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| Committee:         | <b>Lead Member for Children and Families</b>  |
| Date:              | <b>10 September 2014</b>  |
| By:                | <b>Director of Children's Services</b>  |
| Title of Report:   | <b>Proposed de-designation of five Children's Centres</b>   |
| Purpose of Report: | <b>To update the Lead Member on the results of a recent consultation on the proposed de-designation of five Children's Centres and request approval to proceed with de-designation.</b> |

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**Recommendation:**

**The Lead Member is recommended to approve the de-designation of five Children's Centres to enable their use for the provision of additional childcare places supported by wrap around Children's Centre services either on-site or at other local venues.**

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**1. Financial Appraisal**

1.1 If the recommendation in this report is implemented a saving will be made in the Children's Centres budget of approximately £50,000 from reduced premises costs such as rent, utilities and maintenance. This will make a small contribution to the savings required in 2015-2016 under the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan. The main driver for the recommendation is not financial, however, but the need to provide early years education and childcare places for two year olds.

**2. Supporting information**

2.1 The national policy to deliver 15 hours of free early education to the 40% most vulnerable 2 year olds in England was piloted in 2012 and has been rolled out across the country in two phases with the final 1,100 children in East Sussex receiving their entitlement in September 2014. A number of steps have been taken to increase the number of places available but there is still a significant deficit, notably in Hastings and St Leonard's, Polegate and Eastbourne.

2.2 The five Children's Centres proposed for de-designation are not heavily used and are very appropriate for use for two year old nursery places as they were purpose built for 0-5 year olds. Activities currently offered at the Centres could either be provided at other local venues or at times of the day when the buildings are not needed for early years education or childcare.

2.3 "Designation" of Children's Centres was the process used by the Department for Education to certify that a new Centre met the statutory definition of a Children's Centre. Ongoing monitoring of the performance of Centres was made a statutory responsibility for Ofsted in 2010. Using a Children's Centre building primarily for early years education and childcare would compromise its ability to deliver the broad range of services that the inspection framework expects. It is therefore proposed that the five Centres are "de-designated" as Children's Centres, even though some may still offer services for families outside of nursery times. Additional services will be delivered at other local venues. The term de-designation was used in the consultation as it was felt that to describe the proposed changes as "closures" would imply that all services would be lost rather than relocated.

2.4 The proposal to de-designate Children's Centres represents a significant change to the service and, as such, the service planned and implemented a consultation exercise that sought the views of staff, partners and service users. Staff workshops were held in March and April, partners were consulted through the Children's Services Planning Groups in April, May and June and a 6 week public consultation closed on the 18<sup>th</sup> July. A report on the consultation is attached as Appendix 1.

### **3. Conclusion and Reason for Recommendations**

3.1 There were 185 responses to the public consultation. The principal issue that was raised by respondents was anxiety about services that they value being lost or no longer being accessible to them locally. This demonstrated some confusion about the meaning of the term de-designation, assuming it was a euphemism for “closure”. If the proposals are approved the service will work closely with service users to ensure that where necessary services are re-located to alternative venues that are accessible to them and continue to meet their needs.

3.2 Staff reported concerns about the availability and suitability of alternative community venues but research has since been undertaken that indicates that the majority of services can be relocated within their current locality.

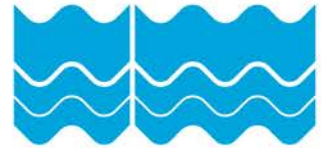
3.3 Partners at the Hastings Children’s Services Planning Group were anxious that the plans would alter the proportion of funds that are allocated to Children’s Centres in the town. Funds are allocated based on the number of children and the relative deprivation of the area in which they live, not on the number of physical buildings. Data was provided to the meeting that reassured them that the proposals would not affect the proportion of funds spent on services for families in Hastings and St Leonard’s.

3.4 The Lead Member for Children and Families is recommended to approve the de-designation of the five Children’s Centres named above to enable them to be used for additional childcare places for 2 year olds supported by wrap around Children’s Centre services either on site or at other local venues.

STUART GALLIMORE  
Director of Children’s Services

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Tel: 01323 747431  
Local Members: All  
Background Document(s): None

Appendix 1 Report on the consultation to de-designate five Children’s Centres



# De-designation of Children's Centres August 2014

## **1. Introduction**

In June this year we launched a six week public consultation on a proposal to “de-designate” five of the thirty one Children’s Centres in the county: one in Polegate, one in Eastbourne and three in Hastings. The background to this proposal is the need to provide additional early years education places for two year olds. As a result of new national arrangements, 40% of two year olds in East Sussex will be entitled to 15 hours per week of free early years education from September 2014. There are currently insufficient places available for these children in some areas of the County and additional places need to be created so that all eligible two year olds can take up this opportunity.

In order to provide these additional places we consulted on a plan to use 5 of our Children’s Centre buildings to provide nursery places. These Centres will need to be formally de-designated as Children’s Centres but may continue to provide services to families either outside of nursery times or through other Centres. Designation of Children’s Centres is part of the Department for Education’s formal process of creating a Children’s Centre and means that the Centre was approved as meeting the full statutory definition of a Children’s Centre at the designation point. On-going monitoring of Children’s Centre performance is through external inspection by Ofsted. Using a Children’s Centre to offer just early education for at least half of its operation would compromise its ability to meet the broad expectations of the inspection framework.

The 5 Centres that are in areas where additional childcare places are required and which we therefore plan to de-designate as Children’s Centres are:-

Polegate, Willingdon Trees, Silverdale, Redlake, Churchwood.

Three of these Centres are in Hastings and St Leonards, the area of greatest deprivation in East Sussex. There is however a strong body of evidence that high quality early years education has a positive impact on outcomes for children; and services for families will be maintained through the remaining network of 6 Centres in the town.

The de-designation of Children’s Centres is a significant step to take. A range of consultation activity was undertaken to gather feedback from staff, partners and communities about the proposed changes. This document summarises the consultation activity and the responses that were received.

## **2. Consultation activity**

Consultation activity began in March with a series of staff engagement workshops. These workshops provided an opportunity to discuss the proposals with local staff and test whether the re-location of some services to other venues was realistic.

Partners in the delivery of services to families were also consulted through the network of Children’s Services Planning Groups (CSPGs).

In June the service launched a 6 week public consultation that closed on the 18<sup>th</sup> July. The consultation was publicised on the Children’s Centre facebook pages, leaflets were handed out at local schools and pre-schools and information boards were displayed at all Children’s Centres within the areas affected by the proposals.

Responses were collected via the County Council “Have your say” webpage, comments boxes in the Children’s Centres, via facebook, and at a series of 4 public meetings.

The questions that were posed through the public consultation were:-

*Question 1: Which is your local Children's Centre?*

*Question 2: Are you and your family likely to be affected by the proposals?*

*Question 3: Do you feel these proposals will affect families generally?*

*Question 4: Which of the proposed changes to centres will affect you? (If you answered Yes to Q2 or Q3)*

*Question 5: How will the proposed changes affect you? (If you answered Yes to Q2 or Q3above),*

*Question 6: Do you have any suggestions you would like us to consider, to help deal with the effects of the changes for you?*

(Standard demographic data was also collected)

### **3. Summary of responses**

#### **3.1 – Staff workshops**

Staff in Eastbourne were concerned about losing the use of a purpose built Children’s Centre at Willingdon Trees and having to run services in community venues that were not as well equipped. Access to the sensory room on site was a particular concern. There was broad agreement however that taking the service out into the community could increase access by more vulnerable families. Staff also acknowledged the importance of high quality early education and the benefits of enabling the most vulnerable 2 year olds to take up their new early education entitlement.

*The lease of the Willingdon Trees Centre to the Academy is being drafted to include a clause allowing on-going use of the sensory room.*

Staff in Hastings and St Leonard’s welcomed the development of additional childcare places but were concerned about the lack of community venues from which to run services.

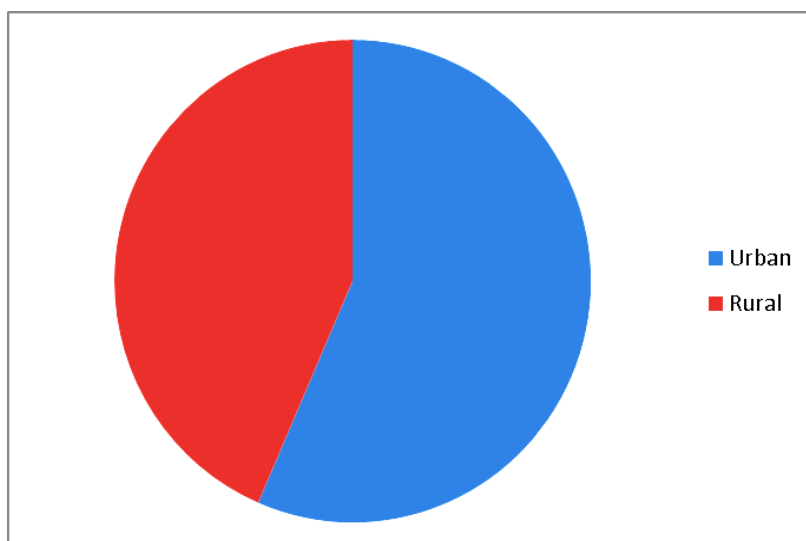
*An exercise has been undertaken to identify community venues in Hastings and St Leonard’s*

#### **3.2 – Children’s Services Planning Groups**

Partners and colleagues at the CSPG meetings were interested about the County Council’s strategic plan for Children’s Centres and whether the current plan to de-designate 5 Centres was part of a broader strategy to close more Centres. Questions were raised at the Hastings and St Leonard’s CSPG about the proportion of Children’s Centre funds that were spent on urban areas compared with rural. The following diagram was sent for inclusion in the minutes. This shows that more funding is deployed in urban than in rural areas. This would not change as a result of the

proposed de-designations; the level of funding for each area does not depend on the number of buildings used.

Diagram to show the proportion of Children’s Centre resources allocated to Urban and Rural areas of the County.



### **3.3 – Public consultation**

There were 185 responses to the public consultation questions 108 of which were via the on-line survey on the County Council website.

*Question 1 – Which is your local Centre?*

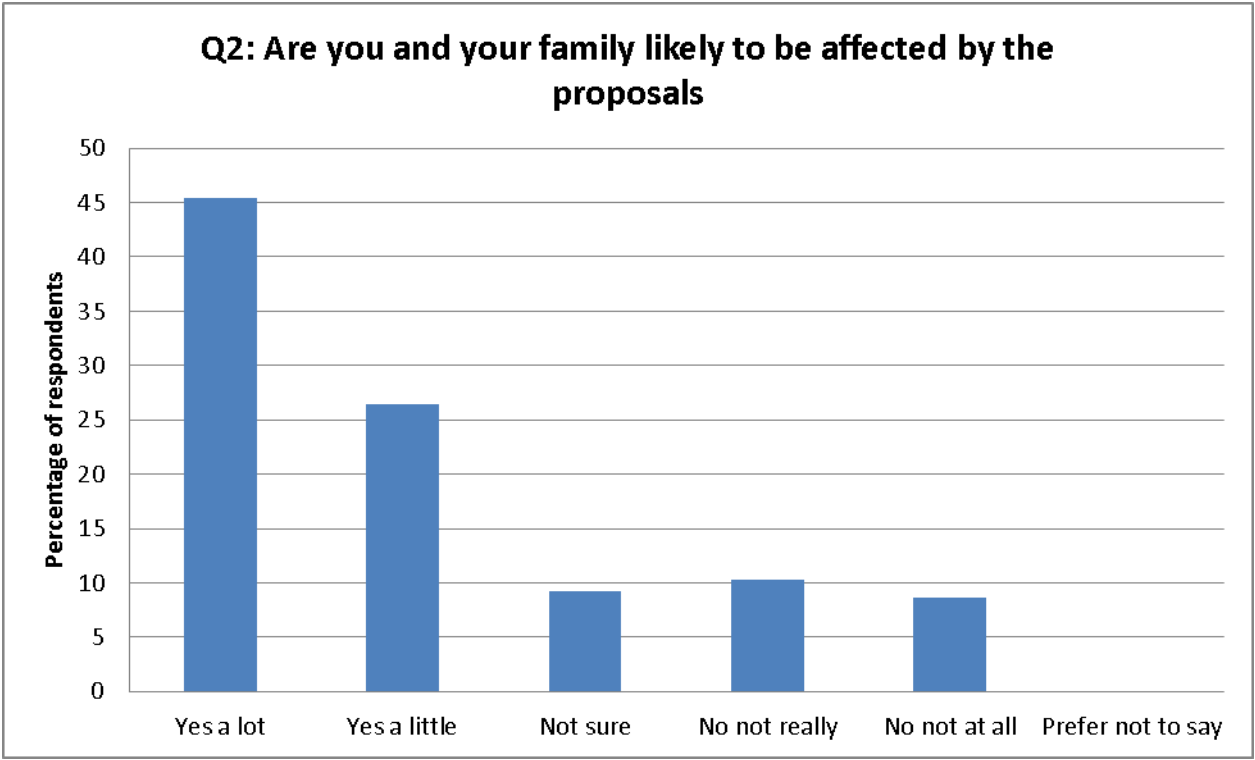
The table below shows those Centres that were identified by more than 5% of respondents as their local Centre.

|               |       |
|---------------|-------|
| Churchwood    | 5.2%  |
| East Hastings | 6.4%  |
| Polegate      | 18%   |
| Redlake       | 18.6% |
| Silverdale    | 20.3% |
| St Leonard’s  | 7.6%  |

The highest number of responses was from people who use Silverdale Centre with other Hastings and St Leonard’s Centres, even those not directly impacted by the proposals, also attracting some comment. This may be because they are the busiest Centres in the town. Polegate also had a significant response rate.

*Question 2 – Are you or your family likely to be affected by the proposals?*

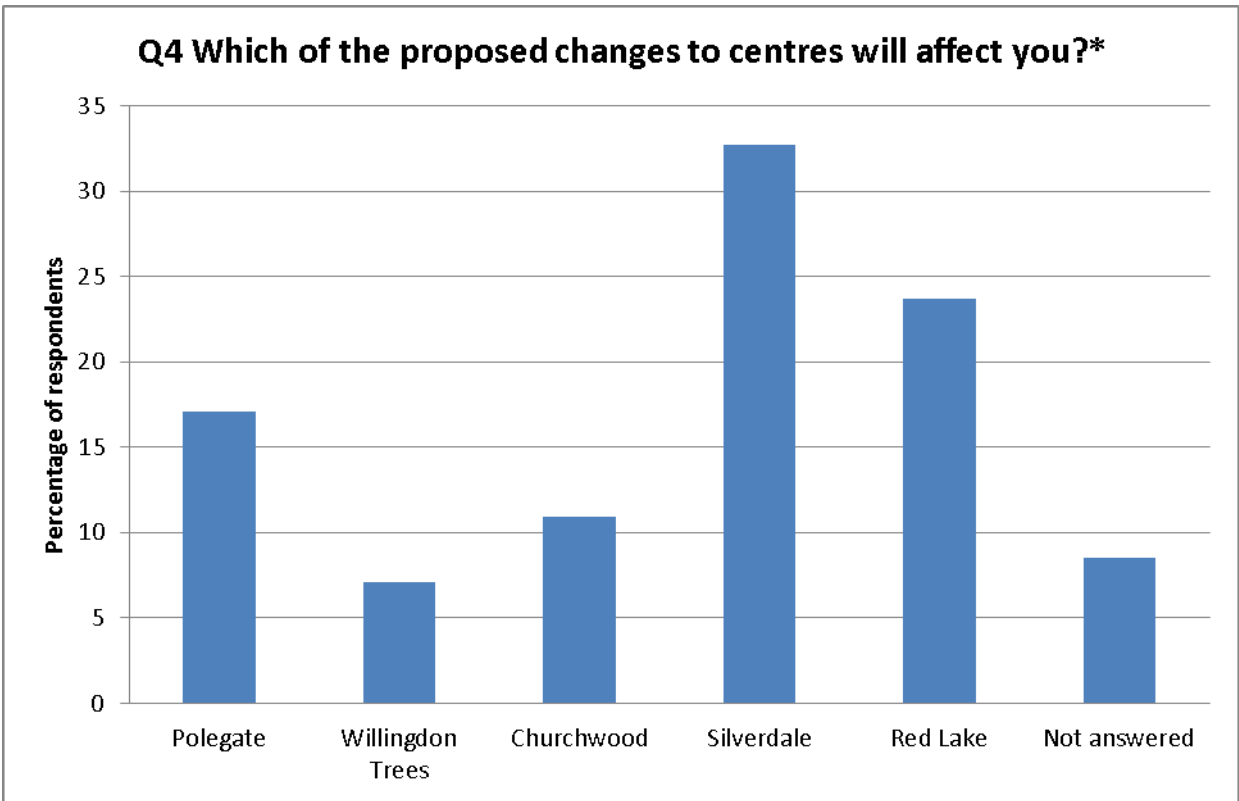
Respondents were asked to tick the box that best represented their view and 71% of respondents reported that they would be affected “a lot” or “a little” by the proposals.



*Question 3 – Do you think these proposals will affect families generally?*

Respondents were again asked to tick the box that best reflected their view. 88.6% of respondents reported that they felt the proposals would affect families “a lot” or “a little”.

*Question 4 – Which of the proposed changes will affect you?*



The table above shows that changes proposed to Silverdale and Redlake Centres have been identified by the highest number of respondents as likely to affect families. This correlates with the higher number of responses from users of these Centres.

*Question 5 – How will the proposed changes affect you?*

This question invited respondents to write their comments in a text box rather than choose from a range of options. The most common themes were:-

- Concerns about services being lost and the lack of other community venues that could be used
- Loss of services could cause more isolation.
- Possible impact on the size of groups if there were fewer of them
- Concern about loss of the sensory room at Willingdon Trees
- Questions about the accessibility of community venues for wheelchairs and buggies
- The balance of spend on services between deprived and affluent areas
- Need for better advertising of services
- Cost of travel to alternative venues
- Change is disruptive to children
- The need to consider the needs of the whole family and working parents
- There is a need for more services for children with additional needs

There were also some comments about the development of early education and childcare places for 2 year olds:-

- Existing nursery provision should be expanded rather than Children’s Centre services lost
- Money that is being spent on childcare for 2 year old should be spent on Children’s Centres
- Limited provision in Polegate so the proposal is helpful

**4. Equality Impact Assessment**

An Equality Impact Assessment was completed to assess which, if any, protected groups would be disproportionately impacted by these proposals. The Willingdon Trees Centre has a purpose built sensory room on site and therefore runs a number of services for Children with disabilities, changes to which could impact on this group negatively.

The data below shows that for most of the Centres proposed for de-designation, the percentage of children identified who have additional needs is largely in line with the county average of 1%. Willingdon Trees is the exception to this, with a percentage of 10%.

| <b>Children's Centre</b>  | <b>All under 5</b> | <b>With additional needs (numbers)</b> | <b>With additional needs (as a percentage of all those attending)</b> |
|---------------------------|--------------------|--|---|
| <b>All in East Sussex</b> | <b>12377</b>       | <b>151</b>                             | <b>1%</b>   |
| Churchwood                | 126                | 2                                      | 2%  |



|                     |     |    |     |
|---------------------|-----|----|-----|
| Polegate            | 474 | 6  | 1%  |
| Redlake             | 321 | 3  | 1%  |
| Silverdale          | 499 | 5  | 1%  |
| Willingdon<br>Trees | 425 | 44 | 10% |

The potential impact of de-designating the Centre at Willingdon Trees will be mitigated by the addition of a clause in the lease document that will require the Academy who wish to offer the nursery places to allow the Children’s Centre team to retain access to the sensory room for families.

## **5. Discussion and recommendations**

The proposal to de-designate 5 Centres represents a significant change to the Children’s Centre service and, as expected, raised some anxiety among service users and partners. One of the challenges in planning the consultation activity was to use language that appropriately described the changes that were being proposed. The term de-designation was used to describe the changes as referring to the proposals as “closures” would infer that all services would be lost. This proved to be quite confusing for respondents and many of the comments received refer to protecting services that will be relocated rather than lost. Alternative accessible venues have been identified in most cases and services will remain close to the communities that they serve.

Hastings and St Leonard’s areas have high levels of deprivation. Six Centres will remain in these areas, however, maintaining a high concentration of Centres in the coastal strip. The service is also confident that by implementing effective commissioning practice, assessing need, planning services and reviewing outcomes, the needs of local families can be met effectively. The Children’s Centre offer is not related directly to the number of physical buildings it maintains and funds are allocated to Centres for service delivery and not for building costs, which are retained centrally.

The funding model used for allocating resources to Children’s Centres is based on a formula that includes the number of children in the area and the relative deprivation of the Super Output Area in which they live. The proportion of funding allocated to each Children’s Centre area will not therefore be affected by a change in the number of separately designated Centres and the higher resource allocation for Hastings and St Leonard’s will not change as a result of these proposals.

The particular issues regarding the high number of children with special needs that use the Willingdon Trees Centre has been addressed by negotiating on-going use of the specialist facilities located at this Centre. The Academy provider who will be the provider of nursery education on this site are keen to work with us to support vulnerable families and have agreed to a clause in the lease enabling on-going access for families.

De-designation of the Polegate Centre represents a potential risk for the service as it is some distance from neighboring Centres. There is currently only one provider of pre-school education in Polegate and a significant deficit in the number of places available for 2 year olds. There is however a church hall nearby that can be used to provide Children’s Centre services and potential times outside of nursery delivery that could be retained for “Stay and Play” activity. Several of the responses concerning Polegate were about the Breakfast and After School clubs that Polegate school

currently runs in the Children's Centre. The on-going accommodation for these services is for the school to address.

In view of the positive impact that accessing high quality early years education can have on children's outcomes and the potential opportunity to work with nursery providers to support the parents of the most vulnerable 2 year olds **it is recommended that the proposal to de-designate 5 Children's Centres is agreed.**

The service will need to continue to engage local parents in discussions about local changes to ensure that vulnerable families are supported to access services. Access by vulnerable groups will be monitored to ensure the service continues to engage with families who need support. The home-visiting Keywork strand of the Children's Centre service is not affected by these proposals and will continue to work with families where children meet level 3 on the continuum of need.