

Full Equality Impact Assessment Report for Children's Centres



1. Introduction

Bracknell Forest Council is anticipating having to make savings of nearly £6m across the Council in the financial year 2012/13. The imminent reduction in resources has prompted a review of services and the way we deliver support in order to maximise efficiency and effectiveness while providing the best outcomes for individuals.

The Council has a statutory duty to provide children's centre services that improve the outcomes for families with children aged 0-5 years old. These services are designed to meet local need and will therefore be different in each area and will reflect the level of need in each community. Services are reviewed regularly to ensure that changing needs are met.

Bracknell Forest Children's Centres are based in the following areas:

The main centres with a central building are:

- **The Oaks Children's Centre** situated on the site of Great Hollands School (Serving the communities of Great Hollands/Jennett's Park/ Birch Hill/Hanworth)
- **The Rowans Children's Centre** situated on the site of Fox Hill School (Serving the communities of Easthampstead/Wildridings)
- **The Willows Children's Centre** – situated at Priestwood Youth Centre (Serving the communities of Bullbrook/Priestwood/Town Centre)
- **The Alders Children's Centre** situated on the site of College Town Schools (Serving the communities of Sandhurst/Owlsmoor/College Town)

The satellite centres are:

- **The Chestnuts Children's Centre** - delivering services from community venues (Serving the communities of Crowthorne/Little Sandhurst)
- **The Maples Children's Centre** - delivering services from community venues (Serving the communities of Warfield/Ascot/Winkfield/Cranbourne)
- **The Hollies Children's Centre** - delivering services from community venues (Serving the communities of Binfield/Temple Park/Amen Corner)
- **The Sycamores Children's Centre** - delivering services from community venues (Serving the communities of Crown Wood/Harmans Water/Forest Park/Martins Heron)

It is proposed that:

The Hollies merges with The Oaks
The Chestnuts merges with The Alders
The Maples merges with The Willows
The Sycamores merges with The Rowans

The mergers are proposed to:

- Reflect the current staffing structures as each staff team already supports one main centre and one satellite centre
- Maximise efficiency and utilise resources to best effect in light of possible cuts to budgets

- To strengthen the links between the main and satellite centres

This Full Equality Impact Assessment Report looks at the issues, considerations and conclusions around the potential merging of the four satellite children's centres with the four main centres. The key groups affected have been identified as: service users; staff; stakeholder groups including health partners and other providers, and the wider community.

2. Background

In order to ensure greater efficiency, it is proposed that the four Bracknell Forest Children's Centres without a central building (satellite centres) are merged with the four main centres. It is intended that targeted services will continue to be run in these satellite areas to ensure the needs of families are met.

The staffing and management structure will remain the same, as each Manager and team of staff currently provide the services to two centres, one with a main building and one operating from community venues. There will be no impact on staffing levels.

Of the four satellite centres that are to be merged, The Hollies, The Maples and The Chestnuts are in areas of relative affluence i.e. Binfield, Warfield, North Ascot, Winkfield, Cranbourne, Crowthorne and Little Sandhurst. The Sycamores covers areas of disadvantage in Harmans Water and Crown Wood, but services will continue to be delivered and the funding formula will reflect the number of children and the levels of disadvantage in those areas.

Targeted services in these areas will continue to run, reflecting the level of need. Families from the satellite areas can continue to access the universal services delivered through the main centres as is the case now.

3. Methodology and Sources of Data

In order to establish what the impact would be of merging the Children's Centres a number of sources of data have been analysed.

The ward data sheets in Appendix 1 were compiled for the Poverty Needs Analysis and highlight the relative affluence in the areas where it is proposed that the Satellite Children's Centres are closed; Binfield with Warfield (Hollies); Crowthorne and Little Sandhurst and Wellington (Chestnuts); Warfield Harvest Ride, Ascot and Winkfield and Cranbourne (Maples) which indicates a lower level of need. They also demonstrate the high level of need of the communities in Crown Wood and Harmans Water (Sycamores).

Further data was collected on current registrations in the satellite centres on the following:

Number of disabled adults
Number of males
Pregnant women
Ethnicity
The number of under 5s in each centre area

Full details are shown on the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) Screening form (see Appendix 2)

4. Assessment of Impact on Equality strands

The following characteristics were identified in the EIA Screening as receiving a neutral impact: and this has been supported by the consultation.

Gender Re-assignment Equality

We have no evidence of a differential impact on this group at this time. However, Bracknell Forest will adhere to its diversity policy and practices wherever necessary.

Marriage and Civil Partnership Equality

No known impact. However, Bracknell Forest will adhere to its diversity policy and practices wherever necessary.

The following characteristics were identified in the EIA screening as having a potential adverse impact, but this has not been reflected in the consultation in all cases – see below:

Racial Equality

No users or staff have identified an impact from a racial equality perspective.

Sexual Orientation Equality

No users or staff have identified an impact from a sexual orientation equality perspective.

Religion and Belief Equality

No users or staff have identified an impact from a religion and belief equality perspective.

Equality monitoring information is held that reflects service users' religious and cultural beliefs. Bracknell Forest will respect and ensure that people's religious beliefs and cultural needs are respected and where services are commissioned, the procurement process includes respecting diversity as a key issue. Staff are aware of the needs of different religious groups.

Pregnancy and Maternity Equality

Current registrations in the satellite centres are = 6 pregnant women

Some potential adverse impact has been identified as pregnant and new mothers are at risk of not being able to access services outside their local communities. This will be mitigated by the continuation of some services in the satellite areas and will be closely monitored.

Disability Equality Issues

Current registrations of disabled adults and children in the satellite centres are: Adults = 5
Children = 2

Whilst this was not a concern raised during the consultation, some potential adverse impact has been identified as disabled adults and children are at risk of not being able to access services outside their local communities. This will be mitigated by the continuation of some services in the satellite areas and will be closely monitored.

Gender Equality Issues

Current adult registrations in the satellite centres are: Female = 1,333 Male = 265

The majority of users who may be affected are female and the vast majority of respondents were female. Some potential adverse impact has been identified as women will be the group most affected by any changes to service delivery. This will be mitigated by the continuation of some services in the satellite areas and will be closely monitored.

Age Equality Issues

Current registrations of children aged 0-5 in the satellite centres are 3,270

Some potential adverse impact has been identified as children's centres were established to meet the needs of children aged 0-5 years and their families. Any changes to service delivery will impact on this age group but this will be mitigated by the continuation of some services in the satellite areas and will be closely monitored.

5. Monitoring Arrangements

Monitoring the ongoing situation against our equalities ambitions is of crucial importance. In the case of this proposal, there may be users who might experience adverse impact and this will be monitored and mitigated against if necessary.

Should the proposed mergers go ahead, the situation will be monitored by using the eStart computer system to check the equality information for registrations and the attendance at both the main and satellite centres, to ensure that the current profile of users remains the same or improves.

In addition, users of the both the satellite and main centres will be consulted on a regular basis to ensure that their needs are being met.

6. Consultation & Engagement

6.1 How the consultation was carried out

The consultation was carried out to meet the requirements of both the Council and the Department for Education. It was also considered essential to gain the views of service users and providers when any major changes are made to the service delivery in children's centres and to ensure that any impact on equality issues is identified.

The consultation period was December 16, 2011 to January 20, 2012.

Methods of Consultation included:

- Letters
- Emails to all registered users, Advisory Board members and stakeholders
- Questionnaires – online and hard copy
- Posters
- Bracknell Forest Council Website
- Public Meetings in those communities where it is proposed that satellite children's centres are merged as follows:
 - January 9, 2012 - Crowthorne
 - January 11, 2012 - Harmans Water
 - January 16, 2012 - Warfield
 - January 18, 2012 - Binfield

The consultation was advertised widely through posters in children's centres, community venues, early years settings etc.

Hard copies of the questionnaire were available if required and were also sent to all early years settings.

Parents were made aware that support was available, if required, to complete the questionnaire.

107 people responded to the consultation by completing the questionnaire either on-line or in hard copy.

3 people attended the public meeting in Crowthorne but there was no attendance at the meetings held in Warfield, Binfield and Harmans Water.

The quantitative data regarding the responses are shown in Appendix 3

6.2 Summary of views, recommendations and issues received

Parents/carers

There are approximately 7,500 children aged 0-5 years living in the Borough which equates to about 5,000 families. 107 parent/carers responded to the questionnaire, either on-line or in hard copy.

Of these, 44% opposed the proposed mergers, 24% supported them and 32% had no view.

Where comments were made by parent/carers, the main concerns were:

- Having to travel outside their local community in order to access services, particularly when they had no transport. 67% of respondents currently walk to access local services.
- The main centres not having the capacity to accommodate the additional users from the satellite centres.

Other concerns raised by individuals were:

- Reduced flexibility of services to meet the needs of working parents
- Where the main centre is not convenient, would they be able to access any centre
- A concern about staff having the capacity to deliver more services
- The high cost of the bus fare would stop a parent from accessing services if they had to travel to the main centre.

Parent/carers also commented on the ways in which children's centres had supported them – 74% of respondents said that using the services had increased their confidence in being a parent.

- By having the support of professionals .e.g. breastfeeding
- Gaining an understanding of child development and how to deal with difficult behaviour
- Having somebody to talk through worries
- Meeting other parents, making friends and sharing experiences
- Provision of information, advice and support
- Developing confidence in talking/interacting with other people
- Having access to outside space when living in a flat

Professionals

There were no adverse comments from the professionals involved in the delivery of the children's centre programme.

6.3 Next Steps

Should the Executive approve the mergers on February 21, 2012 the following steps will be taken;

- February 22, 2012 – the mergers will be effected on the EC Harris website which in turn informs the Department for Education and the Directgov website.
- February 29, 2012 - Full Council meeting where the budget will be approved.
- March 1, 2012 – March 31, 2012 – Review of services and planning for revised service delivery. New service schedules to be established and promoted to the public.
- April 1, 2012 – New service programme rolled out

6.3.1 Action Plan

Concerns	Potential Adverse Impact	Mitigation	By whom	Timing
Families will have to travel outside their local community to access services	Families will stop using children's centre services and will not be able to access additional support if required. Parents will not be able to build relationships with staff which gives them the confidence to seek support if required.	Services will continue to run in each of the satellite areas according to local need and available resources. If an individual family is vulnerable and needs to access specific support at another centre, help with transport costs might be provided subject to available resources.	Children's Centre staff	Commencing April 2012
The main centres might not have the capacity to accommodate additional users	Families will not have access to all services Those families who need additional support might not always be able to access the support they require.	Additional services will be run if resources allow. Volunteers will be recruited to support the delivery of these additional sessions Families who are identified as needing additional	Children's Centre Managers	Commencing April 2012

		<p>support will be given priority at sessions</p> <p>Further engagement with voluntary partners will be explored to ascertain whether they could support the delivery of services from children's centre sites.</p>		
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7. Publication of Equality Impact Assessment

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 aims to make public authorities more transparent, accountable and increase public debate and involvement. Under the Act the Council makes available to the public a vast amount of information via its Publication Scheme. All completed EIA screening forms are published and available to the public on a quarterly basis. The EIAs are published to <http://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/your-council/yc-community-cohesion/yc-equality-impact-assessments.htm>.

8. Conclusions

The consultation has shown that most people using the satellite centres walk to the local community venues from which the services are delivered and there was a concern that those people without transport would be unable to access services run from the main centres which could be up to 5 miles away.

There was also a concern that all services in the satellite centres would cease and that services users would have to travel to the main centres to access any services, although this is not the case.

The Council will endeavour to deliver weekly services in the satellite areas according to local need to ensure that families without transport and the most vulnerable families who might be less willing to travel outside their local communities, will continue to receive support.

The responses also raised a concern about the capacity of the main centres should more families try to access services there. It is hoped that by continuing to run some services in the satellite areas, this will not be an issue. However, should this occur services will be reviewed and additional services will be run depending on available resources.

In addition, the Council is considering how else to support the delivery of children's centre services e.g. the expansion of local volunteers who can work with the centre staff in a number of roles.

The consultation demonstrated that 83% of respondents would be prepared to make a small financial contribution to services (£1 - £2). However, the response was statistically very small and this response cannot be taken as representative. Whilst this might indicate some opportunities for additional income that could be used to deliver more services, this cannot be relied upon.

In summary, it is important that, if the mergers are confirmed, the satellite centres maintain their identity to ensure that local communities still feel that there is a children's centre presence in their area and that some services continue to run in these areas according to local need and available resources. This will also support community cohesion and social inclusion in the satellite areas.