

GMB/CAM

17 June 2009

Councillor R C Edger OBE
3 Turner Place
College Town
Sandhurst
GU47 OFW

Dear Bob

Overview and Scrutiny Report: A Review of Children's Centres and Extended Services in and around Schools in Bracknell Forest

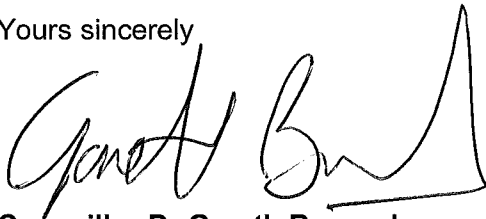
On behalf of Alan Kendall and myself, I am pleased to enclose a copy of the report considered by the Executive on 16 June 2009.

Following discussions, officers set out the response to the sixteen recommendations made in the report by the working group. The Executive have now considered these responses and agreed them.

We are pleased that the report recognised the considerable progress that has been made in these two areas for the benefit of children, young people and families in the Borough.

The Executive has asked that members of the working group are thanked for their thoughtful contribution.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gareth Barnard', written in a cursive style.

Councillor Dr Gareth Barnard

Enc

cc Councillor Alan Kendall
Lesley Heale, Director of Social Care & Learning
Richard Beaumont, Head of Performance & Scrutiny

TO: EXECUTIVE
16 June 2009

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REPORT: A REVIEW OF CHILDREN'S CENTRES AND
EXTENDED SERVICES IN AND AROUND SCHOOLS IN BRACKNELL FOREST**
Director of Social Care and Learning

1 PURPOSE OF DECISION

- 1.1 To determine the Executive's response to the recommendations in the report by the Social Care and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel's Working Group on *A Review of Children's Centres and Extended Services in Bracknell Forest Schools*.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **That the responses and recommendations outlined in the supporting information in section 5 of this report are approved.**
- 2.2 **That the members of the working group are thanked for their report.**

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Working Group has spent considerable time reflecting on all the issues with the support of appropriate officers. As a consequence the report and recommendations are fully informed and merit support.

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 Not applicable.

5 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 5.1 The report portrays a very positive picture of the way in which the Extended Services and Children's Centres programmes have been developed in Bracknell Forest and recognises the progress that has been made. Both programmes have proved challenging to deliver: in the early days there was some resistance to the concept of extended schools and making the right facilities available for Children's Centres has sometimes been difficult given the limitations of available funding and constraints over where it is possible to build. Both are now well established and there is a high degree of confidence that targets for delivery will be successfully met. Whilst recognising this, the report sets out a number of recommendations for future development. These recommendations along with a considered response are set out in the following paragraphs.

- 5.2 **(a) Working Group Recommendation** *We would encourage the Council to move towards outcome-based performance measures for Extended Schools Services and (needing less advancement on measures) Children's Centres as early as possible, to get fully to the heart of what outcomes are being aimed for, in terms of improving the*

lives and life chances of families and children. The Executive should set a timetable for stating and adopting these performance measures.

This recommendation is agreed in principal.

Extended Services is a provision that covers a variety of services that have the potential to benefit children, young people, their parents and the community. These people may also be in receipt of many other interventions from the Council or its partners. Therefore it is sometimes difficult to determine precisely exact cause and effect and the impact of any one service in isolation. However, outcomes overall are measured through the Children and Young People's Plan, without reference to the individual interventions that children or families may have received. There is a clear timetable associated with this and relevant performance measures are reported in the quarterly Performance Management Report. The majority of extended services work is encouraging and supporting schools and other partners to make provision and so the performance measures that are used measure the outputs in terms of provisions made.

Children's Centres already have in place a set of performance measures. All services are monitored against national and local Key Performance Indicators and the membership of each centre is regularly reviewed to ensure that it is representative of the local community and that vulnerable families are accessing services. Parents who use the enhanced services of Family Outreach Support and parenting programmes also evaluate their own progress against personal targets set at the beginning of the intervention.

All but one of the national KPIs for Children's Centres are targets that are shared with other agencies e.g. the maintenance of breastfeeding rates; the reduction of A & E admissions; the reduction of children living in workless households etc. It is therefore more difficult to evidence the impact that children's centres alone are having on these targets.

In addition to quantitative data, a wide range of qualitative evidence is also collected including case studies; written and verbal feedback from families; the results of consultations etc.

Both programmes, Extended Services and Children's Centres, are the subject of specific external review and the national framework for monitoring effectiveness continues to develop.

- 5.3 **(b) Working Group Recommendation** *The departmental service plan statements and targets need to be less vague, so it is clearer exactly what is to be achieved in each year.*

Agreed. The Social Care and Learning Service Plan, 2009/10 is more precise in terms of both actions and targets for Extended Services and Children's Centres.

- 5.4 **(c) Working Group Recommendation** *The current assessment of Children's Centres by officers, which is on-going, should cover the next 5 years, the optimum disposition of the buildings for each Centre, partnership input, and the long-term funding position.*

This recommendation is agreed in principal. Whilst a five year planning cycle would be optimal, funding is confirmed on a shorter term basis.

The LA is currently reviewing the final disposition of the remaining centres taking into consideration the available capital budget which has to be spent by March 2010. It is unlikely that there will be any further capital allocations and it is therefore essential that the remaining buildings are sited in areas of need and also meet government reach criteria. Planning constraints will also play a major part in these decisions.

Revenue funding is also secure until March 2011 (the end of the last Comprehensive Spending Review). However, once the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Bill receives Royal Assent (expected towards the end of 2009), children's centres will be given a statutory basis and will receive long term revenue funding on the same basis as schools.

Current partners, both voluntary and statutory, are either commissioned through Service Level Agreements, or work together under Partnership Agreements. It is hoped that it will be possible to award SLAs of 3 years in order to secure the already successful multi-agency working.

- 5.5 **(d) Working Group Recommendation** *Residents in the areas without a single-site Children's Centre building should be surveyed for their views on the accessibility, range and success of the service.*

Agreed. Once the phase three buildings are in place, it is likely that the only area without a central building will be that which encompasses Binfield, Jennett's Park and the new development at Amen Corner. Services will be run from local community buildings and the local communities will be consulted on a regular basis regarding the accessibility and success of the services on offer.

- 5.6 **(e) Working Group Recommendation** *The Council strives to improve the involvement of charities and the voluntary sector with the ESS programme, also voluntary support from the private sector.*

Agreed. Charities, the voluntary sector and volunteer support have been involved in ESS work since its inception, from helping identify needs through to being commissioned to provide services in response to needs. Bracknell Forest Voluntary Action is an active partner. The value of the contributions from the third sector overall has been significant. As the programme moves forward the Council will strive to improve engagement still further.

- 5.7 **(f) Working Group Recommendation** *The Council encourages, where appropriate, ASGs to strengthen their membership and accountability, and review whether they are suitably funded and empowered in practice. This is particularly important as there is uncertainty over their budgets after August 2010.*

The Council is developing its work on community activities and services from engagement through commissioning to evaluation. The ASGs are central to the local accountability that the Council believes is needed for community based work to be effective in delivering outcomes in the period to August 2010 and beyond. A strong membership is key to accountability. The best groups are in this position and new members are being recruited to other groups on an ongoing basis.

In practice, the budgets that ASGs have received have been sufficient in recent years to fund local aspirations. Budget provision will continue until August 2011. Currently there is no guarantee of funding after this time as current Government funding plans only stretch to March 2011. However work is underway on a model of funding that includes area based allocations as a key identified element. The expectation is that

this model would be available to use whatever funding allocations are available after April 2011.

- 5.8 **(g) Working Group Recommendation** *The Council carefully manages the expected transition from central funding to schools-based funding, and maximises contributions from partner organisations such as the PCT.*

Agreed. The pattern of central and school based funding is now into its second year, of three. A model is being developed clearly identifying the key areas of support available to schools which seeks to ensure sustainability.

ESS work has been on a basis of facilitating and supporting schools and partners. Work currently embraces the contributions from partners, including the PCT, to shared objectives. This is an essential element that can be expected to continue in the future.

- 5.9 **(h) Working Group Recommendation** *The partnership with Health Visitors should be developed, specifically so that they are informed of the full range of services at all of the Children's Centre.*

Agreed. The co-location of the Health Visitors at The Oaks and The Rowans in multi-agency rooms also housing the Family Outreach Workers, Parenting Worker and the CAF Co-ordinator, is working extremely well and families receive a more holistic service as a result. Wherever possible, this model of multi-agency working will be supported with the provision of office space in future buildings e.g. The Alders.

The promotion of children's centres through the red book insert and discussion with parents at the first ante-natal visit will be part of the Partnership Agreement with the PCT.

Those Health Visiting teams who are not based on centre sites receive regular updates about the centre services via email and packages of publicity e.g. posters etc. They also receive visits from centre staff who attend the Health Visitors team meetings.

- 5.10 **(i) Working Group Recommendation:** *Focus should be maintained on funding those extended services that are sustainable beyond August 2010.*

Agreed. Funding services that will be sustainable in the long term has always been a priority in advising ASGs on spending priorities. This focus will be maintained. Schools are also fully signed up to this approach.

- 5.11 **(j) Working Group Recommendation:** *The Social Care & Learning and Health O&S Panels be kept informed, via quarterly Performance Management Reports as to the funding position and advised of possible future developments.*

Agreed. The format of the quarterly PMR provides sufficient scope for members of the Panel to see both progress in terms of achieving the external and internal targets that have been set and to be made aware of planned developments. Officers will provide any additional information that the panels require in order to further the sound development of these activities.

- 5.12 **(k) Working Group Recommendation:** *The Council should require the 14 schools – Kennel Lane excepted – yet to achieve 'fully extended' services to publish plans showing how that will be achieved by the end of 2010, with the identified progress*

milestones. Progress reports on this should be included in quarterly Performance Monitoring Reports, which are reviewed by the Social Care and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

Agreed. By April 2009 28 schools have met the requirements to achieve 'fully extended' services leaving 9 schools (including Kennel Lane) yet to reach the standard. Discussions are underway and plans have been developed in all these schools that should see them though to meet the standard by June 2010. In many cases action is needed in only one, possibly two, of the five areas and schools are aware of what needs to be done and undertaking the required work. Schools have been encouraged to include these developments in their School Development Plans and in many cases have done so. Progress towards achieving the target is reported in the quarterly PMR.

5.13 **(l) Working Group Recommendation:** *More is done to improve the 'reach' of Extended Schools Services to teenagers and hard-to-reach groups.*

Agreed. ESS services are well-established in secondary schools, using the same inclusive approach as in primary schools. Youth Services have been a central partner since the project's inception. However the Council will strive to extend the reach still further and the development of Integrated Youth Support provides good opportunities to do this, for example, some really positive work in Great Hollands has developed partly from Extended Services activities at Easthampstead Park School.

Focusing services on disadvantaged groups is a priority for spending decisions, and will continue to be so. The Council now has funding to address the needs of economically disadvantaged children and young people on a pilot basis in 2009/10 and across the Borough from April 2010, currently for one year.

5.14 **(m) Working Group Recommendation:** *Given that Kennel Lane School serves the whole Borough, all Area Steering Groups should be encouraged to consider how they can best support the inclusion of special needs pupils at Kennel Lane.*

Agreed. All ASGs should give this consideration. Work is underway, coupled with the Aiming High for Disabled Children focus on short breaks, to identify and provide for individual child and young people. It is agreed that this is best driven from the viewpoint, expectations and capabilities of the child at, normally, Kennel Lane School.

5.15 **(n) Working Group Recommendation:** *Schools should be further encouraged to undertake their improvement planning – setting their vision, objectives and actions – in the light of the 'whole child' and the views of all stakeholders.*

Agreed. The Council is encouraging schools to use the NCSL/TDA School Improvement Planning Framework which is a collection of tools that can be used as whole process or individually to enhance one part of a process. Implicit to the approach is the involvement of all stakeholders. Through the involvement of parents, the community and other local stakeholders the needs of the 'whole child' are identified. About one half of schools have attended workshops and there are reports of the effective use of the tools. The LA collects and analyses school improvement plans and provides support where this is required.

5.16 **(o) Working Group Recommendation:** *The Council strives to realise the benefits of partnership work supporting children and families through the Community Activity and Services Partnership.*

Agreed. The 'CASP' is a relatively new partnership that the Council sees as central to moving forward its work on community focused delivery.

- 5.17 **(p) Working Group Recommendation:** *The Council further ensures that local area needs continue to be identified to inform service delivery through enhanced engagement processes such as consultations, questionnaires, focus groups and other methods.*

Agreed. Engagement has been implicit in service delivery from the start of the ESS programme, as the expectation is that all service delivery is rooted in the needs of children, young people and families. Various engagement methods have been used; the best have been used frequently, others have been used only once and alternatives then used. These approaches will continue.

For Children's Centres, local area needs will be regularly assessed through a variety of different indicators such as the birth rate figures, the take up of tax credits and the Foundation Stage Profile.

Children's Centres have Advisory Boards with representative parents/carers and other members of the local community who meet termly to discuss local need.

There is on-going informal consultation with users of the centre and other professionals to ensure that services meet need.

There are also groups run for parents/carers with specific needs e.g. lone parents, young parents, parents of children with SEN/disabilities, fathers, EAL groups etc. which allow for enhanced engagement around the development of services to meet their needs.

Partnership working with the voluntary sector e.g. PLA, PACT, HomeStart, Action for Children etc allows for engagement with the more hard to reach groups of our community.

6 **ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS**

Borough Solicitor

- 6.1 No legal issues arise from this report.

Borough Treasurer

- 6.2 The Borough Treasurer is satisfied that no significant financial implications arise from this report.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.3 Equalities Impact Assessments have been completed for both Children's Centres and Extended Services.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.4 There are no strategic risk issues arising from this report.

7 **CONSULTATION**

Principal Groups Consulted

7.1 Not applicable

Method of Consultation

7.2 Not applicable

Representations Received

7.3 Not applicable

Background Papers

Report by the working group of the Social Care and Learning Scrutiny Panel - 'A Review of Children's Centres and Extended Services in and Around Schools in Bracknell Forest by a Joint Working Group of the Health Overview & Scrutiny Panel and Social Care and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel'.

Contact for further information

Karen Frost, Early Years, Childcare and Play Manager 01344 354024
karen.frost@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

Graham Symonds, Extended Services Manager 01344 354067
graham.symonds@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

Martin Gocke, Chief Officer: Access & Inclusion 01344 354009
martin.gocke@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

Doc. Ref

