

Oxfordshire Together Children's Services

Giving communities control over local services

Annual Report on Transition Fund for Open-Access Children's Services 2017-2018

Summary

The Oxfordshire Together Transition Fund for open-access children's services has been running for one year. The community-led delivery of open-access children's services as a model has been successful and is responsive to local needs. Services are valued by communities and are run with and for residents.

There are more centres delivering services than before the council moved to the new community-led model of provision, and they form part of a network of support with other existing services. Dozens of committed volunteers are enabling organisations across Oxfordshire to deliver provision; an embodiment of our thriving communities vision.

Thousands of families have already benefited, many being vulnerable or disadvantaged, and feedback is very positive. However, as would be expected with a community-led approach, some areas of the county have not seen organisations come forward to offer provision, or have had it delayed due to external challenges, such as identifying appropriate premises to operate from.

Background

From October 2015 to January 2016, the council carried out a public consultation on future arrangements for Children, Education and Family Service.

This new model included the retention of eight key council-run Children & Family Centres and two satellite Centres (for further details visit: <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/public-site/childrens-centres>).

In response to consultation feedback received, three new Community Coordinator posts were created to provide ongoing support to community groups running open access children's services. The posts are North, Central and South-based and work to support groups to deliver high quality, safe provision and provide links between community provision and the statutory service in addition to supporting the organisations and monitoring their activity. Many of the Annual Returns from organisations thanked the Community Coordinators by name, and clearly their support has been needed and valued.

Some of the county council's existing Children's Centre premises were made available, where possible, to organisations wishing to continue with the non-statutory services that were previously operating from them.

In February 2016, the council agreed to set aside £1m for creating a 'one off' fund to provide pump priming to support the transition to a community-led model of children's services delivery across the county.

The Transition Fund for Open Access Children's Services was launched in March 2017 running until 31 March 2020 in line with the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). Organisations were invited to submit their applications and business plans, which included accounting for future sustainability of their proposed service delivery and identification of suitable premises from which to deliver their proposed services. These applications were considered by a cross-party panel of Councillors in seven

rounds over the 2017/18 financial year, which then made recommendations to Cabinet for decision. The fund is now closed to new bids.

This approach followed a similar model established under the Oxfordshire Together framework which has been successful in delivering a range of Highways services locally. The move to a community-led approach meant a commitment to working with local organisations to identify innovative solutions where people saw there was a gap in local children's service provision. Guidance Notes for applicants applying to the fund is at Annex 1.

Among the criteria of the grant awards from the Transition Fund were those stipulating that the children's services delivered through it are open-access, must benefit Oxfordshire communities and be inclusive.

The nature of community-led provision is such that provider organisations are embedded in the communities they serve, and so are best-placed to meet needs they have identified but which there is no existing provision for. This model creates a link between local voices and a more immediate response to them. The model means providers are likely to 'see' gaps in local provision for discrete groups of residents and strive to fill them with appropriate inclusive services. Community providers can do this relatively quickly.

Ambrosden 4 Children has successfully established services integrating the military families on the army base in Ambrosden near Bicester, with the local civilian community:

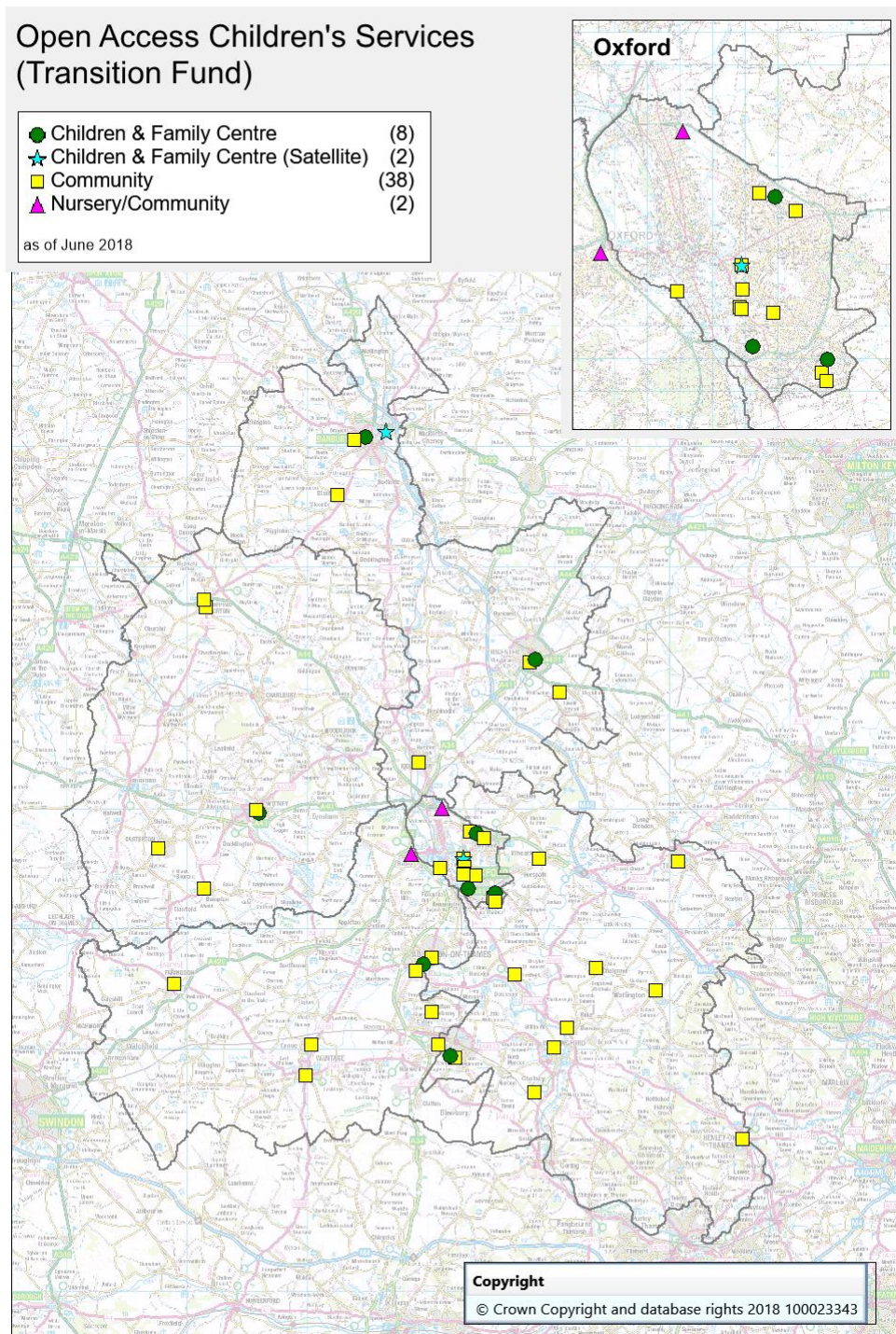
"Sessions are attended by both military and civilian families. We liaise with the family engagement team in the local military base. We also advertise locally, including the village shop. We have a good mix of military and civilian families and we successfully attract new families on a regular basis."

Grants Awarded and Children's Centres Opened

Attached at Annex 2 is a list of grants awarded from the Transition Fund for open-access Children's Services. This list is also available on the Oxfordshire County Council website. The total value of grants awarded at the time of writing is £876,091, however there are some variations to some awards still in process, and this figure may alter.

To date, a total of 37 grants has been awarded. These range in value from £939 to £45K and are geographically spread across Oxfordshire. Of these, 17 grants were for services to be delivered from existing Children's Centres that the council had been running direct.

A current map of locations of children’s centres is below:



The total number of centres currently operating in Oxfordshire via the Transition Fund for Open-Access Children’s Services, when added to the eight centres and two satellite centres the council runs direct, is 50. There are now therefore more physical centres providing open-access children’s services than before the council adopted its community-led approach to delivery.

What is being delivered under the community-led model

There is great diversity in the types of children's services being delivered by community-led organisations across Oxfordshire. These include, but are not limited to:

- Sessions exclusively for male carers and their children
- Baby & Toddler Groups
- Rhyme-Time Sessions
- Infant first aid
- Healthy Eating and Nutrition for the Really Young (HENRY)
- Messy and sensory play
- Music classes
- Forest Schools sessions
- Play and Learn sessions
- Support for families with SEND children, helping with challenging behaviour and parenting
- Stay & Play sessions
- Bumps to Birth sessions for expectant mothers
- New mums' groups
- Baby massage
- Young parents' groups
- Foster parents' groups

As the nature of community-led service delivery is that it exists to meet identified needs in local communities, the provision currently on offer is targeted at meeting local needs for Oxfordshire's residents and varies across the county. Attendance of all sessions is measured by the organisations, and demonstrates the need for the services they run.

“We see 60+ families every week across all our sessions. We have contact with 200 families at our Bumps & Beyond sessions.”



GRoW, Parish Church St John the Baptist, Grove

“A total of more than 49 families with 62 children (age range from 3 months to 8 years; median 2.5), have joined in this first year.”



HBC SuperDads (sessions for male carers), Headington, Oxford

Links and Networks

In addition to delivering open-access children's services, we are seeing many more links and networks being actively created across the county, with greater sharing of information, experience and knowledge.

Most community-led children's services have developed a network, linking in to existing and complementary services, and becoming part of the fabric of support for local residents. The examples below are just two of many across the county.

"We host and support the following services...Neonatal Support, Isis Midwives, Saplings NHS Support Group for Parents with Additional Needs, and Children Seen & Heard (a charity working with children who have a parent in prison)".

**Donnington Doorstep,
east Oxford**



"We work closely with the local Health Visitor team who run a Well Baby Clinic...our local nursery uses one of our rooms daily for lunch and we've built good relationships with them, sharing resources and activities."

The Maple Tree, Wheatley

The ACE Centre in Chipping Norton has drawn on its previous years of experience in supporting a bid by the Charlbury Community Centre and advising it in establishing services in its new accommodation. The ACE Centre has experience of safeguarding, enabling it to offer support, advice and signpost to the correct agencies. This type of local centre of excellence, replicated geographically across the county, would be an excellent use of existing assets and experience if strategically supported by the council.

The county council's Community Co-ordinators have provided training and promoted links between community groups and the Locality and Community Support Service, so groups know who to go to for advice and support around any safeguarding

concerns. They also ensure that workers across children's services are aware of the sessions and services that community groups are providing.

The Coordinators further support groups by fostering relationships between them and encouraging them to learn from each other.

Many of the services rely on committed local people as volunteers to deliver the provision. It is testament to the residents of Oxfordshire that so many people are doing this valuable work, giving their time, skills, knowledge and experience to help fellow residents around them. Oxfordshire has a proud history of volunteering, with over 4,500 voluntary and community organisations in the county, of which 2,301 are registered. That's one for every 289 people in the county; above the national average. However, feedback from some children's groups is that the majority of volunteers are over 50 and there are some worries around the numbers of younger volunteers, going forward.

Service User Feedback and Quality of Services

The annual returns from organisations, alongside the qualitative monitoring completed by the Community Coordinators during the year, has provided evidence from across the county of the value community-led children's services are adding for residents; often those that are vulnerable, isolated or disadvantaged. Our monitoring approach is at Annex 3.

Most services are going beyond pure delivery to enabling community cohesion. Just a few of the many examples are below, reported by providers in Annual Returns in April 2018.

"My kids love coming here – they think it's even better than the Children's Centres we used to go to."



HBC SuperDads, Oxford

“We have seen networks form and peer-to-peer support within groups...phones put away and wonderful instances of adult-child interactions.”

ACE Centre, Chipping Norton

“This is the first time my son has ever eaten with other children, he loves it”. “I don’t feel intimidated or judged here.”



Sunnymead Minnows, Cutteslowe

“As a first-time mum to a now 9-month-old, Botley Bridges has been a lifeline. Having a local baby group to go to, to meet other local mums, has gotten me out of the house and cheered me up on some very difficult days.”

Botley Bridges, west Oxford

“The group is fantastic for my little boy and exceeded my expectations – the sessions have the right balance between structured activities and free play. As a primary school teacher, I would say that they are of a similar standard to those you would see in a pre-school setting.”



Wigod Way, Wallingford

The county council's Community Coordinators have supported groups to run high quality services, and have provided template policies, procedures, planning resources and feedback on Stay & Play sessions they have observed. They are working closely with the Oxford Diocese to run joint workshops to increase knowledge, confidence and quality of sessions run by church groups.

Coordinators have also developed a self-evaluation with the Diocese and VIVA (Volunteer Independent Visiting and Advocacy Service) to help any organisation reflect on its provision for under 5s, and provide advice and support in response to this.

Future of Transition Fund for Open-Access Children's Services

The Transition Fund for Open-Access Children's Services is now closed for new applications, however existing projects will receive year 2 and year 3 grant payments as agreed.

At the end of this period, organisations should be in a position to sustain themselves through other sources of funding, or be structuring their provision according to income.

Background papers:

Annex 1: Published Guidance Notes for applicants

Annex 2: List of grants awarded

Annex 3: Monitoring approach