

EFFECTIVENESS OF CHILDREN'S CENTRES WORKING GROUP

Minutes of the meeting held at 5.30 pm on 1 December 2014

Present:

Councillor Nicholas Bennett J.P. (Chairman)
Councillor Mary Cooke
Councillor Judi Ellis
Joan McConnell

Jane Bailey, Assistant Director: Education
Rachel Dunley, Bromley Children Project Manager
Nina Newell, Head of Schools, Early Years Commissioning and Quality Assurance
Mark Thorn, Head of Referral, Assessment and Early Intervention
Kay Weiss, Assistant Director: Safeguarding and Social Care
Kerry Nicholls, Democratic Services Officer

Also present:

Councillor Stephen Carr, Leader of the Council
Councillor Robert Evans, Portfolio Holder for Care Services
Councillor Pauline Tunnicliffe, Chairman, Care Services PDS Committee

1 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

Councillor Nicholas Bennett JP was appointed Chairman of the Working Group for the 2014/15 municipal year

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Tony Wright-Jones.

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4 TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Working Group agreed the objectives of the working group as:

“To consider the effectiveness and future use of children and family centres in Bromley, recognising the role that children and family centres currently have in delivering early intervention services in a community setting.”

5 USE OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY CENTRES

The members of the Working Group considered a report outlining the current use of children and family centres across the Borough, which

included the delivery of early intervention services in a community setting.

There were six children and family centres based across the Borough, comprising Biggin Hill, Blenheim, Burnt Ash, Castlecombe, Community Vision and Cotmandene children and family centres, with each centre serving a cohort of approximately 3,500 children aged 0-5 years. The children and family centres offered a wide range of services tailored to their specific communities which included early intervention programmes such as the Bromley Children Project, the Tackling Troubled Families Support and Outreach service, and the Information, Advice and Support Service, as well as the services of partner agencies including Jobcentre Plus and Bromley Healthcare.

Whilst offering universal service provision, Bromley's delivery model primarily targeted services to identified groups within each reach area, including families on the edge of care, young parents, carers and people with disabilities. 50% of places on programmes delivered through children and family centres were held for these identified groups, who could be referred to the programmes by a number of partner agencies, including health visitors, the Children's Social Care service, midwifery services and schools, with the aim of supporting families to integrate into the wider community and preventing the escalation of their support needs to the statutory service level. The family of any child subject to a child protection plan was immediately referred to their local children and family centre. Individual families could also self-refer if they identified the need to access the services offered by the children and family centres.

The total budget line for the Bromley Children Project was £2,340,980 for 2014/15, excluding the Information, Advice and Support Service and the Tackling Troubled Families Service. Of this, approximately £1.2m was apportioned to children and family centres (excluding Family Support outreach). Children and family centres also generated income of £63k per annum from the rental of space within the children and family centres to Bromley Healthcare, the Nightingale Centre and St John's Ambulance.

Members were advised that 18 operational children and family centres had originally been established across the Borough with funding provided by the Department for Education. Following the introduction of the Bromley targeted outreach model, this had been reduced to six operational children and family centres delivering both targeted and universal services. The Department for Education had deferred any clawback of the funding it had provided to the Borough for children and family centres, however any further changes made to children and family centres across the Borough, such as the closure of a children and family centre or the provision of services through alternate venues such as schools, risked triggering clawback of up to £13.5m of this funding, which included £4m for the six children and family centres that were currently operating across the Borough. The Department for Education had also indicated that a further payment might be expected from the Local Authority to reflect any increase in the value of properties purchased through this funding. A Member

queried the proportion of users of Bromley children and family centres that lived out of the Borough and further information on this would be provided to Members of the Working Group following the meeting.

In response to a question from the Chairman, the Bromley Children Project Manager confirmed that work was undertaken to chart the journey for children and their parents who accessed children and family centre services, and that this supported the evaluation of service provision outcomes. Further information on the impact of children and family centre activities on children and their families between June and October 2014 would be provided to Members of the Working Group following the meeting. The total operational space available at each children and family centre would also be provided to Members of the Working Group following the meeting.

A Member emphasised the need to maximise the usage of children and family centres. There was potential to offer a wider range of services, including a one-stop shop signposting offer as well as services from partner agencies, and to extend the opening hours of the children and family centres to deliver an evening and weekend offer, although this would have cost implications with additional staffing and other operational costs. It might also be possible for Local Authority officers and key partners based in the community to rent meeting room space at children and family centres which would generate additional income, although the programme at each children and family centre changed on a regular basis which might limit the availability to rent meeting space in advance. Another Member suggested that children and family centres be given a stronger Bromley branding, and noted that better promotion of the services offered by children and family centres would increase the use of the centres by children and families to access both targeted and universal services, as well as assisting families to self-refer when in need of additional support.

In considering the effectiveness of children and family centres, Members generally agreed the need to continue to support the Bromley targeted outreach model, where both targeted and universal services were delivered through six children and family centres as a means to provide early intervention services in a community setting and to avoid clawback of funding by the Department for Education. The Chairman underlined the importance of ensuring that the most vulnerable families were targeted for service provision and proposed that the proportion of places on programmes delivered through the children and family centres held for identified groups be increased to 75%. There was also potential for children and family centres to identify new sources of funding, such as through renting space to partner agencies or by providing new services, which could increase income generation as well as make a wider community offer available.

6 EVALUATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the consideration of the Working Group, it was **AGREED** that it

be recommended:

- 1) To retain the six children and family centres based across the Borough;
- 2) To increase the proportion of places held for identified groups on programmes delivered through the children and family centres to 75%;
- 3) To implement a 10% reduction in the children and family centres budget for 2015/16, and a further reduction of 10% based on the 2014/15 budget for 2016/17 with the expectation that this will be offset by increased income generation; and,
- 4) To introduce one-stop shop signposting services at children and family centres for a range of public services.

7 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

8 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

No future meeting date was set.

The Meeting ended at 6.37 pm