



## Your views on the future of our children's centre services and libraries

### Overview

Norfolk County Council plays a huge part in people's lives – ensuring children and young people have the best start in life, protecting vulnerable people, maintaining a safe road system and helping to create a thriving economy. We'll continue to spend over a billion pounds every year providing public services that you, your family and friends use every day.

Norfolk is facing some big challenges though. Our population is growing, people are generally living longer and the type of services that people need is changing. And as you know, the cost of living is going up. As things become more expensive we also have higher costs, and the amount of money we have coming in isn't keeping up. At the same time the money that central government gives us has fallen by £189 million since 2011 and will fall to zero by 2021.

Even though we are proposing to increase council tax next year, the amount of money we hope to raise wouldn't be enough to balance our budget. This means we have to make some difficult decisions about how we spend your money.

Since 2011 we have saved £334 million. However, we now need to save a further £125 million by 2021. So we are looking again at the services we provide, how they work together, whether they are reaching the people who need them and where they are provided from. Our aim is to create services that meet the needs of residents living in different parts of Norfolk, rather than have a one-size fits all offer.

We are proposing to locate our services together in the same buildings wherever we can, to provide one-stop access to the County Council. In some places we might base more of our services in the same buildings as other organisations, such as district councils, health services and voluntary groups.

## **Why we are consulting**

As part of this work we are looking at the future of our children's centre services. We want your views on:

- our proposal to review how children's centre services are provided in each area of Norfolk
- our proposal to focus children's centre services on the families that need them most
- our proposal for more of our children's centre services and libraries to share buildings.

Together we think these proposals would save us £5.5 million over the next three years.

We will feed back the findings from our consultation to our county councillors as part of the evidence they will use to help them come to a decision about our proposals.

Your views will help us to decide the future of our children's centre services and libraries.

We are consulting through:

- Our online consultation – visit [www.norfolk.gov.uk/budget](http://www.norfolk.gov.uk/budget) to complete this consultation online.
- This paper copy of our consultation.

We are consulting from 6 November 2017 to 2 January 2018. Please note that if we receive any consultation responses after this date we cannot guarantee that we will be able to take them into account.

We will feed back the findings from our consultation to our county councillors as part of the evidence they will use to help them come to a decision about our proposals.

**If you need a copy of this consultation document in a different format please email [haveyoursay@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:haveyoursay@norfolk.gov.uk), call 0344 800 8020 or Text Relay on 18001 0344 800 8020 (textphone) and we will do our best to help.**

## **Background information**

Children's centres offer all families with children under five a range of services, information and support in their local community. They also help some children aged 5-8 with the transition to school.

The support offered by each children's centre is based on the needs of the local community, but most offer advice about pregnancy, parenting support, play sessions, information about children's health, training courses for adults, as well as support finding specialist groups and services.

Some children's centre services are available to all families, such as play and stay sessions, and information, advice and guidance about parenting and other topics such as health services, training and jobs. Children's centres send information to all families registered with them about activities and services on offer locally, and this can include information about activities being run by other organisations, such as local charities and community groups.

Children's centres also provide some services which are for specific groups, for example sessions for new parents / carers or activities for children with disabilities. Children's centre staff plan these activities to help the families that they are working with at the time. So these activities are different depending on where you live and they change over time as the needs of families change.

Children's centre staff also work directly with families on a one-to-one basis. This might involve meeting with families in the children's centre or home visits.

One-to-one sessions tend to be offered to families that need the most support. Sometimes this one-to-one support is used to coordinate the work of different organisations who are all supporting the same family, for example children's centres, social care teams and health visitors.

We have 53 children's centres, supporting families across the whole of Norfolk. Children's centre services are provided from a range of different buildings and locations:

- **In some areas all services are based in one children's centre building.** Whilst some of these children's centres are in purpose built venues, others are on school sites and some are in buildings they share with other organisations. Most of the children's centres in urban areas have a dedicated building, because there are lots of families living near to each other and so lots of people regularly going to activities at the children's centre building.
- **In other areas of Norfolk, children's centres have a base that they use to run activities, but they also offer services in village halls and community buildings.** This approach is used to provide services to families living in some of Norfolk's market towns and their surrounding villages.
- **In some areas there is no children's centre building, instead services are offered in different community buildings, such as village halls and community buildings.** This approach is used in urban and rural areas. It works well for rural communities, where families are more spread out in different villages and there isn't one obvious place to have a children's centre building that all families could easily get to.

Having the service move around helps these families to attend activities and get support. In total we have 37 children's centre buildings. The size of the buildings and how they are used varies considerably.

Over 93% of all children aged 0-5 are currently registered with their local children's centre, which is over 41,000 children and over 33,000 families across Norfolk. We know that some families regularly go to their children's centre and use lots of our services, and that other families don't use children's centre services at all. Typically, three quarters of the children who are registered with their local children's centre use our services on at least three different occasions.

We have developed three proposals that we would like your views on. Together we think these proposals would save us £5.5 million over the next three years - £2 million in 2018/19, £3 million in 2019/20 and £0.5 million in 2020/21.

## **Our proposals**

### **Proposal one – review how children's centre services are provided in each area of Norfolk**

We are proposing review whether children's centre services are being provided in the most appropriate way in each area of Norfolk, or whether in some areas we should change the way they are provided.

We know that the needs of families across Norfolk vary considerably. We want to look at whether we can improve how children's centre services are provided, so that families get the right support, at the right time and in the right way.

### **Why do we want to review children's centre services now?**

The review we want to do isn't just about helping the County Council save money, there are a number of other reasons we want to look at what children's centre services we offer and how they are provided:

- Since children's centres were established over a decade ago the needs of families have changed and the way that many parents / carers want to get support is different. Technology now plays a much bigger part in our lives. Parents / carers increasingly go online, open up an app or ask their peers for information and advice via WhatsApp, rather than go to a children's centre building. Our services need to adapt to how parents / carers want to get support.

- We know that some of the families who need the most support prefer to be supported at home, because they don't feel comfortable or confident enough to go to a children's centre building. We also know that some families prefer one-to-one sessions with a member of staff, rather than group activities. So we need to look at whether we have the right balance of activities taking place in dedicated children's centre buildings and one-to-one support for families.
- Over the last decade Norfolk has also changed. We've had new housing developments, some areas have had lots of money invested in them and families have moved around. As a result the demand for children's centre services has changed across Norfolk and we need to assess whether our buildings are in the right places and if they are all still required.
- There is also a shortage of pre-school, nursery and school places in some areas of Norfolk. So if families with young children could be better supported at home, in community buildings or online, then we could look at whether some children's centre buildings could be used to help families with childcare and their children's education.
- Our children's centres developed in quite an organic way, as funding became available and different opportunities arose. It therefore makes sense to look again at the services they are providing, the way they are supporting families and the buildings they are operating from to see whether we need to change anything.
- We have contracts with 12 other organisations to run our children's centres on our behalf, at a cost of approximately £10 million per year. All of the current contracts for running our children's centres end in March 2019, which means we have an opportunity to review what services our children's centres provide and how they operate.

### **What would our review look at?**

To review how children's centre services are provided in each area of Norfolk we would have to consider a wide range of factors. We are proposing to look at:

- The number of people using each children's centre service
- The number of people going to each children's centre building
- The needs of the families in different areas of Norfolk, including the level of deprivation
- Whether there are opportunities for children's centres to share buildings with other services or organisations – see proposal 3 for more information
- How people get to children's centre services and the transport options available
- The leasing arrangements for children's centre buildings.

Our review would produce recommendations for each area of Norfolk, including whether an area needs a dedicated children's centre building, if the children's centre could share a building with another organisation or if services would be better provided in community buildings. It would also make recommendations about the types of services needed and different ways of supporting families across Norfolk and in each area.

It is too early to say how children's centre services could change in different areas of Norfolk or what this would mean for each individual children's centre building. Much more detailed work would need to be done to understand this. We would consult on any significant changes to how buildings are used, where services are delivered from and changes to the services on offer.

### **Proposal two – focusing children's centre services on the families that need them most**

Children's centres provide a wide range of services. Some of these services are available to all families, such as play and stay sessions, and others are for families who need more support, for example families who are struggling with unemployment, substance misuse, domestic abuse, mental or physical health problems. The organisations who run our children's centres each carry out a detailed analysis to identify vulnerable families.

The Sure Start Children's Centre Statutory Guidance (2013) makes it clear that the service should be focused on helping families who need extra support:

“The core purpose of Children's Centres is to improve outcomes for young children and their families, with a “particular focus on families in greatest need of support” in order to reduce inequalities in: child development and school readiness; parenting aspirations, self-esteem and parenting skills; and child and family health and life chances”.

In 2015 we proposed to focus more of the work of our children's centres on supporting the families that need them most. We consulted people on what they thought of our proposal. We received 291 responses about this proposal, of which 198 people (68.0%) agreed with the proposal and 61 people (21.0 %) disagreed. 32 (11.0%), neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposal. Here is a summary of what people told us:

- Of those who expressed support for this proposal, two thirds did not give a reason for their support. Of those explaining their support, the largest number agreed that services should be better targeted. However a significant number that agreed with the proposal also argued that services should remain universal, providing a broad range of services. A smaller number of people stated that services need to change and needed to provide value for money.
- Of those who expressed opposition to the proposal, the majority stated that Children's Centres provided a universal, preventative service that should be protected and not cut. Some respondents argued that a more targeted approach would miss people that require support, who would then require more expensive services in the long run.

The County Council decided to go ahead with this proposal in February 2016. Since then we have worked with the organisations who run our children's centres to make some changes. Children's centre staff now work more closely with social care teams. The families they are both working with now receive more coordinated support.



We've also seen that more of the activities which are available to all families are now being run by voluntary and community groups, instead of by children's centre staff. This has meant the staff can focus their time on the work with the families that need the most support. The changes we have made have saved us approximately £2.5 million.

Over the past 18 months we had a big push to encourage all families with young children to register with their children's centre. This has been very successful and it means that children's centre staff now come into contact with more families and so have a greater chance of identifying all the families that need extra support. This has also helped children's centres to build better connections with their local communities and we've seen parental satisfaction go up.

We are now proposing to look at what we can do to further improve children's centre services for the families that need them most. We want to look at ways of improving the plans we put in place to support families and how we share information between different organisations about the families we're working with.

In order to improve support to the vulnerable families and save money, we would need to look again at the services available to all families. This might mean that children's centres need to reduce how much they spend on services available to all families or change how they provide them, for example we want to increase the amount of support available for parents / carers online.

We would make sure that children's centre staff continue to work with health visitors, social care teams and others so that each family gets appropriate information, guidance and support.

### **What would proposals one and two mean for the people who use children's centre services?**

We think that the impact of our proposals would be:

- Families that are most in need of support would receive better support that is coordinated between children's centre staff, health visitors and social care teams.
- It might mean that families have to go to different buildings to get children's centres services. For example we might have fewer dedicated children's centres and there might be more services provided in community buildings.

- It might mean that parents / carers have to pay for some of the activities run by children's centres that are currently offered to all families for free, or that some services would have to stop.
- We would need to work with the organisations that run our children's centres to strike the difficult balance between offering services that all families can use and working with families who need extra support. It is important that there are services which all families can use. One reason for this is that we know that the families who are most in need of support are more likely to accept help if it feels like all families are getting some kind of support and if there is no stigma attached to getting help.

We want to know what you think of these proposals, and we are also talking with the organisations that run our children's centres to discuss them. Your views will help county councillors to set our budget, help us to decide whether we should make any changes to our existing contracts with the organisations that run our children's centres, and help us decide what we should include in the new contracts for our children's centre services for 2019/20 onwards. Your views will help us understand what impact our proposals would have on the people who use our services and whether any groups of people would be disproportionately affected.

### **Proposal three – closer working between children's centre services and libraries**

Norfolk has 47 libraries and eight mobile libraries. Our libraries welcome 3.4 million visitors a year, over 10 million online visitors and in 2016-17 our customers borrowed more than 4.9 million books, e-books, DVDs and other materials.

People of all ages use libraries and the service offers a wide range of activities and facilities, including free computer access and help to get online, community learning, literacy activities for children and adults, activities to support health and wellbeing and to reduce social isolation, baby and toddler rhymetimes, book groups, code clubs, work clubs, space for hire and online access to a wealth of knowledge and information.

We currently spend £8.5 million on libraries each year. 21% of the total population of the county have used a library in the last 12 months. 33% of children aged 0-5 in the county used a library in the same period.

We have previously asked people about the future of our library service:

- In 2013 we asked people what they thought of a proposal to make better use of our library buildings by sharing premises with other organisations.
- In 2015 we carried out some research about the future of the library service with library users, lapsed-users and people who do not use the library service.

The findings from this work told us that people are broadly supportive of libraries sharing buildings with other organisations.

People also broadly agree that libraries are a good place to provide a variety of support for families, such as parenting classes and family learning, and that it is good to encourage children to use the library service from a young age. We have used the findings from this work to develop this proposal, and to help us understand the impact it would have.

Many of our children's centres and libraries are located close to each other and they serve the same communities. The children's centres and libraries in Gorleston, Acle and Loddon are already located in the same building. We are proposing that more of our children's centres and libraries could share buildings in future. Because of the financial pressures we are facing we think that having these services located in their own buildings in communities across Norfolk is no longer sustainable.

We want it to be easy for residents to be able to get to and use our services. If more of our children's centres and libraries were to share buildings in future it would mean that these services could continue to be available across Norfolk and people would still be able to get to these services near to where they live. We think this is better than having to consider no longer providing some services in some communities, and for residents to have to travel further to get to our services.

We also know that reading with young children plays a vital role in their development. We believe that having more children's centres and libraries in the same building would encourage families to read more and help more children to be ready for school, which ultimately would improve their life chances.

Last year more than a third of books borrowed from Norfolk's libraries are taken out by children. In a national survey it was found that 1 in 3 children have no books in their home, 22% reported that they received no encouragement to read at home, and 90% of children who only read in class are either below average or average readers. The number of books in the home has as great an impact on a child's school attainment as parental education levels. Furthermore, a child aged 3-5 years who is taken to the library monthly is on average 2.5 months ahead in development terms than one who doesn't visit a library.

### **What would this proposal mean for residents and the people who use children's centre services and our libraries?**

It is too early to say what this would mean for each individual children's centre and library. Much more detailed work would need to be done to understand this. We would consult on any significant changes to how buildings are used, where services are delivered from and changes to the services on offer.

We think that the impact of our proposal would be:

- Children's centre and library services could continue to be available across Norfolk and people would still be able to get to these services near to where they live, which is important in a large rural county like Norfolk.
- Having these services located together could help to improve children's literacy and life chances, by getting young children used to visiting a library and interested in reading and learning.
- Our library service would adapt to having more families visiting, for example by having more children's books available. This has happened in the three areas where our children's centres and libraries now share buildings.

- It might mean each service would have less space to operate. This would depend on how the space is currently being used in each of our buildings, whether there is any unused space or whether in some areas we could move both services into a different building that would provide the same amount of space that each service currently has.
- There could be greater demand for parking if more people were using our buildings for a greater range of services.
- We would need to carefully plan how the services would work together so that people could relax and enjoy using both services. For example, we wouldn't want library users disrupting a play and stay session, or there being too much noise for people trying to study in the library.
- We would need to coordinate the policies and practices of the children's centres and libraries in order to keep the people using both services safe.

## **Your views on our proposals**

**1. What do you think about our proposal to review how children's centre services are provided in each area of Norfolk? What impact, if any, do you think that the proposal would have on you or your family?**

Please write your answer below:

**2. What do you think about our proposal to focus children's centre services on the families that need them most? What impact, if any, do you think that the proposal would have on you or your family?**

Please write your answer below:

**3. What do you think about our proposal for children's centres and libraries to share buildings and work more closely together? What impact, if any, do you think that the proposal would have on you or your family?**

Please write your answer below:

**4. Please select all of the descriptions that apply to you?**

- I am a parent / carer of a child (or children) aged 0-5
- I currently use children's centre services
- I currently use the library service
- I am a children's centre worker
- I work for an organisation that operates from a children's centre
- I work for the library service
- None of the above

**5. If you currently use a children's centre, which one do you usually use? Please select one from the list below:**

Acle (Marshes) Children's Centre

Attleborough Area Childrens Centre

Aylsham Cluster Area Children's Centre

Bowthorpe, West Earlham and Costessey Children's Centre

Caister Children's Centre

Catton Grove, Fiddlewood and Mile Cross Children's Centre

City and Eaton Children's Centre

Corpusty and Holt Area Children's Centre

Cromer Children's Centre

Dereham Central Children's Centre

Dereham South Children's Centre

Diss Children's Centre

Downham Market Childrens Centre

Drayton and Taverham Childrens Centre

Dussindale Children's Centre

Earlham Early Years Centre

East City and Framingham Earl Area Children's Centre

Emneth Children's Centre



- Fakenham Gateway Children's Centre
- Gorleston and Hopton Children's Centre
- Greenacre Children's Centre, Peggotty Road, Great Yarmouth
- Harleston Area Childrens Centre
- Hellesdon Childrens Centre
- Hethersett Area Childrens Centre
- Hoveton & Broadland Area Children's Centre
- Hunstanton Childrens Centre
- Litcham Children's Centre
- Loddon Area Childrens Centre
- Long Stratton Area Childrens Centre
- Methwold Children's Centre
- Mundesley Children's Centre
- Nar Children's Centre
- North City Children's Centre, Angel Road Infant School
- North Lynn, Gaywood North Bank and The Woottons  
Children's Centre
- North Walsham Children's Centre
- Priory Children's Centre, Great Yarmouth
- Reepham Children's Centre
- Seagulls Children's Centre, Gorleston
- Spixworth & Sprowston Children's Centre

- |   |                          |
|---|--------------------------|
| St Clement's Children's Centre, Terrington St Clement           | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Stalham and Sutton Children's Centre                            | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Stibbard Children's Centre, Fakenham                            | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Thetford Children's Centre, Kingsway                            | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Thetford Drake Children's Centre, Drake Infant School & Nursery | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Swaffham Children's Centre                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Thorpe Hamlet and Heartsease Children's Centre                  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Trinity Children's Centre, Martham                              | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Vancouver Children's Centre, King's Lynn                        | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Village Green Children's Centre, Belton                         | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Watton Children's Centre  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Wells-next-the-sea Children's Centre                            | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| West Walton Children's Centre                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Wymondham Area Children's Centre                                | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Don't know  | <input type="checkbox"/> |

## **About you**

### **Personal information, confidentiality and data protection**

We use this information to see how representative the feedback is of Norfolk's population. We also use it to see if any particular groups of people are especially affected by our proposals.

We will process any personal information we receive from you in line with the Data Protection Act 1998.

This means that Norfolk County Council will hold your personal data and only use it for the purpose for which it was collected, being this consultation. Under our record management policy we will keep this information for five years.

We will also, under normal circumstances, not pass your personal data on to anyone else. However, we may be asked under access to information laws to publish or disclose some, or all, of the information you provide in response to this consultation, including any personal information. We will only do this where such disclosure will comply with such relevant information laws which include the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.

## **6. Are you responding as...?**

Please select one answer

- An individual / member of the public
- A family
- On behalf of a voluntary or community group
- On behalf of a statutory organisation
- On behalf of a business
- A Norfolk County Councillor
- A district or borough councillor
- A town or parish councillor
- A Norfolk County Council employee

**7. If you are responding on behalf of another organisation, what is the name of the organisation, group or business?**

Please write your answer in the box:

**8. Are you...?**

Please select one answer

Male

Female

Prefer to self-describe (please specify below)

Prefer not to say

If you prefer to self-describe please specify here:

**9. How old are you?**

Please select one answer

Under 18  55-64

18-24  65-74

25-34  75-84

35-44  85 or older

45-54  Prefer not to say

**10. Do you have any long-term illness, disability or health problem that limits your daily activities or the work you can do?**

Please select one answer

Yes

No

Prefer not to say

**11. How would you describe your ethnic background?**

Please select one answer

White British

White Irish

White other

Mixed

Asian or Asian British

Black or Black British

Chinese

Prefer not to say

Other ethnic background - please describe below

**12. What is your first language?**

Please write your answer in the box:

### **13. What is the first part of your postcode? (e.g. NR4)**

Please write your answer in the box:

#### **How we will make our decision and report back to you**

We will take a report about the findings to this consultation to our Children's Services committee on 16 January 2018. The report will feedback what people have told us about the potential impact of our proposal. The feedback will also be reported at Full Council on 12 February 2018. Our county councillors will consider the consultation responses we receive very carefully. In particular, they will take into account:

- The impact of any proposal on individuals, groups or communities and in particular on people identified as having 'protected characteristics' under the Equality Act 2010. The protected characteristics are: age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation. As well as this equality impact assessment, councillors will consider the impact of proposals on rural areas
- The views of people and stakeholders consulted
- The evidence of need and what is proven to work effectively and well
- The financial and legal positions and any constraints at the time
- Any potential alternative options, models or ideas for making the savings.

**You can fill in our online feedback form at:**

[www.norfolk.gov.uk/budget](http://www.norfolk.gov.uk/budget)

**You can send back a paper feedback form to:**

Freepost Plus RTCL-XSTT-JZSK, Norfolk County Council, Ground floor  
- south wing, County Hall, Martineau Lane, Norwich NR1 2DH.

However, if you want to help the council save money please use a stamp and send to this address: Stakeholder and Consultation Team, Norfolk County Council, Ground floor - south wing, County Hall, Martineau Lane, NR1 2DH.

You may wish to keep a copy of your response to our consultation for your own records.

**Your opinions are valuable to us. Thank you for taking the time to read this document and respond.**



If you need this document in large print, audio, Braille, alternative format or in a different language please contact Customer Services on 0344 800 8020 or Text Relay on 18001 0344 800 8020 (textphone) and we will do our best to help.

**November 2017**

