

Children's centres and libraries consultation feedback

The findings of this consultation are being reported back to the Children's Services Committee and the Communities Committee because our proposals relate to the work of both committees.

In addition to the steps the council has taken to promote the consultation, we have also had meetings with all the organisations who run our children's centres to discuss our proposals with them and we asked the organisations to promote the consultation on our behalf. We have also promoted the consultation on the Family Information Service social media.

We received 335 responses to this consultation. Of these, just over half (172 people or 51%) replied as individuals. Twenty respondents told us they were responding on behalf of a group, organisation or business but not all gave the names of their organisations; some were employees whose response did not necessarily represent the organisational view. Of the respondents who described their relationship to the service, most were people who use the library service (197) and/or parents/carers of a child (or children) under aged 0-5 (139).

We received a petition with 5,792 signatures. Norfolk County Council Labour Group undertook a separate consultation and submitted the responses they received which contained 81 comments relating to this proposal.

Key issues and concerns were:

- a) Children's centre services are valued, and some respondents said they regard them as essential or a priority.
- b) Several people said they think that children's centre services should be reviewed, for example because it is good practice to review any service periodically and because children's centre services need to adapt to changes in the way people live their lives.
- c) Several respondents said that they think our proposals would have a negative effect on the health and wellbeing of families, and they are worried that families would become more isolated.
- d) A majority of people said that there need to be some children's centre services which all families can use, although some of these respondents said that there could be fewer universal services than there currently are.
- e) Several respondents said that having fewer universal services would make it harder for families to get help early on and before problems escalate, so families would end-up needing more intensive and costly support because they would end-up in crisis.
- f) Several respondents said it is difficult to identify which families need support – it is not just families on low incomes – the needs of families change over time

and it is easier to provide support if families have built up a trusting relationship with children's centre staff from having attended universal groups.

- g) Some people said that children's centre services should be focused on the families that need them most, because the County Council has less money and so it is right or sensible that we should target our resources.
- h) Some people said they are worried that families living in rural areas would be negatively affected by the proposed changes to children's centre services, in particular some respondents said they are worried about having to travel further to get to services.
- i) Several people expressed support for children's centres and libraries sharing buildings, for example because it would help to get children reading or because it would help to make both services viable – although some people added caveats or said that each area would need to be looked at on a case-by-case basis because co-location would not be suitable in every area.
- j) Many respondents said it would be difficult for our existing buildings to accommodate children's centre and library services because there would not be enough space for both services, the buildings would not have the right facilities and there would not be enough parking for everyone.
- k) Many people said it would not be appropriate for children's centres and libraries to share buildings because they offer very different services, in particular people raised concerns about offering sensitive and confidential support to families in libraries which are public buildings.

A full summary of the consultation feedback received to the children's centre and libraries proposal can be seen at [Appendix](#).