

Guidance on planning your Sure Start children's centre opening

Each celebration of every children's centre designation or new build will be different, and should be aimed to suit its own community.

These suggestions are as a guide only

Ideally the children's centre manager should organise a small working group to plan the event. For example, Steering Group members, parents and partners.

1. Diary dates

Make sure diary bookings have been made well in advance (at least two months) especially for council members.

2. The guest list

If you are holding an **official** launch event, you might wish to invite certain HCC council members or officials to the function. As a guide these could include:

HCC Lead Member for Children's Services (jane.pitman@hertsc.gov.uk)	-	Jane Pitman
HCC Deputy Lead member for Children's Services (Dave.hewitt@hertsc.gov.uk)	-	David Hewitt
HCC Local county council member for your area	-	<i>(The member you will have included in your naming process – or contact Dee de Bruin for name)</i>
Local district/borough councillor	-	<i>Optional</i>
Head of Integrated Children's Services 0-13	-	Helen Ashdown
Strategy manager for children's centres	-	Caroline Swindells

Your working group should arrange invitations, which can take the form of emails to councillors, probably word of mouth, or posters etc to your local families.

3. Special guests

HCC protocol would prefer that the Hertfordshire County Council lead member for children's services is the invited member to officiate in any official openings if the event requires it and make the opening speech. If neither the lead member or deputy is able to attend, the local county councillor should be invited to represent Hertfordshire County Council, and make the official opening speech.

Your working group could also identify if there is a local celebrity who could be invited to play a key role at the event. Alternatively you may wish to hire a costume for a member of staff or volunteer to dress as a cartoon character (there are strict copyright issues surrounding some high profile characters.) These two options will help you get maximum publicity and media coverage.



You may wish to invite the celebrity or councillor to arrive before the official ceremony for a tour of the centre and to meet children, parents and staff.

4. Commemorative plaque

There is no longer a government requirement to display a commemorative plaque, but you may wish to have your own commemorative plaque unveiled at the opening, Ensure you consider

- Funding
- Ordering resources
- Wording (check on spelling)
- Positioning
- Fixing to wall

5. Speeches

The person opening your event should get a copy of the programme and appropriate notes regarding your service, to help them prepare their speech. Speeches should be kept to a minimum, each lasting only 5 minutes, ideally with a maximum of 2 speakers. Whilst there may be pressure from a number of partners all keen to speak, it should be remembered that the day is about young children and their families.

Although you will not have control over what the speaker(s) wish to say, it would be useful to give them guidelines and briefing notes about the Sure Start children's centre programme and your own children's centre. (Sample briefing notes for speaker are available from the communications team)

One week before the event, send a map and the programme for the day to the speakers, as this will re-iterate the allocated time slot.

Have copies of the speakers briefing notes with you at the event in case the people giving the speeches have forgotten their copy.

Sure Start Local Programmes have found that having a parent make one of the speeches is really effective and powerful.

6. Use of Logos

Make sure all publicity material includes the Hertfordshire Children's Trust Partnership logo and the Sure Start logo. You may also have a logo for your own centre.

7. Programme of events

Although not necessary, decide if you would like to distribute official programmes (you will need to consider how many people will be present)

Design and printing of official programmes: read more advice about publicity in the Communications section of the Children's Centre and Extended Schools toolkit.

8. Invitations

Confirm the fire regulations and capacity for the centre to help you determine how many parents, carers and members of the community can be accommodated.

Decide whether to use letters or cards, email or word of mouth

If choosing formal invitation cards consider design, printing and distribution costs

- Invitations should be personalised - individual names to be written on cards
- Print official logos on invitation
- Allow at least two-three weeks between sending out invitations and the date of the event
- Directions and parking arrangements should be included with the invitations
- The invitation should include a return RSVP slip
- Maintain a register of replies

9. Car Parking

- Reserve parking space for two to three VIPs' cars
- Arrange for traffic direction and parking of other cars
- Make sure visitors and VIPs are directed to the area where the event will take place either by parking attendants or clearly marked signage. Nominate someone to meet and greet VIPs

10. Involving Children

- Consider how children can be involved in the opening ceremony
- The event should be local and child-focused
- Various activities on the day could be planned to entertain visitors, e.g. messy play, face painting, arts and crafts
- Partners may also wish to erect stands / information tables
- Make sure that you have parental permission for children's names and photographs to be used in publicity materials. This may include photographs and names in the local newspaper. Please use the consent form in the communications toolkit
- A child aged under 5 years of age could be involved in any cake / ribbon cuttings which make excellent photo opportunities. Identify this child before hand (e.g - the first child to register with the daycare provider; the first child to attend a stay and play session, etc)
- After the event, remember to write to the family thanking them for allowing their child to take part in the official element of the opening



12. Media Involvement

Hertfordshire County Council will issue news releases but you could issue your own as well. Media presence is sometimes better when local invitations are made. A draft template for a press release is included in the toolkit. Make invitations to the

media to attend at least two weeks before the event. You may also wish to pay for a photographer for your own publicity.

The children's centre manager should be the main point of contact for the local media prior to, during and after the event, and be responsible for co-ordinating photo opportunities and interviews.

13. Resources for your event

If you are planning a balloon release for your event check whether your borough or district council allows this or not. Balloon releases may require a licence.

Your local District Partnership Team has pull up banners entitled "What is a Children's Centre" and "What is an Extended School", for loan. Make sure you book them if you wish to use them.

14. Refreshments

Consider who and what you will need to provide. Local stores may sponsor refreshments as well.

15. Miscellaneous

- Arrange for the site to be tidied up before the event and that waste receptacles are available.
- If you are planning a guided tour of the site remember to arrange escorts.
- After the event, send a letter of thanks from your organisation to the main speakers and any sponsors

17. General Information

You may contact the children's centre communications lead, Dee de Bruin, Senior Communications Officer on telephone 01992 555791 for any other information regarding county hall protocols, names of local councillors, photographers, copies of logos, etc

Enjoy your success!

www.hertschildrenscentres.org.uk