

**Wiltshire Council**

**Cabinet**

**30 April 2019**

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**Hebe Mitchell – statement and question regarding agenda item 11 - Children's Centre Buildings Consultation**

**To Councillor Laura Mayes – Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Skills**

**Statement**

If you're a parent with a worry or if you have a newborn baby it is essential that when you feel you need help or advice you can access it immediately. The only service which offers a drop in service on most days, for any subject or question is our children's centre.

During my first pregnancy my midwife signed me up for the baby steps group due to anxiety. The most helpful thing about being a part of this group was the support I felt, I knew they were there when I needed them and they made me feel safe.

I felt inspired by the women who had helped me and once I had settled into motherhood I contacted them to enquire about what training I could do. As a breastfeeding mother who is very passionate on the subject I completed the training to become a breastfeeding peer supporter. Since then I have run the Mum2Mum group every week.

I can guarantee that if a breastfeeding mother who needs help doesn't get the support she needs within 24 hours there is a high chance of that mother giving up. Which is utterly heartbreaking.

50% of what we gain from the children's centre is social. Drop in services scattered around the town will not offer this same benefit. Therefore if a mother wanted to access a still running children's centre she would have to travel to Trowbridge.

The cost of a return bus ticket is now £7! The buses are becoming more infrequent and this would require a 1.2 mile walk!

The cost of a return train ticket is £4 and would require a 2.1 mile walk!

I suffer with a pregnancy related disability which means that after a point in my pregnancy I can't walk for longer than 5 minutes. I was very lucky to have found a house so close to the children's centre which I can access since I don't drive.

I'm now expecting my second baby and if I were in need of accessing a proper children's centre I would need to spend money we may not have and walk further than my disability allows with a toddler and a newborn. And this is all after overcoming my anxiety of public transport which is enhanced dramatically by travelling with small children

If the centre closes the Council will be failing in its statutory duty. The guidance which underpins the Childcare Act 2006 (section 5a) states that local authorities should: ensure that children's centres and their services are within reasonable reach of all families with young children in urban or rural areas, taking into account distance and availability of transport.

### **Question**

The council has already closed nearly half the children's centres and drastically reduced the number of open access groups. The key reason given is that it wants to focus staff resources on "outreach support to the families most in need". Appendix 18 of the cabinet report says that only 4 families are receiving this outreach in Westbury at the moment.

Does this indicate that there are only 4 such families who meet the intervention level? Or are the targeting methods not finding them?

### **Response**

At the time that the report was prepared there were only four families receiving outreach support. Referrals for services come from a variety of sources, including self-referral and do not include the work carried out by other children's centre supported services which focus on disadvantaged groups that are attended by families. The future plan is to dovetail services with Health Visitors more effectively so that all targeted families are aware of the children's centre services offer.