

AGENDA MANAGEMENT SHEET

Name of Committee North Warwickshire Area Committee

Date of Committee 21st March 2007

Report Title Implications of the Childcare Act 2006 and development of Children's Centres

Summary This paper outlines the duties imposed on Local Authorities by the Childcare Act 2006 and gives information on the developments within North Warwickshire to meet them.

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Would the recommended decision be contrary to the Budget and Policy Framework? [please identify relevant plan/budget provision] No

Background papers

- Phase 2 Children's Centres – Cabinet report 2.11.06
- Developing a Strategy for Children's Centres across Warwickshire – Cabinet report 13.1.05

CONSULTATION ALREADY UNDERTAKEN:-

Details to be specified

Other Committees

Local Member(s)

Other Elected Members Spokespersons for information:
Cllr Richard Grant – “noted for consideration by the Area Committee”
Cllr Jill Dill-Russell – no comment to make
Cllr John Whitehouse

- Cabinet Member Cllr John Burton
- Other Cabinet Members consulted Cllr Izzi Seccombe – *“approve for consideration by the Area Committee”*
- Chief Executive
- Legal Victoria Gould – comments incorporated in the report
- Finance
- Other Strategic Directors
- District Councils
- Health Authority
- Police
- Other Bodies/Individuals

FINAL DECISION **YES**

SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS:

Details to be specified

- Further consideration by this Committee
- To Council
- To Cabinet
- To an O & S Committee
- To an Area Committee
- Further Consultation

North Warwickshire Area Committee – 21st March 2007

**Implications of the Childcare Act 2006 and
development of Children's Centres**

**Report of the Strategic Director for Children,
Young People and Families**

Recommendation:

That the Area Committee acknowledges the duties imposed on Warwickshire County Council by the Childcare Act 2006 and comments on the work in progress to meet them.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Childcare Act 2006 is the first piece of legislation that is solely dedicated to the provision of childcare and seeks to implement the proposals of the Government's ten year strategy for childcare, '*Choice for parents, the best start for children*' (December 2004).
- 1.2 The Act very clearly places a duty on Local Authorities to strategically lead the development of childcare facilities while working in partnership with other agencies in the statutory, private and voluntary sectors.

2. The duties imposed on Local Authorities

There are two main duties imposed on Local Authorities:

- (1) The Outcomes Duty
- (2) The Sufficiency Duty.

2.1 The 'outcomes' duty

- 2.1.1 This duty is imposed to improve the Every Child Matters outcomes for all children under five years of age, to improve their well-being and reduce inequalities in achievements by helping them to access integrated, high quality early childhood services. In discharging their duties Local Authorities are

required to work with partners in NHS, Jobcentre Plus, and private and voluntary sector providers to deliver services through Children's Centres.

2.1.2 It is this legislation that underpins the development of Children's Centres and prescribes the services that must be included:

- integrated early years provision – childcare and education
- a childminding network
- parenting education and family support services
- education, training and employment services
- health services relating to young children, parents or prospective parents
- provision of information to parents
- access to wider services.

2.1.3 It is the duty of the Local Authority to identify and assist those parents who would not otherwise access the services on offer and encourage them to take up those services.

2.2 The 'sufficiency' duty

2.2.1 Local Authorities are required to assess the local childcare market and secure sufficient childcare to enable parents to access work or education that would lead to employment opportunities. Childcare will only be deemed sufficient if it meets the needs of the community it serves but, in particular, it must meet the needs of families on lower incomes and families who have a disabled child.

2.2.2 Local Authorities must take the strategic lead in developing services but will not be expected to provide them directly.

3. How the Childcare Act is being implemented in North Warwickshire

3.1 Warwickshire is already developing a range of Children's Centres. Phase 1 of this initiative (2004/06) concentrated on the 20% most disadvantaged wards in the county but also incorporated Early Excellence Centres and Sure Start Local Programmes which were part of earlier initiatives.

3.2 Thirteen Children's Centres have been designated as part of the first phase. Two of these are in North Warwickshire; they are in Atherstone and Mancetter. The Atherstone Centre originates from the Nursery School and Early Excellence Centre, and the Mancetter Centre has evolved from the Mancetter Sure Start Local Programme. Local Programme which is now kno

3.3 Phase 2 of the programme concentrates on the 30% most disadvantaged Super Output Areas (SOAs) of the country and in Warwickshire it is intended that there will be 18 Children's Centres (on 21 sites) developed by March 2008.

- 3.4 In North Warwickshire in Phase 2 there will be a further two Children's Centres across three sites. These are at:
- Kingsbury Primary School
 - Birchwood and The Nethersole Primary Schools (this is a jointly developed project between the two schools with Birchwood acting as the main site).
- 3.5 These schools have been asked to confirm their preferred governance arrangements for their Children's Centre and where school governors have not expressed a wish to run the services themselves this will go out to a block tender during March 2007.
- 3.6 The main school sites have had detailed design drawings for their Children's Centre drawn up and we are currently awaiting decisions about Planning Permission for Birchwood. (The Children's Centre at Kingsbury Primary School is internal remodelling and refurbishment only so does not require Planning Permission.)
- 3.7 The detailed designs are also waiting for approval from Atkins (the Government appointed agents who oversee the capital aspect of this work). Atkins check designs, value for money, fitness of purpose, etc. The Capital Programme Project Team are confident that requirements are being addressed and this approval will be forthcoming in the near future. At this point the Capital Programme for Children's Centres locally is on track to achieve the deadline for completion (March 2008).
- 3.8 Alongside the capital development, all the Phase 2 Children's Centres are working on consulting locally with parents, identifying service needs and planning for operational delivery from March 2008. The progress of service development is monitored by local steering groups / partnerships and all work with the Area Manager for Early Years and Childcare in planning for high quality services from April 2008.
- 3.9 There is a network of Children's Centres from both Phases whose heads, managers and partners come together regularly to share good practice and ensure that target areas are being addressed. The Centres are also required to provide information on a quarterly basis, some of which is fed back to the Sure Start Unit.
- 3.10 All the existing designated Centres have input from one of the County's qualified early years teachers, all of whom are already familiar with the Early Years Foundation Stage and ready to implement it when final guidance is issued.
- 4.1 In addition to the Children's Centres development, work will continue, through the local North Warwickshire Provider Development Service, to offer training, advice and support to all registered providers of childcare, including childminders. Advisory Teachers and the Registration Adviser will continue the excellent work in which they are involved. The Provider Development Manager

will continue to lead local consultation, encouraging participation of providers through Early Years Forums and through the local newsletters.

- 4.2 An assessment of the sufficiency of childcare is being undertaken through a thorough needs analysis in each of the five districts in the county. Using the *Dartington i* research as a basis, information is being gathered at the five Provider Development Centres across the county and, from that, gaps in provision can be identified and addressed.

5. Proposals for Phase 3 Children's Centres

- 5.1 No information has yet been released about the scope or funding for Phase 3 Children's Centres. Funding for Phase 2 capital development and Phase 1 revenue has been set for 2006/07 and 2007/08 but there is no information beyond that.
- 5.2 The situation in Warwickshire is that if we achieve our target of creating 18 Children's Centres across 21 sites we will have reached our Phase 1 and 2 targets for reaching children and families. Furthermore, we will have incorporated the strategic development plans and will have sited Children's Centres in all priority areas, leaving only the gaps in service delivery to be considered.
- 5.3 It is the aim of the DfES and the Ten Year Childcare Strategy to ensure that there is a Children's Centre in every community by 2010 and that every child under five will have access to a Children's Centre. However, it is not clear at this stage to what extent those Children's Centres will have to meet the core offer. Although information about capital funding has not been released there are indications, which have been supported in speeches given by senior civil servants at various conferences, that it is unlikely that funding will be available at the levels seen in Phases 1 and 2.
- 5.4 If the core offer is not necessarily to be provided and there is no or very limited funding, the options for developing new Children's Centres are limited. Only by fully utilising existing resources are we likely to provide an acceptable service to families in Warwickshire, especially those living in rural areas.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 The Childcare Act 2006 has imposed new duties on Local Authorities to improve the well-being of children under five and to secure sufficient childcare to meet local demand. In doing so, Local Authorities must work with partners in other agencies, including the private and voluntary sector, to deliver services that will meet the performance indicators that have recently been issued by the DfES.

- 6.2 In North Warwickshire the development of Children's Centres is on track. Assessment of childcare available also indicates that there is sufficient provision to meet demand currently, but this will be monitored in accordance with our quarterly procedures to ensure that this level is maintained.
- 6.3 At this point we have no clear strategy from central government about Phase 3 of Children's Centre development. However, we are committed to providing Children's Centre services to all children in the county and need to be ready to move forward with proposals for development.

MARION DAVIS
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6th March 2007