

Q. Is it true that there will only be seven children's centres in Norfolk?

Our proposed childhood and family support service would have seven bases, which would co-ordinate the provision of support and services at a range of community venues across the county, for families who need extra help. We refer to this as 'outreach'.

Q. How will the seven outreach bases operate in practice and what services will be on offer?

We are proposing seven district early childhood and family bases – these would be used as places for staff to work across the district and to deliver some of the local services.

Q. Will I have to travel to one of the proposed seven bases to access support and services?

No – the aim is to bring the services out to you and your family, making use of local spaces that you can easily access as well as supporting you at home where this is helpful or necessary. We are not suggesting families will have to travel to the base to get the support they need. Families living close to the base would be able to access some of the support they need onsite, alongside the outreach support.

Q. What community venues will be used and will these be as good as my local children's centre?

Children's centres already use a range of community venues such as libraries, village halls and other community spaces. Staff check that such venues are suitable and safe for the activity being provided and this would continue to be a task for the early childhood and family support service staff. We are proposing that the early childhood and family service uses more of these venues.

Families have reported to the current children's centres that they like being able to access activities in these community venues as it makes it easier for them to participate.

Whilst we have some purpose-built children's centres offering high quality space other places designated as a children's centre vary, for example some are a room in a library or space in a shared building.

Q. How is my local children’s centre affected by these proposals?

If it is agreed that we support families by bringing services out of buildings and into local communities, your local centre might be operated as one of the bases to coordinate this outreach support. You can tell us what you think about the centre we have proposed for your district base as part of the consultation.

If the proposals proceed, it is envisioned that, in addition to the seven centres used as outreach bases, many of the other existing centres will continue to be operated by providers of services for families. We cannot say at this stage how many, as that depends on the decision taken and discussions with providers.

We want to hear from, residents, local organisations or community groups who might be interested in using the building, especially if they are supporting children aged 0-5. As part of the consultation we ask for your ideas for how you would like any of the children’s centre buildings to be used in the future.

It may be that the proposed early childhood and family service will want to use the centre on a limited basis to deliver some of the support for families living near the centre who need extra help, alongside using a wider range of other community spaces.

Q. Will the new service offer the same range of activities and support currently available in children’s centres?

We know that families use children’s centres for a range of services that they value, and we want them to be able to continue to access this kind of activity by making greater use of groups and local activities running in their community. We also know many parents and carers go online to find information about what is happening in their area or to seek advice when they need help.

We know that families sometimes need extra help beyond that provided in local community groups and this is why we are proposing to offer an outreach service that is focused on meeting the needs of families who need this extra help.

We are proposing that the early childhood and family service is a targeted service. This means that it will not provide some of the universal activities open to any parent regardless of their level of need. We are proposing that the early childhood and family service works alongside community groups and universal services, such as health visitors and child care settings so that families can access the activities they want but from a range of providers, not just a children’s centre.

Q. How will the proposed service reach parents and families who need support?

As now, we expect the majority of families receiving targeted support to do so as a result of a referral, with their agreement, from their health visitor, childcare setting, local school etc. We know there are areas in Norfolk where children experience more disadvantage and we would want the proposed early childhood and family support service to focus on these areas, alongside the range of universal services that offer support to every family.

Q How will parents access the services and support they need if they cannot drop into a children's centre?

Parents would have a single point of contact for the early childhood and family Service and other support so that information, advice and guidance would be easier to find and access. The majority of families currently receiving targeted support via a children's centre do so as a result of being referred to the children's centre.

As a largely rural county, it is not easy for families in many areas to "drop into" a children's centre. This is why we are proposing to adopt an outreach approach and take services out to where families live.

Q. Will there be the same number of staff working with families in the proposed new model? How many staff will be employed in future compared to now?

We cannot answer this at this stage as no decision will be made on the future arrangements until after the consultation feedback is considered by Children's Services Committee in January next year. We want to ensure that as much of the funding is used to fund front line service delivery with families.

Q. Will I have to pay for activities that I currently access at my local children's centre?

Activities and group sessions provided by the early childhood and family service and targeted at families who need extra help will continue to be free.

Q. Will I have to go online to get information and advice – what happens if I want to speak to a real person or have no internet access?

Whilst we want to ensure there is a better online and digital offer for families through joining up some of the existing ways to access information and advice, we recognise that families still want to speak to people. They can already do this through calling the Healthy Child Programme's 'Just one Number', or our Family Information Service and we are proposing to link up with the Healthy Child Programme's 'Just One Norfolk' digital offer.