



Children's Services

Children's Centres

1. Executive Summary

Sure Start Children's Centres are a key component of the Government's strategy to deliver the best outcomes for children.

Children's Centres provide the following core services:

- Childcare integrated with early education;
- Family support;
- Health services;
- Links to job centre plus.

They provide services for children under five and their families, with an emphasis on provision for the most disadvantaged, including children with disabilities. They are expected to contribute to a number of outcomes, including improvements in the Foundation Stage Profile results, increases in the numbers breastfeeding, reduction in obesity at 5 years old, reduction in the number of children in workless households, numbers of teenage parents in education, training or work, and also need to evaluate the numbers of parents from disadvantaged groups using services, and the numbers satisfied with services. Tower Hamlets has 15 Children's Centres in phase one, of which 14 are now designated.

2. Data Collection & Consultation

The data collected gives a snapshot of provision. We are rolling out a data collection system, which will provide more accurate information, and improved data analysis. Children's Centres developed from the old Sure Start local programmes use an electronic system, but did not collect information about religion or sexual orientation. The collection of disability data is patchy and unreliable. Some Centres are still using paper systems, making analysis difficult.

Children's Centres, and Sure Start Local Programmes before them, carry out regular consultation with users and families in the area, as well as stakeholders. There was consultation prior to and during the development of each Children's Centre. Children's Centres have to carry out satisfaction surveys with users of services. All this information is made use of in planning services.

3. Key Findings

Allowing for the fact that we know the data is not comprehensive, generally users reflect the ethnic make-up of the Borough, with the majority being Bangladeshi – a slightly higher proportion than might be expected.

There are variations between areas. Gender of children is collected: users are 50% boys and 50% girls. Information has not been collected about sexual orientation or religion. Disability data

is patchy. The majority of users are mothers – given that childcare is still largely a female role this is to be expected, but Centres are expected to reach fathers.

Some Centres have been successful through activities for fathers (in one case linked to the Mosque), and/or the employment of father’s workers. Through data and anecdotally we are aware that very few parents of disabled children use Children’s Centres.

The other group that Children’s Centres need to ensure that they reach are teenage parents, gay/lesbian parents (no information held), and there is a need to ensure that services are inclusive of Somali and other minority ethnic groups.

4. Conclusions & Recommendations

There is a need for better data collection and monitoring. We also need to increase access to Children’s Centre services for children and parents with disabilities.

Action Plan:

Recommendation	Key Activity	Progress milestone
1. Comprehensive data collection framework in place across the borough’s children’s centres, to collate quantitative and qualitative information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Estart data base rolled out across all centres, to include monitoring of all equality groups. • Registration forms updated to include all equality groups. • 6 monthly reports to strategic planning group on both <i>registration</i> and <i>uptake</i> of services by equality groups. • Analysis of data to feed into planning of services, at strategic and local partnership groups. • Training for front-line staff involved in data collection, to ensure that data not previously monitored — sexual orientation, religion, disability - is gathered appropriately. • Self evaluation framework implemented across centres, to gather information on service user satisfaction; and to cover feedback from equality target groups. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Estart implemented by March 07 • Registration forms updated • Interim monitoring report to planning group March 07; full monitoring report to planning group in September 07. • Self evaluation framework implemented from September 2007
2. Strategy in place for increasing accessibility of children’s centre services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local advisory boards to agree plans/services, for increasing reach/take up of services by fathers • Children’s Centre 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of increased take-up of services by father’s by March 08 • Evidence of increased

Recommendation	Key Activity	Progress milestone
for equality target groups.	<p>involvement in the development of integrated early support / care pathway for children with disabilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Tiered) training in place for children centre staff on disability – early identification and support • Agreed procedures in place for referrals/involvement in care planning with social work teams to ensure that those families most in need access children’s centre services 	<p>take-up of services by children with disabilities and their families by March 08</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased referrals from social work teams reported by March 08 • Representatives from social work teams on children’s centre advisory/partnership boards
3. Strategic and leadership planning for children centres to include impact on equality target groups. .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Percentage targets to be agreed for Tower Hamlets children’s centres • Children’s centre planning linked to both extended schools and LAPS, at a strategic and local level, to ensure continuity and coherence of service planning for children. • Children’s centre strategic and operational managers to take the lead in implementing monitoring and planning in relation to equality target groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targets in place by April 07. • Structures in place for joint planning – both strategically and locally - around extended schools, LAPS and children’s centres by September 07. • Monitoring and planning of services against equality target groups implemented by management team from April 07. • Leadership programme for children’s centre managers informed by equality impact assessment. • Training in place for managers and staff in relation to equality target groups, where necessary