

**Appendix 3b Children's Services Department savings**

Children's Centres Offer		Proposal
<p><b>1. Children's Centres Offer</b></p>	<p>The core purpose of Children's Centres is to improve outcomes for young children and their families and reduce inequalities between families in greatest need and their peers in: child development and school readiness; parenting aspirations and parenting skills; and child and family health and life chances.</p> <p>Children's Centres currently offer free open access activities, often on a drop in basis, for parents-to-be and families with children aged 0 to 5. This might be baby and toddler play activities, music groups, breastfeeding support, or family learning. The activities are designed to promote positive attachment, positive parenting, good child health and stimulate speech and language development. Parents are able to freely attend the activities with their babies and young children, meet other parents, and ask for help and advice from trained staff e.g. on issues such as feeding, sleeping and behaviour.</p> <p>In order to meet necessary savings we are asking Cabinet to make a decision in relation to our countywide Children's Centres Offer. The County Council is integrating its Children's Centre services with Health Visiting (HV) and proposes to focus the integrated service on responding to needs identified through the programme of development reviews offered to all children. This will necessitate the cessation of County Council funded universal access provision i.e. open access drop in activities at Children's Centres.</p>	<p><b>1. To cease County Council funded universal access provision open access drop in activities at Children's Centres.</b></p> <p><b>This saving is highlighted under "Early Help" in Appendix 3, and will achieve a saving of £1.9m in 2016/17 and totalling £4.3m for the three years 2016/17-2018/19.</b></p>
<p><b>Impact summary:</b> The equality impact assessment 'Proposal to cease Children's Centre open access provision run by the Local Authority'. An Equality Impact Assessment for this proposal has been carried out and can be found online, with copies in the Members' room and is available for public inspection at County Hall on request. In summary, consideration of the data has told us the proposal disproportionately impacts negatively on families with children aged 0-5 assessed as level two on the Continuum of Need who are Black and Minority Ethnic (BME), teenage parents in some areas, women in general, pregnant women and women in the first 26 weeks of maternity leave, and families from the most deprived areas or workless households, as these groups are all more likely to access universal children's centre provision than the general population.</p> <p><b>Consultation</b>            Consultation took place between 16<sup>th</sup> November and 18<sup>th</sup> December 2015. This included focus groups with parents and Children's Centres partners in each of the CCG areas. In addition some individual 1 to 1 sessions with parents were undertaken. In total 384 individuals attended. An online and paper based survey was also administered. In total 432 responses were received. Additional information was received via letters to the Local Authority (one through a Local MP). The full consultation findings can be found in 'Children's Centre Changes Consultation Report' (available on the website).</p>		

### **Summary of key points: Comments/suggestions on the proposals**

- The current groups are open to all parents and are non-judgemental. Future targeted groups could be seen as stigmatising.
- Parents see the proposed changes as being short-sighted and are concerned for those with no family support.
- A number of parents are happy to volunteer in order to keep services running but parents and partners are concerned that this may mean that families' needs or safeguarding concerns are missed.
- There was also a concern that families may not be able to access support between the HV mandatory contacts.

### **Summary of key points: Impact if the proposals went ahead**

It is evident that the universal open access groups as they run at present are of great value to parents and partners and parents have told us that a cessation in this service will impact on them in the following ways:

- Increase isolation
- Reduce access to support and advice when they need it
- Lead to increased mental health problems
- Reduce opportunities for children to develop school readiness
- Reduce opportunities to learn good parenting technique
- Targeted provision will become stigmatised.
- There will also be an impact on low income families if no other free provision exists in the area.

And as such community resilience will reduce.

### **Mitigation**

- The key mitigating factor is that families requiring higher levels of need will be identified through HV mandatory checks and can be referred to targeted group provision or 1:1 key work support.
- Further, other services will continue to be able to refer families at level three on the continuum of need for key work provision via SPOA.
- Families with lower levels of support will be signposted to community play provision.
- The digital information and advice offer will be enhanced so that parents and carers can access advice online
- Children's Centres will actively promote opportunities for volunteers to lead universal provision with the centres.
- Children's Centres will offer a venue to community organisations to deliver services to support parents/carers and families.