

Governance of Children's Centres in Hampshire – Final Model (October 2007)

Background

'Research to inform the Management and Governance of Children's Centres' (SureStart 2006) distinguishes between governance and management. Governance is "to ensure that an organisation or partnership fulfils its overall purpose, achieves its intended outcomes for citizens and service users, and operates in an effective, efficient, and ethical manner". Management "is concerned with co-ordinating service delivery, Human Resources and budgeting to ensure that services are delivered to the best possible outcome for end users and the wider community". Management of centres will be detailed through the use of a service contract and performance management arrangements. This paper is primarily concerned with governance.

Successful governance arrangements should be:

- *Responsive* to community needs
- *Clear* about functions and roles
- *Robust* and sustainable to ensure quality of service provision
- *Engaged* with parents through representation on the management group and/or a parent forum
- *Involved* with the wider community
- *Structured* to promote partnership working

Hampshire Context

In Hampshire, a variety of approaches to governance (and management) arose during phase 1 of the implementation of children's centres, some of which proved to be problematic. There was recognition that corporately Hampshire needed to learn from this experience, and move existing centres to a single or at least agreed finite range of effective governance arrangements. Within all Hampshire's children's centres, the County Council have focused on ensuring a robust accountability for the governance of all aspects of management, including:

- Finance
- Health and safety
- Human resource management
- Local partnership working
- Outcomes for children

I. Model of Governance

The underlying principles of the model of governance are as follows:

- The County Council would expect all children's centres to operate with a centre manager or coordinator working with a partnership board. The partnership board should be informed both by a parents' forum and a practitioners' forum. Where there are a number of small children's centres, these forums may represent several centres serving a wider community. The parents' forum should enable the voice of centre users to be heard and will elect at least one member of the partnership board. The purpose of the practitioners' forum is to represent the views of the range of people delivering services through the centre and will elect at least one member of the partnership board.

- For County Council managed centres, accountability for the work of the centre and its outcomes will be through the centre manager or coordinator working with the partnership board. The centre manager or coordinator will be line-managed through a professional support and performance management system overseen by an appointed senior officer within the County Council.
- For school managed centres, the County Council will contract with the school's governing body through a service contract, recognising the governing body's extended schools powers (i.e. its powers under the Education Act 2002) to enter into arrangements or agreements with other bodies to provide community services. Contractual responsibility for the work of the centre and its outcomes will be with the school's governing body, working with the partnership board. The centre manager or coordinator will report through, but not be line managed by the same professional support system as in County Council managed centres.
- In other third-party managed centres, contractual responsibility for the work of the centre and its outcomes will be with the third-party working with the partnership board. The centre manager or coordinator will report through, but not be line managed by the same professional support system as in County Council managed centres.
- Where children's centres are co-located with, or built around, maintained nursery school provision, the options for governance arrangements are the same as for centres located on school sites as described above.

2. Financial and Personnel Management

The Scheme of Financial and Personnel Management for children's centres will provide further detail on the following areas:

Financial Management

The necessary financial accountability to the County Council, whilst allowing local flexibility, will be achieved by obtaining business unit status for the children's centres collectively, to be known as Children's Centre Services (CCS). Accordingly the following principles for devolved financial management to the Children's Centre Services business unit are proposed:

- The initial application for business unit status and the subsequent annual business plans, in respect of the children's centres collectively, will set the overall financial plan within which individual centres will operate;
- Each County Council managed centre is an operational unit within an overall business unit encompassing them collectively;
- Third-party managed centres will receive funding via the CCS under contractual arrangements.

The County Council has chosen to distribute funds among the centres in accordance with a formula, which takes account of the size and type of each centre, and which takes account of other factors deemed relevant, including any brought forward balance.

In County Council managed centres, the centre manager or coordinator will have devolved financial management responsibility for all the revenue funds of the children's centre, including income from: the County Council, government grants, charges to users, sales, other grants, and payments from other bodies. The centre manager or coordinator, working with the partnership board, will determine spending priorities, including related

decisions on the appointment of staff and the use of premises. In doing so they will operate within the CCS strategic plan and annual objectives.

Within the context of the overall business unit and County Council decisions as to the levels of business unit balances, each children's centre manager or coordinator and the partnership board, working together, should have the incentive to plan future spending to meet longer-term needs and objectives, by retaining unspent balances for specific purposes and the amounts should not be excessive.

CCS will develop a policy for fees and charges at children's centres which will recognise the need for flexibility and address the specific issues that might be faced by third-party managed centres. Centre managers or coordinators will work with partnership boards to agree fees and charges that will comply with this policy.

The centre manager or coordinator is responsible for planning, revising and monitoring the budget and must report to the partnership board at least quarterly. Budget deficits will not be allowed and any suggestion of a budget deficit developing in year must be reported to CCS immediately.

Children's centres must use an approved financial system, to account properly for all their funds, and keep sufficient financial records to satisfy the County Council's requirements. The County Council managed centres will be required to use 'SAP'. Third-party managed centres will need to have sound financial systems that are approved by, and meet the County Council's reporting requirements.

The County Council remains the accountable body for all contracts and formal legal agreements for County Council managed centres and for services delivered by third-parties, including schools, through a service contract.

Capital

Capital expenditure is the responsibility of the County Council. The use of children's centre balances for capital expenditure requires the specific consent of the County Council.

Support Services

The County Council managed centres will obtain their support services, such as human resources, ICT, finance from County Council specialist support teams and business units under the terms of an internal service level agreement.

Third-party providers will make arrangements for the management of funds which takes account of the principle of local decision making and the County Council's responsibility for equality of access throughout the county.

Third-party providers will be allocated funding for support services for children's centres as part of their service contract and they will be required to demonstrate how the necessary support will be provided. Depending on the third-party, it may be possible for them to buy-back from County Council specialist support services. Third-party providers will, however, be required to buy-back the support service provided by Hampshire County Council's Governor Services for partnership boards. To streamline this process, this cost will be 'top-sliced' from the third-party providers budget allocation by Hampshire County Council and transferred centrally by CCS on behalf of all children's centres.

3. Health and Safety

All County Council managed children's centres will be required to operate in accordance with the County Council's health and safety and safeguarding children policies and procedures. Third-party providers may choose to adopt the County Council's health and safety and safeguarding children arrangements, or would be required to satisfy the County Council that its own policies and procedures for these areas were comparable to the County Council's.

The centre manager or coordinator will report regularly to the partnership board on these issues and to the County Council as required. Children's centres are expected to be a resource used by a wide section of the community. Adults will be using the same or proximal resources as young and potentially vulnerable children. Where centres are on school or third-party sites, close liaison with the school's governing body or third-party site's management arrangements will be necessary to ensure safety, particularly of children across the site. For County Council managed centres, an identified officer will be available to offer general advice and specialist services will be available from health and safety advisors and the Safeguarding Unit of the Children's Services Department.

4. Human Resource Management

County Council managed centres

In County Council managed children's centres, all human resource matters will be conducted in accordance with the County Council's relevant policies and procedures. Centre managers or coordinators will be appointed by the County Council, working, where possible, with representatives of partnership boards.

Performance management of the centre manager or coordinator will be carried out in accordance with the County Council's Individual Performance Planning (IPP) arrangements and undertaken with the involvement of at least two representatives of the partnership board.

Centre managers or coordinators will agree with partnership boards, the staffing establishment of the centre on an annual basis and exercise devolved powers of appointment. CCS may be represented whenever it considers advisable.

Centre managers or coordinators, working with the partnership board, will be responsible to the County Council for the appointment, induction, performance review, professional development, grievance, discipline and competence of County Council staff at the centre. The County Council may be represented whenever it considers advisable. County Council managed children's centres will receive professional support on all human resource matters, from specialist advisers, under the terms of an internal service level agreement.

Third-party managed centres

Third-party providers will be required to operate in accordance with the principles of local decision making and fair and equal treatment of staff and to show that its policies and procedures for human resource management comply with national expectations and best practice. The County Council will provide a representative for appointments in third-party centres, where appropriate and if requested. Third-party providers will be allocated funding for the provision of human resources support to children's centres as part of their service contract and they will be required to demonstrate how the necessary support will be provided. Depending on the third-party, it may be possible for them to buy-back from County Council specialist support services.

5. Local Partnership Working

Accountability for local partnerships with the community and voluntary sector, health professionals, children's services (including extended services around schools) and the Police, sits with the centre manager or coordinator who will report regularly to the partnership board and the County Council.

6. Outcomes for Children

Performance indicators have been set nationally for children's centres that are based on the five outcomes for children as defined in *Every Child Matters*. Each children's centre will be required to produce, implement, and evaluate its own development plan to achieve these outcomes, informed by county, district, and local priorities and supported by appropriate specialist county staff.

Monitoring centres' plans will be undertaken by Quality & Performance Officers, reporting to the appointed senior officer within CCS. The County Council has the responsibility to intervene if any centre is shown to be underperforming.

Third-party providers will be required to work with County Council monitoring mechanisms to assure quality outcomes for children and to meet agreed reporting requirements. Where centres are underperforming the County Council will put appropriate support and monitoring in place with the third-party. If improvement is not demonstrated within the specified period, actions will be taken in accordance with the service contract.

7. Constitutional Considerations

All children's centres are expected to have a children's centre partnership board that represents users and the interests of other local stakeholders. Training and support mechanisms are being developed for children's centre partnership boards, which will be available to all partnership boards in Hampshire. More detailed considerations regarding the role of partnership boards are listed under section 7.1.

7.1 The responsibilities of centre managers or coordinators working with partnership boards

7.1.1 The centre manager or coordinator should report to the partnership board regarding internal organization and management, and together they should take overall responsibility for the development, delivery and continuous improvement of high quality services that impact on the lives of local families and improve outcomes, as defined in *Every Child Matters*.

- 7.1.2 To ensure services are delivered, monitored, and evaluated and work objectives are achieved, in line with implementation and development plans. Support and advice to be accessed, as necessary.
- 7.1.3 To develop and recommend to CCS annual spending and development plans.
- 7.1.4 To ensure work with parents, children, members of the local community and other stakeholders reflects ongoing evidence of local need. This will include regular consultation exercises designed to reach all sections of the community followed by clear planning and action.
- 7.1.5 To ensure that health and safety and safeguarding procedures are in place across all areas of service delivery that meet the requirements of the County Council and Ofsted.
- 7.1.6 To work within the plans of the District 0-19 Group in the development of district delivery plans and partnership work.
- 7.1.7 To ensure that formal complaints are dealt with in accordance with the Children's Centres Complaints Procedure and agree any actions in response to complaints.
- 7.1.8 To ensure effective financial management systems are in place that meet the DCFS and the County Council's financial requirements for children's centres as set out in the Scheme of Financial and Personnel Management for children's centres.
- 7.1.9 To ensure effective working relationships are developed with other initiatives to ensure integrated delivery of services in the local community and best use of resources.
- 7.1.10 To ensure there are clear lines of communication with the parents' forum and practitioners' forum.
- 7.1.11 To carry out the above responsibilities in an open and transparent manner and in accordance with the Nolan Principles of Public Life and to show respect for colleagues, staff, families and other stakeholders.
- 7.1.12 To provide data and reports to the County Council on request.

In addition, where the children's centre is on a school or third-party site:

- 7.1.13 To ensure there is an effective working relationship and systems to clarify roles and responsibilities with the school and its governing body or the third-party site's management arrangements.

7.2 Constitutional Details

7.2.1 Size

Between 6 - 15 members, to be determined in the first instance by the County Council working with its partners e.g. site owner, third party provider. Thereafter, to be agreed by the County Council, in consultation with the partnership board.

7.2.2 Membership

Should, subject to rounding, represent a 33% split between:

- parent/carers
- providers/partners
- voluntary/community

At least one:

- representative from the parents, elected by the parents' forum
- representative from the practitioners, elected by the practitioners' forum
- representative nominated by the local county councillor
- school governing body representative (from surrounding schools)
- third-party representative (where the centre is managed by a third-party, including schools)
- site representative (if appropriate)
- voluntary/community representative (co-opted by the other members of the partnership board).

The centre manager or coordinator should always be given the option of being a representative of the providers/partners group

The initial appointments to the partnership board will be made by the County Council. Thereafter, appointments will be made by the County Council, acting on the nomination by the partnership board. The County Council reserves the right to refuse to appoint nominees about whom it has concerns.

All partnership board appointments are made under delegated powers by the Director of Children's Services in consultation with the Executive Lead Member for Children's Services (Education).

Membership records will be maintained by the County Council following an adaptation of the existing system used to record membership of school governing bodies.

7.2.3 Term of office

The term of office for all categories of members will be 4 years unless a shorter term has been recommended by the partnership board, agreed by the County Council and recorded in the Constitution for the children's centre partnership board.

Members can be appointed or elected for further terms of office. In cases of misconduct where the partnership board considers removal from office is necessary, it would make a recommendation to the Director of Children's Services. The Director of Children's Services shall have delegated power to remove members from the partnership board in these circumstances. There will be the right to appeal this decision to a panel of elected members convened by the Executive Lead Member for Children's Services (Education).

Parent representatives will cease to be eligible to be nominated to serve on the partnership board once they no longer have children of their own that attend or access services from the children's centre. They will therefore be required to step down at the completion of the term of office.

Where a staff representative is no longer employed in connection with children's centre then he or she will cease to be eligible to sit on the partnership board and their term of office comes to an end on the date they leave that employment.

Similarly where a provider ceases to provide services at or in connection with the children's centre, their representatives will cease to be eligible to sit on the partnership board and their term of office comes to an end on the date the provider ceases to provide the service.

7.2.4 Vetting

All members of partnership boards will be vetted in accordance with the national guidance on vetting for school governors as from time to time amended.

7.2.5 Chairman

To be elected by the partnership board but must not be a member of centre staff or a provider. Term of office to be determined by the partnership board, but no more than 2 years. Individuals may be re-elected for further terms as Chairman.

7.2.6 Frequency of meetings

To be determined by the partnership board, but at least quarterly.

7.2.7 Committees

Partnership boards may set up one or more committees. Such committees must be reviewed annually. Committees must:

- be administered in accordance with the requirements of the partnership board as a whole
- consist of a minimum of three members
- have terms of reference
- report their meetings and actions to the partnership board at the next meeting
- be professionally advised by the centre manager or coordinator or a nominee.

7.2.8 Clerk to the partnership board

Appointed by the County Council, based on a recommendation from the children's centre manager or coordinator and partnership board, but must not be the centre manager/coordinator or a member of the board.

7.2.9 Meeting administration

Agendas, papers, reports, minutes being considered by the children's centre partnership board should be supplied to all members of the board five days prior to, and 10 days following the meeting in question. Officers of the County Council have a right to convene or attend any meeting of a partnership board on request from CCS.

7.2.10 Procedures at meetings of the partnership board

Voting

Decisions by the partnership board will be made by way of majority vote, and in the event of there being no majority, the Chairman shall have a casting vote.

Conflicts of Interest

Members of the partnership board will be expected to declare any pecuniary interest or conflict of interest in matters being discussed by the partnership board, and withdraw from the discussion and voting on those matters.

7.2.11 Transitional arrangements

Where operational centres currently have committees which exceed the maximum size in the County Council's model, CCS may agree a transitional period of up to 2 years where 'surplus' members could continue to serve.

7.2.12 Interim partnership boards

An interim partnership board may be established to facilitate the establishment of a children's centre prior to existence of a parents' forum and practitioners' forum. Membership would be in accordance with the principles of the model. The establishment of the full board will be within 3 months of the opening of the centre.