

Report on the Future of Brent's Children's Centres consultation

January 2015

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Introduction

This report provides the full consultation findings from the public and stakeholder consultation entitled *The Future of Brent's Children's Centres*, undertaken between 25 November 2014 and 14 January 2015. The formal consultation documents can be accessed here (http://brent-consult.objective.co.uk/portal/candf/consultation_on_proposals_for_the_future_of_brents_childrens_centres?tab=files)

The London Borough of Brent invited parents and carers who use the Children's Centres now, and those who have experience of using the Centres in the recent past, to share their thoughts and experiences on the future of model of delivery. With the consultation events planned, MutualGain was commissioned to deliver and report on the findings.

Consultation content

'Children's centres are an important part of Brent's services to children aged from 0 to 4 and their families, especially to those in the greatest need. A number of local authorities' children's centres are faced with closure and cuts to their services. In Brent we are looking for options which can safeguard the future of children's centres while recognising that the council has less money'.

(consultation document)

The consultation document provided parents with information on the history, development and current challenges facing the long-term sustainability of Children's Centres in their current format. It set out a possible future operating model with some key questions for parents and carers to respond to. These lines of enquiry were repeated in all methods used during the consultation.

Methodology

To enable as many parents and carers as possible to participate in the consultation dialogue a number of methods were used to suit a range of diverse needs and reflect the local importance of each Centre:

- Consultation document and feedback form delivered to every parent of a child aged under five in Brent (November 2014) – with a Freepost address
- Online consultation survey (25th November 2014 to 14th January 2015)

- Consultation documents available at every Children's Centre site with postal box
- Face to face engagement sessions held at 6 Children's Centres and 1 session held at Brent Civic Suite (11th and 12th December 2014)
- 4 Focus Group discussions with specific groups January 2015 (reported on page 30) These groups were particularly hard to reach and led to the use of telephone interviews to make participation easier.
- Telephone interviews with parents unable to attend Focus Groups January 2015 (Reported on Page x)

Public participation

The Consultation aimed to reach as many parents and carers as possible. The table below presents the numbers participating across all methods used:

Public Participation Method	Responses	Survey Percentage
Online surveys	43	30%
Postal surveys	7	4%
Collected at Children's centre/face to face events	95	66%
Focus Groups	17	
Telephone surveys	21	
Total Public Participants	183	

The full equalities profile of participants can be seen in Appendices I (public Surveys) and II (Focus Groups)

Stakeholder Participation

Brent Council undertook a workshop with key stakeholders including the voluntary and community sector. The findings from the workshop are not reported here.

Additional opportunity was given to stakeholders to respond using a paper survey and online questionnaire. This option was also made available to staff. The total responses yielded were 24; reported in further detail on page 23. One online survey response was received on 15th January and has been included. This submission has been accepted due to the expectation of a 'midnight deadline', although the Council formally ended the consultation at 'midday'.

Key Findings

Summary of Key findings from the Public Consultation

For ease of use to the reader, the detailed finding from each method used is reported separately in this report. There were strong views that emerged across all methods, which should be taken as the priority voice gathered during the public consultation:

- Parents want all Children's Centres to remain open
- Parents have a fear and suspicion of plans to close Children's Centres
- All parents value the Children's Centres contribution to their children and themselves, particularly the personal benefits of learning, English classes and parenting skills
- Parents are willing to make small financial contributions to protect the services they receive
- The vast majority of participants in the face to face engagement support the proposal as a means to protect the existing Children's Centres from closure
- Parents expressed their desire for any new partner to incorporate the ethics and focus which secures a child centred approach with a community approach that continues to be inclusive
- The vast majority of respondents use the Children's Centres at least once a week
- Few parents use more than one Centre – 60% of the survey respondents have never used another centre
- The majority of reported use is 'Stay and Play' sessions which is also the lead service to have made a difference to their children

Summary of Key Findings from the Stakeholder Responses

Below are the key points found in the 24 Stakeholder responses received. These findings have not been compared to the views gathered in the Workshop delivered by Brent Council, and may not fully reflect the stakeholder position.

40% of respondents were Children's Centre staff.

The consultation response form enabled open comments to be put forward with one statistical measure that showed if respondents 'agree'/'disagree' with the proposal. From the open questions the following issues were raised:

- Clear concerns expressed about the impact of future closures on staff, children and families

- Strong concern for staff retention and TUPE impacts
- The majority of respondents disagree or strongly disagree with proposal (67%)
- Respondents are concerned about the future in terms of access to updated data and information on families
- Concerns raised around quality, access and focus of future model
- Particular support for future service delivery to continue to be provided to vulnerable families
- Support for the provision of additional services – by improving the existing model
- Some support for new partnership model and enthusiasm for additional positive impacts – almost 15% agree and strongly agree with the proposal
- Some concerns that the proposal will add pressure to other services e.g. Health Visitors and Social Workers

The stakeholder responses are provided in further detail on 27. Equalities monitoring data was not collected for this group.

Summary of Key Findings from the Face to Face Public Engagement

Seven 'drop in' style events were provided, giving opportunities for Children's Centre parents and carers to share their thoughts. The events were offered over a range of times and locations to suit varying needs.

Brent has six Children's Centre Network areas: an event was held in each network area, with an additional evening event held at Brent Civic Centre.

Each event was designed to:

- Provide information on the Proposal
- Gather views on the proposal
- Collect new suggestions for alternative service delivery models that could be considered

A flexible approach was taken to give parents enough information about the proposals and enable time to comment and ask questions (and where necessary, to signpost parents to further information and services).

A member of the Children's Services Operational Team attended most events in an observation role, but provided assistance with technical enquiries related to other childcare matters as and when needed.

Participants were asked to provide their views on the following:

1. What do you like most about the Children's Centres?
2. How do you think the proposal will impact on the Children's Centres?
3. Do you have any additional suggestions for a new service delivery model?

Using 'sticky back ticks' they were asked to indicate their support or non-support for the partnership model. A total of 23 parents attended the sessions.

The majority of participants in these events came from BAMER communities (Black and Minority Ethnic Refugee) groups. Many of the parents we spoke with spoke English as a Second Language: all were able to present their views clearly and concisely and were understood by everyone involved.

They said:

- Parents recognise and value the way Children's Centres support their aspirations for future success
- Parents value the opportunity to learn and develop their children, and themselves, as part of their family immersion into the Brent community. It helps them plan for their long-term future
- Parents value the 'low/no cost' of Children's Centre services
- Parents do not want the new partner to focus on income over children's outcomes
- Parents have a perception that the Council intends to close services
- Parents are concerned that costs will be introduced that may exclude them from using the services
- Some parents are concerned that costs will target economically active families
- Majority of parents are willing to make a small contribution to attend specific programmes
- Parents need a clear explanation of the tender process
- Parents support the proposal as the opportunity to save Children's Centre Services
- Parents want the existing staff to remain in their roles: they want 'quality' to be maintained

For more detail on the phase 1 face-to-face public engagement activities see the report of the overall findings in December 2014. This report is attached as Appendix III

Detailed Findings from the Public Survey

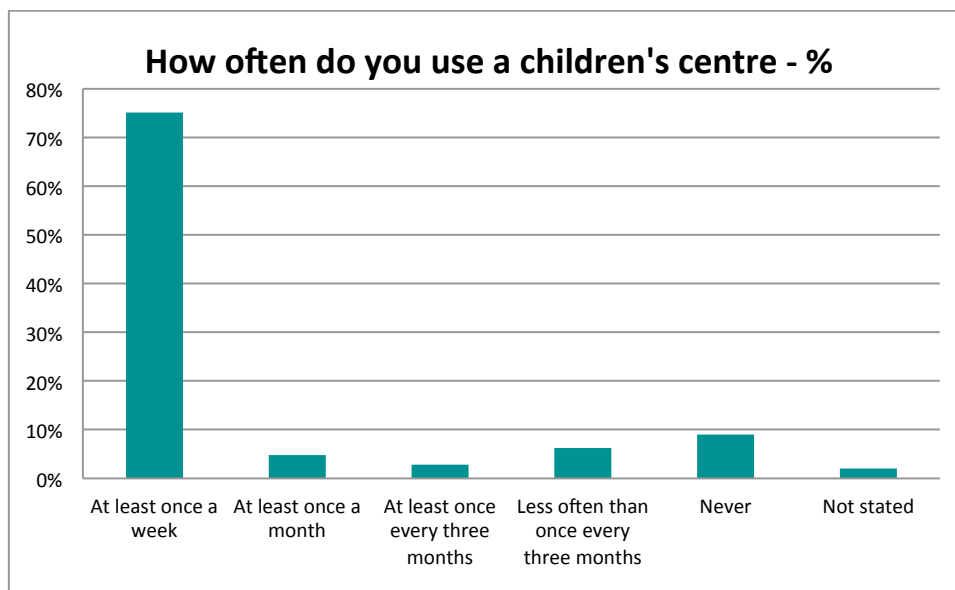
The public surveys enabled a mix of statistical reporting and open comments to be received. This section provides a detailed flavour of the open comments included.

The survey asked:

1. How often do you use the Children's Centre?
2. Which is your nearest Children's Centre?
3. Which Centres do you regularly use?
4. Which services do you use at the Centres?
5. Which services have made the greatest difference to your child?
6. Have you used any other sites to get services or support?
7. If you answered yes to question 6, please tell us the site/s you have used.
8. Please tell us why you don't use a children's centre
9. Further to the information in the council's draft proposals attached to this questionnaire, what do you feel the impact of the proposals will be for the centre that you attend?
10. To what extent do you agree or disagree with Brent Council's overall proposals for changes to children's centre provision in the borough?
11. What do you feel the impact will be for all children's centres in Brent?

Reported below are the quantitative and qualitative responses to each question, followed by some comments which you might consider in light of these findings. These comments qualify some of the statistical responses, particularly the spirit of support given to the proposal that is not immediately evident on the statistical recording alone.

1. How often do you use the Children's Centre?

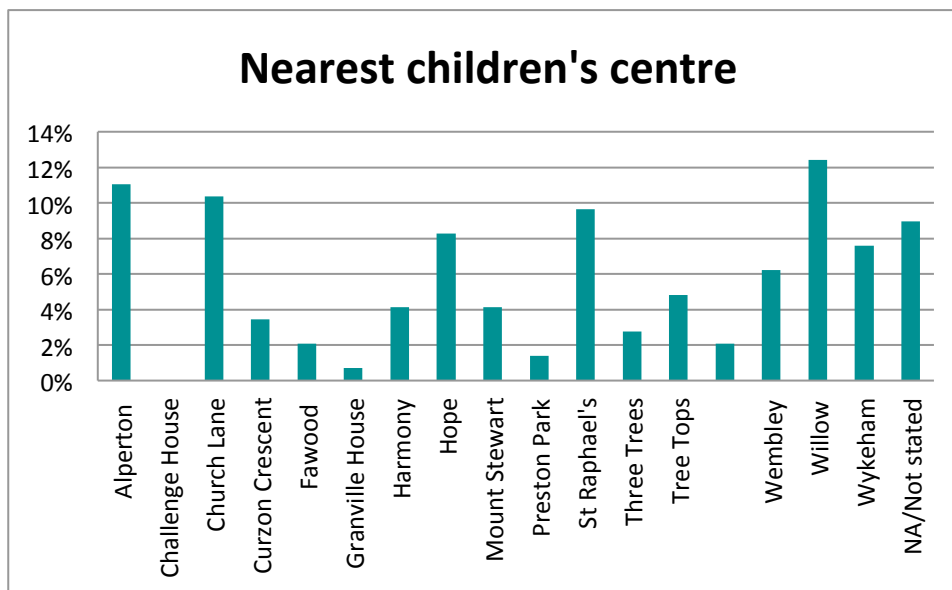


At least once a week	109	75%
At least once a month	7	5%
At least once every three months	4	3%
Less often than once every three months	9	6%
Never	13	9%
Not stated	3	2%

The response to question one should give assurance to the Children's Services team that parents involved in this consultation are mainly current regular users of the service. Their views are based upon current active use of the Centres.

Each Children's Centre utilises the Network Outreach Workers who could potentially increase use of the centres by those parents who are using the services less frequently. By developing their engagement they could understand why some entitled parents do not use the centres at all.

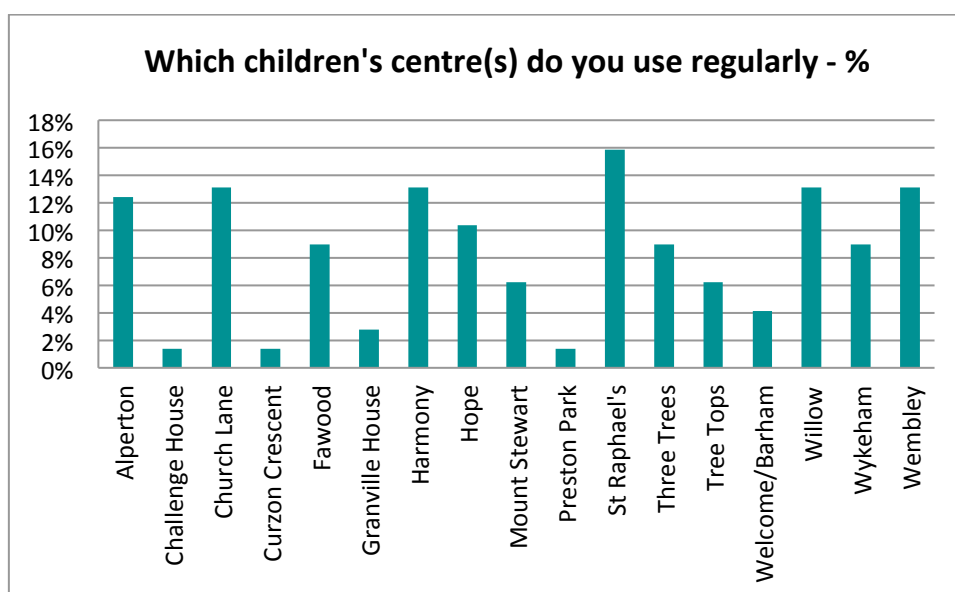
2. Which is your nearest Children's Centre?



Alperton	16	11%
Challenge House		0%
Church Lane	15	10%
Curzon Crescent	5	3%
Fawood	3	2%
Granville House	1	1%
Harmony	6	4%
Hope	12	8%
Mount Stewart	6	4%
Preston Park	2	1%
St Raphael's	14	10%
Three Trees	4	3%
Tree Tops	7	5%
Welcome/Barham Park	3	2%
Wembley	9	6%
Willow	18	12%
Wykeham	11	8%
NA/Not stated	13	9%

Parents at Willow Children Centre gave more survey responses than any other Children's Centre. However it is notable that Church Lane Children's Centre gave 15 responses, putting it in the top 3 response sites, even though face to face engagement activity did not take place here.

3. Which Centres do you use regularly?



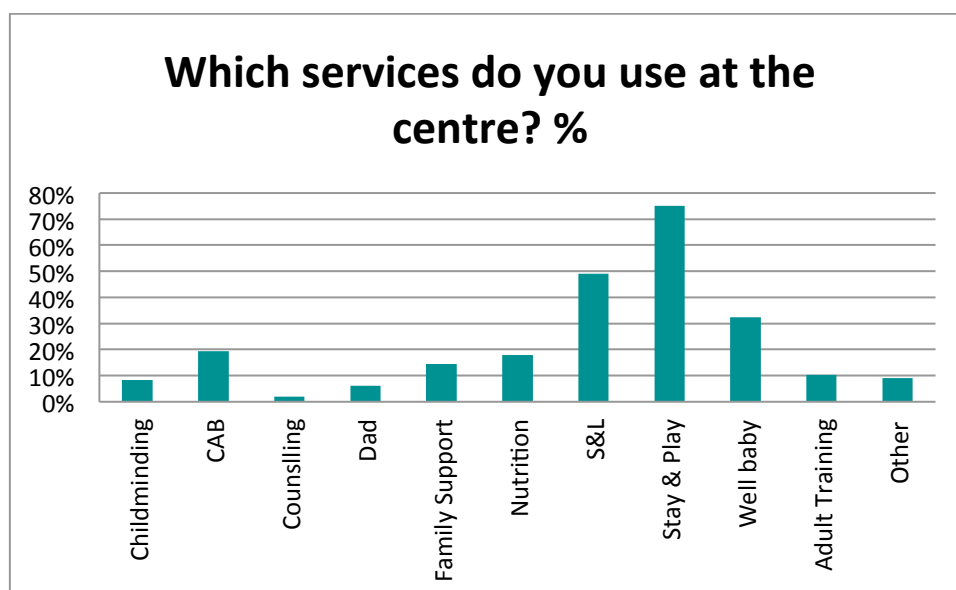
Alperton	Challenge House	Church Lane	Curzon Crescent	Fawood	Granville House	Harmony	Hope	Mount Stewart
12%	1%	13%	1%	9%	3%	13%	10%	6%

Preston Park	St Raphael's	Three Trees	Tree Tops	Welcome /Barham	Willow	Wykeham	Wembley
1%	16%	9%	6%	4%	13%	9%	13%

Wembley, Church Lane, Fawood and St Raphaels Children's Centres are used more often than is inferred from the number of respondents who declared those centres to being the nearest to home. This implies that these Children's Centres are providing services to parents outside of their immediate area.

Three Trees and Tree Tops Children's Centres are recording as having less reported regular use than those who say it is the nearest. This could be for a number of reasons: a useful starting point would be to explore the most popular services as recorded by the Centres to give an understanding of what motivates parents to travel for services. If there are gaps in the services provided by Tree Tops and Three Trees these could be offered by future partners.

4. Which services do you use at the Centres?



Childminding	CAB	Counselling	Dad	Family Support	Nutrition	*S&L	Stay & Play	Well baby	Adult Training	Other
8%	19%	2%	6%	14%	18%	49%	75%	32%	10%	9%

*S & L = Speech and language support

There is significant use of the Stay and Play sessions delivered at the Centres. Good use is also seen in the Speech and Language support service. The comments recorded suggest that parents have high social and housing needs which are a motivator for them 'getting out of the house' and using the centres to alleviate home pressures.

The CAB (Citizens Advice Bureau) service is reported to have more use than the Childminding Network, Dads group and adult training. Again, this may reflect the gender of participants – most are female, and it may be that this female group have higher needs of Advice Services due to the majority being from diverse and recently arrived communities that need additional support.

Parents reported using the following in the 'other' category:

- Sewing classes
- Zumba
- Cooking classes
- Community outreach/celebration events
- Baby massage/bumps and mums
- English courses

From an operational service perspective, these responses provide an insight into the 'popular services' that an existing provider might specialise in. Using CAB as an example, CAB could be a potential partner as part of a consortium, and provide its core services from the Children's Centre sites. This has the potential to reduce its independent facilities and save costs on facilities.

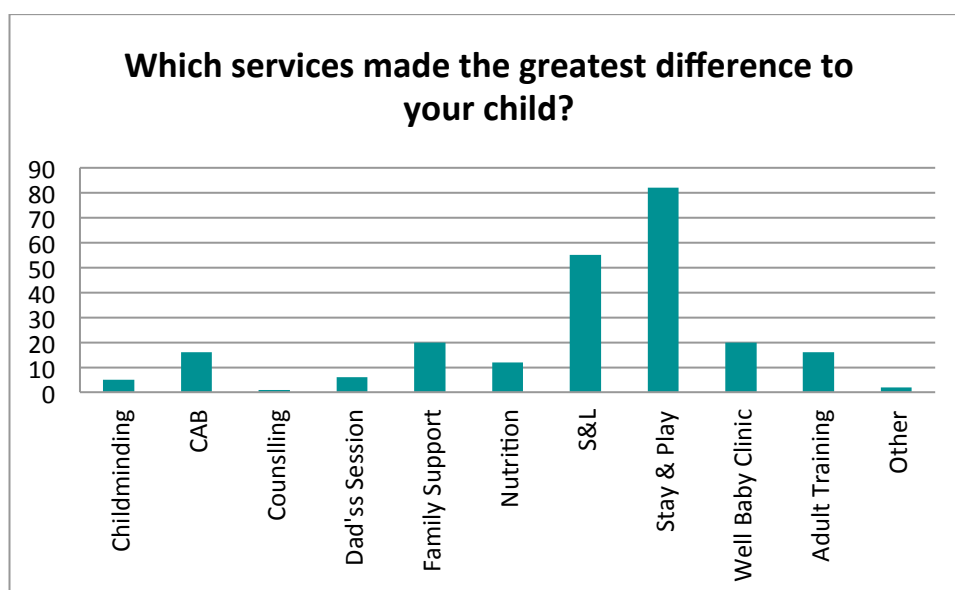
The popular stay and Play sessions may also be an attractive proposition for the independent children's play sector – introducing additional play services to meet the needs expressed by parents (see QX).

5. Which services have made the greatest difference to your child?

Parents immediately recognised the benefits to their children gained from using the Stay and Play sessions. However in the case of Stay and Play Sessions 82 respondents reported it as making the greatest difference (increase of 7 parents from Q4).

Increases could be seen in Speech and Language Service too - 6 more parents reported it as making the greatest difference to their child compared to responses in Q4. Similarly, increase was seen in the numbers reporting the greatest difference made by Adult Training and Family support (increases of 6 parents each).

The Well Baby sessions show a 12 person decrease in the number of parents reporting use of these sessions and the numbers of parents reporting the service to have made the greatest difference to their child.



Childminding	CAB	Counselling	Dad's Session	Family Support	Nutrition	S&L	Stay & Play	Well Baby Clinic	Adult Training	Other
5	16	1	6	20	12	55	82	20	16	2

Parents took the opportunity to describe the classes and sessions they used as follows – these are free text responses added to the options they have ticked. These comments are the qualitative descriptions given by parents:

- Parent workshops (which is under S&L)
- Sewing class
- Zumba
- Crèche provide service
- Giving extra courses
- Sewing class
- Messy play
- Play
- First aid courses
- Singing
- Craft activity
- Identify child's needs
- For my child to interact with other children
- For my child to learn and play
- Cook and Eat
- Messy play
- Childminding network
- Childminding network
- Very very good

The findings from Question 5 give insight into what parents think works for their children. This personal belief in 'what works' could be used to attract a partner that is able to commit to an outcome based partnership. The outcomes could focus on parents need for Stay and Play – increasing sessions, increasing the number of families using them, and increasing the use by those currently not using and having low/infrequent use of the centres.

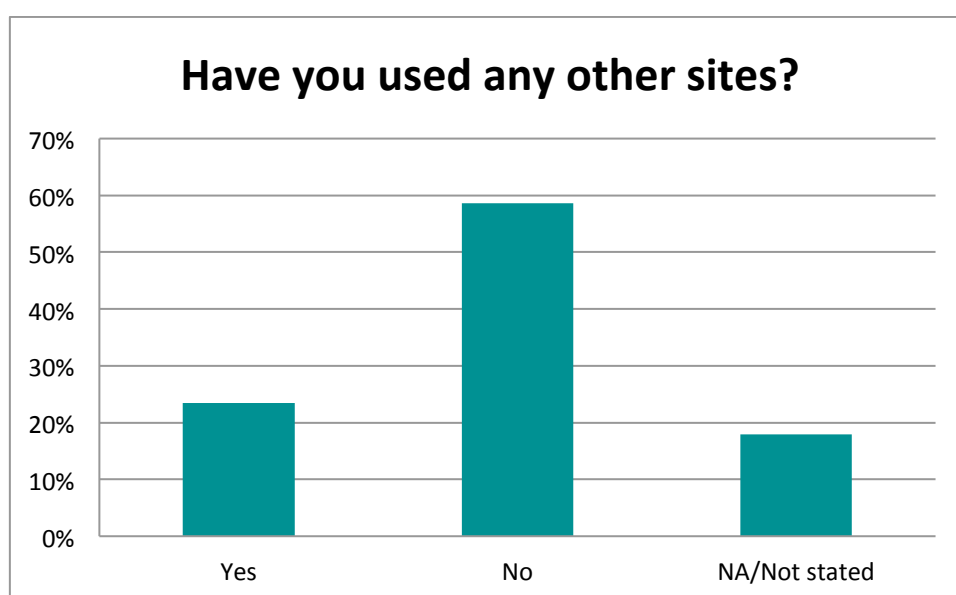
6. Have you used any other sites to get services or support?

This was a closed question offering a simple 'yes' or 'no' response. Responses to this question demonstrate the loyalty and possibly the

'neighbourhood' focus of Brent parents. Almost 60% of parents have not used another Children's Centre site in addition to the Centre they currently use.

In other areas of the consultation, parents verbally expressed the need to keep the Centres local and are concerned about future travel to other sites, as they cannot afford the transport costs. This may explain the need for 'local' children's centres for certain parent groups.

The survey did not ask about transport methods used to access the services but it would be useful to know in the future how parents transport modes influence the way they use the services



Yes	34	23%
No	85	59%
NA/Not stated	26	18%

7. If you answered 'yes' to question 6, please tell us the site/s you have used

Some of the parents that declare using other sites described the services they use. Of the 34 parents that use other services, 20 named the services as.

- Child Hills
- Parenting programmes
- Harmony
- Willow for dad's sessions
- St Michaels Youth Project in Stonebridge

- Willesden
- NCT
- NCT
- Vale Farm
- Food bank
- Wembley, Wykham
- Children centre in Pinner where we used to live. They are very different from the ones in central London. We really miss them.
- Church Lane Children's Centre
- Health Starts.co.uk
- Welford Centre (Wednesday 11 - 1 pm)
- Church Lane and Willow Children Centres
- Harmony children centre
- Curzon Crescent
- HR (sic)
- Harmony

Some parents are already using services from external agencies and voluntary sector organisations as described above. It may prove useful to explore what the voluntary community sector offer is to parents at low/no cost as a way of leveraging additional support for children and families that can be accessed independently, as well as the potential to explore new partnerships.

8. Please tell us why you don't use a children's centre

There were five reported responses where participants have children outside of the Children's Centre age range. For the parents who have children and choose not to access the services, the most common response related to access. The access reasons stated are transport access and issues with full classes and waiting lists.

Parents stated:

'We are too far to easily get to one on foot. I took my son to Wykeham for an advertised cookery session which was not running and was put off''

'Unfortunately, they are not very easily accessible from where we live. The services provided are not necessarily of use to either me or my child due to the hours these are provided. However, I am completing this survey because I know that these services are used a great deal by other parents in the area and are very highly valued, so wanted to support their provision, either by Brent directly or a public/private partnership, as much as possible'.

'We can never get into the sessions, always full'

Two parents reported conflicting working hours as a reason for not using the services, and a further two raised concerns about costs to parents preventing them from using the Centres:

'Yes the government has cut funding, however, they have also cut parents' funding'

'Centres still want a donation even if you bring your own fruit and water'

Costs of using the Children's Centres is a constant theme across all the consultation methods and should be a priority consideration within the future model. This consultation has heard views of parents who currently use the children's centres, and include those who shared the barriers that prevented them from using the Centres. Some parents believe that a small fee might be charged in the future, but a future model should include a financial impact assessment on parents prior to appointment of a new partner.

9. Further to the information in the council's draft proposals attached to this questionnaire, what do you feel the impact of the proposals will be for the centre that you attend?

There was a wide range of comments in response to this question. Those responding to the online survey provided more detailed and clearly articulated feedback, compared to those returning hand written responses. The responses also indicate that parents interpreted this question as impact 'now and in the future'. The implementation timeframe will need to be made much clearer to parents in the coming months.

The comments fell into key areas stated below, with example quotations from participants.

Perceived threat of closure

Parents participating in the consultation have been hampered by their perception and assumption that the Centres face closure. Many comments have been recorded where parents respond as though they are being asked to comment on closure, despite the explanation within the consultation document. Examples include:

'It will create logistical problems for parents and children as the service provision stops being local. The need for transport to access these services will create social isolation and increased risk in the key areas. Children's centres were created in

Brent to address for current users as use of public transport is an additional cost users cannot afford. Also the time factor in travel means that the distance between the nearest children's centre and the local primary school will also restrict parents with children covering the age range 0 – 10'

'I hope it stays open'

"I would be very disappointed if Mount Stewart was to close"

"If they close any centres then I think sessions would be overcrowded. More demand and less supply"

"If it is closed we won't be able to do any of the activities that our kids like or to teach them thymes before they attend school"

These comments show the need for the continued dialogue with parents after the consultation, and during any future modelling process. Centre staff delivering accurate messages about the future model process and implications could help clarify any misconceptions.

Reduction/relocation of services

Parents are concerned about the impact on levels of service delivered. Many are concerned that there will be limited services delivered causing greater demand for fewer Centre Services. Parent comments reported included:

'I am a bit afraid. If you will close some centres or reduce the services, the services you will leave will be too crowded'

Overcrowding at the reduced number of centres therefore children will have less access to staff attention and resources

If they close any centres then I think sessions would be overcrowded. More demand and less supply

These concerns were addressed and explained in the consultation document. Responses imply that not all participating parents have read the full document; as the section below shows clearly a different perspective from parents who demonstrate that they have read the full document.

Aspirations and support for new partnership

Although the statistical representation of the level of support for the proposal was 19%, greater support and aspiration is found in the comments put forward. Several parents verbally supported the proposal:

The impact will be good and services provided will be great for my child if it is run properly

Hopefully there will be better access to the stay and play sessions as these are now very difficult to attend since you have had to book a place

Based upon the aforementioned proposal, I believe that the site I attend would remain operational

I think that if managed well, there will be little negative impact as long as the services are supervised by Brent Council. I can understand the difficulties given the budget constraints.

The proposal suggests that the change won't have any significant impact as the service will just be delivered including partnership

It might give other volunteer groups/businesses the chance to bring their visions and ideas to Brent

The support expressed here is based on a clearer understanding of the proposal by these parents, who do not express fears of closure in the way that parents who do not support the proposal do.

'The partnership 'providers' need to be involved in a grass roots level to some extent otherwise changes may be implemented which do not benefit all those using the centres'

Although the Consultation Document was produced in Plain English, consideration should be given to producing any further information on the Future of Brent's Children's Centres in an Easy Read version to ensure that the diverse parent population groups in Brent have a shared understanding and can engage from an informed position.

**Easy Read is a pictorial and reduced text method of explaining material and content in an easy to read way that meets the needs of many diverse community groups as well as being suitable for people with specific cognitive, language and literacy needs.*

Valuing and maintenance of existing services

Although the statistical representation of disagreeing with the Council's proposal is high, there is a strong indication that parents do not support the proposal because they want to protect the services that they already have.

A large proportion of the comments received were presented as 'keep statements' – as in 'keep the services we have at the point of use'. The majority of statements collected for this question indicate that parents are opposing the proposal as an expression of 'keep the Children's Centres open'. Parents stated:

I hope we don't lose the variety and choice we have

I can't access the proposals but am not in favour of any cuts

We need more accessible places for under 3s

More sensory rooms

10 o'clock clubs are a great idea

I am quite happy with the way my centre (Mount Stewart) is being run today and would like to see staff recognised for the good service instead of having their employment in any way threatened. The way it is today I feel that staff take a genuine interest in our children's wellbeing and this is the best attitude to engage parents

Hopefully the service will continue for those who are in great need, disabled, non-speakers of English as less well-off individuals

If they close any centres then I think sessions would be overcrowded. More demand and less supply

There were 4 comments that were clearly rejecting the partnership proposal. These parents reported:

I just think that is not going to work

I think that the council should continue to provide the different services for the centres. I have seen the changes of family, children and the community

I'm not in favour as I feel the council may close some centres in the future

Any centre would be adversely affected by the proposals

Loss of community socialisation/integration for parents

Many of the respondents taking part in the survey are from diverse communities, including 'recent arrivals' to the UK. The comments they express demonstrate that the Children's Centres enable them to socialise and

integrate into the Brent community. These parents place high value on the support and relationships they build through the Centres:

This is a place that I think it look part the mental group of my child. This is a place we change idea with parents, this is a place that we learn how to be good parent. The impact we will lose all this.

'It is very supportive for myself and my children. It helps them a lot. They feel happy and play, meet and interact with other children'.

'Families not have a place to explore and bond with other families and their children. As well as a place of meeting new people that are going through the same things'.

'This is not good for us. Then there is no stay and play, no music rhymes to sing, no chances to meet other mummies'

'I think me and my child will lose a lot of friends, support and useful information about motherhood'

'I live in Willesden and Tree Tops has given me and my baby the opportunity to meet other babies and mothers who live local to me. It has made my child and I become closer, confident when outdoors in different environments'

Impact will be that any child will not be able to attend any activity and children and families have nowhere to go have a better outcome for children

For these parents the Children's Centres are playing a vital role in supporting assimilation and integration. The expression to oppose the proposal through fear of losing the social connectedness that the Children's Centre give them is a consideration for any future partner.

Access and equity (including gender and geography of perceived closure sites)

Some respondents raised concerns about the locations of the perceived closures, the equity and lack of equity in the perceived closures, as well as the impact on fathers - raising questions of gender equity. Again, the concerns are raised on the perceived notion that some Children's Centres will close.

'The proposals seem to affect all the centres I use in the Harlesden/Stonebridge area, doesn't seem to be considered fairly. More vulnerable parents and children without support of the centre'

'I am a father and attend twice a week with my daughter and it is a great place for children to develop. I fear other providers would not provide the same support'

The proposal will impact all the families in the area because they won't get any advice and support

The quality and variety of service may go down as other providers will see costs as an overriding factor. Not providing relevant activities to each specific area.

The concerns raised about equity will need to be addressed through further equalities impact assessment as the proposal progresses, to ensure that parents feel confident that they are not disadvantaged due to their gender and place of residence in the borough.

These comments also provide the insight that parents in Brent want a partner to provide an equitable service that is not different in different Centres.

Maintain support for vulnerable families

Although not strongly echoed in other parts of the consultation, these parents are concerned about where changes will take place and who the changes are most likely to affect. These comments imply that parents want to be sure that those who need the services most continue to access them. This was clearly stated by a parent as:

'Hopefully you will take it into your plan or you will narrow down the participants? What does it mean 'most vulnerable families'? For example. My love and I have an 8 month old baby. My love works, I can't work because of the baby. The money is just enough for the bills, rent, food and that's it. My family is away. We do not have anybody who could look after the baby while I work. I think our family is not the most vulnerable one but I really need this service. It is so useful for the baby and for me as well. I would be sad if we could not use this service because we are not 'vulnerable' enough'

Concern for existing staff and future staffing models

Parents show concern for the staff at the Children's Centres and would like to see the same staff remain in place. Several comments were recorded about continuity and familiarity that might impact negatively due to potential changes. They stated the impacts on their Children's Centre would be:

Reduction of familiar staff

My child will be unsettled as he is familiar with the staff and his surroundings

There will be unrest and uncertainty, until clarity for staff and parents are provided

I fear that parents will be asked to take a more active role in running the centres which is inconvenient when we already have to look after our children during the sessions (stay and play)

volunteers would not provide the same service as the current staff that are very good'

The comment above was the only reference to the volunteer parent role reported in the surveys. The role of parent volunteer staff was referred to in much higher numbers in the face to face engagement and could possibly be tested by survey in the future to see if the appetite exists for these parents who use the paper and online methods to share their views.

A related concern raised about staffing, is the issue of quality and the need to ensure that families do not 'fall through the cracks' due to staff pressures and expert professionals in place to deliver the quality services parents want:

my concern is that the families who are truly at risk will fall through the cracks, particularly if the centres will be staffed by a number of volunteers who may or may not be able to provide the considerable support some families may need.

9. Further to the information in the council's draft proposals attached to this questionnaire, what do you feel the impact of the proposals will be for the centre that you attend?

The range of views gathered in response to this question provides valuable insight to the level of understanding and variety of needs among parents. It is very clear that parents associate the 'Proposal' with closure, and effort is needed to ensure parents understand the Proposal better. The dialogue with parents should continue throughout the implementation process; and materials used to inform parents must be suitable to their diverse needs.

There are many valuable insights to what services parents expect a provider to maintain. The evidence recorded here demonstrates that parental objection to the Proposal is generated by a perception that the proposal is to close Children's Centres. The dialogue put forward by parents aims to 'protect' the services they receive – with very few comments on the structures that may deliver them. In this we can accept that parents are primarily concerned with the services at the point of use.

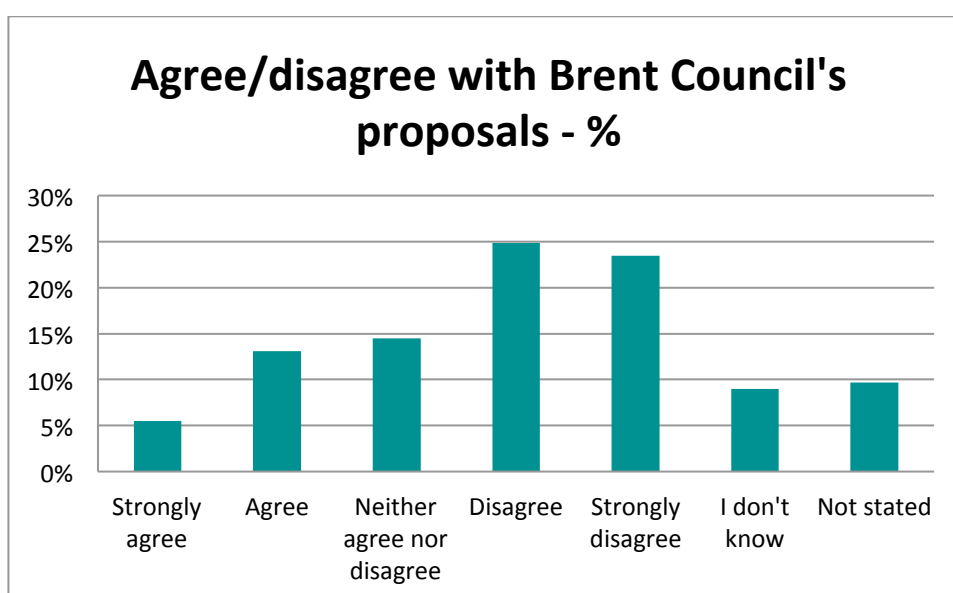
Parents do prioritise the role and need for continuity of staff and do not want a destabilising environment for their children. Maintaining staff stability during and future TUPE process will be of critical importance to maintain the trust and confidence of parents.

The staff role in communicating the Consultation process and explanation of the consultation content must not be underestimated. Children's Centre staff have a very powerful role and influence on many parents, and this must be positively utilised so that parents understand the scope and assurance contained in the Consultation document; and future documents that will be produced as a result of this consultation.

10. To what extent do you agree or disagree with Brent Council's overall proposals for changes to children's centre provision in the borough.

As stated above, there is a dialogue and story behind the statistical responses given in this Consultation. Based on their understanding and misconceptions that the Proposal seeks to close Children's Centres, parents have given a strong voice that they do not support the Proposals.

The evidence put forward above makes it clear that parents want to maintain the services they receive by the existing Children's Centre workforce at the current locations, and do not want any services to close. Parents see a need to increase service delivery and that additional services should be made available to address their unmet need - more sessions at times that meet their needs.



Strongly agree	8	6%
Agree	19	13%
Neither agree nor disagree	21	14%
Disagree	36	25%
Strongly disagree	34	23%
I don't know	13	9%
Not stated	14	10%

The evidence shows 19 % agree or strongly agree with the Proposal; 14% neither agree nor disagree and the majority of 48 % disagree or strongly disagree with the proposal.

The qualitative evidence shows that parents want to maintain their local services – with their interest lying at the point of use and not concerned with the structural organisation of how that service is structured.

Parents in this survey are asserting their disagreement with :

- Children's Centre Closure
- Children's Centre Staff changes
- Reduction in services delivered
- Potential travel to different locations
- Potential variation at different centres
- Potential loss of access to and management of data to protect vulnerable families
- Loss of social networks and support for community integration

Identifiable patterns

There are few areas with the survey that we have explored to see if there are any patterns, connections or links that might provide additional insight for Brent Council. We have identified a few areas that may help develop further thinking on how a partnership model could be specified and address some of the issues raised by respondents.

1. Frequency of use and services used

The majority of respondents use the Centres at least once a week. These respondents are using Stay and Play, Speech and Language and Well Baby Services. All other services are recorded at below 20% of total parental use. The CAB achieves just below 20% reported use. Several other named services achieve less than 10% reported parent use. This gives rise to some areas for future exploration:

- What future role could CAB play in the new model?
- What is the resource required to deliver the lesser used services; and how could these be included differently in the future?
- What can be done to increase use of services by those currently reporting much lower use?
- How can those who never use the services be encouraged to join?

2. Services that make the greatest difference and attendance

The parents that report using the services at least once a week report that the Stay and play, Speech and Language sessions have made the greatest difference to their children in the highest volume.

- How can less frequent users be encouraged to attend?
- Is there opportunity to increase Stay and Play style of services?

3. Frequency of use and disagreement with the proposal

Of the parents that disagreed with the proposal, 45% used a Children's Centre at least once a week: strong disagreement came from those who use the services frequently and possibly those who want to protect the services the most.

- How can Brent utilise this passion to protect services?

4. Frequency of use and sites regularly used

Of those who report using services at least once a week, the highest sites of use were St Raphaels (22%) Willow (15%) Wembley (13%)

- What shared learning might there be for the community outreach workers to be better utilised?
- How can communication with parents be accurately and concisely shared among staff and parents?

The considerations raised above, may or may not have significant meaning – based on the numbers these comments are derived from and the already detailed understanding Brent Council has of its Children's Centres. However they provide potential considerations for those learning from this consultation exercise.

Detailed Findings from the Stakeholder Survey

Stakeholder participants

Few Stakeholders took the opportunity to participate in this method of consultation:

24 Responses were received

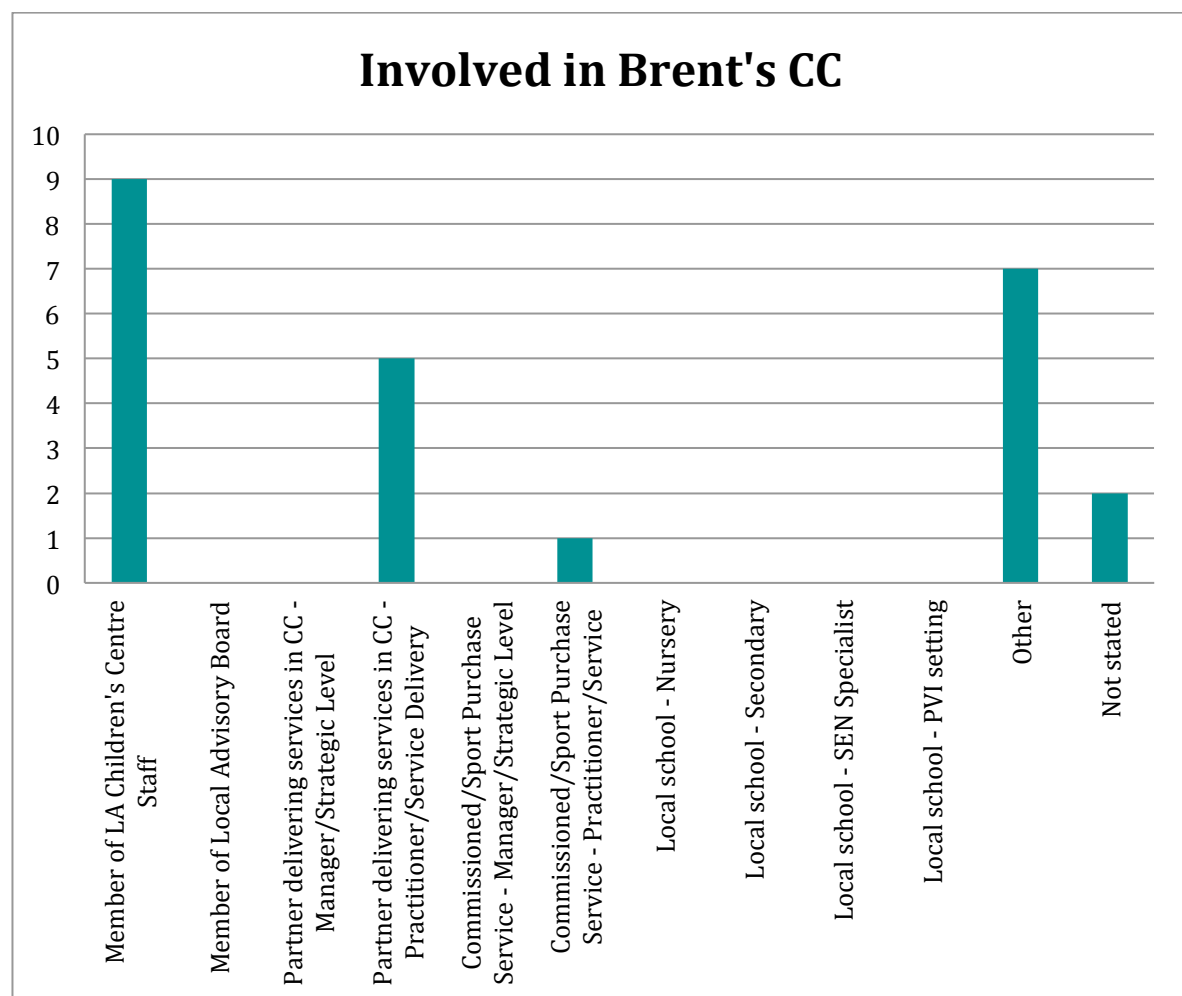
9 declared themselves to be Children's Centre staff

5 were providing services to the Children's Centres

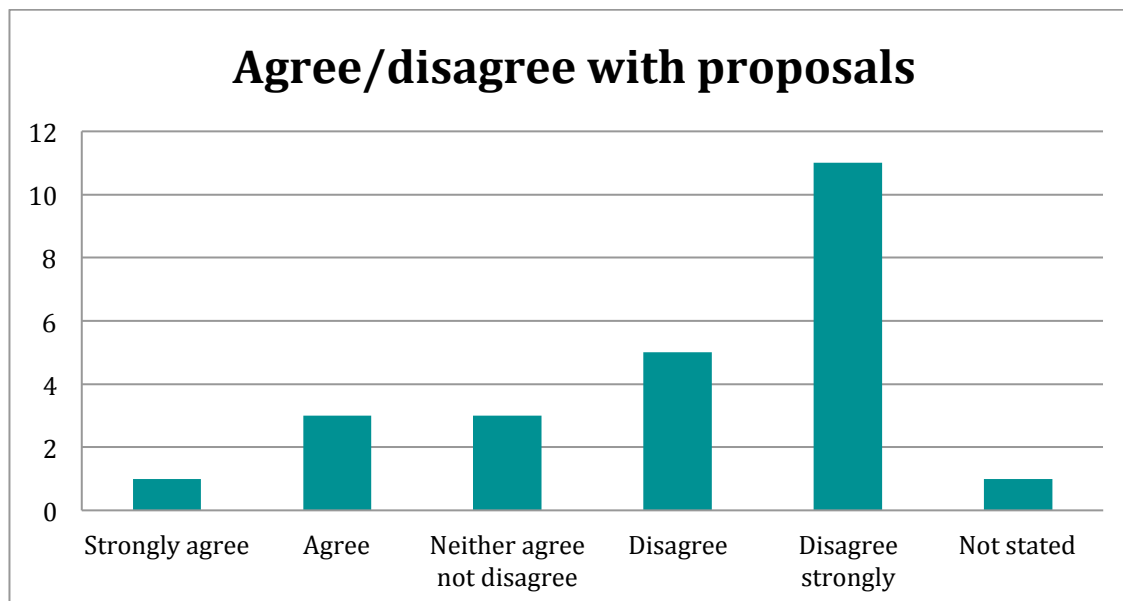
The remaining 10 were declared as 'other' or not stated.

This low response may be due to satisfactory Stakeholder and Staff participation through other Channels led by Brent Council.

A graph of the the response to the question 'How are you involved in the Children's Centre?' is below:



Stakeholders were invited to state their position on the level of agreement they have for the Proposal.



The vast majority of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the proposal. While 67% is a high percentage of rejection, the total number taking part is low and may not reflect the wider views of Stakeholders. This question also invited ‘further comments...’ – which generated a small number views to demonstrate concerns and reasons for disagreement with the Proposal. The direct voice of those Stakeholders is below:

‘The changes are not clear and how it will effect on the worker’

‘Brent has such a high population of children compared to other boroughs and highly deprived families. I think this should be a publicly funded service’

‘I think the proposal will bring in additional services for CCs’

‘Child-minders need somewhere safe and stimulating for the children they care for, other than home setting’

These themes are repeated in the Responses to the two key questions posed to Stakeholders.

Question 3 ‘How do you think this will impact on the Children’s Centres?’

Impact on the wider health and care system

The views gathered here show that Stakeholders are considering the direct and indirect impact of any future changes within the wider local child health and care system. There were several references to the ‘knock on effect’ on other services, e.g:

'If the children's centres will be closed the more pressure will go on NHS (midwives, health visitors, parents support services) nurseries and schools (children centres help a lot with transitions and separations, children achieve good social, physical, emotional behaviour and language skills at children centres),...'

Again, the perception of future closure can be seen in the above quotation – and will need to be addressed swiftly.

'With libraries closing also, children will not get the chance to mix with other children and broaden their social skills'

Earlier in this Report, the role of the Equalities Impact Assessment was put forward to provide assurance as well as exploration into the wider effects of the Future Proposal. It may also provide a useful tool to engender confidence in the Proposal if staff and Stakeholders can be made aware of the use of an EIA and that the Proposal will take on board a wider 'whole system view' as part of the implementation process.

The impact on employment

'Many people will lose their jobs and position after years of good service delivered'

'Less jobs for staff working in children centres this would not be fair'

Although not strongly echoed in many responses, there is a sense of uncertainty among staff: the staff responding to this survey have concerns for their future employment. Closely linked to this are some concerns on the development and growth of parents: already known to be diverse and often vulnerable, staff are concerned that parents will lose opportunities to develop skills that ultimately support them accessing the workplace.

Personal Professional investment

There were several heartfelt expressions that projected the high level of care and commitment staff have to the families they serve at the Centres. Stakeholders are concerned at the longer term impact of the proposal, albeit with some misconceptions about closure. Underpinning these concerns is their recognition for the journey and development of the Children's Centre Services, their own professionalism and the benefits they know they contribute to improving children and families lives – it is this sense of professional investment in the Children's Centres that they want to protect.

Examples given below provide the direct words of those responding:

'The service provided by the children centres has been heavily made use of. Families have a safe and comfortable place where they are able to get advice, help and assistance with various aspects/areas of their lives. The children centre has had a huge impact on many, if not all of the families registered and the various support networks is nothing compared to others. A change in the provision would

have a detrimental impact on many, if not all families considering their reliance on it...'

'Having worked with the children centres for a few years it would be devastating for children centres to close. The families and practitioners would lose all confidence in utilising Brent services. This service is a very important part of people's lives.'

'Child-minders need somewhere safe and stimulating for the children they care for, other than home setting'

'The work we have put into children centres will be cut badly. The passion and love we have for the community, ignored. We love our children centres, they emphasise a caring council who look after their borough/people'

Protection of quality

There were two comments made about 'maintaining quality'. The comments did not put forward any specific aspects or concerns about how quality will be managed in the new model proposed. The assumption is made that stakeholders were making reference to the quality of service at the point of delivery, rather than the management of quality by the Council at distance from the service provider. The comments gathered were:

I think the services will be worse

Concerned about the quality of services provided being maintained across the borough

The above commentary on quality has been included, so that the Brent Council is aware that their future role may need to be more clearly explained so that all staff and stakeholders are aware of 'how' quality will be managed in the future; and in turn be better placed to explain this to parents and carers.

Maintain support for Vulnerable Families

There are concerns that future changes will impact on vulnerable families in a range of ways. Staff are concerned about:

- Reduction in service delivery
- Reduced access to services for parents
- Prohibitive introduction of costs
- Increased risks (safeguarding) to children and families
- Loss of equity across Children's Centres

There were many views that repeated these concerns; which have been summarised above due to the length of commentary put forward. The examples below highlight and contain the key messages put forward:

'I think there will no longer be equity of service in children's centres across the borough'

'Vulnerable families and children will be put at risk because independent funding may not prioritise partnership with health and social care services'

'I think these new changes will put the families away. Maybe they will have to pay for services that they are not used to'

Conversely, there is support within this group for the proposal. Supporters provided their hopes and opportunities that could come from the future model.

'I think that if the quality of the services are kept, in the interest of the most vulnerable will continue to be the utmost priority for all those involved in this process of change, the council to work with other partners can only contribute to uphold the standard envisioned since the inception of children centres, reducing at minimum any risks of negative impact on the services...'

'It may improve children's services, less restriction on types of activities'

'Positive to keep services in place rather than face cuts to service. Potential for other provider (eg: charity) to access other funding streams, utilise expertise and being fresh ideas as to how to utilise buildings, engage with families etc'

'I think the proposal will bring in additional services for CCs'

'Extra services may be bought in because currently so many services have been reduced or disappeared which have had a negative impact on services'

This support for the new model shows the aspirations of some stakeholders, but is also indirectly indicated by some cautious support offered by another respondent:

I am not entirely sure what impact on children's services this will have in the future, but I do hope that whoever the provider will be if it does happen, will continue to think about the families we have in the community who have benefited greatly from services, information, activities and support from the children's centre. I know that change could be good, but I also know that the children's centre has changed a lot of lives and brought people together, increased knowledge and education and I pray that this will continue with the proposed changes

As seen in the public feedback, Stakeholders are asserting the things they want to protect and some areas that concern them, such as closure, parent access and safeguarding risks. While many have utilised the 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree' options, the dialogue supports the principle of keeping the Children's Centres open. What is also clear is that they assert key 'outcomes' positioned as an opposing view, but actually, these views reflect many of the key outcomes defined in the proposal.

Future Responsibilities

One participant made reference to changing responsibilities – and public sector management of the Children's Centres. Two comments were recorded that refer to maintaining publically run children centres.

Brent has such a high population of children compared to other boroughs and highly deprived families. I think this should be a publicly funded service. The continuation of the children services in the manner in which it is currently being managed would be the best suggestion for the public, most especially for the families who regularly take advantage of the life changing services that is accessible to them. Working in partnership with other providers would not allow the service delivery to work as well and therefore will have an impact on the effectiveness of the service provision'

This view was a lone voice within the stakeholder responses, but the previous comment implies that stakeholder are not fully clear that the proposal still depends on investment and funding from the Council, and may need to be clearly explained in the future.

Question 4: Do you have any further comments or suggestions?

Keep the Children's Centres open

Strong agreement from all respondents was expressed to keep the Children's Centres open. Some views were prefaced with fears for staff, some with support for the benefit to the community and some with principles of caring for children and young people.

The closure of children centres can affect many families and parents, children. I think we cannot leave them without support and it is good for children!'

'Keep the children centres open'

Keep our centres open. They are an important part of Brent services. Helping families, supporting, giving them the ability to move on with their lives, become more independent

'It will be really sad if the centres close as they have been a great support for myself and the children I look after love coming to the centres'

In addition to the shared view that the Children's Centres should remain open, respondents did have some comments to add to the future shape of the Service:

- I think it is particularly important for the local authority to have a strong role in supporting families to access health and social care ie: family support workers and speech and language therapist
- I just hope that any changes to come not put families away

- I do think proposals should be considered so that staff are not affected ie: job losses. Pay, conditions and pensions need to be clarified and systems put in place prior to proposals going forward
- I hope that staff contracts will be protected as much as possible in TUPE process and that opportunities for development and progression continue. Hope that services maintain focus on vulnerable families across Brent in an effective and empathetic way
- Children cents should be able to generate extra income depending on the space they have

These suggestions echo the sentiments expressed throughout the responses.

There is a single clear message from respondents to keep all Children's Centres open. The concerns raised are likely to require further clarification so that Stakeholders can be confident that their desired outcomes for high quality accessible and sustainable Children's Centres remain available to children and families in Brent.

Respondents seem to position their desires as being in opposition to the Council's vision set out in the proposal. There is potential to consider how best to continue the dialogue in a way that presents the shared aims and desired outcomes that the Council has.

Summary Findings from the Focus Groups

Target Audience

Four focus groups were organised to attract participation from specific target groups, whose voice wasn't heard during the public engagement events.

These groups were:

- **Group 1:** Families with children that have had a social care assessment, CAF or are in Troubled Families
- **Group 2:** Families with a Nursery Education Grant
- **Group 3:** Families with children likely to have additional needs at school (as provided by SENAS)
- **Group 4:** Families with children with lower levels of additional needs

All parents have been assured of anonymity.

The groups were organised to meet the needs of these parents by:

- Taking place during the day
- Offering a crèche place to all children
- Located in the main Children's Centre they used
- Offered reimbursement of travel expenses
- Providing an incentive (voucher)

The first three focus groups were not well attended, but the dialogue with those who did attend was a useful one. Many of the participants were from diverse communities using English as an additional language, and came from vulnerable groups. Parents gave responses to structured questions that reflected the focus of the main consultation survey.

These questions were developed and further explained where necessary to ensure the groups understood the aims of the proposal and could give their opinion on the possible impact. Some of the responses detailed below may stray from the question, but represents what is important to these parents and what they feel needs to be considered for the future of Brent's Children's Centres: it is their response.

Outline of Session

The group participated in an icebreaker which asked how many children they had, and how long they had been using the Centre. They were then asked the following questions:

Question 1

Could you share with us your experience of the children's centres in your area?

Prompts:

- Do you think the things you've spoken about might be affected by the Proposal?
- What are your reasons for agreeing/disagreeing with the proposal?
- What would make a good partner organisation?
- Give reminder of protection of staff if required.

Question 2

What impact do you think there might there be?

- What are the positive things that a new partner might add to Children's Centres
- What might be the negative impacts? Who/how would that affect parents?
- Do you think many parents share those concerns/hopes?

Question 3

Do you have any suggestions for a new way of maintaining the Children's Centres?

- Give examples of suggestions gathered – charities, sponsorship, rich individuals abroad
- Do you have any new ideas – or ideas that work in other areas or places?
- Should parents make a contribution? What would be acceptable?
- Are there other ways parents could help?

Wind down – close

Are there any final key messages that you want Brent to be aware of?

Summary of Findings from the Focus Groups

There was real congruence with the views gathered from the public engagement events and surveys. The main priority for the majority of parents is to:

- Keep all Children's Centres open
- Resist the introduction of costs but minimal contributions are acceptable
- Keep the focus on positive outcomes for children and families
- Keep local focus and minimise transport distance from homes
- Provide the support and community connectedness they gain as part of being at the centres
- Continue and expand the offer training and development to parents
- Maintain and increase the sessions they can access
- They support a partner with social and community mindfulness
- Maintain access that is equal across Centres

- Continue to access support for children's development including Speech and Language, Parenting classes

The final focus group discussion with parents of children with additional needs brought forward a slightly different position. Comprised of mainly professional working parents, there was less opposition to service change – one parent likened the changes to the rationalisation in health; where local services were centralised to provide a better standard of care to those who needed it. These parents also took a 'longer term view' and raised questions about longer-term changes that might follow after the partnership was formed – rather than the more immediate future explored by the other groups.

Despite this differing perspective, most parents were comfortable accepting a partnership solution rather than reduction in services. Parents were also able to make suggestions towards an alternative model of providing the Children's Centres.

Below are the views gathered from each group in January 2015. A total of 18 parents took part in these discussions. Due to the strong corroboration of the views of this group and the views gathered from the surveys, the parents voices have been put forward here without editing to provide an authentic voice.

Equalities monitoring data was collected, and can be found at Appendix II

Detailed Feedback from the Focus Groups

Focus Group 1: 5 parents attended (two couples and 1 mum)

1. What are your experiences of children's centres in the area?

- Kingsbury helped with breastfeeding
- drop in centres
- meet other mums, felt alone before since I was in a new area. Having two kids was hard, if it wasn't for the children's centre wouldn't of been able to cope.
- Brilliant. Every class of family, really nice thing to have.
- Classes like Rhyme Time.
- Two children's centres Wembley and Alperton, vaccinations, parent study and have a crèche available, able to learn the basic things. Negative is a very small space for events like parent study, makes it difficult.
- Sometimes need to travel to children's centre.
- Alperton children's centre - good that they can use the crèche in addition to day trips like to the zoo and other places like Watford, let children use up their energy.

2. What would be the impact of having new partner?

Positives

- Silent partner or introducing their own ideas?
- Some new changes might not be supported by local community but some might be good.
- Private partner could also allow the children's centre to continue what they are doing.
- They might bring in new things, ideas. Fresh thinking.

Negatives

- Now children's centres take time to help people, you have to make appointments. New partner might make it more like a business instead.
- Some individuals might not be able to enjoy all the services if a new partner comes in if they are not entitled to free help. Now it is equal opportunity, maybe business might separate groups like Catholics, Hindus etc.
- Might start giving free to only concessions which might put some people off. What if the business doesn't have experience with children's centres and the community and can't connect with the community and make services payable? 1pound etc adds up.

- New partner might upset a lot of people, a lot of people out there that don't have that spare cash. When they are little they need to get out. I had been a nanny for 13 years and thought I knew it until I had my own kids and the children's centre can help parents learn from each other and commune and know that they aren't the only ones.

3. What sort of a partner should the council look for?

- Really look for any partner that has funds but massive bonus if they have experience with children.
- They might try and make money for themselves which could be a problem.
- We really enjoy what we have now-partner is not a problem, as long as it doesn't turn into a business, council needs to pick a partner that likes equality and someone who wants to continue what we have now, services. Don't want to lose any services that we have now-only gain new services.
- Some children are in very small spaces: need more room in playgroup, homes and centre are both small spaces, need more room to make it not the same.
- Need crèche at all places while parents are in classes and college.
- Space and learning for children and parents - learning toys like IT important since people learn those things very early on now.
- Give facilities to help children develop earlier on since things are being taught at a younger age.

4. Do you agree with the proposal?

- Yes
- Doesn't mind
- If the proposal to get a partner wasn't an option would the alternative to be to close the children's centres or to start charging parents for sessions? If so, yes to partner

5. Is charging for sessions acceptable?

Some families might not be able to do that. Maybe a donation system would work where some who can give something would while others who can't won't. Donations better than asking.

Could you afford to pay?

- Depends on sessions and prices, different prices for different sessions.
- Music group specialised with instruments charging more than 50p or something like Rhyme Time about 50p.
- Coming to the end of the month might be hard to pay.
- Weekly activities good for children, look forward to it, gives them a routine.

Partners? New model?

- Things can't continue the way they are.
- Solar power companies to help sponsor children's centre.
- Are they looking for one person or many partners?
- There might be companies that want to help but may not have the resources they need eg Solar power to do panels to save electricity. Then other companies to help like Stage Coach (drama group) to help, private, QPR to help invest or other Football clubs. Little Kickers are too expensive because they are based for the wealthy families, reach out to other communities also helps them find new talent. The children are the future of Britain, first 5 years learn a lot, if we as parents aren't able to nurture them then they don't have a lot of hope either.
- Football one is a good idea, more day trips.

Is there anything missing from the children's centres?

Sports activities, dads and kids play football.

Would you come a Sunday morning? More opportunities to use it?

- Yes, football can use the park outside, local coach from local school, kick ball around, few tips, this helps address kids spending too much time on computers. Companies can use their own space to help children's centres.
- Would be great to use on weekend if they have the money.
- Some children's centres have parks but not all. Some are close enough to something like a park etc to use, can walk there, Silver Jubilee park near one centre.

Are there other things that parents can do to help?

- Skills used at home to share with other parents in workshops
- volunteer time in cake making, sewing, business studies to help parents.
- Fundraising buckets? Sponsored parent's activities, sack race with dads and grandmas. Very close to immediate family. Mom goes to grandmother sessions.

Do you see any opportunity to have a role in parents assisting a class?

- Yes to helping run a session. Yes other parents might help to run the session as well.
- A Role for grandparents? Yes.

Top Message for Brent Council:

- Such a valuable thing we have here, otherwise a lonely community: centres bring community and cultures together, really sad if it wasn't here.
- Important that they can find a solution that can continue it, kids are the future it is how we bring them up and what we teach them, it's great for the country.

- When I had my 2nd child I had a counselling service, help to reassure me to help leave my son, don't know where I would be today.
- It's about the future not about now.

- Support for partnership approach but focus on families and children to be maintained
- Additional session and services needed – continue with parent learning sessions
- Concerns around cost introduction
- Positive to more flexible use of sites – particularly weekend use and use of outdoor space
- Increase use and access for fathers
- Bring in partners that can help children excel
- Utilise the skills of parents

Focus Group 1: 3 Parents Attended

Parent A - Using children's centres since 2010, Kingsbury- children 3 years and 2 years, one on the way

Parent B - 1 year using centres

Parent C - Mum received pamphlet by post, other couple didn't receive it

1. What are your experiences using the children's centres?

- engaging with other parents
- attended children's centres to find out more info
- new mother - speak to staff with questions
- to get out of the house
- ran groups - like first aid, children's workshops, activities for children, children are also learning and being around other parents and children as well
- nice to see child interact with other children
- enjoyed going out every few days if didn't have anything else to do
- playing with children and learning language from other children, kids are happy there, cooking classes, language courses,
- the centre with cooking is too far away but do go - two buses to go to the children's centre.
- Use library at centre, parents take turns taking kids
- hasn't been to dad classes because of work.

2. What would be the impact from the proposal?

Parent C - There will be changes, they might be different. Might affect attendance.

Parent B - Used to a certain way of doing things, people might be less motivated to attend if the children's centres are changed in a way.

3. Do you agree or disagree with the proposal?

I would disagree with the proposal. Yes. Yes.

I agree - Brent Council may not be able to keep up what it is doing, better to have a backbone to carry you; before I would of disagreed because change can have a negative impact.

Agree - everything is okay to have a partner, just to carry on.

4. Does it matter if it is a business partner or partner from community?

After explaining the concept of a partner – that the partner could be a charity, community organisation or private company, initial responses included:

- It changes the whole aspect of it, public may not want to go, takes the realness out of it, the name in itself, may take the feel out of a children's centre. It's just money at the end of the day.
- Our library, many are gone: Wilson Library, a private developer bought buildings taking away resources from children that they need, now we have to go to the city centre. A bit out of the way for some, partnership will have more of a say so as to what goes on in the centres and a lot might be taken out of the centres.
- Might have to pay for the services.

How would you feel if costs were introduced?

- We pay for one child, could not afford to pay for sessions, sometimes we can pay the fees and sometimes we can't afford it
- You want to make sure your child gets the best out of their development, not a nice feeling for your child to miss out.
- Child gets used to going and if they miss out one day they get upset and paying all adds up.
- Maybe a one off pound for food or vegetables, but in today's economy parents might not want to invest in their children's centres.
- Life is expensive like food, clothing etc.
- What is the control after a partner?

What type of partner?

- Maybe a sports centre?
- Queen's Park Rangers have no knowledge of the centres, they have no background of children. Main priority to know children, if they are going to make changes, partner needs to know views of parents.

Benefits of a partner arrangement

- take some of the strain off of Brent Council
- open up new doors for the community
- a little bit of extra money - maybe put more things on, better access to other services.
- friendship between the children
- language learning development, mixing with the others, friendships when they go to school later on.
- definitely use buildings for other things, evening courses to help get parents into work, parent groups, more job aspects for parents groups.

5. Anything that parents can do within the partnership model?

- someone on board like a parent governor? already have parent forums?
- could parents look after the grounds? To have parents working they need to be committed, are they committed enough to keep the upkeep of the building, gardening, cleaning?

- incentives of work? parents out of work, centres could have a physician come, vacancies for parents to work, would they want to do it without being paid?
- can we rely on parent volunteers? Parents also have kids to look after, have to have a passion and commitment.
- child uses centre and parent gives us 5 hours? will that work? Certainly not. And no. Time is money. If that was the case much rather pay 2 pounds than 5 hours of your time. All choose 5 pounds. Paying 2 pounds is your choice where as the 5 hours is a must and not as much of a choice.
- should we ask parents for financial contributions? Pay mother and baby session 1 pound previously, wasn't a problem paying as an investment for a child is not a problem for me,
- in the middle, what about parents that can and not afford it? What if they have more than 1 child?

6. Is it okay to ask for a small contribution?

- have to make contributions to go to fun bouncy places (outside private businesses) but those are more expensive than what this could be for children's centres to ask.
- council committed to keep services? everything boils down to money, parents are getting a good deal, it's comfortable, it's carpeted, going down another route to keep places open, asking for a small contribution might assist.

The messages are really clear from this group:

- Parents value the socialisation and friendships they have gained through using the Centres
- Parents skills have been increased and enhanced through services accessed at the Centres
- Mixed opinions on support for the partnership model
- Concerns about changes – staff, services and approach
- Support for exploring opportunities – greater and different use of buildings
- Be realistic about the role parent volunteers can play
- Life is expensive – keep costs out or to a minimum

Focus Group 3: 5 Parents (incl. one couple, 2 mums, 1 dad)

Introductions

- One participant has a 3 year 7 months old child with a disability and has been in many children's centres like St.Raph's and Barnham (?). Feels isolated being at home and the centres help to get out.
- One participant has 1 child with a severe disability, developmental delay, comes to Willow, Alpertons, and Barnham Park: Wife and child from Pakistan in 2013.
- Used centres for one year, child now in school. Used Wembley, Willow and Alpertons: child has delay in speech.
- Has used centres for three years: 4 year old has Prader-Willi syndrome, has behavioural problem, went to Harmony.

Questions that one participant asked at the beginning included

How will the partner help? Are they actually running the facilities? Will the Council spend less money? Has any other council used this model in the country?

1. Please share your experiences of the Children's Centres in your area.

- Family felt isolated, started at Treetops, met other parents with children with disability, helped to have conversation with them and learned their point of view. If some children's centres close down or not find a partnership it will not be nice if we can't go somewhere where we can have a conversation. Worried for all children's centres and for other parents with children with disabilities. Talking for parents on same journey that she is going through.
- Goes to Harmony with son and St. Raphael's. Even if parents have children with different needs it is nice to sit down and talk and see how each other cope, share advice with other parents, felt like they aren't the only one.
- Sympathises with other parents who felt isolated. Can't find other groups of parents with child of same disability. Only now realising things she is going to go through by reading, knows that she has a lot of hurdles to go through - children's centre is a good base for parents that have to face challenges and challenging behaviours as well. Parents sometimes feel low.
- Help and reassurance, see other children with problems and you know that you aren't alone. Gives you courage. Child enjoying the centre. At the start they felt their son wasn't getting the support that he needed and now at Willow he feels that he is getting the support. They are reassured that he is being looked after and is safe. Used to go to Alpertons for a month.
- Children Centre helped with speech language skills, usually not talking that much, always playing with toy car, they helped with child, but Welcome Centre (charity?) helped with that. Also went to Alpertons. Charity offering drop in service to children centres like Alpertons. The charity gives info and meet other parents, signpost services etc.

2. What is your gut reaction to the proposal?

- Good, as long as the service level is the same and care and support is not dropped but stays the same. As long as they can manage all the children's centres and not cut down services or centres.
- A bit fearful of who the partner will be. What will they be offering? Better or the same? Or will they start cutting services. If you have partnership you have to think what they are going to do and are they going to keep things the same or change?
- No objection to find a partner, as long as they are still working so parents can access the centres and children have access to be stimulated by other children. Same value for parents.
- Would suggest not going with any partners. Hasn't been done before in the area. Afraid that the partner might not have enough experience for the children's centres like the council has.
- Worried about child and if he wouldn't get the help he needs. If the council wants to give to the private partner doesn't mind as long as he gets the support.

3. What does the new partner need to be a 'good' partner?

- What I see in the news like prisons run by G4S has been big problems. Serco has problems. The government is too much privatising to contractors and subcontractors.
- The council has been around for years and has learned from things, new partner might not have that much experience.
- Will the new partner be able to value the confidence parents have from the children's centres?
- What kind of level will the partner be at? Will they bring more or expand it? Make more accessible for my child?

4. What positive impact or what negative impact is expected from the new partner?

- We all need the service to be the same from the new partner. Council has an upper hand in experience.
- Will they understand what the children's centres are about? Like Tesco putting money in children's centre? Need to know partnership.
- Trying to think any charities that would do this? Will this be a charity with expertise for children with disability?
- Keeping same staff. Do they have to reapply for their jobs? As they notice things, they might restructure and make staff reapply.
- Parents might not know what to do if they restructure (staff)
- Services would be affected, not at the level they are now, doesn't see any improvements.
- Has been in different centres, Granville, Treetops, Barnham, Willow, when she goes there 2 or 3 moms or sometimes alone which is a

waste of money, just staff around. Seeing inefficiencies, two centres at the same time only each have a few or no people to use them.

5. Are you worried that it might affect you money wise?

- We pay council tax, bills are high and benefits down. Definitely not okay for parents to pay costs. Also costs bus fare as well.
- Not really acceptable to charge parents.
- How much would a contribution be? Hasn't had to pay before for services and doesn't want to pay. Worry is that no one would go because they can't afford. Over 10 pounds, can't afford. Might put parents off. Then children's centres will close if no one is coming in.
- It's a business for them, council has obligation to run and provide service while partner doesn't.
- Anything over 5 pounds? Only one parent working, can't afford. If both parents are working can't come to weekdays, maybe need to come in weekends.

6. Can parents contribute other ways?

- Train some parents to look after other children. Train parents to work with their children in the centres. Might be a temporary solution. There is a difference between trained staff and parents.
- Could do software for centre.
- Gave up work working with other child and parents with disability. Now has son with certain disability. With her work history could demonstrate her skills to other parents.
- Working parents can contribute money according to scale. Those not working can contribute time.

What about Sat and Sun Children's Centres?

- Children's Centres can be used for other activities.
- Primary schools already let others use it for sports after school.
- Allow for family gathering - to be hired, not the children space too hard to change the space but if there was a conference room or hall. People do hire out places.
- His work hires a school space every now and then to play sports and relax.

7. Any suggestions to having a partner alternative?

- Introduce a third party to visit children's centres and know what they need and learn to how to make it profitable, individual children's centres.
- People wouldn't be happy about shutting down a children's centre, better to see what is working and not working, how can we develop it. Advertising.
- In software there is a separate audit body that they follow their standards.
- Is it okay to explore each children centre individually?

- What is the point in keeping one open if no one comes here.
- Explore, understand, identify what works.
- Some parents don't know of the children's centres, don't know that it's there. Harmony told her it was no longer her centre and was told Treetops was the new one even though it was further away. Didn't like that they moved her to a new centre that she would have to get to know.
- Real belief is that parents don't know about the children's centres. Gave friend example.
- When went to the doctor came to know that there was a centre. Thought the centre was a nursery, not visible to parents. Children's Centres are not advertised enough. A nurse told her about Harmony. Even when you're pregnant advertise in hospitals.
- Maybe parents need to think about marketing.

8. Do you agree or disagree with the proposal?

Disagree, undecided, disagree, disagree, disagree.

- Staff highly valued – want to see staff protected and maintained
- Most disagree with partnership approach –
- Parents high standards for partner ethos, experience and expertise
- Must have expertise to meet special needs
- High confidence in Brent Council
- Do not want to see costs introduced
- Utilise skills of parents – but not equate to professional trained staff
- Explore how we can develop and learn from what we already have
- Consider if each Centre should be assessed individually – make bespoke solutions
- Needs marketing and better visibility of Centres

Focus Group 4: 5 parents attended

1. Experience of Children's Centres:

- Fawood, Treetops – used for 2 children; came today because they've been good for me and my children
- Used centres for 3 years – son has autism; didn't have family here – just the children's centre Fawood; did parenting course, supported by speech therapist at 15 months for diagnosis of autism.
- Other parents stated their ages only.
- 1 seen document = 4 haven't
- Uses Willow – happy with progress of son; happy with activities.
- Without the centre don't know where me and my son would be. Early intervention is care – has Autism in family have seen the difference of life without early intervention.
- Have worked with children's centre – and can see the difference. By the time he is 6 years he will be almost ok. Lots of speech therapy – referral to professionals paramount. Am successful with my son *because* of the Children's Centre
- I bring my daughter when she was young – my daughter learned a lot; I have gained by speaking with other parents. Good facilities here.
- Youngest child autistic – he plays with other children and makes him happy. Good to get out of the house and interact with other children. Has helped with behaviour – his tantrums at home decreased – now shares.

2. Impact of the Proposals

- No knowledge of the proposal within the group
- Does it mean that parents have to pay?
- I will feel sorry for parents like me without the children's centre – going into reception class without learning. The earlier the better to identify needs and work on that early.
- What is the partner going to be – business; non profit? It depends on what kind of business they're in – are they social driven?
- I am happy that the Council want to keep them open. No problem if non profit want to keep it the way it is. But if it's a business that wants to close 3 days a week then that's a problem.
- CC are paramount for special needs – perhaps Autistic Society; should be a partner that understands children's needs.
- What if it's a private business? If there are improvements then yes – it's better than closing. If they bring in new things that's ok.
- If the private sector has to come in or it has to close down? We have no choice.
- Is there any options from having a partner?
- It's a double edged sword – we have no choice, I feel like I'm not so open to changes; if I had my way I would have Brent in control – changes attitudes; staff attitudes – some staff might not want
- Would prefer to be with the Council – like the sense of community would prefer the Council to run.

- Like the way things are
- Improvements in the buildings – positive changes in facilities
- Negative is effect on staff – it does affect the staff attitude; if staff aren't happy then that has an impact. Continuity of staff – need to have a stable workforce Council to oversee
- This is a friendly welcoming environment staff are willing to help you, tolerance of staff – if staff are unhappy it beats the purpose. You come here for support and input of staff eg. lady with autistic son. If you work with children you have to be happy – the CC is the centre of community it's a place where you come for support and input of other parents. It is really important to maintain a high morale – their future might become uncertain, look for other jobs
- If the partner can improve the quality of staff then that's good.

3. Are you worried that it might affect you money wise?

- Not concerned about cost, but if it benefits my child it is worth it.
- Children's centre for whole community – some members of community cannot afford to pay and this is a place where everyone belongs. As long as we have parent forum to maintain community minded to keep focus on community.
- If it's private then they will charge!
- 1 or 2 pounds will make a huge difference as to whether I can come and bring my children and loses the purpose of being community – a place where no one is inferior – will affect attendance and it would almost make parents stay home with their children
- One of the reasons we use it, it is accessible and it is free. It will definitely make a difference: there are places in Brent that charge – I don't go to them.
- They might cut services – if sessions were cut it will have an impact – we look forward to going there. It means pressure on services; more people show up to attend; it might mean less staff – or may lead to less people going.
- Most Children's centres should be free for children in need or with special needs – close some. Have fewer children's centres like A & E – concentrate them, make them higher quality – and close the ones that are not used well. Invest the money in the ones that work – and invest in the busy ones for special needs/low income.
- But I would have to travel = on the bus, with the buggy – they should all work. Closing any of them is not a solution, all of them should work. They should be in walking distance.
- Childminders attend – they meet other children; all children should have the chance. It won't work for childminders.
- They need to be near home – special needs children; limited walking.

4. What can parents do?

- Parents should volunteer to run play classes – volunteers need to be trained.
- Fathers should run sessions, and big companies giving volunteers
- Continue and update skills they have, good for parent's future – give feeling of satisfaction and future for self esteem
- A lot of parents are willing to volunteer – need to advertise the support that is needed; ask parents.

5. Suggestions for alternative model

- Rent the rooms to raise income;
- What if you can't afford the service such as dance classes
- Rent it out for adult space – conference meeting space

6. Do you agree or disagree with the proposal?

1 disagree

3 agree

1 cannot say not knowing what it will bring.

- Parents value the early intervention approach – making a huge difference to their lives
- Most support the introduction of a new model that produces positive changes using a dynamic, inclusive approach
- Concerns about the role of 'private' partnerships
- Very strong support for staff, and concern for impact on staff morale
- Support for community role taken by Children's Centres
- Some have strong support for Council to maintain and disagree with the Proposal
- Some accept the introduction of costs – others do not; and most show concern for families that cannot afford to pay
- Continued access for all parents supported
- Some support the closure of some centres – to protect the excellent ones
- Utilise parents skills and support – communicate the support needed

Feedback from Interviews

Participation in the focus groups was lower than expected due to a range of personal challenges that participants faced on the day. As a result we captured their views through telephone interviews.

The findings didn't reveal any new or additional information. None had heard of the proposal, and most struggled to understand the concept of a partner relationship with the Council. For those that did understand there was support for a new partner with the same caveats as set out above: ethics of organisation must go beyond profit, concerns about charging, but a commitment to continue and extend the provision. Some participants spoke of the need for creativity and a fresh look on provision, and understood that the Council could not do that alone in the current financial climate.

Respondents were very clear about the value that the centres contribute to providing good space for parent/child play, as well as the educational/advisory services supporting parents to get the best for their children.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusion

Most respondents believed that the proposal was a cover for 'cuts' and the inevitable closure of the Children's Centres that they love and want to strongly protect: they were unconvinced of the integrity of the Council to genuinely want to keep the centres open and many had not read the consultation document.

Once this was shared and parents/carers were able to discuss possibilities, they were unanimous in wanting to keep the Children's Centres open, with existing staff retained. They were open and keen to look for new ways to generate income and additional resources, which would expand the services currently delivered for the immediate and long-term sustainable future of them (family based services and private hire/use of space).

Their desired outcomes strongly reflected the aims of the proposal consulted on: Brent's parents want the same outcomes that the proposal seeks to achieve, but they are nervous about (and opposed to) reduction in services or closure.

When seeking a partner, there were mixed views: some arguing strongly to keep in the hands of the Council (because of concern about quality and quantity of services), and others welcoming the flexibility and dynamism that a partner (or partners) could bring to the diversity of provision (but concern about potentially imposed charges).

There were mixed views on the inclusion of parents in the provision of future services. Most could see the value of including parents in service delivery: added opportunity to develop work related skills; opportunity to share existing skills used in previous employment and/or the home. Some of the skills could help build cultural bridges and strengthen cohesion for parents and children. There was an appetite to think beyond mothers, to fathers and childminders in this consideration.

In the responses received from stakeholders we saw strong opposition to the proposal, with a minority of stakeholders holding onto the 'state run' service model. The key concern raised by stakeholders was maintaining quality of staff. Many Stakeholders have had long-term histories in the Children's Centre journey and want to maintain the knowledge and expertise gathered over many years to help build the community of Brent. A very real concern for the stakeholders is the impact on future staffing and ultimately the long term stability of the services currently in place.

Stakeholder response rates were low. This 12 week consultation was widely promoted so non-participating stakeholders may have used other channels to contribute their thoughts.

Staff contribution was low which may be because their voice is being pursued through the internal channels.

Recommendations

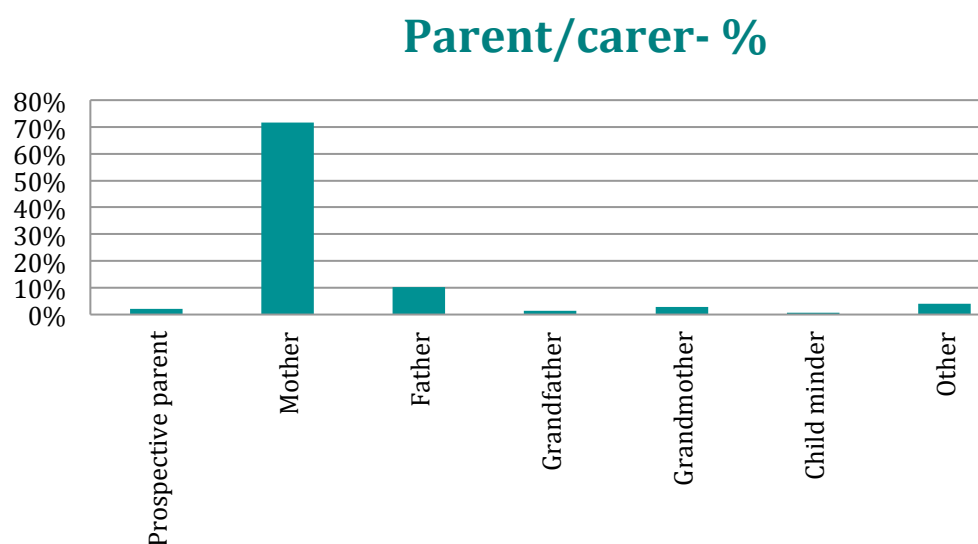
The following recommendations are made to assist the capture of parent, carer and stakeholder voice in future decision-making processes:

1. Parents raised questions about availability, over-use/waiting times for the most popular sessions and services. Underuse was also raised as an issue in some instances. We assume analysis of use has been undertaken, but if it hasn't it should be prior to tendering for a future partner. The findings should be shared with parents and carers to involve them in developing future solutions and contractual ideas for future partner role (examples could be to use the centres at evenings and weekends, and extending Stay and Play sessions to address unmet needs).
2. Parents could be made more aware of similar support services available in the voluntary and community sector. Many expect to receive support from within the Children's Centre buildings, when there may be additional services close by, but uncoordinated. Reducing the 'under one roof' approach through better use of other existing structures may ease some of the concerns about waiting times.
3. A financial impact assessment should be undertaken to understand the potential impact on services charges. Projections based on the lifetime of the contract could help allay fears of future charging or the loss of services.
4. An Equalities Impact Assessment should be undertaken with a focus on the wider children's health and care system. This should involve and be communicated to staff and stakeholders.
5. Clear communication is required to ensure parents understand that the Proposal does not mean immediate closure. To be sure that the correct information is shared, the Council should plan 'how' it continues its dialogue with parents, supported by staff.
6. The Council should consider utilising Easy Read materials for ease of understanding by its diverse communities.
7. The Council and Stakeholders should consider alternative ways to increase the level of parent/carers involvement in any future partner model. Maintaining parental involvement and enabling influence should

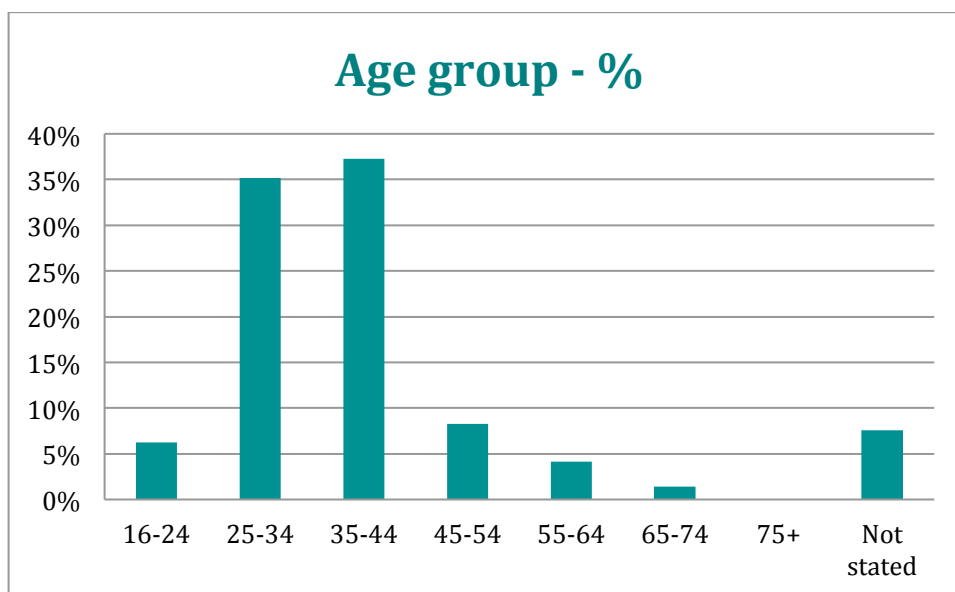
be prioritised to reflect concerns about equity, equality and quality of provision.

8. Future partners should demonstrate how they will respond to the findings in this Report.
9. Staff concerns on quality, wider system impacts and TUPE arrangements must continue using existing internal channels. Any future consultation and engagement should fully separate staff from stakeholder involvement.

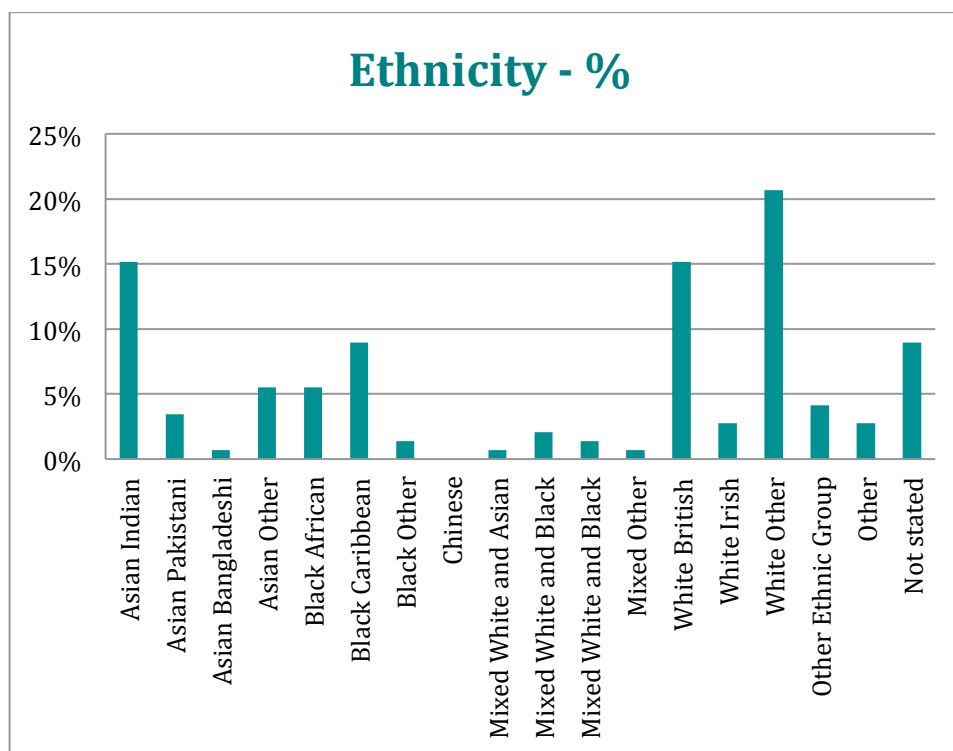
Appendix I: Survey equalities monitoring data



Prospective parent	3	2%
Mother	104	72%
Father	15	10%
Grandfather	2	1%
Grandmother	4	3%
Child minder	1	1%
Other	6	4%
Not stated	10	7%
*Two people stated they were mothers and child-minders		

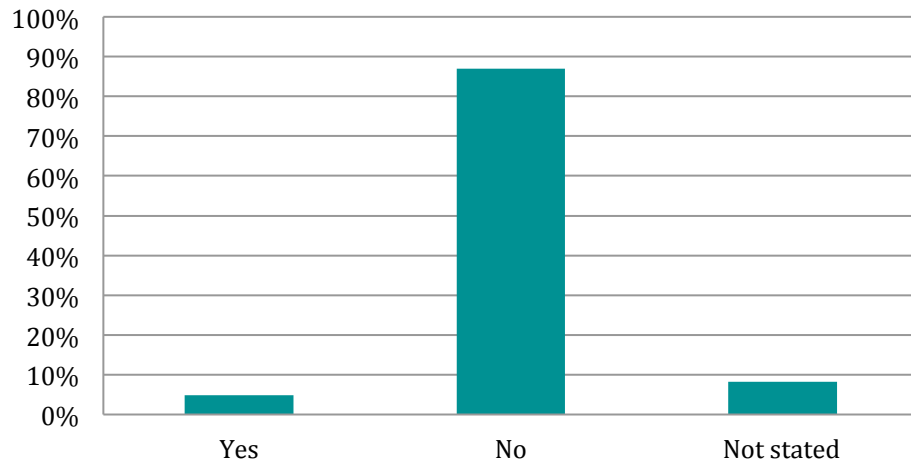


16-24	9	6%
25-34	51	35%
35-44	54	37%
45-54	12	8%
55-64	6	4%
65-74	2	1%
75+		0%
Not stated	11	8%

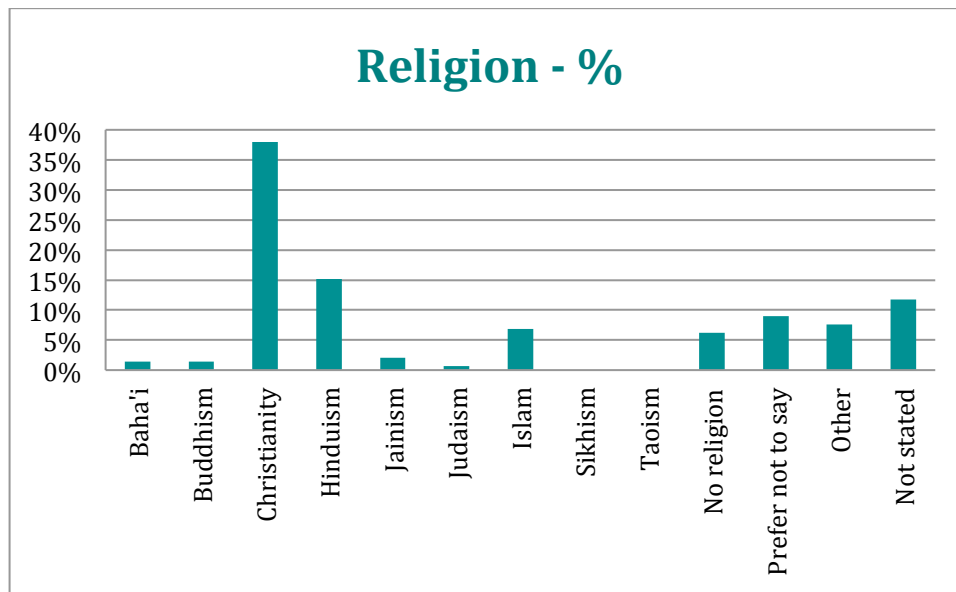


Asian Indian	22	15%
Asian Pakistani	5	3%
Asian Bangladeshi	1	1%
Asian Other	8	6%
Black African	8	6%
Black Caribbean	13	9%
Black Other	2	1%
Chinese		0%
Mixed White and Asian	1	1%
Mixed White and Black African	3	2%
Mixed White and Black Caribbean	2	1%
Mixed Other	1	1%
White British	22	15%
White Irish	4	3%
White Other	30	21%
Other Ethnic Group	6	4%
Other	4	3%
Not stated	13	9%

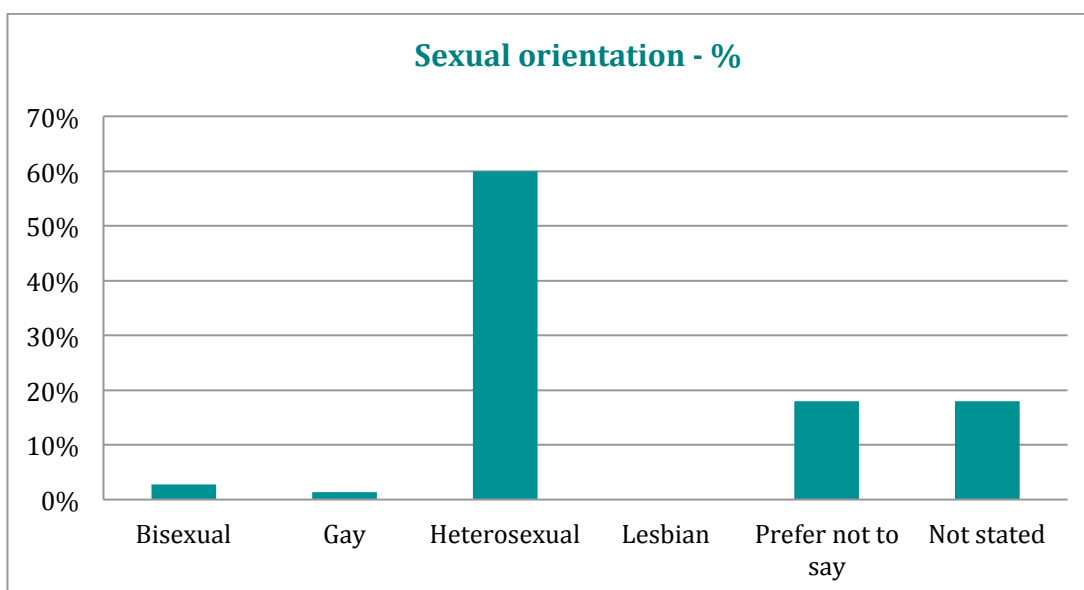
Consider you have a disability - %



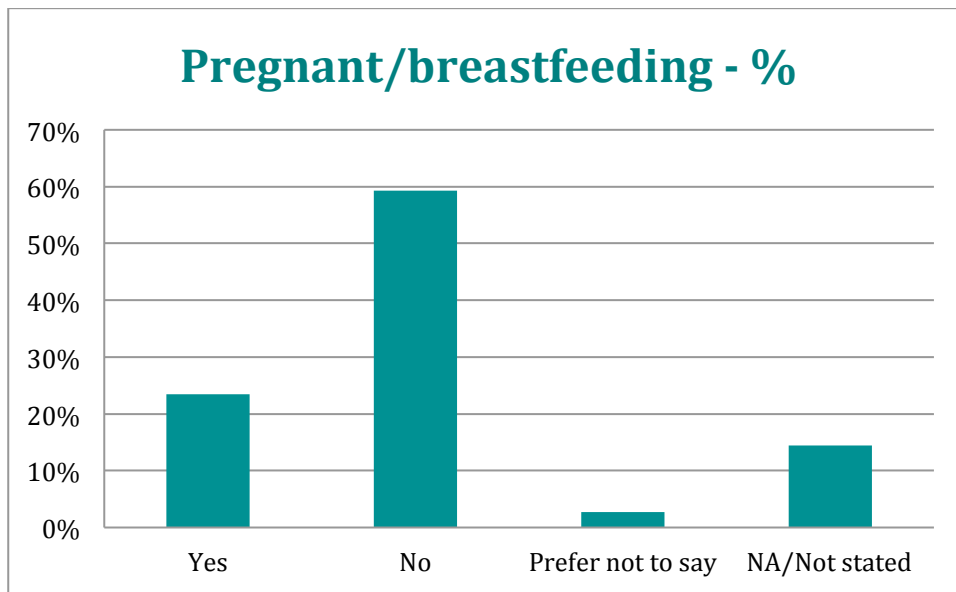
Yes	5	3%
No	137	94%
Not stated	3	2%
71% of those who identified themselves as disabled said it did affect their daily life		



Baha'i	2	1%
Buddhism	2	1%
Christianity	55	38%
Hinduism	22	15%
Jainism	3	2%
Judaism	1	1%
Islam	10	7%
Sikhism		0%
Taoism		0%
No religion	9	6%
Prefer not to say	13	9%
Other	11	8%
Not stated	17	12%



Bisexual	4	3%
Gay	2	1%
Heterosexual	87	60%
Lesbian		0%
Prefer not to say	26	18%
Not stated	26	18%

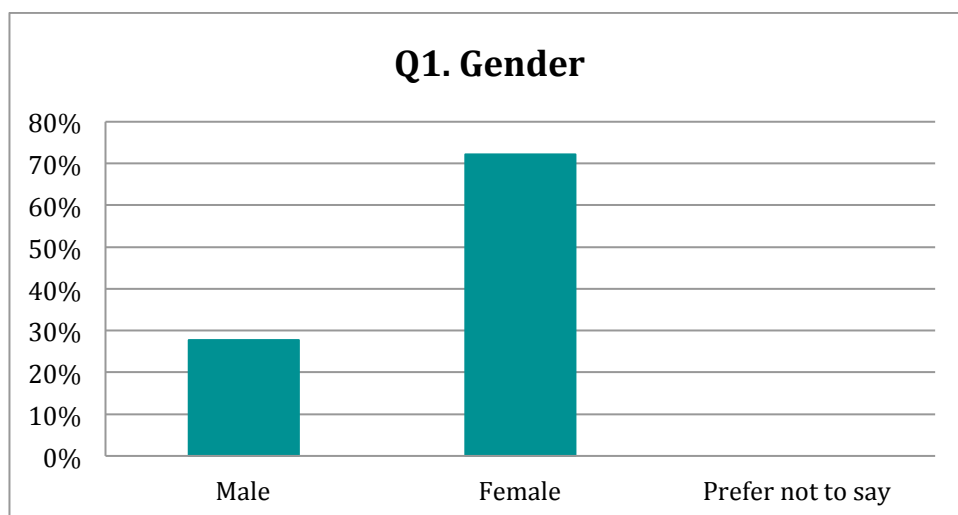


Yes	34	23%
No	86	59%
Prefer not to say	4	3%
NA/Not stated	21	14%

Appendix II: focus group equalities monitoring

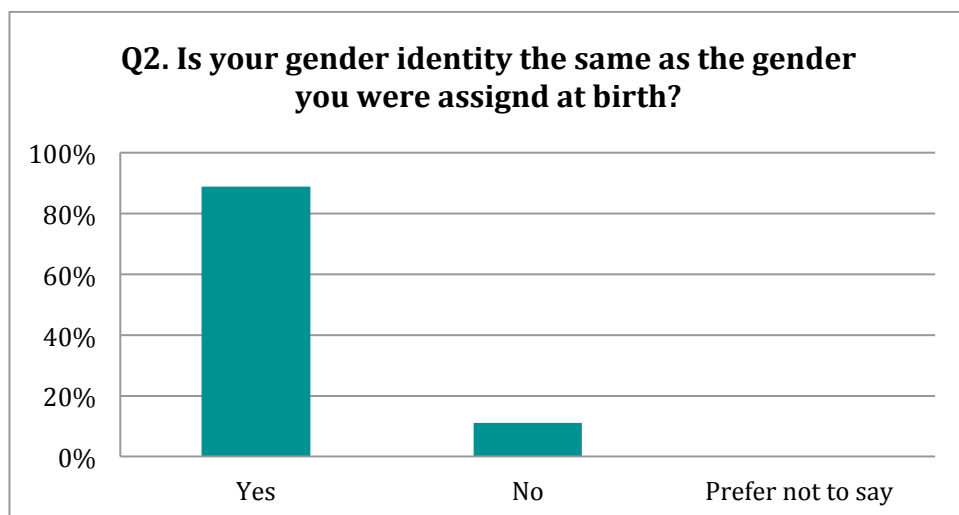
Q1. Gender

	No.	%
Male	5	28%
Female	13	72%
Prefer not to say		0%
Total	18	100%



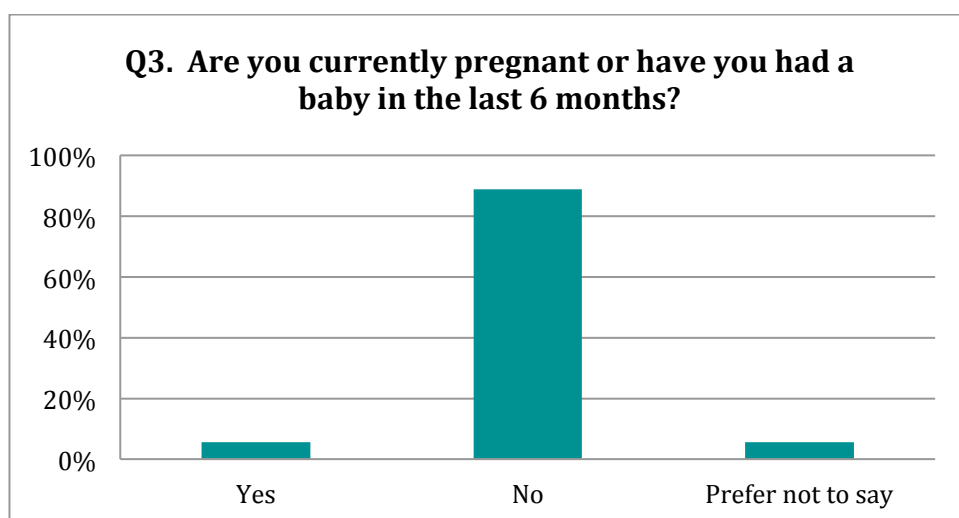
Q2. Is your gender identity the same as the gender you were assigned at birth?

	No.	%
Yes	16	89%
No	2	11%
Prefer not to say		0%
Total	18	100%



Q3. Are you currently pregnant or have you had a baby in the last 6 months?

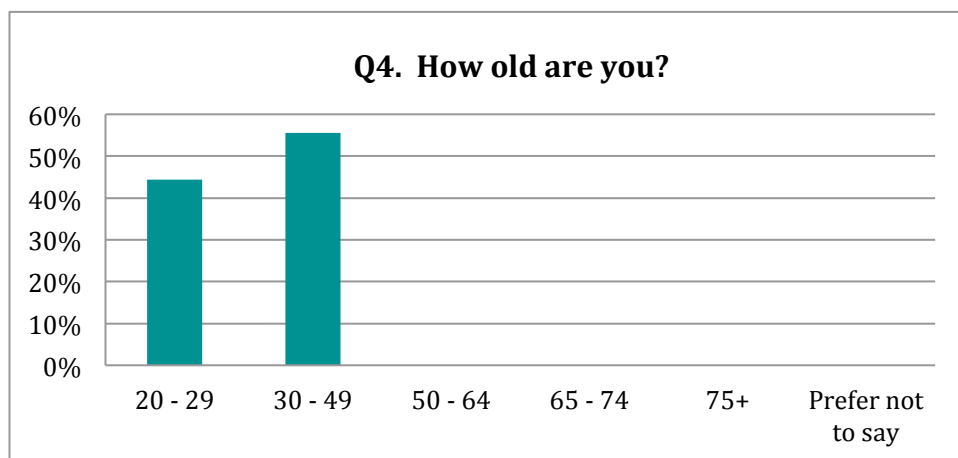
	No	%
Yes	1	6%
No	16	89%
Prefer not to say	1	6%
Total	18	100%



Q4. How old are you?

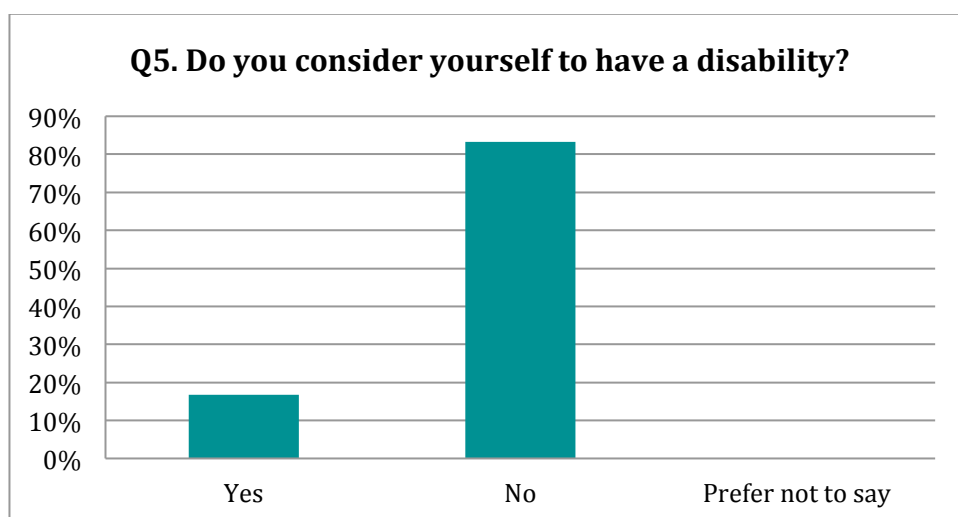
	No	%
20 - 29	8	44%
30 - 49	10	56%
50 - 64		0%
65 - 74		0%
75+		0%

Prefer not to say		0%
Total	18	100%



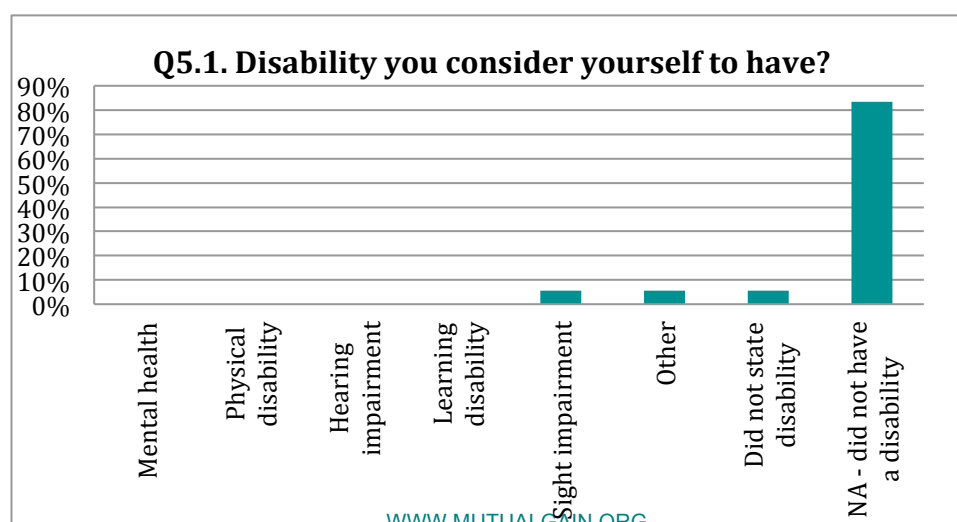
Q5. Do you consider yourself to have a disability?

	No	%
Yes	3	17%
No	15	83%
Prefer not to say		0%
Total	18	100%

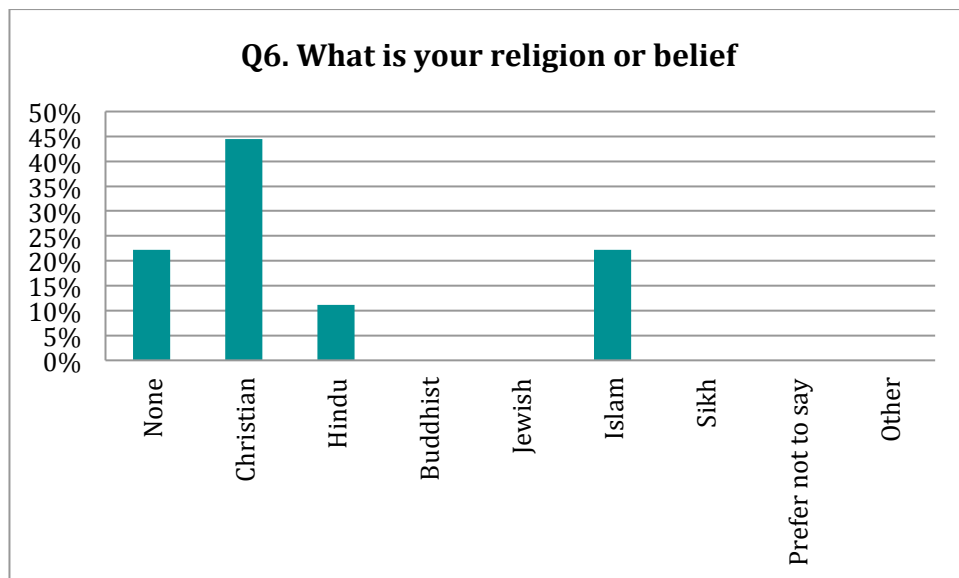


Q5.1 Disability you consider yourself to have?

	No	%
Mental health		0%
Physical disability		0%
Hearing impairment		0%
Learning disability		0%
Sight impairment	1	6%
Other	1	6%
Did not state disability	1	6%
NA - did not have a disability	15	83%
Total	18	100%



Q6. What is your religion or belief?

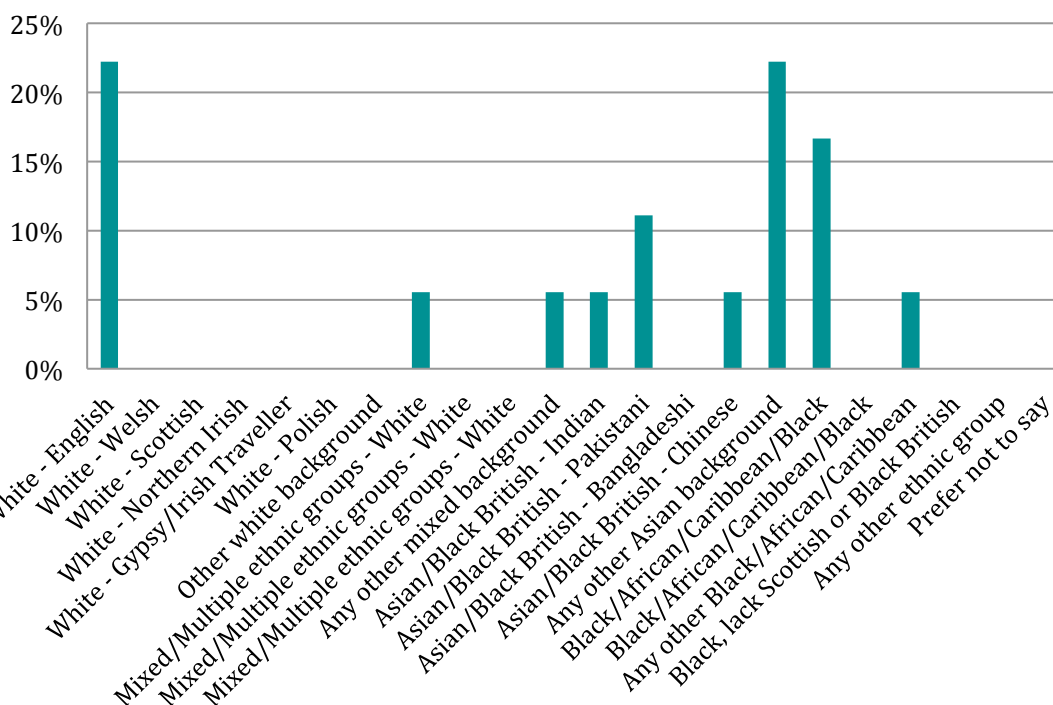


	No	%
None	4	22%
Christian	8	44%
Hindu	2	11%
Buddhist		0%
Jewish		0%
Islam	4	22%
Sikh		0%
Prefer not to say		0%
Other		0%
Total	18	100%

Q7. How would you describe your ethnic origin?

	No	%
White - English	4	22%
White - Welsh		0%
White - Scottish		0%
White - Northern Irish		0%
White - Gypsy/Irish Traveller		0%
White - Polish		0%
Other white background		0%
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups - White and Black Caribbean	1	6%
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups - White and Black African		0%
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups - White and Asian		0%
Any other mixed background	1	6%
Asian/Black British - Indian	1	6%
Asian/Black British - Pakistani	2	11%
Asian/Black British - Bangladeshi		0%
Asian/Black British - Chinese	1	6%
Any other Asian background	4	22%
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British - African	3	17%
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British - Caribbean		0%
Any other Black/African/Caribbean background	1	6%
Black, Black Scottish or Black British (only required if you have staff in Scotland)		0%
Any other ethnic group		0%
Prefer not to say		0%
Total	18	100%

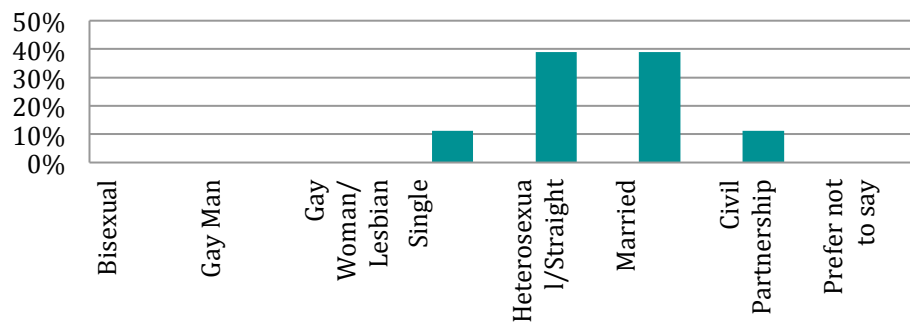
Q7. How would you describe your ethnic origin?



Q8. If you are 16 or over which of the following options best describes you?

	No	%
Bisexual		0%
Gay Man		0%
Gay Woman/Lesbian		0%
Single	2	11%
Heterosexual/Straight	7	39%
Married	7	39%
Civil Partnership	2	11%
Prefer not to say		0%
Total	18	100%

Q8. If you are 16 or over which of the following options best describes you?



Appendix III: Interim Findings, December 2015

Report on the Future of Brent's Children's Centres consultation

Susan Ritchie

Public

Introduction

The London Borough of Brent has put in place a number of mechanisms for parents, carers, families, and future users of Children's Centres to comment on the Future of Brent's Children's Centres consultation. The Council wanted to attract views from a variety of groups, using the following approach:

- Direct mail to every parent/carer who uses the services – a copy of the proposal and attached questionnaire delivered to 24,000 homes in Brent¹.
- An online survey (http://brent-consult.objective.co.uk/portal/candf/consultation_on_proposals_for_the_future_of_brents_childrens_centres)
- A survey collection box in every Children's Centre
- Encouragement and support from Children's Centre staff to complete questionnaires
- Delivery of 7 Children's Centre consultation events – designed, delivered and reported independently by MutualGain²



Drop In Events

¹ The full consultation proposal can be read at www.brent.gov.uk

² The timing and recruitment was set by Brent Council, with independent capture of views

² The timing and recruitment was set by Brent Council, with independent capture of views and opinion

Seven 'drop in' style events were provided, giving opportunities for Children's Centre parents and carers to share their thoughts. The events were offered over a range of times and locations to suit varying needs.

Brent has six Children's Centre Network areas: an event was held in each of those, with an additional evening event held at Brent Civic Centre.

Each event was designed to:

- Provide information on the Proposal
- Gather views on the proposal
- Collect new suggestions for alternative service delivery models that could be considered

A flexible approach was taken to give parents enough information about the proposals and enable time to comment and ask questions (and where necessary, to signpost parents to further information and services).

A member of the Children's Services Operational Team attended most events in an observation role, but provided assistance with technical enquiries related to other childcare matters as needed.

Structure of Events

At each location, parents and carers were provided with:

- An explanation of the proposal
- An explanation of the future role of the Council
- An explanation of the expectations of an appointed 'partner organisation'
- Opportunities for questions to be asked
- Opportunity to contribute to the thinking around the challenge (gathered and recorded visibly using large scale templates)
- A personal 'vote' using 'sticky backed ticks' to support or not support the proposal

Consultation Questions

Participants were asked to provide their views on the following:

4. What do you like most about the Children's Centres?
5. How do you think the proposal will impact on the Children's Centres?
6. Do you have any additional suggestions for a new service delivery model?

Using 'sticky back ticks' they were asked to indicate their support or non-support for the partnership model

Findings: Highlights

This summary report provides the key findings from the events. A Full Report with demographic profiles will be submitted at the end of the consultation in January 2015. Despite the events being offered at all seven locations, only three locations attracted any participation:

- Wembley Primary
- Alperton
- Three Trees

Due to this low participation, a large template has been left for distribution and use in the other Children's Centres. The Template will be mounted on a wall and parents encouraged to leave their comments – known as a 'Talking Wall' in engagement terms, it provides another opportunity for those who may not want to engage face to face, but have a comment to make. These templates will be collated and reported on in the full report.

Participation

Participation in the events was lower than expected, despite significant postal attempts to engage parents. A total of 23 parents attended the sessions. Despite the lower number attending the events, there are clear shared views across the three network areas that achieved better participation. From this we are able to provide the key findings from those who took part.

The majority of participants in these events came from BAMER communities (Black and Minority Ethnic Refugee) groups. These community members are known not to participate in traditional consultation methods (written questionnaires and online surveys), which provided a welcome voice in the engagement, and can contribute to the next stages of how the Council consider the Future of Brent's Children's Centres.

Many of the parents we spoke with speak English as a Second Language. They were all able to present their views clearly and concisely with no language problems: we thank them for their valuable time.



What do you like most about the Children's Centres?

Parents were very easily able to identify the areas of Children's Centre work that they value: they quickly identified the benefits they have personally gained and how this has contributed to their children's development, and their own socialisation in the Brent community. This was poignant from Polish parents who are particularly appreciative of the ability to learn English themselves and how this supports the preparation of their children for school.

The key things most liked and valued are:

- Learning and development of the children
- New structured programme – children learning through play
- Parent learning and socialisation (ESOL, Baby Massage, Aromatherapy)
- Ability to get children 'out of the house'
- Close to home
- Small steps to employment for parents (confidence, language, networks, skills)
- Knowledge – first aid put into practice in home accident (parent did not take child to A & E)

- Access to early support – speech and language therapy, parenting classes, new parent workshops
- Good parent/staff relationships
- Improvement in children’s behaviour
- Day trips – discounted rates e.g. £5 for 10 swimming lessons
- Preparation for nursery means children have command of English and not isolated at nursery school

Parents recognise and value the way Children’s Centres support their aspirations for future success

Many of the parents we spoke with are recent arrivals to the UK and have faced challenging experiences whilst settling in the UK. Language barriers, housing need and immersion into community life in Brent gave them additional aspirations for their children to settle and secure educational attainment. This gives them an acute

Parents value the opportunity to learn and develop their children, and themselves, as part of their family immersion into the Brent community. It helps them plan for their long-term future.

understanding of the wider benefits they gain from the Children’s centres and therefore the Children’s Centres are highly valued by them.

Parents value the ‘low/no cost’ of Children’s Centre services

Closely connected to their recent arrival status, are the challenging economic pressures many parents face. In particular, parents with two or more children voiced praise for the ‘low or no cost’ of services, that they would not be in a position to afford if they were required to pay.

How do you think the Proposal will impact on children’s centres?

There were three clear major concerns among parents about the proposed partnership:

- Potential future closure of Children's Centres if additional funds are not

Parents do not want the new partner to focus on income over children's outcomes

raised

- A new partner will shift focus to 'business' rather than children and families
- The potential introduction of costs to parents to access the services that are currently free

Despite voicing these concerns **all parents fully supported the introduction of a partnership model** to protect and secure Children's Centre Services.

There is a perceived threat of 'closure' that needs to be addressed so that parents can engage meaningfully and make a contribution to finding a solution to the Children's Centres future; so that their creative ideas can be considered.

Parents have a perception that the Council intends to close services

There are concerns that the partners' requirement to raise funds may shift the focus from 'children's outcomes' to 'income generation'. One parent described the Proposal as 'a high risk strategy that may fail if funds are not raised'. These concerns were very much shared in all the discussions and parents do not want a focus on business to overshadow the focus on children and families.

There is recognition that money will need to be raised to secure the future of services; as each group recognise the financial value they gain from 'free and minimal contribution services' – but they **want a partner that will protect children's outcomes as well as source income.**

Costs were present throughout the discussion groups. Many parents told us they could not afford to pay per session in the future; which would lead to less use of the services by parents like them.

Costs were also raised by two families in different consultation events, from a different perspective; they raised fear for costs to 'the middle class' who do not receive benefits and would be the likely ones to face increased charges for use. One parent explained that while they worked and earned money, they also had commitments and it should not be assumed that they have significant disposable income.

These dialogues led to parents making suggestions for the levels of affordable contribution they could, and would, make to maintain and protect services. These suggestions are detailed on [page 10](#), and ranged from £1 per session to £5 per week.

Parents are concerned that costs will be introduced that may exclude them from using the services

Some parents are concerned that costs will target economically active families

Majority of parents are willing to make a small contribution to attend specific programmes

Despite these concerns there is support for the introduction of a partner organisation to maintain the delivery of services.

There is overwhelming support for a model that enables services to continue with as little change or cost implication as possible. The facilitator allayed the initial fears of 'closure' and enabled participants to understand that this new approach is aimed at securing services, and provided confidence that their suggestions would help the development of an appropriate model for Brent.

Key questions raised about the new approach:

- Will there be reduced diversity in current programmes?
- Who will be the new partner?
- Is there a partner lined up?
- Will a 'private' partner change the focus to business rather than on children and families

The questions above were repeated at all the consultation events – and gives an indication that parents welcome more information on any future tender process. We would suggest that parent representation could be sought to inform the implementation of the new approach.

Parents need a clear explanation of the tender process

Parents were able to identify some potential positive impacts from the new approach, and were keen to see a new partner explore opportunities to further develop services and provide more programmes. Examples were recorded about waiting lists for programmes at two Children's Centres and a desire for a new partner to increase access to services.

Support given for the proposal

- A new partner may raise additional funds
- A new partner might broaden the current offer
- The new approach could attract additional services e.g. immunisations, GPs
- The new partner might bring back services that have stopped – music classes delivered by professional musicians

Parents support the Proposal as the opportunity to save Children's Centre Services

Hopes for the new partnership

In discussing the challenges facing Brent Council – cuts, population growth and need, the parents articulated their hopes for the future service. They hope that the new partner will:

- Continue to support disadvantaged families
- Increase the number of sessions and programmes available
- Keep costs minimal, or out of, delivering services
- Parental contribution to delivering sessions is not over estimated (example given of parent led music sessions not having the same input and impact as professionally tutored classes)

Parents expressed the need for the Council to continue its role in quality assurance, educational standards and the performance management of the partner. However, their greatest request to the Council is to protect the staff. Parents have significant affection and respect for the staff at the Children's Centres, and clearly recognise the difference that the Centre staff have made to their lives and their children. Parents would like existing staff to remain as they have relationships and trust in the people they know.

Parents want the existing staff to remain in their roles: they want 'quality' to be maintained

Suggestions for a new model for the Future of Brent's Children's Services

Parents were invited to offer their suggestions for new approaches to delivering the Children's Centre Services. They were encouraged to put forward ideas that could

Parents support the need to generate income and accept business and charitable involvement in Children's Centres

make a difference and assist in shaping a new model.

The most frequent suggestion heard was for parents to make a small financial contribution to the costs of delivering sessions. Although there are concerns about the level of costs and how this impacts of families with two and more children, there is a willingness to contribute rather than lose the service.

Parents' suggestions were:

- A small cost to parents
- Seek support from Charities
- Sponsorship is sought from large energy suppliers – electricity, gas etc.
- Individual benefactors are approached – here and abroad
- Sponsorship from large businesses e.g. Lego, Sony and Early Learning Centre
- Evening room and ground hire to the community
- Health checks in centres to encourage attendance
- Centres should deliver more services like NHS dentist, speech therapy
- Reduce waste through printing and advertising
- Go hard on Central Government and reject cuts – 'education should not be compromised

Voting with sticky backed ticks

Each parent was given a single sticky tick and asked to place it against the statement that most reflected their view:

I support the partnership model

I do not support the partnership model

23 supporting ticks were recorded in total, and 0 recorded as not supporting the proposal – full support of those in attendance, for the introduction of a partner organisation to maintain and secure delivery of Children's Centre Services in Brent.

Use you tick against the statement
you agree with:

I support the partnership model



I do not support the partnership
model



What do you like most about the children's centres?

New timetable - more structured
better programme - kids learning thru play: Maths session

Beneficial

Courses for parents: parenting
ESOL - Aromatherapy - baby massage
Workshops for new parents:

Excursions - discounted rate

Batlis November - day trip

Legoland

Swimming £5 - ten lessons @ Nuffield

→ Children know each other

'its nothing' children benefit:

- Preparing them for nursery - help with learning language/s.

How do you think the proposal will impact on children's services?

costs for families -

Will the partner change

Should be low - not high
lots of families won't be able to attend lots of sessions
£1 - is OK.

Who is the partner

- high risk system will fail if grants not secure - No longevity: unknown lifetime

- Partner might think 'business model' lead them to introduce fees.

- May then lack diversity in programme - look at the costs.

- Hope for no centre closures.

- Did the partnership model work in Greenwich?

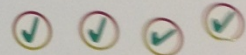
Any other suggestions:

- Families pay a small fee for use/activities
- Granville + three trees
- Charge small amounts to parents
- Council should lobby Government: state the benefits to parents
- Go in harder → wake up the gov.
- Should not compromise on educ.

- Sponsors: Charity, Early Learning Centre, Groups/businesses geared towards children
e.g. Sony, Lego

Use you tick against the statement you agree with:

I support the partnership model



I do not support the partnership model

Next Steps

Due to the lower than expected levels of participation, MutualGain recommends that additional activity is undertaken to gather the views of vulnerable families and working families, through planned focus group discussions

Future engagement activities should consider using incentives to encourage participation and consider if there are other locations in the community to attract more parents into the consultation programme.

SUBMITTED IN DECEMBER 2014