

## Slough Borough Council

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| <b>Report To:</b>                   | Cabinet   |
| <b>Date</b>                         | 20 <sup>th</sup> January 2025   |
| <b>Subject:</b>                     | Use of Former Children's Centre Buildings   |
| <b>Lead Member:</b>                 | Cllr. Puja Bedi – Lead Member for Education,<br>Children's Services and Lifelong Learning |
| <b>Chief Officer:</b>               | Sue Butcher – Executive Director for People: Children                                     |
| <b>Contact Officer:</b>             | Neil Hoskinson – Associate Director of Education  |
| <b>Ward(s):</b>                     | <u>All</u>  |
| <b>Key Decision:</b>                | YES   |
| <b>Exempt:</b>                      | NO  |
| <b>Decision Subject To Call In:</b> | YES   |
| <b>Appendices:</b>                  | None  |

### 1. Summary and Recommendations

The purpose of this report is to seek Cabinet agreement on alternative uses for the former Children's Centre buildings. These five buildings that are no longer being used as Children's Centres and can be used to provide additional nursery places and to widen the Specialist Resource Provision across Slough.

#### **Recommendations:**

Cabinet is recommended to:

- (a) declare Vicarage Way surplus to requirements and authorise its disposal to achieve best consideration,
- (b) let the Elliman Avenue site via a lease on commercial terms at a market rent to a Private, Voluntary or Independent nursery to provide additional early years places,
- (c) agree to the expansion of Cippenham Nursery School by including the former St Andrew's Way Children's Centre as part the nursery,
- (d) agree to the expansion of Lea Nursery School by including the former Wexham Road Children's Centre as part of the nursery;

- (e) agree to the former Orchard Avenue Children's Centre being used as part of Priory School for the purpose of SEND provision under a service level agreement.

**Reason:**

- 1.2 Cabinet approved an alternative model of delivery for Children's Centres in May 2023. This created five surplus buildings, mainly located on school sites. Due to their location, disposal of the sites for a capital receipt is challenging and the buildings could be better utilised to increase the number of nursery places in line with the Early Years Sufficiency Assessment and provide additional school places for young people with Special Educational Needs.

**Commissioner Review**

This report has been reviewed by Commissioners and there are no specific comments to add.

**2. Background**

**2.1 Current Childrens Centre Model**

In 2023, Cabinet approved a new Children's Centre delivery model. This resulted in the following centres being closed and these buildings are currently vacant:

- ✓ Elliman Avenue (Elliman Ward)
- ✓ Orchard Avenue (Haymill Ward)
- ✓ St Andrews Way (Cippenham Green Ward)
- ✓ Vicarage Way (Colnbrook and Poyle Ward)
- ✓ Wexham Road (Upton Lea Ward)

**2.2 Slough's Early Years Strategy**

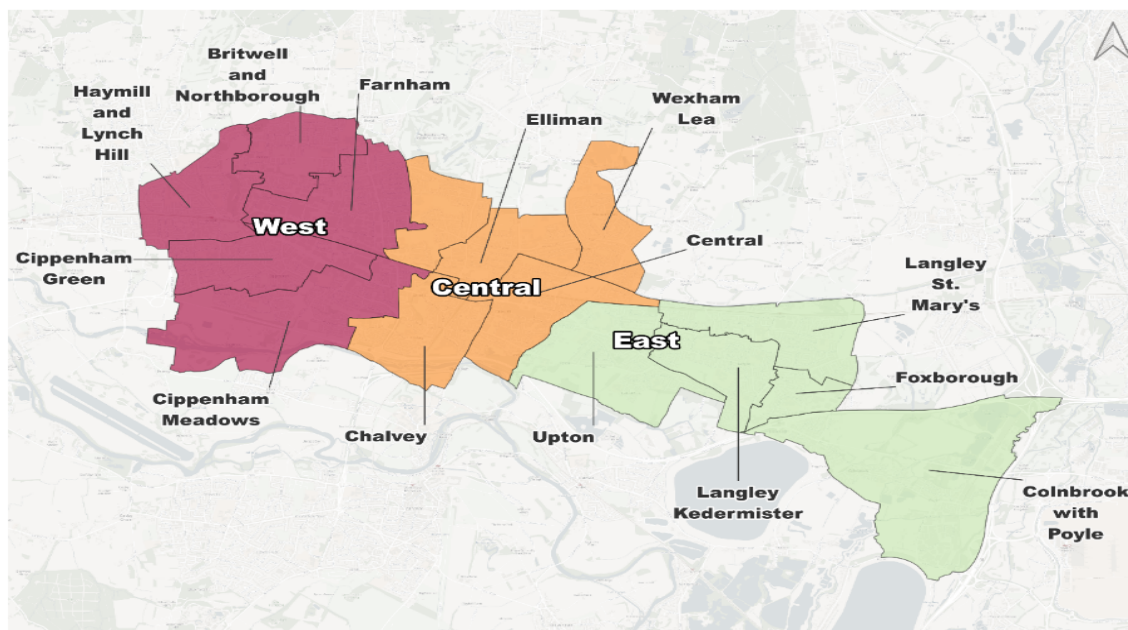
A new Early Years Strategy is under development with the support of the LGA. This will take account of the LGA Mini Peer Review Early Years which made the following recommendations:

- Strategic Leadership for Early Years & Childcare
- Developing a Comprehensive Multi Agency Dataset
- Service Structure and Functions ü Focusing on Early Years Inclusion
- Securing Effective and Accessible Information
- Managing Childcare Sufficiency
- Celebrating Diversity and Tackling Discrimination

- 2.3 An updated strategy will be presented to Cabinet in the latter part of 2024/25. A key priority area for the Early Years Service is embedded through the discharge of our sufficiency duty and the introduction of the new funding entitlements for working families. Working Parent entitlements for 2-year olds from April 2024 and 9 months plus from September 2024 for 15 hours per week for 38 weeks

per year increasing 30 hours per week, 38 weeks per year from September 2025. The DfE has assessed the supply and demand of provision in Slough and identified the gaps where further place development is required according to the eligibility criteria.

For place planning purposes the town is split into 3 planning areas: West, Central and East.



The table below represents the breakdown of place development according to the DfE's assessment of early years provision and the need for new development by areas (West, Central, East) in accordance with the new funding entitlements for 2-year olds and under 2s.

|         | 2-year olds from April 2024 | Under 2s from Sep 2024 | 2-year olds and under 2s from Sep-25 | Total      |
|---------|-----------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------|
| West    | 16                          | 25                     | 105                                  | 146        |
| Central | 42                          | 63                     | 207                                  | 312        |
| East    | 27                          | 41                     | 139                                  | 208        |
|         | <b>85</b>                   | <b>129</b>             | <b>452</b>                           | <b>666</b> |

2.4 The current vacant Children's Centre buildings are spread across the borough and utilisation of these sites to meet the sufficiency need of the new working families entitlements will contribute to an increase in the number of early years places.

- Orchard Avenue and St Andrews Way – West
- Elliman Avenue and Wexham Road – Central
- Vicarage Way – East

### **3. Recommendations for Currently Vacant Sites**

- 3.1 The Children's Centres were all built using DfE capital grant which imposes conditions on the use of the facilities to deliver early years services for 25 years from their opening date. The protection date will be different for each centre as they came on stream at different times and the DfE can release the Council from these conditions.

There are three broad options for the vacant Children's Centres buildings.

**Sale:** With the exception of Vicarage Way, sale to a third party is difficult based on the centres being located within school sites. Apart from Vicarage way, none of the sites feature in the future asset disposals programme, due to use and location of the buildings.

**Lease:** The buildings within school sites could be utilised for an ancillary purpose which is compatible with the school. For instance, the site could be leased to a private, voluntary or independent nursery provider (PVI). Capital clawback risk is reduced if the building continues to be used for early years services. SBC is not the landlord for Orchard Way, so leasing to a 3<sup>rd</sup> party would be difficult.

**Transfer:** The sites could be transferred back to the adjacent schools for continued use for education purposes. Dependent on the use, capital clawback by the DfE could be avoided and the additional places could support the Council's duty to provide sufficient school places. Where the agreed transfer is to a Community School no formal process or lease is required as the site remains in Council ownership, but will become controlled by the governing body of the school.

#### Vicarage Way

- 3.2 Vicarage Way is not on a school site and there are no impediments to sale. Therefore, the site could be sold generating a receipt for the Council. This will deliver financial savings by removing the running costs from the Council's responsibility and generate a capital receipt.

The Council has consulted with the DfE over a sixth month period and, while they have not provided a formal response, clawback is not expected to be a significant concern from any sale of the Vicarage Way building.

**Recommendation:** Cabinet to put the Vicarage Way site forward for disposal to generate the best receipt possible for the site.

#### Elliman Avenue

- 3.3 Elliman Avenue is situated within the James Elliman Academy site, however the school is not interested in taking on the former Children's Centre building at this time. The recommendation to Cabinet for the former Children's Centre building is that it be leased to a Private, Voluntary or Independent provider to increase

early years places in line with Slough's sufficiency needs. This will generate an income for the council and continue to provide early years places in line with the original DfE funding agreement.

An alternative option considered was to use the building for satellite places for Arbour Vale School but it was deemed too small.

**Recommendation** – that the Council agree to dispose of the former Elliman Avenue Children's Centre site via a commercial lease agreement to provide additional early years places.

#### St Andrews Way

- 3.4 St Andrews Way is part of the Cippenham Nursery School site and is ideal for expanding the number of places at the school as it is embedded within the main school site. While a formal decision is made for use of the Children's Centre building, Cippenham Nursery School have taken over the rooms to offer additional places on a temporary basis, so the ongoing costs are not being covered by SBC.

St Andrews Way includes a separate building, the Olive Room, that is currently used for parent's meetings and other activities by the school. Discussions have taken place with the Slough Music Service to see if the Olive Room could be used as their base but it was not felt to be a suitable site and so will also be offered to the school. Once the site is used by a school it will gain protection as education land.

Transferring the former Children's Centre to Cippenham Nursery will increase the capacity of the nursery by 30 places, from 156 part time places to 186 part time places. As this expansion in numbers is less than 25% there is no requirement to formally consult on the expansion.

**Recommendation** – that the Council transfer the building to the Nursery and permanently expand Cippenham Nursery School.

#### Wexham Road

- 3.5 The Wexham Road site is part of the Lea Nursery site and so is ideal for providing additional early years places. Transferring the former Children's Centre to Lea Nursery will increase the capacity of the nursery by 30 places, from 156 part time places to 186 part time places. As this expansion in numbers is less than 25% there is no requirement to formally consult on the expansion. Once the site is used by a school it will gain protection as education land.

**Recommendation** – that the Council transfer the building to the Nursery and permanently expand Lea Nursery School.

#### Orchard Avenue

- 3.6 Orchard Avenue is part of the Priory School site where there is already a Designated Unit and a Specialist Resource Provision. Priory has over 100 pupils with EHC plans and is developing as a centre of excellence for SEND. The school has submitted an Expression of Interest to develop 48 additional

SEND places at the school including remodelling the Children's Centre building. This paper only addresses the creation of up to 12 places for pupils with SEND in the former Children's Centre building. This supports SEND Service sufficiency planning and its identified need for additional places in specialist resource provision.

The school Trust owns the freehold of the land on which the Children's Centre is situated, so a lease or other property agreement would not be required. Since the former Children's Centre is on the existing school site and the planned increase in capacity will not change the range of SEND needs met by the school currently, this will not require a formal statutory process to change the admission arrangements. However, a funding agreement with the Council will be required to ensure that the facility operates in line with Council requirements, in this case the provision of SEND services. In line with other SEND provision across the school estate this would be managed via a Service Level Agreement.

Recommendation - that Orchard Avenue expands SEND capacity at Priory School for up to 12 additional Specialist Resource Provision places which would be delivered through a Service Level Agreement.

#### **4.1 Financial implications**

4.1.1 The recommendations of the report are to dispose of Village Way as part of the Asset Disposal programme; to return two sites to the adjacent school to expand nursery provision and to establish additional SEND capacity at Orchard Avenue. In all instances the Council will benefit from a reduction in running costs totalling £0.113m per year.

4.1.2 The site at Elliman Avenue will be disposed off via a lease on appropriate commercial terms at a market rent to a Private, Voluntary or Independent nursery to provide additional early years places

#### **4.2 Legal implications**

4.2.1 The Council has a statutory duty under s.14 of the Education Act 1996 to ensure that there are sufficient schools for primary and secondary education in the local area.

Expansion of School Numbers - Where it is proposed to expand a maintained community school, the Council must follow the statutory requirements and guidance on making significant changes (prescribed alterations to maintained schools. These are triggered when premises are enlarged by at least 30 places and the lower of 25% or 200 places. This does not apply for any of the projects within this report.

As the sites were used as children's centres and DfE capital grant was used, there is a potential of the DfE clawing back the capital. The amount of grant subject to claw back will depend on the length of time since the grant was paid and the amount of grant. The DfE can waive this requirement if the land is being used for purposes connected with early years and may choose to waive

the requirement in other circumstances. With the exception of Vicarage Way, all sites are to be used for early years and/or SEND provision at primary school level.

As the Vicarage Way site is valued under £1 million, the Executive Director of Property and Housing has delegated authority to sell the site where the disposal meets best consideration criteria.

### 4.3 Risk management implications

#### 4.3.1

|   | <b>Risks</b>         | <b>Potential Impact</b>  | <b>Mitigating Actions</b>  |
|---|----------------------|--|--|
| 1 | Financial            | The Council is currently facing the financial costs of maintaining vacant Children's Centres.  | The paper contains a number of recommendations to ensure that the financial costs of the buildings are no longer the responsibility of the Council.  |
| 2 | Financial            | There are a number of Medium Term Financial Term savings associated with the new Family Hub model.   | It will be important to engage all partners in social care, health and voluntary services to maximise the impact of Family Hubs while making savings based on effective deployment of services.  |
| 3 | Sufficiency          | There is a predicted shortage of places to meet the new entitlements for Nursery provision.  | The recommendations for three of the closed Children's Centres include the provision of additional Nursery places with the priority for two year old places which is where the main pressure is. |
| 4 | Sufficiency          | There is an increase in the level of SEND need in Early Years settings. This is putting pressure on settings.  | The recommendations include additional SEND assessment places at a closed Children's Centre as well as an additional assessment unit at Monksfield Way Children's Centre.                        |
| 5 | Legal                | There are a number of potential legal matters relating to the alternative use recommendations for the closed Children's Centres.                                     | The arrangements for each closed Children's Centre will be different to meet the legal requirements.   |
| 6 | Support for Families | Family Hubs will provide holistic, multi-agency support for families with children up to age 19 (25 if they have SEND). Any delay will affect the support available. | The paper includes the next steps to ensure that the model is in place as planned.   |

#### 4.4 **Environmental implications**

4.4.1 *There are no known environmental implications arising from this report.*

#### 4.5 **Equality implications**

4.5.1 *There are no specific identified equality implications from this report. Equality Impact Assessments will be undertaken for the final Family Hub model.*

#### 4.6 **Corporate Parenting Implications**

4.6.1 *Children's Social Care and Early Help will be an integral part of the multi-agency support available and the seven principles of Corporate Parenting will inform the Family Hub design:*

- to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of those children and young people
- to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings
- to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people
- to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners
- to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people
- for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and
- to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

#### 5. **Background Papers**

Family Hub Update – Progress Towards  
Establishing a Family Hub Model for Slough

Case Studies on the Implementation of Family  
Hubs: Emerging Strategies for Success