

Children's Centre Rationalisation

Briefing Note No. 19-002

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New proposals to build on successful community model for children's centre services

Wiltshire Council is asking for people's views on proposals to expand its successful model of providing children's centre services in local community venues.

More vulnerable families are being reached as many of the services for under 5s are now provided at the heart of communities.

Currently the services are provided in a mix of venues, including dedicated buildings or community sites such as libraries, church halls and community centres. More people are also accessing information online so future provision will have to meet that need.

Latest figures show on average 83% of the activities that children's centre services run are already held in community venues. In Cricklade this is 92% and in Longfield all activities are held in the community or parents' homes.

Now Wiltshire Council is keen to expand the successful model by finding more community spaces including halls, libraries, campuses and leisure centres. People are being consulted on alternative venues so underused buildings can be closed and more sessions can be held for children and families in well-used community sites.

The services for families with under 5s provide a range of support and advice around parenting, home learning environment, domestic abuse support, employment and training opportunities and healthy lifestyles.

Children's centre services would continue to work in collaboration with health visiting and midwifery and other colleagues who support housing and employment. There would also be a greater emphasis on providing help earlier for families before they reach crisis point.

Due to reductions in funding to the council, we are having to look at funding for all services. We have worked with children's centre services providers The Rise Trust and Spurgeons, to identify underused buildings to ensure that frontline services to our families are protected. They have helped provide an overall picture of which centres are best used and where new community venues can be found. The centres which are part of the consultation are: Cricklade, Pewsey, Mere, Salisbury City, Trowbridge Longfield and Westbury White Horse.

If these proposals are accepted Cricklade, Pewsey, Westbury and Trowbridge Longfield would be offered to onsite childcare providers to expand to offer much needed additional childcare. Mere will be offered back to the school and the lease will be surrendered on Salisbury City which is rarely used as services are offered in the Methodist church next door as it is a far better space.

The consultation is available at <http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/council-democracy-consultations> and will run from 23 January until 20 March 2019 with a report due to go to cabinet later this spring.