

Shropshire Children's Centres – 2016 /17 update

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1. Summary

This report provides an update on Children's Centres in Shropshire in the context of national and local developments, including how Children's Centres; the places, resources and ways of working contributes to the delivery of the priorities set out in the Shropshire Children's Trust Early Help Strategy 2016-2018, and reflects the values of the Corporate Plan. The report includes current developments and future direction of travel and a forecast of how the developments respond to the Financial Strategy.

2. Recommendations

The Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the details given in this paper and provide comments and feedback in respect of the Council's approach.

REPORT

2. Background

2.1. *What is a Children's Centre?*

The current supply of early help including preventative and targeted work for families with young children is significantly supported by the provision of Children's Centres directly managed and co-ordinated by Shropshire Council. Children's Centres form part of the Early Help Offer in Shropshire. The statutory duty of Local Authorities under the Childcare Act 2006 relating to Children's Centres states that Local Authorities must:

- Take steps to identify parents and those expecting a baby in their area who are unlikely to take advantage of early childhood services available and encourage them to use them; and
- Ensure there are sufficient children's centres, so far as reasonably practicable.

The Childcare Act 2006 **defines** a Children's Centre as a place or groups of places secured in order to make integrated early childhood services available either on a site or signposted to gain access to include:

- Early years education and care
- Social services
- Health services
- Assistance to parents in training, employment, information, advice and guidance

The **core purpose** of a Children's Centre is to improve outcomes for young children and their families, with a particular focus on families in greatest need of support in order to reduce inequalities in:

- Child development and school readiness
- Parenting aspirations
- Self-esteem and parenting skills
- Child and family health and life chances

2.2. What do Children's Centres look like and where are they in Shropshire?

In Shropshire a Children's Centre is defined by the operation of services from a group of places in geographical areas. There are 12 Children's Centre Areas across the county designated using child population figures, natural communities, levels of deprivation and utilising primary school catchment areas for boundaries. The table below provides a breakdown of the Children's Centre Areas showing the areas as they are registered as required with the Department for Education (DfE) and Ofsted:

Central	North	South
Borders <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Borders 	North East <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Market Drayton • Whitchurch 	South East <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pebble Brook • River Rea • Severn Valley
Roman Way <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roman Way 	North West <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ellesmere & Wem • Oswestry • South Oswestry 	South West <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mortimer Forest • Shropshire Hills

The current Children's Centre Areas were introduced in 2012. Over time other service providers have become fully or partially co-terminus with the Children's Centre Areas, for example social work services and health visiting. These geographical boundaries are used for the collation of management and performance information across a range of indicators including health, education and social care. The boundaries do not present any restrictions for service users and the staff group and partners work across areas.

Appendix 1 shows a map of the Children's Centre Areas.

The locations used for the delivery of services are often co-located on school sites with early years and childcare providers or community venues. Some buildings are managed directly by the LA team, other sites are sub-leased rented or shared with other provision.

A range of services are often delivered from the site including early years education, health services. Other early help providers use sites for the delivery of services including groups for disabled children and families and a number of sites are also used for contact visits for Looked After Children.

Approximately 50 % of service delivery places are located in the 30% most disadvantaged areas of Shropshire (Lower Super Output Areas).

2.3. *How are CC delivered and managed in Shropshire?*

Shropshire Council currently delivers Children's Centre services through an internal staff team, locality commissioning and partnership working with health, education and the voluntary sector.

The governance of children's centres is managed through multi-agency Advisory Boards as required by statutory guidance. There are five Advisory Boards for Shropshire; two for the North, one in central area and one covering South Shropshire. The Advisory Boards include parent representatives and are chaired by a range of partners including; a parent, school lead, voluntary and community sector representative and a Local Authority representative. The range of performance indicators are reported through to Shropshire Children's Trust and Local Safeguarding Board via the Healthy Child Programme Board and the Strengthening Families through Early Help Partnership Group.

2.4. What is the quality and performance of CC in Shropshire?

Shropshire has eleven current Ofsted gradings for our Children's Centre's, most of these, nine out of the eleven (81%) are graded as good.

"there is evidence of the positive impact that the centre's work has on empowering families and improving their well-being ...good support is provided by staff and partners helping families experiencing domestic violence or mental health issues to overcome the challenges they face"

Ofsted – Severn Valley (Bridgnorth) Children's Centre Inspection 2015

"one to one targeted support is very effective in helping families overcome the problems they face. Good collaborative work takes place to empower children and families experiencing domestic violence ... parents are well supported in building their confidence and skills in managing behaviour. As a result this is helping them to become more effective in parenting their children. Good quality advice and guidance raises parents' awareness of how to keep their children healthy and safe". **Ofsted – Borders (North Shrewsbury) Children's' Centre Inspection 2015**

The Peer Review (July 2015) commented on the accessibility and commitment of Children's Centre's to the provision of early help and partnership working.

Targeted case work carried out by children's centre support workers working with identified families is quality assured by managers and the Early Help Stakeholder Group using the Quality Assurance Framework for Children's social work case file audit procedure. Observations of practice are also made by managers.

Children's Centre targeted group work is quality assured through the use of evidence based programmes, for example Understanding Your Child parenting and UNICEF Baby Friendly Standards. Universal groups are quality assured using standards set by the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework.

The Early Help Effectiveness Report (2015/16) which will be presented to Shropshire Safeguarding Children's Board (SSCB) in September 2016 has found most practitioners (90%) found Children's Centre services accessible for requesting early help support for families.

2.5. National direction/changes

There have been significant changes since 2012 in national policy, resourcing and commissioning responsibilities in relation to early childhood services.

Research informing thinking and planning remains strongly supportive of the importance of a good start in life for children and assisting families in being the most significant and positive influences on children.

The LA duties in relation to Children's Centres still apply but it has been recognised by Government and Ofsted that the requirements and inspection framework need reviewing.

Ofsted paused the inspection framework for Children's Centres in July 2015. Since then an All Party Parliamentary Group working with the charity 4Children have undertaken an inquiry into the future of Children's Centres and made recommendations with particular relevance to the development of the Government's Children's Life Chances Strategy. (**Appendix 2** details the recommendations of APPG inquiry)

The development of the Children's Life Chances Strategy includes: a focus on the importance of the early years, expanding parenting support, improving levels of work in families, the importance of positive and resilient relationships and mental health and addiction support.

2.6. What is the position /direction of Children's Centres in Shropshire; the types of work and how they do it?

In Shropshire Children's Centres make up a significant part of the Early Help Offer and the delivery of services and support is aligned to the Strengthening Families through the Early Help Strategy and the principles of the Strengthening Families programme.

The staff team work across the geography of Children's Centre areas to provide targeted family support work, group work in relation to targeted issues including; domestic abuse, Understanding Your Child Parenting courses, groups focusing on attachment and parent child relationships and parental mental health all for families who have been identified would benefit from this support.

Working in partnership and the integration of delivery; for example health visitors and children's centre staff working together to deliver services, duplication of effort is reduced and impact is maximised, this way of working has evolved and is improving constantly.

Case Study 1: Oswestry Family Hub

As part of the Oswestry Resilient Communities project the North Children's Centre team have developed a Children and Families Hub session at The Centre in Oswestry. This provides a point of contact for families with children in the area to access support from trained staff within a universal arena. The Hub also offers a place for families who are referred for Early Help support to meet and engage with services to enable swift assessment of needs to take place to identify and engage the right service at the right time.

A particular case where this has proved beneficial is with a pregnant teenager. She was at risk of being made homeless, had a limited peer and family support network and a history of mental health difficulties. She was able to attend the Hub session, to access benefits and income maximisation advice from a Strengthening Families DWP Employment Advisor. She was also able to access antenatal parenting support, financial advice and housing support, including practical support, from a Children's Centre Support Worker along with working with midwifery services.

Outcomes: early support and intervention for a vulnerable pregnant young person by using a non-threatening, non-stigmatising venue and providing access to a range of support and guidance in one place and time.

Adult Services also provide a weekly Hub session at The Centre; the project envisages that as the Hub develops a joint approach to supporting whole families can be adopted, with a wider range of public, private and voluntary sector agencies, thus empowering individuals and the local community to make and sustain positive change.

Referrals to Children's Centre targeted support are made by a range of professionals and some self-referrals come from parents.

In Q1 2016/17 the highest numbers of referrals came from health visitors, midwifery, primary schools and social workers.

Targeted support has evolved over time and as part of the Early Help Offer Children's Centre services are provided for families with younger children up to approximately 8 years old. However as the service takes a whole family approach support can benefit multiple children of any age in the family.

Children's Centre managers work closely with other Early Help provision using robust information sharing agreements to ensure the right service is offered at the right time.

Q1 2016/17 - Targeted casework for families delivered through home visiting or at Children Centre venue			
North	Central	South	
78 cases (124 children)	46 cases (73 children)	36 cases (53 children)	Total 160 family cases (357 children)
Q1 2016/17 – Targeted group work delivered at Children’s Centres venues			
North	Central	South	
11 groups (221 attendees)	18 groups (103 attendees)	10 groups (66 attendees)	Total 39 groups (390 attendees)
Q1 2016/17 – Universal group delivery – directly delivered by Children’s Centre staff, locally commissioned, co-facilitated by partners or partner – led.			
North	Central	South	
603 families	515 families	445 families	Total 1563 families (a further 53 families are recorded as having addresses outside of Shropshire)
Q1 2016/17 Targeted support in universal groups – information, advice and guidance provided to families attending universal groups (early intervention) to prevent problems escalating.			
Crime/ASB			37 families
Worklessness/Financial exclusion			66 families
Domestic Abuse			37 families
Children who need help			125 families
School attendance			66 families
Health			870 families

In Q1 2016/17, 53 (33%) targeted cases were receiving support as part of a social work assessed plan. The remaining cases had all received an early help assessment and support was part of the early help plan.

Case Study 2: Targeted support provided in a Universal group

A key approach to delivering early intervention is through targeted support within a universal group or activity. This is usually a weekly drop in session that is open to any family and does not require a referral or assessment to access.

This model provides the earliest of early help support to be offered which is proven in some cases to reduce the demand for more intensive or specialist support by preventing things from getting worse.

An example of this is a mother who attended a group and shared her concerns with the support worker about her 2 year old son's behaviour as she felt that he was displaying autistic characteristics and that he also had a speech and language delay.

The family attended the weekly group over a period of time and the worker was able to give support around parenting, routines, managing behaviour at home and language development.

Help was given to register the child for a 24U early education place with a local nursery and provide the parent with ideas, through role modelling, and encouragement to support his learning and development at home.

Emotional support and containment was provided to the parent during the multi-disciplinary assessment with the Child Development Centre and the family was signposted to Autism West Midlands for further advice and peer support.

The family still attend groups which helps them to sustain the positive changes that they have made.

2.7. Staffing and the teams

The current Shropshire Children's Centre staffing structure of 3 locality teams covering north, central and south has been in place since 2010. Whilst the teams have experienced several changes and staffing has reduced by over 30% during this time the reach of services has been seen to increase and become more targeted. The DfE commissioned Evaluation of Children's Centres in England research programme, running since 2013 has shown that approximately 30% of centres evaluated have taken this approach to change.

During 2016; vacancy management challenges, the financial strategy (targets set) and the focus to target work to areas of greatest need as a response to Council and national priority changes are drivers that have resulted in further redesign and development this area of support.

From June to August 2016 the Children's Centre staff team has been subject to a consultation regarding the reorganisation and reduction of staffing. This restructure reduces staffing at every level however impact has been minimised on frontline delivery, the impact being a 17% reduction of the family support worker staff group (5.33 fte of a staff group of 32.33 fte).

This reorganisation is planned to be complete by October 2016.

2.8. *Next Steps for Children's Centres in Shropshire 2016-2018*

The new structure and staffing organisation will continue to provide more focussed targeted case work and targeted group work for families alongside work to increase collaboration and integration of targeted and universal delivery and a review of assets.

The second half of the financial year 2016/17 will focus on the assessment of sufficiency of universal provision of early childhood services, this work will be coordinated through the Children's Centres Advisory Boards and include building on feedback from the Big Conversation and will involve engaging service users and other stakeholders in mapping the availability of services and need and developing the work as described in the case studies to reduce duplication, target need and reduce costs.

Case Study 3: Community Hub at Craven Arms.

The Children's Centre team have been working with Community Enablement Officer; Home Start, Health Visitor and members of the community to bring together resources and expertise to deliver a weekly drop in session for families at the Discovery Centre in Craven Arms from Autumn 2016. This idea was developed following feedback from the community. Engagement, consultation and planning is resulting in collaborative work and resourcing with families and partners to provide information, advice, support and guidance for families with children.

Outcomes: community led group, meeting needs more effectively, reduced costs to public services, stakeholders working in partnership.

The review of building assets will include work with Shropshire Council Early Years team, Early Years providers and schools to understand sufficiency needs and demands for the proposed increase in funded places for 3 and 4 year olds (September 2017) and where appropriate assess the value of meeting these needs through use of available capacity in are currently CC buildings.

We will engage further with other public sector partners to assess and plan for joint delivery of services from appropriate locations, sharing costs and maximising the use of assets.

We will continue to increase co-facilitation of targeted work, through clarifying and focussing the lead professional role to reduce duplication on case work. Co-facilitation of targeted group work will also increase, maximising skills and availability of staff and bringing families together to increase peer support.

Case Study 4: Targeted Group work

Targeted groups and courses provide the opportunity for parents and carers to collectively access evidenced based support and advice to build their confidence through shared experience and learning.

Families are referred by a range of professionals from health, education, voluntary sector and social care and some families self-refer.

Courses are delivered from a range of places in collaboration with key partner agencies. Targeted groups are used to empower families through building confidence thus reducing the demand for caseload intervention.

Groups provide the opportunity for needs to be identified and assessed and advice and guidance to be embedded over a period of time. Workers can also provide additional support, in addition to the programme content.

The impact of parents and carers sharing experiences is invaluable and peer support and containment adds value in building community resilience and reducing social isolation. At the beginning and end of courses families complete evaluations which measure the impact of the intervention.

Parental feedback provided as part of evaluations include,

'I feel more positive about family life, my future relationship choices and friendships. I am more confident in challenging the way people treat me and my children. I can walk away from a situation and not have my views and opinions changed – I am my own person. The course has made me stronger and more independent. The Freedom Programme has changed my life!'

'My attitude to parenting has changed. The course has helped me in situations with my daughter and I have more patience. It has helped us bond and enjoy time together'.

'Mine and my child's relationship has changed as a result of the group. We have better communication and I understand that my child is still learning about her feelings and it's normal behaviour for her to express them'.

'I feel much more confident and able to understand why my children do what they do and that behaviour is secondary to emotion. I have learned to look at the reasons behind their behaviours to help me understand how they are feeling'.

'The most useful thing that I have learnt is to have belief in myself. I feel I have the skills to help me deal with my negative feelings, fear and lack of confidence and that I am not alone. I have made friends for life here, it has made such a difference'.

During 2016 two pilots with groups of schools (Whitchurch and Oswestry) have been initiated to test joint commissioning arrangements and the lead professional 'key worker' role linked to schools. Positive feedback is being received from service users and schools in relation to this work and a third pilot in Ludlow is planned for the autumn 2016. The outcomes of this work will be reviewed by the Strengthening Families through Early Help Partnership Group of Shropshire Children's Trust in 2017 and make recommendations going forward.

A different approach to the commissioning of early help for families with young children is also being tested with Armed Forces commissioners.

Case Study 5: Commissioning of services for RAF Cosford

From April 2016 – April 2017, the Royal Air Force (RAF) Cosford have commissioned Shropshire Council Children's Centre Services to support the development of three weekly family drop-in sessions on the RAF community hub, The Hive. Services for service families had previously been provided on and off the RAF base and funded by Shropshire Council.

Two of the sessions are specifically provided for armed forces families and the third, has developed into an open community group with an aim of bringing the armed forces families and the local community together to foster an understanding of each other's community and to encourage integration. In addition, is the delivery of one baby massage course to promote healthy attachments and a 10 week Understanding Your Child course which will commence in September 2016.

The aim of the commissioning is to engage service families and to provide support, advice and assistance around child development and interaction with children and parents, increase parenting aspirations, self-esteem and parenting skills.

Feedback from the first 3 months is positive from service users, the commissioner and the Children's Centre staff involved. Attendance has increased, examples of early intervention preventing issues from worsening have been seen, volunteers are being supported and developed, trusting relationships are proving to be assisting parents in seeking advice and developing new skills and parenting strategies.

3. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 3.1. The assessment, planning and delivery of the core purpose for Children's Centre's is subject to risk management plans relating to sufficiency requirements. These are reported on a quarterly basis by the Children's Centre Managers. The focus on this work is to support the most vulnerable and as a result equality impact is assessed taking a dynamic approach to the set up and delivery of service but also to any changes that may occur.
- 3.2. Engagement and consultation with service users is planned into all activity and work streams. In addition the development of plans and actions going forward are being considered and assessed in the wider context of community opportunity and impact.
- 3.3. Reductions to staffing and the risk of remaining service provision not being able to meet demand is being mitigated through the planned changes to targeted support and targeted group work; increased collaboration with other early help providers.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1. Shropshire Council Financial Strategy 2015/16 – 2020/21 outlines the impact on service delivery of a sustainable business model. Ensuring the welfare, protection and safeguarding of all children and young people is a key priority of this Strategy. This includes services that provide targeted early help, preventing risk and needs from escalating into the need for social work assessment and child protection.
- 4.2. The Financial Strategy states “we will realign the Early Help provision across all service areas and, with our partner agencies, move forward in our commissioning of local early help. Whilst some commissioned services will be reduced we will identify efficiencies in the way services are delivered as a priority approach to achieving savings in this area”.
- 4.3. Savings targets for Children's Centres (2017/18) are Amber rated “would not be recommended but are considered achievable” The savings target for Children's Centres 2017/18 is £1,000,000. The reorganisation of staff brought forward into 2016/17 and the work being carried out to realise efficiencies of asset management is currently forecasting a savings achievement of £641,733 against the £1,000,000 target (64% of savings target). The final outcome of the consultation with staff and reorganisation along with the next steps to integrated working is intended to increase this savings achievement.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

Shropshire Council Corporate Plan 2016/17

All Parliamentary Group Report on Children's Centres, Family Hubs: the Future of Children's Centres 2016

Ofsted reports:

<http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/inspection-reports/find-inspection-report/provider/ELS/22713>

<http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/inspection-reports/find-inspection-report/results/4/13/any/any/any/severn%20valley/any/any/any/any/0/0#search1>

Children's Centre Statutory Guidance (2013)

Shropshire Early Help Strategy 2016 – 2018

<https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/early-help/strategies-and-reports/>

Evaluation of Children's Centre's in England (2015)

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/433853/RR433A - Organisation Services and Reach of Childrens Centres .pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/433853/RR433A_-_Organisation_Services_and_Reach_of_Childrens_Centres_.pdf)

Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)

David Minnery

Local Member

All

Appendices

Appendix 1: map of CC areas

Appendix 2: All Parliamentary Group on Children's Centres: Inquiry recommendations