

HILLINGDON CHILDREN'S CENTRE PROPOSAL PETITIONS

Cabinet Member

Councillor David Simmonds

Cabinet Portfolio

Cabinet Member Education and Children's Services

Report Author

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Papers with report

None

HEADLINE INFORMATION

Purpose of report

To inform the Cabinet Member that three valid petitions have been received in relation to proposed changes to the Children's Centre Programme.

Contribution to our plans and strategies

Health and Wellbeing Strategy

Financial Cost

None directly from this hearing.

Relevant Policy Overview Committee

Children, Young People and Learning

Ward(s) affected

All

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services:

1. notes the petitions received and listens to the views of petitioners; and
2. considers the views offered by petitioners as part of the proposal consultation process.

INFORMATION

Reasons for recommendations

To receive, consider and listen to the views of petitioners.

Background

On 9 December 2016, Council officers briefed service providers and stakeholders on proposed changes to the Children's Centre Programme. The briefing served as a prelude to the initiation of a formal consultation process in relation to the proposed changes which commenced on 14

December 2016.

Hillingdon Council currently has 18 Children's Centres. Under the current delivery model, each Centre is registered as a standalone centre and has its own distinct leadership and management arrangements.

What is being proposed?

The Council is proposing to remodel the Children's Centre Programme to create five distinct geographical areas across the Borough. Each area will be served by a lead Children's Centre or 'hub' and a number of linked sites with shared leadership and management across all sites.

The lead 'hub' Centre will be responsible for ensuring the delivery of early childhood services within its area and managing the distribution of activity and staff according to local need.

It follows from the statutory definition of a Sure Start Children's Centre that Children's Centres are as much about making appropriate and integrated services available as providing premises in particular geographical areas. In practical terms, this means that only the lead Centres will be registered as standalone Children's Centres, the remaining Centres will be listed as linked sites and will no longer be subject to individual inspections.

The proposed changes aim to further strengthen the current approach to planning and delivery of integrated and flexible family support to residents.

The lead 'hub' Centre in each given locality will ensure that resources are fairly allocated to each 'spoke' Centre in its area and that resources are used to meet the needs of local families. This will include working with local agencies and partners to maximise use of resources beyond those formally allocated to the Children's Centre Programme.

Closure of existing Centres has been proposed where the Council does not have a lease in place and where it has been unable to progress lease negotiations. The absence of an agreed lease means that the Council does not have the level of surety required to plan for the future delivery of the programme from those premises. The consultation process, which concludes on 25 January 2017, is seeking to obtain views in relation to these proposed closures.

Other changes being made to the delivery of the programme

At present, the programme is delivered through a combination of externally commissioned Centres and a number that are directly managed by the Council. The Council has decided to discontinue external commissioning arrangements and bring the management of the programme in-house. This change was communicated to all external providers at an initial briefing on 9 December 2016 and subsequently via a letter of notice.

The consultation process is concerned with obtaining views on the proposed service delivery model and not how the Programme will be managed. However, through the formal consultation and the submission of petitions, views have been expressed both in relation to the model and the decision to directly manage the Programme.

The Council is assuming direct management of all staff employed to deliver the Children's Centre Programme as it considers this to be key to enabling the implementation of the delivery

model, once it has been agreed. It should be stressed that the proposed model is subject to consultation and noted that no changes have yet been determined. Decisions in relation to the delivery model will be made following the conclusion of the consultation process.

Once the consultation process concludes, the proposal will be reviewed and may be modified based on feedback received. Should changes to the Programme delivery structure be formally agreed following the consultation, further work will be undertaken to determine any potential changes required to the current workforce once they have been brought under the Council's management on 1 April 2017. Any such changes would be subject to further consultation with Programme staff.

Petitions Received

Three petitions have been received with more than 20 signatures and are therefore eligible for being heard in accordance with the Council's Petition Scheme:

Date received	Title of Petition and Desired Outcome	Petition Organiser	Number of Signatures
12.1.17	Keep Children's Centres Under Individual Management - To keep the management of Children's Centres as is at the present.	Ms Aarti Goyal	51
18.1.17	Linked to above petition. Save Hillingdon's Children's Centres from closures and job losses - leave the Children's Centres unchanged.	Mr Chris Waters	410
18.1.17	Save Hillside Children's Centre from closure - So the Centre can continue to provide essential services for communities in Northwood and Northwood Hills.	Mrs Leila Melhem	694 (at the time of submission)

At the time of writing the report, the Council is aware of two further petitions gathering signatures. Efforts have been made to contact the petition organisers and encourage them to submit their petitions for inclusion in this process. Should these be submitted in advance of the Petition Hearing on 1 February 2017, the petition organisers will be given the right to speak at the meeting.

A number of letters and Members' Enquiries have also been received in addition to views offered via the formal online consultation process, and will be considered as part of the consultation review process.

Speaking Procedures

Each petition organiser (or their nominee) shall have the right to speak about the matter raised in the petition for a maximum of 5 minutes and the Cabinet Member may ask questions about their petition. Extending the time limit and allowing others to speak is down to the consent of the Cabinet Member at the meeting.

Financial Implications

The draft budget was approved by Cabinet on 15 December 2016 and the final budget for

2017/18 will be approved at a meeting of full Council on 23 February 2017. There was a consultation on the draft budget ending Friday 27 January 2017.

There are savings targets of £189k in 2017/8, £95k in 2018/19 and £744k in 2019/20 relating to Service Transformation in Children's Centres. The MTFE figures are speculative and subject to consultation. The Council will continue to explore options for future efficiency savings.

EFFECT ON RESIDENTS, SERVICE USERS & COMMUNITIES

What will be the effect of the recommendation?

To enable the Cabinet Member to discuss directly with petitioners their concerns and how they can be addressed within the wider context of the related consultation process.

Consultation Carried Out or Required

The Council is currently engaged in a consultation process in relation to proposed changes to the Children's Centre Programme.

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Legal

The Borough Solicitor confirms that there are no specific legal implications arising from this report. As stated in the report, the views of petitioners will be taken into account as part of the consultation process.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

NIL.