

# Children's Centres Task & Finish Group

Findings of Task and Finish Group  
commissioned by Education and Children's  
Services Scrutiny Panel

September – December 2018



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## **Preface**

It gives me great pleasure to introduce the recommendations of the Children's Centres Task and Finish Group. The review was commissioned by the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel after a debate on 17<sup>th</sup> July 2018; the points raised in this discussion were addressed in the terms of reference which can be found at the start of the report.

In order to provide recommendations based on the widest possible evidence base, our Group has conducted a series of meetings and events to shape its views. These have included staff at Slough Borough Council and also at a number of our Children's Centres across Slough. Members present were impressed with the facilities on offer, the levels of investment that had been made in them and the commitment, knowledge and passion of the staff who led visits to these centres. As a result, we have confidence that the service is providing an excellent start in life for local children and providing good outcomes for them.

However, we also acknowledge that improvement is a continuous target and therefore we have made some recommendations regarding the service. These are available in the report and focus on areas such as extending service provision, developing relationships with partners such as Heathrow Airport and maximising the use of these excellent facilities. It is also our intention that the work will have a long term impact which can be measured; the progress being made on these recommendations will be monitored by the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel as appropriate over the coming months and years.

The Members of the Task and Finish Group would like to thank the officers and children's carers who have provided information to the Group. I would also like to thank Councillor Preston Brooker, Councillor Atiq Sandhu and Councillor Wayne Strutton for all their work and support in completing this project, as well as the stakeholders listed at the end of this report.

**Councillor Mohammed Sharif**  
**Chair of the Children's Centres Task and Finish Group**



## Terms of reference

**The following terms of reference were proposed by the Task & Finish Group following a meeting on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2018.**

1. To investigate and make recommendations on the following matters:
  - 1.1 The current provision of children's centre services across Slough
  - 1.2 The delivery of children's centre services
  - 1.3 The potential range of delivery models
  - 1.4 The alignment of any proposed models against the council's statutory duties
  - 1.5 The oversight of any review of children's centres.

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## Summary of Recommendations

The Task and Finish Group would like to propose the following recommendations based on its investigations:

- 1) Maintain the standard of buildings with regular checking of facilities.
- 2) Ensure the relationship with Heathrow is developed to support Children's Centres in the surrounding area.
- 3) Investigate the cost of extending the offer to children and families across higher phases in Slough.
- 4) Build on the excellent relationships with delivery partners to extend and consolidate the offer.
- 5) Explore further the opportunities for other agencies to operate out of children's centres (e.g. libraries) to deliver satellite services.
- 6) Establish more formal opportunities for children's centres to generate additional income by letting out parts of the building in a manner which does not impact on service delivery or compromise safeguarding arrangements.

# **1 Background to the Review**

## **1.1 Introduction**

The issue was first raised by the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel on 17<sup>th</sup> July 2018. This was in response to questions that members had asked regarding the service since Slough Children's Services Trust had become operational in 2015, and Slough Borough Council had retained responsibility for the service under arrangements between the two organisations. Members were aware of the fact that all centres had received ratings of 'Good' or 'Outstanding' in their most recent Ofsted inspections, and also had seen significant levels of investment under the Asset Management Plan.

Overall, attainment levels across Slough are at an excellent level. There are just over 13,000 under 5's in Slough, and the centres were managing this high level of demand. Indeed, statistics regarding attainment were 2.5% above national average.

As a result, this review was not commissioned on the basis of immediate concerns over the level of service provision, but rather because members were aware of the vital role that early years provision had in preparing infants for school. It has also been a long term interest to members, and therefore an area where they wished to see the service in action and have an opportunity to discuss matters with staff. Finally, members were also interested to inquire about the wider provision such centres offered to support parents and families in their responsibilities.

The Task and Finish Group was chaired by Councillor Mohammed Sharif and membership comprised Councillor Preston Brooker, Councillor Atiq Sandhu and Councillor Wayne Strutton.

## **1.2 The Approach**

Given the above, the logical structure of the review was one which focused on site visits. The initial meeting to form the recommendations also took a series of documents regarding provision in Slough and the surrounding legislative structure which defined the Council's responsibilities.

After this, the Group focused on site visits; these covered two centres which offered 8am – 6pm provision 51 weeks a year (Full Service sites) and two which operated from 8.15am – 4.15pm during term times only for early education and children's centre services at other times (Graduated sites). The visits examined all aspects of provision, from babies and infants to services for families, and were led by members of staff at each Children's Centre.

The information from these events is included in section 2 of this report, and was used to formulate the recommendations at the start of this document. These recommendations were compiled by the Task & Finish Group at its meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2018.

## **2 Information gathered**

### **2.1 Site Visits – Full Service Sites (Penn Road and Chalvey Grove Children’s Centres)**

- 2.1.1 Penn Road has an ‘Outstanding’ rating from Ofsted, which had been confirmed by a recent review from a former inspector. Despite the issues that many of its children had prior to attending the Centre (e.g. over half had English as a Foreign Language) it had a good track record on making progress with individuals.
- 2.1.2 The site featured one side dedicated to meetings for the wider family. This included an Adult Education Room, the Small Meeting Room and the Family Room. These provided a range of environments sensitive to the requirements of the types of meeting they hosted, with rooms being adaptable. The SEND Outreach Team also used these rooms as required. In addition, services such as baby weighing, parenting classes and English language sessions were on offer.
- 2.1.3 The Family Room also hosted events where skills for children were emphasised; on the day of the site visit a ‘Little Writers’ session was held, but provision also included ‘Little Scientists’ and ‘Little Writers’. The Family Room also had a series of sections to offer clearly defined spaces for different activities and was keen to display the children, their work and their parents to create a welcoming environment. Key messages were also promoted (e.g. Child Safety Week) with relevant guests invited to support this work.
- 2.1.4 The other side of the campus housed Early Years provision. This covered children from 3 months to young school children attending after school activities, and included those using their 15 or 30 hours of entitlement to free nursery care (as well as fee payers). Uptake for free care was high in the area, especially given the proportion of parents involved in shift work. There was an onsite chef who prepared all food on site to control the healthy content of the food and any allergy issues. The Centre had also been awarded Gold Level under the ‘Healthy Smiles’ scheme.
- 2.1.5 The Baby and Transition Room could house up to 9 babies and operated under the required 1 to 3 ratio. It adapted to the needs of babies rather than the other way round, given the role it had in socialising infants (as the first time they had spent away from parents). The Older Toddler Room was an expansive environment and was themed in a similar fashion to the Family Room. It also featured an extensive outdoor area which had recently been renovated using funds from the Asset Management Plan; this included a garden as well as a covered play area. A ‘Book of the Month’ was also promoted in this area, with related activities for children; parents were encouraged to participate in this. Key message such as vaccination and the role of messy play in development were also publicised.
- 2.1.6 The work of the Centre was based on matching the early years curriculum, the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), with local needs. Attainment levels from Key Stages 1 to 4 were used to map the likely requirements of children attending the Centre. The Centre also had a close relationship with the adjoining Penn Wood School as well as other educational establishments (e.g. The Montessori School). Slough’s results at the end of the foundation stage are above the national average and currently stand at 73.6% of Slough children securing a Good Level of development (GLD) which is 2.1% above the national average.
- 2.1.7 The Centre also worked on safeguarding issues and related matters. A Child Protection Conference was being held on the day of the visit, with the Centre having had a good experience with Slough Children’s Services Trust. The Centre operated as a front door for services twice a week, and was also an integrated part of the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub; referrals were made as required. It had access to social workers, with children having

experienced a level of relative stability in terms of the staff charged with their cases. Handovers had also improved under the Trust, whilst the Early Help Offer had been of benefit as practitioners could liaise and co-ordinate their work more effectively. Threshold training had also been organised for the relevant members of staff. As with all Children's Centres in Slough, supervised brushing sessions were in place to remedy issues with oral health in local children. Parents would also be challenged on the drinks given to children, use of pushchairs and other health matters as appropriate.

- 2.1.8 The Centre was engaged with the apprenticeship scheme and benefitted from the commitment of its predominantly local staff. Where necessary, staff would refer issues to the Housing Service where potential help had been identified.
- 2.1.9 Meanwhile, Chalvey Grove Children's Centre serves local residents in a deprived area with a high turnover of residents. Its ethos centres on providing a constant in a changeable community. It also provided good levels of attainment amongst its children, many of whom started from relatively disadvantaged points. As well as provision for children, it also worked with families on issues such as housing where support was required. Activities such as local walks with exercises for children such as nature spotting were offered to encourage cohesion and address childhood obesity targets. The Nursery and Early Years provision was the first children's centre in Slough to participate in the Active Movement programme.
- 2.1.10 The Younger Main Room (for 2 year olds) and Family Room (for younger infants) had been swapped over in May 2018. This had been to offer 2 year olds a larger outdoor area; this had already had a positive impact on the attainment of boys. There was also a baby room which was refurbished in 2016, which currently hosted 6 children and could take up to 9. Funding from the Asset Management Plan had been used to expand the facilities on offer and ensure the building was more durable. The Centre also had prominent displays on issues such as oral health and healthy eating.
- 2.1.11 The Older Main Nursery was home to 24 children and could host up to 48. This area also had an extensive outdoor play area with a large amount of wooden equipment. There was a considerable waiting list to join the Centre, but its popularity meant that no children had left in 2018 (other than those graduating to school). It also had close links to the neighbouring school, with meetings held with the Head Teacher once a term. The Centre also had a 5 Year Plan, based on an analysis of the local population, its needs and other relevant variables involved in strategic considerations.

## **2.2 Site Visits – Graduated Sites (Yew Tree Road and Vicarage Way Children's Centres)**

- 2.2.1 Yew Tree Road Children's Centre is very popular and well attended, and has a good relationship with the Primary School (St Mary's) situated next to it. Most children graduate to St Mary's, and the link is promoted in terms of assisting with transition and progress (e.g. gates between the centre and the school are open). It also offers other popular services, such as the health visitors clinic (every Friday) which provides weighing, breast feeding and support. It also made referrals to the local food bank as well as a comprehensive range of wider children's centres services including family support and home visiting.
- 2.2.2 The ethos of the centre emphasises active movement, inclusivity and a varied environment. Indeed, pioneering work regarding active movement was being undertaken at Yew Tree, whilst children with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) were integrated into provision rather than receiving separate care. Staff also stressed early intervention to assist with readiness for school, and support for parents to ensure that the centre's work was supported at home.



- 2.2.3 The environment also provided a choice of indoor or outdoor activities, forming part of the continuous provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS); boys tended to learn better outdoors, and girls indoors, but all needed active lifestyles too. The indoor area was well utilised and had themed areas to offer a varied environment, and featured a highly efficient use of this space. Ofsted's latest inspection rated the centre as 'good', and praised the individual nature of provision and care and the themed indoor environment in particular.
- 2.2.4 Support for parents also included monthly reading classes to help them read stories to their children, and overall language skills were offered. There was a wide range of languages amongst local parents and staff, and this was used to help with encouraging these skills. The centre also worked on settling-in periods with new children to ensure that they could participate fully in life at the children's centre.
- 2.2.5 Vicarage Way Children's Centre supports a less populated part of Slough but is popular with children and families that use its services. Sessions are well attended and there is a good mix of children who access their early education entitlements. The centre has a waiting list for children to attend 3 and 4 yr. old places. As a stand alone children's centre the staff work across the reach area in order to maintain links with local schools and early years providers.
- 2.2.6 The centre is open from 8.45am to 4.15pm term time only for early education and at timetabled times for all other children's centre services. Centre staff promote active movement opportunities.
- 2.2.7 The centre houses a satellite library and has seen an increase in local use during this last term.
- 2.2.8 Centre staff work closely with families housed in the nearby hostel to ensure their needs are met and broker opportunities for children to access early education places and children's centre services where appropriate/available.

### **3 List of Meetings and Events**

The following meetings were held by the Task & Finish Group:

- |                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| 25 <sup>th</sup> September 2018: | Formation of terms of reference              |
| 5 <sup>th</sup> October 2018:    | Site Visit – Yew Tree Road Children’s Centre |
| 31 <sup>st</sup> October 2018:   | Site Visit – Penn Road Children’s Centre     |
| 1 <sup>st</sup> November 2018:   | Site Visit – Vicarage Way Children’s Centre  |
| 5 <sup>th</sup> November 2018:   | Site Visit – Chalvey Grove Children’s Centre |
| 13 <sup>th</sup> December 2018:  | Formation of recommendations                 |

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## 4 Acknowledgements

The Obesity Task & Finish Group would like to note it's thanks to the following contributors and witnesses, whose input helped form its recommendations:

### Slough Borough Council:

Michael Jarrett	-	Service Lead Early Years and Development, Slough.
Emma Briggs	-	Early Years Manager, Penn Road Children's Centre
Joanna Mullin	-	Senior Family Services Officer, Penn Road Children's Centre
Jane Jones	-	Deputy Early Years Manager, Yew Tree Road Children's Centre
Bella Dean	-	Early Years Manager, Chalvey Grove Children's Centre
Julie Francis	-	Family Services Officer, Chalvey Grove Children's Centre
Marie-Claire Avis	-	Senior Coordinator Operations, all children's centres
Jacqui Shadrache	-	Healthy Eating Practitioner, all children's centres.

### The following resources were also used in background research:

The Childcare Act 2006	Central Government
Sure Start Statutory Guidance	Department for Education
Main Requirements	Department for Education
Slough Children's Centre Map	SBC, Early Years Service
The Children's Centre Core Offer	SBC, Early Years Service
Services broken down with attendances	SBC, Early Years Service

Action Plan	By when	How
1) Maintain the standard of buildings with regular checking of facilities	2018-2023	5 year maintenance and refurbishment plan in place for 10 CCs. There is £2.5 million to be spent over the next 5 years. The Refit Programme will link into this, to ensure that the CCs are energy efficient
	2023 onwards	Facilities, Property Services and the Children's Centres will have continuing schedules of work, PPM (Pre Planned Maintenance), Service plans and contracts for monthly maintenance. Currently undertaken: annual deep cleaning of kitchens, carpet cleaning
	end 2018	Garden Project- £244,000 spent to improve the outdoor areas of the Children's centres- making them more attractive and enhancing the learning opportunities for children
2) Ensure the relationship with Heathrow is developed to support Children's Centres in the surrounding area.	May-19	Set up a working group to look at any potential grants available from Heathrow, ensuring that this is coordinated with other departments and Councillors within SBC. Potential grants include: grants for young people, environmental and sustainability grants, communities together to help reach isolated members of the community. This will impact Vicarage Way Children's Centre.
3) Investigate the cost of extending the offer to children and families across higher phases in Slough.	Apr-19	Set up a working group to look at the suitability of the CC buildings; refurbish to make age appropriate designated areas ; Review the current Children's Centre offer; Develop staff training to help with the wider service delivery; room hire to facilitate tutoring for 11+ and GCSE, provision of the 0-19 offer
4) Build on the excellent relationships with delivery partners to extend and consolidate the offer.	Sep-19	Review current offer and look at the integration of the 0-19 offer to consolidate into a sustainable holistic, target driven offer; internal staff retraining and re-profiling of duties i.e. ante natal support; commissioning partner agencies to deliver services in the 0-19 (25 for children with SEND) range, the children's centre family services offer is an integrated part of phase two of new Early Help offer for Slough; currently integrated into Early Years Service and will continue to work across the sector with 0-19.
5) Explore further the opportunities for other agencies to operate out of children's centres (e.g. libraries) to deliver satellite services.	Mar-19	Re-purposing the small meeting room in Chalvey Grove Children's Centre into a satellite library.
	Feb-19	Wi Fi to be installed in 6 Children's centres to help support public access PCs for the wider public
	Apr-19	Re-purposing areas to widen the offer i.e. changing the flooring in VWCC to enable Public Health to run Diabetes Clinics
	ongoing	Contact meetings facilitated in the CCs for neighbouring Local Authorities to increase income for SBC

6) Establish more formal opportunities for children's centres to generate additional income by letting out parts of the building in a manner which does not impact on service delivery or safeguarding arrangements.

Apr-19

Working group to meet to put together a full programme of services including: trading skilled services such as Baby Massage, Auditing, Risk Assessments and Training; room hire for the wider community and neighbouring local authorities

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