

SCRUTINY REPORT



MEETING: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE: TUESDAY 10 MARCH 2020

SUBJECT: UPDATE FOLLOWING THE CALL IN MEETING – CHILDREN'S CENTRES REPORT

REPORT FROM: SANDRA BRUCE, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (EARLY HELP AND SCHOOL READINESS)

CONTACT OFFICER: SANDRA BRUCE

Executive Summary

- In November 2019 Cabinet agreed, in principle, to explore Community Asset Transfer of 5 of its Children Centre buildings.
- The transfer of assets was the subject of a call in meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in January 2020 and will be further reviewed by the Committee on 10 March 2020.
- This report provides O and S with an update on progress; including the statutory requirements linked to the Children Centre offer and framework for inspection which will need to be considered as part of any transfer of buildings.

Recommendations

It is recommended that O and S

- Review the information and offer any comment or feedback on progress of the Community Asset Transfer process

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Community Asset Transfer of Children Centre buildings is premised on the provider continuing to comply with statutory requirements in relation to any offer, laid out in the Children Act 2006 and associated guidance including requirements set out in the regulatory framework for inspection.
- 1.2. The transfer and delivery of the Children Centre offer will need to reflect current drivers both from a GM and local perspective of meeting needs early and locally, with greater emphasis on communities contributing to the development and delivery of services.

2. Background

- 2.1. The LA has a statutory duty to provide a universal offer to parents and young children set out in the Children Act 2006 and the associated guidance of 2013 through its Children Centre provision.
- 2.2. Whilst the Act is not prescriptive of the offer it lays out certain principles that the LA must deliver on.
- 2.3. A Childrens Centre is defined as a place or group of places which is managed on behalf of or under the arrangements with the LA to ensure that early childhood services are provided.
- 2.4. The LA should provide universal and targeted early childhood services and **must** provide some of those services on site.
- 2.5. The core purpose of the Centre is to improve outcomes for young children and reduce inequalities between families in greatest need and their peers in
 - Child development and school readiness
 - Parenting aspirations
 - Child and family health and life chances
- 2.6. Whilst the LA can make its own arrangements on how it delivers the offer it needs to ensure that there are sufficient centers to meet local needs.
- 2.7. The statutory guidance also makes clear that any offer should integrate with the provision both of universal services but also targeted services including when families require intervention from social care. The transfer of assets must ensure that the offer integrates with Bury's early help approach through its adoption of the Stockport Family Model as well as the principles underpinning the approach of restorative practice and a strength based practice model. Any new provider will also need to ensure it understands Burys approach to neighborhood working and commitment to the mainstreaming and embedding of the principles underpinning its Troubled Families agenda.
- 2.8. In addition to statutory responsibility and guidance, the LA must also ensure that its offers meets the requirements set out in the OFSTED inspection framework for Childrens Centres. Whilst this framework has been suspended it has not been revoked and therefore the LA will still need to be able to meet inspection requirements should these be re-introduced and any provider will need to keep relevant data and to evidence positive impact of services on children families and communities.

3 Community Asset Transfer

- 3.1. Cabinet has already agreed to the principle of exploring transfer of Children Centre Buildings as part of community asset transfer. This 'fits' with Burys commitment to engaging locally with communities, the principles of co-production and co-delivery and this process could provide a dynamic opportunity to engage with other sectors and partners in delivering quality early years services as part of an integrated early help offer which is more directly linked to local need and influenced by the community.
- 3.2. The process to complete the Community Asset Transfer toolkit is underway. A meeting with key stakeholders has been held to draw up draft guidance linked

to the Children Centre Offer which will be core to the toolkit and sets out expectations for any provider.

- 3.3 The offer is draft as any provider will need to evidence their commitment and strategy for engaging local communities to contribute to the offer. The current draft offer is available at appendix 1.
- 3.4 The toolkit has been completed and work is currently on going to complete the necessary associated information which is on track for completion by end of March 2020 at which point applications will be invited from providers who wish to lease the buildings alongside evidence of how they will meet statutory requirements. The progress of transfer will be dependent on what offers are received as to whether this process progresses.
- 3.5 It will be imperative that any community asset transfer is done in partnership with the LA as the LA will retain responsibility under the Act to deliver the universal offer for families with children under 5

4 Financial implications

- 4.1 Assuming full transfer of costs to new management arrangements the net full year effect saving will be £136,289. However, this is not the driver for considering this step and the LA will continue to have responsibility for building maintenance as the 'landlord' which will likely reduce savings made in the short to medium term.

5 Legal implications

- 5.1 As identified in the original cabinet paper, any legal issues arising will be addressed in the Community Asset Transfer toolkit which is on track for completion by the end of March 2020.

6 Associated Risks

- 6.1 Whilst there remains a limited Children Centre offer which meets the basic statutory requirements, buildings are not being fully utilized and the expectation for the LA to deliver a sound and qualitative offer to families that demonstrates impact cannot currently be evidenced. Should the inspection framework be reintroduced Bury is currently at risk of being found inadequate in its offer. However, Bury is in a position to build a new and exciting offer which would allow for co-production and design and could see buildings utilized in new and different ways to meet its statutory role as well as have a much greater impact on its communities, if assets are transferred to the right provider who it can partner on delivering the offer.
- 6.2 In maintaining the status quo, continuation of existing arrangements will perpetuate the current ineffective use of Children's Centre buildings, and the associated ongoing revenue costs. Further, no provision has been made for capital investment in existing assets that will be required over time.
- 6.3 In seeking interest, there is a risk that there is no interest, or that the provider is unable/unprepared to meet ongoing running costs or deliver on the statutory

requirements and wider vision of the offer. Officers will seek to support and partner with providers especially from Voluntary and Community Sector organisations in the development of sustainable business cases.

7 Conclusion

- 7.1 The process for transfer is currently underway and on track. The viability of the process will be more clear once the toolkit is completed and offers invited in April.
- 7.2 Community Asset Transfer offers an opportunity to build a real community offer whilst also meeting statutory requirements. There is the opportunity to better integrate the Early Years offer with the wider locality early help offer as well as supporting better integration when families need a more targeted response from Social Care. The transfer of assets could allow the right provider to partner with the LA to build a more dynamic and sustainable offer which has greater impact for our families.
- 7.3 The process of inviting providers and assessing applications received is due to be completed by the end of May 2020 with a view to return for cabinet approval by July 2020 and transition and implementation due to be completed by August/September 2020. This is currently on track but is dependent on the quality of applications and this will be clearer in May

Appendix 1 – Draft Offer



List of Background Papers:-

Contact Details:-

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March 2020

Executive Director sign off Friday 28 February 2020

JET Meeting Date: Monday 2 March 2020