

Report to	Cabinet	Item
	14 November 2018	
Report of	Director of neighbourhoods	6
Subject	Norfolk County Council's consultation on early childhood and family Service - transforming children's centres	

Purpose

To consider and confirm the council's response to Norfolk County Council's consultation on proposals to redesign children's centres and early childhood and family services.

Recommendation

To approve the council's response to Norfolk County Council's consultation on proposals to redesign children's centres and early childhood and family services as described in the report.

Corporate and service priorities

The report helps to meet the corporate priority a fair city and a healthy city with good housing.

Financial implications

There are no financial implications arising from the report at this stage.

Ward/s: All wards

Cabinet member: Councillor Davis - social inclusion

Contact officers

Bob Cronk, director of neighbourhoods 01603 212373

Adam Clark, strategy manager 01603 212273

Background documents

None

Report

1. Children's centres were established as service hubs where children up to five years of age and families could access integrated services and information ensuring that every child achieved the best start in life.
2. These services varied according to centre but may have included:
 - support for parents to be
 - parenting – including advice on parenting and access to specialist services for families
 - play sessions
 - access to child and family health services – ranging from health screening and health visitor services
3. Whilst the early phases targeted the most deprived communities to provide high quality early years provision, later Government guidance and ring fenced funding, resulted in a more universal approach to children centre provision led by single tier and county councils.
4. Later changes included a core purpose being defined which was, *to improve outcomes for young children and their families and reduce inequalities between families in greatest need and their peers in the areas of:*
 - Child development and school readiness
 - Parenting aspirations and parenting skills and
 - Child and family health and life chances.
5. These changes also removed the requirement to provide full day care in the most disadvantaged areas and the ring fence for Sure Start, replaced by an early intervention grant encompassing a number of funding streams for children and family services.
6. More recent policy change has been limited but cuts in funding for local government has resulted in a reduction in childrens centres across the country.

What is proposed for childrens centres?

7. Norfolk county council are consulting on a proposed re-design which sets out to *“deliver an early childhood and family service that engages effectively with vulnerable families with additional and complex needs, at the earliest point, and provides appropriately targeted responses to meet their needs”*.
8. The future service model is said to take into account the four guiding principles of the county council's strategy, Norfolk Futures which are:
 - Offering our help early to **prevent and reduce** demand for specialist services
 - **Joining up** work so that similar activities and services are easily accessible, **done once and done well**
 - Being **business-like** and making best use of **digital technology** to ensure value for money; and

- Using evidence and data to **target our work** where it can make the most difference
9. The proposed approach is to create an early childhood and family service, which will ensure early childhood and family services are working together across the county so that they are accessible to children and families and respond to their needs.
 10. Rather than the services being delivered in designated children centre buildings, they would be delivered on an outreach basis within local community venues, such as libraries, village halls and community centres, schools and in families' homes.
 11. Seven early childhood and family bases would be retained, one within each district council area, which would be used as places for staff to work across the district and to deliver some of the local services.
 12. In Norwich this would result in a reduction of six designated children centre buildings.
 13. Wherever possible, the needs of children and families would be met from services set up and run by the local community and the new approach would be developed and established by childrens services working closely with district councils, schools, the NHS and the voluntary and community sector.

Why is the change proposed?

14. A report to childrens services committee in July 2018, said that the county council has an opportunity to secure a refreshed approach that draws together universal and targeted support for families with young children and therefore improves outcomes for children.
15. This is through integration with:
 - the healthy child programme
 - community health provision
 - the county council's early years provision including home learning and family information
 - community development activity, and
 - the council's ambition for flexible and agile use of community assets, as part of delivering fully integrated and joined up public services.

Analysis of the proposals

16. The proposals as scoped and being consulted on by the county council are high level with a great deal of work required to develop and deliver a future model. Based on the current information an analysis has been undertaken to help inform the council's response.

17. Threats

- Budget constraints means fewer services stretched more thinly – there is a lack of clarity on the current finances of properties vs service delivery

- Increasing need and demand for services for children and families
- An enhanced focus on signposting/self-help can entrench inequalities by only meeting needs of more naturally enfranchised families
- Safeguarding risks where interventions are de-professionalised and delivered in community settings
- Reduced prevention work leads to higher incidence of crises in later years i.e. increased looked after child (LAC) population, wider public sector costs etc
- Insufficient appropriate “non-children’s centre” delivery points
- Community development/enabling activity not aligned
- Some activity being charged as it will not be delivered free by childrens centres – impact on low income families?
- Location of the remaining Norwich centre being far removed from areas of highest need
- Disengagement of vulnerable families currently reliant on the existing centres in their local area
- Digital exclusion exacerbating a lack of access to services

18. Uncertainties/unknowns

- Who owns the buildings?
- Is there appropriate and sufficient capacity within proposed locations?
- Knowledge of level and focus of relevant children and family provision
- Are services going to be allocated to localities of greatest need or universally allocated across the county irrespective of the evidence?
- How partners will be engaged
- Capacity and willingness of VCSE sector
- Ability to deliver the new model by November 2019
- How to integrate the various advice and guidance provision
- What happens to children centre nurseries – the consultation is silent on these
- Impact on city council owned buildings used by childrens centres

Scrutiny Committee

19. The city council's Scrutiny Committee considered the consultation at their meeting of 11 October 2018. They raised a series of concerns about the process of the consultation, such as the lack of evidence and data; an absence of Equality Impact Report and issues around accessibility; as well as the substance of what is being proposed, such as the viability of the proposed new locations and the lack of reflection of the wider landscape.
20. Some of the key points raised are included in the proposed council response below, and the full range of concerns are appended to this report. These can be included with the proposed council response to the consultation in the following paragraphs.

Developing a future model for Norwich

21. The council is disappointed that there was no opportunity to be engaged in the development of the draft proposals given our commitment to supporting the most vulnerable residents in Norwich, our knowledge of the city and work already in progress to tailor service provision to those most in need.
22. Based on an analysis of the proposals, the city council does not support the proposals or the closure of any children's centre in Norwich given the high levels of deprivation and child poverty in the city.
23. Equally, the proposals do not appear to reflect the guiding principles of Norfolk Futures which are described in paragraph 7, as well as the county council's local delivery strategy, which states that:
 - a) services will be targeted where they are most needed, this includes Norwich
 - b) investment will be refocussed to meet the needs of residents in the locality rather than a one size fits all approach, which is what is proposed.
24. Any new model needs to have clearly articulated outcomes that relate to local issues that are evidenced to be mitigated by services proposed. As data supplied with the consultation on the current or proposed model is limited, we believe that what evidence there is should be used to shape services to improve:
 - a) The level of development at age 5 of the third of children in Norwich who do not meet this level (in some wards this is 50%)
 - b) The long-term social mobility of the cohort (including those falling short of a good level of development at aged 5) who are more likely to require additional support in school (via pupil premium), lack good GCSEs, and ultimately transition to adulthood with less chance of secure, well-paid employment
25. In order to achieve this, a new model would also need to reflect the higher levels of household and child poverty that are current in Norwich compared with neighbouring districts, and are geographically located in the same areas of sub-optimal development age 5. This would necessarily include addressing socio-economic factors and household-specific issues such as parenting.
26. Although evidence locally seems to be partial on the impact of the current services, individual children's centres are able to evidence that:
 - a) They are working with families from deprived communities
 - b) That those who engage with children's centres on a consistent basis reach a better level of development at age 5 than their comparator peers
27. Recently published evidence from the House of Commons library indicates early year's attainment in Norwich South and Norwich North is better than for overall social mobility. This suggests that the current children centre provision is mitigating some of the negative effects of wider socio-economic factors.

28. In addition, the proposed model does not appear to be supported by any evidence that it would retain the best elements of this current effective practice.
29. A future model should therefore be constructed around this evidence and policy framework, even where causality is difficult to ascertain, with improved data collection, evidence-gathering and analysis built into the new model so that it can be monitored and effectively targeted on an ongoing basis. Without taking this longer-term, evidence-led approach, we believe that the decrease in resource proposed will lead a higher demand over future years for more expensive public sector interventions, including an increase in the Looked After Child population.
30. The city council recognises that all public services are under intense pressure due to reduced funding from Government and the impacts of austerity increasing demand, but also that the impact of the decrease in resources that this represents will only exacerbate demand (including for both county and city councils' services). Therefore, the council proposes to take a positive, collaborative approach to the consultation rather than simply opposing what is proposed.
31. To initiate this, the council would welcome the opportunity to work jointly with childrens services to develop a Norwich delivery model, that would focus investment and bring together the resources in the city on 'turning the curve' in those early years for those who need it most with resource allocated to support this need.
32. This would allow the opportunity to develop an holistic approach to a '*good start in life*' across the locality, including understanding and bringing together the full scope of provision in 'the Norwich system'.
33. Areas for discussion might include:
- A new locality model that could join-up pre-school provision around improved outcomes for the third of children aged 5 in Norwich below 'good' level of development
 - More targeted interventions that reach those who do not access universal services habitually
 - Link early years provision into social mobility activity and through to inclusive economy issues at key transition points
 - Opportunity to align to the:
 - City Vision 2040
 - Neighbourhood model – targeted resources based on need
 - Pooling and sharing data to identify need and better target resources
 - Acknowledging that issues with 0-5 years development is not only an issue for child care but also integrated much more widely in mental health, physical health, community cohesion, family relationships etc and developing a more holistic model.

34. The council believes that there is an opportunity, to develop a model that complements the proposed single co-ordinating 'hub' in Norwich by the addition of a number of 'spokes' that reflects the greater need in the city and the council's neighbourhood model with a local 'hub' in each neighbourhood.
35. There may be opportunities to identify and resource these from across the wider one public estate in the city.
36. The city council would also support a county council request to Government for adequate funding to maintain childrens centre provision across Norfolk at the current levels.

Integrated impact assessment



NORWICH
City Council

The IIA should assess **the impact of the recommendation** being made by the report

Detailed guidance to help with the completion of the assessment can be found [here](#). Delete this row after completion

Report author to complete

Committee:	Cabinet
Committee date:	14 November 2018
Director / Head of service	Director of neighbourhoods
Report subject:	Norfolk county councils consultation on early childhood and family Service - transforming children's centres
Date assessed:	2 November 2018

	Impact			
Economic (please add an 'x' as appropriate)	Neutral	Positive	Negative	Comments
Finance (value for money)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Changes in service will lead to increased demand
Other departments and services e.g. office facilities, customer contact	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
ICT services	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Economic development	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	A reduction in early years provision will lead to decreased social mobility and lack of readiness in later life for work
Financial inclusion	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Changes in service will lead to increased levels of exclusion including financial
Social (please add an 'x' as appropriate)	Neutral	Positive	Negative	Comments
Safeguarding children and adults	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Use of non-public facilities increase a risk of safeguarding
<u>S17 crime and disorder act 1998</u>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Human Rights Act 1998	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	UN Convention on the rights of the child says that 'the best interests of the child must be a top priority in all decisions and actions that affect children.'
Health and well being	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Changes in service risks reduced access to services that enhance social inclusion and health and wellbeing

	Impact			
Equality and diversity (please add an 'x' as appropriate)	Neutral	Positive	Negative	Comments
Relations between groups (cohesion)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Eliminating discrimination & harassment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Advancing equality of opportunity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	A reduction in early years provision could lead to decreased social mobility and reduced life chances in later life
Environmental (please add an 'x' as appropriate)	Neutral	Positive	Negative	Comments
Transportation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Changes in the location of service provision may lead to increased travel costs for some families
Natural and built environment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Waste minimisation & resource use	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Pollution	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Sustainable procurement	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Energy and climate change	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
(Please add an 'x' as appropriate)	Neutral	Positive	Negative	Comments

	Impact			
Risk management	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Recommendations from impact assessment

Positive

Negative

The proposals which appear that they will lead to a reduction in early years provision could result in decreased social mobility and reduced life chances in later life for children in some of the city’s most deprived communities

Neutral

Issues

Norfolk county councils consultation on early childhood and family Service - transforming children's centres

Scrutiny Committee discussion

11 October 2018

Consultation process

Members' concerns about the process of the consultation were as follows:

- The consultation does not provide sufficient evidence and data about the current provision and how the proposed new model would impact on residents
- Specifically, it lacks an equality impact assessment of the proposed changes to show how groups with protected characteristics would be affected, including women and people with English as a second language, who are disproportionately likely to be users of the service.
- There is also no evidence about how the current and proposed investment saves costs elsewhere in the system (including the looked after child population) using any sort of Social Return on Investment or similar methodology
- Similarly there is no evidence of the economic impact in terms of jobs and local economic activity that results from the centres
- The consultation is not explicit about the budgetary pressures that are driving the proposals, instead implying that the impetus is coming from the desire to transform the provision. This is felt to be disingenuous and dishonest.
- Other literature produced by individual children's centres makes it clear that the budget cut of 50% is the root the proposals
- There is reference in the document to the trialling of the 'Local Service Strategy' in Autumn 2018. There will not be sufficient time to learn the lessons from this before the consultation is concluded.
- The online consultation was felt to be somewhat impenetrable given that the majority of people who access it digitally will be using a smart phone or device

Furthermore members would like to underline the depth of their feeling that this consultation is a veneer of engagement, as the budgetary decision has already been made.

Consultation substance

Members' concerns about the substance of the consultation were as follows:

- Despite the suggestion that this is not a 'one-size fits all' approach, there is not sufficient local nuance to reflect the different challenges across the county e.g. Norwich has higher levels of deprivation than most of the county, whilst transport issues are more likely to be an issue elsewhere. Despite the rhetoric about targeting resource where needed, a one hub in each locality would suggest that this is not the case.
- Has there been assessment of the viability of the mobilisation of the additional delivery points (such as GPs, libraries and community centres)? As an example, city council community centres are run by independent committees so the council are not able to ensure access

- The digital offer needs to be offered in a way that engages those at risk of digital exclusion, but there is no indication that this has been considered
- In targeting only the most vulnerable children and families, the opportunity for wider interaction between socio-economic groups that comes from universal provision can be missed. These opportunities can be a key part of the social development of children from all backgrounds.
- The lack of a universal, non-targeted building from which a range of services are delivered risks missing the families and children who may not themselves identify a need for more intensive services, and will not necessarily proactively engage with the targeted services. The 'softer' front-door offered by universal services such as 'stay and play' can provide opportunities for professionals to identify opportunities to engage with families about other issues for which they have not presented. Universal services therefore present a 'front-door' to wider early years provision.
- The corollary of that is that there is a risk of 'self-exclusion' from other proposed venues owing to a perception that libraries etc are not somewhere that particular families identify with or attend – 'not for the likes of us' syndrome
- Where non-professional settings (such as homes) are used, there is an increased need to ensure safeguarding is robust
- The proposed use of volunteers in place of professional staff also risks a lower quality service, and again necessitates a robust approach to safeguarding
- The proposed changes come against a backdrop of wider public sector retrenchment and services for children and younger people (such as speech and language therapy) which are seen as oversubscribed and insufficient to meet demand
- The wider landscape is one of austerity which has resulted in national socio-economic factors which drive low incomes and deprivation. Services such as children's centres are part of the mitigation of these locally, so reductions in them will exacerbate the impact of austerity.
- Although there is other investment in social mobility through the DfE Opportunity Area, this is not targeted at early years, where the lifetime impact of investment is most effective

Overall, the members concern is that the budgetary driver of the consultation means that decisions will be made hastily without adequate chance to ensure that the remaining provision is used effectively and results in better outcomes for children from all backgrounds.