

Notes of Children's Centre Visits by members of the Children, Young People & Learning Panel – 17 May 2018

Reason for visit: To increase member's knowledge and awareness around the work of Bracknell's Children's Centres.

Centres visited: The Rowans & Sycamores, The Willows & Maples, The Oaks & Hollies and the Child Development Centre

In attendance: Cllr's G Birch, S Peacey, M Brossard, M Temperton and Louise Connelly (Governance & Scrutiny Co-ordinator)

Summarised below are the five key themes that arose from the visits:

Usage

- Footfall – members received a valuable presentation which showed the number of individual children who use Children's Centres and come back more than once. (Please see attached presentation).
- Members queried how many families were classed as universal v targeted but figures were not broken down that way.
- 97% of those accessing parenting programmes at Children's Centres no longer required support once they were in primary school. Staff are intending to review again shortly.
- An increase in population could have a potential impact on usage and service delivery and requires careful consideration.
- 7.5k children in reach areas 90% 'registered' with CCs, this is an Outstanding OFSTED grade descriptor.
- Child Development Centre saw 260 children during 2016-17 (academic year). 154 children currently seen to date so likely to exceed that target. However, attendance can be a factor of vulnerability as some of the children have complex health needs, some life limiting conditions and may be too unwell to attend sessions at the centre.

Management

- Previously there were four Managers but this drove competition between them to be the best. Cherry Hall, Strategy & Development Manager Under 5's (CH), and Karen Frost, Head of Early Help, restructured the team. Following the consultation a new structure took place from April 2016. Amanda Hales-Owen (AHO) was appointed as the Children's Centre Manager across all the Centres with responsibility for three Seniors. One Senior covers both The Alders and Chestnuts and The Oaks and Hollies. Staff cover for each other as necessary and it has meant savings to the Council.
- Views from users are gathered via an annual consultation.
- Feedback is given in the style 'You asked, we've done'.
- Families have input regularly into services and range of sessions offered via a feedback board at each Centre. One example of feedback directly impacting on services offered was the 'Dads' group. A member of staff attends the group once a month run by the The Kerith Centre.
- Following a decision by Frimley Park Hospital to stop antenatal classes in 2017 the decision was taken to develop an ante-natal support package. The sessions run at all four centres, however, co-location of health 0-19 service is only possible at 3 centres as there is currently a lack of space at The Willows to accommodate Health Visitors.
- Cherry Hall was involved in the re-commissioning of the Health Visitor Service.
- Family feedback about services is good.

- CH and AHO reviewed Centre records between 2012-2016 to assess outcomes and ensure services were meeting the needs of residents. They cross-referenced information with FIT (Family Intervention Team) which showed only two parents continued to require support after the child started primary school.
- Councillors asked how the Centres would need to adapt given the intention is to broaden usage of the Centres to all ages and not just under 5's. CH said they were working with all partners and council departments so they become a hub for families.
- AHO attends MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference) meetings and has asked youth team representatives to attend her team meetings to establish better joint working with this age group.
- Following discussions at the Early Intervention Hub regarding teenage girls referred who had already experienced controlling relationships, conversations are taking place between the parenting worker and youth service to develop a programme to support healthy relationships by intervening early. The intention is to reduce the number of girls continuing in abusive controlling relationships.
- The Freedom programme for victims of Domestic Abuse runs from the Children's Centres. There are now follow on sessions 'Freedom Recovery' to support women to move on with their lives following abusive relationships.
- There is a 'No mobile phone' policy in all Centres for two reasons – safeguarding and to encourage parents to focus on the child and interact with other parents.
- One Grandparent commented whilst we were visiting The Willows that it was a 'Fabulous resource. Great to have'.
- All parenting programmes now used are evidence based and they are building a strong evidence base for the services provided.
- There are six staff members based at the Children's Development Centre including part-time staff.
- The aim of CDC is to support parents emotionally at a difficult time in their child's life and reduce waiting times for assessment. The staff also worked hard to improve children's learning and development and support their educational achievements.
- The 3 main centres have 1 senior project worker, 2 project workers and an administrator, the Alders has 1.68 FTE project workers.
- All staff now trained by Frimley Park Hospital breast feeding advisors in offering breast feeding advice. A member of The Breastfeeding Network used to come but could not always attend.
- Seniors from CC attend a HomeStart group to share ideas and encourage parents struggling to come to CC groups. Staff sometimes deliver sessions at the HomeStart group for example, Fantastic Food Finder courses.
- The Oaks used to run a breakfast club -20p donation– but this folded due to less need as the school was offering a breakfast club and they found children were eating breakfast twice which was adding to obesity issues for some children.
- CH and AHO identified an area of development as implementing 3 and 6 month feedback from parents when they stop attending Centres to go back to the referrer to see if their services had helped achieve agreed outcomes.
- Another example of parent feedback on service provision was parents saying they did not know who was who, so in Journey to Parenthood the Health Visitor now attends and explain their role.
- CC staff were working hard to get into Early Years settings and pre-schools to identify parents who were struggling as well as looking at children going into reception in September to identify how many were on track or above expectations. 92% of 2 year olds in Bracknell were above the national average. This information was shared by Public Health. Members queried if this data was in the current QSR and were informed it was not.
- CH and AHO intend to set aside a day each term to show visitors around the centres in future.

- CDC Centre staff in collaboration with Berkshire Health Foundation Trust deliver 'Who, what, why' training ' This is a series of workshops for Early Years practitioners to understand more about children with special educational needs and disabilities, the range of professionals who may be involved and strategies to improve child outcomes. They are investigating the possibility of getting accreditation for the course
- Please see PowerPoint presentation for further outcomes/outputs.

Co-location of staff

- The Rowans is the largest Centre and hosts a range of multi-agency staff including parenting workers; speech and language therapist, health visitors; Family Information Service and Quality and Development Officers (working with early years' settings and childminders in a support and challenge role).
- FIS offer information to all families as well as keeping the Local Offer website up to date for parents whose children have Special Educational Needs. Members asked if enquiries go through Time Square or come straight to them and were informed calls could be transferred to them or come direct. Members also asked if the website was accessible and easy to update and were informed it was better than it was but doesn't have all the functionality they desire. Some larger organisations not so good at sending updates but local organisations better.
- Health Visitor co-location funded by Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust. This is part of the service commissioned by Public Health and there is a site sharing agreement between Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust and CCs.
- AH-O has recently spoken to HVs from Wokingham about benefits of co-location in Centres.
- One HV said joint working was going well and able to catch people at the beginning and end of day or can find out when people around which makes referrals easier.
- CC has good relationship with the midwives- integrated care system.
- Members asked who was likely to refer CC staff. Links with GPs not as strong – more HVs – but that is to be expected as GP will link into HV who link into CC staff.
- Monthly meetings with HV & CC team which helps.
- CC staff have gone with HV to house if mum reluctant to attend CC then accompany them to CC for first time.
- Members asked how physical issues were being picked up. HVs tend to pick up disabilities more but The Rowans have a big hall and soft play sessions on Fridays where staff can pick up concerns. Majority of CC workforce are early years degree educated so are able to identify learning and development concerns.
- Partnership working at the CDC is very good following a re-structure of the service in September 2015. The service used to contain three services: Action for Children, TASS and Area SENCO's (supporting early years settings) but now only CDC who works directly with other agencies so that parents have only one point of contact and pathway for help.
- Referrals by GP or other services, such as welfare, lead to a child assessment at CDC i.e. autism (under 5's)
- Occupational Therapist (BHFT funded) available at CDC but there is an 18 week wait.
- CDC staff identified a need to upskill school staff to support children with SEN.
- Core Group meetings for children on a Child Protection Plan can be held at all sites rather than at Time Square as children can be looked after.
- Preschools on site at The Oaks and The Rowans which allows better information gathering as see whole family.
- Cantonese family group set up own group through Preschool Learning Alliance years ago and meet once a month in The Oaks kitchen – for Mum's and children.

- An example was given of joint working when School Nurse unable to attend CP Conferences so gave HV and Senior at the Centre information so can share the load.
- FIT team and CCs staff attend training together where relevant so giving the same information to parents.



Members and Children's Centre staff in the kitchen at The Rowans Children's Centre

Buildings/outside space/indoor space/proximity to schools/parking/access

- The Rowans is the biggest centre but all offer pre-natal and post-natal courses.
- Good outside space at The Rowans and The Oaks – staff had a number of ideas about what additional facilities would be useful, such as a large sand pit for children to climb in and more physical play equipment.
- Sally Hair & Beauty and Vodafone have used their volunteer days in past 12 months to help spruce up the garden and dig up roots at The Rowans which were affecting the functioning of the toilets.
- Office facility for staff in all centres.
- Sensory room available at Child Development Centre.
- Parking an issue at The Oaks and families had to park at nearby shops.
- Small rooms available in most Centres which are good for family therapy/breast feeding/incontinence clinics, etc.

Services offered

- CCs aim to provide fun and stimulating opportunities for families (universal) and (targeted) support to parents as required.
- Ante-natal 'Journey to Parenthood' and postnatal courses offered universally in all four Centres. They accommodate 25 parents at a time and are always full. There is one midwife who attends every other week, funded by Children's Centres, since Frimley withdrew their ante-natal courses. These courses cover topics such as weaning and advantages/disadvantages of different types of childcare.
- Postnatal Plus courses offered to parents diagnosed with depression and referred by Health Visitor. Same as universal offering but two weeks longer and more nurturing. Funded by Children's Centre but nurses 'supervise' staff and discuss cases.
- Baby weighing takes place in large area at The Rowans and health visitors/staff on hand. Baby clinics take place weekly in all centres and parents can access the centre/day that is most convenient for them.
- Donation station at The Rowans – parents can take or give small items. They refer to First Days if families require larger items such as bed/tables.
- Members queried when health checks included teeth due to an increasing number of young children identified as losing teeth at an early age due to poor brushing. AHO explained a toothbrush exchange been set up for any parent to access which was funded by Public Health.
- Monthly jabs undertaken at Centres through liaison with school nurses on site.
- Family usage of Centres encouraged and older teenagers a new target area.
- Nursery providers invited to some events i.e. Fantastic FoodFighters.
- Use Every Child a Talker data to refer to Speech & Language team if needed.
- One Mum we spoke to said she went to the soft play session at The Rowans which prompted her try out other activities on offer at other Centres.
- Monday is assessment day at CDC but a paediatrician was there seeing children and families on the day we visited (Thursday). Assessments at CDC are multi-agency and there is currently a 5 month waiting time this has reduced from 7 months last year. The process lasts four weeks and six children are assessed at a time. They have started carrying out assessments in the school holidays to reduce the backlog. Reports from school staff are requested prior to the assessment and they are invited to the end of assessment meetings, some do attend even when it is during the school holidays.
- CDC staff visit the child's home to assess needs and to help parents who struggle to engage and to support the whole family.
- Sensory room provided at CDC which parents and children appreciate.
- Baby massage courses are delivered in all CCs.
- All Centres run 'Baby Peep' 10 week course designed to help parents discover how opportunities given to a baby at an early age can help with their long term development. Courses are full up as they have to cap it at 15 parents each time. There is pressure to run more courses but staff availability does not allow it at present.
- Singing group at Jennett's Park – 70 parents attended – very popular.
- Centres host Fantastic Food Finders in their kitchens (except CDC) covering fussy eating clinics; store cupboard ingredients, etc. Sessions jointly run for all parents as feedback was parents with children on a CP Plan would not attend otherwise.
- 2nd DART (Domestic Abuse Recovering Together) programme run from a Centre recently.
- Children's Centre staff attended Council run Fun Days.
- CDC had started two new services – Good Night Sleep and Choose Food.
- First Aid courses for parents are delivered at all centres.