

From: [REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, December 29, 2023 12:59 PM

To: [REDACTED]

Cc: [REDACTED]

Subject: Children's Centre Consultation

Dear [REDACTED]

I hope you had a lovely Christmas with the family and a well earned rest?

I hope you don't mind me contacting you but I tried to complete the Children's Centre consultation last night and have some concerns about it which I wanted to share with someone.

1. The questionnaire is targeted at parents and professionals so I felt it was appropriate for me to complete it. However, all the questions relate to the impact the changes will have on my family and as a professional this is not relevant so I am forced to say no impact. This is a design fault which will distort the finding as it will force people who are no longer using the service and professionals so say the changes will have no impact as they will not impact "their" family directly.
2. Question 9 has a typo in it as it has two options that are the same and not an option for some negative impact - again this will distort the answers
3. One question asks for which of the activities offered by the CCs are more useful. This should be determined by attendance figures which are known not by someone ticking a box
4. All the ABSS options on the list of services are only available, as far as I know, in the ABSS children's centres so if people tick these options they will never be offered in the other children's centres as the centres do not have the resources to offer them currently?
5. The ABSS project was designed as a test and learn programme to determine what services are needed for Children and Families in the early years, which services actually make a difference to the children. Surely this should be used to drive the changes to the services offered in Southend, along with other empirical evidence rather than based on a consultation, although I appreciate this is also required. I could see no reference that any decisions were being driven by evidence either from ABSS or other studies?
6. Within the report it references that some of the services withdrawn from the Children's Centres will be provided in future by the health services. Please could you confirm if health have an increased budget to enable them to deliver these services? Children's Centres started to deliver these services because they were not being delivered by health so I have no confidence that they will be able to deliver them in the future without increases to their funding. Health were only able to provide very limited support for those who were escalated as in difficulty. Children's Centre services were designed as preventative services and that is very different from what health will be able to offer. A great example of this is the breastfeeding support which children's centres had to start to deliver due to need as this was not offered by health. Health then ran a series of ABSS trials which showed the benefits of breastfeeding support on the wellbeing of both mother and child and also the impact on breastfeeding rates. However, this is almost entirely offered now by the Cake Club as neither health or CC's have the resources to offer this properly.

7. Blenheim children's centre was part funded by extended services money which funded the cafe facilities and cafe area - this was because the consultation highlighted the need for a community facility in the area. It was need and consultation driven and designed as a meeting place for the community not only families with young children. The cafe operated as a self funded unit paying the school for the space and resources used based on the footage and consumption. I understand that this facility has been removed from the community now. The cafe has closed and people are no longer allowed to even use the toilet facilities - how is the community to be compensated for this loss of facilities?
8. If centres are to become main sites and then some offering selected services and/or reduced services - what will happen in the sites when they are not offering services? The costs of running these centres is made up of staffing (largest element) and running costs. The running costs remain even if the centres are closed and we all know that centres that are partially closed will still incur the running and maintenance costs (or be left to become obsolete as many council building are now and have been in the past). It is neither cost efficient or a good use of public funds for these centres to remain empty for much of the time. What is the proposal offered by the council for the utilisation of these valuable public buildings?
9. The consultation mentions that some of the sites may be used to provide childcare facilities. If this is the case they will then be removed from community use. The council need to be clear about this and this is a very different service and offering that does not offer the same preventative service for all.
10. I believe the public has a right to know how the usage of the centres has declined since the misplaced handover of the centres to family action, as any change at this point is being made based on their current operation and not their true potential to support families from the most deprived households in Southend.
11. There is a list of services that are offered given within the consultation but within this it includes all the ABSS activities. It is my understanding that the ABSS funding is coming to an end soon. What is the assurance that any of these services will continue once the funding stops? as this will make a massive difference to the delivery/offer?
12. When Family Action took over the Children's Centres in 2017 they dramatically increased the resources assigned to Family Support. However, there is clear overlap and duplication between the Family Support offered through the Children's Centres and that offered through the Children and Family teams in the Council. Children's Centres should be all about prevention and if further more targeted support is required such as intense Family Support some of this could be offered through the councils existing teams which would dramatically reduce the costs as there are layers of support and supervision required. Very often families bounce between the various family support offerings and this is not helpful to the "team around the child/family approach". There is no mention about any review of the Family Support offering across Council teams and I wonder if there is an opportunity to manage costs through an internal review, has this been considered?
13. A large number of charities have set up in southend to fill the gaps left by the Children's Centres when they were taken over by Family Action eg Cake Club and Little Heros to name just two. What discussions have been had with these charities about what they are offering and if they would be able to either take on Children's Centre buildings or to run their

services in the buildings so we are considering service delivery to parents as well as just costs.

I had hoped the consultation would actually be looking at this from the parent/child perspective to design a service using evidence based research into what parents and children need in order to have improved outcomes for children, and was disappointed that this does not seem to be the case. I hope the information within this email is useful and I really hope we end up with a service that will provide improved outcomes for families at a time when families across Southend are really struggling.

Kind regards

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the sender's name and contact information.