

Sevenoaks District Council's response to consultation on the future of Children's Centres in the District, incorporating partner views where noted

Response to the consultation on the future of Children's Centres in the Sevenoaks District

There are currently 7 Children's Centres in the District as follows:

- Dunton Green
- Merry-Go-Round, Westerham
- Spring House Children's Centre, Sevenoaks
- Edenbridge
- New Ash Green
- Swanley
- West Kingsdown

The proposals within the consultation that will particularly impact on Children's Centre in Sevenoaks District include:

- Closing Dunton Green and Merry-Go-Round (Westerham)
- Reducing the number of hours in West Kingsdown from 40 to 18 hours.

Linking Centres

According to the consultation KCC intend to reduce management and administrative costs by linking Centres as follows:

- Sevenoaks Town Children's Centre (currently Spring House) – Children's Centre Plus*
- Edenbridge – linked Children's Centre (to Sevenoaks Town CC)
- Swanley Children's Centre – Children's Centre Plus*
- New Ash Green – Linked Children's Centre (to Swanley CC)
- West Kingsdown – Linked Children's Centre (to Swanley CC) with reduced hours
- Reducing hours West Kingsdown Children's Centre

*KCC has identified Sevenoaks Town and Swanley Children Centres as 2 of 16 Lead Children's Centres across the county. KCC state that these are generally larger Children's Centres that will help to co-ordinate services in the Children's Centres linked to it.

Partners and Members views

As part of the consultation, all partners, Members of the Council, Members of the Sevenoaks District Health Liaison Board and the Sevenoaks District Strategic Board* were asked for their feedback.

Key issues raised by Members are summarised below. Consultation materials have been previously circulated and are available at <http://bit.ly/1dOYWzC>

Comments by Members of Sevenoaks District Council, Sevenoaks District Health Liaison Board and the Sevenoaks District Strategic Board*:

Age and accuracy of data

- Members shared concerns that that decisions are being made by KCC about the closure and reduction of services based on data that is not up to date. However, it was recognised that this was the latest available data at the time the consultation materials were put together.
- Of particular concern were the projections of child population statistics. Information included on population projection for 0–5s (produced by KCC Research and Statistics) included in the consultation materials indicated a diminishing demand. At the recent meeting of the Sevenoaks District Locality Board held on 11 September, the KCC Area Education Officer for North Kent highlighted a need for additional Primary School places to meet an increasing demand
- KCC are asked urgently to review population information in association with information available from schools.
- In addition, Members felt it was important to take into account the impact of the West Kent Cold Store development on the future population forecasts for that area.
- Members also wished to draw attention to data available on the KCC website on the Children's Centre Review – Evidence Summary. This shows that there has been an increase of 554% in the number of users at Dunton Green between 2009/10 to 2011/12, 598% at Merry-Go-Round and 412% at West Kingsdown. These figures are considerably above the county average increase of 85%. It was noted that the figures used to produce this data was also in need of updating.

Impact of changes outside the District

Members wanted better consideration to be given to the reductions in services outside the District as it was felt these would have an adverse impact on services within the Sevenoaks District as follows:

- Greenland's at Darenth children's centre to be linked to Swanley Children's Centre Plus group
- Increased catchment area for Swanley from Dartford Maypole centre,
- Increased catchment area for New Ash Green from Gravesham Daisy Chains children's centre
- Borough Green and Little Foxes Centres from Tonbridge and Malling District will be linked to Sevenoaks Town Centre Children's Centre Plus
- Additional catchment area from Hadlow and East Peckam centre to Little Foxes

Links with CCGs

- Members feel that the links between Health and Children's Centres are essential, and that it is vital to continue to develop links, particularly to ensure that Health Visitors are delivering services through Children's Centres'.
- Given the savings KCC have outlined, Members also felt it was very important fully to exploit links with GP surgeries in terms of outreach work.

Libraries

- The consultation is not explicit why Library usage figures are considered. However, discussions with KCC Officers have informed us that it is intended to highlight Libraries as community resources that may be used for signposting purposes.
- KCC are asked to confirm the purpose of Library data.
- KCC are also asked to confirm whether appropriate consideration of the current countywide consultation on Library services has been taken into account. Within this consultation, KCC are engaging with Town and Parish Councils and seeking to make savings in the delivery of services.
- The Sevenoaks District Strategic Board* wish KCC to clarify whether current Library staffing resources are sufficient to meet any increased demand generated by using Libraries to signpost services.

Budget savings and Children's Centre staffing issues

- Sevenoaks District Strategic Board* asked to be kept informed about whether KCC are on target to make the £1.5 million savings at appropriate stages.
- Given the objective of making savings by sharing management and administration costs through Lead Children's Centres and linked Children's Centres, Members wished KCC to give assurances as to whether Lead Centres (Sevenoaks Town and Swanley) would be given the resources for the additional families that they would need to support as a result of the proposed closures and reductions in services.

Cost of Transport

- Members were concerned about the impact of the cost of travelling to Sevenoaks and Swanley Lead Centres if Dunton Green and the Merry-Go-Round were closed and hours at West Kingsdown reduced.
- Members wish KCC to clarify whether they have taken into account the cost and ease of transport for families and children who have to travel further in need of support.

Timing of the consultation

- Members felt the consultation should not have been set in a period when KCC were reviewing the future of Local Children's Trust Boards across the county following proposals to remove support for these partnerships, as these would have been important contributors to the debate.

**Views expressed at the Sevenoaks District Health Action Team (HAT) meeting
1st August 2013**

- A representative from Westerham Parish Council, who is a member of the Health Action Team, expressed the concerns of Westerham Town Council about the closure of the Merry-Go-Round Children's Centre. These concerns were expressed at the HAT meeting held on 1st August 2013 and are recorded in the minutes of the meeting as follows:
 - "There is currently a consultation open about the future of Children's Centres in Kent. There are serious concerns about the plans to close the Westerham Children's Centre. Currently they see 268 children out of the 1500 in the immediate area and the Health Action Team is concerned about a gap in service provision if it does close."

Sevenoaks District Council acknowledges and supports the view of Westerham Town Council is opposing the closure of the Merry-Go-Round. Sevenoaks District Council has real concerns about the reduction in services and additional pressure on the remaining Children's Centres in the District. A copy of a letter from Westerham Parish Council to Michael Fallon MP dated 25th September 2013 is attached as Appendix 2.