

Committee(s)	Dated:
Community and Children's Services	08.04.2016
Subject: City of London Children's Services Review	Public
Report of: Ade Adetosoye, Director of Community and Children's Services	For Information

Summary

The principle purpose of this report is to update Members on the findings and recommendations of a review of children's centre services undertaken towards the end of 2015 and the start of 2016.

The review comes in advance of a new inspection regime for children's centres due to be published by Ofsted in September 2016 following a summer consultation period. It allows the authority to have a clear understanding of its strengths and opportunities for development.

The City of London commissions Cass Child and Family Centre as its designated children's centre but also provides a range of children's centre services through its libraries and supports services at Golden Lane Children's Centre.

The review highlighted that:

- there is a high level of satisfaction among parents and carers, and services are popular
- not all attendance at sessions is captured; data needs to be more consistently managed with all services captured in reports
- a City-wide profile of eligible families should be established to ensure families are receiving targeted support as required
- there is a need for a central management of children's centre services within the City of London and a single advisory board comprising all delivery partners as well as specialist agencies
- leadership is strong although there is a need for consistently rigorous self-reporting and performance monitoring across the City to increase the evidence base against which inspections will take place.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

Note the report.

Main Report

Background

The Childcare Act 2006 (The Act) sets out the responsibility for local authorities to provide sufficient children's centres, insofar as reasonably practicable, to meet local need. The Act includes a range of other duties including a duty to:

- improve the well-being of young children and reduce inequalities
- ensure that early childhood services are provided in an integrated manner.

In the Children's Centre Core Purpose, the Department for Education sets out the minimum expectations required to improve the well-being of young children and reduce inequalities, stating that services should support:

- child and family health and life chances
- child development and school readiness
- parenting aspirations and parenting skills.

The City of London provides children's centre services through a range of key partners, agencies and services which are well attended and popular. An imminent change to the way children's centres are inspected is expected, and although under the current arrangements the City could reasonably expect very positive outcomes from an inspection, the recommendations of the review create a route-map towards consistently outstanding future practice.

In November, Chris Leigh Management, an Early Years specialist consultant, was selected to carry out a review of the children's centre services in the City of London. The review was focused on:

- the number of City families accessing children's centre services compared to local demographics
- the range of children's centre services available to families, and whether these were meeting the needs of children and families and the requirements of the children's centre
- core purpose
- the use of funding and whether this is providing value for money
- establishing a set of recommendations that builds on the strengths of the existing mod and is informed by recognised best practice.

The methodology included:

- face to face interviews with 107 parents and carers
- visits to Cass Child and Family Centre, Golden Lane Children's Centre, three libraries and three private early years settings
- observation of practice in a range of sessions
- desktop review of data

- interviews with 19 staff.

Current Position

The review findings include:

Outcomes for children and families

The review highlighted a high level of satisfaction among the 107 parents and carers interviewed and a high number of popular, well attended sessions. It recommended a more structured way of capturing outcomes and customer satisfaction. There has been an increasing emphasis on 'targeted' services in recent months and this is expected to continue within the new inspection regime.

Data management

Analysis of a number of data sets has indicated that the City of London is reaching a sufficient number of families and young children. The review highlighted a number of issues regarding the way performance data is reported, including the fact that there is inconsistent reporting across locations in the City, and some good practice has been under reported.

Leadership, management and governance

The review recognises the strong leadership at Sir John Cass School, which is echoed in other locations, including libraries and Golden Lane Children's Centre. It nonetheless recommends the central management of children's centre services within the City of London and a single advisory board comprising all partners. The review recommends City-wide engagement of all parties responsible for the delivery of children's centre services including multi agency partners, such as children's health professionals in the aforementioned advisory board, to ensure coherence of the offer in all locations.

The review highlights the need for consistently rigorous self-reporting and performance monitoring across the City to increase the evidence base against which inspections will take place.

Proposals

The review recommends:

- the development of a City profile to align services with need. This will be especially important in demonstrating services targeted to those most in need
- that all good practice is captured consistently across the City to evidence take-up and satisfaction
- that there is rigorous and consistent performance management, including data management across the City, with active use of self-evaluation tools

- that a single advisory board is established to create a co-ordinated City-wide approach to delivery with a membership which includes senior leaders from all delivery locations as well as key multi agency partners.

These objectives are consistent with the key priority objectives of the Children and Young People's Corporate Plan.

The next steps will be to implement the recommendations and report on progress of the children's centre services as part of the City's Early Years strategy update to committee later in 2016.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

Children's centre services are an important part of the way in which outcomes for children are measured in line with the Children and Young People's Corporate Plan.

Conclusion

The review concluded that the City of London provides high quality services that are popular with parents but the authority needs to build a local area profile of need for its children's centres. Rigorous and consistent performance management, including data management, will help capture and evidence usage. A single strategic advisory board should be set up to include representatives from all children's centre services.

Progress reports will be presented to Members via the Early Years strategy update reports later in 2016.

Appendices

Review of Children's Centre Services, Summary Report, March 2016.

Pip Hesketh

Interim Service Manager, Education and Early Years

T: 020 7332 3047

E: piphesketh@cityoflondon.gov.uk