

**MONDAY 24 FEBRUARY 2025**

**PROGRESS UPDATE ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CHILDREN'S CENTRES RECONFIGURATION**

**SUMMARY:**

This report gives an overview of the implementation and effectiveness of our Children's Centres following reconfiguration as agreed by Public Cabinet on 5<sup>th</sup> March 2021.

The reconfigured Children's Centre offer went live in November 2021 and this report provides an update since the last report on March 2024 on how Children's Centres are reaching families in the more deprived areas of the borough and evidence that this is having a positive impact on reducing inequalities.

**RECOMMENDATION:** For the Committee's information and any Observations, it may wish to make.

**1. KEY AIMS OF THE CHILDREN'S CENTRES**

1.1 The model focuses on the first 1001 days of life from the antenatal period until a child's third birthday, in line with guidance within, 'The Best Start for Life, A vision for the First 1001 Critical Days,' published by the Government in 2021, recognising this is a critical time for development and a time when babies are at their most vulnerable. It also sets the foundations for an individual's cognitive, emotional, and physical development. The children's centre offer is open to all but is specifically designed to support vulnerable children and families. Together with other professionals such as health visiting we aim to reach families facing isolation, those experiencing deprivation, children with additional needs, and parents dealing with mental health challenges. The focus on these groups ensures that children who may be at greater risk of disadvantage receive the support, resources, and opportunities they need to thrive. This report outlines the progress we have made since the implementation of the service, the impact of the service so far and planned next steps.

**2. DELIVERY OBJECTIVES:**

- To provide and/or co-ordinate access to universal and targeted family support within a range of welcoming and accessible settings
- To support families to be resilient, self-reliant, and independent whilst having the help when they need it in a timely and appropriate way.
- To lay the foundation for future integration across the community and voluntary sector, as well as collaborating with our partner agencies

**3. CHILDREN'S CENTRE DELIVERY MODEL:**

The pathway of services provided by our model allows for early identification of any additional support needs and, by intervening at this early stage, our aim is to avoid a more intrusive intervention at a later stage in a child's life. As most of Bexley's 3 and 4-year-olds are taking up their free child-care entitlement, we believe this will support children to be school-ready and identify and respond to any emerging needs within their pre-school /nursery settings.

The Children Centre practitioners work in partnership with the Family Wellbeing Service as well as Children's Social Care and other services and agencies when there are under 5's who need specific support. The practitioners offer this direct support for the specific parent/child as part of the wider family plan and goals are set for the overall wellbeing and safety of the children. The parents can then continue engaging with groups and other offers in the community in the longer term, having built good relationships with the local Children's Centre. It is hoped that the support from the Children's Centre can prevent the need for Children's Social Care statutory services involvement in the future.

Families are registered on the EHM database (Early Help module of Liquid Logic). Data reports help us see trends of registrations and attendance from our SOA's. Shared data also ensures closer links with Children's Social Care data. We recognise that some families do not wish to be registered on EHM due to this being a social care system as such our data is not fully representative of all the families who engage with our services.

The Children's Centres use various means of communication, including leaflets, face to face discussions, dedicated pages on the Bexley website and a Facebook page where services/provisions are regularly communicated, and changes updated with clear signposting to universal services. Programmes, leaflets and posters have a QR code to enable parents to access the website/timetable and register online. There is also a Children's Centre designated page on the BVSC Community Connect directory.

Our aim is that, through engagement with children's centres and activities, parents will not only enhance their skills and knowledge but also develop valuable support networks by forming friendships with other parents in their local community. This sense of connection can help reduce isolation and create a stronger, more supportive environment for both parents and children.

#### **4. DEMOGRAPHICS**

The Children Centre Offer has a main hub situated in Erith, West Street with four additional buildings situated in Slade Green (Northend Children's Centre), Northumberland Heath (Northumberland Heath Children Centre), St Mary's & St James (North Cray Children Centre) and Crook Log (Danson Children Centre). There is also our SEND hub in Barnehurst (Normandy SEND Hub). Groups and activities delivered by Children Centre staff, are further offered in Thamesmead East (at Greenmead & The Nest), Welling (East Wickham School and Hook Lane school) and Crayford (Haberdashers primary school).

All Bexley libraries offer their own stay and play groups as well as a toddler singing groups whereby the Children Centre practitioners attend as part of their outreach work.

The Children Centre practitioners undertake outreach to community groups and activities once a month, keeping up to date with changing trends and needs in the community. Thamesmead remains an area of need alongside Belvedere, Erith, Slade Green and Northend and the South of St Mary's & St James, where North Cray Children Centre is located.

#### **5. THE CURRENT REACH OF THE CHILDREN'S CENTRES:**

The demographic data shows that there has been an increase in reaching families in these areas and families attending groups or being referred for one-to-one visits/support. In Thamesmead we are delivering two 'under 3's' play sessions at Greenmead (DA18 4HW), a weekly Early Communication group and a Monthly Information Day at The Nest and a monthly Baby Bank held at Greenmead. Other services such as Benefits advice, Nursery funding and our Health Visiting team also attend these groups for provision of advice and support to families.

Bexley 0-19 Health Visiting service and midwifery Services are established across the Borough in Slade Green, Bexleyheath and North Cray and use other centres and community buildings to run additional clinics. Saturday clinics are held at Danson and Northend.

Other health services, such as Oxleas Speech and language clinics and sessions, BCG vaccination clinic and C&YP Asthma clinic are held in the centres and are well attended as parents can visit the session that is most convenient to them.

Other health initiatives, such as MMR clinics, have also been held in the centres. Normandy Children Centre remains the main hub for children with special educational needs where the Bexley SNAP provider is based.

The Centre offers a wide variety of support and services to all children in Bexley with a disability and/or additional needs. Children Centre Practitioners support families with children on the (ASD) pathway and children with emerging SEN needs. We work closely with Health Visitors, Speech and Language Colleagues and Portage. We signpost and link with other services, such as, the Local Offer, Bexley SNAP and Bexley Voice, Carers Support, Educational Psychologists and Early years provisions to ensure families are aware of services and the children's developmental needs are met.

## **6. PROMOTION AND AWARENESS:**

All families attending either a Children Centre session or another service facilitated within a centre are encouraged to register with us. This can be completed within a centre or online via a QR code which is generally the preference for families.

All registered families receive a welcome confirmation email with details of the programme.

Outreach continues to be a key component of our offer and our Children Centre outreach practitioner takes programmes and information to libraries and Community Groups/Sessions and Food Banks, informing them of the services which can be provided to families.

Health Visitors hand out details of the programme to all new parents when they make their new birth visit. They also provide information at the 6–8-week developmental review, at the 1 year and 2 years reviews, as well as within the baby weighing clinics.

All services receive regular programmes and updates/leaflets of any new groups and promote these via their discussions with families and have leaflets to hand to give out to families.

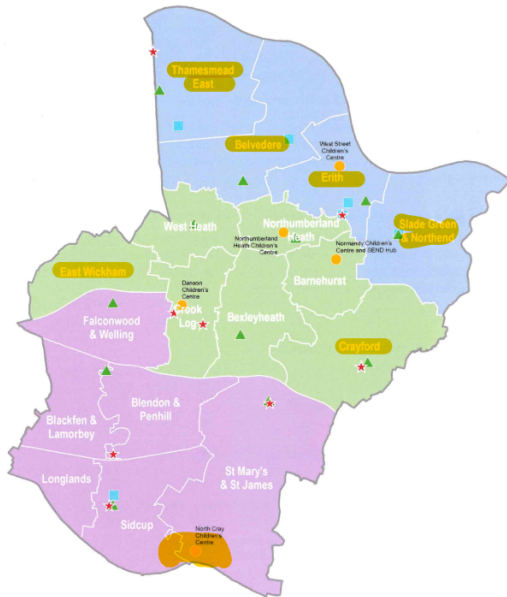
Our Early Years team send out our programme electronically to all preschool and nursery settings and include our details and any programmes on their newsletter.





We are keen to promote our service to other professionals and the Children Centre Operational Lead and Practitioners attend public and service meetings and events for the opportunity to

network, e.g. BVSC C & YP network meetings, Early Years Partners meetings, Infant feeding networking.

## 7. PROGRAMME OF ACTIVITIES:

The map highlights the more deprived areas across the Borough and the programme below sets out all services/sessions and activities delivered by Children Centre Staff and those run by Health and other partners.



-  Children Centres
-  Libraries
-  Community Centres
-  Leisure Centres

Families living in the areas of need can access the following Centres / Services and activities for Families in the areas of need

Thamesmead / Belvedere	
Greenmead Community Centre	Children Centre weekly sessions x 2 Monthly Baby Bank with Benefits Advisor Mindful Mums (perinatal support group) Job Club /Planning to return to work course (delivered by benefits advisor)
The Nest	Children Centre sing and sign weekly session Weekly Play & Stay delivered by library staff Monthly Information Days
Community sessions	Toddler sessions at Belvedere Community Centre Community fridge (food bank) as above Upper Belvedere Library sessions Ichthus church group – music group for under 5's

Erith / Northumberland Heath	
West Street Children's Centre	HENRY programme workshops for parents Baby Massage & Yoga sessions Baby Group PEEPS – parent and child interaction courses Mindful Mums (on rolling programme)  Speech & Language Communication Group Health Development reviews Infant feeding support Perinatal Counselling
Community sessions	Erith Foodbank Erith library sessions x 2 Christchurch Hall – Toddler Church Fairford Academy – 2 x play and stays
Northumberland Heath Children's Centre	Children Centre Baby Group Children Centre Young Parent Group Children Centre Baby Massage Mindful Mums (on rolling programme)  Speech & Language communication groups x 4 per week BCG Vaccination clinic Midwifery clinics x 2

Slade Green	
Northend Children's Centre	Midwifery clinics x 5 days Antenatal classes x 2 days Health Development reviews x 3 days
Howbury & Slade Green Community Centre	0-19 service -child health clinic
Community Venues /sessions	Slade Green Food Bank Howbury Tumblers -daily play & stays Toddler Church play & stay

Crayford	
Haberdashers at Crayford	Children Centre groups – Stories, songs and signing courses Children Centre groups- baby massage
Crayford Library	2 x sessions run by library staff NCT Baby Café – weekly
Community Venues	Crayford Baptist Church Toddler Group St Paulinus Church Toddler Group

East Wickham	
East Wickham School	Children Centre weekly session in partnership with school
Hook Lane community space	Children Centre sessions (baby massage and baby massage) Mindful Mums sessions (on rolling programme)
Community Venues	Welling library x 2 sessions St Stephens Church – Toddler group St John's Welling – Toddler Group

	Salvation Army Food bank
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North Cray	
North Cray Neighbourhood	Children Centre weekly coffee morning Well baby drop-in clinic Infant feeding support Health development reviews

## 8. DATA ANALYSIS:

As of January 2025, 2,644 children under the age of 5 are registered at Children's Centres in the London Borough of Bexley. 85.9% of all registrations are for children under the age of 3, with 48% being under 1 year old. Registrations gradually decrease as children transition to early years education programs.

Attendance at Children's Centres varies by location, with higher engagement rates in areas of greater deprivation. West Street Children's Centre recorded a total attendance of 507 children for the period April 2024 – January 2025, with 82% from the 50% most deprived areas. Monthly attendance in recent months included 72 in November, 70 in December 26 in January and 41 in February. Northumberland Heath Children's Centre saw a total attendance of 715 children for the period April 2024 to January 2025, with 79% coming from the 50% most deprived areas. Monthly figures included 102 in November, 71 in December, 25 in January and 47 in February. North Cray Children's Centre recorded no attendance. East Wickham Children's Centre had a total attendance of 177, with 76% from the 50% most deprived areas. Attendance numbers included 32 in November, 39 in December, 20 in January and 12 in February.

In terms of demographics, 18% of children attending the centres are from ethnic minority backgrounds, while 19.1% are identified as White or White Other. A significant 62.8% of children have no recorded ethnicity due to parental consent limitations. The majority of families accessing services reside in North Bexley, an area with higher deprivation rates. Some blank postcode data reflects attendance from families in bordering areas such as Dartford or from new housing developments where postcode registration has not yet been updated.

The Children's Centres continue to work closely with Early Years Community Services, Health Visiting Teams, and Speech and Language Support teams for children with ASD. The main focus remains on school readiness, ensuring better life chances and improved educational outcomes.

One of the challenges remains the lack of complete demographic data, particularly around ethnicity and parental background. Strategies are in place to improve data collection, including aligning online registration forms with EHM requirements. With an increase in families moving into new residential developments, there is an opportunity to expand early outreach and target services accordingly. Given the rising need for speech and language support and ASD-focused programs, the borough is strengthening multi-agency collaboration to meet the growing demand. The online registration form has recently been reviewed and changed to align with information required on EHM. This remains consent based however we are finding families are completing these sections.

## 9. Additional information regarding attendance/ footfall:

Our service is to support families on a one-to-one basis and deliver parenting sessions and some groups/sessions such as baby/toddler groups to support parents and babies' development. We then

encourage families to move onto community run sessions (rather than to rely on the children centres until they start school) and our outreach worker attends the community groups and libraries on a regular basis.

- We work with a much smaller cohort of families that need additional help and this is reflected on our data.
- Other services and sessions delivered by partners in the centres share their footfall however this cannot be added to EHM as parents not registered/prefer not to register.
- Example of additional data: (per quarter)
- 2-year funding – 77% of children eligible attend a nursery setting (children would not attend a CC group)
- 3- & 4-year funding – 2903 children access 15 hours funding (children would not attend a CC group)
- 1270 children access 30-hours Nursery funding
- Well baby clinics see approx. 30-50 families per week
- 6/8-week health visiting checks – approximately 500 babies seen
- 1 year review – approximately 800 are offered within the centres
- 2-year review – approximately 1,150 are offered within the centres
- BCG Vaccination clinic – approximately. 250 babies
- QE Midwifery at Danson – 780 women seen
- DVH midwifery at Northend/NH – 900 women seen
- Speech and Language groups – approximately 100 children seen (generally 3-4 years old)
- Bexley SNAP under 5's groups – approximately 30 children (3-4 years)
- We are looking at ways that this data can be included with the attendance on EHM.
- Feedback is regularly gained from parents about the changing needs in their households and in the community to review the local offer and groups.

#### **10. SUPPORT/DIRECT WORK:**

Our Children Centre Practitioners support an average of 10-12 families each for a period of between 6 weeks to 6 months. Referrals are allocated within 2-4 weeks of being received and the referrer is kept updated with progress or any difficulties incurred. Practitioners follow the Signs of Wellbeing framework and set achievable goals with the family, all visits and notes are recorded on EHM as case notes.

We have seen a significant increase in the number of referrals for families struggling financially and families whereby children have emerging SEN and we can offer help in the following ways:

- The majority of our groups/sessions are free (small charge for Baby Massage and Yoga) and priority is given to those on a low income or NRPF.
- Baby items and children's clothes/toys and books are available from our Baby Bank
- Benefit advisor attends Children Centre groups and we can refer parents directly
- Food bank vouchers and/or signposting to Big Local food bank
- Referrals to Love Bexley for household items/vouchers for utility bills or shopping
- If NRPF – referral to MASH – grant from the Home Office
- Support with childcare funding

SEN support offered:

- Signpost to Bexley SNAP/Bexley Voice and Local Offer
- Help with DLA forms
- Liaising with other agencies, e.g. carers Support
- Liaising with Early Years settings
- Providing resources (visuals)
- Inclusive play
- Behaviour and routines support
- Fussy eating support due to sensory needs
- Toilet training
- Being available for parents when they want to reach out

**Examples of support given (one to one sessions/direct work): -**

- Couple living in a new parent/baby unit were introduced to us by their support worker and have attended our baby groups and other sessions, their support worker said that the family had made good progress in their parenting skills and making connections.
- A parent struggling with her mental health (with 5-year-old and 3-year-old twins) – practitioner helped her to implement strategies for bedtime and daily routines. Mum is now feeling less stressed and having some time to herself with her children settled.
- Families that have No recourse to public funds are helped with baby bank items, referral to Love Bexley for household items, given food bank vouchers and accompanied to Slade Green food bank. They are encouraged to attend the groups to build up a network and meet other parents in similar situations.
- A supported family came to the Baby Bank and revealed that she was due to be evicted from her home, the benefits Advisor helped her through the process of setting up a payment scheme and was able to stay in her home and apply for additional benefits.
- A parent, who received a cot from the Baby Bank, sent a photo of her baby sleeping and is now having a good night's sleep herself (she was co sleeping in a single bed)



- Support given for nursery and school placement for family recently moved to area, assisted father to complete forms, find suitable school and nursery and correct uniform. Also helped family to access a dentist.
- Parent was getting more anxious regarding her son's lack of speech and showing ASD traits (awaiting assessment) – Advice given about different ways to communicate (signs, visuals etc) and encouraged to come to groups. Within the groups the practitioner helped parent to observe and react to her son's needs and how to interact more with the activities of his choosing.
- Parent told by her GP that she needed to be registered with a dentist as her children had corrosion of their teeth. Practitioner supported family to find a dentist and introduced her to the Oral Health promotor who met her within a group session. Children now having treatment and avoided the need to have more invasive treatment later on.
- Young person on a CP plan – practitioner has supported her with parenting skills and accompanying her to the young parent group – she now attends regularly and has made friends with others in the group and family have been stepped down to CIN.
- An isolated mum with twins had needed a significant amount of support and encouragement to implement some routines in her day especially around feeding and sleeping. Practitioner has helped her get introduce a routine and get organised so she is able to leave the house and connect with other mums in the area.
- Practitioner introduced two families to each other who were both living in HMO's and experiencing the same challenges – the parents have made friends and supporting each other, as neither have any family network they spent Christmas together
- Accompanying a mum to the Solace One stop shop for advice – she has since attended the Arise programme and seen a solicitor regarding her situation

#### **11. CASE EXAMPLE 1. – A and S:**

A is a mum with S (2 years old). They regular come to the centre groups.

She came to the centre and asked if she could speak privately to someone. She broke down and disclosed that her relationship with her partner had broken down and she was experiencing financial and emotional abuse. He was insisting that she move out of the home (that he owned) and the mum did not know what to do. The situation was upsetting her 2-year-old and mum worried the situation was going to get worse.

She had also recently been diagnosed with ADHD and was struggling to deal with her own emotions. Her family lived in another country, so she did not have any family network and although she was working in a professional role, she felt she was unable to share her situation with her manager/work colleagues. Practitioner supported her by being a listening ear and to work through her worries in stages/steps and persuaded her to seek advice from Solace.

Support given:

- Accompanied mum to SOLACE one stop shop – parent was given advice on next steps

- Arranged meeting with benefits adviser and accompanied to council offices to discuss her situation with housing
- Mum was given temporary accommodation and then rehoused to her own flat – Referral made to Love Bexley for household goods and furniture
- Information given to mum regarding ADHD and local support groups
- Persuade her to speak to her manager for support at work
- Regular wellbeing checks and phone calls/texts

Outcome:

- Parent now lives in her own property with her son and both safe as removed from a situation with her ex-partner which could have escalated
- Mum built up the confidence to share situation with her manager and found her workplace very supportive which has helped her emotional wellbeing
- Mum can continue to work and receive additional benefits and childcare funding
- Child is happy and settled, and attending a nursery
- Mum's mental health has improved – she expressed that she now feels in control of her own income and life
- Relationship has improved with her ex-partner and father has now stepped up to fulfil his duties as a parent (when caring for their son)
- Thank you received from A "we are both fine now thanks to you and your lovely team, thank you all very much for helping me over the last few months, I don't know what I would have done if it hadn't been for your help".

## **12. CASE EXAMPLE 2:**

A young mum, with OCD , was struggling with her anxiety about germs around the baby. This isolated her to the home and she was too anxious to attend any appointments /groups without the support of her mum/grandmother. Unfortunately, she did not fit the criteria for perinatal counselling/support and was referred to the Children's Centre via the Health Visitor.

The Practitioner allocated has knowledge and experience supporting parents with low esteem and anxiety and was able to talk through mums worries and agree a plan of action for mum to feel more comfortable.

Support given:

- Practitioner acted as an advocate to contact Bexley Mind and refer to Mindful Mums course and support
- Accompanied her to a baby massage class and introduced her to other team members (running the course) so mum would feel more comfortable.
- Support around dealing with the anxiety and her general mental health

Outcome:

- Situation has improved and she no longer relies on having her own mum every day
- She now attends the baby groups and has made friends with other mums

- She feels more comfortable with family members holding and caring for her baby and has been able to leave the baby for short periods of time – this enables her to have some time for herself
- Her personal journey, overcoming her fears of germs, was quite significant and she became a different person over the months due to the partnership working of Children Centres and Bexley Mind.

### **13. OTHER FEEDBACK FROM SUPPORTED FAMILIES:**

A parent with NRPF was in temporary housing having experienced DA was grateful for the support given - 'Thank you for your kind support in my critical situation and unfamiliar land and thank you for the emotional support and timely response. My little Angel and me are now very happy'.

### **14. FEEDBACK FROM PARENTS ATTENDING GROUPS:**

Young mums in the groups actively listen, support, and encourage each other when concerns arise. There has also been a noticeable increase in partner attendance.

Participants have informed that they appreciate having a local Baby Bank, where they can access and donate clothes. Many value the opportunity to attend groups they missed due to COVID, helping them build friendships. The welcoming and community-focused atmosphere at Greenmead is praised, with attendees finding it more inclusive and supportive than privately-run groups.

Feedback highlights the positive impact of the sessions, with a parent noticing improvements in their child's interactions and expressing gratitude for the professionalism and kindness shown in supporting their ASD journey.

Additionally, a Speech and Language Therapist praised the invaluable service provided to Bexley families, recognizing the Children's Centre for its dedicated support and commitment to going above and beyond in their work.

### **15. Examples of events and partnership working from April 2024 - February 2025:**

Our main referrals for support come from Health Visitors, Family Wellbeing, Social Care teams and Speech and Language. We also work in partnership with community midwives, early years settings and other agencies such as Solace, benefits advisor, housing and other children centres in various Boroughs.

We hosted an information/marketplace event in June whereby 35 families, from Thamesmead and Erith areas, came to speak to local services and organisations for information and advice.

- Benefits advisor helped 10 parents with benefits advice and referred 4 onto job search support
- Health spoke to parents about immunisations, diet, nappy rash and SEN concerns
- South Lond Energy supported 11 parents with energy bills
- Early years – gave 12 parents advice on childcare funding and placements
- Learning and Enterprise College – 11 parents signed up for various courses
- Turn around Toys – 8 families received packages of toys
- Waste and recycle – promoted using real nappies and ideas for waste recycling
- Bexley Voice and BVSC – spoke to parents about their services

A new service, commissioned by Bexley MIND, started in Bexley in September. This is a much-needed service for new mums with postnatal depression/low mood/anxiety but do not meet the Oxleas Perinatal Service criteria.

Children Centres are working in partnership with MIND to support the courses, practitioners have received training and help run the course alongside the Mindful Mums lead.

Parents attending are some of our referred families and /or were able to carry on supporting the parents and encouraging them to attend other groups once the course has finished.

We held two 'beach days' in July/August – 48 families (96 parents and children) who enjoyed the sessions. Some parents commented on it was the first time their babies/children had experienced touching sand and appreciated all the effort that staff put in to make the days successful.

Community C&YP Asthma nurse approached us looking for appropriate space to deliver a community clinic for 2–12-year-olds. This clinic is established at West Street and Northumberland Heath for two clinics per week.

Our centres are used for ad hoc health services, for example, MMR drop in during the summer holidays and additional Speech and Language groups/sessions.

Social Work, Family Wellbeing and Health Visitors frequently use the centres to meet families that live locally to the centres

BVSC use West Street and Northumberland heath to run counselling sessions

Polling Day – held at Danson Children's Centre site and meant that Elections Department did not have to pay for hiring a site thus making a small saving for Bexley.

## **16. PROGRESS & NEXT STEPS:**

- **Children Centre Objective 1:**

***To provide and/or co-ordinate access to universal and targeted family support services within a range of welcoming and accessible settings.***

The Children Centre offers a variety of groups and sessions, with focus in the north of the Borough, working closely with Health and Education services to co-ordinate provisions and avoid duplication.

The Bexley 0-19 Service are based and established within Danson, Northend and North Cray and Darenth Valley Midwifery Community Service have moved into and established at Northend.

Other services that use our centre rooms to provide sessions include SOLACE, Oxleas Perinatal Community Services, Hounslow trust (BCG Vaccinations), BVSC (counselling).

The Partnership Board meets quarterly to discuss trends and plan for changing needs together.

### ***Next Steps:***

The HENRY programme (parenting workshops) to be delivered in partnership with nursery settings and primary schools identified by Public Health whereby a risk of childhood obesity.

‘Understanding behaviour and Fussy Eating workshops delivered in various nursery and school settings. Although this was deemed successful, with 60 parents attending the sessions, most of their children were over 5 years old. Therefore, we have reviewed the project and agreed with Public Health that this is not sustainable.

The 8-week course has not been successful due to parents not being able to commit or cancelling their place despite the effort of promoting and working with partners to gain interest.

Meetings have taken place with Public Health and we have agreed to offer the short (2 hour) workshops that are well attended and parents prefer instead.

90 families (with babies and children under 2 yrs) have accessed the Starting Solids, Fussy Eating workshops

The Baby Bank Plans to have volunteers helping to run the sessions provided by BVSC

The Baby Bank has been a pilot project managed by two members of staff with help from parent volunteers, so we have not yet arranged volunteers through BVSC.

138 families have accessed the monthly session as well as families, who attend the groups or supported parents, have received items such as clothes, nappies, new bottles/feeding, blankets, bedding, cots and pushchairs as well as toys, baby bouncers and any other items that have been donated.

We have also delivered items to 22 families who were unable to attend/collect ( mums who were due to give birth or just given birth).

Early Communication group in partnership with SALT to provide a ‘Listening & Attention’ session for children on the waiting list for the SALT intensive sessions.

Early Communication groups have been offered however there has been very little uptake due to parents understanding that the sessions are not delivered by a Speech and Language Therapist. The SALT team do not have the capacity to support this incentive or to signpost children to the groups.

We have delivered 4 groups with 2/3 families attending.

Our sessions of sing, sign and story time are very popular so we have incorporated the early communication planning into these groups and can identify any children with emerging needs within the sessions. Additional sessions (4-week bookable courses) have been delivered at West Street and in Crayford (using Haberdashers community building) and plans to continue these around the Borough from March 2025.

- **Children Centre Objective 2:**

***To support families to be resilient, self-reliant, and independent whilst having the help when they need it in a timely and appropriate way.***

Requests for support are made from agencies (e.g., Health Visitors), self-requests from families or support identified by practitioners delivering sessions within groups/outreach in community groups. The Children Centre offers one to one support to families in either the home or group environment. Some parents prefer to receive support by phone calls (e.g., strategies to help with sleep).

Although this is a universal Early Help Service and Prevention at Level 2 of the Effective Support in Bexley, it can be delivered alongside Level 3 Family Wellbeing or Level 4 specialist services in Children's Social Care.

### ***Next Steps:***

We will strive to enhance consistency and accountability among practitioners by ensuring a standardized approach to assessments, goal setting, and outcome tracking when working with families. By using the 'Signs of Wellbeing' framework and new standardised forms, the process aims to:

- Ensure all practitioners document support in a uniform way.
- Clearly define and track up to three actionable goals for each family.
- Measure and record whether these goals have been achieved.
- Provide a comprehensive closing summary of the support provided.
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Ultimately, this structured approach seeks to improve the quality of support for families, promote better outcomes, and enable more effective evaluation of practitioner impact.

- **Objective 3:**

***To lay the foundation for future integration across the community and voluntary sector, as well as collaborating with our partner agencies.***

The Children Centre has a quarterly Partnership Board which meets with community members and tracks the changing needs of families in Bexley. Practitioners visit community groups bimonthly in the South and Central areas the Borough and at least monthly in the North. This is an integral part of staying in touch with the community and providing outreach within the voluntary sector.

Our information days invite other agencies to attend to promote their services and sessions.

We also attend community events, for example, Bexley Voice 'tea & talk', BVSC events, Good Food Event, SEND event held at Civic Offices.

### ***Next Steps:***

Changes to role of one practitioner is to include dedicated outreach which will help raise the profile of the centre services and ensure early identification of needs in the community. Timeline: Ongoing - to be reviewed quarterly to measure effectiveness

Practitioner started her new role in April 2024 and visits all community groups and libraries as timetabled. Priority is visiting those in the North of the Borough as well as weekly outreach at the well bay clinics. The worker is able to speak to parents and help with any queries, book them onto courses as well as registering and promoting our services and sessions. We have seen a significant increase in the number of registrations being completed online after she has attended the clinics. The Practitioner speaks to approx. 200 families per month

BVSC -Connect Bexley Directory – Children centre to have a link and be able to promote our services to a wider audience in Bexley . We now have a dedicated page on the website and can advertise any forthcoming events.

Continue to reach and build up attendance at North Cray and Thamesmead:

- Groups at North Cray and Thamesmead are established and continue to be well attended.
- Attendance for North Cray – 216
- Attendance for session held at The Nest – 214
- Attendance for sessions held at Greenmead – 528

## **SUMMARY OF LEGAL, FINANCIAL AND OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

There are no legal, financial, and other implications directly arising from this report.

## **LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 – SECTION 100D**

## **LIST OF BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

None.

<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Jamie Adu-Mensah, Service Manager – 020 3045 5634 Corne Van Staden Head of Service – 020 3045 5476
<b>Reporting to:</b>	Tamysn Basson – Deputy Director – Children’s Social Care