

In response to the call in

1. Failed to clarify its aims and desired outcomes

In November 2015, Cabinet approved the Council's all-age prevention policy and the consultation on the design of the 0-19 prevention service, including the use of buildings used by Early Help Providers (known as Children's Centres). The all-age prevention policy is being used to focus activity around the following five key themes of prevention:-

- **Creating a health-promoting environment** by developing and enforcing healthy public policy and taking health impact into account systematically in decision making
- **Encouraging and enabling people to take responsibility for themselves, their families and their communities** by promoting resilience, peer support and the development of community assets (e.g. buildings or particular community groups)
- **Providing clear information and advice** across the age-range, so that people have the information they need to make choices that favour good health and independence
- **Commissioning prevention services** for all ages based on evidence of effectiveness and within the funding available
- **Gate-keeping services** in a professional, systematic and evidenced way, so that services are taken up by those who will most benefit and the service offer is available on the basis of need, regardless of differences between people in terms of where they live or characteristics such as deprivation.

With the November Cabinet report, paragraphs 9-12 summarised the recommendations from the Early Help Needs Assessment which makes a number of recommendations to improve key outcomes relating to improving the health and well-being of children and young people including:

- Redesign the approach to 0-19 prevention and early help to improve the lives of all but with greater resources targeted at those at risk or where problems have emerged (often referred to as a progressive universal approach)
- Fully implement the local Healthy Child Programme (HCP) led by midwifery, health visiting and school nursing and supported by a range of other children's practitioners providing preventive and early help services including parenting, family support and building family and community resilience
- Review, identify and commission only evidence-based interventions consistently across the county and in accordance with NICE guidance
- Ensure a renewed focus in early years provision on maternal mental health, secure attachment, nutrition and exercise, language & communication, high quality early years education and childcare to improve school readiness

- Review local provision for supporting parenting, promoting resilience and good emotional health & well-being and for the prevention of young people who are not in education, employment or training
- Focus Children's Centres on disadvantaged areas, making use of a "virtual" service in more advantaged areas
- Develop a new workforce approach, to drive a shift in culture: enabling frontline professionals to understand their role, work in a more integrated way in support of the 'whole family' and with other services to collectively reduce dependency and empower parents, and
- Review and implement an effective digital advice and information service to parents and families promoted and supported by the early help workforce.

Paragraphs 13-17 of the report detailed the vision and desired outcomes of this re-designed service. The report also clarified the purpose of the consultation on potential future use of Children's Centre buildings which was to establish which building would be required for the new 0-19 service and what other potential uses there might be for them.

In June 2016, Cabinet approved the revised plan to work with existing providers to vary, extend, align or integrate contracts in order to achieve the vision (as described in the November Cabinet report) of the new 0-19 prevention service. It also received an update on the consultation, approved in November, on use of buildings. It then subsequently approved a more specific centre-by-centre consultation where future proposals would likely to result in a significant change from current delivery as well as approving the future proposals for use of buildings where the future use would not result in significant change. There is no statutory definition of 'significant change' only what is referred to in the Children's Centre Statutory Guidance which states:-

Local Authorities must ensure there is consultation before:

- Making a significant change to the range and nature of services provided through a children's centre and / or how they are delivered, including significant changes to services provided through linked sites.

The June Cabinet report introduced (paragraphs 13-16) the need to increase the provision of good quality early years' education places. Paragraphs 17-20 summarised the recognition that Children's Centre buildings are important community assets and the on-going commitment to ensure they are used to their full potential. Paragraph 26a) reinforced the Council's position on the commitment to continue to use Children's Centre buildings for their core purpose to deliver early childhood services from and/or wider services that meet local need.

The Cabinet Member Decision report published in September 2016 referred back to the November Cabinet Report and recommendations within the Early Help Needs Assessment. It also provided further detail and progress around the implementation of the 0-19 prevention service along with feedback on the centre-by-centre consultation and equality impact analysis. Recommendations were made and approved (currently called-in) on the future use of children's centre buildings and the support for universal provision to become self-sustaining.

2. Reasons given for the decision

The November and June Cabinet papers and the Cabinet Member Decision paper all refer to the recommendations within the Early Help Needs Assessment as the underpinning evidence based behind the changes. They also all clarify the intention to maximise the use of children's centre buildings as important community assets recognising that the children's centre core purpose and duty isn't a building based model.

The June Cabinet Report and Cabinet Member Decision paper both make specific reference to the proposed change of use of children's centre buildings contributing towards realising the budget reductions attributed to the 'early help' budget through the running costs of buildings being picked up by the new lease holder. The proposals will also allow for these buildings to continue delivering early childhood services through a better mix of childcare provision including more funded nursery places; before and after school care; use by the community; parenting groups and family learning; activities during school holidays and/or a space for meetings with families.

3. Respect for human rights and equalities

Due regard has been given to the three aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty and these are outlined in paragraph 30 of the Cabinet Member Decision report and included in the Appendix 1.

The Early Help Needs Assessment also identifies the need to improve outcomes and reduce health inequalities. The 0-19 prevention service(s) will focus on doing this and this will be tracked and monitored through a Starting Well Transformation Board and business as usual contract monitoring.

4. Where appropriate, the realistic evaluation of alternatives

The Decision Notice outlined the reasons for rejecting the alternative proposal for use of Rainbow Children's Centre at St Mary's Primary Kidderminster. This was due to the original proposal being stronger in relation to increase early year's placements which would contribute towards the wider early years sufficiency duties.

It has been said on numerous occasions that implementing this new approach isn't without its challenges or risks. Since 2013/14 Children's Services (excluding communities) has had £14.6m investment. The majority of this (£11.3m) was for children's social care to support our most vulnerable children and young people. In order to manage this investment, the Council has increased Council tax along with deciding to make less money available for other services in the future including early help services. Early help services will continue to focus on improving outcomes for children, with a particularly focus on supporting those in greatest need. In order to do this some current services will have to stop or be delivered in a different way. Officers are working closely with existing providers to develop these new ways of working, making sure that money is used in the most effective way and there is continued focus on improving outcomes for children, with more focus on supporting those in greatest need.

5. A presumption in favour of openness

Throughout the debate on the proposed changes (a summary of the public discussions/consultations on this topic has been listed below) there has been challenge raised around the level of detail presented on the changes in individual children's centres particularly around the reference to 'some' provision being available.

Each centre operates differently and timetables are generally confirmed on a termly basis and often change according to need and availability. This makes it difficult to compare the levels of activity on offer from one term to the next. A lot of activity is also provided away from children's centre buildings either in family homes or other community venues and this also needs to be taken into account, particularly in supporting universal provision (such as stay and play) to become self-sufficient.

The discussions with existing providers and new leaseholders (i.e. schools/early years providers) are at a relatively early stage with the outline proposals forming the basis of the consultation as the intended future use. Following approval of the recommendations, a 6-9 month transition period would be initiated to work through implementing the proposals. It is only at this stage that the more granular detail of service developments would become available. For example a school may have every intention of extending the early year's education placements and wraparound this with parenting support. The more detailed case would only be developed when the school is assured that the building will be made available. This is not without its risks, hence the need for a tightly managed transition period. New leaseholders have to make the building self-sustaining and this is likely to require charging rent for use of the buildings. This needs to feed into the one public estate work in order to avoid unnecessarily moving money round the public sector.

Recognising the risks regarding the proposals, the Cabinet Member Decision report asked for authorisation for the Director of Children, Families and Communities to find and implement alternative proposals of a similar nature if any of the current proposals are unable to be implemented. It also outlined the steps that would be taken if it does not prove possible to find alternative proposals.

- 19 November 2015 – Cabinet – All-age prevention and 0-19 re-design
- November 2015 – January 2016 – Public Consultation - proposed changes and future use of building
- 16 June 2016 – Cabinet - revised plan and intent to consult on specific centres
- 1 July 2016 – Call-in OSPB - discussions on proposals including 0-19 re-design and use of buildings
- 4 July 2016 – 17 August 2016 - Consultation on centre specific changes for children's centre buildings
- 15 July 2016 – Children and Families OSPB - discussions on proposals including 0-19 re-design and use of buildings
- 31 August 2016 - Children and Families OSPB - discussions on proposals including 0-19 re-design and use of buildings following centre specific consultation
- 6 September 2016 Cabinet Member decision paper published

- 15 September 2016 – Notice of Motion debated and rejected at Council
- 16 September 2016 – CMR decision notice published
- 12 October 2016 – OSPB call in (TBC)