

**Wiltshire Council**

**Children's Select Committee**

**Date 05 March 2019**

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## **Consultation on Changes to Children's Centre Services 2019**

### **Purpose of Report**

1. This report outlines why the Council is proposing moving children's centre services from buildings to community venues and the related consultation process it is undertaking.

### **Background**

2. 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 gaining the contracts to provide these services. The focus of the new contracts was on the original children's centre 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 centres have been successfully using a broader range of community venues aiming to deliver services and programmes in places where families are living, socialising and working.
3. Wiltshire Council is facing reduced funding and, to meet the budget gap in 2019-20, services have been reviewed to identify whether they can be delivered more efficiently. In reviewing children's centres, 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 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. The centres that would be de-commissioned are in the less deprived areas and have very little service delivery taking place in the buildings. It is anticipated that these changes would achieve savings of £250 000 in 2019-20.

## **Main Considerations for the Council**

4. To ensure that the proposed community model and reduction in funding is the most effective we aim to:
  - a) Realign the children's centres to a preventative model
  - b) Place children's centres more firmly within an integrated offer of early help
  - c) Coproduce the changes with children's centre providers and other partners and stakeholders
  - d) Closely follow guidance regarding changes to children centre services with full consultation and impact analysis
  - e) Achieve efficiencies largely through not using discrete buildings, but having greater use of existing community venues.

## **How We Will Achieve These Aims**

5. The reorganisation 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 improve this offer so that families who feel more comfortable accessing services online are able to use it as an initial approach
  - Children's centres will be encouraged 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.
6. Children's centres will provide universal support:
  - We will invest in Five to Thrive, an attachment based approach which encourages parents to interact with and listen to their child, improving behaviour and parenting expectation
  - Wiltshire children's centres are part of the scaling up of the Empowering Parents Empowering Communities (EPEC) programme which supports families with parenting and is facilitated by volunteers alongside a trained practitioner. This model would enable parenting support to be more accessible to parents across Wiltshire
  - Open access stay and play events will be available and will have the principles of Five to Thrive as a basis of the session.
7. The children's centres will also provide additional support:
  - There will be closer work with health visitors with a focus on identifying children early. Where there are concerns about a child at birth, six weeks or at the 9-11 month check by health visitors, families will be offered evidenced based support from the children's centre teams

- There will be an increased focus on the development of early language and communication as part of a Early Years strategy led jointly by Public Health, commissioning and the Clinical Commissioning Group
  - Bookstart Bookcorner activities will be undertaken with families who need support with children's literacy
  - Wiltshire children's centres already have a good relationship with Family and Community Learning, but, in the future, programmes will also need to focus on getting families into further training and work and for them to be delivered where there is an identified need.
8. Finally, children's centres will also provide intensive support:
- Wiltshire children's centres will continue to host and co-deliver Baby Steps, a nine week NSPCC evidence based programme, which supports attachment and develops parenting
  - Webster Stratton Incredible Years parenting programmes will continue to be offered to parents whose children are receiving support from social care or where there is a concern that without intervention the need could escalate to social care threshold
  - The Freedom programme will offer support to mothers affected by domestic abuse
  - You and Me, Mum will be available for families affected by domestic abuse.
  - More outreach support will be offered in homes to families where a 1:1 approach will have the greatest impact. They will use strategies from the evidenced based programmes that are used in the children's centres.
9. Other considerations
- Staff in children's centres have been trained in Make Every Contact Count (MECC) and this approach will support families to change behaviours that may be damaging to their health and their child's
  - Wiltshire is part of a DWP Contract Package Area in the south west to deliver programmes that will work with families to Reduce Parental Conflict. This service will be available from April 2019.
  - There will be a greater focus in future on monitoring outcomes and ensuring that we achieve the Troubled Families outcomes of a reduction in support from the public purse
  - Local Area Co-ordinators are already in place in three Wiltshire areas and about to go live in six other areas. This role will be used to link the work of the children's centres with the wider community. Children's centres will also link more closely with the Community Engagement Managers. They will continue to be represented at Multi Agency Forums
  - The Good Level of Development (GLD) for children at the end of Foundation Stage has improved year on year and it is currently at 72.1%. Focussed work is undertaken with parents in areas where there has been a low GLD. The GLD achievement gap is currently 50% and children's centre staff work with families who are eligible for Better2gether Funding, free early learning for two year olds of 15 hours a week

- Wiltshire Children’s Centre staff will work closely with the early years team from Wiltshire Council to plan forum meetings and focus work so that those that are most in need receive appropriate services and support at the earliest opportunity.

10. We will place children’s centres more firmly within an integrated offer of early help:

- Early Years Services in Wiltshire are being reviewed to offer a more streamlined approach to supporting settings. As part of this review children’s centres staff will continue to link with childcare settings to offer complementary parenting support to families
- Children’s centre staff will target work with settings to offer support to parents where there is a low Good Level of Development to improve the Home Learning Environment and family relationships
- Children’s centre staff will check termly with settings on the progress of Better2Gether funded two-year olds and offer additional support for families where necessary
- Children’s centre staff will work with the Early Years Advisory Teachers to ensure that the education offer in children’s centres meets the principles and standards of the Early Years Foundation Stage and with the Inclusion Officers on accessing appropriate services
- Children’s centre staff will have a process in place with health visitors that will enable support to be offered at the earliest and most appropriate point and will avoid duplication
- Centres will work with schools and preschools to identify families who have specific needs where early intervention will have a significant impact.

11. 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.

12. It is proposed that the following sites are closed:

Site	Detail	Why should this site be considered for closure	Alternative use
Cricklade	Mobile building on St Sampson’s School site next to Thames pre-school mobile	Less deprived area and centre is not in the right location for those who want to use it.	Offer to the pre-school as additional childcare places
Mere	Converted rooms upstairs in the primary school, with toilets and an office	Less deprived area very little use of the centre building by the public. Only used 3	Offer to the school for additional places or to the pre-school

	downstairs, leased from Duchy	days a week	
Pewsey	Purpose built building on Pewsey school site shared with Puddleducks Pre-school	Less deprived area and very little use of the centre by the public	Offer to the onsite childcare provider and possibly retain a contact room at the back
Salisbury City	Stand alone building in St Edmund's Church Street	Building is used three days a week by health visiting and very little by children's centre services  The Little Folly on Bemerton Heath building will remain to serve all of Salisbury	Relinquish the lease of the building
Trowbridge – Longfield	Upstairs in a purpose-built building on Oasis Academy Longmeadow site. Stepping Stones and YMCA Little Shoots are downstairs	Less deprived area in Trowbridge  The building at Studley Green will remain and this will serve all of Trowbridge	Offer to the onsite childcare and District Specialist Centre
Westbury – White Horse	Purpose built centre on Westbury Infants School site shared with onsite childcare Bright Stars	Rooms are small and services can be offered in the community	Offer to the onsite childcare

13. It is likely that most of the efficiencies can be met through building closures, however, there will be a reduction in management and administration costs. There will be a recruitment freeze to these posts. It is proposed that the following savings will be made:

Building costs	£110,000
Management rationalisation	£90,000
Admin Staff	£50,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>£250,000</b>

14. We aim to take these changes forward in co-production with the children's centres, key stakeholders and the families that use them. The key stakeholders are:

- Parents
- Staff
- Health Visitors
- Midwifery
- Early years settings

- Wiltshire Parent Carer Council
  - Oral health team
  - Health trainers
  - JCP
  - Debt advice services
  - IAPT services
  - CAMHS staff
  - Libraries
  - Primary schools
  - Community leaders.
15. Representatives from Procurement, Legal, Properties, Finance, Communications, Public Health and Commissioning have been involved in meetings to manage the change process.
16. There is no statutory guidance on how long to consult over the closure of a children's centre building. Historical guidance was that consultation should be no longer than 12 weeks and recent consultations in other authorities have been as little as five weeks. Our consultation period will run from January 23rd until March 20th 2019, lasting eight weeks. A report will be taken to Cabinet on 30th April 2019. The proposed changes will take effect from 1st July 2019, the beginning of the children's centre contract year, which runs 1st July to 30th June.
17. The consultation is mainly in the form of an online survey as well as public and professional meetings in the centres where there are proposed to be closures.<sup>1</sup>

### **Mitigation**

18. To mitigate the effects of the reduction in budget, it is proposed that the children's centres offer a more focussed early help offer for children below the social care threshold with support pathways for children who are subject to a CP or CiN plan. There is also a proposal to appoint a Grants Officer who will seek and apply for grants to support discrete pieces of work that will ensure that the children's centre objectives are achieved. These will include:
- Improving the Home Learning Environment by offering parenting, nutrition, budgeting
  - Literacy support for parents and children
  - Reducing parental conflict
  - Attachment and adult/child interactions
  - Relationship approach to family resilience

### **Safeguarding Considerations**

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<sup>1</sup> At the time of writing, one Area Board, Pewsey, has requested a presentation and a Town Councillor will attend the partners' meeting in Westbury. Two councillors and four preschool managers have each attended a session of the eight consultation events that have been held so far. No parents have attended. There has been little reaction to the Facebook posts although they have received 1500 views.

19. 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**

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

### **Environmental and Climate Change Considerations**

21. The proposal may result in increased energy consumption involving transport 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. 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.

### **Equalities Impact of the Proposal**

22. 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.
23. There is an equalities impact assessment in process which will be updated once the consultation replies have been collated.

### **Risk Assessment**

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

24. 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 coproduced and integrated with a wider engagement in early help, the services may become isolated and disjointed.

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

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	<b>Risk</b>	<b>Action to mitigate the risk</b>
1.	Clawback payment requested by the DfE	Children's centre buildings will be used to provide support for under 5s through childcare
2.	Without buildings services are less visible to families	<p>There will be an emphasis on the children's centres developing greater engagement in sharing information about their services in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• public and commercial resources e.g. Libraries, soft play centres,</li> <li>• cafes and restaurants that families frequent</li> <li>• social media</li> <li>• schools and nurseries</li> </ul> <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

### **Financial Implication**

26. The planned change in the delivery of services will result in a saving of £250,000 per annum. The use of local community venues will give greater security to other community provision e.g. libraries and community hubs.

There are a number of childcare providers who are keen to expand into vacated buildings, giving new childcare in the area and increasing the number of small to medium size enterprises (SMEs) and job opportunities in the area.

## **Legal Implications**

27. 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 is a risk of clawback from the DfE. This will not apply if the buildings are used for the provision of childcare.

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.

There is guidance regarding the closure of children's centre services and buildings<sup>2</sup>. This guidance has been carefully followed to take forward the consultation and the proposed changes.

## **Options Considered**

28. The budget is being reduced so there is a need to make service cuts. There is no other viable alternative that would retain good quality services for families with children under the age of five.

## **Conclusions**

29. Children's centre services are fundamental to a range of early help and early years provision to support the health and wellbeing of children and families in Wiltshire. The proposals identified here whilst making efficiencies will bring support closer to families while protecting provision in areas of highest deprivation.

## **Proposal**

30. The committee notes the proposals as presented and supports the consultation to understand and appreciate the impacts (both positive and negative) of the proposed changes.

**Helen Jones**  
**Director of Commissioning**

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Report Author: Lucy-Anne Bryant, Lead Commissioner

05 March 2019

## **Background Papers**

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[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/678913/childrens\\_centre\\_stat\\_guidance\\_april-2013.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/678913/childrens_centre_stat_guidance_april-2013.pdf)

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## Appendices

1. Consultation document
2. Meeting times and venues document
3. Centre running costs document
4. Select Committee Presentation



Children's C Meeting date



Meeting date



Surgeons C



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Committee presenta