

## TRAFFORD COUNCIL

**Report to:** Scrutiny Committee  
**Date:** 21<sup>st</sup> March 2013  
**Report for:** Decision  
**Report of:** Executive Member for Children and Families

### 1.0 Report Title

Response to scrutiny call in of the Executive decision of 4/3/13 in relation to

#### **RECONFIGURATION OF TRAFFORD CHILDREN CENTRES: POST CONSULTATION FEEDBACK ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### 2.0 Background

The original proposal consulted upon was to reconfigure the 16 Children Centres to become 6 Children Centre Hubs that are aligned with the Area Family Support Teams (AFST's) and to be located as follows:

- Lostock and Old Trafford Hubs (North Area)
- Partington and Urmston Hubs (West Area)
- Altrincham and Sale Hubs (South Area)

The Executive decision on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2013 was informed by a comprehensive analysis of the feedback received from the public consultation held from 22nd October 2012 until 14th January 2013.

The key rationale for the proposed change to the existing children centre service model is to shift the emphasis towards prevention, early help and early intervention service model, which will be achieved through strengthening multi-agency working to safeguard children and young people so as they can achieve the best life outcomes.

The findings from the review of children centres which began in August 2012 and completed in Dec 2012, also reinforced the need for children centres to change the way they delivered services, and the need to develop family outreach services working with the integrated AFSTs to support those children and families who are in the greatest need and thus the most vulnerable.

There was no adverse written feedback from the consultation to suggest that the essence of the original proposal to provide a more targeted service to those children and families who are most vulnerable and who are in greatest need was unsupported.

There was however, significant feedback presented that required further examination of the proposals in respect to the reduction in the number of children centres and the location of the proposed Hubs; this resulted in a change to the original proposals to move one of the North hubs from Lostock to Stretford and to create an additional two new Child and Family Community Outreach (CFCO) bases as follows:

- **Stretford** and Old Trafford Hubs and **Leithwaite (CFCO)** (North Area)
- Partington and Urmston Hubs (West Area)
- Altrincham and Sale Hubs and **Sale Moor (CFCO)** (South Area)

### 3.0 Council Decision

The Council Executive approved the following recommendations:

1. To approve the proposal to reconfigure 16 Children Centres to 6 Hubs that align with the North, West and South Area Family Support Teams
2. To approve the revision of the identified Hub for the North Area in the original proposal from Lostock Children's Centre (Leithwaite) to Stretford Children's Centre
3. To approve Sale Moor and Lostock (Leithwaite) Children Centres to remain open on a sessional basis as Child and Family Community Outreach (CFCO) bases.

Contact person for access to background papers and further information:

Name: Mrs Deborah Brownlee, Corporate Director Children, Young People and Families

Extension: 4676

Relationship to Policy Framework/Corporate Priorities	See previous paper (4 <sup>th</sup> March 2013 –Executive Members)
Financial	See previous paper (4 <sup>th</sup> March 2013 –Executive Members)
Legal Implications:	See previous paper (4 <sup>th</sup> March 2013 –Executive Members)
Equality/Diversity Implications	See previous paper (4 <sup>th</sup> March 2013 –Executive Members)
Sustainability Implications	See previous paper (4 <sup>th</sup> March 2013 –Executive Members)
Staffing/E-Government/Asset	See previous paper (4 <sup>th</sup> March 2013 –Executive Members)
Management Implications	See previous paper (4 <sup>th</sup> March 2013 –Executive Members)
Risk Management Implications	See previous paper (4 <sup>th</sup> March 2013 –Executive Members)
Health and Safety Implications	See previous paper (4 <sup>th</sup> March 2013 –Executive Members)

## 4. REASONS FOR CALL-IN:

### 4.1. INACCURATE INFORMATION

a) **The report on page one suggests that 'consultation written responses do not indicate a strong objection to the proposal to refocus resources'; this claim is repeated again on p33, 7.3. This suggests support for the proposals, however**

**73% of respondents opposed the proposals and the written submissions list a lot of concerns which are not reflected on in the Executive Summary.**

## **Response**

The above quote is taken out of context as the full paragraph reads:

*“The consultation written responses do not indicate a strong objection to the proposal to refocus resources to deliver services to those children and families who are the most vulnerable and in greatest need; There was however, significant feedback presented that required further examination of the proposals in respect to the number and location of the 6 proposed Hubs and the development of the Outreach provision.”*

This therefore clarifies that the principle that underpins the redesign was not objected to however, the number and location of the centres did receive significant negative feedback, and this informed changes to the original proposals, namely changing the Hub from Lostock to Stretford and creating two children and family community outreach bases at Leithwaite and Sale Moor.

All of the feedback analysis was provided to executive members in detail in Appendix A and was considered before any decisions were taken.

- b ) Pages 3 and 9 of the report list perceived weaknesses identified in the early stages of the Children’s Centre review, however this information has to be treated with caution as page 81 of the report highlights that attendance is not always recorded, which will distort the data.**

## **Response**

We acknowledge that the Review of the Children’s Centres report highlighted some under reporting of attendance, however the percentage reach to key vulnerable groups is so low that even accounting for an element of under recording would not change the fundamental need to radically improve engagement of these groups.

- c) The report starts by identifying ‘the need for Children Centre functions to shift towards an outreach family support model’ and suggests ‘the number of families registered with Children Centres were not necessarily engaging with the Centres’. However, this seems contrary to the rationale used to support the retention of a base in Sale Moor (p6-‘Sale Moor has very low engagement figures’).**

### **Response**

The two points are not contradictory. The new service model is based on a hub and spoke approach with outreach activity as a key way of reaching those who do not engage.

The retention of Sale Moor as a part time Child and Family Community Outreach base was identified as this is an area of low engagement where a significant amount of outreach activity will need to be developed. All the areas across the South were considered and the selection of Sale Moor is coherent with the overall model.

- d) **Parents have raised concerns about the suitability of some of the venues listed as community venues available to provide services. Parents have advised that some of the venues have already been rejected due to the expense of hire. This was not made clear before the Executive took their decision.**

### **Response**

**Appendix D of the report to executive members made it clear that the list of venues are** only an example of available venues in each area, and states clearly that some of the listed venues could be used in the future for activities but only if and when they have been checked for safety and suitability.

## **4.2. INADEQUATE CONSULTATION**

- a) **Pages 14-16 of the report highlight a number of concerns with the consultation process. Parents registered with Children's Centres were reporting to the Council as late as December that they had not received consultation information by email/post. Parents reported that forms were not promoted at the Children's Centres which is obviously a main access point for service users. Though the Council did produce an easy read version of the form, this does not address how parents struggling with literacy would be able to participate in the consultation with confidence.**

**The consultation period effectively lost two weeks over the Christmas period, requests were made by parents and councillors to extend the consultation period, which were refused.**

**The Executive did not pay due regard to the concerns raised about the consultation period when taking this decision.**

### **Response**

Section 2 of Appendix A of the report to Executive members details all of the concerns raised by the public regarding the process and provides a detailed response to each point. This information was available to, and considered by, the Executive in reaching their decision.

During the consultation period any concerns expressed about the process were responded to speedily and appropriately, for example additional meetings were called and an easy read explanation of statutory duties was produced and distributed. This is all detailed in Section 2 of Appendix A that was available to members when they took their decision on 4/3/13. Due to the volume and the breadth of the feedback received during the consultation, it is our judgement that the consultation was robust and valid.

#### **4.3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS WERE NOT GIVEN SUFFICIENT CONSIDERATION**

- a) **The report is framed to suggest that the changes proposed were triggered by the early findings of the Children’s Centre review. This contrasts with the report presented to the Executive at the special meeting held on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2012, where the proposal is listed under the heading ‘CYPS Savings Proposals’. It is therefore unclear whether the changes are being driven by a massive, £1.7m, reduction of the budget or the outcome of the children’s centre review.**

##### **Response**

The proposal clearly form part of the budget proposals and are therefore designed to contribute to the significant savings target across the whole Local Authority.

A combination of the budget proposals and the early emerging findings from the review of the children centres informed the development of the redesign of service model.

The Children’s Centre Review however has enabled us to develop proposals that whilst meeting the challenging financial targets also allow us to focus (as identified as guiding principles in the Councils Vision 2015 document and original budget proposals) on the most vulnerable.

- b) **With this being the case, the report does not demonstrate why the status quo would not address the issue of engaging those who are in greatest need. Page 4 of the report under the heading ‘Other Options’ indicates insufficient work carried out when considering alternatives, with three short paragraphs being devoted to this section within an 86 page report.**

##### **Response**

The three paragraphs on page 4 are a summary of Section 6 of Appendix A, which is a five page review of alternative proposals with detailed responses to all alternative suggestions considered. Executive members had this report available to them to inform their decision on 4<sup>th</sup> march 2013.

#### **4.4. INSUFFICIENT INFORMATION WAS AVAILABLE**

- a) **Page 2 of the report (Executive Summary) refers to the completion of EIA’s for both service and staff, stating that both are attached to the report. The Service EIA, which identifies medium risks is included in the report, however the staff EIA, which identifies high risks, has not been included. This is key information not available to the Executive when they took the decision to approve the report’s recommendations.**

##### **Response**

We acknowledge that page two of the report refers to both the service and staffing EIA’s despite the fact that only the service EIA was included as an Appendix. This was a drafting error as only the Service EIA’s are part of the budget decision making process. The staff EIA’s are not public documents as they contain personal information and should not have been referred to in the report. This is the agreed approach across all Local Authority budget decisions

The report does contain information as to the likely numbers of staff who could be affected by the decisions. Statutory consultation is being conducted with the staff concerned and the EIA will be relevant to the decisions which will be made following the conclusion of that consultation process.

- b) A number of councillors have referred to services not being affected by the proposals; one example cited being the impact in Timperley following the closure of Broomwood Children's Centre. However, the Council's response to consultation suggests that this rests on recruiting more volunteers. The report does not make it clear that some services will not be able to continue without the support of volunteers and therefore requires further scrutiny.**

### **Response**

Page 3 of the Executive report provided to members to support their decision on 4/3/13 details the precise scale of the staff reductions.

The original consultation report (published in October 2012) makes it clear that we are proposing a fundamental redesign of the services offered and the consultation responses (see Section 5 of Appendix A) review in detail what parents consider should be the priority services in the future. There is no claim in the report that services will not be reduced, the report consistently references the need to shift the emphasis towards targeting services at those children and families who are most vulnerable and in greatest need.

Section 7 of Appendix A makes it clear that services need to be refocused in order to free up resources to enable the focus on the most vulnerable.

There is reference in Appendix A to the importance of our volunteering strategy to ensure continuity and sustainability of services. We value the volunteer support that is currently in place and will encourage further volunteer support in the future.