Suffolk County Council

Agenda Item 7

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee 2 March 2016

Covering Report: Children's Centres

Summary and Objectives

1. The objective of this scrutiny is for the committee to understand, and make any recommendations in relation to, the effect so far of the changes to the Children's Centres that were agreed by Cabinet last year.

Scrutiny Focus

2. Key focus areas for this scrutiny include the following:

   i) What has been the effect of the changes agreed last year? (Factual information / numbers, in addition to opinions / anecdotes)

   ii) What were anticipated concerns, by Centre, compared with what has actually happened in reality?

   iii) Have the mitigations worked as expected? Is the service level acceptable?

   iv) Effectiveness of outreach (building trust, etc). How do you assess how effectively the outreach is working? Where is the service getting the data from?

   v) What is the interaction between this service and Suffolk Family Focus, with regard to 'Hard to Reach' families?

   vi) How much are Children's Centres used as a 'safe' place in crisis situations?

How this relates to County Council priorities

3. This scrutiny is linked to the County Council's corporate priorities as indicated below:

The County Council's Corporate Priorities	Link to this scrutiny
Raising educational attainment and skill levels	✓
Supporting the LEPs to increase economic growth	
Maintaining roads and developing Suffolk's infrastructure	
Supporting those most vulnerable in our communities	✓
Empowering local communities	✓

4. Having considered the evidence, the Committee may wish to:

   i) make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills, and/or the Corporate Director for Children and Young People's Services;

   ii) agree topics which could benefit from more detailed scrutiny at a future meeting, seek to influence partner organisations, or request further information.

Contact Details	Scrutiny Officer	Local Councillor
Name	Paul Banjo	All Councillors
Telephone	01473 265187	
E-mail	paul.banjo@suffolk.gov.uk	

Background

5. Changes to the Children's Centres were agreed at Cabinet on 24 February 2015. The Cabinet agreed:

   i) to provide an alternative delivery model of services for nine children's centres to meet the local needs by utilising other local facilities and working within the community;

   ii) to cease using the buildings in which the centres' staff were currently based; and

   iii) in order to minimise disturbance, to approve a phased implementation with a transitional period from March 2015 which would include further work with communities and increased advertising of the new delivery points.

6. Some evidential input has also been sought from Lighthouse Women's Refuge regarding any perceived increase in use of their organisation.

Main Body of Evidence (attached)

(i) **Evidence Set 1** (4 pages) - A report from Children and Young People's Services addressing the above focus areas.

Supporting Information and References (available online)

- Cabinet 27 January 2015 (agenda Item 6): http://committeeminutes.suffolkcc.gov.uk/meeting.aspx?d=27/Jan/2015&c=The Cabinet
- Cabinet 24 February 2015 (Agenda Item 13): http://committeeminutes.suffolkcc.gov.uk/meeting.aspx?d=24/feb/2015&c=The Cabinet