

14th April 2015

Petition: Birchills – to keep in place services provided at Birchills and Alumwell Children's Centres.

Ward(s) Birchills Leamore

Portfolios: Councillor B Cassidy, Children's Services and Education

Executive Summary:

A petition has been received from users of Birchills and Alumwell Children's centres in response to the redesign of Children's Centres to deliver budget savings of £1.85m approved at Council on 26th February 2015.

The petition requests that the Council:

Keep in place childcare and staff provided in centre buildings at Surestart Birchills and Alumwell ie Chatterbox, Stay & Play, Messy Monkeys , Music man , story sessions, family cooking etc as these sessions cater for the 0-2 year olds who in the past have benefitted greatly in early childhood development. The draft budget proposals look to cutting a total of £1.85m in the next 4 years and this is the highest cut in comparison to all other council services. Chatterbox sessions have been very beneficial to parents who are working and claim no benefits hence are not eligible for the 2 year old 15 hours and cannot afford nursery. New and expectant mothers have benefited from Bumps and Babe group sessions which run at the centre. Working parents and parents who may not be able to afford to pay the costs of holiday trips, activities and day care have in the past benefited from the holiday play scheme which runs over the school holidays . Here working parents can drop off their children and pick them up after work. Other families who may not be able to afford day trips of their own attend family group sessions and pay less money for trips to places like West Midlands Safari , Hatton Farm and other seaside trips. SEN support has helped to identify children with special needs not only in the nursery but also in all of the above mentioned groups so that by the time children go into school they already have the service and help they need.

It should be noted that prior to the receipt of the petition at Council, the budget proposal relating to Children's Centre redesign had already been amended in response to an extensive consultation process and a revised proposal approved by Cabinet on 4th February 2015. **(Appendix 1)**

The petition has been responded to by the Portfolio Holder and the DCS (**Appendix 2**)

Following Cabinet decision on 4th February 2015 to approve the redesign of Children's Centre services, Council's decision on 26th February 2015 to approve the 2015/ 16, budget, and receipt of the petition, officers held a drop in session at Birchills Children's Centre on 25th March 2015. The purpose of this session was to:

- provide face to face feedback on the outcome of consultation and the decisions made
- offer reassurance about the future delivery of services from Birchills Children's centre
- respond to any concerns service users may have.

The meeting was well received by those that attended

Reason for Scrutiny:

A petition has been received, with over 500 signatures, which requires it to be presented to the relevant Scrutiny and Performance Panel and for a response to be given by either the Chief Executive, Executive Directors, Assistant Directors or Heads of Service. The Portfolio Holder may also be required to attend.

Recommendations:

That the Children's Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel note the response provided and the action taken to address the issues raised.

Background Papers:

The petition received from users of Birchills and Alumwell Children's Centres

A written response from David Haley , Director of Children's Services to the petition organiser Ms Matongera, sent on 23rd February 2015

Children's Centre redesign report to Cabinet 4th February 2015 that details the amended budget saving proposal for Children's Centre services that was approved

Resource and Legal Considerations:

The budget savings relating to Children's Centres were approved by Council on 26th February 2015 following significant consultation.

Citizen Impact:

Birchills Children's Centre will remain as a designated Children's Centre
The existing range of universal and targeted services is unchanged.

Full day care will continue to be provided from Birchills Children's Centre but will be, phased out and converted to sessional childcare by September 2016. Transitional arrangements over the coming 18 month period will mitigate the impact on current users of full day care.

Environmental Impact:

None.

Performance Management:

None.

Equality Implications:

An Equality Impact Assessment was carried out for the budget proposal linked to the redesign of Children's Centres prior to Council approval. It formed part of the Cabinet and Council report and identified the groups affected and action to mitigate the negative impact identified.

Consultation:

A wide range of public consultation took place between 17th November 2014 and 5th January 2015 about the proposed redesign of Childrens Centre services, prior to Cabinet approval.

Details of the full consultation, including the methodology used, the responses received and the amendments made in response are detailed in the Cabinet report approved by Council on 26th February 2015.

In summary, 6 main themes emerged from consultation

Local Access: families' value local Children Centre services and new parents with one or more small children identified that they find it difficult to travel across Walsall so access to a local centre is very important

Universal services: families identified that the first year after having a baby all new parents described themselves as being vulnerable and universal services (such a play and stay groups) were valued as giving an opportunity to meet other parents, to get advice and support and for children to play and interact.

Targeting: during consultation it emerged that there is support from parents to target resource on services for 0-3's as this period of time is identified as being when families and children are at greatest need

Staffing: families value Children Centre staff and see them as knowledgeable, approachable and non judgemental. There were some concerns about whether Health Visitors could perform the role of Children Centre staff as families found it difficult to envisage that Health Visitors will have time to spend with families.

Childcare: the proposal sought views about the Local Authority having less of a role in childcare, instead focusing on supporting others to deliver sessional childcare for 2 year olds from centre buildings, resulting in the phasing out full daycare. Families accessing this provision objected to the proposal as they were concerned about impact on their child (in terms of continuity of care) and impact on their jobs as they feared that they will not be able to source alternative childcare

Children with SEN/Disability: Children's Centres are valued by parents of children with additional needs and during consultation a number of examples were given about how centre staff had supported parents to navigate systems and to access health and education services.

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Cabinet – 4 February 2015

Children Centre Redesign

Portfolio: Councillor Cassidy - Children's services and education

Related portfolios: Councillor Robertson - Health

Service: Children's Centre

Wards: All

Key decision: Yes

Forward plan: Yes

1.1 Summary

This report seeks agreement to implement a new model of delivery for Children's Centre services that will support Walsall's continued focus on improving the outcomes for children who live in the Borough and deliver savings of £1.85m by March 2017.

It describes the current children's centre arrangements and the savings proposal that forms part of the draft budget agreed by Cabinet for consultation in October 2014.

The outcome of consultation with service users and stakeholders which commenced on 17 November 2014 and ended on 5 January 2015 is detailed in the report and a revised Borough-wide Children's Centre delivery model is set out to minimise the impact identified through consultation, is set out.

It is proposed, post consultation, to retain 5 Children's Centre locality hubs in areas where the need is greatest. These hubs will have a greater emphasis on outreach work and partnership working. This proposal focuses on the delivery of basic advice, information and support across the Borough to all families with children under 5's through Health Visiting and Family Information Services and more help to families with children under 5 who need extra support. In addition, following consultation, it is proposed that the model will include the delivery of an ante natal pathway, in partnership with health, to assess needs of new parents to then target appropriate parenting programmes, and universal access to play and stay groups across the borough for 0-3s.

Childcare provided in centre buildings will be refocused to delivery of sessional term time places with a focus on the creation of places for 2 year olds eligible for 15 hours free entitlement and a change in management of this to schools or private / voluntary sector providers.

2. Recommendations

Subject to consideration of the confidential information in the Private session of the agenda, the Cabinet will be recommended to:

- 2.1.1 Consider the results and feedback from the consultation process for the proposed redesign of Children's Centre services.
- 2.1.2 Approve the retention of 5 Children's Centre locality hubs in areas of greatest need (Palfrey, Alumwell, Birchills, Blakenall and Darlaston) and the implementation of the proposed model with changes identified in 2.1.6.
- 2.1.3 Approve the closure of the 5 Children Centres (Streetly, Pheasey, Greenfield, Leighswood and Paddock) in the most affluent areas of the borough with effect from 1st April 2015 and an outreach delivery model that will continue to deliver a range of universal and targeted services to children and families in these communities. (In the case of Pheasey and Streetly this will include the LA seeking to transfer the risk relating to capital clawback if building not utilised for child focused services).
- 2.1.4 Approve a model of childcare focussed on enabling the delivery of places for the most vulnerable 2 year olds eligible for 15 hours free entitlement
- 2.1.5 Approve the transfer of 6 Children Centre buildings (Fibbersley Park, Bentley, Lighthouse, Brownhills. Leighswood and Greenfield) and assets to LA maintained schools that have a Children Centre on site.
- 2.1.6 Approve the lease of vacated buildings at Bloxwich, Edgar Stammers, Hatherton for the provision of childcare (including places for 2 year olds eligible for free entitlement to learning). **See related report for private session as contains commercially sensitive information.**
- 2.1.7 Approve lease of vacated childcare space at Pelsall for the provision childcare services and agree to retain remainder of the building for the delivery of alternative children's services.
- 2.1.8 Delegate the implementation of the proposed Children Centre model, adjusted in response to consultation, to the Executive Director Children Services to include
 - Extend definition of vulnerable to include all new parents of 0-3's and retain universal provision of Play and Stay and PEEP (Parents Early Education Programme) groups to all families with 0-3s.
 - Ensure that there are adequate access points for services by retaining some rooms and venues in Willenhall South, Brownhills and Pheasey to reduce negative impact on parents (women in particular) that have barriers to travel.
 - Retain support to families with children with disabilities and speech and language concerns.

- Continued integration with Health and Education, particularly Health Visiting Services to provide the best start in life for children and families in Walsall by working jointly to deliver early years services from ante natal stage to 5 years. This includes delivery of an ante natal pathway to assess need and target appropriately from pre birth onwards.

2.1.9 Approve the savings proposals for the Children Centre delivery model and note that proposals outlined in this report will fully realise these savings

2.1.10 Approve the commencement of a procurement process for the provision of Children's Centre services if required and delegate to the Executive Director Children's Services, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder authority to award contracts.

3. Report detail

3.1 A Children's Centre is a place or a group of places where parents with children under five years old can access early childhood services. A Children's Centre should make available 'universal' and 'targeted' early childhood services either by providing the services at the centre, or by providing advice and assistance to parents and prospective parents so that they can access services provided elsewhere. In Walsall Children's Centres also provide targeted family support to families with older children.

Early childhood services include:

- ☐ Early Years Provision (early education and childcare).
- ☐ Early support and statutory services for young children, parents and prospective parents.
- ☐ Health services for young children, parents and prospective parents.
- ☐ Training and employment services to assist parents or prospective parents.
- ☐ Information and advice services for parents and prospective parents.
- ☐ Childcare including daycare in some centres and 2/3 hour sessions for 2, 3 and 4 year olds.

3.2 Walsall Children's Centres: Current Position

3.2.1 Walsall currently have 18 Children's Centres, which deliver services across the borough from various locations. These centres are currently clustered and managed in 6 Early Help Areas that replicate Walsall Area Partnership arrangements. Currently 3 Children's Centres are contracted through 2 providers and the remaining centres are managed by Walsall Council.

3.2.2 A range of 'universal' services are currently delivered through our Children's Centres. Some of these services are delivered by the Children Centre staff and others are delivered by partners. A 'universal' service is a service that can be accessed by anyone, for example, play opportunities, health services, adult learning and support for parents.

3.2.3 A range of 'targeted' services are also currently delivered through our Children's Centres to 0-19's. Again some are delivered by the Children's Centre staff and others delivered by partners. A 'targeted' service is a service offered to families

to support a specific and individual need, for example, parenting programmes or family support.

3.2.4 The Children's Centre assets and current delivery model have been established over time in line with previous government's phased and prescribed approach to their development.

3.2.5 The policy direction for childcare has changed significantly over time. Walsall has responsibility for ensuring a targeted entitlement for two year olds from disadvantaged families to access free early education. Initially (September 2013) this required the Authority to develop places for the 20% least advantaged vulnerable two year olds (those eligible for free school meals and looked after children) to access 15 hours a week childcare provision. This was extended to 40% least advantaged vulnerable two year olds (low income households) in September 2014, estimated by the DfE to equate to 2199 two year olds in Walsall

3.3 **Proposed Model pre consultation**

3.3.1 Following Cabinet's decision in October 2014 to consult on the draft budget, proposal to change how children's centre services could be delivered was developed. This proposal aimed to:

- Deliver savings of £1.85m
- Improve educational attainment, health and quality of life outcomes for children.
- Continue to give support to those children and families who need it most.
- Improve coordination and access to a range of services for all families with children aged 0-5 years.
- Focus on what we know works for example parenting programmes and speech and language support.
- Join up education, health and social care services.
- Focus on children and families in greatest need and reduce inequalities
- Provide early help early on.
- Focus on services not buildings.
- Increase 2 year old childcare places for the most vulnerable children.
- Improve information, advice and support to all parents of children aged 0-5's.
- Better target parent support from pre-birth onwards.

3.3.1 Specifically the consultation sought views on a proposal that included:

- a) Reducing the number of Children's Centre buildings; keeping the ones that are located in areas of greatest need and targeting services to the most vulnerable families.
- b) Changing the way we use some Children's Centre buildings to either provide childcare or other children's services at these sites.
- c) Developing a borough wide service for families with children aged 0–5 years, in partnership with Health and Education including advice and information for all and targeted services for those in greatest need.
- d) Prioritising the delivery of 2 year old childcare for 40% most disadvantaged.

3.3.2 The proposal also included a plan to retain the following services (currently provided to **all** families with 0-5s , on an outreach basis, only to families with children aged 0-5 years to be most in need / vulnerable:

- Parenting Courses
- Managing Behaviour
- Breast Feeding Support
- Family Learning
- Adult Learning
- Bookstart
- Play and Stay Sessions
- Play in the Home Support
- Speech and Language Groups

3.4 Consultation

The Children's Centre consultation began on 17 November 2014 and ended on 5 January 2015

3.4.1 Methodology

A Children's Centre consultation booklet was produced detailing the proposal and providing information to allow members of the public , existing service users of centres and stakeholders to engage with the consultation process (attached **Appendix A**) The booklet provided details of all the proposed changes in each area and was made available on the councils website and hard copies were made available in Children's Centres and other public buildings.

- 18 on line questionnaires (1 specific to each centre) were devised and
- Paper copies of the questionnaires and the children's centre consultation document were also made available with information and questions on the proposed changes.
- 6 Focus Groups were held with groups identified with protected characteristics (Equality Act) and feedback was sought on about impact of proposals, alternative delivery suggestions and ideas for delivering more efficiently.
- Drop in sessions were also held at each centre and 6 evening sessions were held. 150 service users attended these sessions to seek clarity on the proposal and to raise concerns. All sessions were recorded and comments incorporated into consultation analysis.
- A stakeholder session was held with key partners and schools impacted by change have been engaged in the process.

3.4.2 Responses

The consultation attracted 269 questionnaire responses on the proposed change to Children's Centre delivery in Walsall (analysis attached in **Appendix B**), 122

comment slips and the attendance of 150 service users to focus groups and meetings organised.

Overall results show respondents are broadly divided so that 53% do not support versus 44% showing support; 28% fully, 19% with concerns/amendments (base 269). This is further complicated by results split by individual Children Centre.

- Respondents show net support for the proposal at:
Alumwell, Bentley, Birchills, Darlaston, Leighswood, Paddock, Palfrey, Pelsall Children Centres
- Respondents do not support the proposal at:
Blakenall, Bloxwich, Brownhills, Edgar Stammers, Fibbersley, Greenfield, Hatherton, Lighthouse, Pheasey, Streetly Children Centres

3.4.3 Consultation outcomes and impact

The 6 main themes that emerged from the consultation are identified in the following paragraphs

3.4.4 Local Access

Families' value local Children Centre services and new parents with one or more small children identified that they find it difficult to travel across Walsall so access to a local centre is very important. Travel by bus can be difficult as often have to wait for a few to go by before there is space for a pushchair. Also getting out of the house between feeds, nappy changes and sleep times of babies and toddlers make it challenging to attend groups and appointments so added aspect of travel would make many families not bother. Parents identified that not having local services and groups available would have put them at risk as they go 'in-sane' being stuck in house with baby and or small children. Risks relating to maternal mental health and welfare of children were highlighted. Families identified strong links with centre staff, particularly in areas that had had less change of staff in the previous year's reshape.

Universal services

Families identified that the first year after having a baby **all** new parents described themselves as being vulnerable and universal services (such a play and stay groups) were valued as giving an opportunity to meet other parents, to get advice and support and for children to play and interact. Post natal depression was identified as a vulnerability risk factor that was helped by this provision. Many parents reported that staff leading Children Centre groups and activities often identified speech and language and physical development concerns and supported families to access health services. The proposal identifies that in the future Health Visitors would lead on this role but families said that it is only from centre workers regularly seeing children that issues are picked up. Parents identified that they would welcome access to information on the internet and via newsletters. A number of respondents have commented that children centre could and should promote services more.

Targeting

During consultation it has emerged that there is support from parents to target resource on services for 0-3's as this period of time is identified as being when families and children are at greatest need. Working parents on maternity leave are often isolated and do not have social support networks; most new parents

lack confidence and welcome advice and support on feeding, routines, development and stimulation; children are usually in nursery by 3 years old so support then tends to come from school.

Staff

Families value Children Centre staff and see them as knowledgeable, approachable and non judgemental. There were some concerns about whether Health Visitors could perform the role of Children Centre staff as families found it difficult to envisage that Health Visitors will have time to spend with families. Furthermore there was a perception that Health Visitors are less approachable and do not engage positively with families as they have to stick to prescriptive health messages and can be quite formal. Families experience of Health Visiting has been based on delivery from an under resourced provision and during consultation we have promoted the changing role of Health Visiting; increase in capacity and the additional training that professionals have had in community development.

Childcare

The proposal seeks views about the Local Authority having less of a role in childcare, instead focusing on supporting others to deliver sessional childcare for 2 year olds from centre buildings. This would mean phasing out full daycare that is still provided at Fibbersley, Darlaston, Birchills and Greenfield. Families currently accessing this provision have objected to the proposal as they are concerned about impact on their child (in terms of continuity of care) and impact on their jobs as they fear that they will not be able to source alternative childcare if required. From a childcare sufficiency perspective the LA can identify that places are available in other settings for daycare. However some of this provision is through childminders and some parents have said this would not be their preference. Where possible we will endeavour to continue to provide daycare for children already in settings to minimise impact. There has been support for a shift in childcare delivery from parents who are not directly affected by change proposal.

Children with SEN/Disability

Children's Centres are valued by parents of children with additional needs and during consultation a number of examples were given about how centre staff have supported parents to navigate systems and to access health and education services. It appears that a disproportionate number of families have accessed childcare for children with additional needs at Children's Centre settings, who offer inclusive environments and additional support to parents. Birchills Children Centre has the highest number of children with SEN support and employ their own SEN Lead. To mitigate risk the new model for Children's Centres needs to align with SEN review currently being undertaken.

3.4.5 Proposal following consultation

The consultation findings have been considered and a full Equality Impact Assessment undertaken. From this analysis it is proposed that Walsall Council implement the proposal, as outlined, retaining 5 buildings in areas of greatest need (Palfrey, Alumwell, Birchills, Blakenall and Darlaston) with the following changes to reflect and respond to learning from consultation:

- Extend definition of vulnerable to include all new parents of 0-3's and retain universal provision of Play and Stay and PEEP (Parents Early Education Programme) groups to all families with 0-3s.
- Ensure that there are adequate access points for services by retaining some rooms and venues in Willenhall South, Brownhills and Pheasey to reduce negative impact on parents (women in particular) that have barriers to travel.
- Retain support to families with children with disabilities and speech and language concerns.
- Continued integration with Health and Educations, particularly Health Visiting Services to provide best start in life for children and families in Walsall by working jointly to deliver early years services from ante natal stage to 5 years.

3.4.6 It is proposed that the operational model will consist of a Boroughwide Universal as a programme of community Play and Stays, PEEP groups and Speech and Language support can be more efficiently delivered by a single team operating across the borough.

3.4.7 Targeted Family Support Services will be delivered from the 5 centres retained in areas of deprivation with outreach across the borough to meet need/

3.5 Alternative options considered

3.5.1 Keeping all centres open – this is not a long term option. It would mean staff resources remain overstretched across multiple sites and the savings identified would not be delivered

3.5.2 Closing a fewer number of centres – the running costs associated with keeping more centre buildings open take away resource from staffing and services for families. It is more cost effective to have a minimum number of buildings and provide outreach from existing community sites. Additionally the use of school based buildings to create additional places for 2 year old early learning enhances school ready and helps the authority to deliver statutory duty to create places for 40% most vulnerable.

3.6 Commissioning and Procurement Considerations

3.6.1 Currently 3 Children's Centres are contracted through 2 providers. These contracts expire 31st March 2015 and there is no option to extend the contracts again. Due to the budget consultation timetable and decision making process, it will be necessary to exceptionally 'spot purchase' targeted services from 1st April 2015 to allow time for the new arrangements to be agreed and put in place. The budget and specification for these spot purchase arrangement need to be agreed with the providers during February 2015. This will require a waiver of contract rules to be agreed by the Director of Childrens Services and reported to CMT.

3.6.2 A Best Value review, undertaken in 2013 found that there was little difference in value for money between internal and external providers of Children Centre Services. Officers therefore propose to retain an existing mixed economy and commence a procurement process for the Palfrey and surrounding reach area.

This would need to commence in April 2015 so that a tender can be completed and new contract awarded by November 2015. If the current provider does not win the tender, TUPE will apply.

- 3.6.3 Procurement of any providers for the model proposed will be carried out in accordance with Walsall Council's contract Rules

4. Council priorities

- 4.1 Children's Centres, and their role in Early Help, make an important contribution to all four of the Council's corporate priorities. This proposal specifically aims to target resource in the first years of life and therefore primarily supports the delivery of two Corporate Plan priorities, 'improving safeguarding learning and life chances for children and young people' and 'improving health and well being'

5. Risk management

Capital grant funding was obtained for Children's Centres under the Sure Start programme. The funding agreement includes provisions whereby a proportion of the grant must be repaid in the event that the use of the buildings for childcare ceases.

Where centres will be transferred to maintained schools, the clawback and the effective control of the building will remain with the Council allowing the clawback risk to be managed.. In the event of a future conversion to academy status, the centre building would be included in the academy lease. As part of academy transfers, all commercial agreements relating to the property are transferred to the academy which would include the clawback liability.

In cases where centres will be leased to third parties, it is unlikely that an operator would be willing to take on a significant capital penalty in the event that the business fails, so the clawback liability will not transfer. It is possible, however, to minimise the risk to the Council through the lease terms by restricting the permitted use of the building and the tenant's ability to assign their lease.

In the cases of Pheasey and Streetly, the Council would seek to transfer the clawback to the school and CA respectively who own the buildings.

Potential negative community response to proposed changes, especially where families have developed an affiliation and identity with their local Children's Centre and particularly where childcare is predominantly used by working parents. These risks will be monitored and mitigated by consulting parents on the location of outreach services and by Family Information Services providing advice, information and support on childcare options.

A risk management plan will be developed to support transition and implementation to monitor risks in relation to impact of change on Performance, Quality, Health and Well Being, Finance and Staff.

The proposal also links with other budget savings and impact on Early Help and intervention as a whole will be monitored. Further integration and joint working with Health and Education will be key to mitigate risks and ensure that impact on vulnerable families is mitigated.

6. Financial implications

- 6.1 Children Centre services currently operates 18 Children Centres, 15 in house and 3 via external contracts. The total 2014/15 financial budget for Children Centres is c£5.312m. Over the next two financial years, budget savings of £1.850m have been proposed, with £1.350m for 2015/16 and £500k for 2016/17.
- 6.2 A financial model has been calculated based on the proposal details within this report. The model includes the following assumptions:
- Closure of 5 Children Centres at 1st April 2015 with the understanding property costs will continue to be incurred for Greenfield until Sept 2015 and will remain ongoing for Pelsall which will be utilised by children services for alternative use
 - Staffing costs will remain in place until a revised staffing structure is implemented from September 2015. Revised Staffing structure budgeted at top of grade.
 - Transfer of further 8 Children Centres at 1st September 2015 to be implemented with the understanding property costs will continue to be incurred for Pelsall which will be utilised by children services for alternative use
 - Retention of 5 Children Centres
 - All centre premises and operational costs based on a combination of 2014/15 forecast position with centre managers and where possible an understanding of costs incurred in previous years. It should be noted that as a result of various centre transfers into the Council from the previous Serco contracts, along with budget movements to reflect previous cluster operations, the Council is yet to incur a full year cost on a centre by centre basis of which to base its cost estimates.
- 6.3 Based on the proposal for Children Centre services and the above model assumptions, it is anticipated that the savings proposed within the budget can be delivered.
- 6.4 The following financial risks should be noted:
- Proposals to staffing structures will result in staff reductions and therefore a potential liability as a result of redundancies. These one off cost are not included within the model and will need to be funded corporately. It is anticipated these costs will be incurred during 2015/16. Any pay protection incurred as a result of the revised structure will need to be funded within service.
 - Of the 3 centres operated via external contracts, though the contracts are due to cease 31st March 2015 there may be the need to spot purchase whilst the above plans are implemented or revised contracts offered. It should be noted there is a risk of incurring costs for a period of time into 2015/16 of which are yet to be quantified and will be subject to ongoing negotiations.
 - It is anticipated that a number of the building currently supporting Children Centres will be transferred to maintained schools where the centre is on site or leased where appropriate. As agreement for a number of sites are yet to be

formalised, it remains a risk that the Council will continue to incur property costs where centre transfer/lease is unsuccessful

7. Legal implications

The Council has a statutory duty to provide sufficient Childrens Centres to meet needs (Childcare Act 2006 s5a), and is required to conduct consultation when planning any significant changes to Children's Centre services under the Child Care Act 2006 (as amended by Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009) and as specified by Childrens Centres Statutory Guidance 2013.

Procurement of any providers for the services being tendered will be carried out in accordance with the Council's Contract Rules and any legislative requirements.

The consultation period could be determine to be relatively short (17th November to 5th January which includes two weeks Xmas break as a school setting). There is no hard and fast rule on duration however as consultation ran over the Christmas break duration applicable consultation period is approximately 5 weeks, which could be deemed to be short. However this needs to be set against the fact that the consultation material and format would appear to be robust and aimed at and including a bespoke group of people rather than the public at large. It is noted that the outcome of consultation is reflected in the recommendations.. It is also noted that Equality Impact has been factored in to the proposals. This would appear to be sufficient.

8. Property implications

- 8.1 The impact that the proposal has on property and plans for future use of buildings are detailed in **Appendix C** and include.
- 8.2 The transfer Children Centre building and assets to the following maintained schools that have a Children Centre on site, including transfer of risk relating to capital claw back, if building is not used for services for children.
 - Fibbersley Park
 - Bentley
 - Lighthouse
 - Leighswood
 - Greenfield
 - Brownhills
- 8.3 The proposals for the following buildings to be leased to third parties with a proviso for the leaseholder to provide childcare services, including sessional care for 2 year olds eligible for free early learning entitlement.
 - Pelsall (childcare room)
 - Bloxwich
 - Hatherton
 - Edgar Stammers

8.4 The transfer of running costs of Children Centres and full use of building as follows, including transfer of risk relating to Capital Clawback, if building is not used for services for children.

- Pheasey > Pheasey Park Farm School
- Streetly > Streetly Community Association

8.5 The utilisation of the following building to deliver alternate Children's Services activities:

- Pelsall

8.6 Children's Services Capital Asset and Strategy Group provides vehicle for Children's Centres and Property Services to oversee transfer of assets and lease arrangements

9. Health and wellbeing implications

The Marmot report emphasises the life-long benefits of good early years services to provide the 'best start in life' and also reduce inequalities. The proposal to focus children's centre services on 0-5's who are most in need and to work in a more integrated way with Health and Education will enhance the health and wellbeing outcomes for young children and their families and work to address inequalities.

10. Staffing implications

The implementation of the proposed model will result in up to 54 redundancies. Staff will be formally consulted in line with the Council's Redundancy and Redeployment policy once the future model of delivery has been agreed.

11. Equality implications

A draft Equality Impact Assessment was available at the start of consultation and has been updated during consultation (**Appendix D**) This identifies that children with a disability and/or speech and language delay could have been adversely affected by the original savings proposal therefore plans are in place to mitigate this risk by retaining this support in future targeting. Pregnant and new parents are also identified as an affected group and again the proposal has been revised to reduce impact by offering outreach play and stay groups with universal access for all 0-3's.

A reduction in the number of Children Centre buildings may have an impact on women and children in particular as there may be a need to travel further to access services. This impact will be reduced by providing outreach services in local communities but affect and outcome will be monitored as part of Children Centre Engagement performance monitoring arrangements.

12. Consultation

Consultation with the public, service users and partners took place between 17 November 2014 and 5 January 2015. Analysis of the responses to the consultation has been undertaken and a summary report provides as Appendix B. Findings from the consultation have been taken into account and proposal has been revised to ensure that:

- universal play and stay provision is maintained for 0-3s;
- additional access points are developed to improve local access to activities and services
- support is provided to help parents to volunteer and run local groups.
- all children who are under 5 with a disability and/or speech and language continue to get support

Background papers

Report to Cabinet – 10 September 2014, Children's Services Commissioning Plan 2014-17 - The preferred and recommended option is to appoint short term temporary contracts for the services for up to one year to allow a new service delivery model for this service to be developed during 2015/16 once the budget available for this service is agreed and consultation has been completed. This will require Officers to use their delegated powers to waive the Contract Rules to enable the setting up of short term contracts to be undertaken. Thereafter, and if required, a procurement process can then be implemented, which will need to commence no later than August 2015.

Report to Cabinet 24 April 2013 - Giving children an even better start in life: Consultation on models of delivery of early help and family support services through children's centres

Childcare Act 2006 - www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/21/contents
Sure Start Children's Centre Statutory Guidance (April 2013) - www.gov.uk/government/publications/sure-start-childrens-centres

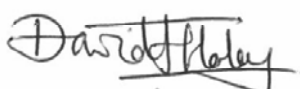
Author

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Assistant Director: Early Help, Commissioning & Workforce Development

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David Haley
Executive Director
23 January 2015-01-26



Councillor Cassidy
Portfolio holder
23 January 2015



Children's Centres Consultation

**17 November 2014
to
5 January 2015**



Walsall Council

Foreword

Children's Centres play a significant role in providing effective early childhood services for families and young children, particularly those who are recognised as being in most need of help and support. They provide a means of bringing together services such as health visiting, midwifery, employment services and adult learning into one place, sometimes alongside child care and more targeted services for children and families in need of them.

Making sure that our Children's Centre services survive, improve and thrive in this difficult financial climate is a key priority for the council. We are absolutely committed to ensuring that our children aged 0-5 years and their parents continue to receive services that:

- Improve the readiness of children for school
- Support parents to keep their children safe and to meet their responsibilities
- Help parents to develop their personal skills, education and ability to get work
- Develop healthy lifestyles for children
- Ensure children reach their full potential
- Reduce inequalities between children and families in greatest need and their peers

But we recognise, with reducing resources, that it is vital that the council sets out a model which is sustainable for the long-term future. The proposal outlined in this document aims to safeguard services we believe are important to our under 5's and their parents whilst achieving the savings we need to make. We believe that focusing resources on services and less on buildings, working more closely with health visitors and early years professionals to co-ordinate services for Walsall's 0-5's and targeting help where it is most needed, will enable us to do the very best we can to ensure every child has a better start.

We would very much like to know what you think about our proposal. The consultation will be running until 5th January 2015. If you want to contribute to the consultation, please complete the questionnaire or attend a drop in session – see your local Children's Centre for dates in your area.



Councillor Mrs B Cassidy
Portfolio Holder for Children's Services



David Haley
Executive Director for Children's Services

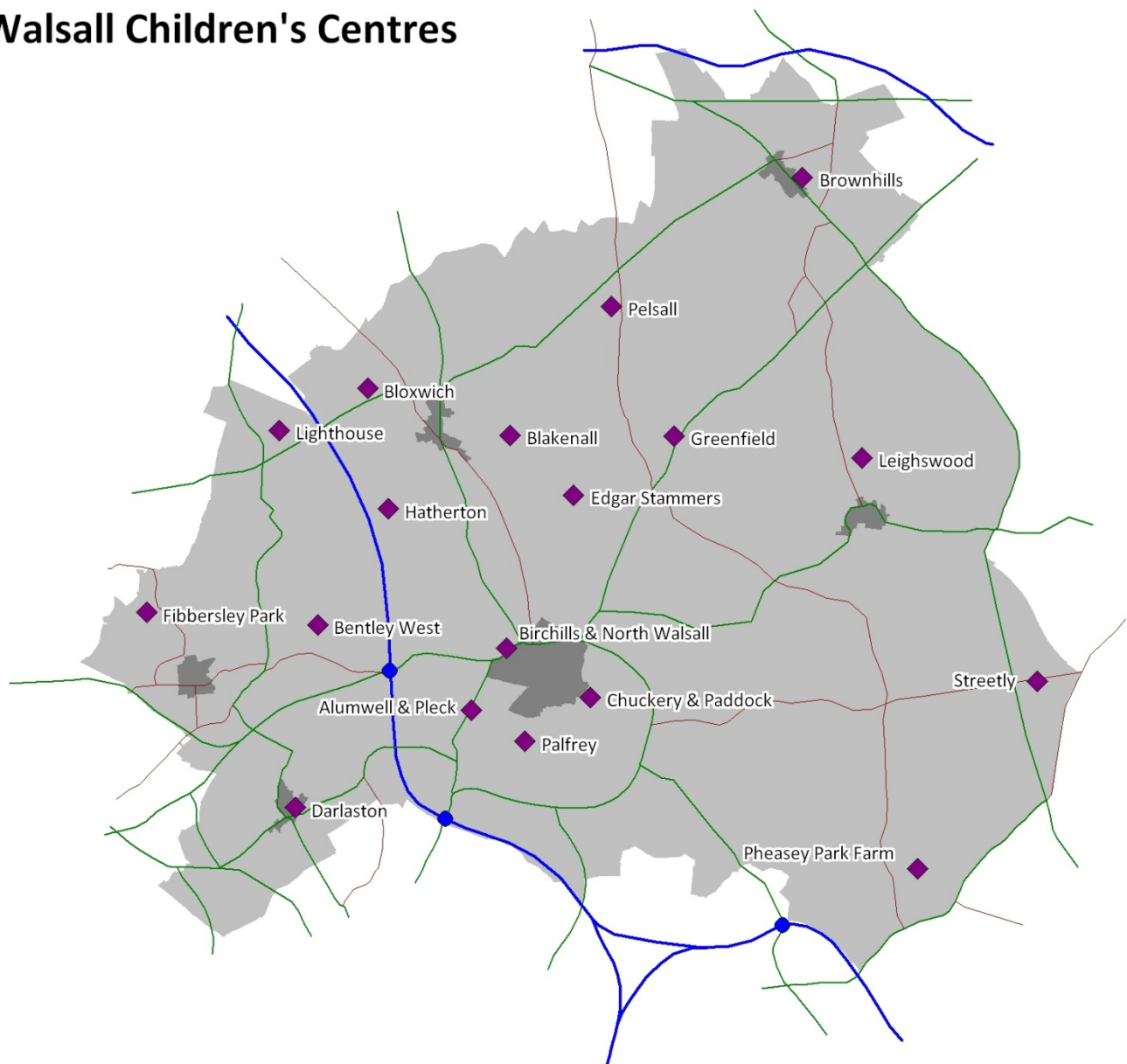
Background

What is a Children's Centre?

A Children's Centre is a place where parents with children aged 0 – 5 years and expectant parents can access early support services, such as parenting support, preparation for school, health services, training and employment services, information and advice and support for families in need.. These services may be provided at the centre, or advice and assistance may be given to find services somewhere else.

In Walsall there are currently 18 Children's Centres located across the borough;

Walsall Children's Centres



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What you have told us previously

A large scale Children's Centres consultation that took place between May –July 2013 identified the following priorities for children and families:

1. Parenting advice and support
2. Preparing children to start pre-school, nursery or school
3. Access to health visitors / professionals
4. Healthy lifestyles and well-being advice
5. Mental well-being (i.e. coping with stress, depression, anxiety, phobias, and other mental health conditions)

The top three factors respondents felt should be taken into account when deciding how to develop Children's Centres were:

1. The needs of local communities
2. The number of children living in low-income households in the area
3. The areas of Walsall where children's health or development is more likely to be affected by their circumstances.

Why are we consulting?

Walsall Council, like many others, is experiencing significant financial challenges. Over the last 4 years we have seen government grant funding reduce significantly and since 2010 the council has reduced its spending by £79.67m.

With funding continuing to reduce and costs rising we need to save a further £86m over the next 4 years to be able to balance the budget in 2018/19.

This reduction in funding will affect Children's Centres along with many other services currently provided by the council and we need to make sure that the resources we do have are used as efficiently and effectively as possible on the provision of services for children and their families.

We have reviewed the way that Children's Centre services are delivered in Walsall. Unfortunately, we cannot continue to operate the current number of Children's Centres as full service centres within the available budget. We also need to review how we provide services to families with children aged 0-5 years, because a lot has changed since Children's Centres have been established; for example we now have more health visitors and more 2, 3 and 4 year olds in early learning places.

We need to work together differently to make the best use of all resources to deliver better outcomes for children.

What are we aiming to achieve?

We have developed a proposal that we allow us to deliver an affordable and effective Children's Centre service that aims to;

- Deliver savings of £1.85 million.
- Improve educational attainment, health and quality of life outcomes for children.
- Continue to give support to those children and families who need it most.
- Improve coordination and access to a range of services for all families with children aged 0-5 years.
- Focus on what we know works for example parenting programmes and speech and language support.
- Join up education, health and social care services.
- Focus on children and families in greatest need and reduce inequalities
- Provide early help early on.
- Focus on services not buildings.
- Increase 2 year old childcare places for the most vulnerable children.
- Improve information, advice and support to all parents of children aged 0-5's.
- Better target parent support from pre-birth onwards.

What are we consulting on?

We are proposing to change the way we deliver services through Children's Centres.

We are consulting on a proposal that includes:

- a) Reducing the number of Children's Centre buildings; keeping the ones that are located in areas of greatest need and targeting services to the most vulnerable families.
- b) Changing the way we use some Children's Centre buildings to either provide childcare or other children's services at these sites.
- c) Developing a borough wide service for families with children aged 0–5 years, in partnership with Health and Education including advice and information for all and targeted services for those in greatest need; prioritising services that you told us were important to you in a previous consultation.

Note: The following services will continue to be provided on an outreach service to those families with children aged 0-5 years that are most in need:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Parenting Courses• Managing Behaviour• Breast Feeding Support• Family Learning• Adult Learning• Domestic Violence Advice and Support | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Play and Stay Sessions• Play in the Home Support• Speech and Language Groups• Bookstart• Healthy Lifestyles Advice and Support |
|---|--|

We have summarised the proposal in the tables starting at page 7:

How to find out more and have your say

You can find out more about this proposal by visiting our webpage

www.walsall.gov.uk/childrens_centre_consultation_2014 or ask any member of Children's Centre staff.



Updates will be made via our Facebook page; search for 'Walsall Families in the KNOW'

Your views are important to us and we want to hear your comments on the proposal and all feedback will be carefully considered before any decisions are taken.

If we do not make the savings outlined in our proposal we will have to find the savings elsewhere or increase council tax. An alternative proposal to commission another year of Children's Centre delivery, based on the current model and geographical spread, but with a significantly reduced budget, is not considered viable as the resources available (£1.85 million less) would be insufficient to sustain this model . However, your thoughts on any alternative proposals to those outlined are welcomed.

Consultation is open from **17th November 2014 to 5th January 2015** and we now want to hear from anyone who currently uses Children's Centres, as well as those who may want to in the future. You can give us your views in the following ways:

- Complete and return the questionnaire available with this booklet or pick one up from your local Children's Centre.
- Save money and time - respond online by completing the survey available on our website: www.walsall.gov.uk/childrens_centre_consultation_2014
- Meet with us face to face at special drop in sessions being organised at Childrens' Centres. Contact your local Centre for details.
- Call 01922 686513

Or write to:

Sue Morgan (Strategic Lead - Early Years and Family Support)
Walsall Children's Services
Walsall Council
Zone 2D
Civic Centre
Walsall
WS1 1TH

The deadline for responses is 5 January 2015.

What do the proposals mean for each Children's Centre?

Proposal to close five Children's Centre buildings and target service provision:

Children's Centres affected:	Greenfield, Leighswood, Paddock, Pheasey, Streetly
Our reasoning for the proposal	To close these centres as they are located in the least deprived areas of Walsall.
What can you influence	<p>Give us your thoughts about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reviewing future childcare arrangements • future use of buildings • how services can be better targeted to meet the needs of the most vulnerable • how information services can be provided

Centre	How will services be provided in the future	What will happen to the childcare provision?	What will happen to the building?
Greenfield	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family Support Services will continue to be targeted to those families, with children between 0-5 years, who are most in need and at times of crisis as part of a borough wide service. This will be delivered via community venues and home visits as required. • Advice, support and information will be provided to all families by Health Visitors and Families Information Service for families with children between 0-5 years. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Childcare will remain in its current location. • It will be provided by a school or alternative provider. • It will change from all day child care (8:00 am to 6:00 pm) to sessional child care (3 hours per session). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council will talk to Greenfield school about using this building for expanding childcare or using it for children's services.

Centre	How will services be provided in the future	What will happen to the childcare provision?	What will happen to the building?
Leighswood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family Support Services will continue to be targeted to those families, with children between 0-5 years, who are most in need and at times of crisis as part of a borough wide service. This will be delivered via community venues and home visits as required. Advice, support and information will be provided to all families by Health Visitors and Families Information Service for families with children between 0-5 years. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Childcare is currently operated by the school This is unaffected by this proposal. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Council will talk to Leighswood school about using this building for expanding childcare or using it for children's services.
Pheasey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family Support Services will continue to be targeted to those families, with children between 0-5 years, who are most in need and at times of crisis as part of a borough wide service. This will be delivered via community venues and home visits as required. Advice, support and information will be provided to all families by Health Visitors and Families Information Service for families with children between 0-5 years. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Childcare is currently operated by the school This is unaffected by this proposal. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Council will talk to the Pheasey Park Farm school about using this building for expanding childcare or using it for children's services

Centre	How will services be provided in the future	What will happen to the childcare provision?	What will happen to the building?
Paddock	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family Support Services will continue to be targeted to those families, with children between 0-5 years, who are most in need and at times of crisis as part of a borough wide service. This will be delivered via community venues and home visits as required. Advice, support and information will be provided to all families by Health Visitors and Families Information Service for families with children between 0-5 years. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is no impact. This centre does not provide childcare. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is no dedicated Children's Centre building. Services are currently offered from community venues. This will continue in a more targeted way.
Streetly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family Support Services will continue to be targeted to those families, with children between 0-5 years, who are most in need and at times of crisis as part of a borough wide service. This will be delivered via community venues and home visits as required. Advice, support and information will be provided to all families by Health Visitors and Families Information Service for families with children between 0-5 years. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is no impact. This centre does not provide childcare. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This Children's Centre is part of the Streetly Community Association building. The Council will talk to Streetly Community Association about future use for children's services in their facility.

Proposal to keep five Children's Centres open and target service provision

Children's Centres affected:	Alumwell, Birchills, Blakenall, Darlaston and Palfrey
Our reasoning for the proposal	To retain these Children's Centres as they are located in the most deprived areas of Walsall.
What can you influence?	<p>Give us your thoughts about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the retention of centres in the most deprived areas reviewing future childcare arrangements how services can be better targeted to meet the needs of the most vulnerable how information services can be provided

Centre	How will services be provided in the future	What will happen to the childcare provision?	What will happen to the building?
Alumwell	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family Support Services will continue to be targeted to those families, with children between 0-5 years, who are most in need and at times of crisis as part of a borough wide service. This will be delivered via community venues and home visits as required. Advice, support and information will be provided to all families by Health Visitors and Families Information Service for families with children between 0-5 years. Activities, family learning and parenting courses will continue to be provided at the building, for families with 0-5s, who are most in need. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Childcare will remain in its current location. It will change from all day child care (8:00 am to 6:00 pm) to sessional care (3 hours per session). It may be provided by an alternative provider other than the Council in the future. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This building will remain open as a Children's Centre.

Centre	How will services be provided in the future	What will happen to the childcare provision?	What will happen to the building?
Birchills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family Support Services will continue to be targeted to those families, with children between 0-5 years, who are most in need and at times of crisis as part of a borough wide service. This will be delivered via community venues and home visits as required. Advice, support and information will be provided to all families by Health Visitors and Families Information Service for families with children between 0-5 years. Activities, family learning and parenting courses will continue to be provided at the building, for families with 0-5s, who are most in need. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Childcare will remain in its current location. It will change from all day child care (8:00 am to 6:00 pm) to sessional care (3 hours per session). It may be provided by an alternative provider other than the Council in the future. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This building will remain open as a Children's Centre.
Blakenall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family Support Services will continue to be targeted to those families, with children between 0-5 years, who are most in need and at times of crisis as part of a borough wide service. This will be delivered via community venues and home visits as required. Advice, support and information will be provided to all families by Health Visitors and Families Information Service for families with children between 0-5 years. Activities, family learning and parenting courses will continue to be provided at the building, for families with 0-5s, who are most in need. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Separate consultation has taken place on childcare arrangements at Blakenall Children's Centre. Sessional childcare will be provided by Valley Nursery from April 2015. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This building will remain open as a Children's Centre.

Centre	How will services be provided in the future	What will happen to the childcare provision?	What will happen to the building?
Darlaston	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family Support Services will continue to be targeted to those families, with children between 0-5 years, who are most in need and at times of crisis as part of a borough wide service. This will be delivered via community venues and home visits as required. Advice, support and information will be provided to all families by Health Visitors and Families Information Service for families with children between 0-5 years. Activities, family learning and parenting courses will continue to be provided at the building, for families with 0-5s, who are most in need. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Childcare will continue but may be relocated to a nearby site. It will change from all day child care (8:00 am to 6:00 pm) to sessional child care (3 hours per session). It may be provided by an alternative provider other than the Council in the future. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This building will remain open as a Children's Centre.
Palfrey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family Support Services will continue to be targeted to those families, with children between 0-5 years, who are most in need and at times of crisis as part of a borough wide service. This will be delivered via community venues and home visits as required. Advice, support and information will be provided to all families by Health Visitors and Families Information Service for families with children between 0-5 years. Activities, family learning and parenting courses will continue to be provided at the building, for families with 0-5s, who are most in need. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is no impact. This centre does not provide childcare. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The future use of this building may need to be reviewed due to lease commitments.

Proposal that a further seven buildings cease to operate as Children's Centres but the buildings are used for childcare and/or other children's services.

Children's Centres affected:	Bentley, Bloxwich, Brownhills, Edgar Stammers, Hatherton, Fibbersley and Lighthouse
Our reasoning for the proposal:	These buildings are not in the least deprived areas of Walsall; the buildings are based on or close to existing school sites, which means they can be used for childcare and/or other children's service .
What can you influence?	<p>Give us your thoughts about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reviewing future childcare arrangements • future use of buildings • how services can be better targeted to meet the needs of the most vulnerable • how information services can be provided

Centre	How will services be provided in the future	What will happen to the childcare provision?	What will happen to the building?
Bentley	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family Support Services will continue to be targeted to those families, with children between 0-5 years, who are most in need and at times of crisis as part of a borough wide service. This will be delivered via community venues and home visits as required. • Advice, support and information will be provided to all families by Health Visitors and Families Information Service for families with children between 0-5 years. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Childcare is currently operated by the school • This is unaffected by this proposal. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council will talk to the Bentley Federation school about using this building for expanding childcare or using it for children's services

Centre	How will services be provided in the future	What will happen to the childcare provision?	What will happen to the building?
Bloxwich	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family Support Services will continue to be targeted to those families, with children between 0-5 years, who are most in need and at times of crisis as part of a borough wide service. This will be delivered via community venues and home visits as required. Advice, support and information will be provided to all families by Health Visitors and Families Information Service for families with children between 0-5 years. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To continue to offer sessional places (3 hour sessions) This may be provided by an alternative provider other than the Council. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Council will talk to alternative providers about future use of this building, potentially looking to expand childcare/children's services provision.
Brownhills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family Support Services will continue to be targeted to those families, with children between 0-5 years, who are most in need and at times of crisis as part of a borough wide service. This will be delivered via community venues and home visits as required. Advice, support and information will be provided to all families by Health Visitors and Families Information Service for families with children between 0-5 years. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To continue to offer sessional places (3 hour sessions) This may be provided by alternative provider other than the Council. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Council will talk to the St James Primary school about future use of this building, potentially looking to expand childcare/children's services provision.

Centre	How will services be provided in the future	What will happen to the childcare provision?	What will happen to the building?
Edgar Stammers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family Support Services will continue to be targeted to those families, with children between 0-5 years, who are most in need and at times of crisis as part of a borough wide service. This will be delivered via community venues and home visits as required. Advice, support and information will be provided to all families by Health Visitors and Families Information Service for families with children between 0-5 years. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To continue to offer sessional places (3 hour sessions) This may be provided by an alternative provider other than the Council. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Council will talk to alternative providers about future use of this building, potentially looking to expand childcare/children services provision.
Hatherton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family Support Services will continue to be targeted to those families, with children between 0-5 years, who are most in need and at times of crisis as part of a borough wide service. This will be delivered via community venues and home visits as required. Advice, support and information will be provided to all families by Health Visitors and Families Information Service for families with children between 0-5 years. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To continue to offer sessional places (3 hour sessions) This may be provided by an alternative provider other than the Council. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Council will talk to alternative providers about future use of the building, potentially looking to expand childcare/children's services provision.

Centre	How will services be provided in the future	What will happen to the childcare provision?	What will happen to the building?
Fibbersley	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family Support Services will continue to be targeted to those families, with children between 0-5 years, who are most in need and at times of crisis as part of a borough wide service. This will be delivered via community venues and home visits as required. Advice, support and information will be provided to all families by Health Visitors and Families Information Service for families with children between 0-5 years. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> From September 2015 (following school expansion), Fibbersley Park school will provide sessional childcare (3 hour sessions) Full day care will cease from this point and parents will be supported to find alternative daycare provision, if required.. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fibbersley park school will use this building for school expansion and sessional childcare. Fibbersley Children's Centre also has premises in Willenhall. This is an additional cost pressure for the Council and it is proposed to close this building and utilise alternative community venues to offer outreach advice and support.
Lighthouse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family Support Services will continue to be targeted to those families, with children between 0-5 years, who are most in need and at times of crisis as part of a borough wide service. This will be delivered via community venues and home visits as required. Advice, support and information will be provided to all families by Health Visitors and Families Information Service for families with children between 0-5 years. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To continue to offer sessional places (3 hour sessions). This may be provided by an alternative provider other than the Council. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Council will talk to the Beacon school and alternative providers about future use of this building, potentially looking to expand childcare/children services provision.

Proposal that one Children's Centre ceases to operate as a Children's Centre but their part of this building is used to provide information and advice.

Children's Centre affected:	Pelsall
Our reasoning for the proposal:	To support the East of the borough (following closure of Children's Centres in this area), to provide additional information, advice and support.
What can you influence?	Give your thoughts about <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how services can be better targeted to meet the needs of the most vulnerable • how information services will be provided.

Centre	How will services be provided in the future	What will happen to the childcare provision?	What will happen to the building?
Pelsall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family Support Services will continue to be targeted to those families, with children between 0-5 years, who are most in need and at times of crisis as part of a borough wide service. This will be delivered via community venues and home visits as required. • Advice, support and information will be provided to all families by Health Visitors and Families Information Service for families with children between 0-5 years. • Activities, family learning and parenting courses will continue to be provided at the building – as a community venue, as and when required to meet identified need. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no impact. • This centre does not provide childcare. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Children's Centre element occupies part of the Pelsall Village Centre; the remainder of this building is not impacted by this proposal. • The Children's Centre element to remain open as a community venue to provide outreach services. • The Council will talk to alternative providers about future use of the Children's Centre element of the building, potentially looking to develop childcare/children services provision.

Walsall Council

Civic Centre
Darwall Street
Walsall
WS1 1TP

Telephone: 01922 65000

www.Walsall.gov.uk

Ref: 22	Close some and redesign remaining children's centre services	
Close 12 children's centres and redesign the remaining children's centre services in areas where the need is greatest. This proposal focuses on the delivery of basic advice, information and support across the Borough to all families with children under 5's through health visiting and Family Information Services and more help to families with children under 5 who need extra support. To change any childcare provided in centre buildings to sessional term time places with a focus on the creation of places for 2 year olds eligible for 15 hours free entitlement and a change in management of this to schools or private /voluntary sector providers.		
2015/16 (£1,350,000)	2016/17 (£500,000)	Total (£1,850,000)

Overall Summary of Consultation Findings

From the 17th November 2014 to the 5th January 2015 Walsall Childrens Services have consulted with service users and partners about redesigning children centres services to meet budget saving requirements. The consultation has resulted in the return of 269 questionnaires 122 comment slips and attendance at focus groups and meetings by 150 service users. Detailed analysis of findings from activity each consultation is provided in this report.

From questionnaire responses, focus groups and drop in sessions the following themes have been identified from consultation about proposal to reduce number of buildings and to deliver a remodelled Boroughwide service targeting services to most vulnerable.

Local Access

Families' value local Children Centre services and new mom's with 1 or more small children identified that they find it difficult to travel across Walsall so access to a local centre is very important. Travel by bus can be difficult as often have to wait for a few to go by before there is space for a pushchair. Also getting out of the house between feeds, nappy changes and sleep times of babies and toddlers make it challenging to attend groups and appointments so added aspect of travel would make many families not bother. Mom's identified that not having local services and groups available would have put them at risk as they go 'in sane' being stuck in house with baby and or small children. Risks relating to maternal mental health and welfare of children were highlighted. Families identified strong links with centre staff, particularly in areas that had had less change of staff in the previous year's reshape.

Universal services

Families identified that the first year after having a baby **all** new parents described themselves as being vulnerable and universal services (such a play and stay groups) were valued as giving an opportunity to meet other parents, to get advice and support and for children to play and interact. Post natal depression was identified as a vulnerability risk factor that was helped by this provision.

Many parents reported that staff leading Children Centre groups and activities often identified speech and language and physical development concerns and supported families to access health services. The proposal identifies that in the future Health Visitors would lead on this role but families said that it is only from centre workers regularly seeing children that issues are picked up.

Parents identified that they would welcome access to information on the internet and via news letters. A number of respondents have commented that children centre could and should promote services more.

53% of respondents to survey identified that universal play and stay groups are the main reason that families access Children Centre services.

Targetting

During consultation it has emerged that there is support from parents to target resource on services for 0-3's as this period of time is identified as being when families and children are at greatest need. Working parents on maternity leave are often isolated and do not have social support networks; most new parents lack confidence and welcome advice and support on feeding, routines, development and stimulation; children are usually in nursery by 3 years old so support then tends to come from school.

Staff

Families value Children Centre staff and see them as knowledgeable, approachable and non judgemental. There were some concerns about whether Health Visitors could perform the role of Children Centre staff as families found it difficult to envisage that Health Visitors will have time to spend with families and also there was a perception that Health Visitors are less approachable and do not engage positively with families as they have to stick to prescriptive health messages and can be quite formal. Families experience of Health Visiting has been based on delivery from an under resourced provision and during consultation we have promoted the changing role of Health Visiting; increase in capacity and the additional training that professionals have had in community development.

Childcare

The proposal seeks views about the Local Authority having less of a role in childcare, instead focusing on supporting others to deliver sessional childcare for 2 year olds from centre buildings. This would mean phasing out full daycare that is still provided at Fibbersley, Darlaston, Birchills and Greenfield. Families currently accessing this provision have objected to proposal as they are concerned about impact on their child (in terms of continuity of care) and impact on their jobs as they fear that they will not be able to source alternative childcare if required. From a childcare sufficiency perspective the LA can identify that places are available in other settings for daycare. However some of this provision is through childminders and some parents have said this would not be their preference. Where possible we will endeavour to continue to provide daycare for children already in settings to minimise impact. There has been support for a shift in childcare delivery from parents who are not directly affected by change proposal.

Children with SEN/Disability

Children Centres are valued by parents of children with additional needs and during consultation a number of examples were given about how centre staff have supported parents to navigate system and to access health and education services. It appears that a disproportionate number of families have accessed childcare for children with additional needs at children's centre settings, who offer inclusive environments and offer additional support to parents. Birchills Children Centre have the highest number of children with SEN support and employ their own SEN Lead. To mitigate risk the new model for children centres needs to align with SEN review currently being undertaken.

Summary of feedback from:

Budget Booklet Survey

Fully Support	Support with concerns/amendments	Do not support	Base number
24 (20%)	15 (13%)	79 (67%)	118 (100%)

Based on this snapshot of feedback through the Budget Booklet Survey, the majority (67%) do not support this proposal. Two thirds of respondents are users of Childrens Centre services.

The reasons used by respondents saying they do not support the proposal, whether they are recent users or not, tend to cover the following reasons;

- The loss of so many Childrens Centres is too big an impact.
- Loss of affordable childcare and impact on working parents.
- Loss of local support and development services that are accessible and affordable and are therefore valued as important to parents, particularly mothers taking part in activities and sessions, and on the development of their children.
- Loss of a community venue/asset
- Would not travel to alternative venues

“My child would not be able to attend the stay and play and I was relying on this service to help with childcare when I go back to work next year.”

“The removal of particular service will impact on my childcare arrangements and have a detrimental effect on both my own and my wife's ability to undertake full time work.”

“I take my toddler to the sure start centre ... It provides somewhere to take my toddler to play, do activities and learn ... as well as somewhere for me to meet other adults and get out of the house.”

Those who don't support the proposal and aren't recent users speak of the impact that closure will have on the local community and lament the loss of what they see as valuable services.

“Working alongside the centres to support a family I can see the benefit of these in the community. ... without the support these centres offer it will be putting a lot of families & children at risk...”

Those who fully support the proposal tend not to be recent users of Children's Centres, though some have used it up to five years ago when their children were younger and lament the loss based on the values they gained from the service. Hence they either state that the proposal doesn't affect them directly or they comment generally about the impact on loss of services for children. Some respondents fully support the proposal but then comment on the impact on them suggesting they have not completed the survey correctly?

“No activity for kids, no place for kids to spend free time, no place for children to develop, no place to meet other parents.”

“Not used this service in last 5 years as children are now adults. But my grandchildren are eligible but as they have responsible parents it is a service not reqd.”

Suggestions for alternatives to make the saving include:

- Introduce charges, rent out rooms.
- Identify shared buildings.
- Council Tax increase.

- Streamline CC management and deliver services where they are needed.
- Stop spending money on things that do not prioritise children for example close other services like New Art Gallery, Family Information Service as information can be provided online.

Additional quantitative research e.g. online and paper surveys

A more detailed survey has been undertaken for this proposal seeking feedback for each Childrens Centre (CCs), services used, issues of importance and service focus, thoughts on childcare provision, preferences for accessing information and services and overall thoughts.

What is your opinion on the proposal.....			
Fully Support	Support with concerns/amendments	Do not support	Base number
.....for Children's Centres overall			
74 (28%)	52 (18%)	143 (53%)	269 (100%)
..... for the Children's Centres that respondents use the most			
92 (33%)	42 (15%)	143 (52%)	277 (100%)

Feedback on the Children Centre proposal overall shows that opinion is divided, with 53% of respondents not supporting proposals compared to 47% showing some support 28% fully supporting and 18% supporting but with concerns/amendments.

When the same question is asked from the perspective of the Childrens Centre respondents use the most the result is broadly similar though with slightly more support overall; so that 52% of respondents not supporting proposals compared to 48% showing some support 33% fully supporting and 15% supporting but with concerns/amendments.

Both these results will differ by Childrens Centre overall and the Childrens Centre respondents mostly use and that picture is detailed in **Table 1 a and b**.

APPENDIX B

Table 1a: Support v Not in Support **for Children's Centres overall** based on Childrens centre most used

Proposals for Children's Centres overall based on Childrens centre most used	Fully support	Support but with concerns / amendments	Do not support	Base	Strength of support (+/- NET %) ie % show support - % not in support
Alumwell Children's Centre	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	(100%)
Leighswood Children's Centre	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	(100%)
Birchills Children's Centre	10 (42%)	6 (24%)	8 (33%)	24 (100%)	(32%)
Palfrey Children's Centre	8 (32%)	8 (30%)	9 (36%)	25 (100%)	(26%)
Darlaston Children's Centre	4 (33%)	3 (25%)	5 (42%)	12 (100%)	(17%)
Bentley Children's Centre	14 (33%)	10 (21%)	19 (44%)	43 (100%)	(9%)
Pelsall Children's Centre	6 (33%)	4 (19%)	8 (44%)	18 (100%)	(8%)
Paddock Children's Centre	7 (47%)	1 (6%)	7 (47%)	15 (100%)	(6%)
Blakenall Children's Centre	0 (0%)	2 (40%)	3 (60%)	5 (100%)	-(20%)
Streetly Children's Centre	4 (36%)	0 (0%)	7 (64%)	11 (100%)	-(27%)
Brownhills Children's Centre	3 (21%)	2 (13%)	9 (64%)	14 (100%)	-(30%)
Pheasey Children's Centre	4 (17%)	4 (17%)	15 (65%)	23 (100%)	-(31%)
Bloxwich Children's Centre	0 (0%)	2 (33%)	4 (67%)	6 (100%)	-(33%)
Edgar Stammers Children's Centre	0 (0%)	1 (33%)	2 (67%)	3 (100%)	-(33%)
Hatherton Children's Centre	3 (30%)	0 (0%)	7 (70%)	10 (100%)	-(40%)
Fibbersley Children's Centre	4 (24%)	1 (5%)	12 (71%)	17 (100%)	-(42%)
Lighthouse Children's Centre	7 (22%)	2 (6%)	23 (72%)	32 (100%)	-(44%)
Greenfield Children's Centre	0 (0%)	1 (17%)	4 (80%)	5 (100%)	-(63%)
Total	74 (28%)	49 (18%)	142 (54%)	265 (100%)	-(8%)

Table 1b: Support v Not in Support **for this Children's Centre** based on Childrens centre most used

Proposals for this Children's Centre based on Childrens centre most used	Fully support	Support but with concerns / amendments	Do not support	Base	Strength of support (+/- NET %) ie % show support - % not in support
Alumwell Children's Centre	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	(100%)
Leighswood Children's Centre	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	(100%)
Palfrey Children's Centre	12 (46%)	7 (27%)	7 (27%)	26 (100%)	(46%)
Paddock Children's Centre	10 (67%)	0 (0%)	5 (33%)	15 (100%)	(33%)
Pelsall Children's Centre	11 (58%)	1 (5%)	7 (37%)	19 (100%)	(26%)
Bentley Children's Centre	19 (40%)	10 (21%)	19 (40%)	48 (100%)	(21%)
Darlaston Children's Centre	4 (33%)	3 (25%)	5 (42%)	12 (100%)	(17%)
Birchills Children's Centre	7 (32%)	5 (23%)	10 (45%)	22 (100%)	(9%)
Blakenall Children's Centre	1 (20%)	1 (20%)	3 (60%)	5 (100%)	-(20%)
Brownhills Children's Centre	3 (21%)	2 (14%)	9 (64%)	14 (100%)	-(29%)
Pheasey Children's Centre	4 (17%)	4 (17%)	15 (65%)	23 (100%)	-(30%)
Lighthouse Children's Centre	8 (24%)	3 (9%)	22 (67%)	33 (100%)	-(33%)
Bloxwich Children's Centre	1 (17%)	1 (17%)	4 (67%)	6 (100%)	-(33%)
Edgar Stammers Children's Centre	0 (0%)	1 (33%)	2 (67%)	3 (100%)	-(33%)
Streetly Children's Centre	4 (33%)	0 (0%)	8 (67%)	12 (100%)	-(33%)
Hatherton Children's Centre	3 (30%)	0 (0%)	7 (70%)	10 (100%)	-(40%)
Greenfield Children's Centre	1 (14%)	1 (14%)	5 (71%)	7 (100%)	-(43%)
Fibbersley Children's Centre	3 (15%)	2 (10%)	15 (75%)	20 (100%)	-(50%)
Total	92 (33%)	42 (15%)	143 (52%)	277 (100%)	-(3%)

Feedback has been received on each of the 18 CCs; with varying frequency of response; Bentley and Lighthouse having received responses in excess of 30, compared to Alumwell, Blakenall, Bloxwich, Edgar Stammers, Greenfield and Leighswood receiving less than 10 responses. Hence due to some small response bases care needs to be taken when interpreting these results.

What Table 1 shows is that the strength of support for proposals differs by CC, and whilst the results from thoughts on overall proposals compared to the proposals at the CC respondents used most often show broadly similar trends, the net strength of feeling is in some cases more supportive of the proposal where the response relates to the CC most used by the respondent. The net score represents strength of feeling regarding overall support versus not supporting. This is likely to be the difference between views about the principle of cuts overall compared to the impact the proposal has on individual CCs and hence on individual respondents. What this shows is that support for the specific proposal differs by Childrens Centre and reflects the diversity of the proposal and its impact on respondents of proposals for CCs they use the most.

In terms of overall impact of the proposal, most respondents say they would stop using CC's (34%), would use the CC service less often (26%), they would attend alternatives activities e.g. swimming, visiting friends, attending local groups (21%), don't know (21%), they would use another CC (9%), proposal has no impact (7%). The table below shows what respondents said is the impact for them based on the CC they use most. Most respondents say they would stop using Childrens Centres, or use them less often; they are less likely to say that they would attend another centre instead.

Q11 What impacts, if any, will the proposed reduction in the number of Children's Centres have on you?							
	No impact	I will use the Children's Centre services less often	I will attend another Children's Centre instead	I will stop using Children's Centres	I will attend alternative (non Children's Centre)	Base	
Palfrey Children's Centre	1 (3%)	6 (19%)	4 (13%)	16 (52%)	4 (13%)	31	(100%)
Lighthouse Children's Centre	0 (0%)	12 (29%)	6 (14%)	12 (29%)	12 (29%)	42	(100%)
Bentley Children's Centre	11 (28%)	10 (25%)	2 (5%)	10 (25%)	7 (18%)	40	(100%)
Pheasey Children's Centre	1 (6%)	2 (13%)	0 (0%)	10 (63%)	3 (19%)	16	(100%)
Birchills Children's Centre	1 (6%)	6 (38%)	1 (6%)	7 (44%)	1 (6%)	16	(100%)
Hatherton Children's Centre	1 (9%)	1 (9%)	1 (9%)	7 (64%)	1 (9%)	11	(100%)
Streety Children's Centre	1 (7%)	3 (21%)	1 (7%)	7 (50%)	2 (14%)	14	(100%)
Brownhills Children's Centre	1 (7%)	2 (13%)	3 (20%)	5 (33%)	4 (27%)	15	(100%)
Darlaston Children's Centre	2 (17%)	4 (33%)	0 (0%)	5 (42%)	1 (8%)	12	(100%)
Fibbersley Children's Centre	1 (10%)	3 (30%)	1 (10%)	5 (50%)	0 (0%)	10	(100%)
Greenfield Children's Centre	0 (0%)	2 (22%)	0 (0%)	4 (44%)	3 (33%)	9	(100%)
Blakenall Children's Centre	1 (11%)	2 (22%)	1 (11%)	3 (33%)	2 (22%)	9	(100%)
Bloxwich Children's Centre	0 (0%)	1 (20%)	0 (0%)	3 (60%)	1 (20%)	5	(100%)
Paddock Children's Centre	0 (0%)	8 (47%)	2 (12%)	3 (18%)	4 (24%)	17	(100%)
Pelsall Children's Centre	0 (0%)	16 (52%)	3 (10%)	3 (10%)	9 (29%)	31	(100%)
Alumwell Children's Centre	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	1	(100%)
Edgar Stammers Children's Centre	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (33%)	1 (33%)	1 (33%)	3	(100%)
Leighswood Children's Centre	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1	(100%)
Total	21 (7%)	78 (28%)	27 (10%)	102 (36%)	55 (19%)	283	(100%)

Based on overall feedback, most respondents (89%) use CCs at least once a week or more; i.e. on two or more times a week (55%), once a week (34%). 5% use it once a month and 4% less

often than once a month.

In terms of the services most used in the last 12 months, overall most respondents say;

- Play and stay (49%); followed by;
- Sessional childcare (up to 3 hrs) (29%)
- Advice and information (26%)
- Health visitor sessions (24%)
- Full day care (8am to 6pm) (20%)
- Training (14%)
- Parenting support (23%)
- Holiday clubs / play schemes (20%)
- Other stated (17%) includes where stated breastfeeding support, baby massage & swimming, rainbow rhyme and family support.

In terms of what respondents think is important for the children's early support services to focus on in the future, there seems to be strong agreement (based on Strongly Agree + Agree showing the following;)

1. Improve information, advice and support to all parents of 0-5's (93%)
2. Provide early help early on (92%)
3. Better target parent support from pre-birth onwards (86%)
4. Focus on what we know works e.g. Parenting programmes, speech and language support) (75%) and
Focus on children and families in greatest need and reducing inequalities (75%)
5. Services are more joined up and coordinated (73%)
6. An emphasis on services rather than buildings (67%)

And in terms of what is important when assessing services for 0-5s, by some margin the top four things that are most important are:

1. Near to home (84%), 2. The staff (82%), 3. Good reputation in the community (70%)
Quality of Care / Ofsted report (70%) 4. Security and safety (67%)

Followed by: The building and facilities (55%), Recommend by family / friend / Health Professional / Social Worker (50%), Opening hours (47%), Attached to local school (35%), Low cost compared to other providers (38%), Places available / no waiting list (36%), Parking / drop off (29%), Good transport links (26%), Near / on route to place of work / study (24%), No reason / don't know (0.7%), Other, please tell us (4%).

The other aspects respondents deemed important included;

- Demand driven rather than meeting those in greatest need i.e. deprived, 'hence a service for all'.
- Having local community based provision, somewhere to meet people
- Behavioural support,
- Face to face contact and one to one support including with someone they know.
- Accessible services i.e. locally based.
- Affordability of childcare, including day care provision.

"Local community based provision to enable families, parents, carers and children to come together within their community to interact, form lasting relationships thus strengthening local communities."

"Qualified caring staff providing a service in local area..."

"Provision of services should not be solely for those perceived to be economically most in need but should be available to all with children under 5. Feelings of isolation, the need for 'peer

support' and a sense of belonging is important for all, regardless of socioeconomic background."

"I am unable to afford a private nursery fees. The children's centre on Mossley estate, Bloxwich is a great asset to the community and affordable to people like myself."

"In order to keep working I need a childcare provider that will be open all day."

When asked about preferred childcare providers, the majority say schools (76%), followed by Voluntary Sector / registered charities (30%), private sector (27%), no preference (15%), other (14%) and where stated commonly included; Childrens Centres/Sure Start, something affordable and supporting employment, and childminders.

Most respondents say they would be willing to access CC services from schools (80%), followed by Community Centres (59%), Health Centres (49%), GP surgeries (34%), Faith Buildings (22%), Other (9%) and where stated this included Childrens Centres/Sure Starts, email and post, somewhere safe, libraries, local day care centre i.e. Monmouth Road and including none of the above.

Preferences for accessing information in order of preference are:

- Leaflets/newsletters (59%)
- Walsall Council website (51%)
- Social media e.g. Facebook, Twitter (34%)
- Online parenting websites e.g. Netmums, National Children's Trust (NCT) (30%)
- Mobile App (28%)
- Telephone help line (20%)
- Other websites (8%)
- Other (8%) and where stated included face to face with key worker, Family Information Service Walsall or breastfeeding helpline.

Suggestions for alternative ways to make the savings:

- Introduce nominal charges, and increase childcare fees.
- Widen reach through You Tube, text alerts and 'at the School Gates'
- Collaborative working.
- Increase council tax by a small amount
- Reduced opening
- Company sponsorship, use of charities, volunteering.
- Save money elsewhere i.e. high earning salaries

Other feedback gathered by services e.g. focus groups, meetings, interviews, any dialogue, letters, emails etc

26 consultation drop in sessions have been held at Children's Centres and 6 focus groups held in each cluster area targeting protected equality groups. 160 parents have attended sessions at centres and contributed their views and comments. Drop in sessions have been available at each centre and 8 evening sessions have additionally been offered.

Based on their feedback, the majority of attendees do not support this proposal. Feedback shows that they value access to a local centre, expert staff, and the support services provided. However, if there were to be a review of the proposed support service package; to ensure that some local universal services can be provided to **all** in 'local' venues, delivered by experienced staff, then it appears there would probably be more support for the proposal. .

The majority attending the meetings thought it unfair to 'target' groups deemed to be 'vulnerable'. Much discussion focused on what 'vulnerable' is and parents vocalised examples when they have needed extra support. A strong case has been presented that **all** new mums

and their children are vulnerable and disadvantaged as travel is difficult and many new parents have post natal depression, are isolated or lack confidence in parenting. Frequently parents expressed a need for support when on maternity leave and/or before their child starts nursery at 2 or 3 years. Similar findings arise through qualitative research.

"Who are you classifying as vulnerable? Why only the families on benefits and free school meals? Why not all Mums ...it can be really lonely when you've first had your baby, even if you're a working Mum".

"The centre has supported me through post natal depression and their services and groups have provided me with a place to go to".

"Is there not a need to see all children? How do we know if there is a need, this is picked up by professionals at the Children Centre, 5 minute health visit would not pick this up".

"Children Centres give sanity to full time mums".

"Our culture makes it difficult for females to go out without husbands, but this is seen as a safe, family environment we can come to on our own with the children. Meet other parents is a safe and trusted environment, it brings different cultures together we have ethnic cohesion here".

Many parents talked about the importance of mixing groups in terms of need and gave examples of how children centre staff had identified early speech and language and development delay which had not been picked up by health professionals. Support provided to these children following early identification was valued and it is noted that many families with children with additional needs access children centre childcare services to benefit from additional support from centre staff.

Peer learning and support in groups was valued in terms of child interaction with other children with a range of abilities and from a range of backgrounds and parents getting support and advice from other parents. However parents felt that they could not run their own groups in the future because they had their own children to look after; did not have time to organise; needed structure of sessions and needed an 'expert' to give correct information.

Working parents, with children in child care said that the proposal does not help or encourage them to work because childcare is no longer going to be provided by the council as full day care; and services will be targeted to deprived areas. Parents with children in children centre day care provided by centres did not feel that there are reasonable alternatives for affordable childcare in the private and voluntary sector. We have agreed to provide affected families with information about alternative childcare in their area. Strength of feeling about lack of support for working parents was great, including the isolation that they have on maternity leave and their need for support at this time.

"You are taking services away from people who are trying hard you are not encouraging people to work".

"I work to provide for my children but if I leave and go on benefits I will get better services how is that fair or setting the right example to my children? Is that what you are looking for us to do".

"Working parents are being shunned; non-working parents get all the benefits. We are trying to make our way and pay for services. We are willing to pay our way but non-working parents are getting all the opportunities, their children will get ahead and we are paying for it".

Parents valued staff expertise, knowledge and community engagement and expressed concerns about Health Visitors having more of a role in the delivery of early years support moving forward as they are viewed as being 'professionals who judge' and do not have time. There was also more support from parents who knew the staff well for centres with less staff turnover in recent years.

There was less engagement from parents in areas that had been impacted the greatest in last year's reshape and clustering of centres. In Blakenall, Bloxwich, Edgar Stammers, Hatherton, Brownhills, Pelsall, Greenfield, Leighswood and Streetly the centres have already had new management and staff spread more thinly across clusters; so from discussions with staff it appears that parents identify less with these centres now as staff have not become embedded in community and relationships have not had time to build. Staff have changed and there was a sense that community identity with the centre was not re-established...one staff member noted that a Brownhills resident, who was asked to be part of consultation, said that they thought the centre had already closed after last year's consultation.

It was noted that at centres identified for retention in the proposal a strong sense of community existed but there was a fear that becoming a Boroughwide resource would dilute that sense of community

APPENDIX C: Children Centre Estates: Proposed Future Use

Centre	Proposal	Risk	Actions
Streetly	Transfer building to be managed by Streetly CA	Capital Clawback if not utilised for children Lease charges to council and health for use of rooms	Negotiation with Streetly CA to secure continued use of facilities for children
Pheasey	Transfer building to be managed by Pheasey Park Farm School	Capital Clawback if not utilised for children Lease charges to council and health for use of rooms	Negotiate with school re access to rooms Transfer Capital clawback risk to foundation school
Leighswood	Transfer building to be managed by Leighswood School	Capital Clawback if not utilised for children Lease charges to council and health for use of rooms	Capital Asset and strategy group to monitor usage of building. LA retain Capital Clawback risk but this is low as building is part of a school.
Brownhills	Transfer building to be managed by St James Primary and/or Ogley Hay Nursery	Capital Clawback if not utilised for children Lease charges to council and health for use of rooms	Business support to school to run childcare Capital Asset and strategy group to monitor usage of building. LA retain Capital Clawback risk but this is low as building is part of a school.
Greenfield	Transfer building to be managed by Greenfield	Capital Clawback if not utilised for children Lease charges to council and health for use of rooms	Business support to school to run childcare Capital Asset and strategy group to monitor usage of building. LA retain Capital Clawback risk but this is low as building is part of a school.
Pelsall	Lease childcare accommodation to a school or PVI Relocate other CS team into building?	Capital Clawback if not utilised for children	Lease childcare room to third party for childcare. Capital Clawback risk mitigated as lease will specify use
Hatherton	Lease childcare accommodation to a school or PVI	Mirus Academy may make claim to building as being part of transfer?	Lease to third party for childcare

APPENDIX C: Children Centre Estates: Proposed Future Use

	Relocate Stroud Avenue or other CS team into building?	Capital Clawback if not utilised for children	Capital Clawback risk mitigated as lease will specify use
Bloxwich	Lease all of building (childcare accommodation) to a school or PVI Relocate Stroud Avenue or other CS team into building?	Capital Clawback if not utilised for children	Lease to third party for childcare. Capital Clawback risk mitigated as lease will specify use
Edgar Stammers (Academy)	Lease accommodation to a school or PVI for childcare Relocate Stroud Avenue / Youth Services or other CS team into building?	Capital Clawback if not utilised for children	Lease to third party for childcare. Capital Clawback risk mitigated as lease will specify use
Blakenall	Lease part of building to Valley Nursery for Childcare Retain remaining space as Children Centre	Capital Clawback if not utilised for children	Consider leasing additional space to Valley Nursery School to expand childcare places Business Support to Valley Nursery
Fibbersley Park	SLA with school to run remaining part of CC building following school expansion for the delivery of childcare by Fibbersley School	Capital Clawback if not utilised for children	Capital Asset and strategy group to monitor usage of building. LA retain Capital Clawback risk but this is low as building is part of a school. Business support to Fibbersley School to deliver 2 year old sessional
Bentley School	SLA with school to continue to use building for daycare	Capital Clawback if not utilised for children	Capital Asset and strategy group to monitor usage of building. LA retain Capital Clawback risk but this is low as building is part of a school.

APPENDIX C: Children Centre Estates: Proposed Future Use

Lighthouse	SLA with School or lease with PVI to provide sessional childcare from building	Capital Clawback if not utilised for children	Capital Asset and strategy group to monitor usage of building. LA retain Capital Clawback risk but this is low as building is part of a school. Business support to Lighthouse School to provide childcare.
Alumwell	Retain as a Children Centre	Capital Clawback if not utilised for children	Business support to remodel childcare to sessional.
Birchills	Retain as a children Centre	Capital Clawback if not utilised for children	Business support to remodel childcare to sessional.
Darlaston	Retain as a children Centre Move childcare out to 'The Nest' Utilise some rooms for contact	Capital Clawback if not utilised for children	Business support to remodel childcare for Rowley View Nursery to manage
Palfrey	Retain as a children Centre	Capital Clawback if not utilised for children Transfer of Lease / Liability to council Other options for site to be scoped	End contract with Palfrey CA. Spot purchase for services pending procurement. LA to scope retention of existing building which is leased or alternative building secured.
Paddock	Dedesignate / close as a children centre.	Currently has no building. Allocation to Palfrey CA would cease on 1 st April if proposal approved	No action

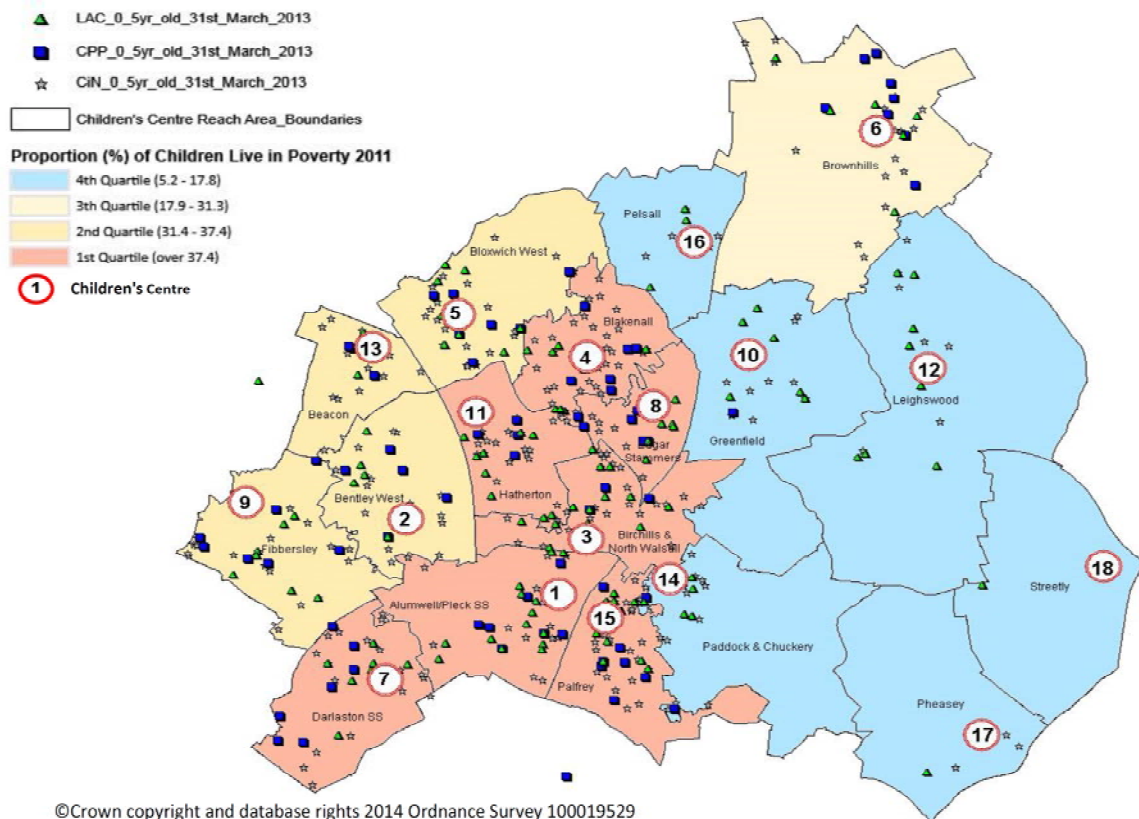
Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) for Policies, Procedures and Services

Proposal name	22 Reduction in children's centres		
Directorate	Children's Services		
Service	Early Help		
Responsible Officer	Andrea Potts		
EqIA Author	Sue Morgan		
Date proposal started	18.09.14	Proposal commencement date (due or actual)	01.04.15

1	What is the purpose of the proposal?		Yes / No	New / revision
	Policy			
	Procedure			
	Internal service		Yes	Revision
	External Service		Yes	Revision
	Other - give details			
2	What are the intended outcomes, reasons for change? (The business case)			
	Phased, remodelled Boroughwide service targeting services to the most vulnerable. Scaling-down of Children's Centre provision by closure of 5 centres (Streetly, Leighswood, Paddock, Greenfield and Pheasey) and review of use of the other 8 centres. Both in order to meet the Council budget savings proposals.			
3	Who is the proposal potential likely to affect?			
	People in Walsall	Yes / No	Detail	
	All			
	Specific group/s	Yes	Children 0 -19 Parents of children and young people	
	Council employees	Yes	Children Centre Staff and partners in Health, Education and Social Care that refer to service	
	Other			
4	Summarise your evidence, engagement and consultation.			
	There are currently 18 Children's Centres in Walsall and their location is shown on the map below. Their core purpose is to improve outcomes for young children and their families, with a particular focus on the most disadvantaged. This aims to ensure that			

children are equipped for life and ready for school, no matter what their background or family circumstances as well as supporting parents in accessing employment and training advice.

Map of Current Children's Centres Reach areas



One of the Office for Standards in Education's (OfSTED) key criteria for success is how a Children's Centre has contributed to raising children's outcomes at the end of Foundation Stage and how they have contributed to narrowing the gap between disadvantaged children and the rest. Children's Centres form part of the Council's Children, Young People and Families Services. This service works to support families needing help to prevent problems escalating (e.g. through parenting support and advice) right up to protecting children who are at risk or who need to be looked after by the Local Authority.

Children's Centres form a key part of the Early Help provided to families with children under age 5 and work increasingly alongside social workers to support families with high levels of need.

The Children, Young People and Families Service is currently reviewing the delivery of early help and more intensive intervention services with a view to delivering a more integrated approach within which families can move easily across the range of support and specialist help. Children's Centres form a key part of the emerging model.

As part of the Children's Centre savings plan the Council undertook a consultation inviting service users to influence the shape of the reconfigured services. The consultation ran from 17

November 2014 to 5 January 2015. The analysis of survey results and qualitative engagement form part of the Cabinet Report Appendices.

The consultation has been carried out in accordance with the Apprenticeship, Skills Children and Learners Act 2009 and the Public Sector Equality Duty which includes vulnerable individuals with 'relevant characteristics' who might otherwise face barriers to social inclusion. These would include disabled people, those with health needs, families under stress, pregnant mothers, BAME groups and those on low income.

The "relevant characteristics" are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race (including ethnic or national origins, colour or nationality), religion or belief (including lack of belief), sex, and sexual orientation.

The Council has a duty to have "due regard to the need to":-

- a) "eliminate discrimination" (including harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act); and
- b) "advance equality of opportunity" and "foster good relations" between those to "persons who share a relevant characteristic" and those who do not.

It was also acknowledged from the outset that it was possible that some "persons who share a relevant characteristic" may perceive themselves to be adversely affected by the proposals.

The Act expects local authorities to consider the effect of decisions on different groups protected from discrimination by the Equality Act. This Equality Analysis goes further than that and looks at the whole population in relation to the Children's Centres proposals.

This report constitutes the Council's Equality Analysis. The Council, in accordance with its legal duties under the Equality Act 2010, will have due regard to the findings of this analysis, and the goals of the public sector equality duty, before approving the recommendations in the accompanying Cabinet report.

This Equality Analysis is wide ranging and covers data about:

- Walsall's population – an overview including the protected characteristics as set out in the Equality Act 2010
- Children's Centres usage figures.
- Population within a 0.5km and 1km radii of centres
- Demographic profile of respondents of the Children's Centres Savings Plan Consultation: the public meetings and the paper and online questionnaires which included a set of questions which sought to collect demographic information of respondents.
- Summary of qualitative responses i.e. which groups the proposals impact
- Equality implications of recommendations

This section of the Equality Analysis provides an overview of Walsall's population. In particular it sets out the details of the borough's population in relation to the protected characteristics. It also covers employment status as this was one of the questions asked in the 'about you' section of the consultation questionnaire.

For context, the national (England) comparators are included.

Overall population

The 2011 Census estimates that Walsall's population is 269,323, this is an increase of around 15,800 residents, or 6.2%, in the ten years since the previous census. This rate of growth is lower than nationally (a 7.8% increase) but in line with the West Midlands regional growth of 6.4%.

Average population density in England is 407 residents per sq km and Walsall is 2591

Ward name	Area (ha)/mi ²	Population (2011 census)	Population density 2011
<u>Aldridge Central and South</u>	1,143	13,781	12.1
<u>Aldridge North and Walsall</u>			
<u>Wood</u>	784	13,207	16.8
<u>Bentley and Darlaston North</u>	439	13,479	30.7
<u>Birchills Leamore</u>	413	14,775	35.8
<u>Blakenall</u>	353	13,773	39.0
<u>Bloxwich East</u>	369	12,155	32.9
<u>Bloxwich West</u>	388	13,246	34.1
<u>Brownhills</u>	724	12,676	17.5
<u>Darlaston South</u>	334	14,342	42.9
<u>Paddock</u>	546	13,006	23.8
<u>Palfrey</u>	368	16,532	44.9
<u>Pelsall</u>	499	11,505	23.1
<u>Pheasey Park Farm</u>	758	11,010	14.5
<u>Pleck</u>	338	15,014	44.4
Rushall-Shelfield	577	11,871	20.6
<u>Short Heath</u>	380	11,449	30.1
<u>St. Matthew's</u>	353	15,088	42.7
<u>Streetly</u>	750	13,934	18.6
<u>Willenhall North</u>	235	12,697	54.0
<u>Willenhall South</u>	481	15,783	32.8
Total	10,396	269,323	25.9
		Pop per sq km:	2,591
		E&W Average:	371

The 2011 Census estimated that there are 107,822 households (with at least one usual resident) in Walsall. This is an increase of 6,500, or 6.4% since 2001. As with the population increase, this is lower than nationally but in line with the increase regionally.

Walsall's overall population is predicted to increase over the next 10 years by 5.1% from 270,900 in 2012 to 284,700 in 2022. In addition to this, Walsall's child and young population (those aged under 19) is also predicted to increase by 13.8%, with the number of people 85 year and older increasing from 47,200 in 2012 to 53,700 in 2022.

England's population is projected to increase 0.8% over the same period (2011-2021).
(Source: ONS)

There are now 12,400 more residents than suggested by the ONS mid-2010 estimates – the last official population estimates released. This represents an increase of 4.8%, well above the 2.7% increase for the West Midlands

Age

There has been an increase in the number of children aged 0-4 years, to 18,373 (6.8%). This chart clearly shows the higher than national average numbers of children in Walsall. One possible explanation for this is the number of residents from minority ethnic groups, which tend to have higher birth rates on average than the overall population.

Palfrey, Pleck, Blakenall, Birchills Leamore and have large child populations.

Around age 18 the pattern reverses, with Walsall having fewer residents than nationally in most years throughout the working age group up to age 65. The 2011 Census sets the number of people aged between 16-64 years old at 167,308.

Palfrey, St Matthew's, Willenhall South and Birchills Leamore wards all have large working-age populations.

Walsall has an over-representation again of people in the older age groups, aged 65 and above. At around age 85 national levels are higher once again, possibly as a result of life expectancy in Walsall being lower than it is nationally. The 2011 Census sets the number of older people (65+) living in the city as 45,815.

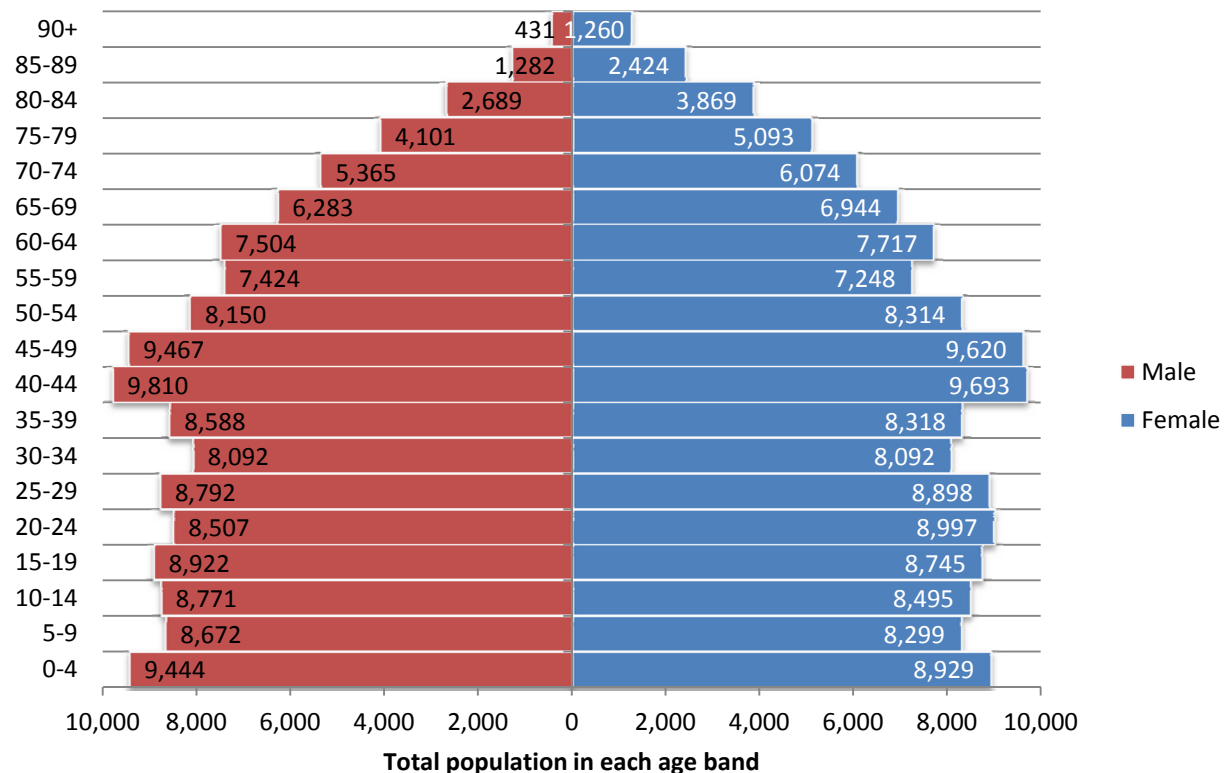
Aldridge Central & South, Streetly, Aldridge North & Walsall Wood, Paddock, Pelsall, Bloxwich East and Pheasey Park Farm wards all have large older populations.

Gender

The mid-year population estimates 2013 states that Walsall has an estimated resident population of 272,200, of whom 133,800 (49.2%) are male and 138,400 (50.8%) are female. Overall, this gives a broadly equal proportion of males to females in the total population. However, this ratio varies considerably according to age.

Nationally there are more male children born than female, with boys outnumbering girls 105 to 100 in the 0-4 age group: a phenomenon that is also seen in Walsall. **(Source: ONS)**

Figure 1



Pregnancy/Maternity

Walsall's fertility rates have seen a rise since 2007, from 3,524 births to 3,816 births in 2012 (Source: ONS 2012). The impact of this show as a bulge in the 0-4 age range in figure 1 above.

The fertility rate per 1,000 15-44 female population in 2011 was 2.11for Walsall compared to 1.96 for West Midlands.

Palfrey (325), Pleck (289) and Birchills Leamore (287) had the highest live births by ward in 2011/2012.

Ethnicity

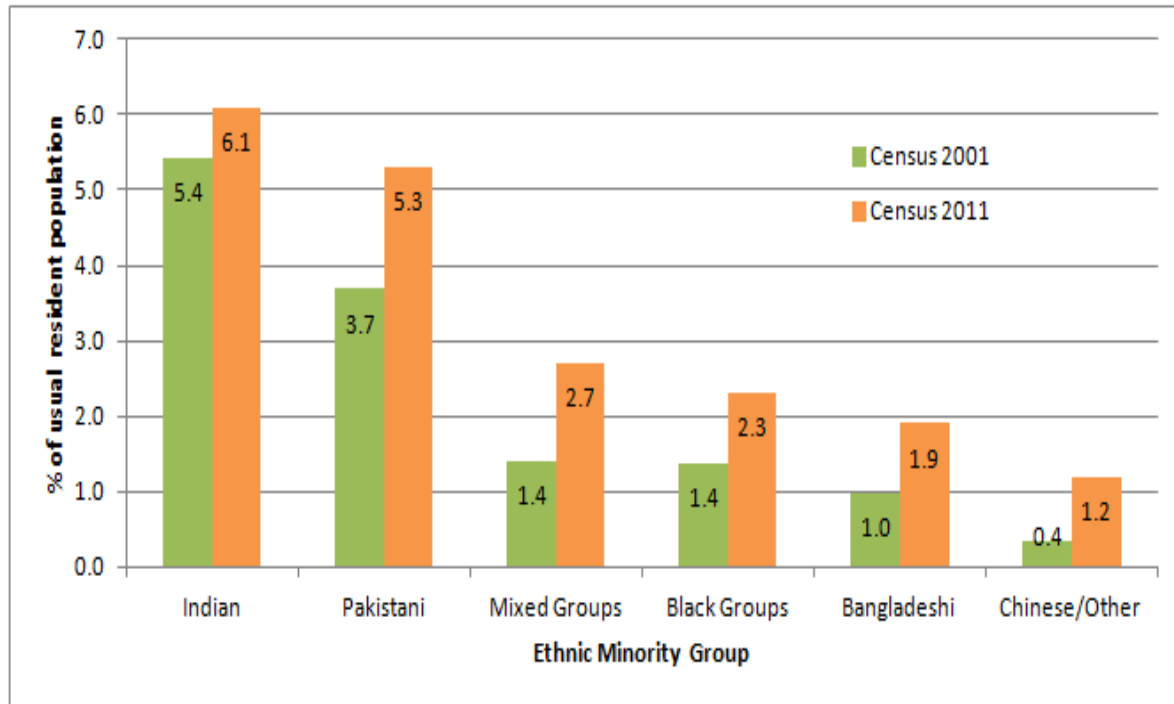
There has been a significant increase in the level of ethnic diversity in Walsall over the past decade. While 'White British' remains the largest single group at 76.9%, the number of residents from a minority ethnic group has risen to almost one in four. This figure of 23.1% residents is an increase on the 14.8% in 2001 (and higher than the 19.5% in England and Wales in 2011).

The largest increase is in people of Asian background, with a rise from 10.4% in 2001 to 15.2% in 2011. Within this group, those of Pakistani background have increased the most to 5.3% of all residents (although Asian Indian remains the largest minority ethnic group at 6.1%).

Walsall also has a culturally-mixed population. People of Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi background form the largest minority ethnic groups in Walsall. The number of Non-UK Born residents in Walsall has increased by 3.7% (or 9,859 people) between the 2001 and 2011 censuses (see figure 2). Walsall now has a small Eastern European population who make up about 1% of the area residents (2,681 people in total).

Figure 2

Percentage of residents in Walsall who are BAME



The table below evidences the following wards have the highest percentage of minority ethnicity; Palfrey (64.9%), Pleck (58.9%) and St Matthews (46.9%).

Walsall Wards	Total People Census 2011	% of Minority Ethnicity
Aldridge Central and South	13,781	8.3%
Aldridge North and Walsall Wood	13,207	6.4%
Bentley and Darlaston North	13,479	29.3%
Birchills Leamore	14,775	23.8%
Blakenall	13,773	20.0%
Bloxwich East	12,155	5.5%
Bloxwich West	13,246	5.4%
Brownhills	12,676	5.6%
Darlaston South	14,342	19.2%
Paddock	13,006	49.4%
Palfrey	16,532	64.9%
Pelsall	11,505	3.7%
Pheasey Park Farm	11,010	13.4%
Pleck	15,014	58.9%
Rushall-Shelfield	11,871	11.3%
Short Heath	11,449	11.3%
St Matthew's	15,088	46.9%

Streetly	13,934	14.4%
Willenhall North	12,697	11.6%
Willenhall South	15,783	25.0%
Grand Total	269,323	21.7%

Religion

The range of religious beliefs/faiths in the Borough is a reflection of its ethnic diversity:

	<u>Walsall</u>	<u>England</u>
Christian	59.8%	59.4%
Sikh	4.17%	0.8%
Hindu	1.60%	1.5%
Muslim	8.2%	5.0%
Buddhist	0.19%	0.5%
Other religions	0.51%	0.4%
No religion	20.07%	24.7%
Not stated	6.01%	7.2%
Jewish	0.02%	0.5%

Apart from Palfrey and Pleck, all other wards have a majority Christian population. The Sikh communities are largely found in Paddock (17.79%) and Willenhall South (11.12%) wards. Walsall now has a high percentage of Muslim residents of 8.2% compared to England 5.0%. Sikh residents account for 4% of the borough's population (England = 0.8%). Christian residents continue to account for the majority of the population at 60%, however, this group has seen an 13% decrease since 2001. Those residents who stated that they had no religious affiliation increased from 10% to 20%, this trend mirrors the national picture.

Disability

There is no one single source of data which measures the number of disabled people in the Borough. There are a series of interlinked health indicators from the Census. In 2011 results confirm that overall health is poorer in Walsall than in England and Wales. One in five residents have a health condition that limits their day to day activities: 10.4% are limited a lot, and a further 10.3% limited a little. 77.3% of residents say their health is good or very good – lower than the 81.2% nationally – with 7.3% experiencing bad or very bad health (5.6% nationally).

Even if an individual is in good health themselves, there are many people in Walsall 11.4% of residents provide unpaid care to relatives, friends or neighbours compared with 10.3% nationally. This equates to over 17,000 people providing between 1 and 19 hours' unpaid care a week, while almost 8,800 provide unpaid care for over 50 hours a week.

One in twenty (5.2%) of Walsall adults are economically inactive because they are long-term sick or disabled (compared to 4.2% nationally).

For the purposes of this Equality Analysis, Long Term Limited Illness (LTLI) is cited in addition to other more up to date data which will be used as a proxy measure for disability: Employment Support Allowance (ESA), Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and Attendance Allowance (AA) are used as proxy measures of disability.

2,410 (1.4%) people claimed DLA (Source: DWP Benefit Claimants – Working Age Client Group, Feb 2014) in Walsall. This is higher than in England (1.2%) or the other Black Country local authorities (1.3%). While the increase in the DLA claimant numbers is marked, it is not as substantial an increase as for Out-of-Work benefits such as JSA and ESA.

Long term health problem or disability by age

Age	All categories: Long-term health problem or disability	Day-to-day activities limited a lot	Day-to-day activities limited a little	Day-to-day activities not limited
All categories: Age	267,397	26,934	27,523	212,940
Age 0 to 15	56,168	992	1,395	53,781
Age 16 to 24	31,165	705	1,099	29,361
Age 25 to 34	33,807	1,135	1,573	31,099
Age 35 to 49	55,394	3,394	4,321	47,679
Age 50 to 64	46,214	6,471	7,075	32,668
Age 65 to 74	24,524	5,527	6,084	12,913
Age 75 to 84	15,375	5,779	4,733	4,863
Age 85 and over	4,750	2,931	1,243	576
Age Band	%	%	%	%
Age 0 to 15	21	4	5	25
Age 16 to 24	12	3	4	14
Age 25 to 34	13	4	6	15
Age 35 to 49	21	13	16	22
Age 50 to 64	17	24	26	15
Age 65 to 74	9	21	22	6
Age 75 to 84	6	21	17	2
Age 85 and over	2	11	5	0

301 children 0 – 5 are registered on the Children's Centre's Database (ESTART) as having a disability. 236 children (0-5) have cases open to the councils SEN team to meet additional needs (Dec 13 to Jan 14)

Marriage/Civil Partnership/Households

The 2011 Census identifies the largest marital status group in Walsall comprises those people who are married – accounting for just under half (48.2%) of all residents aged over 16. This is similar to the national proportion for England and Wales (46.6%). Almost a third of residents over 16 are single, having never been married or in a civil partnership

The Civil Partnership Act 2004 came into effect in the UK on 5 December 2005, and there are now just fewer than 300 Walsall residents in a same-sex civil partnership formed since that date. This proportion is lower than that for England and Wales (0.2%), with significant numbers of people in civil partnerships found mainly London and the South East

The remainder of Walsall's usually resident population is composed of divorced (8.3%), widowed (7.9%) and separated (2.7%) individuals from either opposite or same-sex relationships.

The most reported household type in Walsall is where there is one family (64.2%). Families with a married/civil partnership couple are the most common family type, accounting for one in three of all households in the borough (in line with nationally). There are 12,900 lone parent households in Walsall, accounting for 12.0% of the total – a slightly higher proportion than the 10.7% across England and Wales.

Sexual Orientation

There is currently no source of information for sexual orientation in the Borough. ONS estimate 1.2% of adults in the West Midlands self-identify as LGBT. 1.2% of Walsall's adult population equates to 32664 people – this could be used as an approximation of people who identify as LGBT in the city.

Gender Identity

There is currently no reliable source of information about the extent of gender identity.

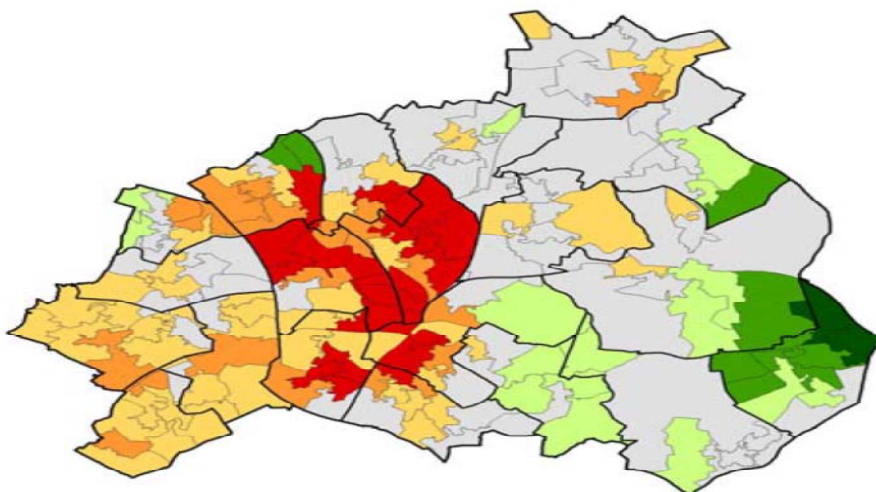
Employment Status

Employment data is a useful proxy measure for deprivation, for this reason we are including an outline of employment status data.

In February 2014 Walsall identified, 30,910 of the working-age population were claiming out of work benefits per quarter. 7,970 were claiming Job Seekers Allowance (JSA), 12,190 were claiming Employment Support Allowance or Incapacity Benefit and 3,240 were claiming Lone Parent Benefit (Source: ONS).

The map shows the levels of deprivation in the Borough. Red areas are amongst the most deprived 5% nationally, and dark green are the least deprived 5%. Walsall contains some of the most deprived areas in England, but also has some of the least deprived. Walsall is the 30th most deprived local authority district out of 326 in England.

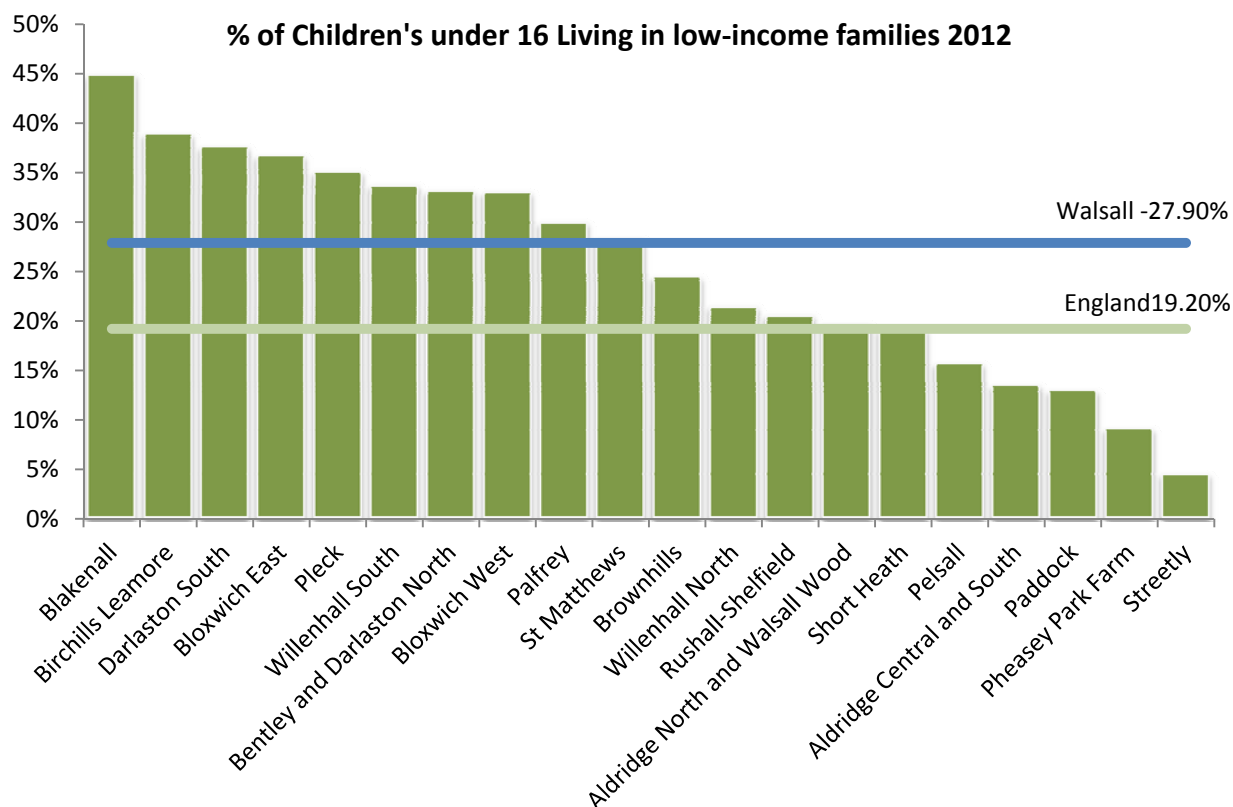
Index of Multiple Deprivation, 2010



Source: Department for Communities and Local Government, 2010

Unemployment levels reported by the census will vary from other measures collected by different methods. In total 6.8% of adults reported that they are unemployed, with figures higher for males than for females. This compares to 4.4% across England and Wales.

The table below identifies the percentage of children in poverty in 2012 with Blakenall (43.8%) being the highest, Birchills Leamore (39.9%) compared to Streetly (5%) which is the lowest



The map on p.10 shows Children's Centre catchment areas and the table below shows the numbers of children using each centre. Children's Centres report on the number of children who use their services through 'engagement' figures; these are how many different people or children had a single contact or more with the Centre in the year. For example if the Centre has 2345 contacts then that would mean they have had at least one or more contact with 2345 people or children.

Although Children's Centres provide services for all families with children under age 5 their development has been focused within communities where there are high levels of deprivation. The Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) is taken into account in setting Children's Centres budgets so that families who are vulnerable to poor outcomes can supported.

The index is calculated by the [Office of the Deputy Prime Minister](#) and measures in a local area the proportion of children under the age of 16 that live in low income households. The local areas for which the index is calculated are [super output areas](#). It

is supplementary to the [Indices of Multiple Deprivation](#) and is used for calculation of the [contextual value added](#) score, measuring children's educational progress. Tables 2 and 3 give self-reported information about the engagement levels in each centre and the cross tabulation of engagement with IDACI rates.

Table 2 Percentage of children living in reach area who live in IDACI 0-10% SOA		
Children's Centre	0-10% most disadvantaged LSOA	
	Number of children	% engaged
Alumwell	743	62%
Bentley	0	0%
Birchills	806	66%
Blakenall	578	51%
Bloxwich	253	45%
Brownhills	0	0%
Darlaston	157	65%
Edgar Stammers	526	62%
Fibbersley	162	72%
Greenfield	0	0%
Hatherton	326	56%
Leighswood	0	0%
Lighthouse	0	0%
Paddock	0	0%
Palfrey	569	86%
Pelsall	0	0%
Pheasey	0	0%
Streetly	0	0%

Table 3 Engagement with children who live in a IDACI 10-20% most deprived SOA		
Children's Centre	10-20% most disadvantaged LSOA	
	Number of children	% engaged
Alumwell	558	56%
Bentley	403	70%
Birchills	240	65%
Blakenall	375	36%
Bloxwich	101	40%
Brownhills	204	66%
Darlaston	681	51%
Edgar Stammers	167	60%
Fibbersley	509	68%
Greenfield	0	0%
Hatherton	501	62%
Leighswood	0	0%
Lighthouse	299	100%
Paddock	322	76%
Palfrey	914	73%

Pelsall	97	85%
Pheasey	0	0%
Streetly	0	0%

Table 4 represents self-reported usage data for BAME communities and gives a positive picture of BAME take-up of Children's Centres services.

Table 4 BAME Usage of Children's Centres		
Children's Centre	BAME	
	Number of children	% engaged
Alumwell	908	47%
Bentley	261	57%
Birchills	852	57%
Blakenall	165	19%
Bloxwich	124	31%
Brownhills	133	55%
Darlaston	527	44%
Edgar Stammers	149	63%
Fibbersley	333	47%
Greenfield	195	84%
Hatherton	270	50%
Leighswood	126	34%
Lighthouse	167	61%
Paddock	843	60%
Palfrey	1417	77%
Pelsall	62	68%
Pheasey	78	56%
Streetly	151	45%

The data on Lone Parents provides an overview; data collected is through self-determination by the parent when they register and whether they complete that part of the registration form is completed. The box is optional to complete and this means that many parents do not fill it. Furthermore if it is completed it will be reliable at that point and if or when their circumstances change they are unlikely to update their status in the Children's Centre database. This means that the reliability of the figures below is less than 100% accurate and therefore should be viewed with caution.

Table 5 Lone Parent usage		
Children's Centre	Lone parents	
	Number of parents	% engaged
Alumwell	304	57%
Bentley	238	84%
Birchills	254	50%
Blakenall	288	33%
Bloxwich	214	49%
Brownhills	190	70%
Darlaston	316	58%

Edgar Stammers	195	56%
Fibbersley	234	82%
Greenfield	130	100%
Hatherton	228	46%
Leighswood	125	61%
Lighthouse	159	96%
Paddock	101	79%
Palfrey	253	57%
Pelsall	70	100%
Pheasey	43	58%
Streetly	18	44%

Table 5 Teenage Parents / Pregnant usage

Children's Centre	Teenage parents/pregnant teenagers	
	Number of teenagers	% engaged
Alumwell	28	79%
Bentley	28	100%
Birchills	31	65%
Blakenall	34	53%
Bloxwich	24	92%
Brownhills	23	74%
Darlaston	42	76%
Edgar Stammers	16	63%
Fibbersley	34	85%
Greenfield	20	100%
Hatherton	30	87%
Leighswood	16	81%
Lighthouse	24	100%
Paddock	13	100%
Palfrey	45	58%
Pelsall	5	100%
Pheasey	2	100%
Streetly	1	0%

Children's Centre Reach Area	CYP with Disabilities (July 2013) - NHS Walsall Healthcare
Alumwell Pleck Children's Centre	115
Birchills & North Walsall Children's Centre	136
Palfrey Children's Centre	151
Paddock & Chuckery Children's Centre	92
Blakenall Children's Centre	123
Edgar Stammers Children's Centre	66
Bloxwich Children's Centre	102

Hatherton Children's Centre	78
Bentley Children's Centre	109
Fibbersley Park Children's Centre	103
Lighthouse Children's Centre (Beacon)	72
Darlaston Children's Centre	126
Brownhills Children's Centre	107
Greenfield Children's Centre	97
Leighswood Children's Centre	118
Pelsall Children's Centre	45
Pheasey Park Farm Children's Centre	26
Streetly Children's Centre	51
Sub-totals	1,717

Table 5 SEND usage

Children's Centre	SEND	
	Number of Children	% engaged
Alumwell	21	100%
Bentley	16	100%
Birchills	24	96%
Blakenall	21	48%
Bloxwich	19	37%
Brownhills	18	100%
Darlaston	23	52%
Edgar Stammers	7	100%
Fibbersley	17	59%
Greenfield	15	100%
Hatherton	11	100%
Leighswood	18	50%
Lighthouse	14	79%
Paddock	11	100%
Palfrey	28	100%
Pelsall	5	100%
Pheasey	4	100%
Streetly	14	21%

Table 7 Analysis of Engagement Levels by Children's Centre with Two Years Olds

	June 2014
Children's Centre	% Engagement
Alumwell	51%
Bentley	65%
Birchills	43%
Blakenall	76%
Bloxwich	65%

Brownhills	73%
Darlaston	50%
Edgar Stammers	60%
Fibbersley	52%
Greenfield	53%
Hatherton	54%
Leighswood	69%
Lighthouse	42%
Paddock	49%
Palfrey	48%
Pelsall	63%
Pheasey	33%
Streetly	67%

Consultation

Consultation activity has included 'Have your say' Budget Booklet, on line Children Centre survey, 5 Focus Groups, 18 daytime drop in sessions; and 8 evening drop in sessions. Consultation displays and comments boxes have also been available at the 18 children's centres.

From the 17th November 2014 to the 5th January 2015 Walsall Childrens Services have consulted with service users and partners about redesigning children centres services to meet budget saving requirements. The consultation has resulted in the return of 269 questionnaires 122 comment slips and attendance at focus groups and meetings by 150 service users. Detailed analysis of findings from activity each consultation is provided in this report.

From questionnaire responses, focus groups and drop in sessions the following themes have been identified from consultation about proposal to reduce number of buildings and to deliver a remodelled Boroughwide service targeting services to most vulnerable.

Budget Booklet Survey

Fully Support	Support with concerns/amendments	Do not support	Base number
24 (20%)	15 (13%)	79 (67%)	1118 (100%)
(72 (67%) users, 34 (32%) non users/not stated)			

Based on this snapshot of feedback through the Budget Booklet Survey, the majority (67%) do not support this proposal. Two thirds of respondents are users of Childrens Centre services.

The reasons used by respondents saying they do not support the proposal, whether they are recent users or not, tend to cover the following reasons;

- The loss of so many Childrens Centres is too big an impact.
- Loss of affordable childcare and impact on working parents.

- Loss of local support and development services that are accessible and affordable and are therefore valued as important to parents, particularly mothers taking part in activities and sessions, and on the development of their children.
- Loss of a community venue/asset
- Would not travel to alternative venues

“My child would not be able to attend the stay and play and I was relying on this service to help with childcare when I go back to work next year.”

“The removal of particular service will impact on my childcare arrangements and have a detrimental effect on both my own and my wife's ability to undertake full time work.”

“I take my toddler to the sure start centre ... It provides somewhere to take my toddler to play, do activities and learn ... as well as somewhere for me to meet other adults and get out of the house.”

Those who don't support the proposal and aren't recent users speak of the impact that closure will have on the local community and lament the loss of what they see as valuable services.

“Working alongside the centres to support a family I can see the benefit of these in the community. ... without the support these centres offer it will be putting a lot of families & children at risk...”

Those who fully support the proposal tend not to be recent users of Children's Centres, though some have used it up to five years ago when their children were younger and lament the loss based on the values they gained from the service. Hence they either state that the proposal doesn't affect them directly or they comment generally about the impact on loss of services for children. Some respondents fully support the proposal but then comment on the impact on them suggesting they have not completed the survey correctly?

“No activity for kids, no place for kids to spend free time, no place for children to develop, no place to meet other parents.”

“Not used this service in last 5 years as children are now adults. But my grandchildren are eligible but as they have responsible parents it is a service not reqd.”

Suggestions for alternatives to make the saving include:

- Introduce charges, rent out rooms.
- Identify shared buildings.
- Council Tax increase.
- Streamline CC management and deliver services where they are needed.
- Stop spending money on things that do not prioritise children for example close other services like New Art Gallery, Family Information Service as information can be provided online.

Children's Centre Consultation Questionnaire

Fully Support	Support with concerns/amendments	Do not support	Don't Know	Base number

64 (26%)	47 (20%)	119 (47%)	19 (7%)	249 (100%)
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A more detailed survey has been undertaken for this proposal seeking feedback for each Childrens Centre (CCs), services used, issues of importance and service focus, thoughts on childcare provision, preferences for accessing information and services and overall thoughts.

At the time of writing, feedback has been received about each of the 18 CCs; with varying frequency of response; Bentley, Palfrey, Lighthouse having received responses in excess of 30, compared to Alumwell, Greenfield and Leighswood receiving just one response each. This information will be used to ensure that where insufficient feedback is received here it is bolstered by other feedback methods.

Overall feedback on the entire Children Centre proposal shows that opinion is divided, with 47% of respondents not supporting proposals compared to 26% fully supporting and 20% supporting but with concerns/amendments. Therefore 46% of respondents show support for the proposal versus 47% who do not support it. 7% said they 'didn't know'.

In terms of impact overall, most respondents say they would stop using CC's (33%), would use the CC service less often (24%), don't know (21%), they would attend alternatives activities e.g. swimming, visiting friends, attending local groups (17%), they would use another CC (10%), proposal has no impact (7%).

The grey boxes represent strength of feeling regarding overall support versus not supporting. Please note low responses for some CC's. What this shows is that support for the specific proposal differs by Childrens Centre and reflects the diversity of the proposal and its impact on those CCs.

Due to small response bases care needs to be taken when interpreting these results.

Based on overall feedback, most respondents (89%) use CCs at least once a week or more; on two or more times a week (53%), once a week (36%).

In terms of the services most used in the last 12 months, overall most respondents say;

- Play and stay (51%); followed by;
- Sessional childcare (up to 3 hrs) (27%)
- Advice and information (25%)
- Health visitor sessions (24%)
- Full day care (8am to 6pm) (18%)
- Training (14%)
- Parenting support (22%)
- Holiday clubs / play schemes (20%)
- Other stated (16%) includes where stated breastfeeding support, baby massage & swimming, rainbow rhyme and family support.

In terms of what respondents think is important for the children's early support services to focus on in the future, there seems to be strong agreement (based on Strongly Agree + Agree showing the following;)

1. Provide early help early on (93%)
2. Improve information, advice and support to all parents of 0-5's (92%)
3. Focus on what we know works e.g. Parenting programmes, speech and language

- support) (85%)
- 4. Better target parent support from pre-birth onwards (84%)
- 5. Services are more joined up and coordinated (73%)
- 6. Focus on children and families in greatest need and reducing inequalities (73%)
- 7. An emphasis on services rather than buildings (67%)

And in terms of what is important when assessing services for 0-5s, by some margin the top three things that are most important are:

- 1. Near to home (84%)
- 2. The staff (82%)
- 3. Quality of Care / Ofsted report (70%)

Followed by:

- Good reputation in the community (69%)
- Security and safety (66%)
- The building and facilities (54%)
- Recommend by family / friend / Health Professional / Social Worker (49%)
- Opening hours (44%)
- Attached to local school (37%)
- Low cost compared to other providers (36%)
- Places available / no waiting list (36%)
- Parking / drop off (29%)
- Good transport links (26%)
- Near / on route to place of work / study (24%)
- No reason / don't know (0.4%)
- Other, please tell us (4%).

The other aspects respondents deemed important included;

- Demand driven rather than meeting those in greatest need i.e. deprived, 'hence a service for all'.
- Having local community based provision, somewhere to meet people
- Behavioural support,
- Face to face contact and one to one support including with someone they know.
- Accessible services i.e. locally based.
- Affordability of childcare, including day care provision.

"Local community based provision to enable families, parents, carers and children to come together within their community to interact, form lasting relationships thus strengthening local communities."

"Qualified caring staff providing a service in local area..."

"Provision of services should not be solely for those perceived to be economically most in need but should be available to all with children under 5. Feelings of isolation, the need for 'peer support' and a sense of belonging is important for all, regardless of socioeconomic background."

"I am unable to afford a private nursery fees. The Childrens centre on Mossley estate, Bloxwich is a great asset to the community and affordable to people like myself."

"In order to keep working I need a childcare provider that will be open all day."

When asked about preferred childcare providers, the majority say schools (79%), followed by Voluntary Sector / registered charities (29%), private sector (25%), no preference (12%), other (12%) and where stated commonly included; Childrens Centres/Sure Start, something affordable and supporting employment, and childminders.

Most respondents say they would be willing to access CC services from schools (82%), followed by Community Centres (60%), Health Centres (42%), GP surgeries (32%), Faith Buildings (22%), Other (9%) and where stated this included Childrens Centres/Sure Starts, email and post, somewhere safe, libraries, local day care centre i.e. Monmouth Road and including none of the above.

Preferences for accessing information in order of preference are:

- Leaflets/newsletters (60%)
- Walsall Council website (52%)
- Social media e.g. Facebook, Twitter (32%)
- Online parenting websites e.g. Netmums, National Children's Trust (NCT) (28%)
- Mobile App (27%)
- Telephone help line (21%)
- Other websites (7%)
- Other (6%) and where stated included face to face with key worker, Family Information Service Walsall or breastfeeding helpline.

Suggestions for alternative ways to make the savings:

- Introduce nominal charges, and increase childcare fees.
- Widen reach through You Tube, text alerts and 'at the School Gates'
- Collaborative working.
- Increase council tax by a small amount
- Reduced opening
- Company sponsorship, use of charities, volunteering.
- Save money elsewhere i.e. high earning salaries

Gender/ Sexual Orientation

The majority of respondents who completed the questionnaire (95%) were female and 100% describe themselves as heterosexual therefore other sexual orientation groups are not represented which we need to consider as consultation continues.

Ethnicity

Questionnaires have been completed by a range of ethnic groups as follows, which is reflective of the Walsall demographic:

White British: 72%

White other: 2%

Mixed or Multiple: 1%

Asian or Asian British: 20%

Black, African, Caribbean or Black British: 5%

A good representation of religious groups have participated in consultation.

Age

Average age of participants completing questionnaire is 32.2

Disability

9% of respondents completing questionnaire identify that their child has a behaviour or development issue.

Low income families

There was a good representation of working and none working families participating in consultation. Approximately a third identified that they were in receipt of tax credits which perhaps suggests that a disproportionate amount of higher income families have responding via the medium of questionnaire.

Area

From the questionnaires returned we have representation from each of the 18 Children's Centre areas, however it is notable that response from service users in the following areas has been low via this medium.

- Alumwell
- Blakenall
- Bloxwich
- Darlaston
- Edgar Stammers
- Greenfield
- Leighswood
- Streetly

5 of the above centres are identified in the proposal as potentially closing therefore effort has been made to give greater opportunity to input into consultation by undertaking focus groups and encouraging comment on feedback slips (as service users had commented that form was too complex).

The feedback slip approach has increased response from Darlaston and Streetly in particular.

Feedback Slips

To encourage a greater response displays have been erected in the reception area of each Children's Centre with comment slips provided. In areas of low return of the questionnaire, identified above, we additionally instructed staff to promote completion at the end of sessions and to offer support. The table below shows the level of response.

Alumwell	0
Blakenall	2
Bloxwich	13
Darlaston	11
Edgar Stammers	2
Greenfield	0
Leighswood	0

Streetly	7
Others	
Bentley	37
Birchills	1
Hatherton	5
Palfrey	1
Pelsall	5

Overview of comments

The main themes from feedback on comments slips are as follows:

- Children's services should not be touched
- Groups valued and provide interaction for children and parents
- Local access is important...home visits not the answer as parents want to get out of the house as isolated.
- There will be no community facilities for parents and young children to go to.
- Children Centres provide social contact and development for 0-3's
- No services will be available in Willenhall
- If centre goes families like mine will struggle
- Had post natal depression and children centre got me through
- Children Centre groups give structure to families
- Children learn a lot from attending PEEP and play and stay sessions as they are structured
- Children try new things at Children Centres
- Children Centres help single mom's make friends
- Change to daycare means I will have to leave work
- Children Centre helps with speech and confidence
- Children Centres help children to get used to being in a routine and get used to interacting with children their age and learn new skills
- Pelsall Children Centre should remain open...village will be outraged if closed
- Someone should take notice of working parents who pay into the system.

Focus Groups

Focus Groups were held in each cluster area and Children Centre staff identified and invited a representative group of parents. All were well attended with the exception of Bloxwich where no one attended. This approach has increased engagement from protected groups.

Focus groups took place at the following venues and dates and were facilitated by Early Years Managers

4.12.14: Pelsall Children Centre
4.12.14: Palfrey Childrens Centre
9.12.14: Darlaston Childrens Centre
9.12.14: Birchills Children Centre

9.12.14: Bentley/King Charles Primary School

A breakdown of attendees at focus group is provided below:

Numbers of Participants: 48

Average Age of Participants: 33.5

Percentage of participants with a disability: 40%

Percentage of Participants from BME groups: 33%

Overview of feedback

Pelsall

Concerns as a result of the proposals

- If schools take over childcare, they will cut hours to 3, which is not flexible and does not meet the needs of the families
- Children will lose the opportunity to socialise, and parents become isolated – it's important for parents and children
- The settings that stay open, will be oversubscribed for activities and groups
- Transition to school might be affected if Centre services are cut – the friendships are formed early and the children get used to different environments
- Loss of peer support
- Information sharing – might not find out about things
- Staff job losses – who will support us with the things they do now?
- Can't afford to access other things – for example Makaton training – we would not be able to pay to access that elsewhere. Church group is £5 per session and I can't afford that
- Children benefit from smaller age group sessions – toddlers can improve confidence when with own age group not if there are older children running around
- Feel safe in the Children's Centre – equipment is safe, environment is safe. Doors are locked, you don't need to worry. Reception and security doors is important
- Not everyone can afford to travel, not everyone drives
- Less groups are available, there are waiting lists for private services. Services for older children is limited, there is much more for babies
- Affordable childcare will not be available
- English and Maths, behaviour management courses won't be available
- Nursery – closure at Greenfield I don't have family support so I don't know how I would cope

Impact of proposals

- Nursery since September, increased confidence, doing things I didn't think she could do – she won't do these things at home. Development has improved, want to use it for younger son. Daughter even wants to go at the weekend!
- I come to Pelsall, but have been to Blakenall Surestart. As a new mum, I was only 21 I was terrified. I didn't know anyone or what I was doing and I had the nursery opposite me and the midwife said go to the bumps and babes, and before I knew

it I was going to groups every day and I was so happy and it helped my confidence. I moved to Pelsall, and had to start again. I at the library times and the Surestart was running a playgroup and Aimee was really welcoming and there were babies everywhere and that's where I met my best friend and the Surestart was the starting point for that. Can come together and meet people in the same position. Support, friendship, advice – you learn so much from other parents

- Friendship and support
- Nursery at Greenfield since 4 months old. Staff supportive and encouraged by staff for child to attend. Daughter used playscheme, but that stopped and we missed it. Would be gutted if the nursery closed. Not access other services, but concerned as to where the children will go to nursery if the nursery closes. Cost is going to have an impact if they go to private nurseries and they are settled in the nursery already
- Lunches stopped – this made people leave and I missed the fact that he would eat round a table
- I had my ante natal classes here, and they told me about the groups here. I then joined the Peep group and the found out about the breastfeeding group at Leighswood and I found the advice from other mums was so valuable. Didn't feel so alone. Support for Breastfeeding was so important, a lot of us would have given up if they had not been to the groups
- Use cradle clubs, use every day. Ease of location, can take her home, she's tired and goes to sleep, which allows me to sleep as I work shifts. Daughter is settled with carers in Centre. Found out from doctors surgery, been attending ever since it opened. Surestart events most days, bookstart sessions, mums and tums group.

Alternative delivery suggestions

- Independent parent and toddler group
- Maybe halving the number of Children's Centres but 12 Centres for closure seems extreme
- Offer spaces in Children's Centres to other services – rent out rooms
- Better advertising to make sure groups are full

Ideas for savings

- Stop wasting money on monuments, gardens etc
- Market – lots of spending, when there are lots of shops empty e.g. Old Square
- School dinners don't need to be provided free
- 2 year old funding is not necessary for all children – seems to be a waste of money

Palfrey

Concerns as a result of the proposal

- Support to attend groups – meeting you at the door, getting you there
- Quality of staff – the staff are caring and take time to plan and provide services. If the staff are moving around areas then it might mean we don't get the same service. Continuity of care

- How will parents know what is normal – the reassurance parents get from attending groups and mixing with others could be lost
- Parking and access of different Centres might be difficult
- Schools might not be the best place for a group to run – some schools some parents do not like
- Families are encouraged to attend – including dads
- Parents of twins – really valued the support they were given from the Centres to help them get out and about. Sometimes you need a nudge!

Impact of proposals

- Easily accessible – distance
- Staff approachable, on hand, always get back to us
- Access holiday activities – not much else in area
- Play and stay, baby clinic, groups at healthy living centre. Peep groups – accessed at both sites
- Parenting programmes – improving parenting skills, the one currently offered is better than those offered previously
- Interaction for children with other children, helps build confidence and then they are ready for schools or nursery. Routines – turn taking and so on
- Space to play – bigger rooms
- Came to ante natal classes – new to area, made mum feel strong and prepared for what is going to happen
- Peep groups, ice breaking, opportunity to build networks for support, share worries get advice from other people. Somewhere to gain help
- Opportunity to access wider support – can share problems, know where to go e.g. MAST
- Welcoming – everyone is treated equally, make friends – both adults and children. Opportunity to get used to new faces and sharing and communicating with friends
- Park is unsuitable – drug zone, dogs soiling, feel unsafe. Centre is a safe space – clean and suitable
- Accessed for first son, weight clinics for babies – helped us identify sons illness

Alternative delivery suggestions

- Use volunteers from the community to increase capacity of workers – support within the groups, rather than used paid workers – enable some groups to come together rather than two or more. Could there be bigger venues that could be used
- Healthy living centre is bigger, part of the school – perhaps it is better to provide services from one centre so that it is less confusing
- Combine the services of centres so that people come to a more central point
- Maybe widen the kind of places for groups – leisure centres
- Doctors surgeries might not be a good place for groups – germs and so on. If groups are held in mosques, that might be limiting. Schools might be a better option – a neutral setting is preferred
- Weekend sessions?

- Look at charging for some services
- Open Centres for longer – to use in evenings, more people using the Centre – more easily accessible for working parents as well as encouraging the whole family to join activities
- Offer rooms/spaces for rent to other services or providers

Darlaston

Concerns as a result of the proposals

- Loss of daycare
- Loss of flexible childcare
- Barrier to return to work for parents
- No family support – Children's Centres offer walk in family support
- Loss of opportunity to attend courses
- Loss of opportunity to volunteer
- Private provision – minimum 2 days per week
- Health visitor services poor - don't feel they can be relied on to provide support
- Lack of opportunities to share ideas, concerns, friendships
- Gain access to other support professionals

Impact of Proposals

- Loss of local activities
- Sessional care not suitable to meet working parents needs
- No baby places
- Worried about support to vulnerable families
- Childcare hours – while parents attend courses
- Increase of isolation for parents/carers
- Children's Centre use of promises

Alternative delivery suggestions

- The Nest – Pinfold Street (old Catherine's Cross)
- May be able to provide some full day care places
- Other services available to vulnerable families in Children's Centre building
- Better advertised
- Working with other groups to provide support to families e.g. toddler groups
- What parents liked –
 - Childcare
 - Party in the Park
 - Interactive with staff – friendly and homely for families. Know you by name, always follow through
 - Courses
 - Local staff

Ideas for savings

- Promotion of Centre and activities to increase use
- Widen people's knowledge of the Centre

Birchills

Concerns as a result of the proposals

- Money being spent on other things i.e. roads
- Removing 0-2 yrs services i.e. messy monkeys, music man
- Removing childcare for working parents – what will they do?
- Closure of childcare groups
- Confusing information between consultation and focus group information
- Health visitors not able to provide the services already provided by Children's Centre
- Loss of support to families by removal of services
- No services for teenagers in Birchills – drug problem
- Changes – don't know what will happen. Confidence in existing staff
- What will happen with holiday schemes?
- No-one will listen to us – Council will do what they want
- Comments from parents:
 - Relationship with staff – they have time (HV's don't)
 - Some use other Centres in Walsall to access services
 - Love courses for parents
 - Valuable services i.e. children with disabilities/Time 2 Start
 - Here to help parents – signpost/accessible/reachable
 - Holiday playscheme – help children & families

Impact of Proposals

- Not able to mix – multi-cultural from babies and parents together (important to be kept open for the kids)
- Remove of full daycare for working parents
- Services cut and parents left unable to access support
- Good services – get used to – now disappearing
- Integration of services - Cultural and sexes. Under threat if groups close
- Who else will provide the services
- Disadvantage areas would stay the same and not improve
- Parents feel safe in this nursery/childcare – not sure if they would feel the same somewhere else

Alternative delivery suggestions

- Make more use of the buildings – evenings
- Combine services to meet the needs of families

Bentley/King Charles School

Concerns as a result of the proposals

- Parents being used for volunteers in childcare

- Working parents and childcare needs
- Where will parents go if vulnerable (through e.g. DV)?
- Support network – housing/bills/child behaviour
- No communal family network
- People who know me – if they aren't there who will help?
- They ask you what to do, they listen, they don't tell you what to do
- Children saved from abuse – DV. Who will be there for them?
- Give opportunities for preparation for the future via courses
- Confidence needed to go into new groups and new people
- Issues with talking to other professionals – Centre staff listen and help, give time
- Where do I get access visits to see my children?
- Children will suffer
- Comments:
 - Support DV victims – used another Centre
 - Quality work on behaviour with children
 - Not listened to by teachers
 - HV's – mixed comments
 - Lots of activities provided and well supported
 - Centres are a godsend

Impact of Proposals

- Lose existing staff who families are used to
- New houses – more vulnerable families – services?
- Transport – how do people access (day service ticket problem)
- Serious issues for DV victims
- Stopping supporting through neighbours meeting at Centres

Ideas for savings

- Leisure centres – are they making money? Do they only take out of the pot? Not fully used – closing Bloxwich and building a new one.
- Mayor's car

Stakeholder meeting

Engagement with stakeholders has also taken place and will continue until end of consultation period. The session began to scope and consider risks and scope how an integrated approach can ensure that vulnerable families and children are still supported and that we are able to identify health, development and social concerns early on.

Suggestions to support implementation

- Universal services can be supported by health visitors
- Schools may plug the gaps by employed family support workers with pupil premium monies
- Need to encourage social enterprise
- Support for community to set up groups required during transition
- Develop specialities in CC's – SEN to be available in all CC's

- Inclusive
- Include Speech and Language
- Base Health Visitors in centres
- Mobile units for outreach?

Risks

- Expertise of staff could be lost
- Gap around partnership and potential risk that revenue won't cover cost
- Easy access geographically and welcoming
- Where will supervised contact take place, and staff will need appropriate skills. If doing this in home, double staff may be needed.
- Paddock is deprived. Need to look at pockets of deprivation in less deprived areas
- Review where need/increased birth rates exist
- Community buildings needed for Health and SLT groups and hub for families
- Voluntary sector – struggling to gain funding – some voluntary services may cease
- Community Centres will charge health for rooms
- CC's – have other benefits
- Lead professional – takes time that reduces core service and specialism's
- Staff will need to do more outreach – with reduction in staff, this will cause issues
- Specialist services – are relied on but might reduce
- Impact on SEN
- Timeframe - is it too ambitious
- Relationship CC staff have formed with families

Drop in sessions

The following drop in sessions have been held across Walsall.

Date	Time	Venue
24.11.14	10:00-12:00	Leighswood
26.11.14	11:00-13:00	Birchills
28.11.14	09:30-11:30	Bloxwich - St Thomas Church
28.11.14	14:00-16:00	Pheasey Park Farm School
01.12.14	10:00-12:00	Hatherton
02.12.14	14:00-16:00	Brownhills (Activity Centre)
03.12.14	15:00-17:00	Bentley Hub
04.12.14	10:00-12:00	Alumwell

05.12.14	14:00-16:00	Streetly
08.12.14	09:00-11:00	Blakenall Community Centre
08.12.14	16:30-18:30	Fibbersley Park CC
09.12.14	14:00-16:00	Greenfield CC
11.12.14	14:00-16:00	Pelsall
12.12.14	09:30-11:30	Palfrey CC
16.12.14	13:00-15:00	St Luke's Church (Paddock)
16.12.14	16:00-18:00	Lighthouse CC
17.12.14	14:00-16:00	Darlaston
18.12.14	11:00-13:00	Edgar Stammers
CC Cluster Evening meetings	Time	Venue
24.11.14 (Cluster 3)	18:30-20:30	Edgar Stammers CC
27.11.14 (Cluster 4)	18:30-20:30	Birchills Children's Centre
01.12.14 (cluster 5)	18:30-20:30	Darlaston Children's Centre
04.12.14 (Cluster 6)	18:30-20:30	Bentley Children's Centre
09.12.14 (Cluster 2)	18:30-20:30	Leighswood CC
11.12.14 (Cluster 4a)	18:30-20:30	Palfrey CC
15.12.14 (Cluster 1)	18:00-20:00	Pelsall Children's Centre
18.12.14 (Cluster 2a)	18:30-20:30	Pheasey Park Farm School

Overview of issues raised

- Families do not want to lose their local access to groups and support
- Families are concerned about capacity of health visitors to pick up support and do not feel that they provide time and level of support that they currently get
- Pheasey, Willenhall and Streetly are particularly concerned about losing children centre and libraries
- Post natal depression has been raised at all meetings...support in the first year is particularly valued
- Where staffing has been stable families identified more with staff and centre...continuity valued.
- New parents have particular restrictions in travel as difficult to access public transport

with pushchair

- Families who access daycare at Birchills and Fibbersley Park have expressed concern about move to sessional child care
- For centres that are school based, parents were hopeful that schools would be able to carry on some services and LA committed to scope this.
- Support for people fleeing domestic violence is valued and withdrawal for local place to get support was identified as a concern.

From questionnaire responses, focus groups and drop in sessions the following themes have been identified from consultation about proposal to reduce number of buildings and to deliver a remodelled Boroughwide service targeting services to most vulnerable.

Local Access

Families' value local Children Centre services and new mom's with 1 or more small children identified that they find it difficult to travel across Walsall so access to a local centre is very important. Travel by bus can be difficult as often have to wait for a few to go by before there is space for a pushchair. Also getting out of the house between feeds, nappy changes and sleep times of babies and toddlers make it challenging to attend groups and appointments so added aspect of travel would make many families not bother. Mom's identified that not having local services and groups available would have put them at risk as they go 'in sane' being stuck in house with baby and or small children. Risks relating to maternal mental health and welfare of children were highlighted. Families identified strong links with centre staff, particularly in areas that had had less change of staff in the previous year's reshape.

Universal services

Families identified that the first year after having a baby **all** new parents described themselves as being vulnerable and universal services (such a play and stay groups) were valued as giving an opportunity to meet other parents, to get advice and support and for children to play and interact. Post natal depression was identified as a vulnerability risk factor that was helped by this provision.

Many parents reported that staff leading Children Centre groups and activities often identified speech and language and physical development concerns and supported families to access health services. The proposal identifies that in the future Health Visitors would lead on this role but families said that it is only from centre workers regularly seeing children that issues are picked up.

Parents identified that they would welcome access to information on the internet and via newsletters. A number of respondents have commented that children centre could and should promote services more.

53% of respondents to survey identified that universal play and stay groups are the main reason that families access Children Centre services.

Targeting

During consultation it has emerged that there is support from parents to target resource on services for 0-3's as this period of time is identified as being when families and children are at greatest need. Working parents on maternity leave are often isolated and do not have social support networks; most new parents lack confidence and welcome advice and support on feeding, routines, development and stimulation; children are usually in nursery by 3 years old so support then tends to come from school.

Staff

Families value Children Centre staff and see them as knowledgeable, approachable and non judgemental. There were some concerns about whether Health Visitors could perform the role of Children Centre staff as families found it difficult to envisage that Health Visitors will have time to spend with families and also there was a perception that Health Visitors are less approachable and do not engage positively with families as they have to stick to prescriptive health messages and can be quite formal. Families experience of Health Visiting has been based on delivery from an under resourced provision and during consultation we have promoted the changing role of Health Visiting; increase in capacity and the additional training that professionals have had in community development.

Childcare

The proposal seeks views about the Local Authority having less of a role in childcare, instead focusing on supporting others to deliver sessional childcare for 2 year olds from centre buildings. This would mean phasing out full daycare that is still provided at Fibbersley, Darlaston, Birchills and Greenfield. Families currently accessing this provision have objected to proposal as they are concerned about impact on their child (in terms of continuity of care) and impact on their jobs as they fear that they will not be able to source alternative childcare if required. From a childcare sufficiency perspective the LA can identify that places are available in other settings for daycare. However some of this provision is through childminders and some parents have said this would not be their preference. Where possible we will endeavour to continue to provide daycare for children already in settings to minimise impact and will provide one to one support to any families adversely affected to identify alternatives provision if required. There has been support for a shift in childcare delivery from parents who are not directly affected by change proposal.

Children with SEN/Disability

Children Centres are valued by parents of children with additional needs and during consultation a number of examples were given about how centre staff have supported parents to navigate system and to access health and education services. It appears that a disproportionate number of families have accessed childcare for children with additional needs at children's centre settings, who offer inclusive environments and offer additional support to parents. Birchills Children Centre have the highest number of children with SEN support and employ their own SEN Lead. To mitigate risk the new model for children centres needs to align with SEN review currently being undertaken.

In summary to mitigate impact on affected groups the proposal has been revised to :

Implement ante natal pathway in partnership with health to assess needs of parents and target parenting and other support as appropriate. This will mean that risks relating to Domestic Abuse and Mental Health issues will be identified by Health Visitors and Midwives early on and referred to appropriate intervention.

Extend definition of vulnerable to include all new parents of 0-3's. This will mean that all parents will be able to access play and stay groups across the borough mitigating risks relating to early identification of disability, SEN or social care concerns. These activities will be free of charge therefore financial barriers will be mitigated. This will mean that

	<p>parents will continue to be afforded opportunity to meet other parents, to access advice and support and to gain support in relation to social isolation, post natal depression and speech and language development of young children</p> <p>Ensure that there are adequate access points for services by retaining some rooms and venues in Willenhall South, Brownhills and Pheasey to reduce negative impact on parents (women in particular) that have barriers to travel.</p>			
5	How may the proposal affect each protected characteristic or group? The affect may be positive, negative or neutral.			
	Characteristic	Affect	Reason	Action needed Y or N
	Age	Negative	<p>All Children</p> <p>Local Access</p> <p>Travel to and from centres increased by distance and cost.</p> <p>Use of public transport with young children difficulties increased</p> <p>Reduction in local community facilities providing social contact and development for young children</p> <p>Services</p> <p>Reduction in speech and language and physical development concerns and supported families to access health services</p> <p>Impact on children of reduction or stopping of child care (in terms of continuity of care).</p>	Y
	Disability	Negative	<p>Children</p> <p>Reduction of affordable, inclusive environments and services</p> <p>Adults</p> <p>Change in method of support for those with mental health issues</p>	Y
	Gender reassignment	Neutral	No foreseen impact	N
	Marriage and civil partnership	Neutral	No foreseen impact	N
	Pregnancy and maternity	Negative	Increase in isolation for working mothers especially on maternity leave - increase in post natal depression.	Y
	Race	Neutral	No foreseen impact	N
	Religion or belief	Neutral	No foreseen impact	N
	Sex	Negative	Women	N

			<p>Increase in isolation for working mothers especially on maternity leave - increase in post natal depression.</p> <p>Loss of local support and development services that are accessible and affordable and are therefore valued as important to parents, particularly mothers taking part in activities and sessions, and on the development of their children.</p> <p>Change of method of support for people fleeing domestic violence.</p>	
	Sexual orientation	Neutral	No foreseen impact	N
	Other (give detail)			
	Further information			
6	Does your proposal link with other proposals to have a cumulative affect on particular equality groups? If yes, give details below.			(Delete one) Yes
	<p>Yes</p> <p>Ref 32: Changes to how we deliver targeted support to young people: The proposal links with budget reductions in Youth Services as Children Centres currently provide family support to 0-19s in partnership with youth services</p> <p>Ref 36: Changes to how we reduce teenage pregnancy: Children Centres provide support groups and services to teenage moms and new model will need to consider future provision.</p> <p>Ref 12: Remove funding for providers of support for Domestic Violence: A large majority of family support provided in Children's Centres focuses on 'the toxic trio' which includes the impact of domestic violence on children. Combined impact of proposals and cessation of support groups provided by the Domestic Violence Forum at 3 of the centres will have an impact and mitigation plans will need to develop.</p> <p>Ref 51: Reduced funding to Community Associations: closure of Children's Centres will result in a reduction in community facilities for families and therefore will link to this proposal</p> <p>Ref 65: The proposal links with Library Proposal as families with 0-5's access services at Libraries and Children's Centre to improve well being, reduce isolation and improve speech and language development of children.</p> <p>The proposal links with Public Health budget reductions as follows:</p> <p>PH1: Remodelling of Sexual Health Services: Sexual Health support is provided via Children's Centres (including provision of contraceptive and STI testing therefore combined impact of proposal needs to be appraised.</p> <p>PH2: Remodelling of Drugs and Alcohol Services; A large majority of family support provided in children's centres focuses on 'the toxic trio' which includes the impact on drugs and alcohol on children. Combined impact of proposals and a potential increase in</p>			

	<p>waiting times may adversely affect children and increase risk.</p> <p>PH3: Targetting Infant Feeding: Children Centre staff are trained to support breastfeeding as part of Baby Friendly so a reduction in both areas will potentially impact however it is hoped that increase in Health Visiting will mitigate against this risk.</p> <p>PH4: School Nursing Reduction. Family support to school age children will cease from Children's Centres as a result of this proposal and reduction in School Nursing budget will also reduce support for families / children with health and well being needs</p> <p>PH5: Remodelling of healthy weight and physical activity services: These services are provided through Children Centres and support well being and development targets for 0-5s.</p> <p>PH6: Targeting Health Trainers: Health Trainers provide services from Children Centres to promote healthy lifestyle and to help parents to stop smoking, lose weight or reduce alcohol consumption, these services enhance delivery in Children Centres and reduce risk factors for children</p> <p>PH9: Community Mental Health advice and guidance: Consultation has identified that mental health / post natal depression and isolation are all significant to families ,</p>								
7	<p>Which justifiable action does the evidence; engagement and consultation suggest you take? (Bold which one applies)</p> <table> <tr> <td>A</td><td>No major change required</td></tr> <tr> <td>B</td><td>Adjustments needed to remove barriers or to better promote equality</td></tr> <tr> <td>C</td><td>Continue despite possible adverse impact</td></tr> <tr> <td>D</td><td>Stop and rethink your proposal</td></tr> </table>	A	No major change required	B	Adjustments needed to remove barriers or to better promote equality	C	Continue despite possible adverse impact	D	Stop and rethink your proposal
A	No major change required								
B	Adjustments needed to remove barriers or to better promote equality								
C	Continue despite possible adverse impact								
D	Stop and rethink your proposal								

Now complete the action and monitoring plan on the next page

Action and monitoring plan				
Action Date	Action	Responsibility	Outcome Date	Outcome
January 2015	Develop integrated model for Early Years to deliver services in conjunction with health and education that meets needs and addresses issues identified.	Public Health led	23.1.15	Integrated specification drafted
January 2015	Further consultation required with schools to understand and mitigate risk relating to withdrawal of Early Help family support for school age children	Sue Morgan	23.1.15	Risk assessment completed
9 th January 2015	EqIA updated to reflect changes to proposal to mitigate impact on protected groups .			<p>Revised proposal to include:</p> <p>Implementation of ante natal pathway in partnership with health to assess needs of parents and target parenting and other support as appropriate. This will mean that risks relating to Domestic Abuse and Mental Health issues will be identified by Health Visitors and Midwives early on and referred to appropriate intervention. Suitable training to be undertaken by all staff before starting the new responsibilities.</p> <p>Extend definition of vulnerable to include all new parents of 0-3's. This will mean that</p>

				<p>all parents will be able to access play and stay groups across the borough mitigating risks relating to early identification of disability, SEN or social care concerns. These activities will be free of charge therefore financial barriers will be mitigated. This will mean that parents will continue to be afforded opportunity to meet other parents, to access advice and support and to gain support in relation to social isolation, post natal depression and speech and language development of young children</p> <p>Ensure there are adequate access points for services by retaining some rooms and venues in Willenhall South, Brownhills and Pheasey to reduce negative impact on parents (women in particular) that have barriers to travel.</p>
January 2015	Further consultation with disability, SEN teams and schools to better understand impact on children and to mitigate risk	Sue Morgan / Nicola Hart	23.1.15	Risk assessment completed
February 2015	Undertake Child care Sufficiency Review to identify childcare availability and share up to date information with families affected	Sue Morgan	01.02.15	
February 2015	If proposal is approved meetings will take place with families to explore childcare	Sue Morgan / Kim Stokes	01.03.15	Families supported to secure appropriate childcare

	options from September 2015.			
March – September 2015	Develop and implement monitoring framework to measure impact of proposal on protected groups	Sue Morgan	30.08.15	Monitoring template and process in place

Update to EqIA	
Date	Detail
17.12.14	EQIA updated with information of consultation to date
6.1.15	EQIA Updated following end of consultation
9.1.15	EQIA Updated to describe changes to proposal to mitigate impact on affected groups
9.1.15	Executive Director reviewed and discussed with Andrea Potts verbally today.



Walsall Council

Children's Services Directorate

David Haley
Executive Director: Children's Services

Your Ref:
Our Ref: DH/JH
Date: 9th February 2015
Please ask for:
Direct Line: (01922) 652081

Dear Ms Matangeria

Petition to keep in place services provided at Birchills and Alumwell Children Centres

Thank you for submitting a petition from users of Birchills and Alumwell Children's Centre in response to the proposed redesign of children's centres to meet budget savings Your petition requested that we '*keep in place childcare, staff and sessions such as Chatterbox , Stay & Play , Messy Monkeys , Musicman , Story sessions provided in centre buildings at Surestart Birchills and Alumwell*'.

Firstly, please accept this letter as acknowledgement of your petition, handed to Councillor Jones at his Leamore surgery on 31st January 2015, which has been shared with the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services, Councillor Barbara Cassidy.

Secondly I am pleased to tell you that on 4th February 2015 Cabinet approved a new model of delivery for children's centres based on the retention of 5 children's centres in areas of greatest need, 2 of which are Birchills and Alumwell.

This means that the 'Stay and Play' and 'Bumps and Babes' sessions referred to in your petition will continue as universal activities, accessible by all. 'Messy Monkeys', 'Music Man' and 'Story Telling', also referred to in your petition are set to continue too , on a targeted basis for vulnerable families and children. As with all children centre services and in accordance with good practice, we will regularly review the impact and effectiveness of all services delivered to ensure they are delivering against agreed outcomes and adjust service activities and delivery as appropriate.

We will be looking to our health colleagues in the future, specifically Health Visitors, to lead on any future family cooking activity, also

mentioned in your petition, as part of their healthy lifestyles / healthy eating / healthy child programme, where a need is identified.

In terms of the specific childcare activities referenced in your petition, whilst the holiday play scheme is unlikely to be financially viable because of reduced resources and the need to make savings, Chatterbox playgroup provides much needed 'Time to Start' childcare places so will be retained on a sessional basis.

I hope my response has addressed all the concerns raised in your petition. If you do have any other points of clarification or need any more information please contact my officer Sue Morgan (strategic lead for children's centres) on 01922 653936

Yours sincerely

David Haley
Executive Director: Children's Services

cc.
Councillor C Jones
Councillor B Cassidy
Andrea Potts
Sue Morgan