5.3 The Council has made good steps forward with the way it works with and makes use of the information provided by the TPCT. The implementation of the Common Assessment Framework has allowed Health Visitors to work in partnership with family support workers to support vulnerable families. For instance every family with a new baby in Haringey is offered a home visit by a qualified Health Visitor – this first holistic family health needs assessment forms the basis of the individually tailored health visiting service that the family will receive.

The Health Visitor collates a family information sheet, and following parental consent, this is forwarded to Children's Services where it is disseminated to each local children's centre. This baseline information offers the children's centre the opportunity to identify their local population and to target their services appropriately. This service is extremely important and the Panel was concerned that it has been affected by staff shortages recently. The service was properly targeted during this period and recruitment prioritised. The Panel was reassured by the TPCT that the service will be much improved by the autumn.

- 5.4 Following a Health equity audit of the health visiting service – there has been a more equitable redistribution of this service, including liaison visits to GP practices on a 4- 6 weekly basis and implementing an evidence based Child Health Promotion programme some of which is delivered in children's centres. One borough-wide initiative has been the implementation of the 'now you are 2 years old'; health promotion contact. This takes place in children's centres, with families of 2 year olds being invited to a health and development session involving health visitors, speech and language therapists as well as children's centre staff.
- 5.5 These initiatives will help to target vulnerable young children early and also give children's centres early warning of their future users and their needs. But it does not identify families who move into the Borough and who do not, for instance, register with a General Practitioner. Such families will probably be identified when their oldest child goes to school but could be picked up earlier if, for example, parents who used children's centre were encouraged to tell centres when new neighbours moved in with young children.
- 5.6 Current work with the Primary Care Trust, voluntary sector groups (based within communities) and link workers - who can access groups or individuals and support them into mainstream services - is currently under review in order to provide the most effective mix. This will help to identify the most vulnerable children and under-achieving groups. As the programme progresses, the Council will further analyse reach data to build a better picture of which groups are actually accessing services and to support the development of strategies to reach those who are not.
- 5.7 The Council and its partners are to be congratulated on what they have done so far in developing outreach work but, because of the importance of this work, it is proposed that Overview and Scrutiny Committee should next year receive a report on progress.

6. Extended use of Children's Centres

- 6.1 The possibility of extending children's centre services to evenings and making use of children services at weekends was suggested by some parents and professionals and the Panel supported this idea since it

would enable maximum use of expensive facilities and widen access for the community.

- 6.2 Many centres do look to provide facilities for the community at weekends and evenings. Bookings for various types of meetings or events are made and can be charged for but responsibility for such bookings is with the head of each centre in accordance with local need. The Panel were told that in order to fully address any demands for greater weekend or evening opening, additional sources of income would have to be found. There is an expectation that more flexible service delivery will evolve as funding is identified to support staffing and resource costs, but more needed to be done to identify self-financing uses of children's centres. A simple example would be hiring facilities to local residents for use for children's parties etc.

7. Charges

- 7.1 Childcare services are charged for at £175 per week per child for a full time place. All 3 and 4 year old children are entitled to 12.5 hours free early education/ childcare. Haringey is also part of a pathfinder group of authorities who are working on delivering a flexible offer of up to 15 hours of free entitlement in advance of a national requirement to do so in 2010. Also some children are allocated places which are free if they meet certain criteria that are assessed through the multi disciplinary panel which meets bi-weekly. The Panel expressed some concern about whether the neediest were benefiting from the limited high-quality childcare, especially children in workless families. Apart from childcare, no other children's centre services are currently being charged for. The Panel commended this approach as it did not deter families on very low income who could most benefit from the social and health benefits provided.

8 Support for Private, Voluntary and Independent providers of Child care

- 8.1 The new legislation provides that the Council has a statutory duty to help parents find child care and this does involve making greater use of and giving support to private, voluntary and independent providers
- 8.2 The development of support for this sector will be in close liaison with the Early Years Quality and Inclusion (EYQ&I) Team in line with current practice. A structure for self-evaluation has been put into place by that Team which, together with information gathered at visits and the outcomes of Ofsted inspections, is used to prioritise support and training to all settings. The settings considered to be most in need of support are prioritised and the Early Years Development Officer works with the Area Advisory Teacher and the nearest children's centre (and the rest of the EYQ&I Team) to establish a working relationship with them. A time-limited action plan is developed and an agreement made

between all parties. Once in place regular meetings are held with the owner/manager of the setting to assess and monitor progress.

- 8.3 Support and training for childminders will be another aspect of the children's centres outreach role with co-ordination provided by the Council's Childminding Co-ordinators.
- 8.4 The Panel would like a progress report on the outcomes of the support strategy to be submitted to Overview and Scrutiny Committee next year.

9. Outcomes

- 9.1 It is essential that outcomes are measured to identify whether children's centres are achieving their objectives. As already indicated a self-evaluation process has been developed whereby centres assess their performance and then have discussions with the Children and Young People's Service on any action necessary. This process is essential if children's centres are to become and remain models of excellence. An example was given from the Triangle Children's Centre where feedback was continually sought from users, parents and the wider community on the services provided.
- 9.2 One important outcome is that children who attend centres make a successful seamless transfer to primary schools. The Panel were told that generally speaking those who attended children's centres were better prepared for statutory schooling than those who did not. The Council's policy of encouraging local primary schools to run children's centres will help this process and also make it easier to measure outcomes. It also means that children's centres and schools can more easily share facilities and provide complementary services rather than duplicating provision, thereby ensuring value for money and a more effective service. The Panel were informed of a tracking system being implemented using information such as where a child had attended prior to school and attainment at Key Stages one and two. Currently there are statutory targets for achievement at age 5 and another for narrowing the gap between the lowest 20% achievers.

10. Training

- 10.1 The training of children's centre managers, staff and independent providers of childcare is a fundamental responsibility of the Council to improve outcomes for children from deprived communities. Whilst the Panel accepted that the Council's budget for this purpose is by necessity limited; the position should be reviewed to ensure that it is used effectively. The Council may also wish to look at the possibility of introducing some kind of financial incentive to encourage those involved in childcare provision to attend voluntary training courses which will improve their effectiveness.

11. Management structures

- 11.1 The management structure of the Centres is already in place and supported through the new funding formula for children's centre which has been discussed with the Director of Children and Young People's Service. The management structure that is put into place within children's centres in schools is discussed with the Council's Children's Centres Team but ultimately is the responsibility of the school and its governing body within the funding limitations set by the budget. However, in the Panel's view, good practice guidelines should be drawn up on who should sit on children's centre management boards.
- 11.2 The Panel also welcomed the action being taken by the Council to strengthen its own management structure for supporting children's centres and schools in strategic planning and monitoring and evaluating the impact of services.

12. Recommendations

That the Director of Children and Young People's Services be instructed;

- to report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee
 - i. In October 2009 on the future developments of outreach services to help identify and target disadvantaged children. (Paragraph 5.7)
 - ii. in April 2009 on progress on the development and outcomes to date of the support strategy for all child care providers in the Borough. (Paragraph 8.4)
- to target resources to provide more affordable high-quality childcare places where a deficiency has been identified. (Paragraph 5.2)
- to continue to encourage children's centres to make greater use of their facilities at weekends and evenings. (Paragraph 6)
- to consider the possibility of introducing some kind of incentive to encourage those involved in child-care provision to attend relevant training courses. (Paragraph 10)
- to issue good practice guidance to children's centres on the composition of their management boards. (Paragraph 11.1).
- to request the TPCT to ensure that sufficient Health Visitors are appointed to enable them to visit newly born children and make holistic family health assessments.(Paragraph 5.3)