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## Progress Report for Thame Town Council July 2017

As a result of the successful campaign by the Red Kite Working Group, sufficient funding was secured to continue the running of our local children's centre after funding from Oxfordshire County Council ceased at the end of March 2017. Charitable status was achieved by the end of January and four trustees were appointed to run the charity. They are John Hulett (chair), Rosie Pearce, Sarah Roberts and Mary Stiles. All the trustees were individuals already involved with the centre which was a great help for continuity. The former children's centre is now known as the Red Kite Family Centre. The trustees were able to advertise and appoint a complete staff team in time for the handover in April. Amy Spicer, the former children's centre leader, has become the Family Centre Co-ordinator. Catherine Myles is our Early Years Family Worker, Helen Burton and Julie Tattersfield are Early Years Family Worker Assistants and Sarah Bradford is the Family Centre Administrator. All these staff are very well qualified for the jobs they fill and have quickly created a strong team spirit, building excellent relations with the parents and children using the centre.

The Family Centre now offers a full programme of universal (open to all parents of under 5s) activities each week and it continues to be used fully by NHS midwives, health visitors and speech and language therapists. This is an important partnership creating a 'one stop shop' for many parents with pre-school children.

The most popular activities run by the centre staff are the 'stay and play' sessions. One is held in Chinnor each week and two at the Rooks Lane centre. These activities introduce the children to a range of learning through play activities and give parents ideas for things that they can do at home with their children as well. All of the sessions are planned to meet the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum. The numbers attending these and the other sessions during our first term of operation are given below. In many cases these figures represent an increase on the numbers attending similar sessions at the former children's centre which is very encouraging.

Attendance Data for Red Kite family Centre April 1<sup>st</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> July 2017

Stay and Play Sessions Thame (2 x weekly): 774 attendees  
(Average 27 attendees per session)  
Stay and Play Sessions Chinnor (1 x weekly): 175 attendees  
(Average 13 attendees per session)  
Health Clinics (2 x weekly): 637 attendees  
(Average 20 attendees per session)

Starting from a story (1 x weekly): 60 attendees

(Average 4 attendees per session)

Dads Group (monthly): 25 attendees

(Average 8 attendees per session)

Young parents group (weekly): 22 attendees

(Average 2 attendees per session)

Sensory Explorers group for children with disabilities (weekly): 57 attendees

(Average 3 attendees per session)

Speech and Language appointments (weekly): 90 attendees

(Average 5 attendees per session)

We are also collecting data on the Centre's impact on the areas of greatest social need in our community and this will be available later in the year.

In addition to this the centre has been able to support Oxfordshire County Council to host contact visits so children who are not in their parent's care have been able to see their family. 101 attendees have used the centre for this purpose since the beginning of April.

The team are working hard to ensure that the sessions being run are meeting the needs of those that attend. A number of parents have completed evaluation forms this term and these provide valuable feedback, helping to guide the planning of future programmes. A couple of quotes below are taken from the parent evaluations.

"Red Kite is by far the most stimulating playgroup that I've taken my kid to. She loves it so much. I can see the improvement on her social skills The team is always sharing helpful tips on nutrition, situations at home and how to help my kid to enjoy different scenarios. I would definitely recommend other Mums to join the group."

"I have been blown away with the level of professionalism since the Red Kite became a private charity. The 'stay and play' sessions are fantastic. The variety of activities for my little boy has improved his social skills, improvised play and creative skills. Thank you so much."

### **The funding position**

The statutory services that used to be part of the centre's staffing commitment are now provided through the OCC social care children and families team based in Didcot. This has meant that the trustees have been able to reduce costs for the new community run centre. We have reduced the provision from 52 weeks a year to mainly during school terms and also slightly reduced opening hours. Usage statistics from the previous centre showed a significant drop in attendance during school holidays for a variety of reasons and so we do not believe this change is having a big effect on parents, especially as the centre will still be open in school holidays and the NHS sessions will continue to run.

The trustees estimate that the annual running cost with the current staffing levels will be about £65k. Thanks to the generous support of Sharing Life Trust, Thame Welfare Trust, Thame Town Council, OCC transition fund, the Thame Mayor's fund, Thame Rotary & Inner Wheel, Thame Partnership of Schools, Mid-Counties Co-op and some private donations, we have been able to secure this amount for Year 1. Raising this level of funding for Years 2



and 3 remains a big challenge and the trustees have set up a 'community forum' group to act as advocates for the centre and help us achieve the future funding needed. We are preparing some new promotional materials and hope to engage the large business community of the town in supporting us, as many of their employees will have young children who benefit from the work of the centre.

### **Future developments**

We already have seen some vindication of our firm belief that it is vital to keep the kind of support that the centre offers to families with young children at the centre of our community, rather than relying on the nearest county 'hub' in Didcot. We continue to hold a strong partnership with Oxfordshire County Council to make sure all families are given the right support in times of need alongside the universal provision from the Red Kite Family Centre. They are actively exploring the possibility of once again basing one of their Early Support Workers in Thame and also expanding the provision to a wider age group as part of their 0-19 strategy. This is very encouraging and, with our highly professional team, the Red Kite Family Centre is well placed to become a model for future practice in other areas of the county.

A special thank you to Thame Town Council for their generous support both financially and practically and to Tom Wyse for nominating us as one of the mayor's charities again this year. Your on-going support will be vital as we continue to fight for the centre's place in our community.

John Hulett, Chair of Trustees  
Amy Spicer, Family Centre Leader

