

Appendix A - Suffolk Children's Centres Strategy

The Suffolk Vision:

Suffolk Health and Wellbeing Board's priority outcome is for 'every child to have the best start in life' - this outcome underpins everything that Children's Centres do.

Suffolk Children's Centres work in partnership with health colleagues, midwifery, education and many other professionals to ensure that services are provided that support every family and provide additional targeted support to those families who are vulnerable or most in need.

What is a children's centre?

The legal¹ definition of a Children's Centre is a place or group of places:

- managed by, or on behalf of, an English local authority, with a view to securing that early childhood services are made available in an integrated manner
- through which early childhood services are made available – either by provision of services on site, or by the provision of advice and assistance in gaining access to services elsewhere
- at which (some) activities for young children are provided on site.

In Suffolk early childhood services include:

- Midwifery, Health Visitor and G.P. services
- Access to information, advice and assistance through the Suffolk Families Information Service
- Access to early education provided by childminders, pre-schools, day care and nursery classes
- Access to family support services such as home visiting services to identify needs and provide appropriate services

In 2006, all local authorities were legally contracted to the Sure Start Unit to create an agreed number of Sure Start Children's Centres. In Suffolk, 48 Centres were created all but one of which are open and running services for families with children from pre-birth to 5 years.

The Government believes that children's centres should have a clear core purpose², focused on:

Improving outcomes for young children and their families, with a particular focus on the most disadvantaged families, in order to reduce inequalities in:

- Child development and school readiness;

¹ Children's centres are defined in Part 1 section 5A of the Childcare Act 2006 (as amended by the Apprenticeship, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009).

² The Core purpose of Sure Start Children's Centres, Department for Education, April 2012

Supported by improved

- Parenting aspirations, self-esteem and parenting skills
- Child and family health and life chances.

The Suffolk Model:

Currently Suffolk County Council (SCC) directly manages 47 children's centres. One children's centre is managed by the Governing Body of a Local Authority nursery school. The 47 internally managed children's centres within the county Integrated Service are grouped into seven localities; West Suffolk, South Suffolk, Ipswich South and West, Ipswich North and East, Coastal, Central and Waveney. Each locality is managed by an Integrated Service Manager, in turn managed by the Head of Integrated Service Delivery who reports to the Assistant Director for Early Help and Specialist Services.

Principles of delivery:

All children's centres in Suffolk deliver services in line with the same service specification, providing services for both prospective and existing parent/carers and their children. The services provided must:

- meet the needs of children from pre-birth to 5 years and their families³
- relate very closely to the needs of the community reach profile of the locality served by the centre.
- target the largest resource to the highest need, whilst ensuring appropriate universal provision is accessible for all
- have a 'no wrong door' ethos
- develop independence rather than dependency
- ensure that the 'hard-to-reach' are never out of reach

The future

Suffolk is committed to continuing to provide Children's Centre Services across the county accessible to all families with young children.

However, all services need to develop over time. It has become clear not all of our Children's Centres buildings are well used, some are very expensive to run, some are in poor condition and some would better meet the needs of their communities by being used for day care. Many of our children's centres services are delivered from community premises and families' homes as these better meet the needs of these communities.

We have the following opportunities:

- The chance to fully integrate Health Visiting and Children's Centres Services creating a seamless service for families with young children, in the Suffolk NHS area
- Building on the work we already do with Libraries to deliver more services from Libraries
- Using buildings for day care where that would be a more appropriate use
- Getting out of buildings that are under-used and/or expensive and/or in poor condition.

We propose to respond to these opportunities by:

- Rationalising our capital assets where this makes sense for those communities
- Realigning our services; to ensure that every community retains access to universal children's centres services.
- Targeting our additional support to those families who need it most, irrespective of where they live.
- Keeping the structure of a countywide service delivered through Children and Young People Services to ensure that there is consistency in approach to service delivery across the whole of Suffolk and delivered in the way that the families find most beneficial.
- Rationalise our staffing structures to ensure an efficient service that offers the public best value for money.
- Maximising our partnerships; working with our health colleagues and others to further develop multi-agency teams offering support to children and families pre-birth to 19.

However, we need to do so in the context of Suffolk County Council facing budget reductions in excess of £156 million between 2014 and 2017. Every department needs to increase efficiencies and maintain sustainability in an ever changing economic climate whilst minimising the impact upon the services that the public value and receive.

Children's Centres Services have been set a target of £2.9m savings over this period - £1.5m in 14/15, £1m in 15/16 and £0.4m over the following 2 years. £1.25m has already been found by ending contracts and reducing commissioning budgets and we are confident the further £0.25m will be found in year.

The future – Strategy for a new way of working:

One: To rationalise the use of Children's Centre designated buildings.

We have reviewed the use of all Children's Centre buildings and we propose to reuse some buildings which are not used as fully as we would wish for other early childhood services such as day care. Although we propose to rationalise the use of buildings, services would still be delivered through outreach and home visiting in all reach areas, as they are now. We have carried out the review of buildings with our partners to ensure we maximise joint opportunities to reduce costs on buildings. Opportunities for increased partnership working through co-location of services and or staff are

being investigated; ensuring that the buildings we have available to us are utilised as fully as possible to service the needs of the community.

Two: Realignment

To coincide with the proposal to rationalise buildings it will be necessary to alter the way that our children's centres are structured and staffed. This realignment of services will look at restructuring, where necessary, back office and leadership of centres. We are grouping Centres in Localities where that makes sense. We will be working within the Making Every Intervention Counts (MEIC) Programme to look at how we can progress full integration of Health Visiting and Children's Centres Services.

Consultation

Any proposed changes will require both staff and public consultation and the agreed strategy should be informed by the outcome of the proposals. The opinions of the local community, parents and professionals will be invited through this consultation to help shape Children's Centre delivery across Suffolk.

Review and evaluation

It is suggested that an internal review of the new model should be undertaken at six months and a year following implementation.

Information used:

- Individual centre Self Evaluation Frameworks (SEFs) and Development Review and Evaluation Plans (DREPs)
- Data on engagement, registrations and footfalls
- Research national and local
- Equality impact assessments
- Local knowledge
- Children's Centre Profiles