

OBJECTIVE:

To investigate the effectiveness of 0 – 5 early years services in supporting vulnerable families and narrowing the wellbeing and attainment gaps

CONTEXT:

Hertfordshire County Council has retained its 82 Children's Centres. Since April 2015 these have been clustered into 29 groups. The children's centre programme is a fully commissioned service. There are currently 17 organisations (lead agencies) with contracts to run the 29 groups of centres. The current contracts with our children's centre providers run until 31 March 2018. The performance of the children's centre programme since April 2015 has been stable. Whilst restructuring staff teams to fit with the new groups and reduction in budgets, children's centre lead agencies have maintained both the quality of services offered to parents and children and the level of user satisfaction with the services.

The children's centre programme is part of the Families First (early help) offer to families in Hertfordshire. Working in partnership with health visitors, midwives, GPs, schools, early education providers, voluntary sector, and adult learning providers Children's Centres play a key role in catching emerging problems early therefore reducing the demand for, and high cost of, safeguarding and children looked after services. The children's centre programme delivers a range of support and services to help children develop and progress by supporting them and their parents. Children's Centres aim to reduce the demand for more expensive services by providing opportunities for young children and their families to access the right support locally at the right time and at the right level.

Children's Centres offer information and links to other early years services to all parents whilst focussing their direct work on families most in need of assistance and ensuring that parents are helped to address any problems that arise at an early stage.

QUESTIONS TO BE ADDRESSED:

1. What support is provided to vulnerable families (to include those part of the Thriving Families programme)?
2. How are vulnerable families identified and engaged?
3. What progress has been made by 0 – 5 services to narrow the wellbeing and achievement gap?

OUTCOMES:

Members have received clear evidence that

- Vulnerable families are known to Children's Services and the health visiting service
- Vulnerable families are well supported by HCC Children's Services
- Gaps in wellbeing and attainment are narrowing

CONSTRAINTS:

- Will not review the HomeStart / home visiting contract

- 2017 procurement exercise of Children's Centres will not be addressed

WITNESSES i.e. individuals	EVIDENCE i.e. organisations e.g. HCS
Sally Orr, Head of Early Years and Childhood Services	Hertfordshire Community NHS Trust (health visiting service)
Caroline Swindells Strategy Manager : Children's Centres	Early Years educational provider
Jackie Clementson (Thriving Families)	Parent/s of funded two year olds
Social Worker (Children's Services)	Volunteers
GP tbc	Public Health
Headteacher tbc	

METHOD: 1 day Topic Group **DATE:** 11 July 2017

SITE VISIT: Children's Centre/s to hear from families, staff and partners
DATE: Early July 2017

MEMBERSHIP:

SUPPORT:
Scrutiny Officer: Natalie Rotherham
Lead Officers: Sally Orr, Caroline Swindells
Democratic Services Officer: tbc

HCC Priorities for Action: how this item helps deliver the

1. Opportunity To Thrive ✓
2. Opportunity To Prosper ✓
3. Opportunity To Be Healthy And Safe ✓
4. Opportunity To Take Part ✓

CfPS ACCOUNTABILITY OBJECTIVES:

1. Transparent – opening up data, information and governance ✓
2. Inclusive – listening, understanding and changing ✓
3. Accountable – demonstrating credibility ✓