

Service Proposals for Early Help - Appendix A Consultation and Engagement Summary

1. Consultation and engagement strategy

- 1.1** Engagement was led through meetings with service users, as well as meetings with local professionals and providers. At these meetings the proposals or options were presented and discussions initiated to engage the audience and gather feedback and comment. For all three service areas, online and printed surveys were created to provide those unable to attend the meetings with an opportunity to provide comment.
- 1.2** Play and Children Centre information events and online and paper surveys were promoted through writing to all service users inviting them to events and view and comment on the proposals online. Posters and flyers were produced for the Children Centre consultation and distributed across the city. Information was also made available through the Council website, and included in Council e-newsletters. The consultation was included in the Council's *Reporter* magazine which goes to every home in Westminster. The youth service engagement was conducted through focus groups with providers and young people at youth clubs. An online survey was also promoted to gather evidence on the needs of young people.
- 1.3** Councillors were kept informed through regular updates ahead of and during the consultation and engagement. They were also invited to a separate briefing and the parent meetings. Council staff were informed of the consultation and engagement via email and the intranet and encouraged to help raise awareness of events and surveys amongst parents.

2. Children's Centres

- 2.1** The Children's Centre consultation webpage received over 1,700 visits during the period of consultation with people spending nearly three minutes a visit on the page which is considered sufficient time to read the information thoroughly. Over 330 responses to a survey were received from parents and carers. For the public consultation meetings, there were approximately 145 attendees, with family support outreach workers available to offer translation in key community languages.
- 2.2** Key themes of the response to the survey and wider consultation were:
- Children's centres are highly valued by all who use them, regardless of social position.
 - A concern about the potential impact of proposed changes on social integration and that services should not be arranged only using socio economic criteria.
 - A concern about the impact of the proposed changes upon those who might not be eligible for future services

2.3 Particular issues identified were:

Approaches to consultation

- Some participants had queries about how the proposals were created, wanting to have been involved more in this, prior to the consultation. Meanwhile some service user misunderstood key details of the proposals assuming that particular children's centres were to close completely.
- A query whether sufficient research into the needs of current service users had been carried out, and therefore was there a sufficient understanding of the impact should the services be withdrawn.
- It was pointed out that online surveys may not be appropriate for service users who do not have internet access or the necessary literacy skills. Others felt that there could have been more clarity about plans for individual children's centres, as this was not immediately clear on the council website.

Stay and Play

- Stay and Play drop-in sessions were the most popular response when parents and carers were asked about which services they found most useful. It was felt that these needed to be open to all and in geographically convenient locations – many parents stated that they could not travel for half an hour for such a service and were concerned that in the future sessions would be oversubscribed with the possibility of parents being turned away. A number of participants recognised the need to target services to those most in need but some suggested that they would be willing to pay for Stay and Play if this helped to maintain the service.

Two year old early education places

- Some respondents felt that the eligibility criteria was restrictive. It was suggested that reducing sessions open to a wider age group and replacing these with sessions which only 2 year olds can use might have a negative impact on non-eligible families. It was queried whether targeted families would access the 2 year old places and whether 15 hours of provision a week would help parents back to work

Other services

- While some other private and voluntary provider sessions are available there was a preference for the quality of children's centre services. While some respondents acknowledged other under-fives provision in the local area, it was felt that there were limited services for those with children aged 0 - 12mths. Fathers and male carers participated in the consultation voicing their support of the fathers groups which they felt were a good introduction to other universal services.
- A perceived lack of information about under-fives services in general was cited with criticisms of what was available through the local authority website and lack of awareness of the Family Information Service. However, in

contrast, of those that completed the survey, 57.7% felt well informed about the services and benefits that children's centres provide.

Detailed records of the meetings and a summary report of the responses to the survey are available.

2.4 Stakeholder Events

A series of meetings with stakeholders took place to consider key themes such as the 2 year old offer; Alternative use of Children's Centre sites; the integrated early years pathway; Targeted and enhanced service offers; the role of the proposed System Change Leader; mitigation of the potential impact of changes on families. A detailed summary of these meetings is available.

2.5 Petitions

Two petitions were presented to the Council in relation to the following children's centres:

Queensway (35 signatures)

"Please we are asking to keep the centre open all days a week as it is now. Please do not reduce the days the centre is open. You do nothing good for all our children's future"

Micky Star (62 signatures)

"We the parents/carers and children who use the children's centre strongly petition WCC to keep this valuable and essential service open"

2.6 Emails and other correspondence

15 of emails or letters were received in relation to 4 children's centres as follows (one contact referred to two centres):

Harrow Road (4 contacts)

Marsham Street (7 contacts)

Micky Star (1 contact)

Queensway (2 contacts)

Key themes of this correspondence were:

- Concern about reduction in or ending of stay and play facilities;
- Potential impact on families who may not be targeted;
- Perceived unsuitability or inaccessibility of alternative services;
- General concern about perceived reductions in services and clarity about which service are being removed or reduced.

3. Play and After School Care

3.1 Survey

A survey was carried out online, between January 23rd and February 3rd 2015, receiving 40 responses.

3.2 Engagement Events

Six facilitated events took place to engage directly with service users as follows:

Bayswater centre (8 service users attended)

Essendine centre (16 service users)

Queens Park and Wilberforce centre (94 service users)

St Clement Danes centre (10 service users)

St Matthews centre (4 service users)

Sussex Street centre (2 service users)

A detailed write-up of each of these events is available on request.

3.3 Engagement and Consultation responses

3.4 The webpage received over 300 visits with people spending nearly five minutes a visit on the page which is considered sufficient time to read the information thoroughly. The online survey was available between January 23rd and February 3rd 2015, and received 40 responses. In addition, 49 parents or carers attended 7 different events.

3.5 Respondents to the survey cited the low cost of attending current provision (74%), the consistency of staffing (64%) and the quality of the sessions (54%) as the aspects of the services that they wanted to be retained following any reorganisation of provision. Some respondents felt that parents would be prepared to pay a little more in order to maintain the level of service provision that they currently enjoy while a significant number put forward views regarding the importance of a low attendance price for the sessions.

3.6 In respect of the proposed options for the service, 77% of respondents felt that the current service should be maintained, albeit with a reduction in the subsidies available. 18% of respondents preferred the idea of transferring the services to schools to run if schools were willing to, while 5% felt that it would be most appropriate to commission an external non-profit organisation to run the services. There was some concern that schools would be unlikely to choose to run services given their own financial constraints, meaning that a transfer of responsibility to the schools would, in essence, amount to the service being cut.

3.7 There was variation with regard to affordable prices for after-school sessions: the most commonly cited figure was £6 per session, which was mentioned by 13 of 38 respondents (34%). With regard to holiday sessions, a daily cost of £20-£25 was by far the most commonly cited figure.

3.8 Feedback from public events suggested that the in-house service was valued and seen as being of good quality, providing affordable childcare for working families. There was a similar view of provision for parents of children with additional needs. Most important to the parents was that there is good quality childcare at an affordable price. While there was concern about potential fee increases, apart from for one particular setting, there was general recognition that costs would still be affordable for most parents even with the increases that were likely. There was a greater level of resistance to increases in holiday fees. Going forward, there was an ongoing wish for there to be continuity of staffing and a range of activities provided.

3.9 Some expressed concern about the Council's longer term commitment to childcare and play as well as the third sector's ability and commitment to providing this instead.

4. Youth Provision

4.1 Survey

4.2 An online survey of young people's views on the key issues affecting them and how and where they preferred to receive information and support was held in December 2014 and January 2015. 28 young people responded. 11 young people with learning difficulties and disabilities completed an adapted version of the survey. When asked about the relative importance of different places in their community, 82% said that youth clubs or projects were most important. The survey then focused on the issues which young people most wanted support with under the headings of staying safe; school, work or college; relationships; health and wellbeing. Youth clubs and projects were cited as the preferred location at which young people would like to receive support for a number of particular issues. A summary report of the findings of the survey is available.

4.3 Young People's focus groups

Focus groups of young people were facilitated in youth clubs across the borough. There were a total of 10 different sessions involving 70 young people. They provided views on activities they enjoyed, advice and support they needed and how they preferred to receive this. Focus groups were also held with young people with disabilities. Engagement will continue with young people as preparations take place to commission new services. A detailed summary of all youth provision engagement activity is available.

4.4 Meetings with service providers

These took place in each locality and were attended by 30 people in total:

North East Locality: 5 participants

South Locality: 13 participants

North East: 12 participants

Key themes for discussion included Flexible models; Targeting; Outcomes for young people; Working with partners; Quality of service.

- 4.5** A consistent and clear message from the locality meetings involving stakeholders was that the service should be based on and be responsive to young people's needs. There was a feeling that the age at which young people can use youth services might be lowered while it was felt that support was needed for older young people to move on to other services when they reached 19.
- 4.6** It was raised that many young people often won't want to travel far to provision for reasons relating to safety and cost. There was overwhelming agreement that youth services should maintain a balance between universal and targeted provision while young people should not 'feel' like they are being targeted. Budgets should be divided between universal and targeted provision with commissioned providers sharing resources better and communicating more effectively with locality teams and a wide network of other services and providers.
- 4.7** There was agreement that there should be an agreed and consistent method for monitoring and evaluating outcomes although outcomes monitoring should also be proportionate to the resource available i.e. level of funding. Quality marks were seen as positive with quality also ensured through contract management and better evidencing of impact. Participants felt that longer contracts (3 years minimum) would enable development of longer term strategies and therefore better quality and sustainability of delivery.
- 4.8** There was a very strong feeling across the workshops that youth services should not become part of locality social work teams and also that they should also remain separate from schools. The value and different dynamic of youth work should be recognised and developed.