

# Early Years Site Visits

## Visit 1: 1<sup>st</sup> Place

Location: Burgess Park  
Visit date: Friday, December 11 2009  
Members present: Cllr Eliza Mann  
Children's Centre contact: Nicki Howard, Centre Director  
Officer support: Rachael Knight

### Summary of notes taken:

### Activities / services provided

As a children's centre, 1<sup>st</sup> place has a considerable span of activities, including as follows:

- provision of activities for close to 1200 children – e.g. music and movement classes
- 51 day care places
- training for parents
- access to health visitors
- support and networking for childminders – and to parents seeking childminders
- on-site midwifery services
- on-site services from the British school of osteopathy
- vocational training for parents to become qualified childminders and daycare/ childcare workers
- English courses for parents and childminders with English as a second language
- support for parents taking their first steps back to work from maternity leave

### General background

- 1<sup>st</sup> Place is a registered charity run by a board of trustees which largely comprises parents. It is one of 21 children's centres across the borough (all to be in place by March 1010), and serves an area with the borough's highest population density.
- The centre was established following a local Sure Start programme in the area that was initiated approximately 5 years ago. At the time there was very little provision for child care in the area other than from childminders. Parents were consulted about their priorities and indicated that they wanted a range of high quality provision, including support for parents.
- The centre is funded through a combination of Sure Start funding; money from parents and revenue from hiring out space in the building. If Sure Start funding was to vanish, activities would have to be reduced, but the centre could still operate on a completely self-sustained basis. All other children's centres in the borough are run by the council.
- There are 125 staff members, and 25 different languages are spoken at the centre.

### Admission and number of places

- There are currently 700 families accessing services / activities at the centre, and 70 of these have children accessing childcare.
- The waiting list for childcare is over 200 for full-time day care. Typically these families that are unable to obtain a place arrange care from a childminder.

## **Admission criteria**

### A List

- Looked after children
- Children with disabilities
- Parent and child live in the catchment area
- Sibling attending 1<sup>st</sup> Place

### B List

- Teenage parents in education
- Children from lone parent
- Training or studying
- Starting or returning to work
- Using working Tax Credit
- Working in the Aylesbury Area

A child receives one point for each of the criteria categories, and parents are asked to provide relevant evidence prior to admission.

## **Parental engagement**

- There are many parents employed by the centre, who were previously unemployed, as well as many childminders who have received training at the centre to improve their English and/ or to obtain proper childcare qualifications. Such courses impact the quality of care inside and outside the centre.
- Volunteering at the centre has also been very popular, as have courses to help parents re-enter the job market.
- Outreach is being planned to families in the local Chinese communities, as there are proportionately very few Chinese families accessing the centre.
- A fathers' group is held on Saturdays.
- Encouraging young parents to attend the centre has proved difficult – there is low take-up of the generic activities. There is however a teenage parents project run by the council in the Chumleigh Gardens extension.
- Some working families have no recourse to childcare benefits, which is a considerable problem, as it can compel families to use very poor quality childcare – and fuels unregulated childcare provision.

## **Single Funding Formula**

- From a first glance at the consultation papers, SSF is expected to benefit the centre.
- The centre has also just received funding through referrals from social care for childcare places, to start early 2010.