

Cambridgeshire Children's Centre Reconfiguration 2014 Analysis of Parents' Consultation Survey

Consulting with Parents and Users

Whenever changes are proposed to Children's Centres, or service changes suggested by local Centres families are always directly consulted with. This means the opportunity is offered for families and users to tell us what they think about the changes. We want to try to make changes that have as little impact on the service the public receives as possible.

The proposal for parents set out the existing provision in Cambridgeshire and then described why we need to make changes, and what those proposed changes are. It described how Centres currently work with partner agencies, what the service offer is, and included information about background data which has been used to make the proposed changes.

Consultation Process

An online survey comprised of 12 questions was devised to seek feedback from Children's Centre users and the wider public about the proposed changes to Children's Centres, linked from the Cambridgeshire Children's Centres website, the main County Council website and the Shape Your Place Cambridgeshire sites.

Children's Centres were also provided with posters to display in their Centres, promoting the survey. Children's Centres had already been alerting families to the fact that this process was due to start, and staff provided with guidance about consulting parents and Centre users.

Consultation Respondents and Responses

There was an excellent response rate to the survey between Wednesday 27th November and Monday 13th January. We received 1151 responses in this time period. Postcode analysis shows that responses came from the following areas of the county:

Proposed Children Centre Area	Count of Postcode	% of Postcode
Bottisham, Burwell & Soham	78	7%
Bassingbourn, Melbourn, Comberton and Gamlingay	120	11%
Cambridge South	71	7%
Ely, Littleport & Witchford	41	4%
Wisbech	7	1%
March, Chatteris & Whittlesey	22	2%

Ramsey, Sawtry and Yaxley	58	5%
Huntingdon and St Ives	249	23%
Cambridge North	49	5%
Sawston & Linton	49	5%
Cottenham & Swavesey	119	11%
St Neots	186	17%
Either out of district, or could not map postcode	15	1%
Did not provide a postcode	86	7%
Total	1151	100%

The responses came from parents/carers (89%), parents to be (3%), members of the community (7%) and members of Children's Centres Advisory Boards (1%).

Summary of the Findings

Of the seven proposals we put to the public in the questions above, the majority of respondents agreed with five of them:

- reducing the opening hours of the Children's Centres that are less well used and use all of our buildings more efficiently
- providing some groups and activities to all families but charging a small fee
- improving what we provide online, so that more families can access information and advice at a time and place that suits them
- providing more services for families in their own homes and in local community venues - reducing the need for some families to visit a Children's Centre building, but still allowing them to benefit from the Children's Centre service.'

There were two that more people disagreed with than agreed with:

- grouping Children's Centres together, covering a larger area between them and sharing resources and staff – creating a more cost-efficient and flexible workforce
- reduce the current variety of activities, groups and services available to all families and focus on those activities that offer the most benefit for local families

One of the questions enabled a free text response: 'Is there anything else that you feel we should be considering in making final decisions on the future of Cambridgeshire Children's Centres?'

The responses ranged from long, detailed responses about people's individual experiences of Children's Centres, to short, informative responses providing suggestions about things we could implement. Some strong themes emerged

regarding the services that people value and want to keep. The responses have been summarised below under some key headings.

Charging for Services

Respondents said that they would rather pay for some services in Children's Centres rather than lose the range of services. Comparisons were made to the fees people pay to attend other activities with children under 5 and there was a general sense that people expect to pay for many things nowadays.

There was concern that introducing charging may mean that the most vulnerable families who cannot afford to attend would be disadvantaged and there were creative suggestions about ensuring this did not happen. People value the fact that there is diversity amongst the attendance at Centres. Equally, people described concern that the introduction of charges may make Centres exclusive.

Responses provided a range of information about contributions people would be prepared to pay. Other suggestions came in including a sliding scale of charges and initiating a monthly subscription fee.

Generating Revenue

Linked to charging for services, there were many responses regarding the ways in which Centres could generate income that could be used to further fund the delivery of services. Many people said that if Centres could earn an income from hiring out their venues, this would help to integrate the Centres with the wider community, and increase viability.

Fundraising was also suggested, learning from what works for local primary schools and potentially replicating that.

Using Volunteers and Other Groups

We suggested that local community groups could help to deliver services, so that services can continue to be provided with reduced staffing levels. Supportive comments were made about this proposal. Respondents suggested that parents could lead some groups, or Children's Centre staff could help to support local community baby and toddler groups. Feedback raised questions were asked about the logistics of taking this approach to running Centres which will be helpful in planning and implementing changes.

Accessibility of Services

In response to our proposal about grouping Centres together, and covering larger geographical areas, as well as reductions in opening hours, there was a significant response regarding the need for services in local communities that people can access easily. Transport issues came up as a significant factor for parents of young children. There were many responses regarding the need to keep services local.

Parents want us to consider what other services are accessible in areas before stopping Children's Centre run activities.

There was a suggestion that perhaps Centres could support parents to help each other to access Children's Centre run activities.

Service Offer-Offering Information Online

Parents had some ideas about how information could be provided in alternative ways other than face-to-face contact with staff. Suggestions include; providing a programme covering activities at all the Centre locations, a central Facebook page.

Others commented that online support is no substitute for face to face contact and that not everyone has internet access. Further comments covered the fact that there is already lots of information online, so Cambridgeshire Children's Centres do not need to spend money on developing more. It was also stated that we need to consider the overlap with other services and ensure there is no duplication.

Offering more support in the home rather than at the Centres

There was limited feedback regarding whether we should offer more support to families in their own home rather than at Centres, however, there were some detailed responses about individual support some families have received from family workers which has been very helpful, especially with regard to post natal depression and domestic violence.

Parents feel that the support provided by one to one saves crisis interventions by other services, such as Social Care.

In general, respondents feel it is better to mix both support at home and in groups, as groups can be a great way to make friends and socialising in group settings is beneficial to children as well as parents.

Access to Health Services

There were many responses regarding the perceived benefits of accessing health services via Children's Centres. Parents feel that midwifery appointments, health visitors being present at groups, inter agency working and communication and breast feeding support are all extremely important elements of the Children's Centre offer. They like the feeling that advice is being given to them in an informal, non clinical setting that they feel comfortable in.

SEND

There were also several responses that made specific reference to the need for SEND groups to be maintained, as they are extremely well valued by the users.

Safeguarding

There were several responses that included comments about the proposed reorganisation of staff leading to reduced levels of safeguarding. Some comments were made about the risks associated with reducing money from early intervention services, and that this could lead to more money being spent on crisis interventions.

Who Children's Centres should offer services to

There were very mixed views from respondents about who Centres should be targeting. These ranged from responses saying that Centres should focus directly on providing services for children of parents who are defined as vulnerable or having specific needs, through to those who said they should continue to offer to all, as otherwise Centre services will become stigmatised. Groups with good attendance encourage participation, peer support, early detection of adverse issues, help to overcome isolation, offer helpful information on parenting, early socialisation for babies and young children, and prepare children for school. These comments reflect the ones about charging for services, as many parents said that they would not fall into any target groups if services were to be restricted to target groups only, but that they would gladly pay for services, as they feel they could not have coped without them.

There were also some responses stating that the offer should focus on children only, whereas others recognised the benefit that they as parents had got from the services provided to them, i.e. Advice with parenting; support to find a job; support to escape domestic abuse.

Post Consultation

The feedback received was considered and has informed the decision making process. Most significantly, as a direct result of the Parents Consultation survey, we will be introducing a countywide Charging Policy, whereby Centres will be able to seek contributions from families for some services in future. The table below summarises how the responses to the survey have informed decisions:

You said	We did
We would be happy to pay for some services, if it means they will continue to be delivered	Charging for services is being looked into and we will be basing our decisions on your feedback, and putting a policy in place about a suggested contributions policy, including what we will charge for, what the charges will be and who will pay. As we need to consider how to take into account the very creative suggestions received.

Please make sure that people who cannot afford to pay to attend groups are not disadvantaged, as they might be the most in need of support.	<p>Decisions about charging for services will be based on your feedback.</p> <p>We want to make sure any system is fair and that those who need to access help are not prevented from doing so.</p>
Could other services or members of the public pay to use Children's Centre buildings, to generate some income that can be spent on delivering services to families?	In principle this would be a good development. We are working with other teams in the Local Authority who are responsible for buildings, to make sure that we can use Centres as effectively and safely as possible.
We would like to help with running parent-led groups, and fund raising, so that we can still use Children's Centres.	<p>We want to work with volunteers, existing parent-led baby and toddler groups and community groups to make sure we continue to meet the needs of local families and deliver what they need and want.</p> <p>Work will start on this in the Spring to ensure we do this in an organised and safe way.</p>
Please consider transport links and how people without cars will access services if you plan to close any Centres, or reduce their opening hours	Whilst we cannot influence local public transport timetables we will be doing all we can to make sure that Centres still serve as much of the county as possible. We will also ensure that we signpost families to other services in their area.
Please don't just deliver everything from the biggest towns or communities, and think about those who live in villages and need services to be local.	We know that some Children's Centre 'reach' areas will be very big and rural; Centres will be expected to ensure that services are delivered across the area. This will involve close working with partners and our links with existing groups.
Promote online resources more and use Facebook and websites to keep families informed about what is going on across the county, so we can look easily in one place for information about what support is available.	We will be working together with colleagues in the Family Information Service, who are responsible for ensuring the County Council websites and other materials can be used effectively by families.
Please ensure that one-to-one support from Family Workers is still available for those who need it, to prevent crisis interventions being needed later on.	<p>We are confident that Family Workers will still be able to prioritise 1:1 work with the families that need it most when we have made the changes.</p> <p>There will still be staff supporting groups and Centre based activities.</p>

Don't stop all universal groups, as they are great place for parents and children to socialise and can be supportive and educational.	We do not plan to stop delivering groups, as we know they can be a lifeline to parents. There will still be groups on offer; some may charge a small fee to access them, and some may not be run at the Centre, or by Centre staff directly, but will be 'linked' to the Children's Centre.
We like to access health services via Children's Centres as we feel comfortable in a non-clinical setting.	Children's Centres have agreements with Health services to work jointly and deliver services together so that they meet the needs of families. This will be continuing and if anything, there will be more joined up working in future, in particular between Health Visitors and Family Workers in Children's Centres.