

Appendix 3 Statutory obligations Children's Centres

Statutory definition of a Children's Centre:

A Sure Start Children's Centre is defined in the Childcare Act 2006 as a place or a group of places:

- which is managed by or on behalf of the local authority to secure that early childhood services are made available in an integrated way;
- through which early childhood services are made available – either by providing the services on site, or by providing advice and assistance on gaining access to services elsewhere; and
- at which activities for young children are provided.

A children's centre should make available universal and targeted early childhood services either by providing the services at the centre itself or by providing advice and assistance to parents and prospective parents in accessing services provided elsewhere. Early childhood services are defined in the Childcare Act 2006 as:

- early years provision (early education and childcare);
- social services functions of the local authority relating to young children, parents and prospective parents;
- health services relating to young children, parents and prospective parents;
- training and employment services to assist parents or prospective parents; and
- information and advice services for parents and prospective parents.

Sure Start Children's Centres improve outcomes for young children and their families and reduce inequalities, particularly for those families in greatest need of support.

Department for Education (DfE) developed the "Core Purpose" of Sure Start Children's Centres in 2011/12 and the vision and principles underpin the statutory guidance and inform the expectations within the inspection framework. The revised Ofsted framework for the inspection of children's centres, issued in April 2013, describes centres as a "one stop shop" for children under five and their families to help them secure good outcomes in the following areas:

- readiness of children for school.
- improved parenting.
- opportunities for adults to participate in activities that improve their personal skills, education and employability.
- development of healthy lifestyles.
- parents' understanding of their responsibilities for their children's safety and well-being.

Brent Council has the statutory responsibility for the management and delivery of Sure Start Children's Centres. Brent's children's centres provide services that support school readiness, health and well-being and effective parenting outcomes for families with

children aged 0-4 (5th Birthday) particularly those with greater levels of need ('target group households').

The Childcare Act 2006 makes local authorities responsible for the provision of children's centres, working with partners in health and Job Centre Plus particularly to ensure integrated early childhood services from children's centres and to meet obligations about the inspection of children's centres. Revised Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities on children's centres was published by the Department for Education (DfE) on 15th April 2013. Local authorities are required to ensure there are sufficient early childhood services delivered through a network of children's centres across their areas. In addition, local authorities must ensure:

- Good quality performance management of children's centres with requirements to set and monitor progress against targets and to provide outcomes and profile data of the reach area.
- Children's centres conform to all safeguarding requirements and have links with Children's Social Care to address any safeguarding needs as quickly as possible.
- Integrated services that support school readiness, health well-being and effective parenting outcomes for families with children aged 0-4 years, particularly those with greater levels of need. This to be jointly with partners including Health and Job Centre Plus.

Under section 98C of the Childcare Act 2006, the local authority's obligations in relation to Ofsted framework of inspection for children's centres emphasises contact with at least 65 per cent of target families actively engaged in support available from children's centres as the minimum expectation for a 'good' children's centre. However, the framework of inspection has been suspended for many years with no expectation of a refreshed framework.

From September 2013, local authorities also have a statutory duty to ensure disadvantaged 2-year olds have access to free early learning places. Children's centres have a core function in facilitating arrangements for these children to take up free early learning entitlements and in working with their families to support positive outcomes for these children and families.