

Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee



SCRUTINY



Date of meeting: 26 November 2013

Subject: Essex County Council Children Centres - Consultation

Officer contact for further information: G Wallis Ext 4557

Committee Secretary: Adrian Hendry ext. 4246

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

(1) To receive a presentation on a current Essex County Council consultation on the future of the County's Children Centres;

(2) To consider a draft response to the consultation prepared by officers in consultation with members and the Portfolio Holder

Report:

1. Essex County Council is currently undertaking a formal consultation on the future provision of Children's Centres in Essex which ends on 5 December 2013. The consultation is about the need to make £2.5m of savings from the Children Centres Budget from 2014/15.

2. Councillor Girling has requested that this matter come before members for discussion.

3. The County Council's Children's Centres offer a wide range of services for families and others caring for children under five. Each Children's Centre is different, offering a variety of services according to the needs of local families. Activities are delivered from a main site, a delivery site, or through a range of outreach venues. All Children's Centres work closely with health, schools, GPs and other local service providers. Services include:

- information and advice on childcare and early learning provision
- health services including pre- and postnatal support
- parent / carer groups, including dads' and grandparent groups
- access to children's communication and early language support
- links to Jobcentre Plus
- family support services.

4. Essex County Council has proposed that the following site be closed and be merged with the Sunrise Centre:

Little Buddies Children's Centre
Roding House
2 Victoria Road
Buckhurst Hill IG9 5ES

5. The reasons stated for this proposal are that "it is in an area of lesser deprivation compared to neighbouring Epping children's centres; we are trying to prioritise resources to areas of greater need. The site suffers from accessibility issues as it is on a busy high street with limited parking. Neighbouring centres in Epping Forest are easier and safer to access. Good transport links between Buckhurst Hill and neighbouring centres in Loughton and Debden will also serve to minimise the effects of this closure."

6. Officers have met with the Portfolio Holder and other members to discuss the issues and attached is a draft Council response to the consultation for consideration. This response is attached as Appendix 1 to this report.
7. The full consultation report is attached as Appendix 2.
8. At the meeting there will be a presentation from Lorna Baker, (ECC) and Stacy Randall (Spurgeons – the Lead Body) who will explain the proposals in detail.
9. Members are asked to agree or amend the proposed response in order that the Council can meet the consultation deadline of 5 December 2013.