Have your say on the future of Ealing children’s centres 2019-22

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Introduction

Ealing Council, along with most local authorities, is facing the toughest financial challenges in recent times. Our government grant has been reduced by £143.7m, equivalent to a reduction of 64% over the past 10 years.

At the same time, departments across the Council, particularly in social services and housing, are experiencing ever-increasing demand; whilst residents’ requirements and expectations of the services we offer are also changing.

To ensure the best outcome for residents, which is a priority to us (in keeping with our Future Ealing programme), we have to review how we provide services in future. We must find the most effective way to meet residents’ needs and maintain our commitment to deliver the services required in different regions of the borough and for those residents in most need - using the resources we have available.

Since 2010 around 1000 children’s centres across the country have had to close. Fortunately, here in Ealing, we’ve managed to maintain and develop all our 27 children’s centres – one of the highest numbers amongst London boroughs.

We are very proud of our children’s centres, the number of families they serve, the range of services they deliver and the very real and positive impact they’re having on young children.

In the last year Ealing’s 27 children’s centres have provided services and support for 39,814 children, parents and carers, including 1063 vulnerable children i.e. those with special educational needs and/or a disability, and children who are looked after (in care) or require additional support.

Services include early education / childcare (including the free childcare scheme for two-year-olds), midwives for antenatal checks, health visitors and baby clinics, parenting support, stay and play sessions and other group activities, adult classes, access to speech and language therapists, support for children with communication needs and more.

All our children’s centres are rated ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ by Ofsted. We know that the services they offer, make a big difference to the children and families who use them; and contribute to the development of the communities they serve.
Why we’re consulting

As part of the council’s wider savings plan, £808,000 could be saved over the next couple of years by making these changes.

We’d like your views on the proposals we’ve made about how children’s centre services may change across the borough; as we need to make savings, whilst continuing to deliver quality services.

We’ve published a draft strategy for Ealing children’s centres (2019-22) which sets out how we propose to re-organise the children’s centre network, working with the council’s neighbourhood services to make better use of our assets, i.e. the buildings the council owns or leases, the staff it employs etc. The aim is to re-shape the services we deliver and where and how we deliver them in response to financial pressures.

You can read our draft strategy and all the evidence on which our proposals are based, at www.ealingfamiliesdirectory.org.uk by going onto the ‘Feedback’ tab at the top of the page and choosing ‘Children’s Centre Consultation’.

Our strategy

Although government cuts force us to consider changes to our children’s centres— we are determined to minimise the disruption of services and access to the children’s centres. Therefore, within our proposed strategy, we will look at:

1. Keeping open and accessible, the centres which serve the greatest number of children and families; particularly those supporting families on very low incomes; living in identified areas of disadvantage.

2. Maintaining early childhood health services through centres, such as midwifery and Early Start Ealing - our integrated health visiting service.

3. Continuing to ensure that vulnerable children and those who have the greatest needs are well supported.

4. Increasing the childcare available in centres that are being re-organised; where other services are being reduced or stopped.

5. Making services run more efficiently now and in the future.

6. Ensuring effective, preventative support and early intervention through close-working with professionals from different services and agencies.
What changes are being proposed and which services will still be available to young children and their families?

Under the current proposals Ealing will continue to have seven main children’s centres and nine linked centres. (Linked centres are those connected to a main centre offering a range of services). The services offered in the remaining 11 linked children’s centres may need to be significantly re-organised to meet the current budget constraints; and this means that a small number of centres may have to close. Please see the table below.

We are already in discussions with childcare providers about offering additional childcare places; especially free places for eligible two-year-olds; across all centres; and especially at centres with reduced services.

For the 11 centres that need to be re-organised; we propose to keep and improve childcare provision and potentially outsource additional services and activities to nearby providers not funded by the council.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children’s centre</th>
<th>All main services maintained</th>
<th>Linked centre services maintained</th>
<th>Services to be re-organised</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Islip Manor, Northolt</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>South Acton</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hanwell</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Grove House, Southall</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>Perivale</td>
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<td>Log Cabin, Ealing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Academy Gardens</td>
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<tr>
<td>(South Northolt Area)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grange, Ealing</td>
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<td>Greenfields, Southall</td>
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<td>Hathaway, Ealing</td>
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<td>John Perryn, Acton</td>
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<td>Limetrees, Northolt</td>
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<td>Maples, Acton</td>
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<td>Petts Hill, Northolt</td>
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<td>Southall Park</td>
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<tr>
<td>St John’s (Jubilee), West Ealing</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>Acton Park</td>
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<td>Copley Close, Hanwell</td>
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<td>Dormers Wells, Southall</td>
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<td>Havelock, Southall</td>
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<td>Horsenden, Greenford</td>
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<td>Northolt Park</td>
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<tr>
<td>North Ealing</td>
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<td>Windmill, Greenford</td>
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<td>Windmill Park, Southall</td>
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<tr>
<td>West Twyford</td>
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<td>Wood End, Greenford</td>
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</table>
How we developed these proposals

Our proposals are based on analysing different information and considering areas of most need and where centres are most used. We looked at:

- Data on where in the borough children aged 0-5 and their families live, particularly those who are most disadvantaged.
- Data on how young children and their families currently use the children’s centres; and travel distances to different centres.
- The location of children’s centres to enable access to families from across the borough.
- The size and suitability of some buildings and premises which makes them better able to provide services to the greatest number of children and their families.
- How buildings we may no longer fund can continue to provide spaces for services that children and families can benefit from (even if they are not part of the children’s centres).

Ideas and options considered

We looked at different ideas for maintaining quality services; whilst managing the budget cuts, and considered our options in line with our main priorities:

- Ensuring vulnerable young children aged 0-5 years have access to alternative service arrangements e.g. children with special educational needs and / or disability.
- Negotiating alternative venues for services and activities, especially in areas of greatest need; where families face many challenges.
- Improving access to high quality childcare on children’s centre sites by expanding where possible the number of childcare places available to vulnerable children.
- Using intensive home visiting for those families with very high levels of vulnerabilities who might be excluded from essential services without this support.
- Spreading activity across the wider children’s centre network to minimise disruption to services and protect access to services for vulnerable young children and their families.

Options considered

Outsourcing children’s centre services was briefly considered but is unlikely to result in significant savings - Ealing has direct experience of this through having used a voluntary sector provider to offer children’s centre outreach between 2009-12.

Keeping children’s centres within the council’s management means we can continue to work collaboratively, sharing information efficiently; bringing together education, health and early help in a way which guards against errors and duplication.
How to take part in this consultation

The consultation runs for 12 weeks, from 22 February to 17 May 2019. We would like to hear from you if you have children under the age of five in your family, or if you are expecting a baby; and if you make use of our children’s centres, regularly, or occasionally and even if you have not yet used a centre but were planning to.

We will do all we can to make it as easy as possible for everyone to have their say. You can take part in the consultation through coming to a meeting at your local children’s centre (dates and times will be advertised on your children’s centre noticeboard). You can also take part by completing an online survey or a printed survey and returning this to your local children’s centre or Ealing’s Family Information Service, based at Ealing Council, Perceval House, 14-16 Uxbridge Road, Ealing W5 2HL.

Detailed information about the consultation, including meeting times can also be found through the ‘Feedback’ section at:

www.ealingfamiliesdirectory.org.uk
Family Information Service 020 8825 5588
children@ealing.gov.uk

What happens next

Responses to the consultation will inform a final report to the council’s cabinet in July 2019, which also takes into account responses from other consultations being carried out as part of Ealing’s future strategy for neighbourhood services. If the proposals contained in this consultation are accepted, based on the consultation and other relevant considerations – the plan for the changes to Ealing’s children’s centres will be implemented from autumn 2019 over a period of three years.

Frequently asked questions

Will my response contribute to decision making?
Your views are extremely important to us. All responses will be carefully considered before any decisions are made.

When will any changes take effect?
Any changes will gradually take effect from October 2019 to March 2022. Information on centres and their services will be shared with families on our website www.ealingfamiliesdirectory.org.uk

What about my childcare?
Centres that currently provide childcare will continue to do so. We may even extend childcare services to offer more places.

How can I read this information in a different language?
Our website has a language translation feature, so you can read the information online and print it off, in the language of your choice.

Will I still be able to choose which centre to attend?
Yes, there are no restrictions on which centres you can attend now or in future.

What will this mean for families of children with SEND?
Services for children and families with SEND are being prioritised and are largely unchanged by the proposals. However, reduction of some universal / general services will affect all children.

You can read more frequently asked questions and submit a new question on the ‘Feedback’ section of our website www.ealingfamiliesdirectory.org.uk
Does this affect you?

Help us to shape local services

We want to hear from you

To have your say visit www.ealingfamiliesdirectory.org.uk and select ‘Feedback’ for information on the consultation