

Report to Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Education & Skills

Decision to be taken on or after 11 April 2013

Decision can normally be implemented at least 3 working days after decision has been signed

Cabinet Member Report No. DLES12.13

Title: Transfer of five County Council run Children's Centres to the management of Barnardo's

Date: 3 April 2013

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Local members affected: Mike Appleyard - Cabinet Member for Education and Skills
Julia Wassell- Councillor for Bowerdean, Micklefield & Totteridge
Chaudhary Ditta- Councillor for Bowerdean, Micklefield & Totteridge
Bruce Allen- Councillor for Chalfont St Peter
Douglas Anson- Councillor for Marlow
Richard Scott- Councillor for Marlow
Timothy Butcher – Councillor for Chalfonts and Seers Green
Martin Tett – Councillor for The Chalfonts and Seers Green
David Watson – Councillor for Thames

For press enquiries concerning this report, please contact the media office on 01296 382444

Summary

The Council's duty is to secure sufficient Children's Centres provision to meet local need and to consult before any significant changes.

There are 35 Children's Centres across Buckinghamshire, delivered by four organisations:



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- The County Council, which delivers 21 Children's Centres
- Barnardo's, which delivers 11 Children's Centres
- The Healthy Living Centre, which delivers two Children's Centres
- Disraeli School, which delivers one Children's Centre.

Children's Centres are subject to Ofsted inspections and recent judgements of the in-house centres indicate that the in-house Centres are not performing well. The recommendation is to transfer five of the in-house Centres to Barnardo's. This will provide an opportunity for a current provider of Children's Centres in Buckinghamshire to turn around the performance of these five Centres and for the in-house management team to focus on bringing sustained improvement to the remaining 16 Centres.

There has been a consultation undertaken with the five Centres' staff, Advisory Boards and parents. There have also been four petitions published online, which have received more than 1,000 signatures. It is because of these petitions that a Cabinet Member decision has become necessary.

Recommendation

The Cabinet Member for Education and Skills is recommended to agree that the management of five Children's Centres, which are currently managed by Bucks County Council be transferred to the management of Barnardo's.

As part of the implementation there will be a transition plan which will include arrangements for BCC staff to continue to provide outreach support to families they are currently working with for up to six months, giving continuity for the families that are most in need of support.

A. Narrative setting out the reasons for the decision

1. **Legislation**
 - 1.1 The Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 inserted new sections into Section 5D of the Childcare Act 2006, which mean that local authorities are under a duty to secure sufficient Children's Centres provision to meet local need so far as is reasonably practicable.
 - 1.2 The Childcare Act places a duty on local authorities to secure that such consultation as they think is appropriate is carried out before three types of action are taken in relation to a children's centre.
 - making arrangements for the provision of a children's centre, i.e. before establishing a new children's centre;
 - making any significant change in the services provided through an existing children's centre;
 - doing anything which would result in a children's centre ceasing to be a children's centre, i.e. either closing it or reducing the services provided to such an extent that it no longer meets the statutory definition of a Sure Start Children's Centre.
2. **The current arrangements for Children's Centres in Buckinghamshire**
 - 2.1 There are 35 Children's Centres across Buckinghamshire, delivered by four providers: Bucks County Council (21 Centres), Barnardo's (11 Centres), Healthy Living Centre (2 Centres) and Disraeli School (1 Centre).
 - 2.2 The performance of all of the Children's Centres, in-house and externally provided, is monitored in the same way, including through:

- A review undertaken each year (Annual Conversation) with each Children's Centre by a panel of professionals, including from Commissioning, social care and health.
- A User Satisfaction Survey conducted each year with users and non-users of Centres. A summary report is then produced for each Children's Centre. More than 2,000 responses were received this year.
- A report is produced each quarter for each Children's Centre summarising attendance by target groups and outcome information.

3. **The need for change**

3.1 The Council's performance monitoring information has shown that the in-house Centres are performing less well than the other providers.

3.2 Children's Centres are subject to Ofsted inspections. There have been 14 inspections of Children's Centres in Buckinghamshire, of which 13 are BCC Centres and the other was the Healthy Living Centre. Barnardo's and Disraeli Centres are yet to be inspected. These inspections have shown that the in-house Centres are performing poorly in comparison to other Children's Centres nationally:

- 36% are achieving good or outstanding for overall effectiveness, compared to 69% nationally.
- 36% are achieving good or outstanding for capacity for sustained improvement compared to 71% nationally
- There are no outstanding Centres compared to 13% nationally.
- There are 7% that were judged inadequate at their first inspection compared to 2% nationally.

3.3 Further changes to the Ofsted Inspection framework for Children's Centres are planned for 2013 and it is likely that the Satisfactory grade will be removed from the framework to be replaced with Inadequate or Requires Improvement. All Centres must therefore be able to evidence sustained improvement over the coming months and years and evidence they are moving towards becoming a Good or an Outstanding Centre.

3.4 Work is being done to improve the performance of the in-house Centres but more radical change is needed in order to improve the long-term sustainability and quality of the services and support offered by County Council Centres overall.

3.5 Transferring five Centres to a provider with a track record of successfully delivering Children's Centres will bring an opportunity to drive up the performance of these centres.

3.6 Evidence that Barnardo's has a good track record of successfully delivering Children's Centres nationally is:

- They run 132 Centres nationally, of which 19% are Phase 1, 52% are Phase 2, and 29% are Phase 3.
- Barnardo's centres are higher than the national average with 71% of those inspected rated as good or outstanding, and 29% rated as satisfactory.
- Barnardo's have no Children's Centres rated as inadequate.

3.7 Performance monitoring information for the 11 Centres in Buckinghamshire that Barnardo's run shows that they are performing well and significantly better than the in-house Centres. For example:

- In the 2012 Annual Conversations, 55% of the Barnardo's Centres were performing 'very well' (the top grade) compared to 10% of the in-house Centres. 100% of the Barnardo's Centres were performing at least 'well' compared to 43% of the in-house Centres.
- In the most recent quarterly report (Oct to Dec 2012), Barnardo's had more than 20% higher levels of attendance of Children's Centres from

across their catchment areas than the BCC Centres (17% of catchment compared to 14%).

- In the most recent quarterly report (Oct to Dec 2012), Barnardo's had more than 25% higher levels of engagement with families identified as vulnerable.
- Barnardo's manage and deliver Little Breaks, a County wide service for disabled children under five, which is delivered in Children's Centres, was recently inspected by Ofsted and received an 'Outstanding' grade.

3.8 Removing five Centres will also allow the in-house management team to focus on driving sustained improvement in the remaining 16 Centres .

3.9 The proposal covers the period until at least April 2014 during which time we will be preparing to go to tender on all commissioned Centres.

4. Criteria for selecting the Centres

4.1 There were 3 criteria used in deciding which Centres are recommended for transfer. These were:

- Level of performance of Centres- to focus on those that need sustained improvement
- Levels of permanent staffing- to minimise the need for moving permanent staff
- Geographical fit with the BCC and Barnardo's Centres- so that Centres for each Provider are clustered as far as possible.

5. The implementation of the change

5.1 The staff in the five Centres which are being transferred would be transferred to the remaining 16 County Council managed Children's Centres, which will build additional capacity in these centres to support improvement.

5.2 There will be a transition period of two months, during which time the County Council staff from the five transferring Children's Centres will continue to work with families to whom they are currently providing support.

5.3 As a result of consulting with staff and families the transition will also include arrangements for BCC staff to continue to provide outreach support to families they are currently working with for up to six months, giving continuity for the families that are most in need of support.

B. Other options available, and their pros and cons

The other option is to continue with in-house provision until April 2014 and include the BCC Centres when the external contracts (ie Barnardo's and HLC) are due for tender.

Pros:

- This would provide continuity of service and staffing in the Centres.
- The ePetitions and responses to the consultation have shown that current service users would like the Children's Centres to continue to be managed in-house.

Cons:

- Performance monitoring over the last three years has highlighted that these Centres are underperforming and this has been reinforced by the Ofsted results.
- This would not realise the benefits of the recommended action.
- Risk that if we go to the market with significant number of Centres identified by Ofsted as requiring improvement, there will not be many providers that come forward to bid.

C. Resource implications

There is a funding formula, based on the Indices of Multiple Deprivation, which calculates how the overall Children's Centres Programme budget is allocated to each Centre. The budget for these five Centres will be transferred to Barnardo's. The recommended action will therefore have no impact on the Children's Centres Programme budget.

D. Value for Money (VfM) Self Assessment

The budget will not be affected by the recommended action, so VfM will be achieved through an improvement in performance of the Centres.

E. Legal implications

Advice has been sought from the Head of Legal and Democratic Services which confirms that the transfer of management of the five Children's Centres can proceed.

F. Property implications

There will be a transfer of leases from BCC to Barnardo's for the five Centres involved.

G. Other implications/issues

All Children's Centres providers are working to same contract and performance framework with the Council, operating to the same core purpose, as set out by the Department for Education, and subject to the same Ofsted regime.

There will be a transition period during which the in-house staff will work alongside the Barnardo's staff.

H. Feedback from consultation, Local Area Forums and Local Member views

Consultation with staff, Advisory Boards and parents

A consultation paper was sent to all staff affected by the proposed transfer, as well as the Advisory Board and Parents Forum for each Centre. This stated that the consultation period of five weeks would end on the 30th January. Formal consultation meetings were then held at each of the five Centres, firstly with the group of staff affected and then separately with the Advisory Board and parents. Generally parents wanted the Centres to remain under the management of BCC. Parents main concerns were:

- That Centres were going to be closed.
It was clarified that the County Council are committed to retaining the Children's Centres.
- Why are in-house not being given a chance to improve performance?
These Centres have been run in-house for five years so sufficient time has been given to improve performance.
- That Barnardo's has been chosen as the provider when they have not delivered in Phase 1 or 2 areas in Buckinghamshire before.
Evidence above shows that Barnardo's are experienced in working with vulnerable families and have run this provision successfully elsewhere.

- Continuity of support during the transition
A clear transition plan to provide continuity of support will be put in place.

In addition, one to one consultation meetings were made available to affected staff. The purpose of these meetings was to give employees, who were potentially directly affected, an opportunity to discuss options open to them including other Children's Centres to which it is proposed they are redeployed. Where employees were members of Unison they were entitled to be accompanied by their union representative.

Throughout, Unison has been invited to participate in the formal consultation meetings, and the Employee Representative for the Children and Young People's Service was invited to attend.

Four e-petitions were published on the Council website, which have the following numbers of signatures:

- Wycombe East and Hampden Way- 477 signatures
- Marlow- 306 signatures
- Bourne End and Wooburn Green- 478 signatures
- The Chalfonts- 156 signatures

The following should be noted about the e-petitions:

- The Wycombe East, Hampden Way and Chalfonts petitions were to 'keep the Centres as Buckinghamshire County Council Surestart Children's Centres and not Barnardo's run centres'. The recommended decision does not mean that the Centres will cease to be Surestart Children's Centres, it is that they will become Surestart Children's Centres but with a different management.
- The Wycombe East, Hampden Way and Chalfonts petitions state that 'Clearly Barnardo's in Buckinghamshire have no experience addressing the needs of the Phase I & II centres.' However, the data shows that they are working with more vulnerable families in the phase 3 Centres than the in-house Centres currently are in the Phase 1 and 2 Centres.
- The Wycombe East, Hampden Way and Chalfonts petitions state that 'both centres have not been consulted at any point about this recent decision'. A five week consultation involving face to face meetings with staff, parents and Advisory Boards has been carried out before the decision is made.
- The Marlow petition stated that 'Barnardos don't currently offer a phase 2, which shows that they would have no experience of dealing with these families.' The evidence stated above shows that Barnardo's manage more than 90 Phase 1 and 2 Centres and have significant experience of working with these families.

Local members were informed about the proposed transfer prior to the consultation paper being sent out and the response received acknowledged that change was needed in the interests of those who cannot access the Centres currently.

I. Communication issues

A letter will be sent to staff, Advisory Boards and Parents Forums who would be affected by the proposals shortly after a decision is made, informing them of the decision. This will be followed up with meetings with staff affected.

Despite the decision might not be what parents wanted the County Council is committed to working with parents and all involved in the Centres to get the best outcomes for all our children and young people.

J. Progress Monitoring

Officers produce performance reports for each Centre quarterly and have a contract monitoring meeting with each provider quarterly. This will continue.

K. Review

The decision will not result in a change in policy.

Background Papers

Your questions and views

If you have any questions about the matters contained in this paper please get in touch with the Contact Officer whose telephone number is given at the head of the paper.

If you have any views on this paper that you would like the Cabinet Member to consider, or if you wish to object to the proposed decision, please inform the Democratic Services Team by 5.00pm on 10 April 2013. This can be done by telephone (to 01296 383610), Fax (to 01296 382538), or e-mail to cabinet@buckscc.gov.uk