

APPENDIX 5: Overview of outcomes of Children’s Centre Consultation in response to Council proposals for Family Hubs

The purpose of this paper is to:

- Share key findings from the Council’s consultation with families and key stakeholders about closing some and redeveloping remaining Children’s Centres into Family Hubs.

Following the consultation, the recommendation is to:

- Progress the development of proposals for closing some and redeveloping remaining Children’s Centres into Family Hubs informed by the consultation as detailed.

The Children’s Centre consultation key findings are as follows:

The Childcare Act 2006 obliges local authorities to consult as appropriate before doing anything which results in a centre ceasing to be a children’s centre or where significant changes in service delivery are proposed.

Council proposals for Family Hubs have the effect of closing some centres and redeveloping remaining centres to serve families with children aged 0-18 (and 25 for children with SEND). For further information about the Council proposals see <http://democracy.brent.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=4625>.

A mixed method consultation was agreed and implemented across June-August 2019, further to Brent Council agreeing proposals for Family Hubs. The mixed method consultation was developed with Barnardo’s and Curzon Crescent and Fawood Partnership which currently manage Brent’s portfolio of children’s centres.

The consultation methodology was developed further to statutory guidance which specifies that everyone who could be affected by the proposed changes (i.e. local families, children’s centre staff, governance body members and service providers) should be consulted with specific consideration of groups that are at greater risk of exclusion. The statutory guidance specifies that the consultation must explain how the local authority will continue to meet the needs of families with children aged 0-4, subsequent to the changes. There are also expectations about providing adequate time for people to share their views and for the decisions following consultation to be made known.

The consultation involved:

- (a) 1:1 informal interviews with 29 parents/carers accessing Brent children’s centres
- (b) 8 focus groups and 2 public consultation events. While public consultation events were not well attended, the 8 focus groups involved 82 stakeholders.

These include 24 parents/carers, 10 childminders and 48 multiagency, multidisciplinary staff and partners.

- (c) An online survey completed by 63 multidisciplinary staff and members of governance bodies.
- (d) A survey (completed online and via hard-copy) by 544 parents/carers residing in Brent. This included a diverse mix of families, including 32 young parents, 40 families with children with SEND, 28 parents/carers where that parent or their partner has a disability and 41 families that are expecting a baby.

The key findings of the consultation are that:

- (a) Largely, no families with children aged 0-4 and other stakeholders engaged with the consultation want any Brent children's centres to close.
- (b) Brent children's centres are strongly valued by all stakeholder groups for their role in securing prevention and early intervention outcomes for children and families and supporting self-help and community cohesion. The most significant recurring concern in the consultation was about proposals that reduce universal provision within Family Hubs, most particularly stay, play and learn activities.
- (c) Proposals for developing centres into Family Hubs are supported in respect of supporting families with older and young children, having more information, advice and services in one place, having more support available at evening and weekend which suit families and doing more to secure positive outcomes for families with children with SEND.
- (d) Clarifications were sought about whether a SEND Hub may mean that there will be no specific support for families with children with SEND at other Family Hubs. In the event that was the case, the recommendation from parents/carers and other stakeholders is that services be available for families with SEND at all Family Hubs, in addition to a more specialist SEND Hub

This is given weight by 626 children with SEND in the year ending March 2019 accessing diverse support at Brent children's centres, with the most popular types of support being day-care (223), family support and outreach (186) and targeted family support (48).

The recurring suggestions about what should be included within future plans for Family Hubs are:

- (a) Dedicated provision for families with children aged 0-4 that is distinct from health visiting/midwifery, early education and childcare settings.
- (b) Some universal provision for families with children aged 0-4, most particularly:

- a. Stay, play and learn activities, including sessions delivered by childminders (and where these include access to outdoor space)
 - b. Health services particularly health visiting and midwifery
 - c. Access to early years speech and language
 - d. Childcare information and advice
 - e. Support with parenting, especially for new parents
- (c) Approaches to scheduling services at times and venues that families with children aged 0-4 can attend and feel confident to do so.
- (d) A service model which helps overcome challenges for some families to access services. For example, those families unable to travel to relevant services due to cost/distance from home/location not being safe for them and/or where families require support in other languages and/or where families with parents and/or children with SEND. There were particular worries expressed about gaps in provision affecting families in parts of Willesden, Harlesden and Neasden.

Aligned to this, are suggestions for more integrated provision with available services within each Family Hub area. In this way, staff across wider community services and at each Family Hub will have better knowledge about, and are effective in referral/ signposting to all provision relevant to the needs of families with children aged 0-4 within local communities.

There are also suggestions that the Council develop a communications and information strategy that keeps families and staff up to date on developments and provides opportunities for families and staff to inform developments.

Amongst most parents/carers, there is an openness to charging for attendance of some families without greater levels of need for non-statutory services. The average level of charge recommended for sessions is £2-2.50 per child.

For specific cohorts of families, there are also other types of support that are strongly valued. These are:

- a. Parenting courses and workshops (especially for young parents and those living in Kingsbury locality). The value of this support was reinforced by multiagency staff, schools and other partners.
- b. Midwifery services (especially for lone parents and families expecting a baby).
- c. Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB) (especially for families where parents and/or children have SEND and those living in Harlesden locality).
- d. Stay, play and learn sessions for families with a child/ren with SEND.

Multiagency staff and partners strongly reinforced parent/carer views about the importance of a, c and d, while representatives from schools and governance bodies also strongly reinforced the importance of a.

Council proposed response to key findings from the Children's Centre consultation

It is encouraging that many aspects of stakeholder feedback can meaningfully be provided for within existing plans for progressing Family Hubs. These are shown as some of the key findings, concerns and recurring suggestions for Hubs. These aspects are recommended to be made much more explicit in future communications and service specification development and finalisation about Family Hubs.

It is also appropriate to implement the suggestion proposed that an information and communication strategy be developed for the next stages of work to keep families, staff and other stakeholders informed and engaged in processes for finalising and implementing Family Hubs.

On the key findings, it is not recommended to keep all Brent children's centres open, whether as stand-alone children's centres or as redeveloped Family Hubs. This would not deliver the required budget savings. The cost of maintaining buildings will necessarily mean that there will also be fewer services from these buildings reducing the impact of service provision. While some individual Children's Centres that were recommended for closure such as Barham Park, Harmony, Mount Stewart, Wembley and Wykeham did have some specific requests not to be closed, there was relatively few families, childminders and other stakeholders that expressed this.

The worries associated with SEND provision and closures can be ameliorated to some extent by the planned Family Hub service model which helps overcome challenges for some families to access services and for a more integrated provision with available services within each Family Hub area. None of the existing children's centre sites are particularly large. This means that we need to identify satellite sites for Family Hub service delivery. This will also enable access to more local services. We plan to build local committees for each Family Hub which means that wider community based activities within the footprint of each area will be included within the Family Hub model.

On concerns around the provision of some universal stay, play and learn activities accessible for all families with children aged 0-4 within each Family Hub, it is recommended that we help facilitate some stay, play and learn activities and we work with community based parent and toddler groups as part of developing a more comprehensive and integrated service offer, providing good quality provision, building relationships with families and identifying/referring families for extra support. On these activities, this needs to take account of both childminders and that delivered by early years workers. Family Hub early years workers and Brent Council early years advisory team could offer quality improvement support.

Some stay, play and learning groups with a targeted message would still be offered from Family Hubs, e.g speech and language development in rhyme time sessions and the introduction of more early learning sessions for parents of babies for a fixed time e.g. 3 months where parents could then be supported to

continue in community groups. For childminders, it would be possible to offer sessions with a small charge attached. Childminders are professional fee charging carers and not seen as a vulnerable group.

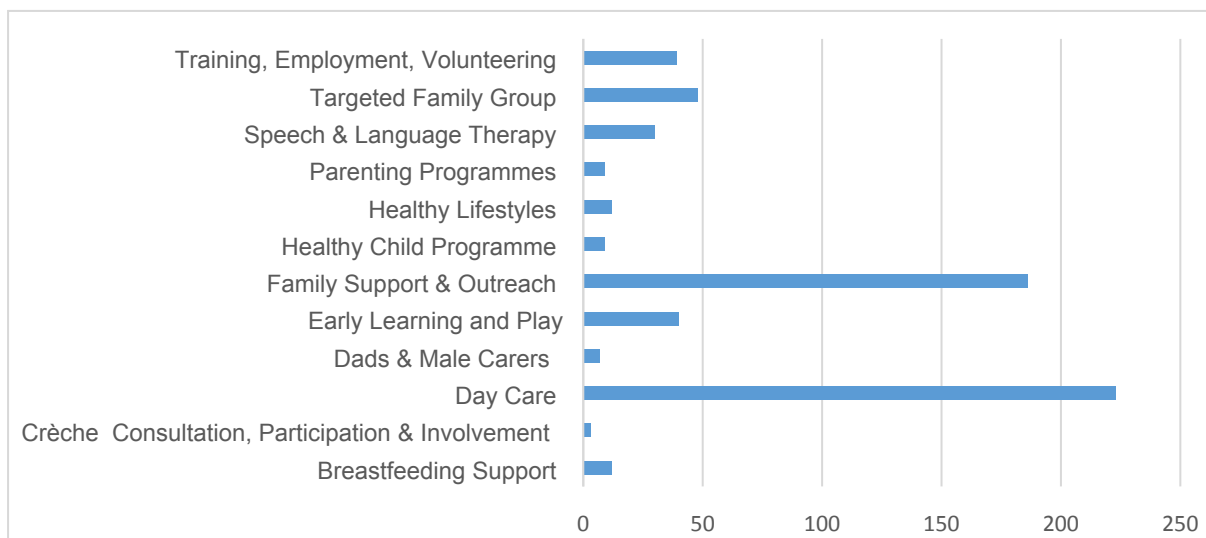
Many other concerns expressed in the consultation process are directly addressed in the emerging plans for Hubs. When the sites and model are agreed, clearer communication can be commenced giving more details for all children’s centre stakeholders and future prospective Hub users.

Take up of different services by some specific target groups

Families with children with SEND

Of the 626 children accessing support through Brent children’s centres, close to 2 in 5 (39%) attended sessions at Curzon Crescent. The next most frequented sessions are by children with SEND at Tree Tops (11%), Fawood (11%), Alperton (10%), Wembley (8%) and Willow (6%). There was attendance by children with SEND at all Brent children’s centres, albeit with very limited attendances at Harmony and St Raphael’s children’s centres.¹

The types of sessions accessed by families with children aged 0-4 with SEND are set out below. The most popular sessions are day care (36%), family support and outreach (30%), targeted family support relevant specifically to children with SEND such as Portage, Buss and Child in Need Free Play (8%), training, employment and volunteering (6%) and early learning and play (6%).



Key services sought by stakeholders forming part of the consultation

The value of specific services reported by stakeholders in the consultation is reinforced by existing levels of demand. For example:

- 16,497 children attended universal stay, play and learn activities. These children are largely resident in the Treetops (19%), Three Trees (18%), Alperton (16%), Church Lane (11%), Fawood (10%) and Curzon Crescent

¹ The source is Estart data for the period 1/4/18- 31/3/19

(9%) children's centres areas.

- Childminder stay, play and learn activities, with 2,219 children assisted. These children are largely resident in the Three Trees (22%), Curzon Crescent (18%), St Raphael's (12%) and Willow (12%) children's centres areas. There have been 1,352 attendances by childminders at these sessions.
- Health visiting services delivered as part of the Healthy Child Programme with 6,258 children assisted. These are mainly supported at Church Lane (21%), Granville Plus (20%), Curzon Crescent (16%), Welcome (15%) and Three Trees (8%) children's centres.
- Ante-natal services, with 4,568 parents/carers assisted. These are mainly supported at Church Lane (39%), Wembley (27%), Granville Plus (22%) and Harmony (7%) children's centres. There were also 1,329 parents/carers accessing post-natal services and breastfeeding support, with more than half (58%) doing so at Curzon Crescent children's centre.
- Early years speech and language activities with 9,512 children assisted. These are supported across diverse children's centres, with the most popular attendances at Curzon Crescent (15%), Church Lane (12%), Treetops (12%), Wembley (10%), Welcome (9%) and Three Trees (8%) children's centres.
- Father's programme was accessed by 157 fathers/male carers. This is mainly at Treetops (49%), Church Lane (20%), Three Trees (14%) and Harmony (9%) children's centres.
- Training, Work related advice, Volunteering & Financial Advice Services were accessed by 3,648 parents/carers. These are supported across diverse children's centres, with the most popular attendances at Wembley (16%), Curzon Crescent (15%), Three Trees (15%), Harmony (10%) and Church Lane (10%) children's centres.

To summarise, legislation Children's Centres is contained in the Childcare Act 2006 (as variously amended by subsequent Acts including the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act (ASCL) 2009, Education Act 2011, and Children and Families Act 2014). This refers to the following sections of the Childcare Act:

- Section 1: Duty on local authorities to improve the well-being of young children in their area and reduce inequalities between them.
- Section 3: Duty on local authorities to make arrangements to secure early childhood services in their area are provided in an integrated manner in order to facilitate access and maximise the benefits of those services to young children and their parents
- Section 5A: Arrangements to be made by local authorities so that there are sufficient Children's Centres, so far as reasonably practicable, to meet

local need.

- Section 5D: Duty on local authorities to ensure there is consultation before any significant changes are made to Children's Centre provision in their area.