



# Northumberland

## County Council

CABINET

11 JUNE 2019

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### **Proposal and Rationale for Changes to Morpeth Children's Centre**

Report of Cath McEvoy-Carr, Executive Director of Adult Social Care & Children's Services

Cabinet Member: Wayne Daley, Lead Member for Children's Services

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#### **Purpose of report**

To provide members with an overview of the context of the proposal and rationale for changes to the use of the current Morpeth children's centre building. To provide assurance that children's centre service delivery will not be reduced as a result. To demonstrate that the proposal adds capacity to the provision available to support education for children with Special Educational Needs in Northumberland. To propose a timeline for the statutorily required public consultation for changing the use of the children's centre building to allow for it to be ready as an education facility from September 2019 if this is agreed.

#### **Recommendations:**

1. That members accept and agree the report understanding that the direct children's centre service delivery will not be changed as a result of this proposal.
2. That members agree with the suggestion to utilise the building to support additional education provision for children with SEN. This will be funded through funding as set out in the 'Expansion of school spaces at Collingwood School' which was approved at Capital Strategy Group on 10th May 2019.
3. That members agree the proposed time frame and method of public consultation.

## **Link to Corporate Plan**

This report links to the 'Achieve and Realise Potential' priority in the Corporate Plan 2018-21

## **Key Issues**

1. Morpeth children's centre is leased to Action for Children on a full repairing lease as part of the children's centre contract for the Central locality. However when it was transferred to them back in 2012 it was identified that the roof on the portacabin building was in a state of significant disrepair and it was agreed that Action for Children would not be responsible for replacing this were that needed in the future.
2. Over the last few years Action for Children have carried out a number of repairs but a recent survey they commissioned identified that the only way to continue using the building was to replace the roof. Within the building rooms had already been shut off as a result of persistent leaks.
3. Action for Children have negotiated with the next door Stobhill First school to deliver the universal Learning Together Through Play group which is the only childrens centre delivery happening at the children's centre building. This has started from May 2nd. Approximately six children and their parents attend this group each week during term time.
4. The building has been identified as a suitable space for an additional resource for Collingwood special school which is also on the same site thus adding to the education capacity for SEN children in the county. A survey has identified that the roof can be replaced and the rest of the building made good. Funding for this has been agreed from the 'Special Provision Capital Fund for pupils with EHC Plans' as set out in the paper which went to Capital Strategy Group on 10th May 2019.
5. 2013 statutory guidance sets out that a public consultation is required for the closure or change of use of a children's centre building and that the Department for Education is notified. In order to allow for change of use of the building by September 2019 the consultation needs to begin in June 2019.
6. The building currently costs the childrens centre budget £25,000 to run excluding significant repairs. If this proposal is agreed that funding can be used for frontline delivery to families.

## **Background**

Morpeth Children's Centre building sits on the same site as Collingwood Special School and Stobhill First School. It is a prefabricated structure which has been in place since about 2007. As part of the Central Early Help Locality arrangements the building is currently leased on a full repairing lease to Action for Children on a peppercorn rent as part of the commissioning arrangements in place in that locality.

When the building was transferred to Action for Children in 2012 it was noted that the roof was in a poor state of repair and that Action for Children would not take responsibility for this. However, they have repaired the roof regularly since then with continuing issues about leaks and damp to the point that one room is now wholly closed off. A recent roofing survey they had completed stated that the roof could no longer be repaired but because of the nature of the building a further structural survey would be required to determine if the building could support a new roof.

Following further surveys over the last couple of months by the schools capital team it has been identified that the building is strong enough to support the replacement of the roof and with other repairs could be utilised as a provision to add capacity to Collingwood Special School, supporting with the current sufficiency issues in relation to special school provision. A paper setting out the costs has been taken to Capital Strategy Group on the 10th May 2019 and has been agreed from 'Special Provision Capital Fund for pupils with EHC Plans'

The suggested proposal has been discussed with the elected member for the Stobhill ward, John Beynon, who is broadly in agreement with the proposed change of delivery. Costs to run the building without any additional repairs amount to £25,000 per year.

### Current Delivery

There is currently one Learning Together Through Play session (a universal group) delivered by children's centre staff on a Thursday morning for 2 hours term time. The average attendance each week is 4-6 children. From Thursday 2/5/19 the delivery of this group will take place within Stobhill school. The previous PVI provider who leased part of the building has now ceased operating from there. There is no call for any other targeted delivery currently as the Morpeth area does not fall within the more targeted approach we have developed for children's centre provision across the county. If this were to change in the future then there would also be the option of using the community room in the new Goosehill School building.

### Proposal

It is proposed that the local authority progress with a public consultation as required by statutory guidance (April 2013) on the deregistering of the building as a children's centre. It would be proposed to start this consultation in June 2019 and run it for a four week period allowing time for responses before school summer holidays begin. The consultation will take the form of a communication through the local press, an online questionnaire and an open meeting for the public held at the children's centre building. Responses will be gathered in enough time to allow a final decision to be made well in advance of the start of school term in September 2019.

### Implications

<b>Policy</b>	This proposal is in line with current policy around increasing capacity for children with SEN and best value for money in relation to children's centre delivery.
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<b>Finance and value for money</b>	This proposal utilises existing funding to frontline delivery to families and repurposes a building currently underused. The financial implications are included within a report recently submitted to Capital Strategy Group on 10th May 2019. There are no additional cost implications from what is being proposed within this paper as the consultation process can be managed within current resources.
<b>Legal</b>	There is a requirement to comply with 2013 statutory guidance
<b>Procurement</b>	The contract for Action for Children's delivery of children's centre services in the Central locality will need to be varied. Action for Children are in full agreement with the proposal.
<b>Human Resources</b>	N/A
<b>Property</b>	The proposal will make better use of the property
<b>Equalities</b> (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	There is no impact from this proposal as the current service is being delivered from the first school next door to the current building. An EIA will be completed
<b>Risk Assessment</b>	N/A
<b>Crime &amp; Disorder</b>	N/A
<b>Customer Consideration</b>	The new arrangements should create a more pleasant customer experience for families using the service
<b>Carbon reduction</b>	N/A
<b>Wards</b>	Stobhill ward (proposal discussed and agreed with ward councillor John Benyon, other Morpeth wards

### Report sign off

	Full name of officer
Monitoring Officer/Legal	Liam Henry
Executive Director of Finance & S151 Officer	Annabel Scholes
Relevant Executive Director	Cath McEvoy-Carr
Chief Executive	Daljit Lally
Portfolio Holder(s)	Wayne Daley

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