



**Children and Families
Overview and Scrutiny Committee
1st March 2007**

**Report from the Director of
Children and Families**

For Information

Wards Affected:
ALL

Children's Centres in Brent

1.0 Summary

1.1 This report sets out progress to date and the key issues in regard to Children's Centres in Brent.

2.0 Definition of a Children's Centre

2.1 A Children's Centre is a building or group of buildings designed to be accessible to children under 5 and their families within a defined catchment area. A Children's Centre provides space for family support, health promotion, training and employability activities. A Children's Centre can provide early education and day-care provision on site, or else signposts parents and carers to services within the catchment area. A Children's Centre provides office accommodation for professionals delivering the Children's Centre core offer within the catchment, and provides a base for local childminders. (See Appendix A Core Offer for Children's Centres)

3.0 Background to Development of Children's Centres

3.1 The government's inter-departmental childcare review of 2002; Delivering for Children and Families, introduced the concept of Children's Centres. It concluded that good quality, affordable childcare was key in improving educational outcomes for children, enabling parents to go out to work, improving health, boosting productivity, improving public services, closing the gender pay gap and reducing crime. In support of its long-term objective to

achieve 70% lone parent employment by 2010, and to halve child poverty, the government doubled its funding allocation for early education and childcare through Children's Centres and other provision to £1.5 billion by 2005.

3.2 The inter-departmental childcare review also introduced the government's intention to transform the way services for young children and their families were delivered. This transformation was intended to improve the way statutory services responded to the needs of young children and their families, particularly the most vulnerable families. The government's longer-term aim was to establish a Children's Centre in every community by 2010, beginning with the 20% most disadvantaged wards. Capital for buildings, and revenue for running costs, would be allocated to Local Authorities to develop Children's Centres. The Centres would bring together early education, day-care, health services, parenting support and employment advice for families with children from conception to 5 years old living in the Centre's catchment area. Services delivered from the Children's Centre would be easily accessible to everyone, would be provided in a welcoming, safe and non-prejudicial environment, and would take account of the needs of all community groups.

3.3 The review explicitly referred to the national Sure Start programme as a model of the way in which Children's Centres would operate. This programme was launched by the government in 1998 to support families in the most disadvantaged areas of the country from conception until the child was 4 years old. This programme was community driven, with a particular focus on professionals listening to local people and redesigning services to meet local needs. Sure Start programmes had common objectives; to improve the health and emotional development of young children and to support parents, as parents, and in their aspirations towards employment. By 2004 there were 552 Sure Start programmes across the country, each had a local management board made up of local people, professionals and community figures. Each Sure Start programme was led by an accountable body which channelled government funding to the local programme, ensured that monitoring data was returned to the central Sure Start Unit, and ensured financial probity. Sure Start programmes were led by a range of accountable bodies including charities, Local Authorities and NHS Trusts.

4.0 Children's Centres in Brent

4.1 The government intends that Children's Centres will be developed in three phases; 2004-06 (phase 1), 2006-08 (phase 2) and 2008-2010 (phase 3). In accepting funding for the programme in 2004, the DfES required the Chief Executive of Brent tPCT to counter sign with the then Director of Education Arts and Libraries, on behalf of Brent Council. Funding would be directed to the Council, with the expectation that Brent tPCT would work in collaboration to develop Children's Centres, and then to deliver services from them.

5.0 Children's Centres in phase 1

5.1 The funding allocation from government for phase 1 Children's Centres was:

Capital £2,337,864

Revenue £1,162,000

A Children's Centres steering group was established to monitor progress and to make decisions on funding, membership was at Assistant Director level within Brent tPCT and the Local Authority. A Children's Centres operational group was established to progress practical issues, such as governance and management, membership was at Head of Service and Head of Centre level, the voluntary sector and Job Centre Plus were also represented on this group.

5.2 In phase 1 Brent's target was to open five Children's Centres serving a catchment of 5,186 families and to develop 347 new integrated childcare places. The new childcare places must support parents' and carers' working arrangements, and so must be available from 8am to 6pm for 48 weeks of the year, and be offered flexibly to meet working patterns. All Local Authorities were advised to work with Sure Start local programmes and Nursery Schools wherever possible to develop existing good practice, and to capitalise on matched funding. Guidance allowed for 25% of the integrated childcare places to be provided through childminders linked to each Centre, however, the number of Centre based places, added to the space required for associated services, meant that substantial sized buildings would be needed. Brent had three Sure Start local programmes, Roundwood led by the then Brent Social Services, Central Brent and South Kilburn led by Brent tPCT. Brent also had four maintained Nursery Schools, three of which were located in the 20% most disadvantaged areas of the borough.

5.3 The Council approved 5 sites for development:

- Evan Davies Nursery School with associated funding from the Stonebridge Housing Action Trust (**Fawood Children's Centre**, Fawood Avenue, NW10 8DX)
- Carlton Nursery School in partnership with the South Kilburn Sure Start local programme and South Kilburn New Deal for Communities (**Granville Plus Children's Centre**, Granville Rd, NW6 5QY)
- Curzon Crescent Nursery School in partnership with Roundwood Sure Start local programme and Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (**Curzon Crescent Children's Centre**, Curzon Crescent, NW10 9SD)
- Sure Start Central Brent in partnership with Mitchell Brook Primary School (**Harmony Children's Centre**, Bridge Road, NW10 9BX)
- Barnhill Social Services Nursery (**Willow Children's Centre**, Barnhill Road, HA9 9YP)

A different architect worked on each Centre, and the buildings that have resulted are unique. Each one has features which reflect views gained through consultation with the local community, and Fawood has attracted international attention for its innovative design, being one of the finalists for the prestigious Stirling Prize in 2005.

- 5.4 In order to ensure good learning outcomes for children Brent has met the government's requirement to ensure that a qualified teacher 'leads the learning' at each Centre for at least 50% of the time. A growth bid was approved by the Council in 2005, and 5 well qualified and highly experienced teachers were recruited.
- 5.5 A consultation event was held in May 2005 to discuss the ideal staffing model and range of services that Brent Children's Centres should provide. The aim was to learn from the local Sure Start programmes' experience and to hear the views of local communities. A wide range of people attended the consultation day, including voluntary sector providers, parents, health, education and social care professionals. An ideal staffing and service model was drawn up and reviewed by the Children's Centres steering group in light of the government's announcement of phase 2 Children's Centres funding. As a result the decision was taken to reduce the level of core staff employed at each Children's Centre and to move towards central commissioning of services to achieve best value.

6.0 Children's Centres in phase 2

- 6.1 The funding allocation from government for phase 2 Children's Centres was:
Capital £2,049,714
Revenue £3,842,938

This funding was intended to support Centres already developed in phase 1 and to create further Centres in phase 2. In phase 2 Brent's target was to build nine Children's Centres serving a catchment of 7,101 families living within the 30% most disadvantaged areas. No further integrated childcare places were to be developed in phase 2, however, places must be available to parents and carers within the catchment area. During phase 1 central government had reviewed its position on the accountability of Sure Start local programmes and decided to fund them through Local Authorities from April 2006, making Local Authorities accountable for Sure Start local programme outcomes.

- 6.2 The Children's Centres steering group reviewed the funding allocation in light of operational costs incurred by phase 1 Centres and feasibility work undertaken on phase 2 building sites. As a result Members were advised that Brent should seek both additional revenue funding, and a reduction in the number of Centres to be developed in phase 2. Brent was not successful in gaining a further revenue allocation; however, approval was given for Brent to develop seven Centres instead of nine.
- 6.3 Having already capitalised on Sure Start local programme and regeneration funding in phase 1, there were few opportunities for joint working with other agencies within the areas required for phase 2 Centres. In line with government guidance Brent sought to develop Centres from a number of different established organisations, including community centres, schools and hospitals.

The Council approved the recommended sites and work is currently underway to establish governance and management arrangements at each Centre.

6.4 The 7 sites approved for development are:

- Wembley Primary School, East Lane, HA9 7NW
- Fryent Primary School, Church Lane, NW9 8JD
- Lyon Park Infants and Lyon Park Juniors, Vincent Rd, HA0 4HH
- Queens Park Community School, Aylestone Ave, NW6 7AD
- Wembley Centre for Health and Care, Chaplin Rd, HA0 4UZ
- Willesden Centre for Health and Care, Robson Avenue, NW10 3RY
- St Raphael's Community Centre, Rainborough Close, NW10 0UD

These Centres will not provide new early education and day-care places on site, but will signpost parents and carers to provision in the catchment that can meet their needs.

The catchment areas for phases 1 and 2 are attached at Appendix B. This shows Brent's progress towards the 2010 target of having a Children's Centre in every community. The programme is recognised within the Local Authority as pioneering integrated service delivery at a local level.

7.0 Key issues

7.1 Children's Centres funding is made available in 2 year blocks. It has proved very challenging to plan, design, build and staff Centres within this timeframe. Childcare places created in phase 1 may not be sustainable in the medium term. This is because the parents and carers living in the 20% most disadvantaged areas have not yet taken up all the available childcare places.

7.2 Children's Centres have been included in documents such as the National Service Framework and Every Child Matters Change for Children guidance, as key locations for integrated service delivery. Children's Centres also feature in the Children and Young People's Plan. However, their future is not guaranteed beyond the funding period of each phase and this is seen as a risk by organisations taking on the management and governance of Children's Centres.

7.3 The Children's Centres programme has benefited from the Council's decision to create a single department for Children and Families. The benefits of early support to prevent difficulties later in a family's life are evident, and the department's structure has enabled services to work together more effectively. The Children's Centres commissioning strategy is an example of delivering enhanced services to meet local need through partner agencies thereby meeting

common aims and objectives.

- 7.4 There are significant challenges to the success of the Children's Centres programme arising from the current Brent tPCT savings proposals. These are likely to affect the services provided for children under 5 and their families by Health Visitors, Speech and Language Therapists, Midwives and Occupational Therapists. The final position for 2007-08 has yet to be determined, however, work is ongoing between officers to assess and minimise the risk to the Council should the health aspects of the Children's Centres core offer not be deliverable.

Background Papers

Brent Early Years Service Strategy 2005

Sure Start Guidance 2002 (DfES / DWP)

Delivering for Children and Families 2002 (DfES / DWP / HM Treasury / Women and Equality Unit / Strategy Unit)

Choice for parents, the best start for children: a ten year strategy for childcare 2004 (HM Treasury / DfES / DWP / DTI)

Contact Officers

Lesley Fox-Lee

Head of Early Years

Lesley.fox-lee@brent.gov.uk

020 8937 3355

John Christie

Director of Children and Families

Appendix A

CHILDREN'S CENTRE CORE OFFER

Core Offer – Sure Start Guidance August 03
1. Early education integrated with day care:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early education integrated with day care for babies and children until they reach school age. • Day care suitable for working parents, 5 days a week, 48 weeks a year, 10 hours a day. • Nursery places will be open to all, not just families in the immediate area, to provide the best educational outcomes for all children (admission and fee policies will be determined locally). • Support for childminders, who may also offer wrap around care. • Early identification of children with special needs and disabilities with inclusive services and support for their families.
2. Family support and parental outreach:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visits to all children in the catchment area within two months of birth. • Access to specialist services. • Parenting support and information as well as specific support for families in need and 'hard to reach' families. • Providing information and advice on parenting skills at significant transition points for the family (e.g. pre birth, early days, settling into childcare). • Increasing parents understanding of their child's development. • Increasing the involvement of fathers.
3. Child and family health services:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ante-natal advice and support for parents. • Information and guidance on breast feeding, hygiene, nutrition and safety. • Identification, support and care for those suffering from maternal depression, ante-natally and post-natally. • Speech and language and other specialist support.
4. Links with schools and the CIS:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Links to local schools, extended schools and out of school activities (holiday play schemes, before/after school play & learning). • Information to parents/carers about CIS.
5. Links with Jobcentre Plus:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linking in with local arrangements (e.g. via the local authority's service level agreement) for collaboration with Jobcentre Plus Childcare Partnership managers. • Encouragement and support for parents who wish to consider training and employment.
6. Other links and services, including:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective links with further and higher education institutions, and local training providers. • Training for parents, including English as an additional language where relevant, Basic Skills, or parenting classes. • Specialist services for children with disabilities. • Benefits advice, including maternity benefits. • Childcare and other services for older children.

