

WORCESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL


RECORD OF OFFICER EXECUTIVE DECISION

TITLE:*	Bluebell Wood, Worcester - Enhanced Early Years Provision
Decision Taken By:	Adam Johnson, Strategic Director of Children's Services
Cabinet Member	David Chambers, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Education
Decision Made*	To approve the utilisation of currently vacant accommodation within the Sure Start Children's Centre (SSCC) site known as Bluebell Wood, Worcester, for Enhanced Early Years provision.
Is this Report Exempt as per Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972	No
Decision taken under the following delegation:	<p>At the Cabinet meeting on 20 September 2020 the following delegation in respect of Children's Centre changes was agreed:</p> <p>4. 2020-09-24 Transfer of Riverside Children's Centre Final Version.pdf</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. (c) authorises the Director of Children's Services and the Director of Public Health, in consultation with the Cabinet Members for Education and Skills and Children and Families, to take all decisions in relation to the change of use of Children's Centre buildings so long as they will continue to provide services under the definition of a Sure Start Children's Centre, and the Director of Commercial and Change be authorised to agree appropriate terms for the future use of Children's Centre buildings.
Division(s) Affected	Nunnery
Date of Decision*	24 April 2025
Summary of Decision*	To approve the utilisation of currently vacant accommodation within the Sure Start Children's Centre (SSCC) site known as Bluebell Wood (onsite of Perry Wood Primary School, Worcester, outlined in red in the location plan attached as Appendix 1 below) for Enhanced Early Years provision for children aged 3-4 years who are unable to access their full Nursery Education Funding (NEF) entitlement due to their complex SEND.

<p>Reason(s) For Decision*</p>	<p>The purpose of this decision is to authorise the change of use of Bluebell Wood Children's Centre. The use will continue meet the definition of a Sure Start Children's Centre. This is required as Children's Centres received grant funding requiring that the use be consistent with Children's Centre purposes.</p> <p>Under the Equalities Act 2010, local authorities must ensure that they promote equality and inclusion, by removing barriers of access to funded childcare. Worcestershire County Council (WCC) has a duty to ensure sufficient Early Years provision is available for eligible 3 and 4-year-olds, including children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).</p> <p>In November 2022, Worcestershire Children First (WCF) (now Worcestershire County Council) consulted with Early Years providers and parent/carers for their feedback on what could be improved to support pre-school age children with SEND. This 'Nursery Assessment Unit Review' identified a need for specialist Early Years provision for children aged 3-4 who, due to their complex SEND, cannot access their full Nursery Education Funding (NEF) Entitlement in other Early Years or Nursery settings.</p> <p>Taking into account the findings of the NAU Review, a specification for Enhanced Early Years provision was developed by WCF. A period of market engagement with existing Early Years/Nursery education providers was held in June 2023. On 11 August 2023, the Council advertised on Find a Tender (reference 2023/S 000-023551), inviting prospective service providers to submit proposals for the Enhanced Early Years Nursery Provision. No bids were received.</p> <p>On 14 August 2024, WCC's Commercial Board approved, in accordance with the PCR 2015 Reg 32, use of negotiated procedure without prior publication 32.2 (a) where no tenders, no suitable tenders, no requests to participate or no suitable requests to participate have been submitted in response to an open procedure or a restricted procedure, provided that the initial conditions of the contract are not substantially altered.</p> <p>Through this procedure, Dingley's Promise - a registered charity who deliver specialist Early Years provision to children with complex SEND - have been awarded the contract to deliver Enhanced Early Years provision in the south of the county.</p> <p>The Children's Centre at Bluebell Wood has previously been used by non-specialist Early Years providers. The previous occupier of Bluebell Wood CC vacated in April 2020 and the building has been void since then. No other user has expressed an interest in utilising the vacant accommodation.</p> <p>WCC have identified Bluebell Wood CC as suitable accommodation for Enhanced Early Years provision, with some adaptations to meet the needs of young children with complex SEND.</p>
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	<p>This provision meets the requirements of use for Children's Centres. This is the provision of Early Childhood Services.</p> <p>It is proposed that Dingley's Promise will deliver Enhanced Early Years provision on behalf of WCC at Bluebell Wood. This provision will offer up to 15 full-time equivalent (FTE) places on site at any one time.</p> <p>In addition to onsite provision, Dingley's Promise will deliver outreach support to other children, and their families, either in their existing Early Years settings or at home.</p> <p>The terms for a lease have been approved. The premises will be leased to Dingley's Promise at a rent of £9,201.00 per annum exclusive. WCC, as Landlord, agrees to fund as a contribution in kind to the Tenant the yearly rent reserved. The property is to be let for a term to expire 31.12.27.</p> <p>This proposal will ensure that WCC fulfils its statutory obligations under the Equalities Act 2010, as well as the Children and Families Act 2014 and the SEND Code of Practice: 0-25 Years (2015), relating to the authority's duty to ensure that sufficient Early Years provision is available for eligible 3 and 4-year-olds with SEND.</p> <p>This proposal provides childcare and education for a cohort of children in Worcestershire who are currently excluded from provision due to their SEND.</p>
Alternative Options Considered and Rejected	<p>Despite a comprehensive period of market engagement held in June 2023, no other Early Years/Nursery education provider has expressed an interest in utilising the accommodation at Bluebell Wood CC, or for delivering Enhanced Early Years provision at this or any other location.</p> <p>Existing SEND Nursery Assessment Units at Fort Royal and Vale of Evesham Special Schools have closed due to the increasing demand for Special School Reception places. Vale of Evesham now provides outreach Early Years support to children in their existing settings or at home. There is, therefore, no onsite Enhanced Early Years provision in the south of Worcestershire.</p>
Summary of any financial implications	<p>Bluebell Wood - £210,450 estimated cost of refurbishment of the building (funded from High Needs Provision Capital Allocation), plus £9,201.00 per annum exclusive, which WCC, as Landlord, agrees to fund as a contribution in kind to the Tenant for the yearly rent reserved.</p>
Summary of any legal implications	<p>There are no direct negative implications relating to the Council's statutory responsibilities in relation to the sufficiency of children's centre delivery arising from this report. The proposals for the centre will have a positive impact for families in the area through the security of early childcare provision along with a range of activities and services.</p>

	<p>The Council has a statutory duty to ensure that there are sufficient early years and childcare places to meet the needs of families in the county. The change proposed secures this duty by integrating early year education places into maintained provision. The core purpose of children's centres set out in statutory guidance is to improve outcomes for young children and their families and reduce inequalities between families in greatest need and their peers in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • child development and school readiness; • parenting aspirations and parenting skills; and • child and family health and life chances. <p>The new use of the facility complies with the Central Government Sure Start grant provisions.</p>
Consultation process and results	<p>November 2022 - 'Nursery Assessment Unit Review' – Stakeholders consulted included Early Years/Nursery education providers (mainstream and specialist), parent/carers and health services. The Review identified a need for specialist Early Years provision for children aged 3-4 who, due to their complex SEND, cannot access their full Nursery Education Funding (NEF) Entitlement in other Early Years or Nursery settings.</p> <p>June 2023 – Market engagement sessions (in person and online) with potential providers of Enhanced Early Years provision in the South of Worcestershire (Worcester, Malvern and Wychavon). Stakeholders consulted included schools and private, voluntary and independent (PVI) Early Years settings. This consultation did not result in any expressions of interest in utilising the accommodation at Bluebell Wood CC, or for delivering Enhanced Early Years provision at this or any other location.</p>
Equality duty Implications	<p>The JIA screening has been carried out in respect of these recommendations. It identified that further impact analysis was required in respect of: Marriage and Civil Partnerships (how the provision will support single-parent families); Race including travelling communities (how GRT families will access the provision).</p> <p>A full Equality and Public Health Impact Assessment has been carried out in respect of the recommendations outlined above.</p>
Social Value Implications	<p>This proposal provides childcare and education for a cohort of children in Worcestershire who are currently excluded from provision due to their SEND.</p> <p>This proposal will also offer support to the parents/carers of these children. Many are currently unable to work or engage in social activities due to them having to care for their children full time. With up to 30 hours of childcare offered in the Enhanced Early Years provision, parents/carers will now have the opportunity to engage in other activities, seek employment etc.</p>

Any Conflict of Interest declared by a consulted Cabinet Member/ any dispensation granted*	None
Background documents*	NAU outcome report Site Location Plan – Bluebell Wood Children’s Centre – Attached as Appendix 1 below.
Signature	
Reference/Date Published	For use by Democratic Services only
Monitoring Officer Review needed	Yes/No (delete as appropriate)

*Legal Requirement

Appendix 1 – Site Location Plan, Bluebell Wood Children’s Centre, Worcester (area outlined red).

