

**THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF KENSINGTON AND CHELSEA
FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**NOTES OF THE SECOND MEETING OF THE EARLY HELP
AND TARGETED SERVICES STRATEGY SUB-GROUP
13 JUNE 2012**

Present:

Members of the Group: Councillors Professor Sir Anthony Coates (Chairman), Robert Atkinson, Judith Blakeman, Victoria Borwick; Tim Jones; Co-opted Members Dr Samar Al-Zaher and Mr John O'Donnell.

Cabinet Member: Councillor Elizabeth Campbell.

Officers in attendance:

Mr John Page, Director for Family Services.

Ms Karen Tyerman, Tri-borough Director for Commissioning (Children's Services).

Mr Mike Potter, Head of Commissioning (Early Intervention and Workforce Development).

Ivor Quinn (Principal Governance Administrator).

AGENDA ITEM AND DECISION	ACTION BY
1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE	
There were none.	
2. NOTES OF FIRST MEETING	
1. The notes were agreed.	
2. The sub-group agreed that early help and targeted services were very important and agreed to recommend that the sub-group should continue its work as part of the work programme for 2012-13.	FCS SC
3. In particular, the sub-group wished to focus on the monitoring and outcome framework; key indicators and comparators; the implementation plan; and a report on maternity services.	
4. The scrutiny committee and sub-group would need to consider how to proceed because there was potentially a lot of work involved in exploring these topics and the workload would need to be manageable to allow the development of the service to be unhindered.	FCS SC

5. It was agreed that tri-borough gave the Council access to a bigger pool of schools which would be helpful in assisting pupils who might be better off being educated outside of the borough to escape from bad influences, peer pressure or gang bullying.

3. CHILDREN'S CENTRES STRATEGY

Ms Tyerman made the following points:

1. Financial context. 27% reduction in grant with all FCS services making a contribution.
2. Early Help & Targeted Support strategy was agreed by Cabinet in January.
3. Not just a cost saving exercise but an opportunity to improve the targeting of services to those most in need; reinforce the contribution of children's centres to Early Help, and encourage innovation.
4. Many councils made changes a year ago after the Comprehensive Spending Review. RBKC has taken time to get it right. Agree the overarching strategy and make changes in a planned way.
5. Early Years provision in RBKC is strong and effective. And will remain so. The proposals are based on several key principles:

no children's centre will close, and every family will still have access to one;
standards will be maintained; good quality provision is important if we want to make a difference;
services should be targeted to the most disadvantaged;
savings from management and back office costs are preferable to cuts to front-line delivery;
improving cost effectiveness through new and different ways of delivering services.

6. There are four main proposals:
 - **reconfigure the children's centres into two clusters**, based within the North & South localities. Each cluster will have a Hub (main centre), which can develop as a centre of excellence, with other centres linked to it. This will reduce both management costs and the burden of inspection. And provide a closer alignment with the Council's other Early Help services.

- **review the range of services** provided in children's centres. We need to check that this is still right, that there is no unnecessary duplication or important gaps in provision. That targeting to the most vulnerable is effective. That we are not duplicating services for which another organisation (e.g. JobCentre Plus, PCT, Libraries, Skills Funding Agency) has the responsibility. And we will consider whether we should charge for some services where people can afford to pay.
- We will **test the market** to see if the childcare in our four directly managed children's centres could be provided more cost effectively by an external provider. There is a mature market in the childcare sector with many high quality providers who can bring specialist expertise into the borough. We will continue to support the most vulnerable by signposting them to the national tax credit system.
- We will reduce the number of places which we provide for **children in need**. Demand for these free places has reduced in recent years and the number of commissioned places now exceeds demand. There will still be a place for every child who needs one. But we will no longer commission places which remain unused.

7. There is a statutory requirement to consult on significant changes to children's centres. This will run for 12 weeks from late June to late September. Revised proposals will then come back to Cabinet.

Nothing is decided yet. There is no predetermined blueprint. The consultation is genuine, subject only to the limitations of the financial remit.

Points made by members of the sub-group:

- Some members considered that the tone and impression of the report was that all the services at children's centres were being considered for outsourcing, e.g., 1.3, 3.5, table 1 in 4.3 and the last line of 4.4.
- Ms Tyerman explained that outsourcing only applied to childcare at the four children's centres run by the Council – Violet Melchett; Cheyne; St Quintin; Clare Gardens.
- Councillor Campbell said that an A5-sized leaflet and a question and answer list were being prepared for the consultation and the outsourcing point would be clarified in those documents. The Chairman suggested that the points made above by Ms Tyerman about the key principles and the four main proposals should be included in the consultation material as they made the matter much clearer.

- In response to a question, Councillor Campbell said that if non-Council run centres wanted to provide childcare themselves to increase their income then that decision would be a matter for their governing bodies or management committees. DC(CS)
- In response to a question about why all the full-time children in need childcare places had not been taken up, Mr Page said that families wanted different levels of help and did not necessarily want full-time places. He said that the Council needed to provide whatever would best meet a particular family's need.
- In response to further comments about (1) not cutting services in the most deprived parts of the borough; (2) those not targeted missing out on services and (3) the children most in need should go to the outstanding centres, Councillor Campbell replied (1) that services would be targeted at the most in need; (2) children's services would remain a universal service and children's centres would be open to all; (3) children in centres would be a mixed group and would not all be children in need – the Council in buying childcare places would be able to ensure a range of different locations.
- The Council would need to strike the right balance in considering charges: there might be a sliding scale from full cost to discounted places and free ones.
- In response to comments about the funding of full-time nursery places for three and four year olds, the budget of £1.2m to provide 342 full-time places, the models to be used to decide which settings should offer full-time places and which part-time, and the free entitlement to a 15 hour nursery place, Mr Potter said that understandably people made connections between these matters and the children's centres strategy and the children in need childcare places, but the two things were separate. The sub-group agreed that the consultation leaflet and the question and answer section should make this clear in a separate paragraph and explain the difference.
- In response to a question about how the children in need childcare places would be allocated, Mr Page said that the places could be block-booked or places could be spot purchased on an individual basis. Councillor Campbell said that provision for this would be written into the contracts with childcare providers. She added that the contract would make it clear that provision had to be made for children in need. DC(CS)
- In response to comments about the need to avoid accepting the lowest bid and the lowest common denominator, and about the Council's aim not only to maintain current high

standards but to improve them, Councillor Campbell said that the Council was not just going to accept the lowest bid. Mr Potter said that to improve standards the Council would need to consider the most advantageous offer, which included high calibre staff and management.

- Childcare would be provided in the same settings as currently.
- Members referred to extended entitlement for nursery places to some two year olds. Councillor Campbell agreed that this ought to be referred to in the consultation documents.
- In response to a comment as to why the voluntary sector should provide facilities and thereby subsidise the Council, Mr Potter commented that children's centres were always intended to be partnership endeavours.
- In response to a comment, Ms Tyerman undertook to make suggestions for members' visits to best practice children's centres during the consultation period.

Other questions which the sub-group thought ought to be considered:

DC(CS)

1. Were the nursery places currently at Maxilla going to go to Golborne or Middle Row?
2. What was the definition of children in need?
3. What was the definition of children with additional needs?
4. What effect would the increased entitlement to nursery places, both full and part-time, have on primary schools with nurseries?

DC(CS)

4. AOB

No other matters were considered.

The meeting ended at 6.30pm.

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