Executive Summary

The County Council is legally required to secure sufficient children’s centres to offer accessible, integrated early childhood services for all parents-to-be and families with young children (Appendix 1). There are currently 49 Sure Start Children’s Centres in West Sussex, four are full service centres, the other 45 cover the full range of graduated models.

The capital programme (£37m) prioritised investment in County Council premises (34 centres) of which 25 are on school sites. The remainder are in leased accommodation.

There is a 25 year service delivery requirement within the conditions of capital grant, now supported by a presumption against closure of centres within statutory guidance. It is possible that repayment of capital funding may be required by the Government if a children’s centre closes and early childhood services cease to be available.

A new management model for CFCs has been developed to deliver an equitable county-wide service in the most effective and cost efficient way, reducing management costs by 30% and improving front-line service delivery. A funding formula for CFCs has been developed to enable differentiated funding for individual centres to be applied in a fair, transparent and consistent way.

It is planned to maintain service delivery through all 49 centre buildings in line with capital requirements, but reduce the total number of CFCs from 49 to 45 by merging some centres and establishing satellite centres where appropriate.

Following feedback from a staff working group, it is proposed to establish ten management clusters based on geographical areas. The proposed model achieves over 30% reduction in management posts, with savings from these posts being used to fund new front-line centre co-ordinator posts.

Staffing levels in each cluster will increase in line with the funding formula, and will be deployed to meet needs and priorities of local communities.

If the proposed changes are approved, minimal impact is anticipated for most centres/areas. However, it is important to note that the resource pool model will enable maximum flexibility for deployment of staff across centres to support service delivery in response to identified needs and priorities.

Recommendation

The Committee is asked to comment upon the principles and proposals for the future management and delivery of children and family centres prior to Cabinet Member decision.
1. **Background**

1.1 Under the Childcare Act 2006 Section 5A, the Council is required to secure sufficient children’s centres to offer accessible, integrated early childhood services for all parents-to-be and families with young children (Appendix 1). There are currently 49 Sure Start Children’s Centres in West Sussex, with each centre serving between 600 and 1200 under 5s, in line with the requirements of the national programme. Four centres are agreed with the former Department for Children, Schools and Families (now Department for Education) as full service centres. These centres are located in Bognor, Crawley, Littlehampton and Worthing.

1.2 The additional 45 centres cover the full range of graduated models, 9 of which serve a high level of need, and a further ten of which are rural models, using mobile units to deliver services at other venues. Seven centres are commissioned services (four from maintained nursery schools and three from Spurgeons, a voluntary organisation). In West Sussex, all centres are known as children and family centres (CFCs) following the integration of Family Resource Teams – under 10s (formerly family centres and part of the Children’s Delivery Programme), which offer targeted, specialist support for vulnerable families.

1.3 The capital programme prioritised investment (£37m) in County Council premises (34 centres) of which 25 are on school sites. The remainder are in leased accommodation. The co-location of CFCs with other services e.g. libraries, community centres, churches, schools have been particularly beneficial in strengthening partnership-working, providing a more holistic response for our customers, whilst maximising facilities and resources. All centres are based on a similar model, offering a welcoming social area with café and internet access, multi-purpose areas for child/adult activities, training events, meetings and a small office. As such, these centres are a valuable Council resource, providing an important focal point in local communities to take the Council’s vision for Think Family: Early Intervention and Family Support.

1.4 There is a 25 year service delivery requirement within the conditions of capital grant, now supported by a presumption against closure of centres within statutory guidance. It is possible that repayment of capital funding may be required by the Government if a children’s centre closes and early childhood services cease to be available.

2. **Proposal**

2.1 Following confirmation of the budget for the Early Childhood Service, a new management model for CFCs has been developed based on the following principles:

- To deliver the service in the most effective and cost efficient way
- To reduce management by 30% and improve front-line service delivery
- To deploy staff flexibly across an area to optimise the use of resources and skills
- To deliver an equitable county-wide service based on clarity of purpose and support available through universal access
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- To support corporate priority: Think Family - early intervention and family support, identifying needs and targeting resources and support to meet the needs of the most vulnerable children in local communities
- To fulfil statutory requirements under the Childcare Act 2006

2.2 A funding formula for CFCs has been developed to enable differentiated funding for individual centres to be applied in a fair, transparent and consistent way, and thereby help target funding and support for the most vulnerable families. The following criteria were used:
  - Number of under 5s
  - Indices of Multiple Deprivation scores/weightings (overall) and Education, Skills and Training
  - Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index scores/weightings
  - Lone parents with dependent children
  - Barriers to services
  - Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs rural/urban code

2.3 It is planned to maintain service delivery through all 49 centre buildings in line with capital requirements. However, following an analysis of updated demographic (child benefit) data it is proposed for management purposes to reduce the total number of CFCs from 49 to 45 by merging the following centres and establishing satellite centres where appropriate, thereby maintaining service delivery on a county-wide basis through all 49 centres:
  - Maidenbower CFC and Pound Hill CFC, Crawley
  - Storrington CFC and Pulborough CFC
  - Rural Steyning CFC and Henfield CFC
  - Rural East Grinstead and Bolney

2.4 Following feedback from a staff working group, it is proposed to establish a cluster management model based on geographical areas. Ten CFC management clusters are proposed, with separate professional line-management of the Family Resource Team–under 10s to support clear lines of responsibility and accountability. The proposed model achieves over 30% reduction in management posts, with savings from these posts being used to fund new front-line centre co-ordinator posts. The CFC cluster manager (1 full time equivalent (fte)) will be supported by a team comprising of a minimum level of staffing per centre.

2.5 Staffing levels in each cluster will increase in line with the funding formula, and will be deployed to meet needs and priorities of local communities. In addition there will be Volunteer Co-ordinators and Toy Library Co-ordinators working across the county to support service development and delivery. The model will result in an overall reduction in CFC posts. However, due to vacancy management, the current employee fte is less than the proposed CFC fte in the new structure.

2.6 Subject to successful recruitment, it is anticipated that centres in more affluent areas will be open for a minimum of two and a half days per week, increasing to five days per week for centres in the most disadvantaged areas.

2.7 If the proposed changes are approved, minimal impact is anticipated for most centres/areas, as due to the recruitment freeze there has been a reduced level of service delivery in recent times. However, it is important to
note that the resource pool model will enable maximum flexibility for deployment of staff across centres to support service delivery in response to identified needs and priorities.

3. **Consultation**

3.1 A CFC manager working group was established at the end of 2009 to review management and operational arrangements and consider options for the future. This recognised that the existing arrangements, established for the development phase to deliver the requirements of the national programme, may not be appropriate for the future. It also acknowledged the uncertainty of funding from April 2011 at that time.

3.2 Ideas from this group and county-wide manager meetings have been taken into account, and developed by the CFC Area Managers.

3.3 Sure Start Children’s Centres are now a regulated service set in legislation. Revenue funding has been allocated to local authorities within the Early Intervention Grant to maintain the existing network of centres. Statutory guidance acknowledges that changes may need to be made to the local pattern of provision. However, the local authority has a duty to consult widely with all stakeholders before establishing a new centre, closing an existing centre or making any significant change to services (Childcare Act 2006 S5D). Therefore it will be critical to plan consultation and manage the message carefully in local communities.

3.4 Consultation will be planned with each Centre Partnership Group and provide key information to ensure that as many local families as possible know that the centre will not be closing, although there may be some changes in their management and staffing. In addition the consultation will gather parents’ views and issues to help plan how each centre will offer services that respond to local needs and priorities.

4. **Resource Implications and Value for Money**

4.1 It is planned to maintain service delivery through all 49 centre buildings. This is essential to comply with conditions of capital grant and to meet statutory duty to secure sufficient centres for young children and their families. Funding for this is from the Early Intervention Grant.

4.2 The proposed model achieves over 30% reduction in management posts, with savings from these posts being used to fund new front-line centre co-ordinator posts. Operational arrangements will include a resource pool to improve flexibility and maximise available resources (premises, staff, skills and funding).

4.3 The CFC cluster management approach will help strengthen integrated service delivery and supports the corporate priority: Think Family – Early Intervention and Family Support.
5. **Risk Management Implications**

5.1 The closure of children’s centres nationally is a high profile issue. Although in West Sussex it is not proposed to close any centres through this process, there may be some concerns raised in areas affected by mergers regarding perceived loss of services. Initial communication with local Members, MPs, staff, parents and partners has been undertaken by Cabinet Member for Children and Families and officers, supported by a press release. Further information, based on clear, consistent messages is planned through each centre partnership group and parents forum as the changes progress.

6. **Crime and Disorder Act Implications**

N/A

7. **Human Rights Act Implications**

The children’s centres are an important tool in helping children and families, and as such Article 8 (the right to respect for family life) could be engaged. However, the proposals as outlined are seen as necessary and proportionate in the context of the Authority’s resources. Rights of families and children have been balanced against the Authority’s resources and it is believed that the service will still be delivered in such a way as to protect rights under the Human Rights Act.

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Background Papers

- Appendix 1 – Legislative Background  
- Appendix 2 – Map of the Children and Family Centres by Model  
- Appendix 2 – Key to the Map  
- Appendix 3 – List of Children and Family Centres including number of Under 5’s in each area.