



House of Commons  
Education Committee

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**Sure Start Children's  
Centres: Government  
Response to the Fifth  
Report from the  
Children, Schools and  
Families Committee,  
Session 2009–10**

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**Fourth Special Report of  
Session 2010–11**

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## The Education Committee

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The current staff of the Committee are Kenneth Fox (Clerk), Elisabeth Bates (Second Clerk), Penny Crouzet (Committee Specialist), Benjamin Nicholls (Committee Specialist), Ameet Chudasama (Senior Committee Assistant), Kathryn Smith (Committee Assistant), Steven Price (Committee Support Assistant), and Brendan Greene (Office Support Assistant)

### Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Education Committee, House of Commons, 7 Millbank, London SW1P 3JA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 6181; the Committee's e-mail address is [educom@parliament.uk](mailto:educom@parliament.uk)

# Fourth Special Report

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On 29 March 2010, the Children, Schools and Families Committee published its Fifth Report of Session 2009–10, *Sure Start Children's Centres*.<sup>1</sup> The Government's response to the Report was received by this Committee on 17 January 2011 and is published as an Appendix to this Report.

## Appendix

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### Introduction

The Government welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Children, Schools and Families Committee (now the Education Select Committee) Report on Sure Start Children's Centres, published on 29 March 2010. The report was timely and provided a wealth of evidence that has been, and continues to be, helpful in developing the Government's approach to early years.

The Government recognises the importance of children's centres and believes they have huge potential as they bring together services in new and innovative ways. The network of children centres is critical to our wider programme for children and families across Government.

The Spending Review signalled a radical new approach, a power shift between central and local government—ensuring local communities have a greater say in the issues that affect them. Directing funding through the new Early Intervention Grant will give Local Authorities (LAs) greater flexibility to make funding decisions based upon the needs of their communities. We have ensured there is enough money in the Early Intervention Grant to maintain the existing network of Sure Start Children's Centres, accessible to all but identifying and supporting the most vulnerable and disadvantaged families. Important new investment through Department of Health budgets to provide 4,200 extra health visitors, working alongside outreach and family support workers, will enable stronger links with local health services.

Going forward, our vision for children's centres is to intervene early to support the needs of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children and their families, whilst recognising the value of retaining a national network of children's centres accessible to all families in the wider community. We want children's centre leaders and staff to use their professional judgement and expertise to provide services that go beyond the current core offer to deliver outcomes more effectively, particularly for vulnerable groups. Government will enable this by working with local authorities to encourage engagement with the Big Society; enabling organisations with a track record of effectively supporting families to get much more involved (through the Localism Bill); greater use of evidence-based programmes and practices to improve outcomes; greater local transparency about what funds are spent on; and, payment by results to reward those LAs and centres which do it well.

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1 Children, Schools and Families Committee, Fifth Report of Session 2009–10, *Sure Start Children's Centres*, HC 130-I

Our approach is guided by the principles of freedom, responsibility and fairness. We are committed to devolving power to local government, communities and citizens. Children's centres have the potential to become the cornerstone of the Big Society—bringing together voluntary, community and neighbourhood groups who work together to initiate change and strengthen families and communities. These changes must be led locally as local communities know what works best for them.

There are a number of reviews across Government that should inform future direction at national and local level. Frank Field's Independent Review of Poverty and Life Chances, published on 3rd December, has highlighted the importance of investing in the early years. And Graham Allen's Review of Early Intervention will report on models of best practice around early intervention and how such models could best be funded (due to report in January and May 2011); and Dame Clare Tickell's Review of Early Years Foundation Stage (due to report in March 2011) is looking at how best to support young children's development and learning and their safety and welfare.

Responses to each of the Committee's recommendations are set out below.

**Recommendation 1: The Sure Start programme as a whole is one of the most innovative and ambitious Government initiatives of the past two decades. We have heard almost no negative comment about its intentions and principles; it has been solidly based on evidence that the early years are when the greatest difference can be made to a child's life chances, and in many areas it has successfully cut through the silos that so often bedevil public service delivery. Children's Centres are a substantial investment with a sound rationale, and it is vital that this investment is allowed to bear fruit over the long term.**

The Government is aware of the innovative practice underway in many Sure Start Children's Centres. This is supported by the National Evaluation of Sure Start (NESS) which provides a good evidence base from which to develop children's centres further. Frank Field's Independent Review of Poverty and Life Chances published on 3rd December recognises the pivotal role children's centres have in reaching out effectively and improving the outcomes of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

We are aware that Durham University published a report recently which suggested that Government investment in Sure Start had not delivered improvements in early language and numeracy development. We do not share that view—the 2010 Foundation Stage Profile results showed that the proportion of young children achieving a good level of development had increased by 4 percentage points compared to 2009, and the gap between the lowest achieving 20% and the rest has narrowed by 1.2 percentage points. Children's centres form part of the landscape delivering these improving outcomes. The data in the Durham report only goes up to 2008—the year in which the Early Years Foundation Stage was introduced.

We have ensured there is enough money in the EIG to maintain the existing network of children's centres, accessible to all but identifying and supporting the most vulnerable and disadvantaged families. In order to meet effectively the needs of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children and their families, we are introducing a sharp and focused period of reform to re-focus support on the families who most require it, through greater use of

evidence based programmes to improve outcomes. We also want to see much greater involvement of voluntary and community sector providers, including encouraging local authorities to contract out more of their services. We will also reward those local authorities and providers which do well, including piloting approaches to payment by results. Children’s centre leaders and local authorities have a crucial role in the development of the reform programme and we are working closely with the sector as we develop and reform children’s centres going forward.

**Recommendation 2: We believe that the many, varied and interconnected ways in which Children’s Centres can influence the lives of children and their families constitute a strength, rather than a weakness, in the programme. We do not consider that fostering wider benefits for families and the community necessarily undermines a Children’s Centre’s primary focus on children; rather, it is a welcome recognition that children’s ability to flourish is profoundly affected by their immediate environment.**

The Government agrees that children’s centres have a vital role to play in fostering family and community support. Children’s centres have huge potential as hubs of the Big Society—many are already supporting community groups and enabling peer led support. We want to enable local areas to consider, in consultation with their communities, what other services can be based in children’s centres—for example relationship support.

**Recommendation 3: Putting the holistic ideals of Children’s Centres into practice is a challenging aim, and it demands vigilance over the quality of individual services and interventions so that none are neglected. For the programme to work to its full potential, therefore, services must be evidence-based and practitioners highly skilled. This is nowhere more true than in the early education and care provision, and we welcome the Minister’s statement that this element of Children’s Centres’ work should have “primacy”. As in all types of educational provision, the vision and commitment of Centre leaders is decisive to their effectiveness.**

The Government agrees with the recommendation—high quality provision leads to better outcomes for children and families. Research evidence shows that it is the quality of support which makes the difference for children’s outcomes, particularly for disadvantaged children. That is why, where children’s centres are providing early education and care, it should be led by either an Early Years Professional or a Qualified Teacher to ensure quality and provide expert input to the activities and services on offer.

Through reform to the accountability framework, we want to incentivise the use of evidence based early interventions. Many of the best children’s centres already draw on evidence based approaches and programmes—and review their practice and impact regularly. There is much to be learnt from programmes such as the Family Nurse Partnership. However, the Government is aware that best practice is not yet common practice in all children’s centres. All centres and local areas will want to review their services in light of the Graham Allen review to make sure they are providing the most effective early intervention and securing best value for money. Children’s centre leaders have a key leadership role in assessing the needs of their local communities and working with others to plan services which meet them in an integrated way.

Children's centre leaders, along with other leaders in education, need to have the freedom and space to develop and evaluate their own practice and to build services that their local community want and need. Going forward, the National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services (National College) will support children's centre leaders to drive sector-led improvement of children's centres, as set out in the Schools White Paper, the Importance of Teaching, published on 24 November 2010.

This approach complements Government plans to enable public sector employees, through the creation of mutuals, to have much greater involvement in the running of public services. The mutuals programme, led by the Cabinet Office, seeks to enfranchise and empower frontline professionals as a key method of improving quality in local services.

**Recommendation 4: The reduction of child poverty must be at the forefront of the thinking of Children's Centres leaders and practitioners. The element of the core offer relating to the services of Jobcentre Plus would, in our view, be more effectively expressed as a commitment to support families' economic wellbeing. This would encompass not only Jobcentre Plus input but also skills and training opportunities, and a range of advice aimed at helping families achieve financial independence.**

Releasing children from the poverty trap to unleash their potential is critical in creating a fair society. To build a fairer and more mobile society, the Spending Review introduces a new fairness premium—worth £7.2 billion in total over the Spending Review period—to support the poorest in the early years and at every stage of their education. The fairness premium will give the poorest children a better start in life—stretching from the age of two to the age of twenty.

The Government appreciates that there are a number of factors which can support good outcomes, such as the provision of a nurturing home environment. As well as having a direct impact on a family's economic wellbeing, there is a link between parental employment and improved wider outcomes in children's development. The Government's approach to tackling child poverty acknowledges the key role that children's centres can play in improving children's life chances through the provision of services which support both families' economic wellbeing and their wider emotional development. This entails children's centres working to build parents' capability in many areas, thus ensuring their children's readiness for school. This contribution is also recognised in Frank Field's independent Review of Poverty and Life Chances, published on 3rd December 2010. We welcome the report's emphasis on the critical early years of a child's life, and we are considering the detail of its recommendations in relation to children's centres.

Many of the best children's centres already offer a wide range of activities that contribute to families' economic wellbeing. This includes links with Jobcentre Plus, but also a range of other ways in which children's centres encourage families to improve their skills, employment prospects and financial situation—for example, through local skills and training providers (especially those who are already engaged in the delivery of centrally funded local family learning programmes), voluntary organisations and volunteering, debt advice and other services, depending on the needs of their communities. The Work Focused Services in Children's Centres pilot is testing out the impact of placing dedicated

full-time Jobcentre Plus personal advisers in children's centres. Interim findings<sup>2</sup> have indicated that the pilot is starting to address customers' needs in a more holistic way, as work-focused services begin to embed themselves within the children's centres and within their network of partners. Most case study areas have started to deliver personalised, flexible and often intensive support for customers in order to meet their needs and respond to their circumstances. The final evaluation will be published in summer 2011.

**Recommendation 5: It is not clear how the Government expects Children's Centres to square the circle of providing the highest-quality integrated care and education in the most disadvantaged parts of the country on a self-financing basis. Neither the quality of the education nor the accessibility of the care should be compromised; we urge the Government instead to consider formalising and increasing the degree of subsidy that in effect already exists for these settings. This would have to be done with due consideration for the impact on local childcare markets.**

The Government is committed to increasing the focus of children's centres on the most vulnerable and disadvantaged families in their communities. Local areas are best placed to assess their communities' needs and local demand for early education and care. In the past, children's centres in the most disadvantaged areas were required to provide full day care, i.e. 10 hours a day, 5 days a week, for 48 weeks a year. However, sector representatives have consistently told us that in some areas, when demand for full day care is low, money intended for other Sure Start services—like family support and outreach to vulnerable families—is subsidising childcare provision. In order to give children's centres the flexibility they need to use their money to intervene early and reach the most vulnerable families, we have removed the overly prescriptive requirement for children's centres in the most disadvantaged areas to provide full day care where there is no demand.

The Government is committed to high quality early education and care as it makes a difference in the long term to both social justice and social mobility. Local authorities remain responsible for ensuring that there is sufficient high-quality early education and care across the whole of their community, and some children's centres will continue to provide full day care depending on levels of demand—but the Government believes that local areas should have greater flexibility in deciding how best to make enough high-quality places available for the needs of their community.

However, we do still expect children's centres in the most disadvantaged areas to continue to provide early education and care as part of their integrated support for families, including free nursery education for 2, 3, and 4-year-olds and additional hours where there is demand.

Centres should make sure that disadvantaged families get priority when these places are allocated. Where children's centres in disadvantaged areas are providing sessional care, it should still be led by either an Early Years Professional or a Qualified Teacher, to provide skilled leadership and ensure high quality.

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2 Marangozo, Rand Stevens, H (2010) Work-focused services in children's centres pilot: Interim report: DWP Research report 677



**Recommendation 6: The involvement of early years qualified teachers is essential to the ambitions of Children’s Centres to provide the highest quality early years experiences. We urge the Department to collect information as soon as possible about the number of qualified teachers employed in Children’s Centres that offer integrated education and care, and the nature of their roles. It is essential that practice in Children’s Centres reflects the lessons of the EPPE research; the requirement for early years qualified teacher posts should be increased to achieve this if necessary.**

It is crucial that children’s centres in disadvantaged areas continue to offer high-quality early education and care to support vulnerable and disadvantaged families. However, since we have removed the requirement for children’s centres in disadvantaged areas to provide full day care, we do not want to be as prescriptive as the previous Government in expecting them to employ both a Qualified Teacher and an Early Years Professional. Therefore, we have removed this requirement.

We know that it is the quality of support that makes the biggest difference for children’s development, so we still expect there to be at least one Early Years Professional or Qualified Teacher. However, we trust professionals to use their local knowledge and professional judgment to decide what level of graduate support they need in their own centres. We want decisions to be made locally on the precise mix of skills required and not impose duplication of roles which may be unnecessary or wasteful in some circumstances. We hope that children’s centres will want to play a leadership role across the early years sector in their area. Emerging findings from the Graduate Leader Fund evaluation show that Early Years Professionals have a positive impact on young children’s learning, as EPPE has shown for qualified teachers.

We are currently considering the type of information that should be collected on children’s centres going forward.

**Recommendation 7: A greater degree of clarity and detail in the strand of the core offer relating to outreach and family support would be welcome. Children’s Centres should have a precise idea of what they mean by outreach and family support, as expressed in the outcomes they are aiming for and manifested in a range of activities which have a clear rationale and theoretical basis.**

We recognise the important role children’s centre outreach and family support plays in reaching the most vulnerable and disadvantaged families in greatest need, particularly when it uses evidence based, early intervention approaches. This is often most effective locally when outreach workers work alongside health visitors, social workers and other early years professionals. With this in mind, we are working closely with the Department of Health to define an ongoing role for outreach within the context of a wider Sure Start Health Team, which takes into account the broad range of issues which outreach workers deal with. We have been learning from those children’s centres and local authorities who have already demonstrated good practice in doing this. Many areas have set up multidisciplinary teams which offer good integrated approaches for children and families, clear supervision, good information sharing and professional development for outreach and other support workers. Important new investment through Department of Health budgets to provide 4,200 extra health visitors, working alongside outreach and family support workers, will enable stronger links with local health services.



**Recommendation 8:** We do not consider that it would be helpful at this stage in Children's Centres' development to require them to extend their formal remit beyond the 0–5 age group, although we advise the Government to recognise and evaluate the impact of well established Centres that have developed their services in this way. Children's Centres are, however, beginning to provide an excellent model for multi-agency working across professional boundaries that services for other age groups should seek to emulate. We encourage the Government to exploit the expertise and experience of Children's Centres leaders and practitioners in the development of youth services and extended services in schools in particular.

The Spending Review secured sufficient funding in the system to retain the network of Sure Start Children's Centres. But local authorities and children's centres will need to think innovatively about how resources are used to reach those families in greatest need. This includes identifying the potential for other services to be based in children's centres (for example, relationship support) and working up the age range, where it makes sense locally. Whilst the primary focus remains quality integrated services for young children and their families, we are keen to think of them as centres for children and families. Ultimately, it is for local authorities, with their local communities, to plan and deliver services that most meet their needs.

Children's centres have a crucial role to play in supporting cross-Government priorities, for example, children's centres play an important role in early intervention which supports Home Office priorities in preventing negative outcomes such as youth crime. We agree that the multi-agency approach that children's centres exemplify is one that could be adopted or adapted for other areas of public services. We also recognise the existing good practice in youth services. Around half of children's centres are located on school sites (and some are led by schools) which provides opportunities to make more effective use of assets and to link with other services, e.g. through locality models working across the age range. For example, having outreach teams delivering services to families using both the children's centre and the school; supporting transition into school; sharing space and equipment; or helping to promote access to extended services provision. The recent Schools White Paper set out the expectation that schools will work together with voluntary and statutory agencies and business to create an environment where every child can learn, and can experience new and challenging opportunities through extended services and where school buildings and expertise are contributing to building strong families and communities.

The National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services will support children's centre leaders to drive sector-led improvement through the Children's Centre Leaders Network which is a professional learning network providing opportunities for leaders to improve practice, share experience and develop expertise.

**Recommendation 9:** Expansion of the Children's Centres programme to all communities has been necessary to ensure that all children and families in need of help can get it. It would be a backwards step to consider restricting access again only to those living in areas which are generally categorised as disadvantaged. We consider that resourcing Children's Centres outside the most disadvantaged areas at a lower level represents at present a regrettable but necessary compromise between focusing on concentrated deprivation and making access available to all vulnerable children.

We agree we want to retain the network. That is why the Spending Review means there is enough funding to maintain the network of children's centres—accessible to all families, but focused on the most vulnerable and disadvantaged families. Under the Apprenticeships, Skills and Children's Learning Act 2009, local authorities (LAs) have a statutory duty to ensure sufficient provision of children's centres to meet local need and consult on any changes to children's centre provision. Funding is heavily weighted towards disadvantaged areas and this is continuing in the Early Intervention Grant.

By retaining a universal presence in their communities, children's centres will be non-stigmatising places to go to access services. Children's centres also play an important role in encouraging take-up of free entitlement to early education. We encourage local authorities and children's centres to target resources on evidence-based programmes and practice for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged families, and to think innovatively about income generation—for example, charging families who are able to pay for other activities, like baby yoga or community cafes or other services that parents have requested (many children's centres already do this effectively, and we encourage others to learn from them).

**Recommendation 10: However, we are concerned that simply placing services called 'Children's Centres' in all communities does not necessarily guarantee that all families will benefit from the Sure Start model of integrated working. We recommend that the Government assess the extent to which Phase Three Centres are able to replicate meaningfully the most salient and valuable elements of the approach of successful Phase One and other long-established Centres. Vulnerable children living in Phase Three areas are not necessarily less needy than those in the 30% most disadvantaged areas, and we seek evidence that the benefits of integrated early childhood services are available also to them through these different models of delivery.**

We agree with the Select Committee's conclusion that the most vulnerable and disadvantaged families don't necessarily live in disadvantaged areas. One-third of the most deprived children under five live outside the most deprived areas<sup>3</sup>. That is why outreach plays a crucial role in ensuring that those families who need support and live in more affluent areas access services, particularly since they can be even more isolated than similar families in disadvantaged areas. Health visitors have a universal role in seeing all new born babies and their families and can refer them to children's centres when they need support, which is why we are expanding them. In retaining a network of children's centres and fulfilling their statutory duties, it is up to local authorities to ensure that local children's centre provision is responsive to these families. Through reform to the accountability framework, local authorities and children's centre providers will be paid in part by the results they achieve for families in greatest need. We encourage local authorities to keep thinking creatively about how best to pool resources and integrate services in a way that makes sense for families who use them. We are working closely with sixteen local areas which will be piloting community budgets in relation to families with complex needs. These areas are doing important work in going beyond traditional boundaries between public services to redesign them around the needs of local families. These first community budgets will be run from April 2011. All places may be able to operate these approaches from 2013–14.

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3 Defined by reference to the Lower Super Output Areas in the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2007

**Recommendation 11: Many Sure Start Local Programmes successfully fostered community ownership and partnership, in some cases re-casting the relationship between professionals and service users. The Government properly encourages Children's Centres to involve parents and carers in planning, delivery and governance. However, too much of the guidance is couched in language that implies a traditional division between service provider and community, with the former having a duty to consult and take advice. Identification of best practice in community involvement rather than consultation, and spreading this best practice to all Centres, should be priority areas of action for the Children's Centres programme.**

The Government agrees with this recommendation. The Government wants to give citizens, communities and local government the power and information they need to come together, solve the problems they face and build the Britain they want. We are moving away from the current presumption of state control towards a presumption of community action.

Children's centres have the potential to become the cornerstone of the Big Society—bringing together voluntary, community organisations, charities and social enterprises who then work together to initiate change and strengthen both families and communities. The original Sure Start Local Programmes were built on the principle of community involvement. Many children's centres continue to have excellent approaches to fostering community ownership and partnership: for example, a recent publication by the Pen Green Children and Families Research Centre in Corby identified effective ways of engaging communities in children's centres. We agree with the Select Committee's recommendation that more can be done to identify and spread this best practice.

We want to see much greater involvement of voluntary and community sector providers, including through more commissioning by local authorities. We will make use of opportunities to free up the market, such as the Localism Bill which will give the voluntary and community sector, local authority employees and parish councils the right to challenge local authorities where they believe they could run services, including children's centres services, differently or better.

The Department for Education is working closely with the Cabinet Office on the Government's plans to enable mutuals, co-operatives, charities and social enterprises to have much greater involvement in the running of public services, so that more children's centres can adopt these models where this would be beneficial for their users and communities. Forming engaging partnerships with communities is at the heart of our Public Service Reform agenda. Children's Centres are an area in which empowered professionals, including within mutuals, can be better placed to provide the responsiveness and community engagement that can take services to the next level. The Public Service Reform White Paper, which will be published in early 2011, will set out more detail on this area.

**Recommendation 12: The expansion of Children's Centres has been an ambitious programme with laudable aims. We support the Government's goal of universal coverage, but the speed of the rollout has posed serious problems in some local authorities in terms of buildings, staffing and community engagement which could have been ameliorated by a more measured approach. As well as evaluating the impact**

**of Children's Centres services, the Department should undertake an evaluation of the rollout process, so that lessons can be learned for the future.**

The Government agrees that the roll out of children's centres has been ambitious. As part of the reform programme, and in a constrained financial climate, we wish to concentrate funding on increasing the focus on those families in greatest need, rather than undertaking a separate evaluation of the rollout process at this time. The Department for Education's contracts to support local authority implementation of their children's centre programmes end in March 2011. Rather than commissioning a separate evaluation of the rollout it is our intention to use the current Sure Start evaluations, National Evaluation of Sure Start (NESS) and Evaluation of Children's Centres in England (ECCE), to help frame implementation. We will also be considering the learning from our current implementation partners to inform future practice.

**Recommendation 13: The network that is now in place must be considered work still in progress. Expansion should not just be about numbers of Centres; service quality, staff skills, team and partnership working and Centres' relationship with the community must all be monitored for continuing improvement. The Department contracted with a national delivery partner, Together for Children, to help local authorities reach their numerical targets; it must now turn its attention to how local authorities can be helped to raise quality throughout their Children's Centres.**

We agree with the Select Committee's recommendation that going forward the attention must be on quality and improvement. Research shows us that high quality settings make a significant difference to child outcomes. The evaluation of the two year pilot of free childcare showed that the impact of provision on child outcomes was negligible except where settings were high quality.<sup>4</sup>

Together for Children's (TfC) remaining work this year is focussed on enabling local authorities to ensure the sustainability and quality of local children's centres, with a particular focus on better reaching the most vulnerable and disadvantaged families and improving value for money through better evidencing of costs and outcomes. TfC's contract ends in March 2011, as part of the Government's approach to placing greater trust in front line professionals and a sector-led approach to improvement support. Going forward, the National College will have a key role in supporting and empowering children's centre leaders to drive the reform programme.

**Recommendation 14: Pressure on the public purse could conceivably come to bear on Children's Centres in two main ways: a retreat to a smaller number of Centres, or a pruning of the range of services delivered by them. We consider that either course of action would undermine the programme to an unacceptable degree and jeopardise the long-term gains from early intervention. Local authorities are now responsible in law for providing sufficient Children's Centres for their community; we would not wish authorities to be bequeathed an underfunded statutory duty.**

We have ensured there is enough money in the Early Intervention Grant to maintain the existing network of Sure Start Children's Centres. However, it will require local authorities and children's centres to work innovatively in order to use their resources to maximum

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4 Early Education Pilot for two year old children: Evaluation National Centre for Social Research 200, ref DCSF RR 134

effect to help those most vulnerable and disadvantaged families, and to make savings; this may include thinking innovatively about income generation (for example, charging those who can afford to pay for certain activities and additional services).

Through reform to the accountability framework, local authorities and children's centre providers will be paid in part by the results they achieve for families in greatest need. We will work closely with representatives from the early years sector when developing this and other aspects of the reform programme.

The statutory duties on local authorities introduced as part of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 remain, including the duty on local authorities to ensure sufficient provision of children's centres to meet local need, so far as is reasonably practicable and the duty on local authorities to consult before establishing, closing or making a significant change to a children's centre.

**Recommendation 15: We recommend that the Government investigate the need for a qualification specific to Children's Centre outreach work, based on the experiences of long-standing Centres with a track record of success in engaging vulnerable families. This need not replace entirely the variety of qualifications which outreach workers currently hold, but it could supplement them by spreading best practice and defining the outreach role more sharply in relation to the roles of other professionals.**

There are many good examples of children's centres engaging vulnerable and disadvantaged families and it is important that others learn from this best practice. Ofsted inspection reports reflect how centres are working to reach/work with the most vulnerable and disadvantaged families. Empowering professionals to do their job is a key strand of our reform programme. We expect everyone who works in children's centres to draw upon evidence based approaches to working with the most disadvantaged and vulnerable families. Identifying and spreading good practice in the use of evidence based early intervention programmes, through a sector-led approach, will form part of our discussions going forward.

We do not accept the recommendation to develop a new qualification for outreach workers as we move towards the sector-led approach for delivering early intervention programmes, as described above. We expect outreach workers to work closely alongside other professionals to develop their skills. In future, LAs and CCs will need to make their own judgements about which training to commission to best meet the needs of their staff.

In addition to this, we have launched a new programme to turn around the lives of families with multiple problems which includes testing and sharing effective practice and new approaches. Manchester is developing a cost benefit analysis model looking at their early years and better life outcomes pilots; and other community budget areas are also using evidence-based approaches to working in an integrated way with families with multiple problems. We will seek to learn lessons from their experiences which can be shared with other areas.

**Recommendation 16: The Government must investigate ways in which information captured locally about how successfully Children's Centres are reaching the most vulnerable can be given a more robust basis, such as by requiring standardised data sets**



**to be made available by the responsible agencies, and can be aggregated to produce a nationwide picture.**

The Government is considering what data is most helpful to collect and publish nationally so that everyone can hold children's centre services to account. We will carefully balance this objective alongside our commitment to promoting the devolution of power to local government and community groups, who play an important role in enabling and sustaining strong children's centres, and reducing unnecessary data burdens. Partners have been encouraged to share information and data with children's centres. It is encouraging that a number of local authorities already make statistical data available to their local children's centres (such as population, deprivation, homelessness, demographic and ethnicity data).

**Recommendation 17: In order to evaluate the cost-effectiveness and value for money of Children's Centres nationally, the Government must make more effort to work out the totality of funding that is supporting Centres, including resources from the Departments of Health and for Work and Pensions. It is unacceptable that such basic information remains apparently unknown.**

Whilst at present a significant amount of children's centre funding goes to local authorities through the Sure Start, Early Years and Childcare Grant (and from April 2011, through the Early Intervention Grant), health and employment services funding for children's centres is decided at a local level between the Local Authority, Primary Care Trust and Jobcentre Plus. This provides local areas with freedom and flexibility to agree the resources and services that are needed to meet the needs of their communities. This means that there are no national ring-fenced specific health and employment budgets for services delivered through children's centres. In addition, health and employment services are often delivered via a service level agreement or memorandum of understanding and not through the direct provision of funding to centres. It is important that value for money is demonstrated locally—local authorities are responsible for delivering children's centres and the centres deliver a wide range of tailored services. Multi-agency and integrated working is vitally important to ensure outcomes are delivered cost-effectively. We will also look at how we can further support centres to calculate and demonstrate the value of their services, as part of our work to ensure that providers are paid in part by results they achieve.

**Recommendation 18: We recommend that the Government commission research into the ramifications of population mobility for the delivery and impact of early childhood services including Children's Centres. We also recommend that the Government issue guidance on how Centres in areas with highly mobile populations can undertake effective evaluation of their services.**

The Government recognises that population mobility can present a challenge for children's centres and local authorities when planning, providing and measuring the impact of services. We believe it is important that children's centres are able to self-evaluate their services in ways that are robust. This should include assessing how effective they are in reaching out to all families, especially those who may be less likely to use children's centres (such as transient families). They should also be able to demonstrate how their services support improved outcomes for all families, especially those who are most disadvantaged.

We recognise that professionals working in children's centres have huge experience in reaching out to families in their communities. They should, therefore, be in the best position to share good practice in engaging with transient families such as service families, families of offenders, or gypsy and traveller families. We want to support local authorities, where appropriate, to share best practice on how children's centres can measure their impact on such groups, as well as identify and support them. We will be considering this issue as part of the reform programme.

We want to empower the workforce to make decisions based upon their professional expertise, local knowledge, self evaluation, evidence based programmes and practice and sharing good practice. In light of this approach, we do not accept that there is a need for a national research exercise about the ramifications of population mobility or to issue more guidance to children's centres at this time.

**Recommendation 19: We recommend that the Department assess the need for training Children's Centre staff and leaders in the techniques and mindset they will need in order to become 'practitioner-researchers'. There is huge potential for Children's Centres to be hubs of workforce learning and continuous improvement, and we are concerned by reports that the good work of Early Excellence Centres in this respect has not been mainstreamed within Children's Centres.**

Children's centre leaders, along with other leaders in education, need to have the freedom and space to develop and evaluate their own practice and to build services that their local community want and need. The Children's Centre Leaders' Network, and National Professional Qualification for Integrated Centre Leaders (NPQICL), enables children's centre leaders to build their leadership skills and spread good practice both within their setting and with other leaders. We agree that children's centres have expertise in partnership working that others can learn from.

We want to look further at how children's centres can be supported to take on more of a community leadership role —building, for example, on what the best children's centres are already doing to support childminder networks. As the National College continues to train leaders of children's centres, we will be working closely with them to ensure that future training empowers children's centre leaders to develop and exercise their leadership skills.

**Recommendation 20: Children's Centres have the potential to transform children's services by leadership and by example. We recommend that the Government recognise these effects when assessing the full impact of the programme.**

The Government agrees that children's centre leaders have a transformational role to play in their local communities, including children's services. We will work closely with the National College to ensure that future training supports centre leaders to lead local reform, including effective use of evidence based programmes and practices. In addition, Ofsted inspections of children's centres include judgements on the quality of leadership which recognise the crucial role leaders have to play in achieving outcomes for children and their families.

**Recommendation 21: In order to fulfil their potential for improving children's lives, Children's Centres with proven expertise in early learning need to have the time, skills, resources and remit to promote quality learning in other early years settings and in the**



**home. We recommend that supporting other settings should be an aspect of these Centres' work which is reflected in the core offer, and against which they are assessed.**

We agree that children's centre leaders are well placed to promote high quality early education and to work pro-actively with specialists and other providers in their communities who are already delivering successful family learning programmes. The leadership of children's centres leaders will be crucial in improving the quality and take-up of free entitlement to early education. We will work closely with the National College to ensure that future workforce development for children's centres leaders reflects these requirements.

**Recommendation 22: It is essential that Children's Centres are given time to prove their worth. Some Centres are not open yet and the majority of those that are open have been in place for less than four years. It would be catastrophic if Children's Centres were not afforded long-term policy stability and security of funding while evaluation is ongoing.**

The Government remains committed to children's centres. Funding for the most vulnerable children and families is to be streamlined into a new Early Intervention Grant. The Government is committed to investment and reform in early intervention at a time of financial constraint. Against the background of greater flexibility to decide priorities locally, there are key areas of early intervention where the Government is ensuring that the overall Grant provides support. This includes investment in children's centres and building local authority capacity to meet the commitment to provide high quality early education to the most disadvantaged 2-year-olds.

**Recommendation 23: We consider that it would be unwise to remove the ring-fence around Children's Centres funding in the short or medium term; putting Centres at the mercy of local vicissitudes would risk radically different models and levels of service developing across the country, with differences out of proportion to the variation in community needs.**

The Spending Review signalled a radical new approach, a power shift between central and local government—ensuring local communities have a greater say in the issues that affect them. The Government is committed to trusting professionals and creating local flexibility. Greater freedom at local level to pool and align funding, will help local authorities and partners to achieve better results. That is why we are radically reducing the number of ring-fenced grants to local authorities for education and children's services. It is right that local authorities should have greater autonomy and flexibility to respond to local need.

From April 2011, Sure Start funding will be part of a new Early Intervention Grant (EIG). This grant has been created to bring together funding for a number of early intervention and preventative services, including children's centres, families with multiple problems, and targeted support for young people. It will be worth around £2bn by the end of the period. EIG is not ring-fenced, giving local authorities the flexibility to respond to local needs and drive reform, while supporting a focus on early intervention across the age range.

The inclusion of Sure Start funding in this new grant reflects the crucial role that children's centres play in ensuring that families have access to early intervention when they need it, to

tackle issues early and prevent costly problems emerging later on. High quality early years provision makes the biggest difference. The network of children's centres provides the foundation for stronger, early joined-up working, offering universal services for all families and targeted services focused on the most vulnerable and disadvantaged families. It is vital to maintain and capitalise on the network, while driving reforms to improve efficiency and focus services on the most disadvantaged.

It is important that the Sure Start network becomes more efficient: we are already seeing improvements as local authorities "cluster" children's centres to streamline management costs; develop stronger local partnership arrangements with health; and develop innovative local approaches to income generation.

Local authorities continue to have a statutory duty to provide sufficient children's centres to meet local need, as far as is reasonably practicable. Greater local transparency of data, with payment by results, will increase local accountability for Sure Start funding. We will be piloting approaches to payment by results with a number of local authorities as part of the Early Intervention Grant, to ensure the right incentives are introduced to focus children's centres on effective early intervention.

**Recommendation 24: Local authorities clearly require more reassurance about future funding than they have so far received. Uncertainty in this regard is hampering long term planning and constructive voluntary sector involvement.**

The local government finance settlement on 13 December 2010 gave local authorities indicative allocations for the Early Intervention Grant for 2011–12 and 2012–13. This will give local areas the certainty to plan ahead for the next two years, and allocations for later years will be made in due course.

The new Early Intervention Grant (EIG) will provide a substantial new funding stream, with new flexibility, for early intervention and preventative services. It is not ring-fenced, bringing significantly greater freedom at local level, to respond to local needs and drive reform, while supporting a focus on early intervention in the early years and up through the age range.

We have additionally ensured there is enough money in the EIG to maintain the existing network of Sure Start Children's Centres, accessible to all but identifying and supporting families in greatest need. Local authorities continue to have duties under the Childcare Act 2006 to consult before opening, closing or significantly changing children's centres and to secure sufficient provision to meet local need. Important new investment through Department of Health budgets to provide 4,200 extra health visitors, working alongside outreach and family support workers, will enable stronger links with local health services.

**Recommendation 25: We welcome the Minister's assurance that issuing guidance about information sharing between health professionals and others is a priority for the Department. We recommend that it contain a clear statement that new births data in particular must be shared with Children's Centres.**

Sharing information is key in ensuring that all children and families are protected and supported, particularly the most vulnerable. A leaflet on information sharing between health professionals and those working in children's centres was published in March 2010

and was submitted as evidence to the committee. The Government will look to build on this in developing the health offer in children's centres. Midwives record all new births via the child health system. This information can then be used by health visitors working with those children, including those working in and with children's centres. We expect professionals to share information where they need to, seeking the permission as appropriate of parents and carers in the process. At the same time, professionals will share information on the expected numbers of births to allow local authorities and centres to plan services. In rare circumstances, parents or carers may be concerned about proposed information sharing and health professionals may be uncertain how to proceed. The Department of Health published guidance in November 2010 to assist NHS staff in making what can be difficult decisions on whether information sharing can be justified in the public interest.

Following the vision set out in the White Paper *Equity and Excellence: Liberating the NHS* many of the functions of Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) will be transferred to GP Consortia. We propose that the existing duties to cooperate with children's services authorities in making arrangements to improve children's health and wellbeing will pass from PCTs to GP Consortia and Local Authorities (LAs). Such arrangements could include the sharing of information.

**Recommendation 26: It is unacceptable that GPs are able to categorise co-ordination with other services for children's well-being as an optional, 'spare time' activity. The Secretaries of State for Children, Schools and Families and Health must urgently follow through on the good intentions expressed in the joint child health strategy, published in 2009, to ensure that GPs play a full, active role in collaborative services for children and families, and in Children's Centres in particular.**

The Government recognises the importance of all partners working together. *Equity and Excellence: Liberating the NHS* set out our vision for the future of the NHS. We want to ensure that decision making is as close as possible to individuals and for that reason we are devolving power for commissioning to local consortia of GP practices. In *Liberating the NHS: Legislative framework and next steps*, we have noted that whilst forthcoming legislation will introduce a number of duties of partnership, the strength of the new arrangements will draw primarily upon leadership and behaviours demonstrated by leaders of GP consortia working together with patient groups, local authorities and other health and care professionals. Alongside the existing duty to cooperate between NHS bodies and local authorities, the Government will place a duty on relevant GP consortia and local authorities to participate in the work of the health and wellbeing boards by requiring them to be members. The Department for Education and Department of Health are discussing what else can be done to promote effective partnerships between GP practices and children's centres. Health visitors will have a key role in promoting effective partnerships.

*Healthy Lives, Healthy People* outlines a new approach to public health, shifting power to local communities. It notes that in local government there will be new opportunities to develop integrated local strategies between public health services, children's services and the NHS, aligning outcomes and resources. The increased number of health visitors will work with children's centres and GPs and will lead and deliver the Healthy Child Programme, alongside the evidence based Family Nurse Partnership programme.

*Achieving equity and excellence for children: How liberating the NHS will help us meet the needs of children and young people* began a dialogue about how to ensure high-quality services for children and young people. The right to register with any GP practice could make an important difference to families. Under the new arrangements, families will have the opportunity to choose with which practice to register.

**Recommendation 27: We believe that it was a backwards step to end formal Department of Health responsibility for the Sure Start programme at ministerial level, a situation which has carried over to Children’s Centres. This is clearly not the only reason why local health services are not consistently involved in Children’s Centres either strategically or operationally—there are many practical and professional reasons why collaboration is difficult. Nonetheless, the Government should lead from the front by establishing joint DCSF and Department of Health responsibility for Children’s Centres. The first task of the Ministers who take on this role should be ensuring that Children’s Centres are prominently and consistently reflected in both Departments’ policy priorities and performance frameworks.**

Ministers work together across Departments on a range of issues. Ministers in the Department for Education and the Department of Health are working together closely on our work to strengthen support for children and families. Both Departments sit on the Prime Minister’s Childhood and Families Taskforce; the Public Health, Social Justice and Child Poverty Sub Committees and the Inter-Ministerial Group on Violence against Women and Children. Both Departments have developed and published complementary business plans:

- the Department for Education commits to retain a national network of Sure Start Children’s Centres with a core universal offer, while also ensuring that they deliver proven early intervention programmes to support families in the greatest need; and
- the Department of Health complements this by committing to recruit an additional 4,200 extra health visitors by 2015 who will deliver the universal Healthy Child Programme to all families, working closely with children’s centres and their staff.

Recruiting 4,200 new health visitors and doubling the number of families reached through the Family Nurse Partnership by 2015 will be taken forward in partnership with children’s centres, other early years services, and local authorities as well as other NHS services including maternity services.

**Recommendation 28: Health visitors have an immensely valuable role to play in co-ordinating health provision at Children’s Centres and in maintaining links to other health professionals, especially GPs. It is vital that health visitors in all parts of the country are fully bound in to Children’s Centres to allow Centres to reach their full potential as hubs for all services for children under five.**

The service vision for health visiting in England which was published in October and the Health Visitor Implementation Plan, which will be published shortly, illustrate how we envisage health visitors and children’s centres working together in the coming years. It will be for health visitors and their partners locally to determine which mix of settings to use to ensure they best meet the needs of their local populations.

**Recommendation 29: The Government's default position that the shape of services delivered through Children's Centres should be determined locally is welcome. However, where research and pilot projects give clear indications of the features of effective services—such as the type of Jobcentre Plus involvement that gets the best results—local negotiations should be backed up by a clear expectation nationally that best practice should become common practice.**

The Government is committed to increasing the involvement of organisations with a track record of supporting families and to ensure that providers are paid in part by the results they achieve. Working closely with the sector and, drawing on Graham Allen's Review of Early Intervention and evaluations such as the Work Focused Services in Children's Centres Pilot, we intend to make available evidence of the most effective programmes and practices to improve outcomes.

The Work Focused Services pilot is testing out the impact of placing dedicated full-time Jobcentre Plus personal advisers in children's centres. Interim findings have indicated that the pilot is starting to address customers' needs in a more holistic way, as work-focused services begin to embed themselves within the children's centres and within their network of partners. A final evaluation will be published in summer 2011.

The Graham Allen Review of Early Intervention will report on models of best practice around early intervention and how such models could best be disseminated and supported (and the institutional arrangements for supporting them); and, new and innovative funding mechanisms, including non government funding, which will ensure the long term stability and funding of early intervention programmes. The Review will report by end January 2011 on the first area and provide an interim report on the second. A final report on funding will be produced by May 2011.

Local areas and children's centres can then make evidence based decisions on the types of programmes and practices they should offer to improve outcomes for their local communities. We are exploring how to introduce payment by results as part of the Early Intervention Grant (including for children's centres). We will promote transparency by working with the sector to measure the key outcomes and incentivise reform and effectiveness through payment of local authorities and providers by results, working with a number of authorities to develop a fair and effective methodology. Greater local transparency of data, with payment by results, will increase local accountability for Sure Start funding and ensure funding goes to services which have proven effectiveness.

We will be consulting on data reporting changes so that local authority expenditure on children's centres would be published from 2011–12, including expenditure on evidence based early intervention services delivered through children's centres.

**Recommendation 30: Children's Trusts are still young organisations. This Committee and its successors will take a keen interest in how they develop, particularly whether they prove successful at improving the consistency of partnership working with schools, Jobcentre Plus and Primary Care Trusts. The Government should consider ways in which Children's Trusts can be used as a mechanism for ensuring that all partners take ownership of Children's Centres as a core activity of their own organisation.**



The Government believes that the core principle of local agencies co-operating in a shared commitment through Children's Trusts to improve the lives of children, young people and families—enshrined by the overarching 'duty to co-operate' (section 10 Children Act 2004)—is sensible and should remain. It is right that local authorities should continue to lead these partnership arrangements and that certain key partners should be required to co-operate. In addition the Department of Health has recently consulted on proposals for local statutory health and wellbeing boards, which will bring together the key NHS, public health, adult social care and children's services leaders in each local authority area. These boards are designed to establish greater strategic coherence and improve joint working significantly. They will be able to establish a shared local view about the needs of the community and support joint commissioning of NHS, social care, children's services and public health in order to meet the needs of the whole local population.

The Government intends to simplify the Children's Trust system and remove the additional and unnecessary prescription brought in by the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009. We have already withdrawn the statutory guidance on Children's Trusts; and revoked the Children and Young People's Plan Regulations 2010.

This means there is now no requirement for Children's Trust Boards to produce a Children and Young People's Plan. Local partnerships are free to publish their own strategic plan in a way that best reflects local circumstances and to develop innovative solutions to integrated working between partners. Professionals working together with children, young people and families, for example integrating Jobcentre Plus advisory services into children's centres, will decide what works best in meeting children's needs.

The Government is also planning in the forthcoming Education Bill (subject to Parliamentary approval) to remove schools, non-maintained special schools, Academies and FE colleges from the list of 'relevant partners' under the statutory 'duty to co-operate'. This is intended to enable schools and colleges to choose to continue to engage through the local Children's Trust co-operation arrangements in ways that are appropriate and proportionate to their circumstances, size and capacity.

The Government intends (subject to Parliamentary approval) to remove the requirement for local areas to have a Children's Trust Board and for Job Centre Plus to be a 'relevant partner' under a formal 'duty to co-operate' at the first available legislative opportunity. Together, these reforms will return the Children's Trust arrangements set up under the Children Act 2004 closer to its original position—giving a lead role to local authorities in setting up partnership arrangements but allowing local flexibility in how these are structured and organised.

**Recommendation 31: Children's Centres can benefit greatly from the skills, expertise and distinctive approach of voluntary sector organisations. We are concerned to hear that in some cases, organisations have felt excluded either from opportunities to run Centres on behalf of local authorities, or opportunities to contribute to the range of services on offer. We recommend that the Government consider making it compulsory for Children's Centre advisory boards to include local voluntary and community sector representation. This would aim to ensure that Children's Centres give these organisations a platform for their services rather than competing with them.**

The Government is committed to increasing the involvement of organisations with a track record of supporting families and to ensure that providers are paid in part by the results they achieve. Local authorities are already expected to consult with and to consider using the private, voluntary and independent sectors to run services within children's centres, as well as the overall management of centres. However, we intend to make it easier for these organisations to get involved in running children's centre services.

Through the Government's Localism Bill, we will introduce a right for communities and local authority employees to challenge local authorities where they believe they could provide services differently or better. This will enable them to submit an expression of interest (EOI) in running a service, which local authorities must consider and, where an EOI is accepted, run a procurement exercise for the service in which they can participate. Through this right, we hope to see more voluntary and community organisations and groups of local authority employees coming forward to challenge their local authorities to increase the diversity of children's centre provision in their area. The Government is also working closely with the voluntary sector to understand better some of the practical barriers they face in bidding to run publicly-funded services, and to identify solutions to these. The Public Services Reform White Paper next year will set out more detail on this.

We agree that the role of the voluntary and community sectors in helping to shape services and set direction is vital and that representation on children's centre advisory boards is a helpful way of doing this. The Childcare Act 2006 (as amended in 2009) requires local authorities to have advisory boards in place for all children's centres, and to have regard to statutory guidance when considering membership of such boards. Among other things, the statutory guidance currently says that local authorities should consider including a number of different people or organisations as possible advisory board members, including local community groups.