

Report to: Lead Member for Adult Social Care and Health

Date of meeting: 15 December 2025

By: Director of Adult Social Care and Health

Title: The future of the Circle Room Sexual Health Service.

Purpose: To present the outcome of the public consultation and seek approval on the proposal for the future of the Circle Room Sexual Health Service.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Lead Member is recommended to:

- 1) Note the outcome of the consultation and Equality Impact Assessment; and
 - 2) Approve the proposal to maintain the Circle Room Sexual Health Service under a new contract as set out as option 2 in Appendix 4 of this report.
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1 Background

1.1 As part of East Sussex County Council's (ESCC) Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (RPPR) process for 2025/26, a proposal was made to decommission the Circle Room sexual health service in Lewes as de-commissioning the drop-in services would deliver a revenue saving of £45,000 annually. The proposed closure date is 31 March 2026, as this is also the expiry date of the current contract.

1.2 [On 4 June 2025 the Lead Member for Adult Social Care](#) and Health approved a targeted consultation to evaluate the Circle Room sexual health service in Lewes, and an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) was conducted to inform the decision-making process.

1.3 Recommendations regarding the future of the Circle Room are based on consultation findings, equality and financial considerations, and identified risks.

2 Supporting information

2.1 The consultation findings are summarised in the Consultation Report (Appendix 1). The key themes from the consultation were:

- The overwhelming opposition to closure
- The clinic is valued for accessibility and confidentiality
- There are concerns about the negative impact the closure will have
- Many felt alternative services were either unknown, unsuitable, or inaccessible, and that any financial savings would be offset by increased pressure elsewhere in the healthcare system.

2.2 Summary of anecdotal evidence from the service providers:

- Young people prefer the drop-in clinic model over traditional GP appointments.
- The GP-led service allows holistic assessments and immediate referrals for mental and physical health, offering broader support than specialist sexual health services.
- Young people value and respect the service, with some avoiding online or postal options due to personal circumstances or being aged under 16.
- ESCC's safeguarding team notes that children we care for in Newhaven favour this clinic.
- Data shows cost savings, with contraception services preventing repeat unintended pregnancies, saving £9 for every £1 spent ([Contraception: Return on Investment \(ROI\) report](#)).
- The cost of one unwanted child being provided care is approximately £700-£7,000 a week. [Children's social care cost pressures and variation in unit costs](#)
- This service reaches young people who are stating they may not go to their GP or access any services for contraception.

2.3 A Consultation Impact report has been written in response to the themes highlighted via the consultation. This document acknowledges challenges and barriers to access but also signposts to already available solutions, mitigating actions and to opportunities for change in service provision. The Consultation Impact report is Appendix 2 to this report.

2.4 Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been carried out by the Inclusion and Support Services team (see Appendix 3). The EqIA highlighted, the proposed closure may have the following negative implications:

- on those aged under 16 who do not have an alternative online option, the clinic saw 255 under 16s in the last year 2024-25.
- may present an increased risk for young women, with the potential consequence of unintended pregnancies due to unmet contraceptive needs.
- may negatively impact on young people residing in areas of high deprivation in Lewes District e.g. northwest of Lewes Castle and 'the Havens'.

2.5 The proposal to close the Circle Room clinic as part of the RPPR process has been reconsidered, as commissioners identified alternative savings within the sexual health budget due to a negotiated cost avoidance with the local Integrated Care Board (ICB).

2.6 This cost avoidance is related to the introduction of an ICB contract for the fitting of coils for non-contraceptive use. Previously, identifying the coils that were fitted for non-contraceptive reasons in women of fertile age was challenging, and the associated costs were covered by ESCC. Due to the new ICB contract, a cost avoidance has been identified for ESCC. This saving will meet the RPPR requirement as well as support the continuation of the Circle Room service.

2.7 In addition, the consultation clearly demonstrated the clinic's cost effectiveness and vital role to the community. This means that RPPR financial targets can be met and that the young person's clinic can be maintained. It is important to note that the ESCC sexual health budget used to fund the Circle Room only covers staff costs, while other expenses (eg. the physical building) are funded by the provider. This financial arrangement ensures the service remains accessible without compromising its quality or reach.

2.8 Following an options appraisal and consultation, maintaining the Circle Room service under a new contract of the value of £45,000 with revised specifications is recommended. This is

option 2 within the options appraisal, which is appendix 4 to this report. This approach enhances focus on alternative services, including online provision, and supports young people transitioning to the over-25 offer. It also enables referrals to wider support. The model may inform service expansion in underserved areas such as Uckfield and Bexhill. Outcome indicators will be monitored quarterly, with annual reviews. Future collaboration with Integrated Community Teams may extend services, subject to budget constraints. Funding is proposed for two more years to sustain and adapt the service based on findings.

3 Conclusion and Recommendations

3.1 The consultation and discussions on the future of The Circle Room Sexual Health Service demonstrated its cost effectiveness and crucial role in reducing unwanted pregnancies, Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), and HIV amongst people under 25 years old. The young people's sexual health service specifications will be reviewed. The required RPPR savings will be met by using sexual health budget identified through a negotiated cost avoidance with the local ICB.

3.2 The Lead Member is therefore recommended to:

- 1) Note the outcome of the consultation and Equality Impact Assessment; and
- 2) Approve the proposal to maintain the Circle Room Sexual Health Service under a new contract as set out as option 2 in Appendix 4 of this report.

MARK STANTON

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Background Documents:

None

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Consultation Findings Report

Appendix 2: Consultation Impact Summary

Appendix 3: Equality Impact Assessment

Appendix 4: Options appraisal