

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

30 April 2019

Subject: Rationalisation of Children's Centre Buildings

Cabinet Member: Cllr Laura Mayes Cabinet member for Children, Education and Skills

Key Decision: Non Key

Executive Summary

Children's centre services are a vital resource for parents with very young children, they provide a one stop service of advice and support.

Due to the rurality of Wiltshire it is not easy for all parents to access services in a building in a particular area of a community. It is more important to offer services in the places that are accessible to families and to ensure that the delivery of outreach services in the home to those who are most in need is available.

Children's centre services are an important part of the early help offer in Wiltshire and they must be aligned with all partner services to ensure that there is a joined up streamlined service for families.

This paper discusses the consultation and responses to consider the proposal to extend the activities of Children's Centres into more community venues. This will achieve savings and further develop the outreach work of Children's Centres, bringing services closer to families.

Proposal(s)

Reduce the number of children's centre buildings by six and focus the work in the community, using space in libraries, leisure and health and well-being centres where possible and practical.

To work closely with maternal health and community child care providers to support the choice of future community venues and keep and expand the scope of services to families in the most deprived areas of Wiltshire.

To work closely with families to utilise social media and community networks to raise the profile of available provision.

Reason for Proposal(s)

Children's centre services provide an important role in offering early help to families with young children. It is vital that this resource is maintained and spread wider into rural communities, particularly those in the most deprived areas. Reducing to 12 buildings will mean that finances can be concentrated on front line staff in priority geographical areas and work directly with families

Terence Herbert
Executive Director

Wiltshire Council

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Purpose of Report

1. This report outlines why the council is proposing to move children's centre services from buildings to community venues. A consultation with the public has been undertaken and the results have been considered in the preparation of this report.

Relevance to the Council's Business Plan

2. The proposal is relevant to the following priorities and objectives laid down within the Council's Business Plan¹:
 - Early Intervention (Prevention): Proactive Early Help and Children's Centres' services - *Re-shape the way we deliver services, with more focus on providing help early in a child's life and on supporting families where parents have difficulties which affect their ability to parent effectively - through strong ongoing relationships with families and within communities.*
 - Reduced social isolation and loneliness: *Children's centres and outreach services offer support to isolated mothers.*
 - Personal Well-being (Prevention): Improved provision through campuses, sports and leisure centres and community hubs (including libraries and cultural engagement): *Increase use of libraries*
 - Personal Well-being (Prevention): Provide the right environment and infrastructure to prompt more active and healthy living.
3. When children's centre services were recommissioned in 2016, they were clustered into four areas to allow for a more financially efficient model. Spurgeons, a national charity and The RISE Trust, a local charity, were successful in tendering for the contracts to provide these services. The focus of the new contracts was on the original children's centre service priorities of: health, parenting, educational attainment, training and employment opportunities. The services were also more focussed on the most disadvantaged children in Wiltshire in the most deprived areas. There would be limited universal access to provision, but this would be available in all community areas. In order to achieve this, children's centre services have been successfully using a broader range of community venues to deliver services and

¹ <http://thewire.wiltshire.council/index/business-plan-2017-2027.htm>

programmes in places where families are living, socialising and working. The vision is to build on the community model which has been used since 2016. For instance, families accessing services in the Baptist Church, Amesbury and perceive it to be a children's centre as regular events are held there and information and staff are available as they would be in a children's centre building. In Wilton (53) more mums access the Mum2Mum Breastfeeding Group at the community centre than do the group in the children's centre building in Tidworth (34), 88 families accessed the child health clinic in a community venue (library) in Bradford on Avon compared to 86 in the centre at Bulford. Families who live in rural isolated communities cannot easily get to a children's centre building, so it is important to make services accessible for them in their homes, many outreach services are delivered in family homes and this will continue to be a priority from July 2019.

By expanding the delivery of services in leisure centres and libraries, it is hoped that families, who would not normally access existing buildings, would find them welcoming and accessible and be inclined to access swimming or other classes that they would not previously have thought to use. This would have an overall positive effect on the families outcomes.

4. Wiltshire Council is facing funding pressures and, to achieve savings, services across the council have been reviewed to identify whether they can be delivered more efficiently.

When reviewing children's centre services, the council has considered what savings could be made without having a significant impact on frontline services. Based on the successful use of wider community venues for children's centre services, rather than tie money up in the running costs of buildings, it is proposed that we reduce the number of buildings by six and deliver more services in the community where they are needed and where the families can easily access them. This is already happening in many areas as the children's centre service providers assess the need in an area and offer groups in venues that are convenient for families e.g. Purton Village Hall, Leigh Park Community Centre Westbury, Longfield Community Centre, Trowbridge. This is a development of the work that is already taking place and follows discussions at contract meetings with providers about how efficiencies can be made with the least impact on services for the most disadvantaged families. Saving money on buildings means that delivery staff will be retained and able to work with families. Three of the centres that would be de-commissioned are in the less deprived areas and three are in areas (with pockets of greater deprivation) that have very little service take up in the Children's Centre buildings - between 0% in three centres and 19%. It is anticipated that these changes would achieve savings of £250,000 annually.

Main Considerations for the Council

To consider the results of the consultation and the equalities impact assessment to decide if it appropriate not to use six building and use more community venues.

To ensure that the proposed community model and reduction in funding is most effective we aim to:

- Realign the children's centres to a preventative model
- Place children's centres more firmly within an integrated offer of early help
- Co-produce the changes with children's centre providers, families and other partners and stakeholders
- Closely follow guidance regarding changes to children centre services with full consultation and impact analysis
- Achieve efficiencies largely through not using discrete buildings but having greater use of existing community venues.

How We Consulted

Statutory Guidance on Children's Centres 2013 states that Local Authorities must ensure that there is a consultation before closing a children's centre or changing use of buildings.² The consultation process was undertaken following a launch briefing with Members and a Public Press Release on 23rd January. This was followed by:

- An online survey
- Face to face sessions in buildings that are proposed not to be used: Cricklade, Mere, Pewsey, Salisbury City, Trowbridge Longfield, Westbury White Horse.
- A presentation at Pewsey Area Board on March 11th.
- Information on the Wiltshire Council Early Years Facebook

Consultation Response

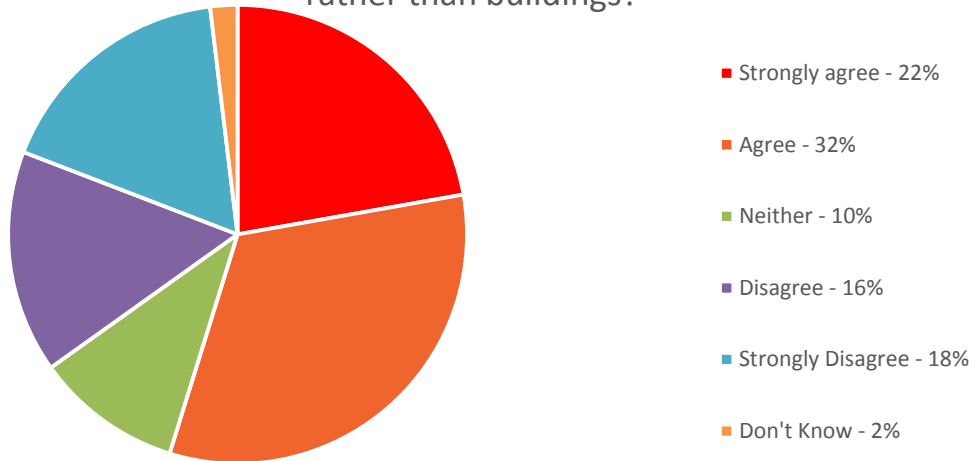
There were:

- 262 online responses to the consultation which was open for eight weeks from 23 January until 20 March 2019.
- 1500 hits on the Facebook page
- One response via the consultation e-mail inbox
- 10 parents and 14 professionals attended the 12 face to face events and their comments are recorded as part of the feedback.

The overall response to the online survey was:

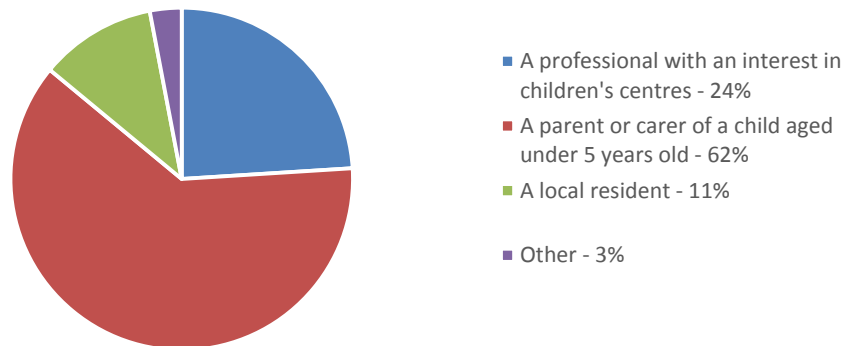
- 54% in agreement that children's centre services should be offered in the community and investment be made in staff rather than buildings
- 10% neither agreed or disagreed
- 34% disagreed or strongly disagreed with offering the services in the community
- 2% did not know

Do you support the decision to offer children's centre services in the community and therefore invest in staff rather than buildings?

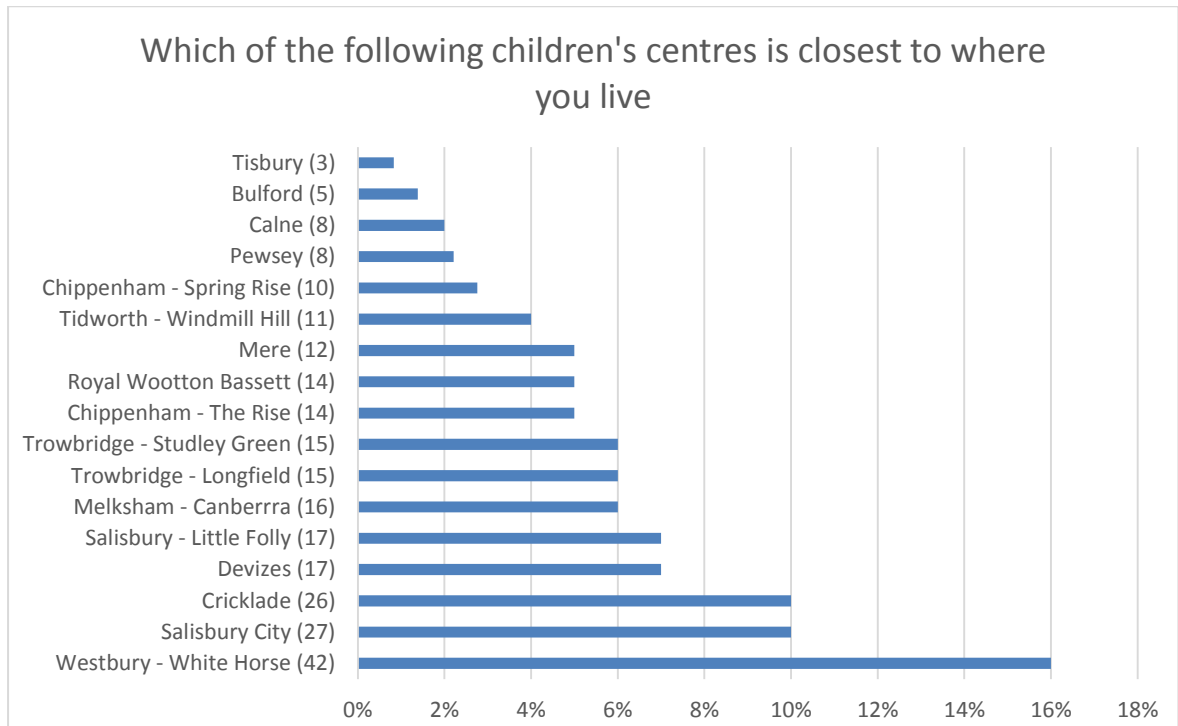


62% of respondents were a children's centre user.

What is your interest in children's centres



Of those who responded 62% were parents with a child under the age of five years old and 56% with children had a child aged two or under. Responses were received from across the county, the chart below shows the breakdown:



Of those who responded 84 made a comment and the following concerns were raised about the change from designated children's centre buildings to the use of community venues:

| Comments on proposed changes | Number of respondents who offered an opinion |
|---|--|
| Children's centre buildings provide specialist equipment/ purpose-built venue | 19 |
| Children's centre buildings are a safe space | 18 |
| Children's centre buildings offer breastfeeding peer support | 6 |
| Transport will be an issue | 3 |
| Redirect money to other resources | 4 |
| Retain some children's centre buildings | 3 |

Comments included:

'It's important to have the children's' centre as a community building, it has so much specialist equipment that can't be moved around.'[sic]

'In communities where children's centres were closed in 2016 the services are not as visible, and the drop-in facility will be lost 'you cannot timetable when you are having a bad day and need support'.

'Children's centres need a base and an identity of their own...privacy may be lacking in other settings.'

'The children's centre is a wonderful venue which is ready made. A lot of money was spent setting up so to discontinue its use seems very wasteful. It has been a lifeline to so many local mothers and families.'

'I think the same dedicated buildings are important but as then proposal closes Salisbury city which doesn't seem to be used for much anymore but keeps little folly open this seems ok.'[sic]

'The money would be better spent on preschools and nursery who see children everyday not dip in and out, and on health visitors.'

'I don't think it matters in which building these services are offered as long as they are still available in Westbury, Cricklade, Pewsey, Longfield, Trowbridge, [sic] Mere and Salisbury.'

Libraries were the preferred venue for providing children's centre activities and the one which respondents would be most likely to attend, along with community halls.

| Venue | Number | Percentage |
|---------------------------------|--------|------------|
| Libraries | 156 | 62% |
| Leisure Centres | 116 | 46% |
| Community Halls | 151 | 60% |
| Nurseries and pre-schools | 129 | 51% |
| Churches and church halls | 125 | 50% |
| Schools | 90 | 36% |
| Cafes and coffee shops | 63 | 25% |
| Health Centres and GP surgeries | 103 | 41% |
| Other | 31 | 12% |

Of those who responded 'other', 49% (19) said they wanted to use a children's centre venue only. A positive suggestion was to offer services outside 10% (4)

| Preferred alternative venues | Percentage of respondents who offered an opinion |
|---|--|
| Retain children's centres | 49% |
| Outside space/community farm | 10% |
| Cinema/ museum/ civic space | 5% |
| Health Centres/ with Health Visitors | 5% |
| Baby and Toddler Groups | 3% |
| Various comments not relating to a specific venue | 26% |

'Outside spaces in the summer'

'Disabled friendly locations'

'You need a welcoming smallish and comfortable venue which has resources aimed at children'

There were over 100 suggestions of alternative venues in communities made by consultation respondents, including community centres, cricket pavilions, civic centres, sports clubs and village halls. As well as the previously suggested libraries, leisure centres, church halls, surgeries and schools. At the face to face meeting councillors and community representatives said that they would help to source suitable local venues.

| Venue | No of respondents |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|
| Children's centre | 15 |
| Church | 8 |
| Church/ village/ community hall | 45 |
| Library | 6 |
| School | 5 |
| Leisure/ sports centre | 3 |
| Scout Hall | 1 |
| GP/ health centre | 3 |
| Nurseries and Preschools | 1 |

Parents who responded to the impact that the changes would have on their family mostly mentioned that they would have to travel further to a children's centre building. The idea of the changes is to keep services in the community so that families do not have to travel distances to designated buildings. A priority will be to advertise services and reassure parents about the accessible local services. There were also a fair number of respondents who said that it would have little or no impact on them: *'Won't impact too much at all.'*

| Impact on your own family | Number of respondents who offered an opinion |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Exclude me | 3 |
| Travel further | 15 |
| Lack of breastfeeding venue | 9 |
| More accessible | 7 |
| None/ limited | 25 |

Comments included:

'Harder to park, reduced range of onsite facilities such as change facilities: none in libraries as an example, less play space'

'We probably won't attend anymore'

'Unlikely, but I support you finding accessible venues where families don't feel obligated to spend money.'

'May be more accessible'

'I feel it is beneficial for parents to have a local venue that is consistent, non-threatening, accessible and local. Networking is helpful and a drop in centre is useful'

'Dependent on location to whether we would use it or not.'

There were 66 suggestions of other options which could be considered for the delivery of children's centre services within reduced budgets. These will be considered going forward and include:

- Streamline services
- Donations from those that would have the capacity to make a contribution.

- Volunteers
- Facebook and message options
- Parenting support advisors available at school/nurseries
- Hire children's centres out to local organisations, clubs and people
- *'Less stay and play and more targeted and specific services'*
- More e-learning, awareness and more support for vulnerable families
- *'Weekend activities to support working families, potentially with voluntary donation for those who can afford it.'*
- Local fundraisers
- *'There might be a possibility of using students who are training as nursery personnel, nurses, playgroup leaders nannies etc. or on apprenticeship schemes for working with the young.'*
- *'Some services could be means tested'*
- *'Shut the buildings and base a support worker alongside the health visitors so that the families who really need the support have it straight away'*
- *'Good quality web site with lots of useful info to support families and keep people informed of what is available and where to find the services'*
- *'Having clear bases, sign posting and a responsive service. Building accessible hubs makes sense, but only if they are visible'[sic]*
- *'The need for publicity and networking between professionals to ensure vulnerable families/children are identified and supported'*
- *'Funding voluntary sector groups (e.g. sessions run by church volunteers) to fill any gaps in provision'*

Feedback from the face to face events and to the consultation e-mail box highlighted the importance of children's centre services and the impact that they have on the lives of children in disadvantaged families. They are also a vital lifeline to new mums whatever their circumstances, as they offer a non-judgemental environment to help understand parenthood and the challenges it brings.

Engagement with Health Services

The Bath and North East Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire Local Maternity System Programme Board (BSW LMS) also contacted the Local Authority during this period noting they would like to consult with stakeholders around the possible use of the remaining and community-based venues for children's centre programmes as part of potential community hubs. This vision was articulated in Better Births 2016³ and children's centres offer ideal possible options.

Health Visitors currently use the centre buildings for child health clinics and these can continue to operate in community venues shared with the children's centre as happens currently in Marlborough and Bradford on Avon libraries.

If Health Visiting are expected to hire separate venues that will have a negative impact on their ability to deliver the service. Children's centre services providers will need to work with health visiting to see if services can be co-delivered.

³ <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/national-maternity-review-report.pdf>

Post Consultation

After the close of the consultation a report was submitted by a Westbury resident, the mayor, deputy mayor and the local councillor and an additional two-page document from Westbury Town Council were received. Despite being late, it was a substantial report, so the ideas have been included in considering the proposals in this report. These late inclusions set out the case for retaining White Horse Children's Centre. The town has an area which is in the 20% most deprived in the country, therefore will continue to be a priority for children's centre services. Little use has been made of the building and there are fewer universal services. However, better outreach is being achieved to more vulnerable and disadvantaged families often in their own homes. We recognise that this may present as less activity for all families, but it is enabling services to reach some of the most deprived families who formerly were not attending building based activities. Spurgeons and Wiltshire Council agreed with Westbury Town Council at the consultation event to meet with the Town Council to continue to explore suitable local venues and ensure that activities are well advertised via social media and health visitors (Appendix 5). The overriding ambition of the proposed changes is to continue to work with the more disadvantaged families, to identify their need as early as possible and to support the children to achieve improved outcomes⁴.

Community Venues

Working with colleagues in communities we have identified the following council buildings which are alternative venues for children's centre services:

| | |
|------------|---|
| Amesbury | Amesbury Library |
| Chippenham | Chippenham library |
| Cricklade | Cricklade Library |
| | Cricklade Leisure Centre |
| | Jenner Hall |
| | Smart Zone Room |
| Malmesbury | Malmesbury Library |
| Mere | Mere Library |
| | Grove Building |
| Pewsey | The Vale Community Campus |
| | Pewsey Library |
| Salisbury | Bemerton Heath Centre |
| | Five Rivers Leisure Centre Salisbury |
| Trowbridge | Castle Place Leisure Centre, Trowbridge |
| | Trowbridge Sports Centre |
| | Medley Room County Hall Trowbridge |
| Warminster | Warminster Library |
| Westbury | Leighton Sports Centre |
| | Westbury Community Hub (when it opens) |
| | Westbury Library |

⁴ Responses were sent to correspondents who submitted emails or reports.

In addition to the above venues children's centre services are delivered in family homes. The following venues are already being used for children's centre services in the community:

| | |
|------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Amesbury | Amesbury Baptist Church |
| | The Redworth Centre |
| Bradford on Avon | Bradford-on-Avon Library |
| Calne | Calne Family Health Centre |
| Chippenham | Central Methodist Church |
| | Ladyfield Church |
| Corsham | Springfield Community Campus |
| | MOD Community Centre, Rudloe |
| Devizes | St James Parish Rooms |
| Downton | Downton Baptist Church Hall |
| Lyneham | St Michael's Hall, Lyneham |
| Malmesbury | Primary Care Centre |
| | Riverside Community Centre |
| Marlborough | Marlborough Library |
| | Marlborough Scout Hut |
| Melksham | Forest Community Centre, Melksham |
| | Queensway Chapel Hall, Melksham |
| Purton | Purton Village Hall |
| Ridgeway | Peatmoor Community School |
| | Blue Bus (from June 2019) |
| Tidworth | Trinity Hall Tidworth |
| Trowbridge | Longfield Community Centre |
| | Paxcroft Community Centre |
| | Studley Green Community Centre |
| Salisbury | Friary Community Centre |

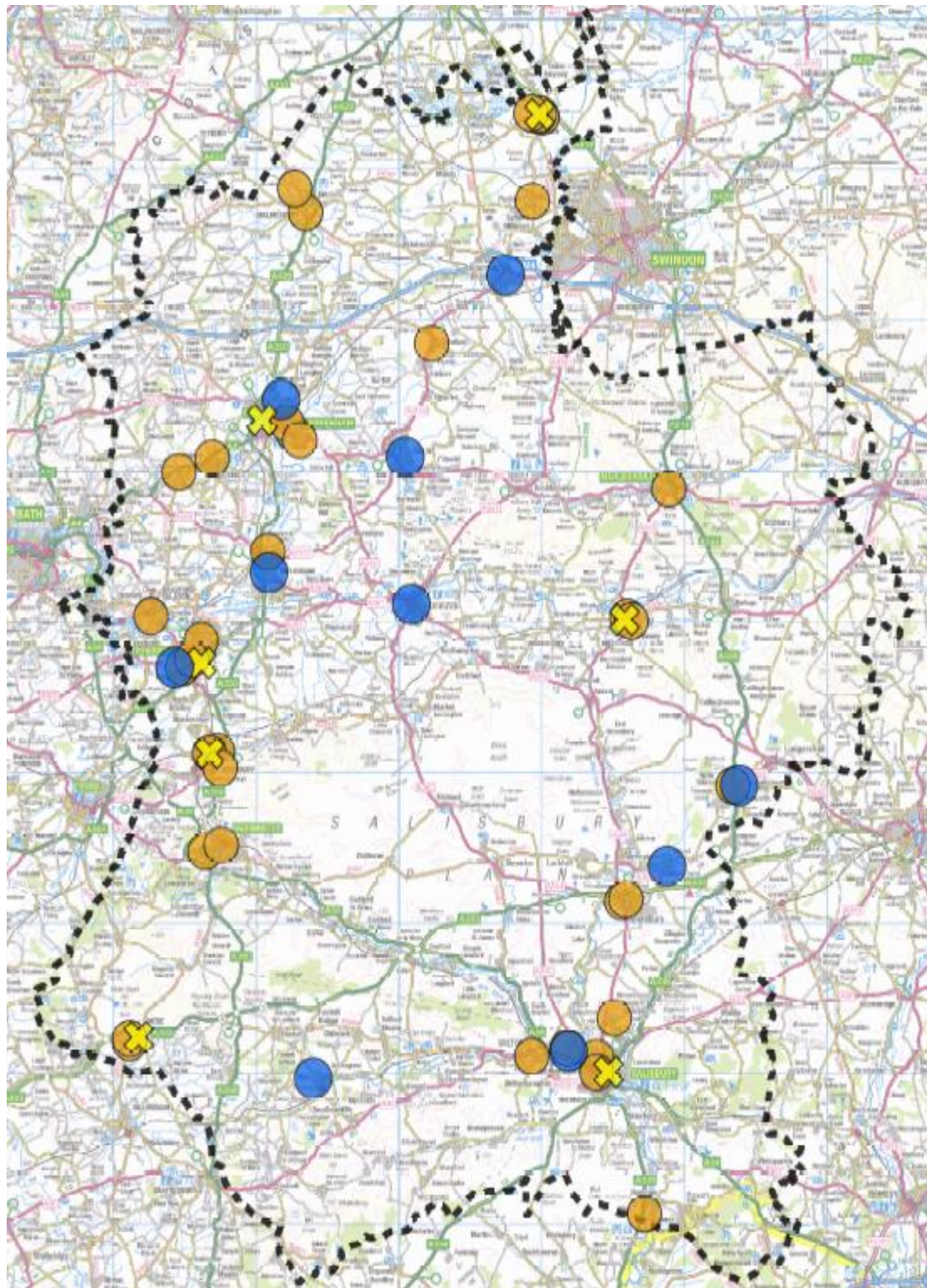
In addition to children's centre services there are many toddler groups in each community area which parents may attend, for instance, in Warminster, there are community toddler groups available every day of the week. Together for Families, a separately funded piece of work by Spurgeons offers support for families through New Parent New Baby course, this was attended by nine parents on two separate courses in Warminster last year. Courses are also run in Westbury and were attended by 19 families in the last year. Other courses have been and continue to be held in Devizes, Trowbridge and Melksham. These are run in church venues with the support of the churches. This work links with volunteer support from the Mother's Union. Baby Bundles have been given to 61 disadvantaged families who need clothes and nappies for their babies. Where there are less community groups children's centre providers ensure that there is an open access (universal) service for families. It is part of the children's centre services' remit to be aware of these local activities and ensure that families are made aware of them via health visitors and other community engagements.

Map showing location of children's centre buildings if these proposals are agreed

Blue dot – remaining centre buildings

Orange dot – delivery in community buildings

Yellow cross – planned de-registered buildings



How the service will look if the consultation results are accepted

The re-organisation will refocus children's centre services to work with families at the earliest opportunity. Services will be accessed in the following ways:

- Both children's centre providers offer a digital doorway to their services. We will aim improve this offer so that families who feel more comfortable accessing services online are able to use it as an initial approach. This will include the wider use of social media.
- Children's centres will be encouraged to continue to work closely with local partners to ensure information about activities and services are widely shared in the community and with voluntary and commercial community providers (e.g. parent and toddler groups, nurseries, soft play centres etc.)
- The Early Help Hub will give early access to families who need support, ensuring families receive the right support at the right time and place, reducing barriers to access and duplication of services.
- Health Visitors will continue to be a primary referrer for additional support.
- Children's centre services will have a tiered approach offering relevant support depending on a family's needs.

In discussion with the children's centre providers the following efficiencies have been identified to ensure frontline services are maintained:

- Closing six of the sites which are underutilised and delivering services in more community settings
- Management rationalisation
- Some reduction in administration staffing costs

Overview and Scrutiny Engagement

5. A Rapid Scrutiny Group took place to discuss the proposal of reducing the number of children's centre buildings. This group was able to specifically explore if there were genuinely alternative community venues, whether the most vulnerable families were benefiting from and would continue to benefit from proposed changes, the scope of outreach, the value of social media as a key part of contacting families, the multi-agency approach to provision, the reuse of buildings, (in the main by childcare providers) and the contractual framework behind the services. The report is attached as a supplement to this cabinet report.

Safeguarding Implications

6. Safeguarding is a priority of both children's centre services contract holders. They regularly monitor cases and work with families at all levels of need from universal through to families who are at risk of breakdown or who are already separated. There will be no increased risk to children and families through these proposals.

Public Health Implications

7. Specialist Public Health Nurses, commissioned by Public Health, deliver a universal service that aims to empower parents to make positive choices to support the health and wellbeing of their family and to identify those families that require additional support. Child health clinics are part of this service and where possible are run in children's centre buildings; this enables easy access to support for families and strengthens relationships between early years practitioners. This model supports the local drive to improve integrated working particularly in the early years at a time when we have the potential to make the greatest difference to children's long-term outcomes.

Children's centre services work with Public Health to deliver Baby Steps courses to vulnerable expectant parents and Mum2Mum breastfeeding support groups in centre buildings. The children's centres also act as a distribution point for healthy start vitamins and vouchers

Procurement Implications

8. There are no procurement implications.

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

9. Children's centre services offer a free accessible service to parents in Wiltshire. Universal services are available in halls and centres that are local to families. Where families live in more rural areas, services can be delivered to their home in the form of outreach support. It has always been the vision of children's centre services to be accessible to all families who need additional support. If there are less buildings, this will not have a negative impact on services to those most in need. All services are affected by access to travel links.

There is an Equalities Impact Assessment attached in the appendices. This evaluation concludes that there is some risk of families being adversely affected by the change to delivering services in the community rather than in designated buildings, but this should be managed by offering home visiting for those most in need and other services in community buildings which should be local to families. There is a concern that child health clinics will not be offered in as many venues as their service delivery is modelled on the use of children's centre buildings. To mitigate this children's centre services providers will work with Virgincare to co-locate child health clinics with sessions organised and run by the children's centre services providers. Staff will have to travel more but this will be offset by reducing the number of buildings that require upkeep. Work will be undertaken to ensure that there is a low to moderate impact on those families with protected characteristics, specifically pregnant and breastfeeding mothers and those in lower socio-economic groups.

The assessment conclusion is that the impact on vulnerable groups is minimal, as the main aim is to bring services closer to these families. Indeed, the aim is to increase engagement with vulnerable families. It is acknowledged that the key risk is linked to the visibility of services which can be interpreted as a withdrawal of services. Communication via social media/ apps and texts (the

preferred method of communication by families) will need to be appropriately invested in.

Environmental and Climate Change Considerations

10. The proposal may result in increased energy consumption involving transport by staff but a decrease in the energy consumption of buildings. It will also give better use of existing buildings getting better value from the investment of heating and lighting in these current buildings. If services are delivered in community buildings near families, there should be a reduction in vehicle use. There are no specific measures required to reduce the carbon emissions associated with the proposal. There are no additional risks relating to day to day environmental management.

Risk Assessment

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision and related work is not taken

11. There will be a reduction in the number of staff able to deliver children’s centre services if the buildings remain open and there is a budget reduction. If these changes are not co-produced and integrated with a wider engagement in early help, the services may become isolated and disjointed.

There will continue to be a significant number of families living in rural areas that will not be able to access services.

Potentially not using community venues e.g. libraries, would put these provisions under threat as well due to under use of expensive buildings.

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision is taken and actions that will be taken to manage these risks

| | Risk | Action to mitigate the risk |
|----|--|--|
| 1. | Clawback payment of SureStart grant requested by the DfE | Children’s centre buildings will be used to provide support for under fives through childcare, so clawback does not apply. Where the building is not used for under fives the DfE funding was used to make alterations to buildings and these have now exceeded the clawback requirements, so clawback will not be payable. |
| 2. | Without buildings services are less visible to families | There will be an emphasis on the children’s centres developing greater engagement in sharing information about their services in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public and commercial resources e.g. Libraries, soft play centres, • Cafes and restaurants that families frequent • Social media |

| | | |
|----|---|---|
| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools and nurseries <p>There will be a focus on partnership information sharing ensuring that all professionals are able to share information about partner services with families.</p> <p>The Community Engagement Managers (CEMs) will help share information.</p> |
| 3. | Health Visitor clinics will need new venues | Health Visitor clinics will be run in venues identified with Health Visitors and linked to the work of the children's centre services. The children's centres and health visiting services are working together to negotiate with local venues which in turn contribute to keeping local services vibrant in rural areas e.g. Libraries |
| 4. | Lack of rooms for children's services meetings with families | Assessments have and are being made in the key towns to use available venues such as libraries and leisure centre rooms as well as sites where parents already frequent. e.g. softplay centres, and parent/toddler groups. |
| 5. | Lack of rooms for midwifery clinics, IAPT sessions, CAMHS sessions | Services have been asked to source their own rooms from their budgets, but in partnership with the children's centres |
| 6. | Possible venue for Maternity Transformation Plan (MTP) Community Hubs will not be available | Conversations with representatives from MTP will ensure that there is a joined-up approach to provision |
| | These public building will be unused | There has been significant interest from Nursery providers to expand or use these buildings for extra childcare in the area. |

Financial Implications (agreed on behalf of the S151 (CS – MT))

12. The planned change in the delivery model for services will result in a saving of £250,000 per annum. This is 7% reduction on the previous contract values.

Discussions with the current providers have taken place in order to achieve the new ways of working with families within the lower contract values through efficiency and service remodelling.

Reductions in service costs were proposed by the providers across management, building costs and admin support. Delivery models will move towards better use of local community venues. The use of local community venues will give greater security to other community provision e.g. libraries and community hubs.

| | 18/19 Contract | 19/20 Contract |
|------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| | Number of Buildings Utilised | Number of Buildings Proposed |
| North Area | 5 | 4 |

| | | |
|-------------------|-----------|-----------|
| East Area | 3 | 2 |
| West Area | 5 | 3 |
| South Area | 4 | 2 |
| TOTAL | 17 | 11 |

The providers were paying rent to the Council for the buildings. The lost rental income will be replaced in the majority if not all properties because there are a number of childcare providers who are keen to expand into these buildings, giving new childcare provision in the area, increasing the number of small to medium size enterprises (SMEs) and job opportunities in the area.

The period of time for the DfE Sure Start grant clawback arrangements for closing centres has passed and there is no risk of clawback for these leased buildings

Legal Implications

13. The provision of children's centre buildings was restricted to use by children aged 0-5 and their families. If the buildings are closed there could be a risk of Surestart Grant clawback from the DfE. This will not apply if the buildings are used for the provision of childcare and will only apply to capital build project (Longfield, Westbury, Pewsey, Cricklade).

The Salisbury City building will not be used for childcare or the provision of services for children under the age of five. These services will be available in the Methodist Church next door; therefore, Clawback will not be payable.

There is guidance regarding the closure of children's centre services and buildings.⁵ This guidance has been carefully followed to take forward the consultation and the proposed changes.

Options Considered

14. Several options were considered around the future delivery of children's centre services.

| Option | Consideration |
|--|---|
| No change | Funding focused on buildings at a time of financial pressure which should be directed to staffing/service |
| Reduce Staff | This would result in an inferior service for disadvantaged families |
| Relocate centre buildings | This would be costly in the short term and not provide any benefits to families |
| Dissolve the children's centre service | Negative impact on disadvantaged families |

Conclusion

15. Children's centre services offer vital support to parents in the early years of a child's life and it is important that this support continues in the most effective way with genuine outreach to families across rural Wiltshire. The best way for the service to continue is to offer programmes in community buildings, homes and venues that families already attend and venues that also support children's development (e.g. libraries) and to close some of the existing centre buildings. This releases funding from building rent and the related costs allowing the remaining money to be directed to frontline staffing. If the buildings were retained, then the providers would need to reduce the number of front facing staff working with families and that would result in an ineffective service that would leave disadvantaged families more vulnerable to poor outcomes. The public consultation around the future use of children's centre buildings was 55% in favour of the proposal to offer services in the community and for investment be made in staff rather than buildings. The Town Council in Westbury feel very strongly that the centre should be retained in the town. If this were to happen it would affect the number of children's centre staff available to work in the community with families.

Respondents have mentioned the importance of the support from children's centre services and their desire for it to continue in an accessible way, this will be a priority of any future service delivery. If services are delivered in the locality where a family live it makes the likelihood of community cohesion greater.

Children's centre staff will continue to work with partners, specifically Health Visitors who offer the universal service to parents in the early years of a child's life, to ensure that services are clearly available and visible to all parents who need them.

It will be very important to liaise closely with Virgincare who offer the health visiting service. Plans are already underway to align services more effectively and to offer more focussed provision for those who are most in need.

It will be appropriate to engage Wiltshire Council library and leisure centre staff, who are forward facing, so that they are able to direct parents to where activities are being held and to available support services. Significantly the role of Community Engagement Managers and Local Area Co-ordinators will be important in working alongside children centre services to ensure comprehensive and varied activities and support in all areas

Social media is a growing resource which is particularly used by younger people, and this will need to be further used to ensure that the messages and information around services are widely available.

As respondents mentioned, the internet and apps are a great resource for parents to initially locate support. The digital doorway and platform currently offered by the providers should be further extended to provide up to date support for parents, this could be linked to Wiltshire Council resources to avoid replication.

Children's commissioning will continue to work with the Families and Children's Transformation Programme (FACT) to ensure that partners work together to develop a range of timely and coordinated support.

Proposals

16. The recommendation of this report is that the Cabinet is asked to make a decision:
- a. To reduce the number of children's centre buildings by six (Cricklade, Longfield Trowbridge, Mere, Pewsey, Salisbury City, Westbury White Horse) and increase use of community venues and focus the work in the community, using space in libraries, leisure and health and well-being centres where possible and practical.
 - b. To consider five of buildings for childcare provision and return to one in Salisbury City to the landlord.
 - c. To work closely with maternal health and community childcare providers to support the choice of future community venues and keep and expand the scope of services to families in the most deprived areas of Wiltshire.
 - d. To work closely with families to utilise social media and community networks to raise the profile of available provision.

Helen Jones (Director - Joint Commissioning)




















Report Author: Lucy-Anne Bryant Lead Commissioner

Date of report: 15 April 2019

Appendices

- i. Equalities Impact Assessment
- ii. Children's centre consultation with final results
- iii. Children's centre consultation graphs and comments
- iv. Westbury Parent Consultation Meeting notes 20190226
- v. Westbury Partner consultation Meeting notes 20199226
- vi. Cricklade Parent Consultation Meeting notes 20190308
- vii. Cricklade Partner Consultation Meeting notes 20190306
- viii. Pewsey Partner Consultation Meeting notes 20190208
- ix. Consultation Response from LMS
- x. Virgincare Health Visiting Response
- xi. 19 02 17 Children's Centre Rationalisation Consultation E-mail response
- xii. 19 03 Consultation Response about Westbury from a resident
- xiii. 19 02 17 Children's Centre Rationalisation Kimmins
- xiv. Children's Centre Services July 2019
- xv. Children's Centre Map future locations
- xvi. Report from Unitary Councillor, mayor, deputy mayor and Nadine Crook
- xvii. Comments from Westbury Town Council
- xviii. Children's Centre Fact Sheets

xix. Letter from Andrew Murrison MP

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