

Children & Young People Select Committee		
Report Title	Update on Realignment of Meliot Road Centre	
Key Decision	No	Item No. 7
Ward	All	
Contributors	Director of Children's Social Care	
Class	Part 1	Date 1 st November 2017

1. Summary and Summary of the Report

- 1.1 Following the budget report to Select Committee on 11th January 2017 and subsequent Mayor & Cabinet Meeting on 8th February 2017, proposals were approved for the Meliot Centre to cease operation as an assessment centre and re-align as a contact and intervention centre (with a lesser function of providing interventions and parenting assessments.)
- 1.2 This report provides an update as requested by Select Committee on progress made on the realignment of the Meliot Centre following the above decision.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Select Committee note the progress made and subsequent actions being taken to further develop the Meliot Centre contact service and associated delivery of savings.

3 Policy Context

- 3.1 The proposals within this report are consistent with 'Shaping Our Future: Lewisham's Sustainable Community Strategy' and the Council's corporate priorities. In particular, they relate to the Council's priorities regarding young people's achievement and involvement, including inspiring and supporting young people to achieve their potential, the protection of children and young people and ensuring efficiency, effectiveness and equity in the delivery of excellent services to meet the needs of the community.
- 3.2 It supports the delivery of Lewisham's Children & Young People's Plan (CYPP), which sets out the Council's vision for improving outcomes for all children and young people, and in so doing ensuring children stay safe by
- a) identifying and protecting children and young people at risk of harm and ensuring they feel safe, especially from:
 - Domestic violence and abuse
 - Child sexual exploitation
 - Serious youth violence
 - Child abuse and neglect
 - Deliberate and accidental injury

- b) Reducing anti-social behaviour and youth offending.
- c) Ensuring that our Looked After Children are safe

3.3 The National Family Justice Review 2011 recommended that criteria for using expert evidence in family proceedings should be strengthened to avoid the lengthy delays which commissioning unnecessary or superfluous reports can create. Provisions in the Children and Families Act 2014 and changes to the Family Procedure Rules 2010 mean that expert evidence can now only be ordered where the judge deems it to be necessary to resolve the case justifiably and where the information sought cannot be obtained from one of the parties. This has significantly reduced the requirement for expert witnesses and Independent Social Worker use by the Court.

4 Background

4.1 The rationale for the proposed re-alignment of the Meliot Centre was to meet the corporate objective to deliver efficient, effective and equitable services whilst achieving value for money and addressing the Council's savings requirements given the impact of the Government's austerity measures.

4.2 The aim is to maximise the skills, development and learning for front line practitioners by delivering a service in line with arrangements with most other local authorities. At the same time the realignment sought to develop a new 'centre for excellence' model for our in-house contact service.

4.3 Previously the work of the Meliot team focussed solely on child protection assessments, court directed parenting assessments, transition and rehabilitation work, assertive outreach support and group work. It was agreed that the Meliot Centre ceased operation as primarily an expert parenting assessment centre and became the 'Meliot Contact and Assessment Centre,' re-aligning as principally a contact and intervention centre retaining a lesser function of providing parenting assessments. It was anticipated that this would serve the purpose of:

- Improving the quality of contact provided by moving this from external spot purchased suppliers to in house quality assured provision.
- Promote the skill development of the Family Social Work service in undertaking parenting assessments.
- Retain some specialist capacity to avoid the use of external independent court ordered assessment and provide a lead development role on guidance and best practice in this area.

5. Contact service

5.1 The Children Act 1989 stipulates that every Local Authority has a duty to promote contact for Looked After Children and, where required, to provide safe contact for Children in Need.

5.2 The Meliot building is a one story, detached structure situated within a housing estate in New Cross. The Centre is served well by public transport. The staff team moved to the premises in April 2015. The building operates Monday to Friday 8am – 6pm with staff working a shift system to maintain these hours. The building is open occasionally at weekends for contact by prior arrangements. The health and safety and security of the building is maintained by the manager at Meliot.

- 5.3 The building comprises of 3 family rooms, an art room and 2 small meeting rooms. There is a room with a one way mirror and taping facilities. There is a room for staff training, meetings, parent groups and workshops. An upstairs office accommodates the majority of the staff team, whilst the small downstairs office supports and monitors reception and greets service users and contract workers.
- 5.4 Since approval of the realignment of the service we have undertaken small building works to improve the accessibility of the service via a ramp to the front entrance. In line with user feedback and plans to maximize the use of the Centre, work on garden security was scheduled albeit this has been delayed due to requirements for planning permission; this is moving forward and will be well in place for the spring and summer months when higher usage would be anticipated.

6. **Realignment of Meliot Centre**

- 6.1 Following approval for the realignment formal staff consultation was initiated on 1st April 2017. Feedback was received and comments and amendment was made to job descriptions in line with this. The formal new service and staffing arrangements went live on 12th June 2017, albeit some of the previous assessment work still needed conclusion and so ran simultaneous to the introduction of new service delivery arrangements to ensure continuity for service users. The realignment resulted in 1 redundancy and all other existing staff transferred to new roles within the Centre, vacant posts were deleted. It is positive that a skilled staff group who have been trained and developed by Lewisham have been retained within the service. Currently all social work and contact officer posts are permanently filled by suitably qualified and experienced practitioners.
- 6.2 Once the revised Meliot Centre arrangements were in place supervised contact began to move over to in-house provision. To minimise any service user disruption, the first priority was to move newly court ordered contact arrangements, followed by highest cost contacts due to family size and frequency. Transition of contact work from private providers to the Meliot Centre has involved a range of complex negotiations regarding room bookings and timings, foster carer locations and travel time, complexity and intensity of contact and risk management of this.
- 6.3 As of September 2017 163 episodes of contact per month took place at Meliot totalling approximately 300 hours. Supervision and support are provided to children and their families in contact and detailed reports are provided on the progress, outcomes and quality of the contact sessions. Service user feedback is undertaken on an ongoing basis, for September 75% of service users rated the overall contact arrangements at Meliot as excellent, similarly 70% of parents rated the support within the contact session as excellent.
- 6.4 Parenting assessments within Meliot have continued albeit on a reduced basis with 28 assessments being undertaken since 1st April 2017; this compares to 68 for the previous calendar year. Social workers within the Family Social Work (FSW) service are now undertaking parenting assessments either on their own caseloads or via joint work with other FSW teams. We have commissioned specialist training for assessment of parents with learning difficulties (PAMS assessment) to further enhance the skills and flexibility of social work response for this need group.
- 6.5 It was proposed within the new arrangements to retain the two specialist group work programmes delivered by Meliot post realignment and as such these have continued.

The Focussed Attachment to Babies (FAB) group has been delivered since April with 6 parents in attendance for the 6 week programme and the Caring and Safe Practical Parenting (CASPP) group has supported 9 parents within the 6 week programme continuously.

- 6.6 Tracking systems are now in place for all contact arrangements that are provided or spot purchased by the Department. Of those provided outside of Meliot: 16 are transitioning to Meliot (these are contacts with bespoke needs); 44 are long term low frequency contacts provided for Looked After Children and their Families and 12 are currently receiving Saturday contact. Planning is in place to transition these contacts into the Meliot Centre and any additional financial implications are being assessed.

7 Financial implications

- 7.1 The original saving for the realignment of Meliot Road was £734k, this was later reduced to £600k.
- 7.2 The delay in the realignment of the Centre earlier in the year means that the full saving cannot be made this year. The financial forecasts allow for a shortfall in the saving of £323k, leaving a saving of £277k to be made this year.
- 7.3 The realignment of the Melliot Centre proposed a saving of 2 posts realizing a saving of £96k that has been achieved. The move to be used as a contact centre to date has led to a saving of £157k based on the current contact numbers and average costs based on 2016/17 spend. The total saving anticipated this year stands at £253k based on current contact activity. As noted with the continued transition of contact arrangements from private providers to in house this will further increase the associated saving.

8 Legal implications

- 8.1 There are no particular legal implications arising.
- 8.2 The conduct and timetabling of Public Law applications in relation to children is now governed by the Children and Families Act 2014, and the practise directions issued from time to time in relation to this. The duties to promote contact to Looked After Children and to provide support services to families arise from the provisions of the Children Act 1989 and the Children Act 2004.

9 Crime and disorder implications

- 9.1.1 There are no crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

10 Equalities implications

- 10.1 The Equality Act 2010 (the Act) introduced a new public sector equality duty (the equality duty or the duty). It covers the following nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- 10.2 In summary, the Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:
- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
 - advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected

- characteristic and those who do not.
- foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

11 Environmental implications

11.1 There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

12 Background documents and originator

If there are any queries on this report please contact Stephen Kitchman on 020 8314 8140.