



Brent Consultation Team

Communication & Consultation Unit

**St Raphael's combined
Children's Youth & Community Centre**

9th January 2007

Community Consultation conducted for
Brent's Children & Families Service

Table of Contents

1	Introduction	3
2	Background & preamble	3
3	Presentation and interpretation of data	4
4	Publication of the data	5
5	Main Findings.....	5
5.1	What services do residents want to see in the Children’s Centre?	5
5.1.1	Retaining existing services.....	5
5.1.2	Is there a need for another children’s centre in the local area?.....	7
5.1.3	New facilities and future provision.....	8
5.1.4	Opening hours	9
5.2	How should the centre be refurbished?	9
5.2.1	Extension of the centre	10
5.2.2	Suggested improvements	11
5.2.3	Further consultation on the refurbishment.....	11
5.3	Options for management of the centre.....	12
Appendix 1	- Resident concerns	14
Appendix 2	- other comments	16

1 Introduction

This report contains the findings of two consultation exercises, conducted with local Brent residents at St Raphael's youth and community centre on Tuesday 9th January 2007. The objective of the consultation was to explore community feeling and issues arising from the establishment of a children's centre at the current youth and community centre premises in Rainborough Close and specifically, to gather information from the community on service provision, premises refurbishment and management options for the new centre.

The consultation took the form of moderated discussion sessions with members of the public drawn from the St Raphael's, Brentfield and Stonebridge areas.

Community input was recorded on pinpoint boards and written up by staff from the Brent Consultation Team.

2 Background & preamble

In July 2006 Brent Council's executive approved in principle the recommendation to change the use of St Raphael's Youth and Community Centre to become a combined Children's Youth and Community Centre. In November 2006, the executive further approved a provisional capital allocation of monies in excess of £400k for improvement of the centre. The executive further directed officers to consult with the community to seek their views on how the capital investment in the community centre could best be used. The consultation programme took the form of presentations and feedback at the December meeting of the St Raphael's neighbourhood forum and two consultation workshops, (the current consultation and the subject of this report), scheduled for 9th January 2007.

The current consultation aimed to gather views on three key questions:

1. What services do the community wish to see in the combined Children's, Youth and Community Centre?

2. How should the centre be refurbished?
3. What ideas do the community have for the management of the new combined centre?

Two consultation sessions were held, one in early afternoon and another in the evening of Tuesday 9th January 2007. Fifteen residents attended the first session and just over thirty residents attended in the evening. At least five residents were present at both sessions. Both sessions began with a short contextual scene setting presentation given by Brent's head of early year's service, Lesley Fox-Lee.

Both groups registered considerable vocal unhappiness at the extent to which the council decision making process had progressed ahead of the consultation exercise. Most of those attending claimed to be under an impression that the current consultation was a precursor to decisions being taken regarding ownership of the current building and the establishment of a children's centre. The strength of feeling was such that it would not have been possible to proceed without giving an undertaking to record resident concerns regarding the process. These issues and concerns are set out at appendix 1.

3 Presentation and interpretation of data

Qualitative research, (consultation), is an interactive process between the facilitators and participants and between the participants themselves. Qualitative research gives an insight into attitudes and reasons for these attitudes. Results are not based on numeric or statistical evidence, but on the attitudes, experiences and perceptions of a small sample of residents.

Qualitative research tends to elicit more negative than positive responses, as participants are inclined to discuss aspects of which they are critical, or which they feel need improving. This is very apparent with this particular consultation exercise, given the extent to which a majority of the participants claimed to be in outright opposition to the proposals as they understood them.

This should be borne in mind when interpreting the findings from the group discussions.

4 Publication of the data

Copies of the draft consultation report will be made available to those participants who registered their contact details. In addition a copy of the final report will be available on consultation tracker - the Brent consultation website at: www.brent.gov.uk/consultation

5 Main Findings

5.1 What services do residents want to see in the Children's Centre?

5.1.1 Retaining existing services

A consistent and strong message that emerged from both sessions was that the participants wanted the existing services provided at St Raphael's Community Centre to be retained and ideally expanded. The participants did not want the community centre converted to a children's centre and the associated improvements, if it was to be at the expense of the services, projects and activities that the centre currently provides.

'The Council is effectively making residents fight among themselves and force prioritisation of services'.

'Missing "social life" that was there before'.

There was a genuine fear and scepticism among the participants that if the proposal goes ahead, services for children under-five and their parents/carers, will dominate the centre. In the event participants felt existing services and the wider local community could be marginalised and ultimately forced out of the centre.

There was widespread agreement that the centre should meet the needs and provide services for all sections of the local diverse community and not just for children under-five and their parents/carers.

'Continue partnership working with Age Concern, pensioners' and youth advice sessions'.

'Continuation of funding, projects in partnership'.

There were also concerns that the term 'Children's Centre' would act as a barrier and discourage the wider community such as youth and/or older people from using the centre. It was felt the term 'children's centre' implied the provision of services for certain users and not the community overall.

Tensions were also clearly evident at both sessions between different local factions. There was considerable discussion around what services are currently provided at the centre and issues were raised around accessibility and affordability. As mentioned earlier a priority for the majority of the participants is to ensure the centre develops into an integrated community centre that is both accessible and affordable for the whole community. Many participants also wanted improved communication and marketing of the centres' services and facilities.

Participants, particularly from the evening session, were also concerned that the centre was simply too small to accommodate existing services as well as the proposed additional services related to the children's centre.

'Under-5's need their own separate area, there only 2 toilets'.

'Child protection – provide a safe & secure environment – cameras, monitoring of movement, adequate security, 'green' bldg, ventilation, to meet Health & Safety standards'.

5.1.2 Is there a need for another children's centre in the local area?

Participants at the early afternoon session expressed outright opposition to conversion of the community centre to a children's centre and did not think there was a need for another children's centre locally.

In the evening session there was some division and discussion around this issue. There was initially very strong opposition and many of the group felt such services would just be duplicating what is already available at other centres such as Monks Park or the Harmony Centre.

Even so, one resident at the evening session said that although services for under-five year olds and their parents/carers were provided at other local centres, there were often difficulties in accessing them. This resident pointed out that existing crèche and nursery places were often full and that some residents were not able to afford the cost of nursery provision in the local area. There was a mixed response from the group when this resident suggested that there was a need for additional free or affordable nursery places, and that they could be provided by the proposed St Raphael's Children's Centre.

'Nursery across the way doesn't cater for everyone / not everyone can afford to pay / need free places'

'New clinic nearby offers services, Monks Park annexe, but not easily accessible on these 3 estates, over 900 families in this area'

The resident went onto say that the children's centre would serve all three local estates - Brentfield, St Raphael's and Stonebridge and not just St Raphael's.

A crèche - so that parents could leave their young children while they attended hospital appointments or go shopping was one example of a service that could be provided by the centre. This was felt to be beneficial for parents with children under-five.

'Need crèche locally e.g. when parents go to Ikea or appointments'.

5.1.3 New facilities and future provision

There was agreement from virtually all participants that there is a lack of activities for young people in the local area, particularly those in the age range 6 to 21. Participants were keen that services and activities targeted at young people should be an integral part of the future development of the centre. Suggestions included:

- Youth clubs open to till 10pm
- After school and holiday clubs
- Dance, music and performing workshops
- Sports activities (netball, football and other sports)
- Mentoring schemes

Concerns were also raised about local dispersal orders that have been put in place by the Safer Neighbourhoods Team. Participants generally felt providing more youth activities from the centre would be a more constructive way of tackling young people loitering on the estates and getting into trouble. Participants again stressed the need for such activities to be affordable, well advertised and accessible to the local youth. Some participants felt that this was not the case at the present time.

Other activities and services participants wanted to be available at the centre included:

- Keep fit (for all ages)
- Healthy eating, cooking and lifestyle advice and guidance (for all ages)
- Church / Faith / Muslim groups
- Private functions and social events
- Adult education and training courses, e.g. IT or First Aid

- More partnership working and local provision of services, e.g. Age Concern, PCT, legal advice and a citizen's advice service. *'Such services used to be provided at the centre'*.
- Activities for older residents, e.g. luncheon clubs
- Activities for disabled residents

It should be noted that very few residents who attended the two consultation sessions had young children under-five. It was therefore not surprising that there was very little enthusiasm for services such as early education, child health services, outreach for parents, help for children with behavioural problems, or for the centre acting as a base for local child minders. Only one participant identified activities and facilities for single parents as something they would like to see provided by the centre.

More targeted consultation with parents who have children under-five would be needed to accurately gauge the views of this group and identify what services they would like to see provided by the centre.

5.1.4 Opening hours

Many of the participants did not favour the centre's opening hours being restricted. Although 9am to 5pm would probably be adequate for children under-five and their parents/carers, participants felt more suitable opening hours would be 8am to 10pm Monday to Friday and even later closing on Saturday and Sunday. This would ensure the centre was open at peak times and that young people would be more likely to use the centre, (evenings), and would also allow more scope for private/social functions.

5.2 How should the centre be refurbished?

Participants were aware that a budget of approximately £400,000 was available for refurbishment. It was generally recognised however, that this amount would be insufficient for major rebuilding works.

'£400k capital is not enough'.

Participants felt that spending money on the 'Phase 3' extension FIRST would be preferable - before making decisions on what services to provide.

'The present space not enough for the facilities we want'.

'One side of building is for youth as present. Provision for under-5's is likely to be at the expense of young people'.

5.2.1 Extension of the centre

Both groups acknowledged that £400,000 would not be enough to cover any major works to the centre. However, the majority of participants felt that without additional money to extend the existing building, it would be unlikely to be 'fit for purpose' as an integrated community and children's centre.

There were discussions around the ownership of the building and participants wanted clarification on this. Several participants felt the community had raised money to support the running and maintenance of the centre for several years. Over this period, none, or very limited funding was received from the council and participants felt this gave the community a stake in the centre's ownership. There was general agreement that £400,000 was insufficient to adapt the building to a standard whereby it could continue to provide existing services as well as those additional ones within the children's centre proposal.

Participants also raised the issue that originally the centre was due to be developed over three phases. The third phase was to involve extending the existing building. Participants wanted to see adequate funding spent on extending the building and completion of the third phase as was originally intended. There was a consensus that the council should explore other forms of funding to pay for additional services and possibly the extension, e.g. Lottery, Sport England, regeneration funding etc.

At both sessions further concerns were raised about combining the community centre with a children centre due to health and safety and child protection issues. Many felt access of the wider community would be

restricted if services are provided for under fives and this was another reason why they should have a separate extension/section/rooms in the centre.

A concern was also raised that the majority if not all of the £400,000 would probably be spent on expensive adaptations that would be required for under-fives, e.g. scaled down toilets, sinks and furniture, secure doors, CCTV camera's, other security measures etc. One participant mentioned expensive greening work relating to energy efficiency etc.' that may have to be undertaken.

5.2.2 Suggested improvements

Further suggestions made by participants on the way the £400,000 should be spent, included:

- New toilets
- New flooring
- Heating
- Storage space for equipment
- Kitchen refit
- Air conditioning
- Showers
- Snooker tables
- Darts board / area
- Astro turf outside – next to football pitches
- The hall expanded and more flexible use of space (dependent on funding)

5.2.3 Further consultation on the refurbishment

Many of the participants felt it was of critical importance to consult young people on how the centre should be refurbished. One suggestion was that a steering group of young people could be set up to take forward refurbishment priorities. This work could be done in partnership with the St Raphael's youth groups and would help young people develop ownership, interest and respect for the centre.

5.3 Options for management of the centre

There was universal agreement among participants that the community centre should be run by a local committee or board, they would oversee refurbishment and develop a business plan.

'First, all staff were paid by council, then it changed to a management board, then it was run by ACPO for 8 yrs – there was no logic to the proposed changes'

The creation of a new management board could provide the opportunity for the local community to work together. This would also enable past political issues to be put aside for the sake of a new positive direction. A positive starting point for local residents would be to get local Councillors on board, who could act as community champions for the centre.

Residents felt the board should be representative of the local community, for instance comprising young people, the elderly and users of services. The board or committee should also take on board views of centre users when developing a strategy or business plan. The board or committee should capitalise on the skills of local people from various backgrounds, e.g. legal, consultancy, local government, engineering and trades.

'Decision making process must be clear BHP manages well'.

'Make-up (of board) is crucial.'

'Combined board of residents and tenants'

'Centre manager'

Who would appoint or select community representatives was a key question in this regard. Some form of election process or secret ballot was suggested.

Other issues raised:

A caretaker was needed to look after building.

Community development and training issues.

There were important issues to be considered around supporting and building the capacity of local residents. Specific training on the following was suggested:

- Chairing meetings
- Management training
- Funding and organisational issues
- Financial systems
- Community involvement
- Dealing with conflict

'Need money for training and management of centre and board members'.

'ACCA qualified. Accredited members giving advice'.

The Council's commitment to sharing management control must be real and meaningful.

'Residents don't know enough about boards, trusts – Council could have all the power and it would be a 'talk-shop'. Must clearly state what power and responsibilities residents have'

'Transparency from council!'

Appendix 1 - Resident concerns

About the proposal

- Don't want a children's centre at all!
- Why take away what we have?
- ***'Would be a better place if given back to the community'!***

About the consultation

- Residents claim they were told that any decisions to establish a children's centre at the current premises was subject to consultation.
- Residents felt that the purpose of the current meeting was to decide on whether or not a children's centre should be established on this site.
- Residents claimed to be unaware that decisions on bringing back the centre within the ownership and control of the Council, or to establish a children's centre had already been taken.
- Lack of politicians – not attending the consultation meetings.
- ***'Residents will put down list of services that they want but will it happen'?***
- ***'This is not a consultation' - 'should have been done 9 months ago' – 'what's the point, it's cut and dried - a fait accompli'.***

About ownership of the building

- The community raised money for the building in the first place – so by rights its part community owned.
- Building doesn't belong to council. ACP money came from *'Levy's foundation'*. Community has a stake in the building.
- Organise a future meeting to address issues e.g. legal ownership, maintenance of building, past history, and an acknowledgement of the community's contribution.

About future meetings & consultation

- Children & Families should organise visit to the Granville centre for people to see facilities

- The agenda for the 'next meeting' should include timescales, draft refurbishment plans, proposed services.
- How seriously will our feedback be taken on board?
- The decision makers should attend future meetings!
- Elected members should also attend future meetings!
- We want responses to our questions!

DRAFT

Appendix 2 - other comments

The following comments, received in writing, were from residents who responded to the invitation.

1. *'Waste of money and waste of time. We never visit the community centre and never will. Only walked through St Raphael's estate once and got offered drugs and was frightened. We, (my family), never walk through the estate now. Thank you very much but this is my opinion'. Brent resident.*
2. *'St Raphael's may not need another family centre, but if it means that the community benefits from being able to use the centre then I say go for it. Because over the last few years although I have been on St Raphael's, I must admit that going to the centre has been very difficult. It's either closed or if you wanted to hire it for an event, unless you have corporate funding it was out of the locals' reach. Let's get the centre back for the benefit of the community I say. Never mind where the initial funding is coming from'.*
3. *'More Police presence; more activities; e.g. computers, internet with safe website. More sports and games facilities; more street lights; cleaner environment; healthy snacks, drinks and fruit. More tuition, help with school work; day trips, (school holidays) and weekend outings, e.g. swimming, cinema. Crèche facilities improvement. More consultation and feedback on future developments'.*
4. *'I think it's down right disgusting that Sure Start should take over the Borough and its community facilities and estate community rooms for unmarried parents and toddlers clubs, and that the Borough has no youth clubs for today's youth – hence crime in the Borough. Let Sure Start get less and the youth more. No Sure Start – Yes to the community'. Brentfield resident.*

5. *As I live in the St Raphaels Community and have done so for over 20 years. I would like to find out what impact if any would it have on the community overall eg Parking, Noise, Pollution*

DRAFT

This report was prepared by Brent Consultation Team.

Contact for enquiries:

Owen Thomson

Head of Consultation

Telephone 020 8937 1055

email: owen.thomson@brent.gov.uk

DRAFT

Project ref: 06/