

HILLINGDON'S 0-19 YRS CORE OFFER TO CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR FAMILIES

Cabinet Member(s)	Councillor Susan O'Brien
Cabinet Portfolio(s)	Children, Families and Education
Officer Contact(s)	Claire Fry – Assistant Director, Child and Family Support Services
Papers with report	Appendix A – Family Hub Strategy 2023-2025 Appendix B – Family Hub Network Consultation Report Appendix C – EIA Barra Hall CC Appendix D – EIA Charville CC Appendix E – EIA Coteford CC Appendix F – EIA Cowley CC Appendix G – EIA Harefield CC Appendix H – EIA McMillan CC Appendix I – EIA South Ruislip CC Appendix J – EIA Early Years Nurseries

HEADLINES

Summary	<p>In March 2023, Cabinet agreed to commence a 12-week public consultation on the draft Family Hub strategy. The strategy sets out a plan for delivering a Family Hub programme for residents in Hillingdon, through a network of integrated services providing support for children and young people aged 0-19 years (0-25 years with SEND) and their families.</p> <p>Cabinet further agreed that the public consultation should seek residents' views on options for the delivery of childcare in the Council's early years nurseries.</p> <p>This report presents the findings of the consultation. Cabinet is asked to note and consider the consultation responses and consider approval of the strategy and recommendations for the early years nurseries.</p> <p>It should also be noted that during the consultation, the DfE shared draft calculations of demand and supply for the new early years entitlements, effective April and September 2024, which have been considered as part of this process.</p>
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<p>Putting our Residents First</p> <p>Delivering on the Council Strategy 2022-2026</p>	<p>This report supports our ambition for residents / the Council of: Live active and healthy lives</p> <p>This report supports our commitments to residents of: Safe and Strong Communities Thriving, Healthy Households A Digital-Enabled, Modern, Well-Run Council</p> <p>This report supports the priorities of the Health & Wellbeing Strategy.</p>
<p>Financial Cost</p>	<p>The Family Hub Strategy and the realignment of corporate assets from which services will be delivered, will support the delivery of the associated MTFF saving of £2.5m by 2025/26, through the wider rationalisation of the council's estate.</p> <p>The lease or rent of Nestles Avenue, South Ruislip and Uxbridge Early Years Nurseries will remove the corresponding per annum loss from this operation, which was £710k in 2022/23 and enable the realisation of the corresponding MTFF of £230k, which constitutes the budgeted subsidy.</p>
<p>Relevant Select Committee</p>	<p>Children, Families and Education</p>
<p>Relevant Ward(s)</p>	<p>All</p>

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Cabinet:

- 1. Notes the findings, considers the responses from the comprehensive public consultation and has due regard to the Equalities Impact Assessments which have informed the proposed final Family Hubs strategy;**
- 2. Notes the findings, considers the responses from the comprehensive public consultation and has due regard to the Equalities Impact Assessments which have informed the proposed option for the delivery of childcare in the early years nurseries;**
- 3. Agrees the Family Hub Strategy as set out in Appendix A for implementation from October 2023;**
- 4. Agrees the use of council assets for the delivery of Family Hub services as set out in Table 1 of the report and agrees the children's centre sites that are surplus to requirements and will close with no reduction in service as set out in Table 2 of the report;**
- 5. Agrees to enable the continued delivery of childcare at Nestles Avenue, South Ruislip and Uxbridge Early Years Centres by securing an alternative provider(s) from the childcare market, as set out in this report;**
- 6. Agrees to receive a further report back to determine future provision for the nurseries;**
- 7. Agrees to support the development of the childcare market in Hillingdon to manage sufficiency in line with the new Early Education entitlements effective April 2024.**

Reasons for recommendations

Family Hub Strategy and Delivery Plan

- The Family Hub strategy sets out the council's ambition to improve approaches to meeting the needs of children and young people through a network of family hubs, increasing the core service offer from 0-5 years to 0-19 years [up to 25 for those with SEND] to meet the needs of Hillingdon residents.
- Feedback gathered through the consultation shows that the response to the draft strategy was positive overall, from both residents and partners. Families with children with SEND were very positive about the strategy and particularly keen to see a change in the way services and support for families is integrated.
- Whilst it should be noted that some parents and partners expressed concern about ending service delivery from some children centres, including Barra Hall, McMillan and Harefield children's centres, the relocation of services and staff to alternative sites will be phased to ensure continuity of services for residents within the locality.

- Collaboration with local communities and service delivery partners will ensure opportunities are maximised to increase access to services in local spaces, supported by the use of mobile services such as the Transporter Bus and to increase the reach into some communities.
- In making these recommendations that council has had due regard to the DfE Sure Start Guidance for Children's Centres, 'in making appropriate and integrated services available as it is about providing premises in particular geographical locations.' (p6)
- Partners were open to the strategy, inspired by the scale and ambition, and welcoming of the opportunity to integrate working practices and build closer cross sector relationships.

Early Years Childcare Provision

- The council is responsible for ensuring sufficiency of childcare within Hillingdon and has a role in ensuring the quality of childcare provision and support for children with SEND. The introduction of the new extended Early Entitlements for working parents from April 2024 is expected to increase demand for childcare and the council will proactively work with childcare providers to expand the number of childcare places available in Hillingdon over the next 2 years.
- The council has a duty to deliver services in the most efficient and cost-effective way, including making best use of its assets. Currently the council nursery provision has a budgeted subsidy of £230k; in addition, the nurseries do not bring in sufficient income to meet the high operational costs, which places an additional pressure on the general fund. The overspend was £710k in 2022/23.
- The council is not required to directly deliver childcare services. Securing an alternative provider to deliver the service will enable the council to remove the subsidy and the associated overspend incurred by the early years nurseries and focus efforts on increasing capacity in the market to ensure sufficiency and develop and enhance the quality of provision available.
- Previous decisions to close the early years nurseries generated widespread concern and anger amongst parents of children attending the nurseries and local communities who value the nurseries highly and the benefits they bring.
- Parents are keen for the local authority help to build childcare capacity and quality; maintaining childcare provision at Nestles Avenue, South Ruislip and Uxbridge early years centres via an alternative provider will support parents to continue to access childcare locally and enable them to work.

Alternative options considered / risk management

- An alternative option would be to do nothing; however, this is not considered to be in the best interests of residents. The Family Hub Strategy reflects the national programme championed by the DfE and a move towards more integrated services for children, young people and their families. The council is committed to ensuring that services remain responsive to the changing needs of residents and communities over time and reflect national as well as local policy.
- In August 2022, the council took the decision to close the nursery provision at its three early years nurseries. Parents using the nurseries did not support this decision, and council withdrew the decision, pending further review and consultation. Some residents and parents remain opposed to the closure of the council's nursery provision as evidenced in the feedback to the consultation.
- An alternative option considered increasing nursery fees, so that the families who used the nurseries pay for them. However, for the council to deliver a full cost recovery model and

remove the current subsidy and reliance on general fund, parental fees would need to be increased substantially resulting in them being higher than other local private providers.

Democratic compliance / previous authority

In March 2023, Cabinet gave approval for a public consultation to be undertaken on the proposed Family Hub strategy and delivery model for children and young people aged 0-19 (0-25 for SEND) and their families and that the public consultation should include consultation on options for the Council's directly delivered childcare in the three early years nurseries.

Delegated authority was given to the Executive Director of Adult Services and Health in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education to approve the commissioning of an independent provider to run both public consultations and, review and approve the final consultation documents for publication.

Cabinet agreed to receive a report back to consider the consultation responses and to make a decision on the strategy and delivery model for Family Hubs Services and the delivery of childcare in the nurseries, informed by the findings of the consultation.

Select committee comments

The Children, Families and Education Select Committee was consulted on the draft strategy and options for the early years nurseries and commented as follows:

The Children, Families and Education Select Committee welcomes the extensive consultation being undertaken and notes that the Family Hubs model in Hillingdon aims to integrate with a wider range of delivery partners. This idea of collaborative working stands to benefit our children, young people and their families as it increases the range of support and services available. Additionally, using a locality-based approach will ensure that services are bespoke to the needs of the communities and are agile in their delivery, whilst making the best use of Council assets and facilities. To this end, the Committee wants to highlight the importance of appropriate geographical coverage and that all areas of the borough receive equality of provision and awaits the final results of the consultation with interest.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Family Hubs Strategy and Delivery Model

1. The Family Hubs strategy and delivery model was developed in line with the council's approach to putting residents first and is aligned to the commitments of safe and strong communities, thriving healthy households and digitally enabled, modern and well-run council as outlined in council strategy. The strategy makes clear the council's commitment to delivering an enhanced service offer which builds upon and goes beyond the offer for families with children aged 0-5 years delivered through the network of children's centres. Family Hubs will act as central places in local communities where families with children and young people aged 0-19 years (0-25 for children with SEND) can access support and services in an integrated way.

2. Cabinet approved a public consultation on the draft Family Hub Strategy and service delivery model and options for the childcare provision in the council's early years nurseries in March 2023. The consultation ran for 12 weeks concluding on 30 July and enabled a good level of engagement and feedback from both residents and, statutory and community partners, through a survey, community drop-in sessions, partner workshops and qualitative conversations.
3. Following the end of the consultation period, feedback has been collated and reviewed, to understand resident and partner views on the proposals that outlined. Feedback gathered demonstrated a positive response to the strategy overall with 71% of residents and 79% of community partners in agreement.
4. Respondents were mixed in their views of the proposed location of the family hubs; this is in part a reflection of the value they place upon the services and support they receive from children's centres. 61% of parents were opposed to the closure of some children's centres, despite assurances that services would be relocated in alternative sites. Some families expressed a level of distrust that this was effectively a cost cutting exercise that would result in a reduced service offer. Similarly, families were worried that an increased offer for older children and young people would water down the service they valued in the early years. This is indicative of the conceptual nature of the strategy; officers will need to ensure good communication with residents and partners throughout the implementation phase, and that opportunities for coproduction and community collaboration are maximised and, delivers the council's ambition to reach children and families of all ages and maximise impact on their lives.
5. A key tenet of the Family Hub strategy is the Start for Life offer, which sets out the services available locally for families during the period from conception to the age of 2, including access to information advice and support. The offer will include universally available services, such as midwifery, health visiting and perinatal mental health support, as well as additional, targeted or specialist services and support, such as support for domestic abuse and debt advice.
6. Therefore, whilst adoption of the strategy will see a reduction in the number of traditional children's centres buildings, there will be no reduction in the service offer for the council's youngest residents and their families. Rather, services will be relocated in newly developed hubs and delivery sites in a way that ensures continuity of service and staff, which residents have said they value highly.
7. The corporate assets proposed for use as part of the Family Hub estate over and above the children's centres to be retained, are outlined below in table 1 along with the status of concept plans. This will enable the council to deliver services to meet the needs of a wider age range of children, young people and their families as set out in the strategy. All decisions regarding the development of these sites and the associated costs will be subject to further scrutiny and decision-making in line with the council's constitution, should cabinet make an in principal decision to approve the use of the recommended assets.
8. The change in use of buildings from a reliance on children's centres is essential to provide bright, welcoming and modern, well equipped, multi-purpose spaces, that can be used flexibly to deliver services that meet a wider age range. Whilst residents disagreed with the

proposal to close some children’s centres and relocate services, it is not financially or operationally viable for the council to retain all children’s centres, in addition to developing new sites; this could also create an overabundance of assets in certain parts of the borough, which it would be challenging to effectively staff and maintain. Consequently, implementing the strategy will result in the closure of 9 children’s centres, in preference for new or alternative sites.

Table 1. Corporate assets recommended for use as part of the Family Hub Networks

Location	Proposed Hub/Delivery Space	Status
North Harefield	Harefield Library	Concept plans are currently in development and will be subject to a separate business case. Harefield Children’s Centre will continue to operate until an alternative site is available.
North Ruislip & Northwood	Ruislip Young People’s Centre	Concept plans are being reworked following feedback from the pre-application planning process. Coteford Children’s Centre will continue to operate until an alternative site is available.
	Wren Centre, South Ruislip	Internal redecoration is included in current schedule for outstations. Quotes for repairs to the outdoor area being sought.
	Ruislip Manor Library	Minor internal adaptations required to library lower ground floor to better facilitate community use and will be subject to a separate business case.
	Northwood Hills Library	Plans drawn up for redevelopment of library site, to include space for community use.
Southwest Uxbridge & Colwley	Uxbridge Family Hub	Fully operational
	Oak Farm Children’s Centre	Fully operational
	Colham Manor Children’s Centre	Fully operational
	Platinum Jubilee Leisure Centre, West Drayton	Under construction and includes space for family hub and youth activities.
	Cherry Lane Children’s Centre	Fully operational
	Yiewsley Children’s Centre	Fully operational

Southeast Yeading Hayes Park	The Asha Centre	Currently in final stages of completion, anticipating handover in September 2023.
	Yeading Children's Centre	Fully operational
	Charville Library	Options for use are currently being considered and will be subject to a separate business case. Charville Children's Centre will continue to operate until an alternative site is available.
Southeast Hayes Town	Botwell Leisure Centre	Concept plans have been developed and costed and will be subject to a separate business case.
	Pinkwell Children's Centre	Fully operational

9. The adoption of the core and flexible service delivery model will ensure residents are able to access services within their communities, in a way that best meets their needs. The core offer will be universally available across the borough and will ensure the delivery of key services, including health services, activities to promote children's learning and development, transition support and school readiness, access to universal youth provision.
10. The flexible offer will ensure that targeted services are delivered according to the needs of the children, young people and their families within their communities. For example, support for families with children with autism, through parenting programmes such as Earlybird, Ducklings or Cygnets; support for children with speech, language and communication needs through Small Talk and Attention Hillingdon. Activity to address health inequalities will also be supported, particularly in relation to poor oral health, immunisation take-up and rising levels of obesity within the borough.

Table 2. Children's Centres surplus to requirements in Family Hub Strategy

Children's Centre	Status	Action
Barra Hall	LBH Estate	Close and return to asset workstream for decision on future use or disposal
Belmore	LBH Estate	Close and offer to school for inclusion within existing lease
Charville	Leased from Academy Trust	Retain until remodelled library space is available, then release back to the school
Coteford	Maintained school	Retain until remodelled youth centre space is available, then release back to school
Cowley	Leased from Academy Trust	Close and release back to school
Harefield	Maintained school	Retain until remodelled library space is available, then release back to the school
McMillan	Maintained school	Close and release back to school
Nestles Avenue	LBH Estate	Close and seek commercial rent or lease for nursery provision
South Ruislip	LBH Estate	Close and seek commercial rent or lease for nursery provision

11. The Council recognises the importance of knowledgeable, highly competent and well-trained staff and recognises that the value and significance that families place upon the relationships they have with staff members is intrinsic to them feeling supported, and able to access services. Likewise, staff are keen to expand their knowledge, to earn new skills and work in partnership with colleagues across sectors to ensure that the service offer meets the needs of families with older children and young people as well.
12. Some residents valued the proposal to develop family hubs, as the proposed locations would provide them with greater access to services locally in their communities. However, a greater number of residents raised doubts that the proposed locations were easily accessible, and that locating services within 30 mins walk or 1.5 miles of a resident's home, would still be too far to walk in bad weather with young children.
13. These concerns are recognised and understood as the strategy is predicated on council assets. It will be important for officers to work with families and local communities to resolve additional local delivery points, particularly where transport links are more challenging or there are no council assets that can be utilised, for example in the Heathrow Villages, to ensure services are accessible to all.

Early Years Childcare Nurseries

14. Parents using the early years nurseries for their childcare provision were actively encouraged to engage with the consultation and were invited to participate in individual or small group discussions facilitated by the Family Hub Network. 33 families took up the opportunity to share their thoughts, ideas and concerns regarding options for the future of the nurseries, which has fully informed the decision-making process and the recommendations in this paper.
15. It is also important to note that the context within which decisions are being made, regarding the future delivery of childcare in the early years nurseries, has changed significantly. In the Spring Budget of 2023, the Government announced plans to expand the Early Years Entitlements for children of working parents. Roll out of the new entitlement is occurring in phases:
 - Phase 1: April 2024 – 15 hours of childcare over 38 weeks of the year made available to eligible parents of two-year-olds
 - Phase 2: September 2024 – 15 hours over 38 weeks of the year made available to eligible parents of 9 month to 36-month-olds.
 - Phase 3: September 2025 – 30 hours over 38 weeks of the year made available to eligible parents of 9 month to 36-month-olds.
16. Early indications from the DfE are that with the introduction of the new entitlements, demand for places in Hillingdon in April 2024 and September 2024 will exceed current supply; whilst the modelling does not yet take account of the amount of childcare use per child i.e. number of hours, officers are currently working to analyse the anticipated supply and demand, and it is expected that there will need to be further development of the market over the next 2 years to increase the supply of childcare available.

Childcare Fees

17. In July 2023, a data collection exercise was carried out to obtain up to date information relating to the costs of childcare in day nurseries in Hillingdon. Day nurseries were asked about the current fees that they charge parents who pay for childcare and responses were received from 43 out of 58 day nurseries (74%).
18. Childcare fees vary significantly across the borough and between providers. The lowest daily rates are in the southeast of the borough, with the average cost of childcare in the north and southwest of the borough being relatively comparable. The average daily cost of a place increases by £15.48 - £17.46 for the north and southwest of the borough, when compared with the southeast.
19. Hillingdon council charges a flat fee for childcare across all three nurseries irrespective of where in the borough they are located. Currently, the council operates a 2-tier charging system, which reflects the increased costs of higher adult to child ratios for the youngest children; daily rates (based on a 10-hour booking) are charged at £72.74 for children under 2 years of age, and £65.68 for children aged 2 years and above. This is marginally higher than the borough average of £71.78 for the youngest children, but lower than the borough average for 2 year olds and 3 and 4 year olds at £69.92 and £69.01 respectively.
20. The consultation posed three options for the future delivery of childcare at the council's early years nurseries and asked respondents to rate them in order of preference. There was also the option for respondents to share additional ideas or options for the council to consider.
21. Whilst no additional fully formed ideas were offered for consideration, parents of children attending the nurseries commented on the way in which the service operated and gave examples of ways in which they felt the service could be delivered more cost effectively, such as bringing catering services in-house, reducing food waste, or offering the option for children to bring a packed lunch.
22. Parents pointed to what they perceived to be the council's inability to run the business efficiently, citing examples such as a culture of keeping fees low, an over reliance on agency staff, and low occupancy rates. Parents also expressed their frustration regarding a perceived lack of transparency regarding the financial status of the nurseries and that they had not been given the opportunity to offer support or help fundraise to help remedy the situation.

Option 1 - Full Cost Recovery

23. A review of the current nursery fees and charges was completed to establish the level of income required to fully recover the cost of delivering the service and remove the subsidy and overspend currently incurred year on year by the council's general fund.
24. For the council to recover full costs of running the service, the daily charges for children under 2 years would need to rise to £113.90, an increase of 57% from the current position, and £72.30 for children over 2 years, an increase of 10%. This assumes the current

balance of privately funded hours and early education entitlement funded hours is maintained, with each nursery operating at 100% occupancy.

25. This would make the parental fees for children under 2 years higher than any other provider in the borough, and above the average cost for the borough for children aged 2 and over.
26. Furthermore, the assumption of 100% occupancy is not realistic. Despite significant efforts the nurseries continue to operate below full occupancy. Whilst the impact of COVID cannot be underestimated, the nurseries were not operating at capacity prior to the pandemic, indeed, the highest levels of occupancy in recent years were achieved in June 2022, with all three nurseries operating at over 80%, which is still significantly short of the 100% occupancy assumed in the calculation above. Recovery of full costs at 80% occupancy would require a 25% increase to be applied to the fees quoted above.
27. High levels of inflation have had a significant impact on the operational costs of the nurseries, including staffing overheads, water and utility charges, food and material costs, and uplifts for contracted services e.g., cleaning. Whilst it is recognised that the ongoing impact of rising costs may reduce over time (if, and when inflation goes down), there are limited opportunities for efficiencies to be achieved through the review of contracts and services, given the procurement framework the council is required operate under.
28. Parents were divided as to whether the council should subsidise childcare costs; it was equally difficult to say whether the fees chargeable under a full cost recovery model would be affordable, as the detail was not available as part of the consultation. Given the significant increase in parental fees required to cover full costs, and feedback received during the consultation, this option is not recommended.

Option 2 – Offer the nurseries to the private, voluntary and independent childcare sector

29. All three of the council's nurseries are purpose built, with direct access to enclosed outdoor play areas from each playroom, full working kitchens, and dedicated space for staff to both work and take a break away from the children, making them likely to be appeal to alternative providers within the market.
30. South Ruislip EYC is the newest building, operational since 2010. Whilst it has limited capacity within its current footprint, additional nursery places could be created by utilising the co-located children's centre rooms for childcare. This additional space includes a training room, and large playroom with separate outdoor space. The children's centre activities would be relocated to the Wren Centre which is located on the same site in South Ruislip, as part of the Family Hub strategy.
31. Uxbridge EYC was constructed circa 1950 and has been extended in last 15-20 years to provide additional space for the under 2's room. The building has had significant maintenance completed in recent years to underpin two elevations of the building and replace the internal mains water pipework and gas boiler, as well as the redevelopment of the children's outside play areas. A review and reorganisation of the internal space may marginally increase the number of children the centre is registered to care for.

32. Nestles EYC comprises three building blocks; the original prefabricated building was constructed circa 1950-60, with 2 further additional Portacabin bolt-ons added to extend and develop the nursery and children's centre provision. The nursery comprises 5 playrooms, although only 3 of these are currently operational and when combined with the additional space vacated by the children's centre, would increase the number of nursery places able to be delivered.
33. The new early years entitlements outlined in the Spring Budget of 2023, expands the offer to more parents, enabling them to return to work following parental leave. Early indications are that in Hillingdon, demand may exceed supply and it will be necessary to increase the level of provision, particularly for children under 2 years of age over the next 2 years.
34. Following the council's previous decision to close the nurseries in August 2022, several enquiries were received from private providers keen to understand the council's plans for the nursery buildings. Advice received from property services is that the council could put the early years nurseries to the childcare market with the premises either let to a provider on a commercial lease or via a disposal of the sites, with restrictions in place, to ensure their ongoing use as a nursery.
35. Under this option the council would seek to secure a new provider and transfer the nurseries as a going concern. This would provide a level of reassurance to parents as to the availability of childcare for their children, should they choose to move to the new provider.
36. Whilst the council has a statutory duty to ensure sufficiency of childcare 'so far as is reasonably practicable' for working parents or parents who are studying or training for employment, there is no requirement for the council to directly deliver childcare. Therefore, it is recommended that the option to outsource the Nestles Avenue, South Ruislip and Uxbridge early years nurseries is progressed.

Option 3 – Close the nurseries and retain a group of staff to support the sector with children with SEND

37. Staff working in the council's nursery provision are proficient in working with children with SEND and have developed their skills through access to training and development opportunities, working alongside therapists and experts in the field. Whilst staff who are experienced and knowledgeable in working with children with SEND is not restricted to the council's early years provision, meeting the needs of children with a range of complex needs, is an area of ongoing challenge and development for some settings.
38. Parents are clear that they value the nursery staff; particular emphasis on their skill, knowledge, and empathic support was evident through the feedback. Parents and the local community see the nurseries as a valuable resource and are keen to see the nurseries remain open so that access to childcare would continue to be available locally and other families would benefit from what the nurseries have to offer in the future.
39. Therefore, in response to resident feedback and the anticipated increase in demand for childcare places under the new early years entitlements, this option is not recommended.

Financial Implications

Early years nurseries and children's centre establishment operational costs

The Council's children's centres are located in a variety of corporate and community buildings. Operational costs and general building maintenance, including cleaning and hygiene services, minor repairs, FM recharges, utilities, water, refuse collection are largely accounted for in the children's centre budget for each locality. Shared service agreements (SSA's) are in place for 8 community buildings, and partner organisations undertake to manage a range of premises related functions on behalf of the Council; these vary by site, with additional services being provided by the council's internal services and contracted providers as required.

The proposed changes to the use of community and corporate assets will result in the closure of 9 children's centres; however, the operational budgets will be retained and diverted to cover costs associated with new and alternative sites as they come on stream.

Should cabinet approve the recommendation to secure an alternative provider for the early years nurseries, the operational overheads will likely form part of any lease or rental agreement.

Table 3. Operational costs associated with children's centre sites identified for closure

Children's Centre/ Early years Centre	Shared Service Agreement costs	Corporate Costs/Recharges (Cleaning, FM, rates etc.)	Total
Barra Hall CC	N/A	18,230	18,230
Belmore CC	10,000	4,853	14,853
Charville CC	N/A	17,747	17,747
Coteford CC	29,030	3,046	32,076
Cowley CC	2,932	12,811	15,743
Harefield CC	18,629	1,954	20,583
McMillan CC	19,459	4,285	23,744

Medium Term Financial Forecast (MTFF) Savings

Sourcing an alternative provider from within the childcare market to lease or rent Nestles Avenue, South Ruislip and Uxbridge Early Years Nurseries will remove the corresponding per annum loss generated by the service, which was £710k in 2022/23 and enable the realisation of the corresponding MTFF saving of £230k, which constitutes the budgeted subsidy, at the point at which the council ceases to deliver the service.

It is anticipated that the early years nurseries sites may be leased to third-party operators on a going-concern basis with the net lease income contributing towards the council's saving programme. The value of these potential income streams will be known once the market has been appropriately tested. Proposals on the future of each nursery will be brought back for decisions in line with democratic reporting, as and when a provider is secured for each site.

The Family Hub Strategy will support the delivery of the identified MTFF saving of £2.5m by 2025/26 through the wider rationalisation of the council's estate; however, any decisions on implementation will be brought back for decisions in line with democratic reporting.

RESIDENT BENEFIT & CONSULTATION

The benefit or impact upon Hillingdon residents, service users and communities?

Family Hubs Strategy and Delivery Model

The move to a locality based operating model is aligned to the Council's objectives and wider transformation in meeting residents needs locally. The Child and Family Development service will work closely with services across the Council, and partners from health, education and the voluntary and community sector to expand the operating model and deliver more integrated and efficient services, "putting residents first."

Other benefits include:

- Accessible services in their local communities
- Services that align with their family's needs
- A range of connected services
- Informed, knowledgeable staff who can give advice, support and signpost to solutions
- Residents become more resilient
- A very early help response to children and families with SEND
- A reduction in reliance on Social Care interventions in the future

Early Years Childcare Provision at the Council's Nurseries

Maintaining and potentially increasing the number of childcare places at Nestles Avenue, South Ruislip and Uxbridge early years nurseries will ensure that families continue to be supported to access childcare locally and ensure continuity of provision for children.

Consultation carried out or required

Following delegated approval received at cabinet in March 2023, officers secured The Family Hub Network (FHN), an independent provider, to run the consultations, bringing capacity, professional expertise and extensive knowledge of Family Hubs policy and Early Childhood services to the process. The full consultation report is attached at Appendix B, with individual comments viewable as background papers for this report, redacted for personal information.

The public consultation lasted for 12 weeks ending on 30 July 2023, and used a range of methods to seek the views of residents and professionals who support children, young people, and their families. An online survey was developed, with paper copies made available at drop-in sessions and on request; a total of 690 responses were received.

34 drop-in sessions were conducted across children's centres and libraries, and FHN staff conducted qualitative conversations with 95 participants. Children's centre staff supported families to engage with the survey, both in the centres and at community outreach events, providing translation support as appropriate to enable families to participate and respond. Parents of children attending the early years nurseries were provided with bespoke opportunities to participate in the consultation and in person and virtual discussions were held with 33 parents.

A social media campaign ran alongside the consultation, inviting residents to 'Have their say', promoting upcoming drop-in sessions, and using targeted posting in the last week of consultation. Articles in Hillingdon People, online and in community newsletters further promoted the consultation to residents and items in newsletters of varying professional networks added to the awareness raising.

Two workshops were attended by a range of stakeholders from health, education and community partners, and staff also attended a range of community settings and stakeholder team meetings, to engage in dialogue around the draft Family Hub strategy and options for the Early Years Nurseries.

Senior officers attended both the Health and Social Care Select Committee and the Children, Families and Education Select Committee, and presented to members on the draft plans and consultation.

Information about respondents

- 624 (90.4%) of respondents were residents or responding on behalf of a resident. 63 (9%) of respondents representing professionals working with children, young people and their families or local community and voluntary sector partners. The remaining respondents were categorised as 'other'.
- Most responses were from those aged 35-44 years (40%), followed by age 25-34 years (33%).
- Of those who told us their ethnicity, a higher percentage of respondents were White - 48%, which is representative of the borough population, followed by those of Asian/Asian British heritage at 29%.
- A high number of respondents were female - 83%, which is higher than the borough total of 50.6%, and 14% of respondents were male.
- 8% of respondents told us they have a disability which is lower than the Hillingdon population of 14.7%.

Children's centre use and attitudes

- 496 of all respondents (72%) used, or had previously used children's centre users, of whom 75% visited children's centres once a week, or more often.
- Parents and carers who used the children's centres were overwhelmingly positive about the service; they value the range of activities and support available. Parents spoke very highly of the staff, whom they describe as being knowledgeable, prompt to reassure or escalate concerns as needed and relational in their approach. Many parents described the centres as regular, welcoming, safe places to go.
- Parents describe how the centres have played a significant role in their early days of parenting, helping them to discern between normal challenges and when expert input is required.
- However, parents also expressed concerns that COVID has had a long-term negative impact. There is a perception that there has been a reduction in children centre services that would not be reversed if the service had to extend to work with older children.
- Some parents are children's centre enthusiasts. They regularly visit several children

centres and coordinate booking systems and frequency rules to maximise their opportunity for attendance. However, most parents who responded tend to access one children centre for most of the time, with some occasional use of others.

Responses to the draft Family Hub strategy

- 71% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the proposed Family Hub strategy. Bringing services together should make the system easier to understand and convenient to access. However, whilst the principal of a 30-minute walk or 1 1/2-mile distance to travel was acceptable to some, others were concerned that it was not realistic to expect young children to walk this far, particularly in bad weather and using public transport with pushchairs could also prove problematic.
- Respondents were keen to understand if the buildings proposed would be adapted to meet the diverse needs of the range of services to be delivered. Respondents also expressed some concerns and questioned the suitability and safety of combining diverse age groups and families with very different levels of need in one location. Some suspected that the strategy was a camouflage for savings making, and some feared that change would inevitably result in a loss of valued services and staff.
- 82% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the range of proposed services. They welcomed the simplicity of one system, providing all the services families might need, from pregnancy through to adulthood, but struggled to envisage service delivery in the settings, with an assumption that all services will be co-located, leading to concerns about challenging teenagers accessing services within the proximity of very young children. This highlights the need to further engage with residents and partners in developing the concept of the Family Hub as a network of places and services working together.
- Only 27 % of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the proposed locations for the family hubs; 55% Strongly agreed or agreed with the locations and a further 18% neither agreed nor disagreed.
- 61% of parents disagreed with stopping service delivery and closing children centres. 17% were undecided, and 22% agree with the proposal. This is indicative of how parents value the services and support provided by the children centres. Parents fear that children centres could close, without alternative delivery spaces being realised and the new strategy would prove to be an empty promise; therefore, there is a need to reassure residents of the council's commitment to supporting families and ensure a seamless transition from the current children's centres to the new delivery points so that services are not disrupted.

Families with Children with SEND

- Families with children with SEND were well represented - 16% of respondents. They were positive about the Family Hubs proposal overall, with 62% agreeing or strongly agreeing compared to 53% of other families. Families voiced their hope that the strategy will deliver a solution to their long-held concerns and challenges, including poor access to help, challenges with system navigation, long waiting times and siloed ways of working.
- Overall, families with children with SEND were less negative about stopping services from some children centres. They felt that access to services may be easier, with 44% agreeing or strongly agreeing, compared with 37% of other families. However, others disagreed with the proposal and feared the consequence of losing a local lifeline should children's centres

close, whilst others expressed concern that the mixed service offer could be too overwhelming for some children, particularly those with neurodiverse needs.

Partners – professionals and voluntary and community sector representatives

- 79% of partner organisation representatives either agreed or strongly agreed with the concept for family hubs this is compared with 71% of parents 17% disagreed or strongly agreed compared with parents.
- Partners welcomed the strategy to address current challenges and the potential to create one effective system that would be easier to navigate, create opportunities for community collaboration, and focus on solving family problems were considered important. Some professionals questioned whether the ambitions could be realised and if the scope and scale of the required tasks risked chaos. Others still felt that there was a risk of preoccupation with buildings, when creating the network should be the central focus.
- Partners who responded wanted to be involved in shaping the strategy and its implementation, and recognised the need for ongoing communication to raise awareness and understanding of the services that each provider would bring to the network.
- The need to start locally and work outwards, bringing together people working and living in communities to codesign and create services that meet their needs, was suggested as being pivotal to being able to deliver the strategy.

Childcare and Early Years Nurseries

- 471 of respondents said they had children aged 0 to 4 years and 60% of this sample used childcare. Over 70% used day nurseries, whilst childminders, playgroups and nursery classes were used by much smaller numbers. These findings are likely to have been influenced by the promotion of the survey to parents using the council's early years nurseries.
- Of the main reasons for using childcare, 54% said it enabled them to work, 22% cited supporting their child's learning and development, and a further 19% said they were planning on returning to work.
- Where parents chose to look after their children themselves, 36% cited childcare as being too expensive, but only 2% reported that they had been unable to find a suitable nursery place for their child.
- Interviews with the early years nursery parents showed them to be a diverse group, from wide ranging socioeconomic backgrounds. All parents were united in their praise for the nurseries, commending the experienced and dedicated staff who go over and above in meeting their child's needs. Parents valued that the nurseries provided separate rooms for different ages, a cosy atmosphere and that they were clean and looked after (even if the buildings are tired). They also stated that the nursery places were good value for money.
- Parents talked about their distress in learning in August 2022 that the nurseries were due to close. They were concerned that they had had no warning of the financial difficulties the nurseries were in, and that there was little notice of the planned date for closure. Many expressed that the stress that they experienced at that time had continued.
- Parents talked about the impact of external factors, including the cost-of-living crisis and poor experiences of using other settings. Parents also spoke about the challenge to find alternative provision in the right place, with the appropriate sessions and days to meet their individual needs.

- A small number of families said that if they had been given more notice, they would have accepted the decision to close the nurseries. However, many families challenged the council's business case for closing the nurseries, given that childcare was in high demand and increasing and that the nurseries were not running at capacity. Parents were also frustrated that they had not been invited to support the nursery or to fundraise and were sceptical about the council's ability to run the business efficiently, describing an over reliance on agency staff and a culture where fees had been too low. Parents also expressed concern that the consultation was pre-empting the impact of the recent 30% fee increase and suggested the council should wait to understand the impact of this before making a further decision.
- Overall residents preferred option was to keep the nurseries open and increase the fees so that the costs are covered by the families that use them. The second most popular option was to invite private, voluntary and independent (PVI) providers to deliver the nursery provision instead of the council. However, closing the nurseries was considered to be the least preferred option. Whilst some parents could see the link between the early years nursery staff's SEND expertise and the potential to raise standards elsewhere, ultimately this option did not support their childcare needs.
- Parents were confident that the 30% increase in fees in April 2023 would help and would accept further raises, if fees would not exceed the top tier of fees charged by other private nurseries. However, parents expect the council to be more transparent about potential efficiencies and to be open to parent's suggestions and offers of help.
- Some parents felt strongly that the nurseries should continue to be subsidised by the council and made comparisons to the other services such as golf courses and Family Fun Days, which they deem to be subsidised. With regards to private providers running the provision, parents accepted that this would keep the nurseries open and offer consistency of childcare, although there were concerns regarding the impact this would have on the quality of care and a loss of current staff.

Summary

- The consultation has generated a substantial response and delivered clear and consistent findings.
- Overall, the draft Family Hub strategy meets with residents' and partners approval; they value services and staff over buildings and the closure of some children's centres is likely to be acceptable if familiar and trusted staff deliver services in new spaces.
- Raising awareness and understanding of the Family Hub approach with communities and partners will facilitate and support implementation and engagement.
- As the proposed hubs and delivery points are currently predicated on council buildings, the local network does not yet demonstrate how local, community-based settings and services will form and shape the wider network of services.
- Cross-sector partners are keen to collaborate with the council, to influence and share responsibility, as the strategy is refined, and the transformation process begins.
- Childcare is an emotive issue and challenging marketplace; the parents of children attending the early years nurseries will need support in understanding and adapting to the council's plans.
- Due to increasing childcare demand, parents hope that the council prioritises supporting the childcare sector to increase capacity and improve quality of provision.

Equalities Impact Assessments

Equalities Impact Assessments have been completed to consider the impact on children and families of the closure of the following children's centres and relocation of services to alternative hubs and delivery points. These are appended to this report for consideration by Cabinet.

- Barra Hall Children's Centre
- Charville Children's Centre
- Coteford Children's Centre
- Cowley Children's Centre
- Harefield Children's Centre
- McMillan Children's Centre
- South Ruislip Children's Centre

Belmore and Nestles Avenue children's centres were closed in March 2020 to comply with Government guidelines during the COVID pandemic and are not currently operational. Belmore children's centre was temporarily repurposed in September 2021 to provide an interim reception class for children with special educational needs from Hedgewood School, whilst building works were completed at the school site. Following this the space has been temporarily utilised by Belmore Academy School, to provide additional space to for their cohort of children with additional needs, whilst future options for the children's centre were considered.

The children's centre space at Nestles Avenue was vacated during COVID; the children's centre is physically integrated with the early years nursery and therefore officers paused reinstating services whilst options were considered regarding the future of the nursery provision.

Parents who reside in the local area were effectively supported to access services at alternative nearby children's centres. Therefore, Equalities Impact Assessments have not been completed for these centres, as there is no current user information available.

Children's centre staff typically work in teams within an identified locality but are flexible and work across the borough as required, delivering outreach programmes in the community. This is reflected in their contract of employment and therefore it was not necessary to complete an impact assessment for staff as the Family Hub delivery model mirrors their current ways of working.

An Equalities Impact Assessment have been completed for the early years nurseries, to consider impact of changes for the children and families. This is also appended to this report for consideration by cabinet.

Currently the nursery staff position is unclear, until market research has been explored and options for the future delivery of the service are known. All options will be considered in line with HR policy and the council is committed to keeping staff informed throughout the process. It is anticipated that an EIA will be completed at a further point, as part of any future decision-making process.

CORPORATE CONSIDERATIONS

Corporate Finance

Corporate Finance have reviewed this report and concur with the Financial Implications set out above, noting the recommendation to note the findings from the public consultations and agree the Family Hub Strategy, with the strategy being the driver for transformation work within the service area and delivering an efficiency benefit to the Council of £2,500k through the release of assets as set out in the Council's Medium Term Financial Forecast approved in February 2023. Furthermore, it is noted that the report recommends a course of action with regard to the Council's Early Years Centres that will enable the Council to realise the benefit of this transformation work, securing the associated reduction in spend included in the Council's budget strategy.

Legal

As explained in the report an extensive consultation has taken place and in reaching decisions on this matter, Cabinet must have regard to the consultation responses as well as the equality impact assessments. A summary of the consultation responses is contained in the body of the report and the full responses are available as a background paper. The equality impact assessments are appended to the report.

The Council's proposals for Family Hubs are in accordance with statutory guidance issued by the Department for Education and the proposals are broadly supported in the consultation. However, a number of concerns about the proposals have been expressed and Cabinet will wish to ensure that the proposed family hubs provide appropriate geographical coverage and that there is equality of provision across the Borough - a concern expressed by service users and also the Children, Families and Education Select Committee.

In relation to nurseries, the Council has considered all options for their future and recommended that the Council seeks to secure an alternative provider. The reasons for this recommendation are fully set out in the report as are the views of service users in relation to the future of the nurseries. Should the recommendation be agreed, a further report will be made to Cabinet giving full details of any alternative provider and the terms on which the premises will be let so that Cabinet can make a fully informed decision about their future provision. This report will, of course, include further legal advice as necessary.

Property

Property and Estates Services confirm the details relating to possibilities in letting and selling the nursery sites. If sold to an owner occupier, or let on leases and sold to investors, the capital receipt received would assist in meeting the Medium-Term Financial Forecast (MTFF) Disposals Target in 2023-2024.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- [Cabinet report – 23 March 2023](#)
- [Individual comments to the consultation questions \(redacted\)](#)
- [Sure Start Childrens Centres - Statutory Guidance issued by the Department for Education April 2013](#)