

# Equality Impact Assessment

**Relating to: Children's Centres**

**Date: April 2012**

## Introduction

This Impact Assessment supports the County Council in meeting its legal obligations under the **Public Sector Equality Duty**, now contained in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010. The Equality Duty ensures that public bodies have due regard to the statutory needs referred to in section 149 when exercising their functions.

Section 149 provides that in exercising its functions an authority must have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and others who do not share it; and
- foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not share it.

Having due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and others who do not share it involves having due regard (in particular) to the need to:

- remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic;
- take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it; and
- encourage persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

Having due regard to the need to foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it involves having due regard (in particular) to the need to tackle prejudice and to promote understanding.

The steps involved in meeting the needs of disabled persons that are different from the needs of persons who are not disabled include, in particular, steps to take account of disabled person's disabilities.

Compliance with the duties in section 149 may involve treating some persons more favourably than others; but not if that will itself involve conduct which is made unlawful under the Equality Act 2010.

The protected characteristics to which the duty applies are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation, also marriage and civil partnership but only in respect of the requirement to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination.

Having **due regard to** means consciously thinking about the statutory needs as part of the process of decision making, when the proposals are still at a formative stage, and before a decision is reached. This means that consideration of those equality issues must influence the decisions reached by public bodies. The Equality Duty must be exercised in substance, with rigour and with an open mind.

Indirect discrimination occurs where a condition criterion or practice is applied which would put people with one of the protected characteristics at a disadvantage, and the imposition of that condition, criterion or practice is not a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim, i.e. it cannot be objectively justified.

It is important to understand and consider how different people will be affected by the decisions the Council makes, so that policies and services are appropriate and accessible to all and meet different people's needs.

This assessment will help you think about the potential impact your proposals will have on all sections of the community. Recognising these impacts early on in the process of developing policies will assist good decision making and ensure that the County Council delivers services appropriate to people's needs. Remember that the Equality Duty involves having due regard to the needs to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, as well as to eliminate discrimination and other conduct which is unlawful under the Equality Act 2010.

**1. Person responsible for undertaking this assessment:**

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<b>Service:</b> Commissioning – Children & Families	<b>E-mail:</b> ruth.lewis@gloucestershire.gov.uk

## 2. Name and brief description of the policy, service, strategy, procedure or function: (indicate whether new or revised)

There are 39 Children's Centres in Gloucestershire. 31 children's centres are managed under a Service Level Agreement with schools or by Gloucestershire County Council. A further 8 centres are commissioned under a contract with Barnardos from Sept 2010 to Aug 2013. The total budget for Children's Centres during the current year (2012/13) is £8,269,804.

**The proposal is to tender centres on a district basis involving seven contracts** delivering the same number of children's centres overall. The number of centres within a locality would range from 4 to 7 individual centres. This would align with the emerging localities arrangements for NHS services and GCC Children's Services. This process would create a mixed economy with a reduced number of providers of between 1 and 7 organisations

This proposal is part of a joint GCC and NHS vision to ensure that all services for early years remain relevant, offer value for money, and are aligned with a joint strategic commissioning framework for early childhood services and an agreed overarching specification for improving outcomes designed to ensure that families with young children get the best start in life, underpinned by:

- A local and single assessment process and a whole service response to meeting the needs of the whole family
- An emphasis on early intervention to break cycles of disadvantage and under achievement
- A single evaluation framework for the measurement of outcomes from locality based interventions and services
- Reduction in costs through improved efficiency and by cost avoidance
- A move towards fully commissioned Early Childhood services to include children centres
- Supporting parents and communities to have more involvement and control in the running of children centre services
- Building community cohesion through children's centres acting as a hub for the local community and becoming a single conduit for all early years services
- A payment by results system for children's centre services linked to an agreed set of local and national outcome measures for universal and targeted services

### 3. Briefly describe its aims and expected outcomes

Children's Centres are part of Gloucestershire's early intervention and prevention strategy to help children to have the best start and improve outcomes for families, particularly in terms of identifying, reaching and helping families in greatest need to improve parenting capacity, health and wellbeing and children's development and readiness for school.

Over the last year a series of key reports have reinforced the significance of early intervention and the provision of more targeted support to young children and their families. The most recent Department for Education business plan 2011-2015 confirms the Government commitment to children centres and reaffirms their role in supporting families greatest in need.

Retaining a national network of Sure Start Childrens Centres with a core universal offer, while also ensuring delivery of proven early intervention programmes would support families in the greatest need however any future service provision needs to reflect the multi agency nature of support for families with young children. The overall Gloucestershire provision of Children's Centres needs to be sustainable and ensure equity and value for money in the use and allocation of available funds

In recognition of these developments, the Gloucestershire Joint Commissioning Partnership (JCP) has supported the development of a strategic commissioning framework for the early years which includes identifying opportunities for joint commissioning between Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) and NHS Gloucestershire (NHSG) as well as wider partnership working.

The revised core purpose for Childrens Centre Services would offer the opportunity for alignment with the locality working model. This would allow a review of resource allocation and delivery models in light of establishing integrated locality services across Gloucestershire, and would align with the emerging localities arrangements for children's services in Gloucestershire. The new service model would include:

- A commissioned service to support parents to take responsibility for the development and the delivery of their children's centre services and local community early years services.
- A commissioned Health Visiting service (Call to Action)
- Specialist service for Families with Children under 5 with neglectful parenting where substance misuse or mental health needs are problematic

- Early support for SEN/SLCN
- Revised specification for Children's Centres.

This planned investment in specialist services for under 5's would further support targeted intervention. A commissioned parental offer would enable communities and parents to run and manage services.

#### **Outcomes for children and families**

There are four overarching outcomes that we want to see achieved for young children and their families:

**Outcome O1:** Young children develop well and are ready for school

**Outcome O2:** Parents have high aspirations for their children, good self esteem and the skills to help their children grow and develop

**Outcome O3:** Families are healthy and have good emotional and mental well being

**Outcome O4:** Families who are identified as being in 'greatest need' have 'sustained contact' with appropriate services for young children and their parents.

These high level outcomes would form the basis of any commissioning or provision activity, with indicators and measures being identified that can help demonstrate progress toward achieving them.

#### **4. Describe how this policy would impact on the Council's duty to:**

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- Advance equality of opportunity
- Foster good relations

Identify what particular groups of people would be affected by this policy.

Characteristics of children and parents registering at Children's Centres are recorded in the E Start database held at Gloucestershire County Council . Internal profiling reports are generated to identify a range of vulnerable groups

As part of the local authority's performance management of the children's centres, there are a range of targets which must be met and which include the specific focusing upon the inclusion of priority and excluded groups. Children's centres report on the qualitative and quantitative data of engaging with the following groups of people:

- Teenage mothers and pregnant teenagers
- Lone parents
- Children in workless households
- Children in black and minority ethnic groups
- Disabled children and children of disabled parents
- Other groups that are vulnerable in the children's centre area such as armed forces families and traveller families

All contracted organisations have an equality and diversity policy which is held on file by the local authority and against which the children's centres are monitored

The locality model would encourage diversity of provision, supports the development of local solutions and would draw on a range of data sources, effective practice, expert knowledge and experience to identify and meet the needs of the locality. Locality delivery provides the opportunity to use resources and the whole workforce skill mix more effectively, including locality-wide job roles and responsibilities.

**5. Provide details of the evidence you have gathered in making this assessment, including data sources, consultation undertaken and the outcome/s of this.**

Between 20<sup>th</sup> July and 30<sup>th</sup> September 2011, Parents and professionals across Gloucestershire, were invited to take part in a county wide consultation to inform a review of children's centre services. Two different opportunities were provided for both parents and professionals:

- On line SNAP Survey with paper version for parents if required
- Focus groups (in 6 x district venues for professionals and at 16 events in children's centres for parents) these included:  
Fathers, Young parents, Parents with Learning Disabilities, Parents with Mental Health difficulties, Parents experiencing domestic abuse, Parents with

English as second language (Polish, Czech, Portuguese, Rumanian Bengali, Gujarati, Urdu, Arabic) Parents new to Gloucestershire/children's centre/area, Parents who live in rural areas, Parents with children with SEN/Disabilities who use a centre, Parents with children with SEN/Disabilities who don't use centres, Parents where child protection was an issue, unemployed parents and Working parents, Grandparents, Informal Carers.

In addition 13 children from 4 different schools gave feedback about their experience of attending a children's centre.

The consultation and particularly the online consultation proved to be powerful tool which provides us with a whole range of useful information to inform the future. In total we received on line responses from 1206 people and 227 people joined focus groups.

Feedback from the consultation indicated that parents, carers and children value and are generally satisfied with their children's centre provision in local communities. They value the relationships they make with professionals and other parents with young children. They are clear about the services which enable them to improve their families' lives and have a range of ideas about service improvements and development. Consultation with parents and professionals indicated a desire for a more straightforward funding formula for centres.

The consultation explored how children's centre services should be delivered in the future. An emerging appetite from parents to become more involved in running, designing and managing services for themselves was identified. Over 70% expressed a desire to co-ordinate groups to help others and over 60% wanted to become involved in devising and delivering services. When consulted they expressed a wish to access further training and development opportunities to make this happen. Consultation with professionals highlighted that the appetite from them to involve parents in devising and delivering services was low (37%). Audits of children's centres' show that progress in involving parents in decision making, management and developing services was inconsistent.

Children have a very positive response to their Children's Centres; they like the range of activities and the early education sessions provided at centres. They also liked trying new things and like parents they enjoy forming relationships

The outcome of the consultation is in the public domain <http://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/extra/index.aspx?articleid=10930>

**6. Is this Policy affected by, or would it have an impact on other Meeting the Challenge proposals? Yes/No. (If yes, please specify relevant project and indicate how it is affected).**

The children's centre budget funded from Early Intervention Grant has been maintained at £8.37 million for 2011/12 ,2012 /13 and 2013/14 This was following a 11% reduction on the total budget to support Meeting the Challenge requirements in 2010/11.

As part of a joint GCC and NHS vision to ensure that all services for early years remain relevant, offer value for money, and are aligned with a joint strategic

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commissioning framework for early childhood services and an agreed overarching specification for improving outcomes designed to ensure that families with young children get the best start in life.

It recognises the important role that children’s centres have in Gloucestershire in leading and co-ordinating integrated children services for children under five and their families. With much research and evidence emphasising the benefits that come from identifying need early and intervening sooner in order to prevent difficulties from escalating and becoming more challenging and costly to ameliorate.

It builds on what is already happening across partner organisations ,who already contribute to the delivery of Early Childhood services, with a focus on new and innovative ways of working which would make the best use of the total workforce avoiding duplication of effort and developing a shared understanding of an integrated approach to achieving improved outcomes for vulnerable families.

Gloucestershire is involved in a Government trial to explore the introduction of Payment by Results for Sure Start Children's Centres. Through the implementation of Payment By Results it is intended that children’s centres would:

- Increase their contact with all children in their reach area
- Deliver universal services that make a positive difference to all families, including those in greatest need
- Deliver well targeted services that make a positive and sustained difference to the families in greatest need.

Through this Local Authorities would be able to improve their knowledge about the cost and impact of services.

**7. Where any particular group is affected differently by the policy in either a negative or a positive way, if you identify a negative impact, explain what actions you have undertaken or you plan to undertake, including consideration of any alternative proposals, to lessen or negate this impact.**

	Negative	Positive	Neutral	Evidence	Mitigating actions where a negative impact has been identified	How would the mitigating action be monitored/evaluated, including who would be responsible for monitoring.
<b>Age</b>			✓	Children’s Centre are for children under the age of five and their families  The revised specification is clear		

				<p>about the levels of accessibility needed for the service.</p> <p>The proposed retendering process would have no impact on service users on the basis of age (i.e. the age of users would remain the same) Parents and parents to be of all ages would have the same access to services.</p> <p>Teenage parents are a priority user group and would continue to access services in the way they do at present 306 teenage parents are currently registered with children's centres</p> <p>All under fives and their families can access children's centre services</p> <p>Currently 13,445 children under five are registered at children's centres which is 40% of the population.</p>		
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<b>Disability (indicate different impacts on different types of disability)</b>		✓		<p>All children's centre buildings are Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliant and have been designed to meet the latest legislation.</p> <p>Children and / or parents with disabilities and special needs are a targeted user group and would continue to access services as they do at present.</p> <p>280 children and 721 parents with a</p>		<p>As part of the local authority's performance management of the children's centres, there are a range of targets which must be met and which include the specific focus upon the inclusion of priority and excluded groups. Children's centres would report on the</p>
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				<p>disability are currently registered with children's centres</p> <p>Early Start programme ensures children with disabilities are identified early in partnership with health and specialist targeted service providers. Children's centres and SEND services work jointly to meet children's needs locally.</p>		<p>qualitative and quantitative data of engaging with children and parents with a disability</p>
<b>Gender reassignment</b>			✓	<p>Addressed through Equalities &amp; Diversity Policy, and the revised specification. Those registering at children's centres are not asked about their sexual preference. The reorganisation of children's centres would have no impact on service user on the basis of gender reassignment. There are no current identified issues.</p>		
<b>Marriage &amp; civil partnership</b>			✓	<p>We do not anticipate any impact either positively or negatively.</p>		
<b>Pregnancy &amp; maternity</b>		✓		<p>The retendering process may affect a small number of staff who are on maternity leave. Arrangements would be made for communicating with these staff members and they would be kept informed of the progress of the tender.</p> <p>The joint overarching specification with the NHS would create more joined up support for the most vulnerable and pregnant women and their partners. The revised</p>		<p>Annual performance information and quarterly monitoring of the contract would ensure excluded groups have access to services.</p>

				<p>specification would ensure that the service delivery continues to focus on early intervention, and engaging with all parents when they access ante-natal services. Childrens Centres have strong links with Midwifery and Health Visiting services to gain information after health and development reviews on parent and/or child vulnerability, development delay or disability. The service specification requires children's centres to provide a sustained contact with parents who are identified through vulnerability flags from Health Visiting Services within the locality.</p>		
<b>Race (including Gypsy &amp; Traveller)</b>		✓		<p>Children's centres actively collaborate with local partners across the reach area to develop local data and knowledge of the families within the area. Where access may be more difficult for parents from a minority ethnic group because language and or custom may present a barrier, steps are taken to recruit staff specifically to support these groups.</p> <p>Social English groups run through children's centres support families for who English is not a first language</p> <p>E Start data provides data on BME and travellers who are specific target groups</p>		<p>Annual performance information and quarterly monitoring of the contract would ensure excluded groups have access to services.</p>
<b>Religion or Belief</b>			✓	<p>Those registering at a children's centre are not asked about their faith beliefs and so the profile of service users is unknown. Some third party organisations who currently manage children's centres are</p>		

				affiliated to faith groups. e.g. Barnardos. However this does impact on the day to day running of the centres ( including access to services with different beliefs , or the actual services offered )		
<b>Sex</b>			✓	<p>Internal profiling reports are generated to identify profiles for individual centres. This includes data on the number of fathers accessing services who are a specific target user group.</p> <p>Specific groups are set up to encourage the participation of fathers The tendering of children's centres would have no impact on service users on the basis of gender.</p> <p>10,301 fathers and 15,020 mothers are currently registered as attending children's centres.</p>		Consultation would continue with male carers. Children's centres, their advisory boards and parents' forums would continue to monitor the situation
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>			✓	We do not anticipate any impact either positively or negatively		
<b>Indirect Discrimination</b>		✓		The local authority has a statutory duty to make sure that each children's centre has a partnership board and it is the local authority's view that this should comprise one third parents and service users, one third voluntary and community representation, and one third professional (health, Jobcentre Plus etc). The function of this group is to provide support and robust challenge to the children's centre management, part of which would include ensuring equality of access.	.	As part of the local authority's performance management of the children's centres, there are a range of targets which must be met and which include the specific focus upon the inclusion of priority and excluded groups. Children's centres would report on the qualitative and

				Self evaluation documentation requires centres to indicate the extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal and unlawful discrimination is tackled and how the centre fulfils its statutory duties. This is supported with relevant data and case studies		quantitative data of engaging with children and parents.
<b>Other groups: e.g. rural isolation, long term unemployed, health inequality, carers</b>		✓		<p>Children's centres have been located in the areas of highest deprivation and so should be accessible to many of the neediest of families in areas of high socio-economic disadvantage.</p> <p>1,887 lone parents 2,229 unemployed carers and 1,364 workless households are recorded on the E Start database</p> <p>Access in rural areas may be more difficult for families who do not have access to, or cannot afford, public transport and so may face issues accessing those services designed to help service users improve their economic wellbeing.</p> <p>Where rurality and/or the economic situation of services users affects access to transport and so access to services, children's centres would continue to make provision for delivering services in existing community buildings within easy reach such as village and community halls.</p> <p>Outreach staff would continue to travel to those families in most need to deliver services in whichever way is best for the</p>		

				service users		
<b>Socio-economically deprived groups</b>		✓		<p>Children's Centres work with a range of partners to reduce child poverty and increase social mobility. These include:-</p> <p>Health professionals  Other Early Years providers  Job Centre Plus  GP consortia /Clinical Commissioning Groups  Information and Advice organisations  Schools  Colleges  Voluntary and community sector organisations</p> <p>The proposed re-tendering by locality would further support this activity</p>		<p>As part of the local authority's performance management of the children's centres, there are a range of targets which must be met and which include the specific focus upon the inclusion of priority and excluded groups. Children's centres would report on the qualitative and quantitative data of engaging with families in greatest need</p>
<b>Community Cohesion</b>	<p>Provide details of any ways in which the proposed activity would promote equality in the community between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, and how it would promote good relations between such groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there equality between those who would and won't benefit from the proposal?</li> <li>• Are there strong relationships between groups and communities in</li> </ul>			<p>The latest Performance Report on Children Centres has highlighted a growing number of families and vulnerable groups accessing children's centre services but with considerable variation across reach areas and districts in improving outcomes , demonstrating what works and closing the inequalities gap</p> <p>The new outcomes based service specification would ensure services are targeted at the most vulnerable children and their families, thereby improving outcomes and narrowing the attainment gap. This would involve children centres</p>		<p>As part of the local authority's performance management of the children's centres, there are a range of targets which must be met and which include the specific focus upon the inclusion of priority and excluded groups. Children's centres would report on the qualitative and quantitative data of engaging with families in greatest need</p>

	<p>the area affected and would the proposed action promote positive relationships?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the proposal bring groups/communities into increased contact with each other?</li> </ul>	<p>capitalising on their locations in the heart of local communities and being a welcoming environment for families. This would ensure children's centres use their facilities creatively so that the whole community can benefit and use their skills to the benefit of the children centre (e.g. members of the community volunteering their skills) It reinforces the development of stronger community cohesion and provides opportunities for a parental community offer whereby volunteers and voluntary and community sector organisations are supported to develop services that complement those offered by centres Other initiatives such as the Department of Health Visitor Implementation Plan ' A Call to Action 'would also promote community capacity building to enable families and communities to build on their strengths to develop new ways of providing services</p>		
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## Declaration

We are satisfied that an Assessment has been carried out and where a negative impact has been identified, actions have been developed to lessen or negate this impact where possible.

Where the impact on equalities of the policy or proposals is very significant, and mitigating actions do not sufficiently lessen the impact, or mitigating actions cannot be identified, we have considered whether to go ahead with the original proposal at all, or whether to reformulate it.

We understand that the Equality Impact Assessment is required by the County Council and that we take responsibility for the completion and quality of this assessment.

Completed by: Ruth Lewis

Date: April 2012

Role: Outcome Manager

Countersigned by Head of Service:

*Linda Wen.*

Date: May 2012

Name of relevant Portfolio Holder/Cabinet Member: .....

I confirm that I have examined and understood the potential impact of the proposal and confirm that I have had due regard to the needs set out in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010.



..... Portfolio Holder/Cabinet Member

Date: . May 2012