

# Property Strategy Consultation

## Focus Group for Families – Children's Centres

July 2016 v1

Author: Victoria Clifford

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## Introduction

A series of six focus groups were carried out across Lancashire, looking to engage with members of the community and ask their views on the Property Strategy Consultation in relation to Children's Centres.

The focus groups took place as follows;

Chorley	4 <sup>th</sup> July 2016
Lancaster	8 <sup>th</sup> July 2016
Hyndburn	11 <sup>th</sup> July 2016
Pendle	14 <sup>th</sup> July 2016
West Lancashire	15 <sup>th</sup> July 2016
Wyre	15 <sup>th</sup> July 2016

The groups were facilitated by an impartial research team, on behalf of the Asset Management Team within Lancashire County Council.

The research team followed a loose script to ensure consistency across all the districts in terms of the themes covered. The topics raised included;

- The group's use of the current Children's Centres
- The proposals to make changes to the County Council's buildings
- Envisaged access and impact on the Children's Centres
- Neighbourhood Centres

## Facilitation for the Property Strategy Consultation for the District of Chorley

Venue: Astley and Buckshaw Children's Centre, Chancery Road, Chorley, PR7 1XP

Name of Facilitators: Victoria Clifford and Ayub Laly

**Date: 4<sup>th</sup> July 2016**

### Background Information

Venue: Astley and Buckshaw Children's Centre – proposed to **no longer** deliver services (school site)

Centres across Chorley that are proposed to **continue** to deliver services:

- Chorley Library – nearest centre to Astley and Buckshaw. Proposed to deliver 0-19 services, library and YOT
- Coppull Library
- Eccleston Library
- Clayton Green Library
- Duke Street Children's Centre

Centres across Chorley that are proposed to **no longer** deliver services:

- Blossomfields Children's Centre (Eccleston)
- Clayton Brook Children's Centre (designated)
- Coppull Children's Centre (designated)
- Highfield Children's Centre (designated)
- Millfield Children's Centre (Brinscall) (designated)

There was only one participant at the consultation focus group. This was a female and her children were not within the Children's Centre age range (15 and 9 years old).

### Using the Current Children's Centre

The participant no longer uses the Children's Centres as her children are now grown up, but she did use it on a regular basis when her children were young. When the participant used the service she found it extremely useful and a very big resource of support and help. It gave her the opportunity to mix with other mums and exchange conversations at a demanding time of upbringing a child.

The participant felt that Children's Centres offer an excellent opportunity for children to develop, they hold a variety of events which help a child's development and motivation. It also allows a child to have freedom to visit different places rather than to be in one place (the home).

The participant explained that she felt the service provided currently is very good and there is no room for improvement. She had no further suggestions for improvements to the current offer.

### **Proposals to Make Changes to the County Council's Buildings**

The participant explained because she is a volunteer at a Children's Centre she is aware of the Property Strategy; what is to close and what is to remain open, including the Library Service. She understood the reasons behind the change, although she could not answer if it was fair or not because the cuts will still have to be made - if not within Children's Centres then elsewhere instead. However, she felt this service is convenient for many mums; it gives them the support and respite they need and parents could struggle if the offer is withdrawn. This will especially impact single parents and those less fortunate financially to afford help elsewhere. Any cuts made to Children's Centres could have an impact on the wellbeing of both the parent and child, therefore County Councillors should carry out the property review but keep the current services as they are.

The participant stated there will be no direct impact on the proposals as her children have grown up.

### **Children's Centres – Access and Impact**

It was difficult to gauge the impact of the proposals with the participant as her children are not current users of Children's Centres. However, in her role as a volunteer at Duke Street, she stated that she had heard worried parents discussing the impacts it will have on them. The main concerns with parents is around convenience – currently the Centres are located for most within easy travelling distance from their homes. It was felt that the proposal will mean that many will not be able attend at the centres because they will need to catch a taxi or bus and this may not be financially viable for them to do so. An example given was in Ecclestone; many of the service users do not drive and she felt they will be deprived.

The participant felt that Children's Centres are used as a respite service for parents, allowing them to drop off their children for two hours whilst they carry out jobs, visit friends/family or recharge themselves. She felt that if distance became an issue, parents would not be able to take advantage of this. She believed that the amount of people using the Children's Centres could reduce in number.

Activities currently vary from centre to centre, so the participant was unsure how the Property Strategy could affect the offer. She felt that parents from Brinscall, Adlington and Clayton-le-Brook may struggle to access any offer due the distance they would have to travel.

### **Neighbourhood Centres**

The participant felt that the Neighbourhood Centres are a great idea and welcomed the approach. However, she felt some services should not be included alongside a Children's Centre – mainly the service provided by the Youth Offending Team. She felt she would worry for the safety of both herself and her children. The participant

did welcome integrating services such as libraries or services for people with disabilities.

### **Overall Comments**

Overall the participant felt that Lancashire County Council should continue to provide the Children's Centre offer and keep it accessible. It currently helps some vulnerable members of society and this should be considered before decisions are made. She felt there are positives in merging services (except for the Youth Offending Team) but thought needs to be given about locations. The participant felt that Lancashire County Council should have asked for public opinion before the proposals, as at this stage there will only be minor tweaks that can be made.

Her final thought was that there has to be the right number of staff with the right motivation for the Children's Centres to continue successfully.

## Facilitation for the Property Strategy Consultation for the District of Lancaster

Venue: Balmoral Children's Centre, Balmoral Road, Morecambe, LA3 1HH

Name of Facilitators: Victoria Clifford and Roger Wells

**Date: 8<sup>th</sup> July 2016**

### Background Information

Venue: Balmoral Children's Centre – proposed to **no longer** deliver LCC services

Centres across Lancaster that are proposed to **continue** to deliver services:

- Westgate Children's centre – nearest to Balmoral
- Halton Library
- Appletree Children's Centre
- Morecambe Library
- Lune Park Children's Centre
- The Carnforth Hub Children's Centre and Young
- People's Centre

Centres across Lancaster that are proposed to **no longer** deliver services:

- Firbank Children's Centre (designated)
- Galgate Children's Centre (Ellel)
- Heysham Children's Centre and Young People's Centre (designated)
- Poulton Children's Centre (Morecambe) (designated)

There were eleven participants at the consultation focus group. The group included ten females and one male. All had children currently accessing Children's Centre provision in the Lancaster district and all centres were represented.

### Using the Current Children's Centre

The participants listed a range of services that they currently use within the Children's Centre setting. These included clinics, outreach services, courses, CAF appointments and access to other external agencies.

The group on the whole said they had very little trust in Children's Social Care and felt that Children's Centres were a crucial linkage to Social Care – ensuring families engaged but in a less scary way. Outreach was cited as an essential part of this.

It was felt that having Children's Centres on the doorstep was critical to accessing services – it allowed them to access support and stopped isolation.

Some services that a Children's Centre should additionally offer could be counselling or access to a medical practitioner.

## **Proposals to Make Changes to the County Council's Buildings**

The group felt that the Property Strategy was not very service user friendly. There was confusion over which centres were proposed to stay open or close. A few members of the group stated they had tried to access the website but found this very confusing, so had had little success. All members of the group were confused by the word 'designated' – they did not understand what this meant or the connotations for the relevant centre. The group felt the Strategy and Consultation had been written in a way that did not come across easily to them and wondered if they were being 'baffled with science' so less comments were made.

## **Children's Centres – Access and Impact**

In Lancaster there were felt to be some real issues with closing a few of the centres; namely Firbank, Heysham and Poulton. The group stated that some families simply won't cross the river to access their nearest provision. The distance to travel to the nearest centres was felt to be an issue, for example, the one way system in Lancaster is seen as quite frightening for pedestrians and one member stated she would not feel safe walking with a pushchair to the next available centre away from Firbank. Another group member said that it would take some service users two buses to reach the provision, which would put off those without access to a car attending.

Group members said that they had built up their relationship with the centre over time and the thought of having to attend a new centre filled them with dread. They felt a centre had to be local to create familiarity.

The Children's Centres were seen to be key for school readiness for children and many were concerned if they couldn't access the provision, their children would be disadvantaged.

All the group agreed that new parents seeing health visitors at the Centres may be put off attending if they had to take public transport, which could consist of two separate buses. This was especially worrying for heavily pregnant mums or new mums who may have had complications at birth/C sections and were unable to make longer journeys.

The question was raised if less centres meant less staffing and less sessions being available. It was felt by the group that preventative measures were going to decrease, which would result in a more costly crisis response causing costs to soar in the long run.

There were concerns from the group about capacity. The members stated that there were already waiting lists for some sessions. They questioned how this would be impacted if more people would be accessing a lesser number of centres.

The Children's Centre setting of a less clinical environment was felt to be key to their success. The group believed it put them at ease and they enjoyed attending.



## Neighbourhood Centres

The group felt that the Neighbourhood Centre approach was already happening within Children's Centres as many services already came together in the one setting. They felt they did not have enough information to comment if Neighbourhood Centres were a good idea, but stated that they would not like to see youth services, mental health services or drug and alcohol rehabilitation services around a place where their young children attended. This was due to safeguarding concerns and of feeling intimidated.

There was genuine concerns around the use of Morecambe Library being used with the 0-5 age range. The group felt it was not appropriate to have a health clinic there and cited safeguarding concerns, confidentiality concerns and they felt the building was not big enough for purpose.

The group also commented on the 12-19 offer and stated that they didn't feel that this age group should be mixed with Youth Offending Teams as this could stop the children not involved with YOT from attending due to intimidation or parents not wanting them influenced by those under the service.

## Overall Comments

The group were worried about how the closures affected those Children's Centres with nurseries attached. There had been no information given to parents and even Nursery Managers were devoid of information.

The group asked had any Members of the County Council visited the Children's Centres prior to the consultation and proposals being published? They felt that it was difficult to convey the importance of the work being carried out in the Centres and that a piece of paper didn't adequately show what was happening on the ground. They stated they would relish a visit from County Councillors before the September meeting to ensure that they fully understand the implications of closing their Children's Centres.

There were passionate concerns regarding social inclusion if the proposed Centres in Lancaster are closed down. It was felt that Children's Centres removed social isolation, including for extended family members, and that families could access vital health and support without the need of GPs or crisis intervention.

The group asked if the buildings could be used for different purposes to help keep them open. Income generation was discussed; charging internal/external agencies for room hire, fundraising bids, children's parties and respite care were all mentioned. The group felt that there would be no need to spend more on the facilities to make them income generation-ready as they were already at a high standard. It was felt to be a waste of resource to let the buildings go. The group were keen to see plans in place to ensure sustainability in the long term for Children's Centres.

The group felt that the real losers here would be vulnerable families – others with disposable income may be able to source provision elsewhere or use a car to get to Centres further away.

The accessibility to the consultation was again discussed, members of the group had found some links on the website were not working and it was generally hard to navigate.

The courses accessed by individuals were felt to be vital to their development - many had generally upskilled or improved on their parenting. There were concerns raised about what would happen to this area of support and urged to keep it at the current standard. Many group members felt courses had positively impacted on their lives.

The group were fearful if Children's Centres start running alongside Children's Social Care then this will put families off from attending. The current Children's Centre model enables families to seek support and advice without fears of reprisals.

Whilst decisions are being made about the future of Children's Centres, the group felt that interim support/groups should be in place. It was felt that decisions could not be made around if groups/support would be running as nobody fully understood what the service offer would be in the future. It was requested that this be looked at.

One participant stated that without the support given by the Children's Centre she did not believe that her family would still be together and that there would have been an intervention from Social Care.

## **Additional Information handed to the Research Team at the Lancaster Focus Group**

My name is Jessica Holmes and I'm a volunteer at Stanley's Youth & Community Centre. In March I took on the ongoing running and maintenance of the Balmoral Community Allotment that's located just at the back of the car park of this building. As far as I'm aware this is the only public access food growing space in Morecambe that doesn't require people pay any rent or maintain a specific plot in order to participate. Our members are free to turn up however often they wish and to either work or simply socialise in the space. This has proven very important as a number of our members could be considered socially marginalised or isolated and have a variety of serious health issues.

From starting, essentially from scratch in March, we now have 21 members on our allotment Facebook page and more people have recently been in contact with me since we had a stall at the local West End Festival a few weeks ago. As well as individuals we have a number of professional groups and charities either currently using the space or that have expressed an interest in doing so soon. The groups currently involved are the North Lancs Community Inclusion Mental Health Group, The Exchange Creative Community who use arts and crafts to improve local people's health and wellbeing and Stanley's Young People's Centre Playschemes. We have had interest expressed from Galloway's Centre for the Blind, Red Rose Recovery and from Out in the Bay. We also link up with the local schools and nurseries through our fruit donations and encouragement of the children to participate in fruit picking and we have the full support expressed by our local Councillors, Margaret Pattison and David Whitaker.

We've also recently been awarded £300 from the West End Millions Fund to provide both cooking facilities on site and to run a series of craft workshops in partnership with local businesses such as the Exchange and Shrimping Ltd who specialise in teaching project based computing to young people and other learners.

From starting out in March, I hope you'll agree, that Balmoral Community Allotment is gradually becoming a valuable and important community hub for the West End, which is one of the most deprived areas of Morecambe. Our future plan would be to simply keep building upon this and to provide a safe and healthy space for both the young and other members of our community. I'd like to offer a tour of what we have to all Council Members at the end of this meeting or at your own convenience.

## Facilitation for the Property Strategy Consultation for the District of Hyndburn

Venue: Great Harwood Children's Centre, Rushton Street, Great Harwood, BB6 7JQ

Name of Facilitators: Victoria Clifford and Roger Wells

**Date: 11<sup>th</sup> July 2016**

### Background Information

Venue: Great Harwood Children's centre – proposed to **continue** to deliver LCC services

Centres across Hyndburn that are proposed to **continue** to deliver services:

- Clayton-le-Moors and Altham Children's Centre
- Copper House Children's Centre (Rishton)
- Fairfield Children's Centre (Accrington)
- Sure Start Hyndburn - Church and West
- Accrington Children's Centre (The Park)

Centres across Hyndburn that are proposed to **no longer** deliver services:

- Huncoat Children's Centre (designated)
- Sure Start Hyndburn - Accrington South Children's Centre (The Beeches) (designated)

There were six participants at the consultation focus group. The group was made up of all females. All had children currently accessing Children's Centre provision in the Hyndburn district and all centres were represented as two participants had used all Centres.

### Using the Current Children's Centre

The services that the participants had used through the Children's Centre included accessing all the courses on offer. Some participants were very grateful for this offer and had upskilled from no qualifications to university study. This had given the participants a sense of achievement and had built their confidence. The group felt strongly about the positive impact they had experienced through peer support, allowing their children to mix and the social aspect – they believed this had stopped social isolation. The Centres were believed to help parents on the cusp of vulnerability, especially those considered at Level 2, stopping the escalation to Level 3 (prevention rather than crisis intervention). As well as supporting child development, it was felt that the Children's Centre had helped their child become school ready. They believed that by having ready access to non-judgmental support, the Centre had helped vulnerable parents to change their lives.

The participants were happy with the current offer and described it as a 'one stop shop', but there was flexibility if something more bespoke was required.

### **Proposals to Make Changes to the County Council's Buildings**

There was a mixed response, but on the whole little was known about the Property Strategy.

The participants raised concerns about what was happening to Youth Centres – this was felt essential for teenage development and they wondered how easy it would be for children to access positive interventions. The group were slightly confused about the offer, for example how libraries would merge with a range of services. Also raised was issues around the broadening of the age range to 0-11 and how this would impact the number of groups that can actually run within timeframes. Transport was raised early as a barrier to participation where Centres could be closing.

### **Children's Centres – Access and Impact**

The group were not sure of the impact of closures until they fully understood how this may affect the offer made by the Children's Centres. Participants were unsure if they would feel comfortable attending if older children were in the same building at the same time – they cited safeguarding issues. The 0-19 age range at Clayton was felt to be too wide. Great Harwood Library was also raised as a concern and the group wondered if this would attract teenagers and if older people would be comfortable with this.

There was the feeling that not a lot of thought had gone into the Property Strategy and that the safeguarding of children had not been thought through properly. Huncoat's potential closure was felt to be negatively affecting that community and there were concerns about other Centres becoming swamped with service users from elsewhere. The group couldn't see that the communities that currently use Huncoat or Beeches moving to a new Centre as there were too many obstacles – transport issues and minority communities stepping out of their comfort zones were discussed.

The group questioned what income generation methods had been employed to help keep Centres open, ideas such as open days and hiring out for meetings were given. Some members of the group were angered at the money that had been spent on road works and bus stations and felt the money should have been spent more appropriately on provision for children.

The group strongly believed that the Property Strategy would ensure costs increased in the long run, as support went from prevention to crisis intervention.

There were questions raised around the viability of some properties and if they were adequate to accommodate the bigger age range. Clayton again was cited as a concern, with the 0-19 age range proposed.

## Neighbourhood Centres

Concerns were raised around losing the progress individual services had made by pushing them together. The age ranges proposed were felt to be worrying and could be off-putting to all members of the community (e.g. teenagers mixing with the elderly – would the elderly be ok with this?).

The evidence base was requested that this approach was going to work. It was felt that the County Council were 'gambling' with vulnerable people's lives based on a cost-cutting exercise.

There was a strong belief within the group that changes shouldn't be made as it worked well as it was with integrated wrap-around support. They believed that Counsellors and decision makers should talk more to the Outreach Workers to understand the impact their decisions could have.

## Overall Comments

There was an overwhelming urge for the County Councillors to attend the Children's Centres in person and talk to the families who will be affected by the decisions made. The possibility of an 'Undercover Boss' type exercise was discussed. Again, the group reiterated that they couldn't understand how money would be saved in the long term, as it went from prevention to crisis.

Participants were passionate the Centres had changed their lives positively and any loss of service would be a blow for vulnerable families.

Some members of the group raised that schools should take more responsibility for pastoral care, as this would relieve Youth Services. Again, there was a heated discussion around how the County Council spends money elsewhere. It was felt that unnecessary roadworks/bus lanes/museums should be examined which would free up more money for services affecting vulnerable families.

The consultation document was felt to be too difficult for families to understand due to terminology. This was felt to be especially true for minority families, such as Polish. Participants believed it was not easy for them to express their opinions formally during the consultation process.

## Facilitation for the Property Strategy Consultation for the District of Pendle

Venue: The Beacon Centre, Maurice Street, Nelson, BB9 7HS

Name of Facilitators: Victoria Clifford and Roger Wells

**Date: 14<sup>th</sup> July 2016**

### Background Information

Venue: Beacon Centre – Proposed **to continue** to deliver LCC services

Centres across Pendle that are proposed to **continue** to deliver services:

- Earby Community Centre
- Colne Children's Centre
- Family Tree Children's Centre (Brierfield)
- Gisburn Road Children's Centre (Barnoldswick)
- Walton Lane Children's Centre (Nelson)

Centres across Pendle that are proposed to **no longer** deliver services:

- Pendleside Children's Centre (Barrowford)
- Riverside Children's Centre

There were eleven participants at the consultation focus group. The group was made up of eight females and three males. All had children currently accessing Children's Centre provision in the Nelson district. The two Centres proposed to close were not represented.

### Using the Current Children's Centre

Participants felt that they had accessed the full range of services on offer through Pendle Children's Centres. These included courses, nurseries, sessions, breastfeeding support and outreach services. There was a strong belief that the offer provided wrap-around care and helped exclude social isolation.

Parents of children with Special Educational Needs felt that the Children's Centres had really supported, where Social Care had failed. The theme of Social Care came up with several participants, who felt that without the Children's Centres, there could have been another outcome involving social workers if they'd not had the support of Outreach Workers.

There was a discussion around how being a new parent can be an especially anxious time and the Children's Centres moved vulnerable parents to a position of empowerment. One member of the group was now an active volunteer.

Many parents were passionate about breastfeeding and felt that the only support available was through Children's Centres and this was crucial.

The Centres were felt to be a safe haven, where parents could be sure that their children were safe, whilst they found support from peers and staff alike. This support was considered to be accessible for all, regardless of how much money a family had.

The offer from the current Children's Centre was felt to be more than adequate, although more of the same was felt to be needed as sessions were difficult to access due to be oversubscribed. Some ideas for other support that could be offered ranged from some form of exercise where children could be looked after or get involved, more emotional wellbeing support and extra support for children with Special Educational Needs, looking at integrating children and parents.

### **Proposals to Make Changes to the County Council's Buildings**

There was a mixed response when the group was asked if they'd seen the Property Strategy. Concerns were raised about the distance needed to travel to Centres – parents believed if services were not on the doorstep, they may not be accessed.

### **Children's Centres – Access and Impact**

The Centre in Trawden was felt to be a worry, this community could become isolated in winter months and parents may not be able to make the journey to another Centre.

The group felt that Social Care Teams had a very blinkered view of families and by taking away Children's Centres, there could be more referrals, moving from a prevention to crisis approach.

In Nelson it was believed that the Centres were vital for Asian families as they were deemed 'safe' spaces and mothers were allowed to use the facilities. There were concerns if the provision disappeared this community could become socially isolated.

The group were concerned that there was no representation from the Centres that were proposed to close. They wondered if this was due to distance, cost and fitting in with other childcare arrangements. They felt that this could reflect their future withdrawal from the service if the Centres were closed. The group asked if Outreach could continue, maybe from another site, in Trawden and Barrowford.

Real safeguarding concerns were highlighted if support was withdrawn from Children's Centres. The group were worried for the affect it would have on future generations.

### **Neighbourhood Centres**

The participants were worried about the size of the buildings and how they would accommodate the proposed services. One member of the group stated that they believed costs would rise at the remaining Centres anyway, as they would be open longer, leading to higher costs for heating, lighting etc.

The group felt they would benefit from some other services being integrated, such as CAMHS and that counselling services would be ideally placed at Neighbourhood Centres. One member of the group had accessed grief counselling for the loss of a child, but this has taken place in a hospice, which was distressing.



Concerns were raised about the Family Tree Centre and how safeguarding would be ensured when services such as a library was incorporated. Other safeguarding concerns were raised around mixing younger and older children. The group thought if this could happen at different times of the day, it may be acceptable, but sharing rooms and resources may not be appropriate (e.g. young children in a room advertising sexual health services on the walls).

Participants were worried that the Neighbourhood Centres could become too stressful to use, if too many services were crammed into one space. They felt this could lead to social isolation for many members of the community.

### **Overall Comments**

The group requested that County Councillors should experience first-hand the services provided by a Children's Centre to allow them to understand the services that they were proposing to cut. They understood that cuts had to be made and what was important to one sector of the community, wasn't important to another, but urged the County Council to not close the Children's Centres.

Income generation was cited as response to less funding – through hiring out facilities and nominal payments for services, the Children's Centres could look to remain open.

## Facilitation for the Property Strategy Consultation for the District of West Lancashire

Venue: Park Children's Centre, Barnes Road, Skelmersdale, WN8 8HN

Name of Facilitators: Victoria Clifford and Roger Wells

***Date: 15<sup>th</sup> July 2016***

### Background Information

Venue: Park Childrens Centre – proposed to continue to deliver services

Centres across West Lancs that are proposed to **continue** to deliver services:

- First Steps Children's Centre (Skelmersdale)
- Ormskirk Library
- The Grove Young People's Centre and Children's Centre (Burscough)
- Upholland Children's Centre

Centres across West Lancs that are proposed to **no longer** deliver services:

- Hesketh with Beconsall Children's Centre
- Moorgate Children's Centre (Ormskirk) (designated)
- St John's Children's Centre (Skelmersdale) (designated)

Only one female participant attended the focus group. Her two children did attend several of the Children's Centres in West Lancashire, although she did not attend any of the Centres proposed to close.

### Using the Current Children's Centre

The participant used the Stay and Play sessions within the Children's Centre setting. She felt that these had already decreased in frequency and were vital for parents during the school holidays as this made support affordable and educational.

The offer made by the Children's Centres currently was felt to be adequate and that the wrap-around support was extremely useful for parents and children alike.

### Proposals to Make Changes to the County Council's Buildings

The participant had not seen the Property Strategy document, but was aware of the list of proposed closures in West Lancashire.

The proposed closures did not really affect the participant, but she felt it was a shame that affected families had not made the session to raise their concerns. The participant wondered if the time of the session, and distance from affected families' homes, had affected their ability to attend.

### **Children's Centres – Access and Impact**

The participant was concerned about how services proposed to run at the library would impact on the Early Years Foundation Stage. She felt very lucky that the 1<sup>st</sup> Steps and Park Children's Centres were not proposed to close. She hoped that Lancashire County Council had understood how deprived the area was, so had decided to keep the provision in these areas.

The main concern for the participant was not over the closure of the buildings, but on the remaining offer available and the impact a reduction in this could have on families. The participant feared a move from Early Years Foundation Stage Learning to more Family Support would happen, which would not fit with her needs. It was believed that the provision had already reduced due to staff reductions.

### **Neighbourhood Centres**

The participant felt the principle of the Neighbourhood Centre was a good one, with many services under one roof. She believed that Citizens Advice Bureau and the services of a family law solicitor could be useful services to be part of the Neighbourhood Centre.

There were no concerns raised over the broader age range at Centres as the participant would not be leaving her children alone whilst attending. She felt that timetabling would have to be carried out carefully though to ensure certain groups didn't clash.

### **Overall Comments**

Although not personally affected, the participant was concerned for the communities that use St John's, Moorgate and Hesketh Bank. She felt these children could miss out on becoming school ready and families from the area could suffer from social isolation due to the distance they would have to travel to their nearest Centre, combined with additional costs. The participant believed these children wouldn't possibly be able to access Early Years provision which would put them at a disadvantage to their peers.

## **Additional Information handed to the Research Team at the West Lancs Focus Group**

My name is Nicola Royds. I am a mum of two little boys aged 1 and 3 years of age. I have lived in Hesketh Bank and Tarleton all of my life. I have used Hesketh Bank Children's Centre since the birth of my first son in 2013. I am a paediatric nurse and work on the local children's ward. I also voluntarily lead the breastfeeding group at Hesketh Bank children's centre.

I wanted to attend the focus group on Friday 15th July however due to work commitments I am unable to attend in person, so I wanted to put my views down in writing so that they could be shared in the appropriate ways as part of this consultation.

I feel very strongly that the loss of the Children's Centre is a huge blow to our small, rural community. I think there is a lot of potential in the new plans to create a neighbourhood centre within Tarleton library, however I think the plans as they stand will leave many needs of the community unmet.

I have tried to structure my thoughts using questions/subheadings. I hope this is useful.

### **What we used to have:**

Booking in with the midwife was held at the Children's Centre, to introduce new mums to the building at an early stage. After the baby was born, Children's Centre staff would visit the mum at home and introduce them to the services, support, information and groups available at the centre. If breastfeeding they would offer the loan of a breast pump and then visit the mum again to go over its use. They could also do additional visits to the mum to offer breastfeeding support if needed. When mum went along to baby weighing clinic in the Health Centre there would frequently be a member of Children's Centre staff there, who the mum would probably have met previously on a home visit. This member of staff could chat with the mum, reinforcing the information and advice already given, and remind the mum about the services and encourage them to come along to the Thursday morning baby group. This whole picture led to the mums feeling comfortable with that staff member, and gave them the confidence to come along to the baby group, knowing there'd be a friendly and welcoming face there.

On a Thursday the centre ran three groups: newborns, 6 months to one year olds, and children over one (also for mums with an older child and a baby) in the afternoon. The groups carried an optional donation of £1 and included a healthy snack and a drink, and age appropriate activities for mums and babies to participate in.

The staff at the groups were excellent and ensured that everyone felt welcome and included. They would arrange for professionals from other sectors to visit and there were lots of opportunities for health promotion advice to be informally given to mums. A lady from the dental service came regularly and offered advice about teeth brushing, diet, drinks and weaning. The health visiting team offered sessions such as safer sleep, stop smoking, healthy weaning etc.

As a brand new mum I found these sessions invaluable. If we had had a sleepless night, or my baby was so unsettled we'd struggled to get dressed that morning, it was great to know that if we could just get ourselves out of the house, there was

somewhere to go, with supportive staff, full of other mums in the same position as myself. It didn't even matter if I'd not managed to have any breakfast yet as there was a piece of toast and a drink on offer there. We did lovely activities that many new mums might not think to do at home, such as making Mother's Day cards with baby's footprints on, or sand and water play, or sensory sessions. We sang nursery rhymes and read stories to the babies. All such valuable things in terms of a baby's development and promoting bonding between mum and baby.

I also did a course in baby massage at the centre which carried a minimal charge and was run by the health visiting team.

When I had my second baby, the afternoon session was invaluable. There was no other group in the area where a toddler was welcome and had activities specifically for them, but also with a safe area with stimulating activities for a new baby as well. This group was so popular that it frequently was full, with the maximum capacity of the children's centre reached and families being turned away, such was the demand for this service.

The mums I met in these groups have remained my friends, and with babies of the same age we've truly gone on a journey together and been able to support each other through some challenges and share great times together also. We frequently met outside of the group, arranging visits to the park, picnics, play dates at each other's houses etc.

Whilst attending baby groups at the centre I asked whether a breastfeeding group could be established. With the support of the Children's Centre and the health visitors we got a group up and running. We meet at the centre every Tuesday afternoon and numbers are increasing all the time. This week we had ten mums attend, with babies ranging from new born to 1.5 years. This is an opportunity for new mums to seek out advice and support from like-minded mums who understand what it's like to be in their shoes. Again, through this group mums get to meet others from their local area, who in many cases become friends who see each other outside of the group and who support each other in many ways as their babies develop and grow.

Currently however the Thursday baby groups have stopped running, despite the obvious need and demand for them.

**What we will have after the proposed changes:**

We will potentially have a space within the new neighbourhood centre at Tarleton library, but as I understand it no member of staff would be available to reinstate and facilitate sessions such as the ones described above.

The breastfeeding group is currently volunteer led, and with support hopefully this could continue to run, however further input from the Children's Centre is required. See below.

**What else is there in the villages in place of these services?**

There is an excellent privately ran group called PEEP which runs at the local Christian centre. They hold classes for babies of all ages up to school age. However there is a considerable charge for this, as well as a termly registration fee. In total this comes to around £40-50 per term. This is not inclusive as many families could not afford this, certainly as in my case where a family has more than one child to pay for. This is term time only.

Two of the local primary schools, as well as one local church hall, hold weekly toddler groups. There is a baby area within each. Again these are term time only. These carry a small weekly charge also. None of these hold a specific baby group. I think a mum with a new born baby would feel that this was not the place for them, as they are obviously full of older children, quite noisy and not very appealing to a mum with her first baby. They can also be quite daunting places to walk into as they are usually held in large halls, whereas the children's centre has such a small intimate feeling which makes it more friendly and accessible.

All of the groups mentioned above are term time only. This leave long stretches of time where these families have nowhere to go, which was one of the huge positives with the Children's Centre groups as they ran year round. For many these groups are the focus of their whole week so to go for up to six weeks without a group is an awfully long time.

Another independent business offers sing and sign and baby massage classes in the village. She currently rents the Children's Centre as her base. I am not aware of what her charges are but again I suspect that the cost associated with these classes would make them hard for many families to access.

The alternative to our Children's Centre is for mums to use the Grove Children's Centre at Burscough. For a mum from Hesketh Bank who didn't drive, or who was unable to drive following a caesarean etc, getting to Burscough would involve two buses, leaving Hesketh Bank at 08.40 and arriving home at 12.51 after another two buses home, to attend a 10-11.30 group. This is extremely unrealistic for a new mum, with a pram and a new baby. So this completely excludes these parents from being able to attend a baby group.

So whilst we are lucky that we have lots of activities available to us in the community, none of these meet the needs of all parents in the way that the Children's Centre has previously been able to do.

### **What needs are there locally?**

Whilst the villages of Hesketh Bank and Tarleton are relatively affluent, I don't believe this means there are less needs in our community, just different needs.

Social isolation is a big issue facing families with young children around here. Most new mums in our area will have been working prior to the birth of their baby. Often this means they do not know their neighbours very well, and may not know other young people with families of their own. Many younger couples are new to the area, with lots of new housing being built in recent years. So when working full time many have not had the opportunity to engage with the local community very much. When their partners return to work a couple of weeks after the birth of their baby, mums can often feel very alone and may go for long periods of time without adult interaction.

Also with good employment rates, even if they were more local and perhaps had parents living in the area, they may well (like myself) have two parents still working full time, again leaving a gap in the support that these new mums could need. In an area where less people were in work they might actually find they have more support available to them on a day to day basis for this reason. Families with lower incomes would also get more help with childcare at a younger age. Whilst mums like myself who wish to return to work face childcare costs that might actually mean they are

less financially well-off be going to work. This might lead to the mother giving up her employment, thus increasing the isolation already discussed.

This issue of isolation is increased by the rural community we live in. Bus links are poor and whilst mums who drive and own a car might access various groups in neighbouring villages, mums without a car would find many of these impossible to get to on public transport, and the infrequency and cost of buses makes this yet harder to access.

Maternal mental health is key to ensuring that the family functions properly and that children are well cared for and thus develop to their full potential. The provision of a baby group accessible to all would go a long way towards enhancing the lives of these families.

### **Are needs being met currently?**

I do not believe that the current provision, with all baby groups already having closed at the Children's Centre, is meeting the needs of all of the families in our community.

In fact the only services offered now at our Children's Centre in Hesketh Bank are the midwives booking-in service, and the volunteer led breastfeeding group. Other than that it is used by the school for before and after school club, and by a lady offering privately run baby massage classes.

### **What would help going forward?**

In line with the new buildings proposals, if we did get a space allocated within Tarleton Library I don't think any of the issues above would be resolved without dedicating the time of a member of staff to reinstating some of the services we've already lost, namely the baby groups.

I understand there will be staff based there, but not with a view to actually running any sessions there. Also I have been told that the member of staff will still attend baby clinic regularly. But to promote what? When there will be no groups or facilities to tell mums about, except for Burscough, and potentially the breastfeeding group, if a suitable alternative venue can be found, and if volunteers are given adequate support to enable it to continue.

If one member of staff had just one day a week set aside to run activities in our area, they could meet all of the needs discussed above.

There could be age specific baby groups held at different times throughout the day. If these were in the original format with 1.5 hour sessions, then a breastfeeding group could also be facilitated on the same day.

I really feel that with the allocation of this amount of staff time the needs of the community would be being met to a far greater extent than under the current proposals.

In terms of ensuring that the breastfeeding group is able to continue to run successfully, as stated above I feel that there are areas that could be improved/further supported. To sustain the group and ensure that the support given is of a high standard some additional input/training for the volunteers would be a great, as the "group leader" I have no formal breastfeeding training, and this is something that would certainly help to develop the group. Also, there is currently no effective way to ensure that new mums in the area are made aware of our group. The midwives are not being consistent in telling new mums in the area about the

group and by the time the health visitors get out to see the family, and in turn pass on their details to the Children's Centre, several weeks have passed since the baby's birth, and the mum has potentially gone without support in the most difficult first few weeks of feeding her baby. Although they get referred to FAB (families and babies) by the hospital, they often receive only telephone support from them, and again they are not consistent in telling the local mums about our group, so face to face support is not always given to these mums. FAB seem reluctant to visit mums in our area as we lie on the periphery of their area, and I think this contributes to the fact that often only telephone support is given to many mums. Some work around these issues is needed, with information/literature held by midwives, the local children's ward etc all needing to be updated so that any mum in our area is given the correct information regarding groups and other sources of support, to ensure they are fully supported and given the best opportunity to be successful in breastfeeding their baby. Again, if volunteers like myself were given some more formal role, we could take on more responsibility for helping to make contact with some of these new mums, for example a text message inviting them to group or asking if they have any issues. But whilst I am "just another mum" within the group there is obviously no way that I can be given the personal information of new mums. Currently we use a Facebook group that I set up to promote the group to local mums. This group is very well used and many mums who can't make it to group seek support via the Facebook group instead. Again I worry that without any formality to this, there are some issues around accountability and whether the support being offered is in line with current recommendations etc, and this is something we should definitely look at further to take the group forward.

I hope that my views are put forward, and I would be very keen to offer any further information that may be required, and also to support the new services in whatever format they take.

Thank you

Nicola Royds



## Facilitation for the Property Strategy Consultation for the District of Wyre

Venue: Flakefleet Children's Centre, Northfleet Avenue, Fleetwood, FY7 7ND

Name of Facilitators: Victoria Clifford and Roger Wells

***Date: 15<sup>th</sup> July 2016***

### Background Information

Venue: Flakefleet Children's Centre – proposed to continue to deliver LCC services (school site)

Centres across Wyre that are proposed to **continue** to deliver services:

- West View Children's Centre
- Garstang Library
- Thornton Children's Centre

Centres across Wyre that are proposed to **no longer** deliver services:

- Cleveleys Library and Children's Centre
- Fleetwood Children's Centre (designated)
- Over Wyre Children's Centre (Hambleton satellite)
- Over Wyre Children's Centre (Preesall satellite)
- Poulton-le-Fylde Children's Centre
- Rural Wyre Children's Centre (Garstang) (designated)

There were five participants at the Wyre focus group. The group was made up of females. One participant was from the district of Fylde. The other four members of the group used a mix of Centres staying open and some that were due to close.

### Using the Current Children's Centre

The group used a wide range of services currently offered by the Children's Centres in the district of Wyre. They believed the drop-in sessions were crucial for parents who could not afford other types of Early Years provision. The sensory room at Kemp Street was felt to be a real asset. Breastfeeding support was also cited by a number of participants as a vital service enabling parents to give their children the best start in life.

By using the Children's Centres, the group felt that they were stopping themselves becoming socially isolated. Regardless of background and social status, it was believed that new parents are vulnerable and through social interaction with other adults they were able to cope. The group felt comfortable being in the company of other like-minded people.

One member of the group stated that it was essential that Children's Centres were within walking distance as people couldn't always access services without a car or on public transport (e.g. when recovering from a C section). The group also discussed the need for provision to take place in smaller settings. This enabled the child to build in confidence and this was invaluable to ensure school readiness.

The group had already experienced a reduction in provision and said that there were waiting lists in place for many classes.

If any improvements could be made to the Children's Centre offer this could include more parenting classes before the baby arrives, to ensure parents are ready. There was also a call for more breastfeeding areas that parents could use ad hoc, as some found it daunting to breastfeed in public.

### **Proposals to Make Changes to the County Council's Buildings**

There was a low response when asked if participants had seen the Property Strategy.

Concerns were raised over the closure of Kemp Street. Participants were worried about what would happen to the resources (such as the sensory room). It was felt that Kemp Street and Cleveleys were easily accessible due to tram links. It was also felt that the Cleveleys Centre worked well alongside the library setting.

The participant from Fylde cited Freckleton as a concern. It was felt this community would be losing all facilities and would become socially isolated.

### **Children's Centres – Access and Impact**

The group believed that closures to the Children's Centres in Wyre could result in a rise of mental illness, social isolation and mean that children will not be school ready. This would affect the whole community and all age ranges.

There was a fear about some communities losing all services, such as Cleveleys. It was felt that for some children not at nursery, the loss of groups will take away their social development. One member stated that some children would not have any interaction with peers until school.

The participants were fearful of losing their support networks. The support was felt to be non-judgmental and improved their confidence.

It was believed that the goals of Children's Centres was different to other facilities, such as church play groups and free play, and that Centres provided wrap-around support which couldn't be accessed elsewhere.

One participant stated that it felt as though her choices were being removed. She wanted to be the key person raising her child, with gentle support, but felt she was being pushed into a 'nanny state'.

Kemp Street was raised as an issue if it was to close. It was felt that other Centres were not as accessible for Fleetwood residents, parking was frequently an issue at other sites and that it could put service users off from going to baby weigh or seeing the Health Visitor.

One member of the group, who was a stay at home mum, felt that if the Chatter Group at Cleveleys was to go, she would feel quite housebound. She believed that there was nothing else on offer for her that was easily accessible. The group felt that going to the groups was sometimes the only adult interaction they had all day.

The participants were also concerned that for the Centres remaining open, they could become too crowded and provision would be difficult to access. There was also fears about different age groups mixing and how this would work practically.

The group wondered if the Children's Centres could make themselves more available and open, income generate and pull classes and services together in order to try to keep themselves open.

### **Neighbourhood Centres**

The group generally felt uncomfortable about the Neighbourhood Centre approach. They stated that they wouldn't want their young children around certain members of the community in a single building.

The group wanted to understand how the Centres would be managed. For example, they couldn't understand how a room could cater for a young baby and a teenager. They also wanted to understand how the creation of Neighbourhood Centres would affect the offer.

On a positive note, participants thought it would be good to bring some services together, like the Sure Start model. This could be a one stop shop including doctors, nurses, dentists and speech therapy.

Breastfeeding mums felt they would be uncomfortable in a centre feeding their babies around teenagers, and thought that teenagers would feel awkward around this too.

The group struggled to understand how a 0-19 age range would come together and would welcome further information around this, including safeguarding measures.

### **Overall Comments**

Participants felt that the decision makers needed to see the Children's Centres for themselves before they made a decision on the Property Strategy. They stated it was easy to make a decision whilst they remained detached and would welcome talking to County Councillors to discuss the impact the service had had on their lives.

The group believed that the Property Proposals were hitting both ends of the spectrum with the possibility of social isolation (e.g. would an older person who may use the library for social contact be happy sharing the facility with babies and teenagers).

Again, income generation was discussed and the group thought that a Centre could pay for itself if it opened up to more users, like a church hall does.

The group spoke passionately about how they felt Lancashire County Council was taking away vital resources and stripping away communities. It was believed that support would be shifted to further along in a child's life, from preventative support to crisis intervention.

## **Additional Information handed to the Research Team at the Wyre Focus Group**

Dear Sir or Madam

This is a letter of concern for the proposal of the Children's Centre closing in the Lancashire area. I can't help but feel as a woman all our services and benefits to our wellbeing are being cut. The majority of us take maternity leave to nurture and bond with our babies from birth but the Government seems to be massively discouraging this. It is vital that I inform you of the effects you are going to create for our future generations if you cut the funding to our much needed Centres.

It has been well researched that children's brains develop at a rapid rate from birth to two years of age. Yet the services being cut directly affect the children in this age group. Baby groups offer young babies a chance to start interacting with others, explore new environments and experience healthier activities. As a parent I have already learnt a great deal about my child, her development and met people who I can approach if I have worries or concerns about my child's development which is critical at this early stage. It has also kept me going on those tired days when I just needed a bit of a chat and to get out of the house on a rainy day.

Money is being spent in all areas of children's development in primary and high school. However it has been proved that the earlier the intervention on development concerns and issues there is a higher success rate for children being ready for school and completing a decent education. The groups give parents an opportunity to discuss our concerns in an informal setting without feeling judged. Practitioners can guide us to the correct services which can often be difficult enough. So far I have met numerous professional who I wouldn't have known existed. I don't want to sit at home on social media or Google to talk about issues I may have concerns with, I want to talk to a real person and want my child to learn this skill as well.

As a first time mum I have accessed Bump, Birth and Beyond and that provided me with a lot of information I needed for the arrival of my little girl. By accessing this early class I have also accessed the Baby Massage group and the Mother and Baby groups. Having a C section it was a while until I could access these services. They have provided me with information to continue with breastfeeding (another service being cut due to Government funding), moral support and has given me information on ways to help my child when upset through colic and other childhood issues (injections, teething and bonding).

I feel these centres offer parents ways of teaching their children to be sociable that should improve how many children access speech and language. Are we going to have to wait until our children reach school age to access speech and language therapy?

I feel the Centre has also helped with my relationship with my husband. It can be very hard being at home with a young child and maternity pay is not a lot to live off. The groups offer a method for women to communicate and socialise. I'm sure this also lowers postnatal depression as we don't feel so isolated and can share those tough experiences like sleepless nights and long sessions of crying (the babies, not us).

If centres cannot be saved could today have been put together with community members to decide on how to use the Centres better? For example why do other

Mother and Baby groups use premises that are not Children's Centres? Why cannot they use centres that are located just around the corner?

I don't want to live in a society where we are limited to our choices when on maternity leave. I'm not ready to return to work and send Isla to nursery but I still need to meet other parents and find out information about how to offer the best to my child. Why are mainly women being targeted with cuts to the services they access? It could be interpreted that we encourage skin to skin to bond with our children but not have choices and support with breastfeeding, for nurseries to take responsibility for our children whilst we return to work. To be honest this is not the vision I have – I want to bond with my child, aid her development and offer her different experiences and cultures by meeting other families and enjoy her early years before she goes to school. Why is this so taboo?

Please consider the services you are cutting! Please can we find a way to save them for the sake of our community?

Thanks

Jennifer Banner

## Summary of Key Points from the Focus Groups

### Using the Current Children's Centre

It was felt that;

- The Children's Centres are an invaluable resource of support and help and participants accessed a range of resources on offer and this was important, regardless of background or social status of the parents
- The Centres are a key way of stopping social isolation at a time where most parents are feeling vulnerable and alone
- Children's Centres are a vital part of child development, including getting children school ready
- There was little trust in Social Care and it was felt that Children's Centre outreach worked well in ensuring vulnerable families remained engaged and together
- Courses offered by the Children's Centre were crucial in upskilling, building confidence and self-esteem
- The current Children's Centre offer, on the whole, was felt to be adequate for parents' and children's needs, although if possible it would be useful to have counselling, access to a medical practitioner, exercise sessions, more emotional wellbeing support, Citizens Advice Bureau, family law, breastfeeding spaces, parenting classes before baby arrives and support integrating SEN children and parents. A call for 'more of the same' was discussed as sessions were often oversubscribed

### Proposals to Make Changes to the County Council's Buildings

- There was a mixed response in regards to what was known about the property strategy. Where participants were actively involved (e.g. through volunteering), they felt they understood the proposals. Most service users did not fully understand how the closures would impact the offer made
- Although participants understood the need to make cuts, they felt these should be directed away from Children's Centres. There was an understanding that the money had to be saved from somewhere and that another service area would suffer, but felt that Children's Centres provided essential help for some of the most vulnerable members of Lancashire's society
- Accessing the property strategy was not felt to be service user friendly. Participants were confused by jargon, broken links and unclear information

### Children's Centres – Access and Impact

- There was concern raised over the distance some parents would have to travel in order to access their nearest centre. Participants felt that distance

could be a barrier to using the centres – the expense to get there, time for travelling alongside other commitments (such as school drop-offs), crossing busy city centres – and this could impact on the more vulnerable users who would not be able to financially commit to attending. Alongside this was the worry for new mums/heavily pregnant mums who may not physically be able to make the journey

- There was some concern about how the Property Strategy could affect the capacity and offer made by the Children's Centres. Participants were interested in how the timetable/number of sessions etc. would look, especially if being accessed by more users
- It was felt important that Centres had a local focus and this could be lost if properties closed. There were also concerns for minority communities – if some Centres were closed, it was questioned if parents would access the service elsewhere
- Concerns were raised around moving from prevention to crisis – with crisis seen as a more costly outcome in the long run
- Questions were raised around income generation, or how money spent elsewhere with the County Council could be moved to Children's Centres' budgets to keep buildings open
- In some areas there was a lack of representation from Centres proposed to close. The groups wondered if this was indicative of their use of Children's Centres in the future, as families probably hadn't made the sessions due to transport, money and time commitments

### Neighbourhood Centres

- Most participants felt the Neighbourhood Centre approach was a positive one. However;
  - Concerns were raised about which other services could be located alongside a Children's Centre. This included the Youth Offending Team, which parents felt would put them off using the service as they would fear for safeguarding and the impact of young offenders around their young children
  - Some buildings were questioned in relation to safeguarding and confidentiality
  - Housing different generations in one place was felt to be off-putting for vulnerable members of society (e.g. teenagers could put off elderly people from using services)
  - The approach was felt to be a gamble, with vulnerable people possibly suffering if it failed
  - There was concern raised over different generations using the same facilities (e.g. parents with young children would not want to use a room which had sexual health posters on the walls)

- Concerns were raised over cramming too many services in one Centre which could make using services too stressful and lead to social isolation

### Overall Comments

- The continuation of Children's Centres were seen as vital, as they provide support and advice for a whole spectrum of service users, including very vulnerable parents and children. Some participants felt passionately that without support from their Children's Centre, they would not be a family unit today. This linked in with a distrust of Social Care and the need for a softer, less fear provoking support network provided by the Children's Centres
- It was suggested that Lancashire County Council should have asked for public opinion before the proposals were drawn up
- It was felt that in the future it will be important to ensure that there are the right number of employees who are motivated to ensure the success of Children's Centres
- There was confusion around Children's Centres with nurseries attached and what would happen if these Centres closed
- There was a request from several Centres for the County Councillors to visit Children's Centres to get a feel of the impact the service had before making any decisions to close buildings
- There was a real fear that by closing Children's Centres there could be a rise in social isolation for vulnerable service users
- Questions were raised about income generation as an alternative to closing Centres down and how money was being spent elsewhere with the County Council, which should be directed to more vulnerable families
- How the cuts and possible closures affected courses accessed by service users was a concern. It was felt that courses had positively affected many participants
- There were concerns about a lack of continuity of provision/offer whilst decisions were being made about the future of Children's Centres



## Soundbites from the Property Strategy Consultation Focus Groups

“The distance for some families to travel to their nearest Centre will put off those who can't afford public transport and who do not have a car.”

“I can understand there is a need to save money, but the Children's Centres should be protected.”

“This strategy is going to affect vulnerable families in our area.”

“Through the help given by my Children's Centre I have been able to keep my family together – without this Centre, which is due to close, Social Services would have been involved.”

“I really don't trust Social Services, that's why I access help here. It's a safe environment for me to improve myself.”

“Accessing the courses has positively changed my life. I had no qualifications before here, now I'm at university. I've grown in confidence and self-belief.”

“I can't see that some minority communities will move to a new Centre... there are too many obstacles in their way.”

“Surely this approach is going to cost more in the long run? Crisis intervention will be more costly than prevention measures.”

“Why fix what isn't broken? LCC are taking a gamble with vulnerable lives!”

“It feels like my choices are being removed. This is impacting mainly on women and young mums – we are looking to a future in a nanny culture. I need support, but want to be the key person my child develops with. The Children's Centres allow me to do this.”

“I didn't know anybody in my area, but through attending my local Children's Centre, I found out I wasn't alone. I'm not sure I would have coped without the support.”