

Chairman's Announcements

Subject:	Children's centres
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In line with Government requirements Wiltshire created 30 designated Sure Start children's centres between 2006 – 2011. The initial centres were located within areas with the highest levels of deprivation and additional centres were set up in areas with a higher population of children aged under five. Their Core Purpose is:

- To support good early child development and school readiness.
- To raise parenting aspirations and improve parenting skills.
- To improve child and family health and life chances.

Wiltshire's children's centre services are currently delivered by a four of voluntary and community sector organisations. The contracts for children's centres finish in June 2016 and the council is looking at how to ensure that the money spent has the greatest positive impact on young children's development before re-tendering the contracts. The annual expenditure on children's centres services is currently just over £4m. Along with other local authorities across the country, Wiltshire Council has significantly less funding available due to reductions in central government funding. We therefore need to find ways to continue to meet the needs of young children and their families through re-shaping service delivery whilst looking at opportunities to save money. We want to ensure that we maximise support for the most deprived areas whilst retaining wide service coverage across the county.

Changes in national and local policy on early years since the children's centre contracts started in 2010

- Nationally the Childcare Minister has emphasized the importance of delivering support in the community rather than focusing on the buildings these services are delivered from.
- Locally our focus is increasingly on supporting the most vulnerable children and families at the earliest opportunity through effective partnership working with services such as Midwifery and Health Visiting, with providers of childcare and with primary schools to ensure that children are ready to start school.
- The Government's policy on free entitlement to childcare for disadvantaged two year olds and the recent announcement on the increase in free entitlement to childcare for three and four year olds of working parents (from 15 to 30 hours) means that the council needs to look at how to create more childcare places as part of its early years strategy. There is an opportunity to consider this agenda alongside delivery of children's centre services.

Proposed Model for Consultation

- We have spoken to children's centre staff, early year's professionals and parents and their view is that front line staff and effective partnership working makes the most difference for families.
- Wiltshire council will refocus the current resources to deliver more services to the wider community with less emphasis on the buildings they are delivered from.
- Children's centre staff will continue front line delivery of services and support.
- The space released by de-registering some of the existing buildings could be used to provide more childcare places for 3 and 4 year old children of working parents.
- Children's centre services will be delivered from 15 key buildings based in four geographical clusters – North, East, South and West from July 2016.
- The proposals on where children's centre should be located in the future are based on the following factors:
 - The level of deprivation in each area
 - The number of children aged under five living in the area
 - The suitability of current buildings to deliver children's centre services
 - The potential to expand childcare provision

What do these proposals mean for the delivery of help for families with young children?

- The same children's centre staff will continue to support families in a wider range of locations through more use of other community buildings.

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- Families with young children will continue to access support through more increased partnership working with Midwives and Health Visitors.
- Areas with the greatest levels of need and more young children will continue to have access to a designated children's centre building in or very close to their local community.
- There will be greater availability of childcare places in communities where more provision is needed.

Consultation is open from 14 September until 6 November

- Meetings and events are planned with key stakeholders including professionals and parents and carers.
- Briefings will be given to all council staff and its partners involved in the delivery of services for families including voluntary sector organisations.
- A questionnaire is available on line and in paper format at the end of the consultation document
- The consultation document is on the council website as follows :
www.wiltshire.gov.uk/schoolseducationandlearning/earlyyearsandchildcare/childrenscentresinwiltshire.htm