Children's Centres Consultation January 2016

Evaluation and Performance Team

City of Westminster

Date: February 5, 2016

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1 Introduction

1.1 Consultation overview

Westminster City Council has proposed a new model for Children's Centres in Westminster to come into place from 1st October 2016 – building on the good work already taking place to reach vulnerable families and going even further in targeting services to those most in need.

Through an online and paper questionnaire, respondents were invited to comment on the proposals and to help shape the future of Children's Centres in Westminster.

The questionnaire elicited 170 responses. Please note that not all questions were answered by all respondents and some questions allowed multiple answers to be selected, therefore the base number for each question may vary.

1.2 Free text (comments) analysis methodology

For the purposes of analysis, comments have been grouped into themes and tallied based on the frequency of mentions. The number of respondents for each theme may not correspond with the total number of comments received for each response. This is because one comment may have flagged several issues.

Comments grouped within 'other' are those which do not fit into any general theme or were not frequent enough to warrant their own theme. A full list of the comments is available separately.

2 Respondent Profile

The following tables illustrate the profile of those who responded to the questionnaire. Please note total number of responses maybe higher than the number of people who responded due to them being able to select more than one answer option.

The majority of those who responded to the questionnaire are parents (80%) a small number of responses came from other groups. Most commonly those who responded have one or two children. Respondents were most likely to have children aged between 0 and 5 years olds.

Are you responding to the consultation mainly as a...	**No. of responses**	**% of responses**
Parent	136	80%
Local resident	7	4%
Nanny/au-pair	5	3%
Ofsted registered child-minder	5	3%
Other	4	2%
Representative from a local organisation	4	2%
Childcare/health or other Professional	3	2%
Expectant parent	3	2%
Grandparent	3	2%
Total	**170**	**100%**

If you have children, how many children do you have/do you look after?	**No. of responses**	**% of responses**
1	80	47%
2	49	29%
3	21	12%
4	7	4%
6 or more	1	<1%
I don't have children/don't look after children	11	7%
Total	**169**	**100%**

How old is your child/are your children or the children you look after?	**No. of responses**	**% of responses**
0 to 2	124	54%
3 to 5	59	26%
6 to 10	33	14%
11 to 15	9	4%
16 to 19	5	2%
Total	**230**	**100%**

3 Questionnaire Response Analysis

3.1 Summary of Proposals

Key aspects of the proposal were outlined at the start of the questionnaire including details about the introduction of three 'Children and Family Hubs', the retention of the Maida Vale Children's Centre and increased provision for two-year-old early education places.

Respondents were asked to comment on how the council have developed these proposals and whether they feel there should be other criteria considered when developing proposals. Over a third (39%) of those who responded to the questionnaire left a comment about this.

Of those that commented, some (10 responses) cited concern was that the proposals will have a detrimental impact on the social wellbeing of parents and children. One specific point raised around this issue was how existing provisions enable parents to mix and bond with others - helping to prevent isolation and depression/post natal depression. It was also perceived by respondents that since Westminster is such a diverse borough, existing services greatly help with social integration and this is something which has not been addressed by the proposals.

Some (10 responses) also feel that the consultation process and the information on the proposals are insufficient. In particular, that there needs to be greater operational detail of what the proposals mean (for example in relation to changes to place numbers, impact on other centres in the borough etc.) and that more meetings should have taken place as part of the consultation.

Another prominent concern relates to the 'targeted' nature of the proposals (7 responses). That is, while many respondents support a focus on the vulnerable, others feel childcare provision should benefit all members of the community – including those that work.

3.2 Children and Family Hubs

This section of the questionnaire outlined the rationale behind the proposals for the Children and Family Hubs. Based on this information, respondents were asked to comment on the council targeting services for those most in need.

Over half of those responding to the questionnaire commented on this specific proposal (57%). Of these responses, around half were critical of the targeted approach (43 responses). Specifically, many feel that childcare provision funded by the council should benefit all members of the community who need it. Targeting care in such a way may come at the expense of those who may not easily qualify for such support (working/single parent households etc.).

A prominent perception is that the provision of 'targeted' services risks undermining the social development of children and bonding between parents (9 responses). As some of the comments show, the existing provision is deemed to be the only way some parents can meet other new parents during the week and this is thought to help prevent isolation/depression.

A similar proportion also queried the principles in design and delivery of the proposals (8 responses). In particular, some responses noted the scope for working with third party organisations to support existing provision and raising funds from alternative sources such as local businesses etc.

Do you have any comments on the council targeting services for those most in need? **Themes**	**No. of respondents commenting on this theme**	**% of respondents**
Concern over 'targeted' approach of care delivery	43	43%
Proposals will have adverse impact on social/educational development	9	9%
Operational issues regarding delivery of proposal	8	8%
Concern about mixed age group	4	4%
Proposals will have negative impact - general	6	6%
Proposals are positive	4	4%
Proposals appear to serve one a specific area (at the expense of others)	4	4%
Proximity of proposed 'hubs' is a concern	3	3%
Other	18	18%
Total	**99**	**100%**

3.3 Children and Family Hubs – 0-19 provision

Following on from the previous section, this part of the questionnaire explained how the Children and Family Hubs will serve multiple age groups (0-19). Based on this information, respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they support this proposal and to comment on their response. 140 responses were received to the initial question and around two-thirds of these provided further comment (78%).

To what extent do you support or oppose the proposal to offer services for 0 to 19 year olds at one location?	**No. of responses**	**% of responses**
Strongly support	16	11%
Tend to support	19	14%
Neither support nor oppose	23	16%
Tend to oppose	23	16%
Strongly oppose	49	35%
Don't know	10	7%
Total	**140**	**100%**

Prominent reasons cited for not supporting the proposals include; concern that the proposals will adversely impact on the quality and safety of childcare provision and that the diverse needs of each of the groups merits a distinct environment, for example early years childcare.

Many also voiced concern that some of the sites are not particularly suitable to host wide ranging age groups. In particular, many singled out Churchill Gardens as being inadequate owing to a lack of space and no lift.

Of those that support the proposal, 26 commented on their response. Among the reasons cited are; that it would make sense for efficiency (if parents have children of varied ages), other respondents mentioned that careful precaution will be needed to safeguard the youngest and reassure parents.

Among those that stated they neither support or oppose or don't know about the proposals, many cited that it is a good idea. For some, the proposals are perceived as positive as long as the age gap is not too big, while other respondents simply feel that sharing resources between age groups is welcomed.

3.4 Services at Children and Family Hubs

Respondents were asked to state two services that they would most like to see offered at the Children and Family Hubs. Idea 1 drew 102 responses while 78 provided a response to Idea 2.

The three most popular ideas cited are (the need for) an outreach worker (15 responses), Stay & Play (14 responses) and drop-in sessions (12 responses). The full list of ideas is available separately.

3.5 Current use of Children's Centres

The chart below shows the Children's Centres most commonly used by those who responded to the consultation questionnaire. This is not necessarily representative of the use of Children's Centres more generally across Westminster.

Which, if any, Children's Centre (or Centres) do you currently use most often?	**No. of responses**	**% of responses**
Marsham Street	57	34%
Churchill Gardens	31	18%
Queen's Park (hub)	12	7%
West End (Fitzrovia)	11	7%
Bayswater	10	6%
Maida Vale	9	5%
Westbourne	7	4%
Portman (hub)	7	4%
Paddington Green	6	4%
Micky Star	5	3%
Harrow Road (Essendine Building/Mary Paterson School)	3	2%
Queensway (Hallfield School)	0	0%
None	10	6%
Total	**168**	**100%**

Those who responded to the questionnaire say they most commonly visit a Children's Centre one to two times a week (50%) with around a third saying they visit more often than this.

How often do you visit a Children's Centre?	**No. of responses**	**% of responses**
3-4 times per week	32	30%
1-2 times per week	53	50%
2-4 times per month	15	14%
It varies from time to time	6	6%
Less than once per month	1	1%
Total	**107**	**100%**

3.6 Community based Stay & Play

This part of the questionnaire informed respondents that stay and play sessions will remain at the three Children and Family Hubs and Maida Vale Children's Centre and the council will also help setup volunteer based sessions. Based on this information, respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they support this proposal and to comment on their response. This question elicited 117 responses, four-fifths of whom provided additional comment (85%).

To what extent do you support or oppose the council facilitating the setup of community based stay and play sessions?	**No. of responses**	**% of responses**
Strongly support	36	31%
Tend to support	8	7%
Neither support nor oppose	14	12%
Tend to oppose	12	10%
Strongly oppose	41	35%
Don't know	6	5%
Total	**117**	**100%**

Around half of those that commented on this question oppose the proposal. The key reason cited for this opposition is that volunteers cannot be relied upon to provide a reliable, quality service unlike trained, employed staff. Additional concerns about the ability of the authorities to scrutinise backgrounds and conduct appropriate security checks of volunteers were also cited.

Of those that support the proposal, many are happy to have this provision – the stay and play facility has been a particularly popular service. It was also acknowledged that within the context of broader budget cuts, it is positive that the council is being creative in delivering vital services.

For those that neither support nor oppose the proposal, issues varied from not knowing enough about the proposal to comment, to questions over the commitment, competencies and accountability of volunteers.

3.7 Free Early Education Places for Two-Year-Olds

Respondents were informed that there is continued need for two-year-old early education places for eligible children in certain wards in Westminster, and therefore the council is aiming to create more places at up to four additional Children's Centre sites. Based on this information, respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they support this proposal and to provide further comment on their response. This question elicited 119 responses, of which more than two-thirds commented on their response (71%).

To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should expand the free early education places for two-year-olds at these centres?	**Number of responses**	**% of responses**
Strongly agree	55	46%
Tend to agree	24	20%
Neither agree nor disagree	16	13%
Tend to disagree	8	7%
Strongly disagree	13	11%
Don't know	3	3%
Total	**119**	**100%**

Two thirds (66%) of those that commented agree with the proposal. A prevalent reason cited for support is that such provision addresses the educational/developmental needs of two year olds and will truly aid their development.

Of those that disagree with the proposal and commented on their response, a number feel provision to be unfair - as many will not qualify. Other respondents mentioned that they want to see parents taking on greater responsibility for providing care to their young (through for instance, parental training courses) or just simply caring themselves. This sentiment was shared with those that neither agree nor disagree, or don't know – perceiving that the proposals may mean an inability to access the provisions owing to eligibility.

3.8 Further Comments

Respondents were asked if they had any additional comments on the proposals. This question drew 76 responses of which just over a third expressed support for the retention of existing services and staff (28 responses). Among the most prominent issues cited were the need to retain the centre in Marsham St, that cutting down on existing services should not be part of a cost cutting exercise and that, with demand outweighing supply, it will present further challenges to the council in delivering childcare provision.

Some respondents perceive that the targeted approach of childcare delivery may well impede access for families that would not necessarily qualify or be considered 'vulnerable'. The full list of comments is available separately.

Do you have any further comments about the proposals for Children's Centres? **Themes**	**No. of respondents commenting on this theme**	**% of respondents**
Retain existing services/staffing of Children's Centres	28	37%
Issues regarding specific CC/Churchill Gardens too small-no lift/Use of Marsham St	8	11%
Concern about the consultation process	6	8%
Increase existing provision	5	7%
Concern over 'targeted' approach of care delivery	4	5%
Proposal may have a negative impact	4	5%
Proposals will have adverse impact on social/educational development	3	4%
Positive about proposal	3	4%
Other	15	20%
Total	**76**	**100%**

4 Demographic Profile

The following tables present the findings from all respondents who completed the questions in the final section of the questionnaire (About You).

Are you...	**Number of responses**	**% of responses**
Female	117	89%
Male	15	11%
Total	**132**	**100%**

Which of the following age groups do you fall into?	**Number of responses**	**% of responses**
16 to 24	3	2%
25 to 44	109	83%
45 to 54	11	8%
55 to 64	4	3%
65+	3	2%
I don't wish to answer	1	<1%
Under 16	1	<1%
Total	**132**	**100%**

Can you tell me which of the following describes you. Are you...?	**Number of responses**	**% of responses**
At home/looking after family	39	30%
Working - Full time (30+hrs)	39	30%
Part-time (8-29 hrs)	33	25%
Other - (please write in)	12	9%
Full-time student	3	2%
Retired	3	2%
Unemployed, not registered - seeking work	3	2%
Total	**132**	**100%**

Can you tell me which of the following describes you. Are you...?	Number of responses	% of responses
White British	45	35%
Other Ethnic Group (please write in)	21	16%
White - Other	15	12%
White Western European	12	9%
Black African	8	6%
Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi	7	5%
White Eastern European	6	5%
Black British	4	3%
Mixed Heritage - White and Black Caribbean	4	3%
Asian or British Asian - Indian	2	2%
Black Caribbean	2	2%
Mixed Heritage - Other	2	2%
Black - Other	1	<1%
Mixed Heritage - White and Black African	1	<1%
Total	**130**	**100%**

5 FINDINGS FROM FACE-TO-FACE EVENTS

PROPOSAL	KEY THEMES & CONCERNS	CONSIDERATIONS/PRINCIPLES IN MAKING CHANGES
South and NW Locality Consultation		
Maintaining services in the hubs	Parents questioned if Churchill Gardens was the best hub site. Services at Churchill Gardens are not attended by parents that were at the consultation. Parents were concerned that the distance for them to travel from Marsham Street to Churchill Gardens is unreasonable. Concern raised about the future of the satellite sites. Parents asked what would happen to Marsham Street and West End. Is the proposal saying these will be close? Parents requested clarity about	Services for the very young children (aged 0 – 1 year) were seen as a vital resource for new parents. Many parents spoke highly about the quality of advice they receive from specialist staff at the café mama group. Attending the group has meant that they have developed a network of support and built friendships. Parents spoke highly about the outreach services and the role staff played in offering information and support to parents about what services were available.

	what we are saying will happen to services that are delivered from these sites. The majority of parents who attended consultations were from Marsham Street- parents strongly voiced their concern about losing activities like Café Mama and Tiny Times from Marsham Street. Concern that no services in their locality, and that most parents want activities close to them especially when they have small babies. Local service for 0-18month old is really important. Some parents did suggest that they would be happy to make some financial contributions to attend groups such as £1.50-£2 however others were against this on the basis that CCs would not be inclusive. A number of midwifery and health visiting staff attended the NW meeting and were concerned that closer/reduction of activities from satellite sites will impact significantly for new mothers, they will become even more isolated and difficult to engage.	
Extending services to 0-19	Concern that the age range is too broad, young children would not feel comfortable being in the same space as young adults 12-19years. Current space is too small and not set up for older children- concern that it does not make sense to offer service to older children from the same sites. Hub site already fully utilized, can it cope with more service for	Reassurance that services would not be delivered at the same time. Older children's activities will take place after CC activities end. Will need to consider how services can be delivered

	older children? Parents felt this was positive especially for activities during half term and holidays especially for 8-10 year olds	
Service run by trained volunteers/other organization	Over all, parents do support the idea of training volunteers to deliver some stay and play activities but some parents did raise concerns about using volunteers to deliver activities like café mama as they felt these required qualified and trained health staff. Parents also raised concern about using volunteers and whether volunteers are reliable, the continuity of volunteers, and the knowledge and expertise of volunteer. On balance, the majority of parents think this is a good idea, but only for stay and play sessions Concerns expressed about the level of training a volunteer would have compared to a trained EYP	Volunteers need to be part of the CC structure, and with clear support from the centre. Continuity and quality of volunteers is a key factor.
Use of alternative Children Centre/Community Sites	Will families be willing to travel to another site in the locality, if current activities reduced/removed? ○ costs and time to travel ○ relationships with local families and staff is what brings families in Parents suggested that existing provider of Marsham Street Nursery should be asked to support council to maintain the delivery of current groups because the provider is gaining from having CC activity on site. Parents felt the provision at Maida Vale CC was already	Consideration of time and travel needed for any change in location of activities and accessibility of sites. Parents and staff concern that only having activities in the hub will mean many vulnerable mothers/father will not access activities. Danger of isolation, increase in low mood and escalation of problem Keep Maida Vale as a CC site as is, do not include 2 year offer at this site

	oversubscribed with parents being turned away as activities were full	
Other general comments	A number of parents raised the issue of early intervention and the benefit of these activities. They raised the concern that if these activities were not available they would be taking up GP, HV and consultants time. They felt that this was a better use of resources, than issues escalating and intervention costing more. Has LA engaged with health Visiting, midwifery and GP to see if they can fund these services? A number of parents also said that these activities are recommended by consultants, HV and Midwifery and GP's. Can the Council wait for the Business Rates to come into Council funding before making cuts to Children's Services. Children Centres were vital in supporting women's roles in curtailing extremism and future terrorism; women became stronger through Children centre involvement. Many families who arrive from different countries experience high levels of social isolation, Children Centres are a life line to these families Health professionals are intimidating for some parents compared to the non-judgmental approaches of the stay and plays	The benefit of investing in early intervention and universal activities to prevent escalation of issues and cost effective use of resources.
	Health staff commented that it would be a shame if link site activities such as stay and play, and baby message are closed, as	

	they would than not have anything to refer mothers too. Number of staff said 'what's the point of us being in CC if there are no activities for mothers'.	
2 year old place	Some parents commented that they did not feel that this was a priority, they felt that drop in and activities for young children was more needed than 2 year old place. Concerns expressed that there is not a high demand for 2 year offer places as suggested by Council. Providing 2 year offer places instead of drop-ins will mean a greater number of parents having to stay at home with their children; this only benefitted those families who were eligible There are a number of families who although not eligible for 2 year offer, still could not afford childcare in central London. Need to educate parents of 2 year olds as well. 2 year offer only supports child's needs.	