

Children's Services Committee

Minutes of the Meeting Held on Tuesday 22 January 2019
10am, Council Chamber, County Hall, Norwich

Present:

Mr S Dark – Chairman

Ms E Corlett
Mr J Fisher
Mr R Hanton
Mr H Humphrey
Mr E Maxfield
Mr J Mooney

Mr S Morphew
Ms J Oliver – Vice-Chairman
Mr M Smith-Clare
Mrs S Squire
Mr B Stone
Mr V Thomson

Church Representatives:

Mr P Dunning

Chairman's Announcements

- The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained that the Chamber was not the normal meeting room but the meeting had moved for the comfort and safety of all that had attended.
- The Chairman acknowledged the level of feeling on the issue but asked that the work of the Committee was respected and explained that this was a meeting in public, not a public meeting. He reminded the Committee that they were there for the good of the children of Norfolk and that must be in the minds of all.

1. Apologies and substitutions

1.1 Apologies were received from Mr David Collis, substituted by Mr Steve Morphew.

2. To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 16 November 2018

2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 16 November 2018 were agreed as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the following amendment at item 14.2;
To add;

It was proposed that a cross-party working group examines the experience of children with disabilities and their families in Norfolk. The proposal was accepted by the Chairman. It was suggested that this was looked at relatively quickly so it could

be reported before the governance change with any recommendations that could be picked up by scrutiny committee.

3. Declarations of Interest

Mr R Hanton declared an 'other' interest as his daughter-in-law was a teacher.

Mr S Dark declared an 'other' interest as his sister was a Headteacher at Swaffham and he was a Governor at the West Norfolk Academy.

Mr E Maxfield declared an 'other' interest as he was an employee at a Charity in Norwich which provides services under contract to Norfolk County Council and was a Governor at two schools.

Mrs S Squire declared an 'other' interest as her sons had Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP) administered by Norfolk County Council.

Mr H Humphrey declared an 'other' interest as he was a Governor at Emneth School.

Mr V Thomson declared an 'other' interest as his son has an EHCP administered by Norfolk County Council.

Ms E Corlett declared an 'other' interest as she volunteers for HomeStart which are affected by item 8 on the agenda.

Ms J Oliver declared an 'other' interest as she mentors at North Walsham High School

4. Items of Urgent Business

4.1 There were no items of urgent business.

5. Public Question Time

5.1 There were 9 public questions submitted which are attached at Appendix A.

5.2 Mr C Collis asked a supplementary question about NCC came to the view that the school had the capacity to improve bearing in mind the view of the parents. Officers explained that they were working with Ofsted to help the school improve. There was no formal arrangement in place with the School.

5.3 Mr Jon Watson asked a supplementary question asking if the County Council would release a copy of every comment that was put forward in the consultation. Officers replied that the information was accessible to anyone who wished to view it but there was an extreme amount of data.

5.4a Ms Lex Thompson asked the following supplementary;

As services move out of Children's Centres and just toward certain 'bases', I have concerns as to the ad hoc usage of the existing buildings. By way of example, I live in Thorpe Hamlet, which is served by the Thorpe Hamlet, Heartsease and Dussindale Children's Centre. According to the Council's own Wellbeing statistics, Thorpe Hamlet is ranked 79th out of 84 wards for child development by age 5, 77th out of 84 wards for family domestic violence, 70th out of 84 wards for child poverty, and the worst of all wards for 'violence against the person' crimes. As a result, our Children's centre is used frequently by those seeking refuge from domestic violence, those needing emergency referrals to foodbanks, and those requiring support when in crisis. All of these require a confidential safe space to be used. The nearest 'base' proposed will be the City & Eaton Children's Centre - which is an hour's walk away, or two buses (which is not financially viable for me personally, nor for many others). Where is it that you are suggesting these people go for this help now?

- 5.4b Officers explained that the proposed model took into account where families lived and where the pockets of need occurred. There was no expectation for families to travel to the Centres as there would be services elsewhere in their vicinity that they could attend.

6. Local Member Issues/Member Questions

- 6.1 There were 12 Member questions submitted which are attached at appendix A.
- 6.2a Ms Alexandra Kemp asked the following supplementary;
It is most important to keep children out of care by supporting families to be resilient. I represent King's Lynn South, which is in the top decile of deprivation affecting children, and in the top decile of deprivation, in the indices of multiple deprivation. I note that there has been some listening with the new proposals for Children's Centres, there will be 15 bases retained instead of 7, including the Nar Centre; the Stay and Play Sessions will be open to all families; there will be drop-in sessions open to all families, and families will not be charged for accessing the services, other than the current nominal charge. I cannot stress enough the importance of the universality of Children's Centres Services reaching all children, particularly as NHS and ONS figures show there may be 1300 babies and children under 5, in West Norfolk who are not registered with a GP and so are at risk of not accessing basic health services. How will the new Children's Centre Service engage with these families and should there be a mechanism to register all babies at birth with a GP and with their local Children's Centre?
- 6.2b The Director of Public Health added that she was surprised to hear that children were not registered with a GP as there was a robust process in place that linked with midwives and the registration service. She agreed to follow this up after the meeting with Ms Kemp.
- 6.3 Mr Mike Smith-Clare wanted clarification on the reason that the food bank in North Denes was set up. He assured Officers that the contributing factor was hunger and to ensure that children and families who couldn't otherwise afford it were receiving a meal. Officers explained that it was also about an ambition of teaching families cooking skills. They would continue to monitor this and work closely with the school.

- 6.4a Dr C Jones asked the following supplementary question about who would be able to get onto the pathway for the support being proposed, and how he can direct parents in his constituency that would ask.
- 6.4b Officers explained that there would be a variety of professional routes. Current delivery was being examined but it would not be helpful to have a single route and that it needed to be more flexible to be able to reach out to all those that needed the support.
- 6.5 Mrs B Jones asked a following supplementary regarding East City Children's Centre. She explained that it was in high need and well used and made no sense to shut the Centre.
- 6.6 Mrs C Walker asked how the proposals would help the vulnerable children in the rural areas. Officers explained that the detailed presentation would answer those questions.
- 6.7a Ms J Brociek-Coulton asked a supplementary question around how Officers know the availability of the proposed 'other' sites that services could be delivered in when those venues had not been asked about their availability.
- 6.7b Officers explained that the list of venues in the agenda papers that could be suitable to deliver services were just a proposed list. To ask them about availability would be pre-determining the outcome of the discussions today. If and when the proposals were agreed, suitable venues would then be contacted.
- 6.8a Ms E Corlett asked the following supplementary question; "Why were partner organisations that currently work out of the Vauxhall Centre where my Children Centre is based not included in the stakeholder consultation? Particularly Independence Matters who manage the whole building and the deaf charity, who also work closely with the Hamlet Centre next door. How was it decided who was in and who was out of scope for engaging as a "stakeholder"?"
- 6.8b Officers explained that there had been various engagement events with the wide stakeholders and anyone was invited to attend. There was no deliberate decision to who was in and out of scope as a stakeholder.

7. Performance Monitoring Report 2018-19

- 7.1 The Committee received the annexed report (7) by the Executive Director, Children's Services which focused primarily on data as at end of November 2018.
- 7.2 The Committee expressed concern at the data regarding the Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP). It was acknowledged that assessments were not being completed in time and they should be. Officers added that there was a challenge around the resources when the assessments had been completed. There had been mitigating circumstances around those cases that had been referred to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO).

- 7.3 Although the Committee welcomed the report on EHCP's in March, they requested that it included exact timescales, complaints over the legal timescales and how many EHCPs were outstanding. Officers explained that the report in March would include published reports from the LGO.
- 7.3 Officers recognised that there had been a downward dip in the percentage of care leavers in education, employment or training. The Committee were reassured that there was targeted work happening to improve this, and it was a focus for the department.
- 7.4 In relation to page 20, para 1, the Committee asked if there was a reason behind the exclusions and what was being done to help support schools. Officers explained that exclusions were always disappointing. There was constant support and engagement with schools and Headteachers that felt exclusion was their only option.
- 7.5 The Committee REVIEWED and COMMENTED on the performance data, information, analysis presented in the vital sign report cards and **AGREED** that the recommended actions identified were appropriate.

The Committee broke for 10 minutes.

8. Early Childhood and Family Service

- 8.1 The Committee received the annexed report (8) by the Executive Director, Children's Services, which set out the revised proposals for a new Early Childhood and Families Service, considering the community views and the equality impact assessment, and a timetable for procuring the new service. It sets out both the national policy direction, research into effectiveness and assessment of 'what works' in early years provision, as well as local drivers for change including an assessment of need across the County. It details the consultation that had been undertaken to ensure views of service users were reflected in the proposals and sets out the findings.
- 8.2 The Committee received a presentation relating to the new proposals and this is attached at Appendix B.
- 8.3 Some Members argued that the proposals would not deliver what it states it will. The onus is on the provider to deliver the outcomes. The Stay and Play sessions referred to in the National Evidence Base are led by a qualified early years foundation specialist, however in the new proposals this is not the case. The Executive Director confirmed that sessions would be taken by suitably qualified staff. Part of the process would be to have those discussions with the providers who would procure the sessions. Delivery would be dependent on the provider but as a minimum they would be trained in Early Years.
- 8.4a Some Members were concerned that suitable environments would be used for personal discussions especially those around wellbeing and mental health. Offices explained that a number of library managers had emergency mental health training and private rooms on site if needed. Professional judgements would be made for

specific families and a range of opportunities would be provided through the new model to be able to talk to professionals. Extra cost was not envisaged as this was a development of the current offer.

- 8.4b The Executive Director added that they would work with colleagues around helping those families that need extra help or earlier help. Retaining extra bases as part of the consultation to help those with high need. Resources released as a result of the new model will mean help is given to those who need it and need it early.
- 8.5 There was a comment that the new model covered all children wherever they lived in the County and that the access into the system was easy. It was explained that there would be a network of drop ins and an online route to access services. It was essential that the system and to the wider network of services available was easily accessible.
- 8.6 The Executive Director confirmed that they would be constantly reviewing the services according to the local contractual, demographic and national policy changes.
- 8.7 The Committee heard that that partners were committed to the new model and that funding from those partners would be more efficiently used. Although contractual obligations would change, this was supported and would work alongside the Early Childhood and Family Service to deliver the necessary outcomes.
- 8.8 Some Members questioned the lack of evidence about the impact on outcomes. Two documents focus on the processes and not on outcomes. They added that although it was great that there would be an ongoing review but if decision to take out the £1 million showed to have a detrimental impact on outcomes, would it get put back into the budget. The Executive Director confirmed that the department were clear about outcomes; what to achieve and how to achieve it. They would continue to look at spending to ensure the focus was on outcomes.
- 8.9 The Committee heard that a quarter of children are living in most disadvantaged communities currently had no contact with Children's Centres. Officers explained that they were confident that the new model would help reach all families access services. Hard to reach groups could be reached via engagement with partners.
- 8.10 Some Members felt that there was a need to have all the information to make an informed decision. A breakdown between urban and rural beneficiaries would have also been helpful as it was unclear whether the 24% existed in a rural or urban area.
- 8.11 Officers explained that the bases needed to co-ordinate with each other and be placed according to the index of need across the County. They were not related to the size of the District that they were placed in. Budgets would be related to provision of services within the area and the index of need in their area.
- 8.12 There was concern that as part of proposed model, the Committee had been given no other information about buildings or groups that could be affected. There had been no information regarding accessibility to proposed buildings, pre-booking to pre-existing groups or public transport. It would have been difficult to give this

information as it would have been pre-determining the outcome of the Committee meeting.

- 8.13 Members suggested that it could be helpful to arrange staff briefing sessions. This would keep dialogues open and keep everyone informed. Officers wanted to retain staff who wanted to undertake more focused, outreach work.
- 8.14 Some Members felt that there was an element of risk that a fully funded professional service was being replaced with a less funded service and therefore put in question the sustainability of the provision of investment. The Executive Director explained that there was no suggestion of replacing qualified staff with volunteers but they would add to a network of support that families could access. Volunteers added value to a service which enabled more families to be reached.
- 8.15 Officers gave assurance that volunteers would not replace any paid staff in the new model. It was not possible to give estimates of the numbers of staff and volunteers until after conversations with providers had taken place as the providers and the intentions of those providers was not known.
- 8.16 Some Members felt that the new model proposed an improved service with better integration which would respond to local need. More of the funding would be spent on the need of families and not on the buildings and as a result there would be better value out of the estates that NCC had. Thanks were expressed to Officers who carried out consultation.
- 8.17 There were concerns from some Members that certain groups had been digitally excluded particularly those who are seeking asylum or refugee access. According to the papers, it was not clear how the needs of those people are going to be addressed. Officers who addressed the equality impact assessment explained that it was noted nationally that access was limited due to software. The outcome which related to disabled service users was positive and there was confidence that the right mitigating actions were in place. Where English was not the first language, there was targeted outreach in place.
- 8.18 Some Members were still unsure who the re-design of the service was for and how it should be explained to their constituents. Officers explained that there would still be tier 2 services for those who needed multi-agency help. threshold guidance has been developed which sets out levels of need for families and what services and support that might be needed.
- 8.19 Officers explained that there were not assumptions being made about the future use of the current Children's Centres buildings. There had been expressions of interest for all sites and a plan was in place to help providers over the next few months to help them with what they may or may not be able to do.
- 8.20 Some Members questioned if the current 'good' outreach groups that existed be actively encouraged to carry on and engage in partnership working. Officers explained that they would be encouraging and working alongside those groups to give support.

8.21 The following amendments to the recommendations were **MOVED** to replace recommendation 4-7 with the following;
4. Agrees to establish a working group to develop proposals further in the light of concerns expressed through the consultation and by members particularly in relation to outcomes, targets and costings.
5. Agrees this working party will consist of cross party councillors, parents, providers and appropriate experts.
6. To request the Executive Director of Children's Services to draw up the membership and timetable in consultation with group spokespersons to present to Policy and Resources on Monday 28th January with any funding implications that may result.

8.22 With 9 votes to 4, the amendments were **LOST**.

8.23 The Committee;

1. Unanimously **NOTED** the consultation on proposals to develop a new Early Childhood and Family Service, and the future of children's centres
2. Unanimously **NOTED** the feedback from the community
3. Unanimously **NOTED** the rationale for the revised proposals
4. **APPROVED** the revised proposals following 9 votes for and 4 votes against (Mr M Smith-Clare, Ms E Corlett, Mr S Morpew and Mr E Maxfield).
5. **APPROVED** the de-designation of specific children's centres as set out in the paper following 9 votes for and 4 votes against (Mr M Smith-Clare, Ms E Corlett, Mr S Morpew and Mr E Maxfield).
6. **APPROVED** the timetable for the transitions to new service arrangements set out in the paper, following 9 votes for, 3 votes against (Mr M Smith-Clare, Mr S Morpew and Ms E Corlett) and 1 abstention (Mr E Maxfield).
7. **AGREED** to delegate any further decisions regarding the operational implementation of the new service to the Executive Director of Children's Services, in consultation with the Chair of Children Services Committee following 9 votes for and 3 votes against (Mr M Smith-Clare, Mr S Morpew and Ms E Corlett).

9. **Budget Monitoring Period 8 (November)**

9.1 The Committee received the annexed report (9) by the Executive Director, Children's Services which set out the financial resources to deliver the Safer Children and Resilient Families Strategy of Norfolk Futures and the forecast revenue expenditure for 2018/19.

9.2 The Committee **NOTED** that;

- i). the forecast overspend of £11.340m for General Fund Children's Services
- ii). the forecast use of Children's Services General Fund reserves and provisions
- iii). the forecast overspend of £5.514m for the Dedicated Schools Grant Children's Services, which:
 - a. is after utilisation of the additional High Needs Block allocation of £1.803m announced in December for 2018-19

- b. will need to be carried forward as a deficit, alongside previous years' deficits brought forward of £8.087m, to be recovered in future years
- iv). the amendments to and reprogramming of the Children's Services Capital Programme

10. Strategic and Financial Planning 2019-20 to 2021-22 and Revenue Budget 2019-20

- 10.1 The Committee received the annexed report (10) by the Executive Director, Children's Services which summarised the Committee's saving proposals for 2019-20, identified budget pressures and funding changes, and set out the proposed cash- limited revenue budget as a result of these. The report also provided details of the proposed capital programme for 2019-20 to 2021-22.
- 10.2 With 8 votes in favour, and 3 against, the Committee **RESOLVED** to;
- 1) Consider the content of this report and the continuing progress of change and transformation of Children's services;
 - 2) Consider and agree the service-specific budgeting issues for 2019-20 as set out in sections 5 and 6;
 - 3) Consider and comment on the Committee's specific budget proposals for 2019-20 to 2021-22;
 - 4) Consider the findings of equality and rural impact assessments, attached at Appendix 1 to this report, and in doing so, note the Council's duty under the Equality Act 2010 to have due regard to the need to:
 - Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act;
 - Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
 - 5) Consider and agree any mitigating actions proposed in the equality and rural impact assessments;
 - 6) Consider the advice of the Executive Director of Finance and Commercial Services, and recommend to Policy and Resources Committee that the Council's budget includes an inflationary increase of 2.99% in council tax in 2019-20, within the council tax referendum limit of 3.00% for the year;
 - 7) Agree and recommend to Policy and Resources Committee the draft Committee Revenue Budget as set out in Appendix 2, including all of the savings for 2019-20 to 2021-22 as set out, for consideration by Policy and Resources Committee on 28 January 2019, to enable Policy and Resources Committee to recommend a sound, whole-Council budget to Full Council on 11 February 2019.
 - 8) Agree and recommend the Capital Programme and schemes relevant to this Committee as set out in Appendix 3 to Policy and Resources Committee for

consideration on 28 January 2019, to enable Policy and Resources Committee to recommend a Capital Programme to Full Council on 11 February 2019.

11. Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG)

- 11.1 The Committee received the annexed report (11) by the Executive Director, Children's Services which presented the changes to the distribution for the Dedicated Schools Grant from April 2019 in line with the Department of Education's Fairer School Funding arrangements.
- 11.2 The Committee heard that letters had been written to Members of Parliament lobbying them for more funding to achieve the outcomes that they needed to achieve and deliver. It had the support from all of Council.
- 11.3 The impact of cluster funding and how that was working would be brought in a report to Committee in March.
- 11.4 The Committee **AGREED**;
- (i) the Dedicated Schools Grant funding and the changes to the schools funding formula;
 - (ii) to delegate decision making powers to the Executive Director, in consultation with the Chair of the Committee, to revise the Dedicated Schools Grant funding if the application to the Secretary of State to move £4.580m from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block is not approved in full.

12. Determination of 2020/21 Admissions Arrangements

- 12.1 The Committee received the annexed report (12) by the Executive Director, Children's Services which summarised the statutory consultation outcomes and changes to Norfolk's admissions co-ordination scheme and timetable for the academic year 2020/21.
- 12.2 The Committee expressed their thanks to Officers for the detailed report and work that had gone into it.
- 12.3 The Committee **AGREED**;
- i. The co-ordination schemes and timetables including in-year coordination for 2020/21
 - ii. The admission arrangements for Community and VC schools
 - iii. The revised priority for Looked After Children, to include children adopted from abroad within the over-subscription rules for Community and VC schools
 - iv. To approve the introduction of the Fair Access Protocol

13. Committee Forward Plan and update on decisions taken under delegate authority

- 13.1 The Committee received the annexed report (13) which set out the forward plan for the Committee to enable Members to shape future meetings, agendas and items for consideration.
- 13.2 A report on the Education Health and Care Plans would be brought to the Committee in March.
- 13.3 The Committee **AGREED** the Forward Plan.

The meeting closed at 4.35pm.

Chairman



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CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE QUESTIONS
22 January 2019

5. Public Question Time

Question 1 from Alice Mouncer

How can you justify closing North City Children's centre when 93% of eligible local residents are registered, and of those, 90% regularly attend the centre? Any other business, organisation or service would see figures like that as a wild success, not a reason for closure! Please tell us why North City has been earmarked for closure when it is such a roaring success.

Reply: *Registration and attendance of the current service was not a consideration in selection or choice of proposed bases within the new model.*

The rationale for the original proposed bases is detailed in the consultation document and the updated rationale as a result of the consultation process is detailed within the committee report. There was no one deciding factor that determined which buildings we have recommended as bases. We have taken a number of factors into consideration to provide an appropriate network of buildings across the county and within each district area, that would best enable us to prioritise the delivery of direct support work with families who need extra help whilst maintaining a level of universal provision. This will include the delivery of services within bases, especially in areas of high need, but with greater emphasis on taking services out to where families live, alongside supporting families at home.

Question 2 from Alice Mouncer

Has any more research been done on the feasibility of using alternative venues for sessions such as Pathway to Parenting and bounce and babble? The initial consultation document appeared to assume that there would be plenty of church rooms, village halls and other community spaces readily available for courses and sessions, without considering accessibility, suitable and consistent times and dates of availability, cost, location, parking, change facilities, etc. Who will be dealing with all the admin around room hire?

Reply: *NCC has reviewed the location of alternative delivery venues throughout this service redesign. The new model will increase the choice and number of venues that families can access, as services will be offered across districts and no longer restricted to postcode reach areas. This includes the range of community venues that are used currently, or have been previously, to run children's centre services for children and families, and which will be potentially used, depending on families' needs, as part of the new service offer to take services out to families. Given their previous use by children's centres with families, we are confident that these are suitable venues. Beyond this, our 47 libraries are well placed to deliver universal services such as "bounce and rhyme sessions" and our Adult Education family learning classes are run from a variety of locations across the county, including the libraries, community centres and Wensum Lodge. These locations can also be used, in response to local needs as they are identified and reflect our ambition for joining up opportunities and services as part of a new whole system approach. In addition, the Library Service recently undertook a trial of "pop up venues" in some rural locations and reported back to January 2019 Communities Committee.*

We will expect the new Early Childhood and Family Service provider to take responsibility for the administration of room hire as part of delivering a responsive and flexible operational service. We also promote joined up opportunities for use of outreach venues through our local partnership arrangements.

Question from Sandra Lysaght

Why does the report into closing children's centres highlight that 24% of the most deprived members of the community don't use centres? Why doesn't it state that 76% do and that's why these centres work and deserve investing in rather than cutting?

Reply: *We are pleased 76% of families living in our most deprived communities are currently accessing services in some way and we want to build upon this through the delivery of targeted support, within bases or as part of the outreach approach within locations close to where they live, or in their home. We are also focused on reaching the most deprived families and it is right that we are concerned about the 24% of families living in our most deprived communities that are currently not accessing children's centre services at all. The proposed new Early Childhood and Family Service will be focused on supporting all families who need extra help and be more targeted than current delivery.*

Question from Daniella Ross

I live in Brundall and have already seen drop in sessions for baby weighs be cancelled at my 2 most local doctors surgeries due to HV cuts. I now go to Acle Children's centre or Sprowston to have my 3 month old baby weighed. Both of these are on the proposed list of closures. So my question is; why are so many centres within the same areas being closed? And have you considered how this would effect GP/hospital care when a comparison of growth is required for treatment, yet it will be more difficult and inconvenient for parents to get their babies weighed regularly?

Reply: *Acle is one of the proposed locations for a base in the Broadland district. We have proposed a service model that is focused on taking services out to families, rather than relying on delivering services within a number of designated buildings. As detailed in the report to CS Committee, we have proposed operating via a network of 15 bases.*

In relation to access to baby weighing services, as well as clinic sessions we now offer self-weigh in all Norfolk libraries, including Brundall and Blofield- and will expand this to include availability at pop up libraries if parents would welcome this. Where a baby is required to be weighed at home for any specific reason that means self-weigh or clinic is not appropriate, the HCP will of course continue to do so.

Those libraries that have Open Library technology will also have extended opening hours meaning that, after registering at the library, people can access 7 days a week: from 8am to 7pm on week days, 9am – 4pm on Saturdays and 10am – 4pm on Sundays. Library staff will be able to signpost parents who have any concern to the Just One Norfolk phone number and other services, including the new Early Childhood and Family Service, where they can speak to a professional for advice or be referred to the support that they need.

Question from Jon Watson (Save SureStart Campaign):

Following the public consultation that was held by Norfolk County Council in regards to the first set of proposals released by this committee, the response that was experienced was very high for a public consultation.

The report that was released on 14th January 2019 shows that 68% of residents who responded are against the plans to close children's centres, along with 54% of organisations. As this data shows the majority of respondents are against the proposals, why is this council still pushing ahead with any closures, which shows a clear disregard for public opinion and ignores the consultation findings, and also ignores it's own data.

Reply: Consultations are not referendums or popular votes. They are information-gathering exercises that help to test proposals with those directly affected, experts and with residents more generally. In particular, they help us understand the impact our proposals on those affected to inform our Equality and Rural Assessment and any mitigating actions we might need to take if our proposals went ahead.

As such our consultation findings are just one of the elements that committees take into consideration when making a decision. Members also need to take into account the Equality and Rural Assessment, the evidence of need and what is proven to work effectively and well, and the financial and legal positions and constraints at the time.

In the case of this consultation, we are very grateful for the numbers of individuals as well as organisations responding and the detailed comments that they have provided. The recommendations to the Children Service Committee have very much been informed by the consultation responses. The Committee will have before them the consultation report, the Equality and Rural Assessment as well as listen to Committee Member views and questions posed by public in reaching their decision on Tuesday.

Question from Mr Richard Steer

Wasn't the consultation fundamentally flawed because no analysis was made of the true costs and benefits of Children's Centres*, in particular the savings to mental health services from the Centres' role in supporting mothers with Post Natal Depression?

* This omission is confirmed in NCC's response to my Freedom of Information Request (ENQ-293665) which refers only to an Equality Impact Assessment which is not an economic assessment. The response also confirms that "We have not specifically spoken to Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust about Post Natal Depression." NCC Officers have used an economic argument to say the Centres are not affordable, but they have failed to take account of the potentially huge costs savings to mental health services that result from the support provided by Children's Centres.

Reply: The purpose of the consultation was to seek feedback on a proposed new service model that is focused on taking targeted services out of buildings and closer to where families live, with a stronger focus on impact and outcomes. We do recognise the value of many of the services currently provided, including where these support families in terms of their emotional wellbeing and mental health.

With the proposed emphasis on outreach and supporting families in a more targeted way, including in their home, the new service will offer greater opportunities to make contact with mothers suffering post-natal depression (many of whom may struggle to leave the house) and to better support them to access support from relevant mental health professionals. As part of developing more of a 'whole system' approach we expect the new service to work closely with these and other professionals as part of building a team around the family.

We recognise the impact that postnatal depression has on mothers, babies and the wider family and close working with mental health colleagues will be essential for the new Early Childhood and Family Service. We also expect the new Early Childhood and Family Service to work alongside the Healthy Child Programme which provides ante and postnatal support for all parents, early identification and assessment of post-natal depression, and early intervention is a key role of health visitors who are trained and highly skilled to deliver this role. In addition, the Healthy Child Programme has invested in an enhanced Emotional Healthy Pathway. Led by clinical psychologists and specialist practitioners, the service provides training and consultation for their own practitioners, and the wider early years workforce, as well direct early intervention to support the parent child relationship.

As a council, we are working closely with the health system as part of redesigning mental health services for children and adolescents. Increasing support for parental mental health is part of the Five Year Forward View for Mental Health. The specialist perinatal mental health services have

been increasing over that past 2 years specifically around community and outreach models across Norfolk and Waveney.

Question from Mr C Collis:

The outcome of the recent Ofsted inspection of North Walsham High School was reported by the Eastern Daily Press along with comments from parents. What action will be taken to address their considerable concerns and will the local authority terminate any professional arrangement they have with the Chair of Governors at North Walsham High?

Reply: *We are continuing to work with the school and the governing body. The judgement for the school from Ofsted confirms our view that the school has the capacity to continue to improve. The Local Authority has no 'professional arrangement' with the Chair of Governors.*

Question from Lex Thomson:

Research into early years care has demonstrated that for every £1 on quality early care and education, £13 is saved in future costs for children reached. In the wake of the Conservative Councillors looking to save £3m with the closure of centres throughout the county, I would like to know please: where do you envisage you will find the £39m required later on to cover the needs of this children as they grow?"

Reply: We agree that investment in early childcare and education provides the best indicators for future outcomes. In Norfolk we have good early years provision and this model will enhance that through bringing the system together for families who need it most. This is why the Council is continuing to spend £65m a year on services to support families with children aged 0-5. It is essential that our services are focused on impact and outcomes, so that we can be clear that they are making a positive difference for children and their families. We have developed a new framework to focus planning and delivery of services, for the proposed new Early Childhood and Family Service, and the wider system. We have had strong endorsement of this approach from the Early Intervention Foundation as highlighted in the report to CS Committee.

6. Local Member Issues / Member Questions

Question from Cllr Alexandra Kemp

Looked After Children and Kinship Care

Can the Committee assure residents that Children's Services always seriously considers the possibility of Kinship Care, before placing a child in foster care or adoption, and that there is no conscious or subconscious discrimination in Norfolk, against supporting children in poorer neighbourhoods to stay within the extended family? Research shows that Looked-After Children have been more likely to become homeless adults, because social workers took a restrictive approach to promoting a child's contact with the wider family.

Reply: *The LA, is committed to supporting children to remain in the care of their parents, where it is safe to do so. When this is not possible family members are always explored in the first instance with a view that this could become a Kinship care arrangement . It is only when there are no suitable Kinship arrangements will the LA, consider alternate options of foster care or adoption. Arrangements such as children who are placed for adoption are always overseen by the Courts who scrutinise the Local Authorities care plan. Children who are placed in Kinship Care will receive financial, practical support and training as a Kinship foster carer. The Local Authority are committed to supporting children to be supported in their own family of origin where this is safe*

to do so. Equally, the LA has a duty to promote safe and good quality contact between children, young people and their birth family including their wider family where it is considered in the child or young person's best interests. Such arrangements form the basis of children and young people's care plans that have scrutiny and oversight of Independent Reviewing Officers, and through our commitment to and promotion of a family networking approach, that they stay in touch into adulthood with those important to them who can provide a range of ongoing practical and emotional support.

Question from Cllr Keith Kiddie

On behalf of the community of Diss I welcome the proposals for the new Early Childhood and Family Service and the location of the bases which will deliver this service across South Norfolk. I fully support the concept of outreach from the bases to get more consistent support to those who need it the most. Could you please reassure the constituents of South Norfolk, who will not be in sight of one of the proposed new bases that the intention is to provide them and particularly, those in the most need, with a better service than the current model.

Reply: *The proposed new Early Childhood and Family Service will have a clear focus on taking services out to families, rather than expecting them to attend one of the bases. We recognise that under the current model, for many families, especially in more rural communities, getting to a designated children's centre is challenging and limits their access to support. This is why we are proposing greater use of suitable and safe delivery venues in communities that are closer to where families live. Many families already access these venues in their community for other community activities, and this familiarity will help break down the barriers that some families can experience in accessing the support they need.*

Whilst continuing to provide regular opportunities for all families to access support, through drop-ins, and the enhanced online offer, the new service will be more targeted at families who need extra help, through offering one to one support, targeted groups and where it is appropriate, working with families in their home.

Closer working with partner agencies, such as the Healthy Child Programme and our Library and Adult Learning Services, will also add to the range of universal activities and support that families are able to access across the district. For example, the latter offer responsive courses around Family Learning, as well as second chance learning to build functional skills around English and Maths.

Question from Cllr Andrew Jamieson.

I have read and fully support the latest proposals to change the way our Early Childhood and Parental Services are delivered.

This evidence based move to a more targeted approach to helping families not only means that more money will be spent on provision of services rather than administration but will also mean an enormous improvement in access to and quality of children's services in rural Divisions such as mine.

Hunstanton Town Council has been developing a business plan to acquire NCC's old Sure Start building to use as a multi-service Community hub.

Can you give us details of any support available to the Town Council in order to make the building fit for purpose in the future? Furthermore, can you advise what level of support will be available to the Town Council and to community groups wishing to access regular outreach support and drop-in services from the Community hub and detail what help there will be in establishing and maintaining these universal childhood activities?

Reply: *The Council has agreed a £500,000 capital fund to support community groups and organisations take on the running of buildings currently designated as a children's centre, but not required as one of the proposed 15 bases for new Early Childhood and Family Service. This funding is in addition to the revenue funding of £5.2m previously agreed by Full Council for the new service.*

We are keen to see as many of these sites taken on and continue to provide services for families with children aged 0-5. With local interest expressed in the building in Hunstanton we are confident that the initial interest for future use of the site can be pursued following decision making by CS Committee in January.

We will expect the new Early Childhood and Family Service to identify local accessible and suitable delivery locations to provide a range of services to support families in Hunstanton and the surrounding areas of West Norfolk, alongside working with families in their own home where this is appropriate. We expect this to include use of the building currently designated as a children's centre in the town, integrating support provided by the new service with any future services being delivered onsite, e.g. childcare or the range of services operating out of a community hub.

The new Service will also have a role to support and work with community led groups and activities as we recognise that these universal groups and activities are a key part of the wider early childhood offer for families in any community. In addition to staff from the Service visiting and working with these groups to help families access the support they need, we will also be establishing a £250,000 fund to support community development across all districts.

Working closely with King's Lynn and West Norfolk Council, Town and Parish Councils and voluntary sector organisations, we will build on existing local community development to ensure that there are the needed 'networks of support' for local families with young children.

Questions from Cllr Mike Smith-Clare:

Can members be assured that all archived social work case files are stored according to regulatory requirements and that any anomalies, including missing or empty files have been appropriately identified and reported?

With the need for a food bank in North Denes Primary School - is it possible that many children will experience increased hunger during school holidays when free meals and food distributions aren't available and as corporate parents how can we monitor and intervene when there is a need?

Reply:

- 1. Our records management policy details the responsibility we have to handle our information and records in accordance with General Data Protection Regulations. All staff are aware of their responsibilities to adhere to our information management policies and procedures. These include procedures to ensure we keep the information we hold on children and families safe and a procedure for missing files.
A similar question was asked in 2018 regarding missing files, here is the response provided at the time. This information is unchanged, and we have not had any further cases of missing files that have been reported to the Information Commissioner. 'There has been a very small number of cases where a person has requested their files, but we could not provide all of the information. The number is so small that we unable to give the number or details without risking identifying the people concerned. These cases have been reported and the Information Commissioner decided to take no further action. We are sorry to the people concerned, as the management of their records fell short of the standard we would expect.'*
- 2. The North Denes food bank was created by the school to help a small number of families who are coming into school every day and is linked to supporting them with wider skills to prepare meals. We know there are other food banks in Great Yarmouth which they could access. The*

council is corporate parents to children in local authority care, and not all children. Whilst we would not wish for any child to be hungry parents are responsible for ensuring that have food and that they access the available support.

Question from Dr C Jones

Following the release of the Council's plans for Children's Centres, which refer to targeting services on specific groups and to a referral process, a number of constituents have asked me what the inclusion criteria for the new service will be, and who is able to make referrals. Can the chairman please provide details which I can pass on to concerned parents?

Reply: *The new Early Childhood and Family Service is open to all families with children aged 0-5 and will offer appropriate and proportionate support. The offer of support will match need, ranging from providing information, advice and guidance (including online), drop-ins open to families, and targeted evidence-based interventions, whether through one to one support or in small groups. Targeted one to one support and groups for families who meet the criteria for Tier 2 support (as described in the report) will be accessed via a referral which can be made from a professional or the family themselves, this is the current process and will not change in the new model. The Children's Service system as a whole offers a wide range of open access activities and groups run in local communities and Early Years childcare settings run by a range of partners, including the Healthy Child Programme and libraries. These universal services currently enjoy high engagement with a broad range of families and are a key element to ensuring children can access a range of support geared towards their healthy development and enable families to move between services as their level of need changes. The new model will continue to offer these activities and will be expanded to include the digital offer. The Early Childhood and Family Service will work with existing providers to ensure that there is an integrated referral pathway for families who need more targeted individualised support - with the right person, providing the right intervention at the right time.*

Question from Cllr B Jones:

East City children's centre in my division is disappointingly earmarked for closure. In the criteria you say you have considered the quality of the environment. How is the decision to close my purpose built, child centred building compatible with this criteria, when non-purpose built / child focussed environments are being retained?

Reply:

The rationale for the original proposed bases are set out within the consultation document and updated rationale in the CS Committee report. There was no one deciding factor that determined which buildings we have recommended as bases. We have taken a number of factors into consideration to provide an appropriate network of buildings across the county and within each district area, that would best enable us to prioritise the delivery of direct support work with families who need extra help whilst maintaining a level of universal provision. This will include the delivery of services within bases, especially in areas of high need, but with greater emphasis on taking services out to where families live, alongside supporting families at home. Whilst the current buildings designated as a children's centre vary considerably, given that a number of the venues do offer high quality spaces for early childhood services, we will strive to support continued future use by services focused on families with children aged 0-5yrs

Question from Cllr C Rumsby:

Considering the safeguarding measures that are put into any space which is for children, be it Children Centre or Nursery, what safeguarding will be put in place in a community centre or

Library? Given anyone can walk into a community centre and there is now remote access to most Libraries, what are you going to do? And for those communities that have no community centre and Library and homes have safeguarding issues, what are you going to do? Given County is just out of special measures, you are really taking a risk with this new model and risking not only the child but families as a whole.

Reply: *Children's centres have historically used a range of community venues, including libraries, as a safe and suitable space to work with children and families. Four of the sites currently designated as children's centre are libraries. Libraries are widely considered to be safe spaces and there have been no issues in delivering universal services, such as Bounce and Rhyme, Mini-movers etc., to the children and families to date. Similarly, the introduction of the Open Library offer has demonstrated that people use the libraries in a considerate and respectful way. All library staff undertake safeguarding training, and this includes being able to pick up and act upon any concerns in a timely and appropriate manner.*

The new Early Childhood and Family Service provider will be expected to assess that any venues being used are appropriate to the needs of the families, and to ensure that appropriate steps are taken to keep service users safe.

Question from Cllr T Jermy:

Just two Children's Centres will be kept operational in the Breckland District. Given the lack of public transport in the District, with no train access to Swaffham, and poor bus routes elsewhere, does the Committee anticipate any usage of the two remaining Centres from families currently accessing Centres in areas such as Dereham, Watton and Attleborough?

Reply: *The rationale for the original proposed bases is detailed in the consultation document and the updated rationale as a result of the consultation process is detailed within the committee report.*

There was no one deciding factor that determined which buildings we have recommended as bases. We have taken a number of factors into consideration to provide an appropriate network of buildings across the county and within each district area, that would best enable us to prioritise the delivery of direct support work with families who need extra help whilst maintaining a level of universal provision. This will include the delivery of services within bases, especially in areas of high need, but with greater emphasis on taking services out to where families live, alongside supporting families at home.

The Enterprise Centre, containing space currently designated as Attleborough children's centre, will become a new multi-function service hub later in the year and a range of services will be delivered from this site. Families will be able to access services in a flexible way across Breckland either at bases if they live nearby, or in venues that are more accessible in their local community, including libraries, or where it is appropriate, at home.

Question from Cllr C Walker:

May I ask the chair why you are not listening to our constituents who have overwhelmingly raised concerns during the consultation process by requesting that this council keep open our children's centres. The public are incensed by the complete lack of empathy shown by this Conservative run council and are keen to get you to rethink this outrageous decision overturned and try listening to the voice of those who elected us.

Reply: *Consultations are not referendums or popular votes. They are information-gathering exercises that help to test proposals with those directly affected, experts and with residents more generally. In particular, they help us understand the impact our proposals on those affected to*

inform our Equality and Rural Assessment and any mitigating actions we might need to take if our proposals went ahead.

As such our consultation findings are just one of the elements that committees take into consideration when making a decision. Members also need to take into account the Equality and Rural Assessment, the evidence of need and what is proven to work effectively and well, and the financial and legal positions and constraints at the time.

In the case of this consultation, we are very grateful for the numbers of people responding and the detailed comments that they have provided. The recommendations to the Children Service Committee have very much been informed by the consultation responses. The Committee will have before them the consultation report, the Equality and Rural Assessment as well as listen to Committee Member views and questions posed by public in reaching their decision on Tuesday.

Question from Cllr J Brociek-Coulton:

How is your decision to close North City Children's centre consistent with the criteria that you have said you used? There is not a library in our reach area, yet some centres being retained have a library in theirs? Only 6 groups listed as alternatives are in North City, and the list of providers is not accurate as it includes duplication. How many alternatives are there in my division that are free to use, and how many have current vacancies?

Reply: *The rationale for the original proposed bases is detailed in the consultation document and the updated rationale as a result of the consultation process is detailed within the committee report*

There was no one deciding factor that determined which buildings we have recommended as bases. We have taken a number of factors into consideration to provide an appropriate network of buildings across the county and within each district area, that would best enable us to prioritise the delivery of direct support work with families who need extra help whilst maintaining a level of universal provision. This will include the delivery of services within bases, especially in areas of high need, but with greater emphasis on taking services out to where families live, alongside supporting families at home.

The opportunity to move to a more flexible delivery model that does not restrict families' access to service based on their postcode and centre reach areas, means there will be greater opportunities for the workforce to offer services across the city, widening where families can access the support they need.

NCC has reviewed the location of alternative delivery venues as part of this service redesign. This includes the range of community venues that are used currently, or have been previously, to run children's centre services for children and families, and which will be potentially used, depending on families' needs, as part of the new service offer to take services out to families. Given their use by children's centres with families, we are confident that these are suitable venues. The new service provider will be expected to use additional delivery venues and spaces that are accessible, safe and meet the needs of local families.

The 6 community led groups listed in the North City area were identified as current and complementary community groups that local families already access.

Question from Cllr Emma Corlett:

How was the children's centre in my division, City and Eaton, assessed for suitability and capacity to accommodate additional staff in the future children's centre model? I attach a photograph of the current car park situation as an example of the current situation on a daily basis, as requested by Cllr Dark. Please also confirm who owns the leasehold for this group level car park, adjoining the Vauxhall Centre.

Reply: *The rationale for the original proposed bases is detailed in the consultation document and the updated rationale as a result of the consultation process is detailed within the committee report*

There was no one deciding factor that determined which buildings we have recommended as bases. We have taken a number of factors into consideration to provide an appropriate network of buildings across the county and within each district area, that would best enable us to prioritise the delivery of direct support work with families who need extra help whilst maintaining a level of universal provision. This will include the delivery of services within bases, especially in areas of high need, but with greater emphasis on taking services out to where families live, alongside supporting families at home.

With the emphasis on delivering an outreach model of service, we expect the new provider to make use of the network of 3 bases within the city in a flexible way that enables staff to be out delivering services and working directly with families across the city. This would mean staff being able to work out of any of the bases.

The leasehold for the ground level car park outside of the Vauxhall Centre is leased to Independence Matters.

Question from Cllr John Ward

Could the Chairman please confirm that the proposals for the new Early Childhood and Family service are based on professional and evidenced advice and could he comment on the key recommendations of the All Party Parliamentary Group looking into the future of Children's Centres

Reply: *The proposed new Early Childhood and Family Service have been developed by officers taking proper account of national policy, evidence about the effectiveness of children's centres and research about 'what works'. This has been an extensive piece of work, reflected in the quality and depth of the report being presented to CS Committee. As you are aware, it is part of our Council's commitment to ensure that future service design and delivery is evidenced based. I am pleased to note the endorsement by the Early Intervention Foundation for Norfolk's work in developing a clear logic model focused on impact and outcomes and this will help ensure that future delivery is evidenced based – through focusing on impact and outcomes – the difference being made for families, rather than simply capturing registration and engagement data.*

The All Party Parliamentary Group's report is a significant piece of evidence, not least given that it has been endorsed by all political parties nationally. The proposed new Early Childhood and Family Service, along with the emphasis on building a system approach to meeting the needs of families in Norfolk is entirely consistent with the report's 12 recommendations which focus on health and development; employment support and childcare, relationship support and supporting families with complex needs. The report advocates delivering services through wider community venues from pre-birth and throughout life, engaging with voluntary, self-help and peer support organisations, providing online support systems and creating better links with local employers and Jobcentre Plus.