

Slough Borough Council

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Report To: | Cabinet |
| Date: | 19 th December 2022 |
| Subject: | Remodelling of Children Centres |
| Lead Member: | Lead Member for Children's Services |
| Chief Officer: | Andrew Fraser, Chief Executive and Executive Director: Children's Services |
| Contact Officer: | Johnny Kyriacou, Associate Director, Education and Inclusion |
| Ward(s): | ALL |
| Key Decision: | YES |
| Exempt: | NO |
| Decision Subject To Call In: | YES |
| Appendices: | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Needs Assessment Summary2. Children's Centre Review Report3. Early Education and Childcare Review Report4. Centre by Centre Implications Summary5. Equalities Impact Assessment |

1. Summary and Recommendations

1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Cabinet approval to consult on options for change to Slough Borough Council's (SBC) Children's Centres and the early education and childcare provision delivered from them.

Recommendation:

Cabinet is recommended to:

- 1.2 Authorise a 6 week consultation on options for change to the Council's Children's Centres, including proposals to reduce the number of buildings and reduce the amount of childcare provision being directly provided by the Council.
- 1.3 Note that a report will be presented to Cabinet in the Spring 2023 for a decision on the proposal.

Reason:

1.4 The recommendation is offered so that potential opportunities to improve the support provided to children and families may be explored. The proposal is made within the context of needing to respond to a number of drivers for change including improving preventative work across the partnership, addressing deficiencies in current Children's

Centre arrangements and where feasible, to enable the Council to deliver financial savings as part of its budget setting process and medium-term financial strategy.

1.5 The Governance Review of Slough Borough Council, published in September 2021, highlighted that SBC operates with 10 children's centres for a population of 149 000, generally providing a universal offer, which has not proven to reduce demand in children's services.

1.6 Review work undertaken across the Children's Services system continues to highlight the need to strengthen preventative support for families to address disproportionately high demand for children's social care intervention compared to statistical neighbours. Work is being progressed to develop the prevention and early help offer in Slough to address this issue. Children's Centres have a key role to play in this critical area of family support.

1.7 The recommendations will allow the Council to engage with key stakeholders, current service users and the public in general regarding a potential alternative model of delivery which strengthens current Children's Centre delivery arrangements.

1.8 The decision to enable consultation on these options will support the process of developing services which contribute to the following 2 Council priorities:

- A council that lives within its means, balances the budget and delivers best value services for tax-payers and service users; and
- A borough for children and young people to thrive.

1.9 Needs assessment analysis and associated review findings in relation to Children's Centre provision suggests that there is both a need and an opportunity to develop new ways of working to strengthen the provision of integrated preventative support and early help for families that most need it. The options in this report are therefore concerned with enabling change that will contribute to realising Slough Children First's vision that "every child in Slough should be safe, secure and successful".

1.10 Consultation will focus on obtaining views in relation to the recommended option of creating a new three centre model. A three centre model is preferred because it would enable the proposed new way of working to be introduced and embedded, whilst also allowing for alignment with existing locality based approaches applied by SBC and its partners. It would also allow for future alignment to the development of an integrated 'family network' and family hub model within a revised Early Help Strategy, by creating the early childhood, 0 – 5 year old component of a coordinated 0 – 25 age ranged child and family early help offer in Slough.

1.11 The provision of early education and childcare is a core part of the current Children's Centre offer. 8 of the current 10 Children's Centres provide directly delivered childcare. Identified options for change have a bearing on both the directly delivered childcare and the wider offer of early childhood services. Families may not readily make the distinction between the different elements of service. It is therefore important to make clear reference to how options may impact these two key elements of service and to ensure consultation secures views on potential changes to the service area of childcare alongside associated options for change to the Children's Centre model in general.

1.12 The report is therefore segmented into two related parts so that due reference can be made to each element of service, which have different statutory frameworks. The potential implications of pursuing identified options from both a Children's Centre and an early education and childcare perspective have been set out for consideration. Both will be consulted on should approval be granted to do so.

Commissioner Review

“Rationalising the children's centre provision is the correct way forward in the Council's circumstances. However, it will require an effective programme management regime to be in place. Cabinet needs to ensure this is in place from the outset if the proposals are to be successfully delivered.”

2. Report

Children's Centres

Children's Centre Purpose

Strategic Aim

2.1 Children's Centres aim to improve outcomes for young children and their families and reduce inequalities between families in greatest need and their peers.

2.2 Legislation in relation to Children's Centres is contained in the Childcare Act 2006, and underpinned by Sure Start Children's Centres Statutory Guidance, which defines a Children's Centre as a place or a group of places: which is managed by or on behalf of, or under arrangements with, the local authority with a view to securing that early childhood services in the local authority's area are made available in an integrated way; through which early childhood services are made available (either by providing the services on site, or by providing advice and assistance on gaining access to services elsewhere); and, at which activities for young children are provided.

2.3 The Statutory Guidance states that “Centres are as much about making appropriate and integrated services available, as about providing premises in particular geographical areas. A Children's Centre should make available universal and targeted early childhood services either by providing the services at the centre itself or by providing advice and assistance to parents (mothers and fathers) and prospective parents in accessing services provided elsewhere”.

2.4 The guidance frames core Children's Centre activity using the following themes:

- child development and school readiness;
- parenting aspirations and parenting skills; and,
- child and family health and life chances.

2.5 SBC has 10 centres across the Borough. The Children's Centre programme seeks to address need by delivering and enabling a range of early childhood services the details of which may be found in the ***Children's Centre Review*** attached as **Appendix 2**.

2.6 In addition, 8 of the 10 centres provide early years education for 2, 3 and 4 year-olds and day-care services for working parents as a central part of their offer.

2.7 The Council must determine what constitutes sufficient children's centres to meet its local need. When assessing sufficiency local authorities should ensure a network of

centres, that services are within reasonable reach, taking account of distance and availability of transport, together with partners consider how best to support families to access them, target services at those at risk of poor outcomes through effective outreach services, demonstrate effectiveness and availability to meet local need and not close an existing provision unless it can be demonstrated that the outcomes for children, particularly the most disadvantaged, would not be adversely affected.

2.8 Review work has given due consideration to need when determining the options for change to current children's centre arrangements. The detail of this assessment may be found in the **Needs Assessment Summary** attached as **Appendix 1** to this report.

2.9 Needs assessment data indicates that many families in Slough experience prevailing and entrenched challenges in relation to social and health outcomes including those that align with the core purpose of Children's Centres. It can be assumed that these may well be compounded given wider social and economic pressures. These challenges contribute to significant pressure on the children's social care system.

2.10 Associated analysis and review work undertaken in relation to the current Children's Centre model and its programme of activity has found that it is not delivering against core Children's Centre requirements. The outcomes of this review work may be found in the **Children's Centre Review** attached as **Appendix 2** to this report. They are summarised as follows:

Capacity to provide key functions has diminished overtime

2.11 Organisation change and associated redeployment of resources has had a bearing on the current model being able to maintain key functions traditionally undertaken by Children's Centres and has impacted on its capacity to meet need, particular for those most in need of support and therefore impacting on demand for statutory services. The model has evolved to be primarily concerned with the provision of early education and childcare.

2.12 Current arrangements, which include a primary focus on early education and childcare, do not enable the service to carry out the necessary work to systematically assess need, identify those most in need of targeted support and coordinate early childhood services in response.

Core functions and offer maintained but spread thinly and unevenly across the range of centres and associated localities

2.13 The current model delivers core activity across its 10 centres, however the offer is inconsistent in its range with provision not being systematically informed by an assessment of borough-wide and localised need.

Capacity to identify and target those most in need of support is limited

2.14 Current arrangements, which include a primary focus on early education and childcare, do not enable the service to identify and reach out to those most in need of targeted support and fully coordinate early childhood services in response.

Proposal for change

2.15 Needs assessment analysis and associated review of the current Children's Centre model has led to the identification of the following in terms of need for change:

- The need to consolidate resources to enable Children's Centre functions to be renewed;

- The need to enable key Children’s Centre functions to be fulfilled and focused on core Children’s Centre requirements; and
- The recognition that resources and associated approach needs to enable and ensure the coordination and targeting of early childhood services at the most vulnerable.

2.16 In light of the learning arising from review work and consideration of what might best suit Slough in terms of a revised model to meet need, it is proposed to remodel the existing Children’s Centre structure so that it will provide a renewed focus on the core functions of Children’s Centre coordination, outreach and family support. It will do so by reorganising existing arrangements, including the discontinuation of aspects of directly delivered early learning and childcare where there is a case for doing so, to create dedicated resource to undertake these functions, enabling a refreshed approach to identifying need in collaboration with partners and developing and coordinating a renewed offer of Children’s Centre provision in response for example, improved integration and targeting of services with partner agencies to improve outcomes for 0-5 year olds.

2.17 The options have been drafted following consideration of need, what provision is required to meet need and what number of Children’s Centres it would be reasonably practicable for the SBC to provide. They are summarised below:

| Children’s Centre Options | Potential benefits | Potential constraints |
|---|--|--|
| <p>1. To create a new 3 centre model by closing 7 of the existing 10 Children’s Centres to establish a new model of delivery serviced by the existing Centres at Penn Road, Chalvey Grove and Romsey Close (Recommended)</p> | <p>Renewed and enhanced capacity to develop and coordinate early childhood services</p> <p>Reduces cost and allows for the consolidation of Children’s Centre resources to enable greater targeting of those most in need. This option would see the flexible deployment of dedicated Children’s Centre staff across 3 Centres in order to maximise efficiency.</p> <p>A third children’s centre is required to provide a fit with the borough’s locality strategy, dividing Slough into three areas, north, west and east. The intention is to build up in those three localities a more local offer, bringing services closer to those communities having Penn Road as the third children’s centre will assist with this. Resources will be used flexibly across the Centres with a view to enabling partners to contribute to and invest in centre operations. Penn Road is in a good position; it is accessible and has car parking.</p> | <p>70% reduction in the number of physical Children’s Centre outlets and the associated loss of contact / service access points for families in affected areas, particularly for vulnerable children and families.</p> |

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| | <p>See appendix 4 centre by centre review for a more detailed breakdown of sufficiency and further analysis.</p> | |
| <p>2. To create a new 2 centre model by closing 8 of the existing 10 Children's Centres to establish a north and south locality model serviced by the existing Centres at Penn Road and Chalvey Grove respectively</p> | <p>Renewed and enhanced capacity to develop and coordinate early childhood services</p> <p>Reduces cost and allows for the consolidation of Children's Centre resources to enable greater targeting of those most in need</p> | <p>80% reduction in the number of physical Children's Centre outlets and the associated loss contact / service access points for families in affected areas, particularly for vulnerable children and families.</p> |
| <p>3. To create a new 1 centre model by closing 9 of the existing 10 Children's Centres to establish a boroughwide model at Chalvey Grove</p> | <p>Renewed and enhanced capacity to develop and coordinate early childhood services</p> <p>Reduces cost and allows for the consolidation of Children's Centre resources to enable greater targeting of those most in need</p> | <p>90% reduction in the number of physical Children's Centre outlets and the associated major loss of contact / service access points for families in affected areas, particularly for vulnerable children and families.</p> |
| <p>4. To continue with the current provision of 10 centres or to have less of a reduction of centres than proposed above.</p> | <p>No centre would be closed.</p> | <p>The current model is not targeted at those most in need and therefore does not fulfil the requirements of the statutory guidance. The current model would not meet the savings target and if savings are to be made, the reduction in hours and staffing would be extreme leaving buildings that are not meeting the core functions of a children's centre.</p> <p>Unnecessary revenue would be spent on maintaining buildings instead of investing in non-building based services such as outreach.</p> |

2.18 The presented options for change would see the establishing of a new, dedicated Children's Centre resource, enabling a refreshed approach to identifying need in collaboration with partners and developing and coordinating a renewed offer of early childhood services. Key aspects include:

- A consolidated approach centred on the coordination of early childhood services in collaboration with partners;
- A way of working that isn't reliant on the use of existing premises to enable the development and delivery of the early childhood services offer;
- The establishment of dedicated Children's Centre resource to attend to the key functions of coordination, outreach and family support which are not currently being effectively provided; and
- The use of this resource to connect with related resources and functions across the partnership to achieve the aim of Children's Centres making available universal and targeted early childhood services and supporting child and family access to them as part of the developing prevention and early help offer to residents.

2.19 The model would maintain usage of, and operation from retained Centre/s for use as the base from which to assess and map need for early childhood services across the borough in collaboration with partners. It would also work closely with the Asset Disposal Programme team (Housing & Property Directorate) to explore options for related, alternative use of premises no longer designated as Children's Centres. As part of this work it will also consider the full operating costs within the retained premises.

2.20 Existing centres may also be used to continue to house critical joint partnership, early childhood service operations within, as part of the transition process to the new model. However, the designated centre/s in the proposed new model would primarily become the principal operations hub/s for a borough-wide network of early childhood services. The model would align to the developing Early Help Strategy and associated work regarding a family network and family hub approach to delivering coordinated preventative early help to families.

2.21 Continuation of the existing model for Children's Centres is not considered as viable given the findings of associated review work and the need to ensure best value for residents.

2.22 These options will be subject to consultation should approval be granted to do so. Should other viable options be identified during the consultation process, they will inform recommendations for change which will be presented to Cabinet for consideration in due course.

Implementation

2.23 Should approval to consult be granted, a consultation process with key stakeholders will be enacted. If authorised, consultation will commence early in the new year. It will apply a range of processing including both online and direct engagement activity to secure the views of residents and stakeholders on the presented options and potential alternatives. Once the consultation process is concluded, findings will be collated to inform final recommendations for change for presentation to and consideration by Cabinet in due course.

Early Education and Childcare

Strategic aim

2.24 Given the prominent role the direct delivery of early education and childcare plays in SBC's Children's Centre model, separate consideration has been given to this provision to inform options for change to the Children's Centre programme whole.

2.25 The Childcare Act 2006 and the associated statutory guidance for local authorities on Early Education and Childcare, March 2017 requires SBC to secure sufficient childcare, as far as is reasonably practicable, for working parents, or parents who are studying or training for employment, for children aged 0 – 14 (or up to 18 for disabled children).

2.26 The strategic aim of early education and childcare provision is to work with parents, early years practitioners and partner agencies to support the development of all young children, including the most vulnerable, and to help them build the skills and resilience needed to become successful adults, with the capability and willingness to make a positive contribution to society. Allied to this is the associated aim of enabling sufficient childcare to be available to those who need it in Slough.

2.27 It should be noted that by law local authorities should not directly provide childcare unless they are satisfied that no other person is willing to provide childcare for a particular child or group or it is otherwise appropriate to provide it. Local authorities providing childcare directly risks distorting the market, potentially preventing choice and options for small businesses to meet demand. Since 2006 local authorities' role in childcare/early years education has been to focus on market management and ensuring quality of provision.

Childcare sufficiency

2.28 8 of SBC's 10 Children's Centres provide Council managed early education and childcare. Parallel review work has been undertaken, under the wider auspice of the Children's Centre review, to assess this element of provision from a sufficiency and best value perspective. The **Early Education and Childcare Review** is attached as **Appendix 3** to this report.

2.29 The childcare economy is complex. The offer comprises a range of types of provision to meet different needs ranging from free entitlement education to more generic childcare. Capacity types also vary from setting to setting with providers offering a mixed economy of funded places and paid for childcare, some all year round and others term-time only. It is therefore both difficult and unhelpful to try to determine an absolute position in terms of sufficiency.

2.30 Birth data used to forecast demand for example, suggests that current supply of places overall doesn't match demand, however consideration at a more locality-based level indicates a more mixed picture.

2.31 Current data and analysis indicates that Monksfield Way Children's Centre for example operates in a catchment area with a significant surplus of places, whereas Chalvey Grove Children's Centre catchment area has a notable deficit of places. It is important to note that this data does not give a definitive position in relation to supply and demand. Local intelligence gathered during the annual Childcare Sufficiency Assessment is key to building up a more accurate picture of both the supply and the nature of the offer in terms of type and age range and the demand based on a range of data sources including birth rate projections and census data.

2.32 The analysis and review work informing potential options for change to current directly delivered early education and childcare provision via Children's Centres has drawn on a combination of existing data and local intelligence to determine potential options for change. This analysis will be strengthened via both the consultation process and the annual Childcare Sufficiency Assessment once complete. This will be completed before any decisions are made.

2.33 Local intelligence indicates that there are providers in the market who may be interested in developing their provision in response to changes SBC may make to its directly delivered provision. Further work will be undertaken with the wider economy of provider to explore options fully should agreement to consult be given.

2.34 Analysis of the findings of this review has resulted in the following summary conclusions being drawn:

- SBC is delivering early education and childcare via its Children's Centres in areas where analysis suggests there is surplus capacity;
- Analysis also suggests that SBC's directly delivered offer is being provided in areas with sufficient capacity to meet requirements and need in the absence of directly offered provision; and
- SBC is delivering early education and childcare via its Children's Centres at a cost to the Council, ie. the Council is subsidising childcare costs, and that there is scope to reduce this cost by the discontinuation of directly managed provision within the overall context of making changes to its Children's centre delivery model.

2.35 Sufficiency analysis suggests that there is low risk of a significant, negative impact on sufficiency level when considering the discontinuation of SBC delivered early education and childcare provided via the following Children's Centres:

- St Andrews Way;
- Vicarage Way;
- Wexham Road;
- Elliman Avenue; and
- Orchard Avenue.

2.36 A medium level of risk in potential discontinuation of directly delivered provision has been identified for early education and childcare provided from the following Children's Centres:

- Monksfield Way; and
- Penn Road.

2.37 This assessment is informed by consideration of data and intelligence which suggests there may be scope to mitigate against potential discontinuation from a local capacity perspective. However, carefully attention would need be given to how the needs of vulnerable children currently accessing provision at Monksfield Way in particular, would be met should any potential change be agreed for implementation.

2.38 A high level of risk has been identified for provision delivered from the following Children's Centres:

- Romsey Close;
- Chalvey Grove; and
- Yew Tree Road.

2.39 Data and local intelligence indicates that the demand for early learning and childcare in the 3 catchment areas above, where this provision is located is high, with limited scope for external providers to address any reduction in offer in the short to mid-term. Advice received from local independent providers also suggests that some settings in these areas are experiencing significant recruitment challenges impacting on their capacity to meet need.

Proposal for change

2.40 Given the need and opportunity to remodel Children’s Centre arrangements and the fact that the current model primarily concerned with a resourced to deliver childcare, it is proposed that consideration be given to the following summary options for potential discontinuation of directly delivered early education and childcare provided from the centres.

2.41 The information below serves as summary of identified options in relation to the direct delivery of early education and childcare via SBC’s Children’s Centre together with reference to the number of children potential affected by the changes.

| Early education and childcare delivery options | Potential benefits | Potential constraints |
|--|--|--|
| 1. To discontinue all directly delivered early education and childcare provision provided by the Council through its Children’s Centres | Reduces cost and potentially enables the wider economy of providers in the market to expand their provision where demand requires | Full discontinuation would present challenges in ensuring sufficiency requirements are met and access for vulnerable children in particular maintained. Family access choices will also be limited. It would be challenging to enable the market to fully address potential gaps in provision in the short to mid-term. |
| Total number of children attending provision as of Sept 2022 potentially affected by option for change: 347 | | Total number of vulnerable children potentially affect by option for change: 197 / 347 |
| 2. To discontinue directly delivered early education and childcare provision provided by the Council from 7 Children’s Centres whilst maintaining direct delivery via Chalvey Grove and Romsey Close Children’s Centre and stand alone provision at Yew Tree Road. (Recommended) | Reduces cost and potentially enables the wider economy of providers in the market to expand their provision where demand requires whilst maintaining provision in key areas of need and demand | Discontinuation will present challenges in ensuring sufficiency requirements are met although analysis indicates this risk can be addressed through actions to mitigate impact with particular regard to market engagement and the phasing of change to minimise any negative impact. Due consideration needs to be given to the access needs of vulnerable children in particular |

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| | | |
| Total number of children attending provision as of Sept 2022 potentially affected by option for change: 176 | Total number of vulnerable children potentially affect by option for change: 144 / 176 | |
| 3. To discontinue directly delivered early education and childcare provision provided by the Council from 8 Children's Centres whilst maintaining direct delivery Chalvey Grove and stand alone provision at Yew Tree Road. | Reduces cost and enables the wider economy of providers in the market to potentially expand their provision where demand requires whilst maintaining provision in key areas of need and demand | Discontinuation will present challenges in ensuring sufficiency requirements are met although analysis indicates this risk can be addressed through actions to mitigate impact with particular regard to market engagement and the phasing of change to minimise any negative impact. Due consideration needs to be given to the access needs of vulnerable children in particular |
| Total number of children attending provision as of Sept 2022 potentially affected by option for change: 203 | Total number of vulnerable children potentially affect by option for change: 157 / 203 | |
| 3. To continue to provide existing childcare arrangements | No changes will be made to existing provision. | <p>The target savings for reducing buildings will not be achieved.</p> <p>The Council will continue to subsidise childcare costs by provision of buildings.</p> <p>The Council will continue to directly provide a significant number of childcare places without a clear rationale as to why this is appropriate, which is contrary to the legislation.</p> <p>The Council continuing to provide a significant number of childcare places has the potential of distorting the market and putting other childcare operators out of business or preventing new providers entering the market.</p> |

2.42 It should be noted that the implementation of any of the above options would require careful consideration in terms of transition. The proposed consultation process should be used to increase understanding of the provider market and the scope for it to either assume the undertaking of provision currently provided by SBC where appropriate and feasible to do so or develop provision to address demand where required.

2.43 A phased approach would be required so that families potentially affected by any change are supported to make timely, alternative arrangements for childcare should this be necessary. It should also be noted that careful attention would also need to be paid to

implementation from the perspective of impact on staff whose employment may be affected by any agreed change.

2.44 The table below provides a ‘centre by centre’ summary of the bearing these options have on each of the current centre’s offer of directly delivered early learning and childcare should they be pursued.

| Current Children’s Centre location | Maintained as Council delivered early education and childcare | | |
|---|--|-----------------|-----------------|
| | Option 1 | Option 2 | Option 3 |
| Chalvey Grove | No | Yes | Yes |
| Elliman Avenue | No | No | No |
| Monksfield Way | No | No | No |
| Orchard Avenue | No | No | No |
| Penn Road | No | No | No |
| Romsey Close | No | Yes | No |
| St Andrew’s Way | No | No | No |
| Vicarage Way | No | No | No |
| Wexham Road | No | No | No |
| Yew Tree Road | No | Yes | Yes |

Implementation

2.45 Should approval to consult be granted, a consultation process with key stakeholders will be enacted as part of an overall ‘options for change to Children’s Centres’ consultation process.

2.46 Current analysis suggests that a phased approach to enacting change would be required. If the recommended option were to be approved, a three-phase process would be applied, summarised as follows:

2.47 Phase 1: Discontinuation of directly delivered childcare from:

- St Andrews Way;
- Vicarage Way;
- Wexham Road;
- Elliman Avenue; and
- Orchard Avenue.

2.48 Phase 2: Discontinuation of directly delivered childcare from:

- Monksfield Way; and
- Penn Road.

2.49 Discontinuation in phase 2 enabled through engagement with local providers to ensure sufficient provision is in place to meet need.

2.50 Ongoing consideration would be given to future options for maintained provision at Chalvey Grove, Romsey Close and Yew Tree Road allied to continued market engagement activity.

Timescales

2.51 The following indicative milestones and timescales have been drafted for implementation should authorisation be granted to consult on the options for change as outlined.

| Milestone | Timescale |
|---|---|
| Secure cabinet authorisation to consult | 19 th December 2022 |
| Commence consultation | Week beginning 9 th January 2023 |
| Conclude consultation process | Week beginning 13 th February 2023 |
| Collate consultation findings and produce final recommendations | Week beginning 20 th 2023 |
| Present final recommendations for Cabinet consideration | Cabinet 20 th March 2023 |
| Commence implementation process | Week beginning 24 th April 2023 |
| Conclude implementation process | July 2023 |

3. Summary

3.1 Consultation would enable the testing of the options outlined in this report, securing resident and wider stakeholder views on how best to make changes to current arrangements for the provision of the services in question.

3.2 Parallel consideration has been given to the two related areas of service namely, the Children’s Centre programme and SBC delivered early education and childcare. Related review work and analysis has concluded that change is required to both elements in order to re-establish a Children’s Centre delivery model that is able to focus on core Children’s Centre requirements. The combination of the 2 preferred options, would see the creation of an integrated Centre model, that maintained aspects of early learning and childcare, where data and analysis suggest it is essential to do so, whilst releasing resource to enable dedicated Children’s Centre capacity to be created.

3.3 The model may then be aligned to the revised early help strategy in general, and the development of a family network and hub model in particular in order to contribute to a strengthened whole systems process or supporting families.

Background

4.1 As advised, work has been carried out to explore the feasibility of modifying existing arrangements for the provision of Children’s Centres. The detail of this work may be found in appended review reports and is summarised in the main body of this report.

4.2 The following information has been generated from this review work, which has in turn informed the options outlined for consultation:

- Consider reduction in the current number of centres to consolidate the offer and enable an increase in identification and targeting of support for those most in need;
- Consider the application of a ‘centre without walls’ approach by reducing the number of physical centres and developing a more flexible, peripatetic approach to fulfilling the functions of the service;
- Consider the discontinuation of the provision of directly delivered early years provision where data and local intelligence indicates sufficiency levels can be maintained without it and / or; enable the wider economy of providers to take up provision in areas of need where necessary; and
- Work towards ensuring any continuation of directly delivered provision is cost neutral and / or transferred to the market to provide.

4.3 Collective analysis of needs assessment data, review findings and the resultant case for change have informed the drafting of the options referenced in this report.

4.4 Should approval be given, consultation on these options will be undertaken with a view to securing stakeholder views and opinions on potential changes so that recommendations can be produced for Cabinet consideration in due course.

5. Implications of the Recommendation

5.1 Financial implications

5.1.1 The four options in this paper have been costed for savings based on them being independent of each other. The existing budget for Option 4, do nothing, is the base against which the savings of the other 3 options are measured and presented below.

5.1.2 The following table shows the overall saving for each option split between Children's Services cost savings (staffing, supplies and services) and income foregone. Offsetting the total saving achievable is a saving of £277k which was put forward as part of the 2022/23 budget proposals but which as at period 6 is currently not deliverable. The options put forward will enable this outstanding saving to be achieved, hence the total additional budget saving generated by the option selected would be reduced by this amount. The do nothing option results in an ongoing pressure of £277k as this would no longer be deliverable.

| Option | Description | Cost saving | Lost Income | Total Savings | Deferred 2022/23 Savings | Further Savings Potential |
|--------|--|-------------|-------------|---------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| | | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 |
| 1 | 3 Children's Centres Romsey Close, Chalvey Grove, Penn Road plus Yew Tree Road Early Education and Childcare provision | 1,053 | (622) | 431 | 277 | 154 |
| 2 | 2 Children's Centres and Chalvey and Yew Tree Early Education and Childcare provision | 1,564 | (1,148) | 416 | 277 | 139 |
| 3 | 1 Children's Centre | 2,348 | (1,909) | 439 | 277 | 162 |
| 4 | Do nothing | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | (277) |

5.1.3 The above reductions in options 1 to 3 ignore the potential reduction in property operating costs such as business rates and utilities. The budget in respect of this expenditure on premises which would no longer be required by the Children's directorate would be upward of £450k and this would revert to the Housing & Property directorate. However this would not result in an immediate saving of this amount as many of these costs would continue to be incurred until such time as an alternative use/occupant could be found. Were a new occupant (e.g. another

childcare provider) identified then these costs could be recharged to the tenant, along with a commercial rent. This would be subject to planning permission, other conditional restrictions on use, capital investment etc and so no estimate has been made in this regard and does not form part of the decision requested in this paper.

5.2 Legal implications

5.2.1 The Council's duties are multi-faceted and include the following legal duties

- To improve well-being of young children in their area, and reduce inequalities between young children in their area.
- Make arrangements to secure that early childhood services in their area are provided in an integrated manner to facilitate access to services and maximise benefit - early childhood services include early years, but not exclusively. This must be informed by information about the views of young children and the quantity and quality of early childhood services and where those services are provided. The duty includes requirements to involve parents and prospective parents, early years providers and other relevant people in making and implementation of arrangements.
- The duty to work with relevant partners and provide staff, goods, services, accommodation or other resources or to pool funding of relevant partners - relevant partners are health bodies.
- The duty to provide sufficient childcare for working parents - this is a duty to secure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that provision of childcare is sufficient.
- The duty to secure early years provision free of charge for specific children.
- The power to assist any person who provides or proposes to provide childcare; make arrangements with any other person for the provision of childcare and provide childcare (but only if satisfied that no other person is willing to provide the childcare for a particular child or group of children or it is otherwise appropriate to provide it).

5.2.2 Where arrangements provided for provision of childcare in consideration for financial assistance the council must exercise functions with a view to securing that the provider of the childcare meets any requirements imposed.

5.2.3 There is no duty to directly provide childcare, rather it is intended that formal childcare should be provided in the main by providers in the private and voluntary sectors and schools with the cost being met by parents, some of whom will be eligible to claim tax credits in respect of qualifying childcare.

5.2.4 Ongoing consideration will need to be given to the legislative framework for this area of provision so that any recommendations determined for future consideration following consultation, are informed by the need to meet statutory duties as outlined.

5.3 Risk management implications

| Risks | Potential impact | Mitigating actions |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Failure to maintain Children's Centre sufficiency | <p>Breach of statutory duty and potential resultant action including Judicial Review.</p> <p>Inability of families, particularly the vulnerable to access early childhood services.</p> | <p>Ensure new model has capacity to deliver core functions.</p> <p>Work with partners so that core offer is maintained with emphasis placed on revised model coordinating offer and providing outreach and family support.</p> |
| 2. Failure to maintain early education and childcare sufficiency | <p>Breach of statutory duty and potential resultant action including Judicial Review.</p> <p>Inability of families to access early education and childcare with residual impact on child (early education) and family (employment risk for example).</p> <p>Inability of vulnerable children including those with SEND to access early education.</p> | <p>Undertake analysis to assess impact on demand and sufficiency.</p> <p>Work with the market to encourage and enable alternative provision as required.</p> <p>Phase implementation in order to manage impact. Work with external providers to support and enable inclusion.</p> |
| 3. High levels of resident dissatisfaction with changes | High level of complaints, members enquiries and / or petitions. | Carry out robust consultation and develop and implement detailed communications plan. |
| 4. Failure to meet statutory requirement to effectively consult on changes | Breach of statutory duty and potential Judicial Review. | Carry out robust consultation and develop and implement detailed communications plan. |
| 5. Inability to continue to accommodate core offer partnership activity | Inability of families to access critical early childhood services, particularly midwifery and health visiting. | Phase implementation to manage impact and maintain key partnership services from existing sites where necessary in the interim. |
| 6. Inability to make alternative use of assets, surplus to service requirements | Sites remain vacant and require ongoing maintenance. | Research potential alternative use options informed by scope and limitations of facilities. This work will be driven primarily by the Asset Disposals Programme Team to ensure that, where possible, surplus assets will be brought forward for disposal and |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| | | any retained are effectively managed through the future Asset Management Plan. |
| 7. Failure to manage transition effectively | Parents experience major difficulty in finding alternative provision in a timely fashion. | Phase implementation in order to manage impact with particular regard to needs of parents in finding alternatives. |
| 8. Clawback of capital grant afforded to construct centres | Financial impact on cost and savings projections. | Determine cost and factor in to cost and savings profile. |
| 9. Loss of preventative capacity which minimises children's social care demand | Increase in demand for statutory children's social care. | Work with targeted early help and Children's Social Care to manage transition as part of Early help Strategy development. |
| 10. Insufficient capacity to lead and implement change | Change is inadequately led and managed resulting in timelines and deliverables not being achieved. | assigning adequate and appropriate leadership and operational implementation capacity to deliver the project successfully. |

5.4 Environmental implications

5.4.1 No environmental implications identified.

5.5 Equality implications

4.5.1 This report presents options for making changes to the current children's centre delivery model. It seeks to secure approval to consult on the options presented.

5.5.2 An interim Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) has been drafted and attached as appendix 5 to this report. They will be reviewed and further developed subject to the approval of recommendations and the outcomes of related consultation activity.

5.6 Procurement implications

5.6. No procurement implications identified

5.7 Workforce implications

5.7.1 All presented options for consultation have workforce implications which include the potential need to consult with the staff on proposed changes to the service should they be recommended and agreed. Staff will be actively engaged in the consultation process with any further workforce implications determined and addressed, subject to the outcomes of the consultation process and any resultant changes that may be recommended.

5.8 Property implications

5.8.1 Responsibility for the effective management of the ten assets sits within the Property and Housing Directorate and the recently adopted Disposals Strategy includes the following provisions with regards disposal/leasing the Council's properties:

5.8.2 As a general principle, any new property arrangements should be on commercial terms and decisions should be made informed by the full cost of an asset. For lease arrangements, this will be on a Full Repairs and Insurance [FRI] basis with market-facing commercial terms unless otherwise justified.

5.8.3 There is a property cost with regards the provision of this service that needs to be accounted for within and covered by the Children's Services Directorate to show the true cost of this service provision and to not show as a pressure within the Property and Housing Directorate.

5.8.4 Each of the options being considered within this paper have significant implications for the Property function by the creation of between 6 and 9 assets being no longer used for their designed function. Preliminary work has already been carried out on the 10 assets which has determined:

- The majority of these sites are within school premises and therefore are likely to require Secretary of State approval for disposal.
- Advice from Planners which details which proposed uses are acceptable without applying for planning permission. The centres currently fall under Use Class F1(a) which is for the provision of education. If the children's centres are to provide medical or health services, then this would fall under use class E and would require change of use planning permission.
- The William Penn and Monksfield Way present the best opportunity for alternative use as they both have their own access and can be easily separated from the adjoining schools.
- Access to Chalvey Grove and Romsey is currently shared with the school but there are opportunities for alternative access.
- Yew Tree Road has potential use as an NHS hub
- One of the main issues with alternative use will be access as most of these centres sit within school grounds or have narrow access.
- In particular, Wexham Road and James Elliman centres fall within the school grounds and separation will be an issue.

6. Background Papers

1. Needs Assessment Summary
2. Children's Centre Review Report
3. Early Education and Childcare Review Report
4. Centre by Centre Implications Summary
5. Equalities Impact Assessment