

ITEM 4

Early Years Budget – Centrally retained funding reserves proposed transfer to children's services 2020/21

Schools Forum – 6 December 2021

Recommendation

The Schools Forum is asked to:

- (1) Note update on the centrally retained funding
- (2) Approve the proposal of a one off transfer of £234k from the underspend of the 5% centrally retained funding reserves to support Children's Centre delivery.

Reason for recommendation

We have an underspend from the centrally retained 5% Early Years Budget as a result of delayed recruitment and other employee related cost due to COVID related issues with recruitments and training. This includes less internal recharges. The request is to use some of this to support our children accessing support via the Children's Centre

Members of Forum allowed to vote:-

All school and academy members are able to vote. Only early years representatives from the non-schools members are able to vote. Non-school members even if represented by school staff are not eligible to vote.

1. Background – Children's Centres

1.1 Croydon Best Start Children's Centres deliver child development and school readiness services working alongside partners as part of the Best Start programme for children aged under five years.

1.2 Children's Centres core purpose focus on three areas of support:

- a) Parenting skills and aspirations
- b) Child development and school readiness
- c) Child and family health and life chances

1.3 Currently 9 children's centres deliver services, including:

- Stay and play provision
- Focussed provision supporting child development including transition and promoting independence
- Evidence based Speech and Language support
- Parenting advice and support including evidence based group and individual support
- Adult and Family Learning/ employability support
- Healthy child programme development checks, health advice and support, access to midwifery services, pre and post-natal, breastfeeding support.

- Support to families in crisis with practical help and access to community resources such as food banks, charitable trusts
- Welfare benefits advice and support

1.4 In May 2021 the Council consulted on a proposed redesign of Children’s Centres into a 3 Hubs and 6 Spokes service model. In July 2021, Cabinet agreed a 3 hub and 8 spoke delivery model.

1.5 A full Children’s Centre programme will be delivered from each of the Hubs in North, Central and South Croydon along with a continued high quality offer but with reduced opening times, from each spoke – services will be responsive to the needs of local families and will include activities that support children

- Proactively reaching families living in lower super output area
- Identifying and engaging children who have emerging additional needs
- Children who are subject to or have been referred for early help or children’s social care intervention, contributing to their intervention plan

The new delivery model in place January 2022

2. Funding

2.1 Children’s Centre services are funded through the council’s General Fund.

2.2 Early years services are funded through the Dedicated Schools Grant, 5% of which is retained by the Local Authority.

In line with the ESFA Early Year’s entitlements: local authority funding of providers
Operational guide 2021 to 2022:

“Local authorities are required to plan to pass-through 95% of their 3 and-4-year-old funding from the government to early years providers. This pass-through requirement ensures that the vast majority of government funding reaches providers so that they can deliver the government’s free entitlements. This means that local authorities, in planning their budget allocations for the forthcoming financial year, need to allocate at least 95% of their EYNFF hourly rate to providers.”

2.3 Local authorities are able to centrally retain the remaining 5% of the funding for central services to lead and support the system. The 5% of expenditure could include the following:

- a) centrally retained funding (for central services or services in-kind, including special educational needs and disability (SEND) services)
- b) transfer of any funding to 2-year-olds
- c) any extra hours that local authorities choose to fund in addition to the government’s entitlement hours for 3 and 4-year-olds
- d) any funding movement out of the early years block.

2.4 Centrally retained funding reserves 2020/21

The 5% central retention of the Early Years Funding Block is vital for local authorities to have effective strategies to improve outcomes in the early years. Central services include the strategic and operational leadership and management of the early years system.

- 2.5 We are proposing to transfer £234k of the 5% centrally retained funding reserve to provide support through the new children's centre model. This funding will support activities that promote school readiness and child development (including speech and language). Whilst children's centres support all children under 5 and their families, centres must know about and effectively engage and support children that require additional support, enabling them to access early education and activities that support child development. Specifically support for speech, language and communication development, support for children with emerging SEND in partnership with the early Years SEND team. All activities are informed by the EYFS framework.
- 2.6 This transfer of funding (underspend) will enable continued services during a period of financial challenge being faced by the council, the funding will enable services to be in place to identify and support children who require additional support, aiding development and enhancing school readiness, reducing the need for costly intervention.
- 2.7 The proposed transfer of funding (underspend) to Children's Centres meets the above criterion at a) "centrally retained funding (for central services or services in-kind, including special educational needs and disability (SEND) services).
- 2.8 As outlined in table 2 below, there is currently a total of £470,712 in the centrally retained funding reserves for 2020/21. This includes £254,856 carried forward from previous years.

Table 2 - Centrally retained funding reserves 2020/21

	£
Brought forward prior year reserves	254,856
2020/21 in year transfer to reserves	215,856
Carried forward reserve to 2021/22	470,712

Children's Centre services

Children's Centres support children under 5 and their families, the core purpose of services are:

- Parenting skills and aspirations
- Child development and school readiness
- Child and family health and life chances

Children's Centres provide social and practical support to all parents and families with children up to 5 years of age. This is through a range of activities for new parents, promoting babies physical development and providing support to parents. As children grow, centres offer services and support that promote child development, family learning and adult learning opportunities. They proactively support families to access

services that will support their child’s development and are well placed to identify where additional support may be required, enabling early intervention through targeted activities, onward referral and transition support into early year’s provision.

Children’s Centres are based in local communities and play a vital role in signposting families or facilitating referrals to more targeted services, with the benefit of a trusted and sustained relationship with the family which supports independence and resilience.

Centres support all families including –

- Proactively reaching families living in lower super output area
- Identifying and engaging children who have emerging additional needs
- Children who are subject to or have been referred for early help or children’s social care intervention, contributing to their intervention plan

3. Population and take up of children’s centre services

3.1 There are 27, 372 children aged 0-4 resident in Croydon. The tables below show take up for the full year 2019/20 and for Q1 and Q2 in 2021/22. Centres are actively supporting 30% of children within the population and the data shows sustained contact with services indicating these children are benefiting from activities that support school readiness and promote child and family health.

3.2

Age	No of Children
0	5,416
1	5,318
2	5,503
3	5,518
4	5,617
	27, 372

3.3 The priority for Children Centres is to reach a greater number of families and children who would benefit most from provision, we know also that due to the Covid restrictions we are meeting 2 year olds for the first time and identifying a range of needs. Whilst the new delivery model is leaner, the focus will be on high quality delivery, minimising overheads. With a proactive partnership approach across localities and centres the service will actively reach families and children that would benefit the most. The flexible approach to delivery through the spoke sites will respond directly to the developmental needs of local children, in partnership with our education, health and voluntary sector partners.

3.4 Children's centre attendance April 2019 - March 2020 - children aged 2, 3 and 4 years old (pre covid)

* Unique figures are a single count of a child's attendance regardless of how many activities they have attended

Volume figures show all attendances in the year

Activity groupings	Unique 2019/20 *				Volume 2019/20			
	Age 2	Age 3	Age 4	Total	Age 2	Age 3	Age 4	Total
Stay and Play	2,103	955	438	3,496	12,618	5,222	1,820	19,660
Outreach	524	261	93	878	2,629	977	238	3,844
Bookstart	241	114	38	393	717	323	120	1,160
Chatterbox	553	364	114	1,031	2,101	1,281	375	3,757
Transition Support	256	225	63	544	659	908	160	1,727
Family Support	107	55	33	195	208	144	127	479
Creche	25	12	13	50	94	45	36	175
Other **	771	332	122	1,225	2,579	1,406	353	4,338
TOTAL	4,580	2,318	914	7,812	21,605	10,306	3,229	35,140

Children's centre attendance April 2021 (Q1) - September 2021 (Q2) - children aged 2, 3 and 4 years old

Activity groupings	Unique Q1 & Q2 2021/22 *				Volume Q1 & Q2 2021/22			
	Age 2	Age 3	Age 4	Total	Age 2	Age 3	Age 4	Total
Stay and Play	1,692	714	282	2,688	436	221	105	762
Outreach	5	0	3	8	3	0	1	4
Bookstart	14	27	0	41	4	6	0	10
Family Support Group	2	1	0	3	2	1	0	3
Transition Support	97	54	100	251	26	18	13	57
Other **	171	78	24	273	122	49	19	190
TOTAL	1,981	874	409	3,264	593	295	138	1,026

** includes crèches, health engagement, added value activities and parent forum

The feedback below was received as part of the recent Children's Centre consultation

"...Before Covid I would go to the Aerodrome Children's Centre every week for the playgroup sessions and often fit my weekly plans around playgroup sessions there. We would sometimes go twice a week. I am pleased that the centre has reopened since lockdown and that there is a session available for my daughter.

I have also previously used the "Get Ready for Nursery" sessions held there and a "Book Club for pre-schoolers" and other sessions. I have found it useful where a dental consultant has been at the centre to give advice as well.

My 3 daughters have all enjoyed being at the Aerodrome Children's centre. I still take my 2 year old daughter. She started a toddler session in May once the Covid restrictions allowed the centre to open. She was very apprehensive and scared about socialising and being outside of the home since lockdown. The staff at Aerodrome Children's Centre were very welcoming to her and engaged with her to help her settle. She used to cry at song time but the staff supported me with advice of how to help make the new environment easier for her. By her third session she thoroughly enjoyed playgroup and had no hesitation of getting involved with the "What's in the Box?" and the song time at the end of the playgroup session. She

also recognises familiar children and is sharing and playing alongside them.”

Recommendation that the Schools Forum

- (1) Note update on the centrally retained funding
- (2) Approve the proposal to transfer of £234k from the centrally retained funding reserves to support Children’s Centre delivery.