

Answers to Questions put to Jenny Boyd that could not be answered on the night.

“Please see below responses to the questions posed before the meeting and the one additional one that I received at the meeting itself. If I’ve missed any please let me know.”

Jenny Boyd

Q1. The Children's Centre in Lawton Road, Loughton was doing excellent work with young families in a deprived area. Are you hoping to provide an alternative service in future with reduced funding?

Answer: *Little Oaks Children's Centre relocated from Lawton Road (co-located with the Loughton Family Centre) to Torrington Drive (co-located with the Loughton Resource Centre/Essex Cares) in September 2012. This relocation was driven by the ECC property transformation strategy. The centre continues to serve the same reach area, and was inspected by Ofsted in March 2013. The centre received an overall 'Satisfactory' outcome, with elements of 'Good'. Strengths included safeguarding and the positive relationships between staff and the most vulnerable families.*

Under the current contract with Spurgeons (from 1st April 2012 - 31st March 2014), all the children's centres in West Essex have a target of reaching 80% of families with children under 5 in their reach area and with providing further targeted and/or 1:1 support to families, based on identified need. The re-location, and subsequent disruption to services while the new building was made fit for purpose did result in a decline in the number of families registered with and accessing services from the centre. Currently Little Oaks is reaching 54% of families (against a quadrant average of 66%), giving it the 2nd lowest reach in the Epping Forest District [data taken from Quarter 4 KPI submission, April 2013]. The centre was given an Amber rating at its annual review in January 2013. Actions from both the annual review and Ofsted inspection are being monitored and reviewed regularly by ECC. The number of families receiving services from the centre is now increasing, with 1:1 targeted work with families being co-ordinated by the Senior Family Support Worker across the Epping Forest District.

Q2. Homestart is a highly valued service working, I believe, nationwide. Our local service has helped many young families, often single parents without any other means of support, to turn their lives around. Homestart has had County and District Council support in the past but is also heavily dependent on volunteers and local fund-raising. Evidence is that demand for such help is increasing at an alarming rate. Failure to provide that support will lead to more intervention being required from Social Services, Housing services and the welfare system which would probably prove even more costly. Can we be re-assured that support for Homestart will continue?

Answer: *Funding for services for the under 5s is now via the Children's Centre contracts. The Family Innovation Fund is for commissioning services for the over 5s. Other Homestart organisations were funded through FIF by submitting bids for adapting*

their work to include work with over 5's. Homestart Epping did not submit a bid for this funding.

ECC and Spurgeons met with the Homestarts in Epping Forest, Harlow and Uttlesford in February 2013 to agree a process/protocol for ensuring families continue to be supported through changes in Homestart funding. It was confirmed that the children's centres would have the capacity to work with any families with children under 5 that require support, based on identified need. A process was agreed between Homestart and Spurgeons for referral from Homestart to the children's centres of families wanting this. This is co-ordinated at a district level for Spurgeons by the Senior Family Support Worker. To date 9 families in Epping Forest have been consulted by Homestart and asked whether they would like to receive support from a children's centre. 8 families chose not to take up this offer of support.

Q3. In contrast to Homestart can you confirm that the Surestart centres will continue to be funded to an adequate level?

Answer: *Work is currently underway to review the Children's Centre budget and required level of service delivery. It is not possible to give these assurances until this work is completed, however Children's Centre delivery does remain a priority for ECC*

Q4. How do your services relate to those with those of the Youth service and Education? Do you work collaboratively? Whilst the needs of various age groups are different, is there an overlap in provision at a particular age, or alternatively a gap in provision, and are you able to share resources?

Answer: *We view collaborative working with our key partners (including youth services and education) as an absolute priority. This has always been the case to ensure consistency, lack of duplication and clear communication in working with vulnerable families and young people but has become even more pertinent in a context of austerity, localism and reduced public sector budgets. An example of this collaborative working has been the secondment of Targeted Youth Advisers employed by the Youth Service into Leaving Care Teams across the county. These workers work with the most vulnerable young people in and leaving care to increase their chances of entering work or education. We also use district based Youth Centres to run groups for young people in and leaving care, which helps these young people to become integrated into mainstream Youth provision.*

Q5. How do you see the future of Childrens Services in a climate of reducing budgets?

Answer: *We have very challenging times ahead, with significant savings to be made over the next 3 years across the council. We have embarked on a very ambitious re-structuring and re-design of all our services in order to achieve this whilst still ensuring that we met the needs of the most vulnerable children and families in our*

communities. One of the ways in which we are doing this is to establish Family Solutions Services in each part of the county. In West one team has already been established in Harlow. From October 2013 the remit of these teams will expand, to provide a multi-disciplinary early help service across all districts. We will be establishing a second team to serve both Epping Forest and Brentwood districts. In order to make sure we continue to provide the most responsive and effective service in this challenging climate our partnerships at a district level are absolutely crucial.

*An additional question was asked at the meeting about use of Youth Centre facilities in West by other groups. I am directing that question at the relevant manager for the Youth Service and will come back to you when I receive a response.

Jenny Boyd
Director of Local Delivery West
Children's Social Care