

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP TO DELIVER HEALTH RELATED EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES FROM CHILDREN'S CENTRES

Summary of Key Issues:

- The Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Bill, which could be in force as early as January 2010 requires LAs and PCTs to consider which of their early childhood services should be delivered through a Children's Centre
- Children's centres and health staff are currently engaged in joint delivery of health related services for young children and their families with much positive work going on but lacking a formal agreement to support consistent practice/focus on shared key priorities

1. Background

- 1.1** Children's Centres are currently charged with delivering health services to under 5's and their families through Children's Trust arrangements. These services include post and antenatal care, breastfeeding, mental health, nutrition and support for healthy lifestyles, smoking cessation and speech and language support. In Oxfordshire there has been much shared goodwill to progress this work with some examples of excellent practice, but ongoing reorganisations and change within all partner organisations has impeded the development of any formalised agreement to support delivery arrangements.
- 1.2** The Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Bill, currently at committee stage in the House of Lords, will amend the Childcare Act (2006) to give a statutory basis for the provision of Children's Centres. It will require LAs, Primary Care Trusts and Jobcentre Plus to consider whether each of their early childhood services should be delivered through a children's centre.
- 1.3** GOSE and the two south east Strategic Health Authorities jointly commissioned a report to gain a greater understanding of partnership and joint working between health services and other staff within Children's Centres in the region (Partnership

and joint working between Health Services and Children's Centres in the South East, NLH Partnership, Dec 08)

Some of the key findings:

- Evidence of development of effective partnership working across the region – collocation noted as being a factor that greatly assisted this.
- Small amount of fully integrated working but seen to have a positive impact
- Scope for significant development to ensure that partnership working is consistent and effective
- Specific challenges re lack of strategic guidance, shared understanding of priorities and partnership, data sharing, willingness of individuals to work differently.

2. Current position in Oxfordshire

2.1 Health visitor teams are co-located in two centres (ACE, Chipping Norton and East Street, Banbury) and deliver services from all centres. Midwives are co-located at Florence Park and Bicester and have involvement in service delivery at most centres. There are six half time 'Choosing health' health visitors linked to centres in areas of deprivation; this is due to expand to another 5/6 centres in the Autumn. There are no fully integrated teams although in some centres this has been partially achieved through jointly funded/managed posts (Leys, Rose Hill and Littlemore), and through involvement in the management of centres.

2.2 Partner organisations including Public Health, CHO, ORH and the PCT sit alongside Local Authority representatives on the Children's Centre Programme Board.

2.3 Key partners from the Childrens Centre Management team, ORH Maternity services, Public health, CHO and the PCT met in March to identify strategic and operational priorities to progress partnership working. The outcome was a commitment to the delivery of a service that enabled families to access support in a way that was not constrained by agency boundaries. It was agreed that this would require:

- A greater shared understanding from Children's Trust Board to individual worker of our key delivery priorities and how we will achieve them
- A workforce with a set of core common skills and clearly defined tiers of specialism
- Shared and simplified referral, planning and evaluation systems in work with families
- Agreements over the practicalities – ICT issues, leases, costs
- Clear and consistent agreement over the sharing and provision of data

2.4 Consultation with Children's Centre heads in May confirmed some of the barriers to a more integrated approach; heads placed particular emphasis on the need for professionals to have a better understanding of each other's priorities, organisational demands and culture, as well as the practical irritations over ICT, building use etc. Discussion between heads highlighted the inconsistency of expectation of health staff and of health service engagement.

2.5 In the past month:

- A joint half day event has been organised in each area for September at which Children's Centres/midwives/health visitors/therapists will share good practice and explore better joint working possibilities.
- Key shared training needs have been discussed with ORH and CHO, with a commitment to sharing training opportunities in the short term and the possibilities to moving to an integrated training programme explored.
- An agreement has been drawn up re premises charges and use (currently with OCC legal team).
- The principle of HV and midwives attending Children's Centre team meetings monthly has been agreed with ORH and CHO but not formally communicated to staff.

3. Next Steps

While we can progress specific under 5 related aspects of the joint health/Children's Centre agenda this needs to fit into the broader vision for delivery of services for children and young people under the umbrella of the Children's Trust.

The Children's Trust Board is therefore recommended to:

Endorse the work that has happened so far to 'join up' service delivery.

Ask partner organisations to draw up a partnership agreement outlining principles for partnership delivery of Child and Family Health Services from Children's Centres as part of locality integrated service delivery.

Ask senior representatives from partner organisations to begin the process of establishing, for each Children's centre, the feasibility of delivering health related early childhood services from the Children's Centre