

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**CHILDREN'S SERVICES CABINET PANEL
THURSDAY, 25 JUNE 2015 AT 10.00AM**

<u>Agenda Item</u> <u>No.</u> 8
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THE FUTURE OF THE FUNDING FOR THE HOME VISITING SERVICE (HOME-START)

Report of the Director of Childrens Services

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Executive Member: Richard Roberts, Children's Services

1. Purpose of the report

1.1 To outline the rationale for the preferred option for the future of Hertfordshire's volunteer-led home visiting service, currently delivered through nine contracts with Home-Start. To recommend to Cabinet that it agrees the recommendations as set out in Section 3, below.

2. Summary

2.1 This report describes the way in which support is currently offered to families through the funding of a home visiting service, delivered by Home-Start. The service has been in existence for a considerable period of time, pre-dating the development and expansion of free nursery education for two, three and four year olds, the recent expansion of the scale of the Health Visiting Service and the historic development and expansion of the Children's Centres programme.

2.2 Home visiting, Home-Start, and the volunteers working within it, have played an important and positive role in the past in supporting families. However, the expansion of other provision and changing needs means that this model of service delivery is no longer the best way to spend money to meet priority families needs. Accordingly, it is proposed that when the current contracts through which the service is funded and delivered expire, they are not renewed. Arrangements will be put in place to help families, volunteers and provider organisations manage the transition from the current pattern of provision.

3. Recommendations

- (a) To take forward the proposal not to retender the current Home Start contracts when they expire in September 2015.
- (b) To allocate if appropriate £200,000 of savings in 2015/16 for transitional support to Home-Start providers, to include both wind-down costs and activities and support to current providers in developing proposals to assist them in longer term sustainability. The allocation of such costs to be determined by the Director of Children's Services in consultation with the Executive Member for Childrens Services.
- (c) To note the consequent savings of up to £390,000 that will accrue from 2016/17.

4. Background to Home-start and Home Visiting contracts

- 4.1 A volunteer-led home visiting service is currently provided through nine Home-Start schemes, each with a contract with HCC to support families in their area. The contracts are jointly funded by HCC (approx. two-thirds) and East and North Herts, Herts Valley and Cambridgeshire and Peterborough NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups (approx. one-third).

Organisation	Budgetary contribution 2014/15
Herts CC	£391,565
CCGs	£206,520
Total	£598,085

- 4.2 Home-Start schemes received their funding initially as a direct grant without being subject to a commissioning process, and then as a non-competitive contract.
- 4.3 The funding contributes to a home-visiting service by funding support for 395 families per annum at a cost of £1514 per family. This is about twice the cost per family of services delivered via children's centres to high need families. The current level of service is determined by the available funding rather than any assessment of the need/impact.
- 4.4 The Home-Start / home visiting service has been operational for many years. Its existence pre-dates the major expansion of children's centres as the main avenue of support to families with under fives, and the development and extension of the free offer of nursery education to three and four year olds, and most recently to deprived two year olds. It also predates the expansion in recent years of Health Visiting services.
- 4.5 The service users of Home-Start are families with identified support needs with children under five. Referrals are mainly through self-referrals, health visitors, GPs and children's centres. The service is popular with service users.

4.6 From contract monitoring, Home-Start would appear to deliver about 80,000 volunteer hours per year. An assessment in 2014/15 indicated that children's centres use of volunteers extends to 25,000 hours per year, albeit with no specific identifiable costs attributed to that.

5. Contractual position

5.1 Current contracts have been extended for 6 months to 30 September 2015. The funding associated with this is at the same rate as in 2014/15, therefore equates to £195,782.50 from HCC and £103,260 from the CCGs.

5.2 Home-Start schemes are not the only providers of this type of service, and partly in consequence the current contracts cannot be extended any further. If they are replaced, then HCC would have to follow an open and competitive tender process for any future service provision.

5.3 Meetings have been held with Herts Valleys CCG and East and North Herts CCG, to discuss future financial contribution to any contracts. Indications are that they will not continue to contribute to the current service specification, although we await a formal confirmation of their position. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough CCG currently contribute towards the Royston Home-Start scheme and have indicated that they also will end this funding.

5.4 The Joint Commissioning Team undertook an evaluation of the current service in 2014. The evaluation report explains that the data had not been collected in this way previously and so this may not be statistically valid. However the findings indicate that a county-wide service may not be good use of the available funding. In particular, the specification would need to be tightened in order to deliver demonstrable positive outcomes.

5.5 A workshop was held on 25 March 2015 with stakeholders to gather views of the need for a home visiting service. Officers also met with Home-Start managers and trustees on 29 April to gain their input.

6. Service needs

6.1 From the workshop and evaluation of the service, the key needs addressed by the current service have been identified as:

- Social isolation
- Child behaviour management
- Mental health
- Under fives with a disability
- Family resilience
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Domestic abuse
- Short term physical disability and illness

6.2 These needs are largely the same as those addressed by the Children's Centre programme, in a somewhat different way, and to a degree by Health Visitors and other services. However children's centres provide support in a more structured, managed and targeted way, and are tied into the wider early help offer by the use, where appropriate, of e-CAFs and the Family Star Plus impact assessment. The emphasis is on enabling and supporting families to develop the skills and abilities to manage themselves, rather than direct and day-to-day help in the home. In many areas, health visitors, GPs and Children's Centre staff refer into the current home visiting service in order to provide longer term support for lower level vulnerable families, for example multiple births, support during medical treatment, anxiety and low parental confidence.

7. Key issues determining future proposals

7.1 The two key issues determining the future shape of proposals in this area are:

- i. Are the practical support services currently delivered by Home-Start the best use of scarce resources? Currently the service is not specifically targeted at those most in need. But even if this were to be achieved, there is no evidence that this would be an optimal service delivery model. In a time of scarce resources, it is judged that services of this type represent lower value for money than alternatives – children's centres in particular, where the services offered have been re-commissioned, re-designed and reconfigured as a part of a wider strategy towards support for under 5's.
- ii. As regards more targeted support to parents round, for example, emotional wellbeing or mental health as opposed to practical support, it is not clear that it is beneficial in quality and service delivery terms for families to have several organisations delivering services with, in some areas, essentially the same purpose. On the face of things the answer to this question is no, other than to the extent that it is seen as valuable for its own sake to retain a separate volunteer-delivered set of services.

7.2 On the basis of the analysis set out above, it is recommended that Cabinet ceases to fund a home visiting service as currently delivered by Home-Start, with effect from October 2015.

8. Transitional arrangements

8.1 Currently families receiving support from Home-Start are intended to be supported for no more than nine months. Once a decision has been taken to end support for the service, notice will be given to Home-Start so that no new families are taken on, and the number supported will begin to reduce. Officers would intend to discuss transitional arrangements on a case-by-case basis with those families who will be being supported at end-September, with (or via) Home-Start schemes, volunteers and children's centres. Similarly, children's centres will be encouraged to make contact with existing volunteers who might wish to explore continuing to

volunteer but with a somewhat different remit and via a different service-provider. It is therefore suggested that part of any savings made in 2015/16 - £200,000 is estimated – are set aside to support this process, which may continue into 2016/17.

- 8.2 As regards Home-Start schemes, in some cases these receive money from other sources, and may be able to adapt their operations to achieve future sustainability given time and support. It is proposed that some transitional funding is also provided to schemes in developing new business plans and models for the future, and if appropriate for covering the costs of winding up operations and staff severance where this is necessary so as to avoid the risk of organisations becoming insolvent and closing in an uncontrolled manner.
- 8.3 A robust communications strategy will be needed to emphasise the message that the children’s centre service has been retained, and this is the mechanism through which families with young children will receive early help support. Children’s centres work closely with schools, early education providers, health visitors, GPs and midwifery services as well as other local VCS services to provide a package of support for families.

9. Alternative options

- 9.1 A series of alternatives have been considered, which are set out in Appendix A. None of these are recommended.

10. Equality implications

- 10.1 When considering proposals placed before Members, it is important that they are fully aware of, and have themselves rigorously considered the Equality Implications of the decision that they are making.
- 10.2 Rigorous consideration will ensure that proper appreciation of any potential impact of that decision on the County Council’s statutory obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty. As a minimum this requires decision makers to read and carefully consider the content of any Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) produced by officers.
- 10.3 The Equality Act 2010 requires the County Council when exercising its functions to have due regard to the need to (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act; (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it and (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. The protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation.

10.5 An EQiA has been prepared and is attached as Appendix B. It is the view of officers that support for vulnerable families will be maintained by provision within children's centres with focussed intervention programmes.

11. Financial implications

11.1 Full year savings of up to £390,000 will accrue from 2016/17 onwards, though there may be some limited transitional and other costs in 2016/17 as well as this year.

12. Conclusion

- (a) To take forward the proposal not to retender the current Home-Start contracts when they expire in September 2015.
- (b) To allocate £200,000 of savings in 2015/16 for transitional support to Home-Start providers, to include both wind-down costs and activities and support to current providers in developing proposals to assist them in longer term sustainability.
- (c) To note the consequent savings of up to £390,000 that will accrue from 2016/17.

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Options considered

Appendix 2: Equalities Impact Assessment

Background Information

None