

People and Families Scrutiny Committee

14:00	Tuesday, 04 February 2014	Committee Room 1, County Hall, Chelmsford, Essex
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Quorum: 4

Membership

Councillor G Butland
Councillor A Bayley
Councillor D Blackwell
Councillor R Boyce
Councillor J Chandler
Councillor R Gadsby
Councillor T Higgins
Councillor P Honeywood
Councillor R Howard
Councillor N Hume
Councillor M McEwen
Councillor M McGeorge
Councillor C Seagers
Councillor A Wood

Chairman

Non-elected Members

Richard Carson
Mark Christmas
Rev Richard Jordan
Marian Uzzell

For information about the meeting please ask for:

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Essex County Council

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Part 1

(During consideration of these items the meeting is likely to be open to the press and public)

Pages

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|----------|---|----------------|
| 1 | Apologies and Substitution Notices
The Committee Officer to report receipt of apologies for absence and substitution notices as appropriate. | |
| 2 | Declarations of Interest
To note any declarations of interest to be made by Members | |
| 3 | Call-in on Decision on Home To School Transport Policy
To consider the Decision relating to the Home to School Transport Policy, which was agreed at Cabinet on 21 January. PAF/04/14 attached. | 5 - 30 |
| 4 | Call-in on Decision on Children's Centres
To consider the Decision relating to Children's Centres, which was agreed at Cabinet on 21 January. PAF/05/14 attached. | 31 - 66 |
| 5 | Increasing Independence for Working Age Adults
Councillor Aldridge, Cabinet Member for Adults Social Care, will brief Members on this CMA, ref FP/488/01/14 (see PAF/06/14, attached). | 67 - 74 |
| 6 | Urgent Business
To consider any matter which in the opinion of the Chairman should be considered in public by reason of special circumstances (to be specified) as a matter of urgency. | |

Exempt Items

(During consideration of these items the meeting is not likely to be open to the press and public)

To consider whether the press and public should be excluded from the meeting during consideration of an agenda item on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as specified in Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 or it being confidential for the purposes of Section 100A(2) of that Act.

In each case, Members are asked to decide whether, in all the circumstances, the public interest in maintaining the exemption (and discussing the matter in private) outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

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Urgent Exempt Business

To consider in private any other matter which in the opinion of the Chairman should be considered by reason of special circumstances (to be specified) as a matter of urgency.

		AGENDA ITEM 3
		PAF/04/14
Committee:	People and Families Scrutiny Committee	
Date:	4 February 2014	
<u>Home to School Transport Policy Decision Call-in</u>		
Enquiries to:	Robert Fox Scrutiny Officer Corporate Law & Assurance 01245 430526 robert.fox@essex.gov.uk	

Purpose of the Paper:

To review the Decision relating to the Home to School Policy, FP/290/08/13, taken at Cabinet on Tuesday 21 January 20014.

Attached is:

- A - The Notification of the Call-in
- B - The Cabinet Paper

A - Notification of Call-in

Decision title and reference number Forward Plan reference FP/290/08/13 Title of report : Home to School Transport Policy	
Cabinet Member responsible Cllr Ray Gooding	Date decision published Tuesday 21/01/14
Last day of call in period 24 February 2014	Last day of 10-day period to resolve the call-in 5 February 2014
Reasons for Making the Call in I wish to call-in this decision on the grounds that: The People & Families Scrutiny Committee received a report on Home to School Transport in broad terms in December 2013. There has been insufficient scrutiny undertaken on this decision taking account of this Council's priority to increase educational achievement and enhance skills; the proposed measures to mitigate the policy change; the lack of school inclusion during the consultation and the impact on choice, children and the environment.	
Signed: Councillor Melissa McGeorge	Dated: 22/01/2014
For completion by the Governance Officer	
Date call in Notice Received 22 January 2014	Date of informal meeting None held
Does the call in relate to a Schools	If yes, date when Parent Governor Reps

issue Yes	and Diocesan Reps invited to the meeting 24 January 2014
Date of People & Families Scrutiny Committee Meeting (if applicable) 4 February 2014	Date call in withdrawn / resolved

B - Cabinet Paper

AGENDA ITEM 9

Report to Cabinet Report of Cllr Ray Gooding, Cabinet Member for Education and Learning	Forward Plan reference number FP290/08/13
Date of meeting: 21 January 2014	County Divisions affected by the decision All Divisions
Title of report – Home to School Transport Policy	
Report by Tim Coulson – Director for Commissioning: Education and Lifelong Learning	
Enquiries to Emma Toublic, Head of Transport and Awards email emma.toublic@essex.gov.uk telephone 01245 431625	

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1. The Council's current home to school transport policy makes provision for some pupils to receive free transport in circumstances where the Council is not required by law to provide it. A public consultation was carried out in respect of proposed changes to the policy between 16 September and 25 October 2013. This report identifies recommended changes to the policy based on feedback received and asks Cabinet to approve the revisions.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. That with effect from September 2015 the Council will only provide transport to a pupil's nearest non-faith school unless there is a statutory duty to provide transport, but that as a transitional measure, this is not applied to pupils who are, in July 2015, receiving transport until they complete their current phase of education or leave that school. For the purpose of this decision 'faith school' includes Voluntary Aided Schools and Becket Keys School.
- 2.2. That the routes in Stansted Mountfitchet and Wickford identified in paragraph 3.21 of the report are designated as safe walking routes and the Cabinet notes that the Cabinet Member will be reviewing other routes which have previously been

considered not to be safe walking routes in the light of advice from the Member Routes Panel.

- 2.3. That where a pupil ceases to be entitled to free transport as a result of the re-classification of a route as available to be used as a walking route, the Council will give at least one full term's notice to those affected.
- 2.4. That the Council will continue to provide transport for those students from low income families attending selective (grammar) schools in accordance with the existing policy.
- 2.5. That with effect from 1 September 2014 the Council will take account of family income when deciding whether transport should be provided in exceptional circumstances, and that the means test in paragraph 3.34 of the report will normally be applied.
- 2.6. That with effect from 1 September 2014 the Council will not normally consider requests to provide transport in exceptional circumstances other than between 1 March and 30 September and between 1 and 31 January.
- 2.7. That with effect from 1 September 2014 post 16 learners from low income families are asked to make a contribution of £450 per year for transport to post 16 education which can be paid in instalments.
- 2.8. With effect from 1 September 2014, transport for Post 16 learners who have a statement of SEN will continue to be provided, as long as the school named within that statement is the nearest to their home that meets their needs. There will continue to be a charge for this provision.
- 2.9. Transport assistance to those new Post 16 learners with SEN or additional needs, who no longer have a statement, but attend FE Courses be provided from 1 September 2014. Assistance will be in the form of either a pass to travel on existing or public transport contracts or a Personal Transport Budget, based on assessed need.
- 2.10. The provision of subsidised transport to all other Post 16 learners not covered in 2.7 – 2.9, be ceased from 1 September 2014 and instead allow the purchase of tickets on existing public services on a full cost recovery basis.
- 2.11. That the Council will work with transport operators to encourage them to provide commercial school transport services to meet community demands and that they will in principle be permitted to sell spare seats on ECC commissioned routes on a commercial basis with a view to reducing the cost to the Council of those services.
- 2.12. That the Director for Commissioning: Education and Lifelong Learning be authorised to update the Council's transport policy to reflect these changes.

3. Background and proposal

- 3.1 The Council's current annual expenditure on home to school transport is circa £25 million. Over £10 million of this is spent in facilitating access to schools for those pupils with a statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN). The cost is increasing as a result of increasing demand and the general cost of transporting children to and from school, and budgetary constraints
- 3.2 The current forecast spend on home to school transport for the 2013-14 financial year is £25.3 million. The 2013-14 budget for this service is £24.1 million. This equates to a £1.2 million overspend.
- 3.3 Maintaining expenditure at a level which is sufficient to continue to meet the Council's current policies is difficult in the current financial climate. The Council therefore has to look at where efficiencies can be made within this area. The Council must look at the possibility of reducing support in the areas where it currently exercises discretion.
- 3.4 A number of options were developed for reviewing the service to see whether it continues to meet need and represent a fair and effective policy. Consultation has been undertaken on those options.

Consultation

- 3.5 A consultation document was published in September 2013 (see Appendix 1). The consultation commenced on 16 September and lasted for 6 weeks ending on 25 October. There was an extensive set of communications to MPs, County Councillors, Borough, City and District councils and with schools. Communication with these key stakeholders began over a month before the start date as the Council wanted to ensure early engagement.
- 3.6 Around 1500 people viewed and/or responded through the online consultation portal. In addition we received over 70 emails, many of which are from residents, head teachers and Parish Councils from across the County. People were asked to provide some information about themselves, including their postcode. As expected, the postcodes provided cover the majority of the County, including some out of County postcodes in bordering authorities.
- 3.7 A summary of the responses received is provided in Appendix 2.

Highlights from the consultation

- 3.8 The consultation document set out a number of proposals. Respondents were asked to state whether they agreed or disagreed with each proposal.
- 3.9 The proposals with the highest proportion of people disagreeing with them were:

- Withdrawal of the use of priority admission areas (15% supported, 72% opposed)
- Withdrawal of support to those low income families who are offered support to attend grammar schools in the County (15% supported, 72% opposed)

3.10 The rest of this section of the report sets out each proposal in detail and the justification for it as well as setting out the results of the consultation.

Removal of the use of priority admission area to determine entitlement - use nearest school

Proposal

- 3.11 At present the Council will provide home to school transport for children who meet the relevant distance criteria from the school they attend if they live in the priority admission area for that school – even if a place is available at a school which is nearer their home.
- 3.12 However, many schools (eg Academies, free schools, Voluntary Aided and Foundation schools) are now able to set their own admission criteria and their own priority admission area. Some schools have chosen to use their power to expand their priority admission area and this is a trend which is only likely to increase in future. In addition, some schools have ceased to use a priority admission area at all, in which case the council uses the school's historic priority admission area for the purposes of assessing eligibility for home to school transport. These historic areas are likely to become increasingly out of date and inaccurate as time passes.
- 3.13 This leaves the council with a clear risk that more children, who do not have a statutory entitlement to free home to school transport, will be eligible for free transport under these discretionary criteria. Residents of some addresses are in the priority admission area of four schools, others are only in the priority admission area of one (or no) schools.
- 3.14 At present the Council has a special rule which applies to Ongar and to the 'Five Parishes' of Brentwood (Doddinghurst, Blackmore, Hook End, Stondon Massey and Kelvedon Hatch). This agreement put in place following the closure of the secondary school provision in Ongar in the early 1990's. Residents of this area are assessed for school transport as if they were in the priority admission area of all Brentwood schools
- 3.15 The proposal is to amend the policy to align with the law so that if a place at a nearer school is available then the Council will not meet the cost of home to school transport, although Voluntary Aided (faith) schools and Becket Keys School in Brentwood would be disregarded for these purposes. Low income families will be entitled to some choice. All pupils would continue to be entitled to free transport if

they live outside the statutory distance and no places are available at a closer school.

- 3.15 This change is proposed to take effect from 1 September 2015; to be replaced by the provision of transport only to the nearest school to the child's home address to which there are places available, measured using the shortest available walking route, where the statutory distance criterion is met.
- 3.16 As a transitional measure, it is proposed that any student already qualifying for transport at 31 August 2015 would continue to receive assistance until their current school phase ended or until they left that school.

Benefits

3.17

- ECC will be able to bulk assess full year groups of children and express confirm at the time of the school place offer. This will improve service for the customer and decrease administration resource required to process applications. Despite having the technology available to 'bulk assess' currently we are unable to utilise this due to the complexity of our current home to school transport policy.
- potential increase in public transport network in the areas affected due to operators selling seats commercially to parents and opening up their routes to the wider public;
- Cost savings - at March 2012 the Council was transporting 3,870 students to a school which was their priority admission area for school admission but was not their nearest school, although in some cases those children may not have been able to secure a place at their nearest school. The cost of providing transport to these pupils is approximately £2.9 million per annum. The Council would not save this whole amount but it is expected that cost savings between £500K and £1 million per annum on both contract prices and administration efficiencies could be achieved.

Risks

3.18

- The changes proposed could affect trends in applications for admissions;
- potential increased traffic flow and congestion around schools affected where parents choose to transport their children to schools in preference to purchasing bus tickets etc;
- a potential increase in spend in this area during the phasing in of this policy due to the potential need to provide transport in one area to two different schools i.e. the priority admission area school for those with an existing entitlement and the nearest school for those qualifying post September 2015.

- 3.19 Officers would work closely with bus operators to try and ensure that commercial networks are available to those that wish to utilise transport to school at the full cost

to their family and to establish networks of transport in each area of the County to strengthen public transport availability.

Response to Consultation

- 3.20 Of the responses received in respect of this option 15% agreed with the proposal and 72% disagreed. There were 183 comments made on this proposal through the consultation portal and a further 14 letters direct from schools opposing the proposals.

Several comments were made through the consultation on this issue and the main themes and responses to those are below:

- i. the impact on school admissions – including the availability of space at the nearest school as oppose to the priority admission area, particularly with the forecast increase in cohort size over the coming years
This will be monitored closely by officers with School Admissions and Transport teams, particularly in light of the expected pressure on places in many parts of the County over the coming years
- ii. Concern that this will effectively lead to withdrawal of parental choice
The proposal does not withdraw parental choice. Parents/carers still have the opportunity to make a choice in terms of the preferences they make at the time of application. Parents/carers who choose to send their child to a school that does not meet the qualification criteria for transport will need to consider how they will get their child to school should then be successful in gaining a place, this situation applies to many parents at present.
- iii. Concern that this may lead to an increase car use, congestion and environmental impact
There is the potential for an increase in car use, although many children will still be able to travel by public transport. At present the Council provides transport to around 11% of the overall school population. 81% are accessing school by other means including using cars. ECC is working currently on a project to provide alternatives to the car, such as introducing a cycle scheme and working with operators to increase the commercial network of transport available in areas across Essex to help students get to school without using a car. Whilst avoiding car use is desirable, it is not itself a justification for provision of free transport
- iv. Concern about financial impact on parents at a time when cost of living is increasing.
Free transport will still be provided to children at their current school and to other children if the Council cannot make arrangements for a child to attend a closer school less than the prescribed distance away. The large majority of parents currently receive no support for their children and are already having to bear any expenses associated with travel to school. The Council will consider requests for support if there are wholly exceptional cases.

- v. the effect on families with one child entitled to assistance now with another who would start post September 2015 and not receive an entitlement
It is acknowledged that withdrawal of support could in some circumstances cause a parent to have siblings attending different schools. This is a question for parents to decide. However, making this provision for siblings could extend the transitional arrangements substantially and would be unfair to other parents who would not receive this support. The Council is working with operators to establish a wider commercial network of transport at reasonable rates to allow families to purchase seats on vehicles transporting entitled students to and from schools in Essex
- vi. Impact on Low Income Families
Low income families will continue to benefit from protections built into the national rules about free transport. Primary age students aged 8 or above from low income families qualify for free transport for journeys of more than two miles. Secondary school pupils from low income families are entitled to schools transport assistance if they attend one of their three nearest qualifying schools provided they reside between 2 and 6 miles from those schools. Furthermore, those students attending faith schools qualify for transport assistance where the school is between 2 and 15 miles from their home address.
- vii. Lack of alternatives available (i.e. public transport routes as oppose to dedicated school transport)
As above in ii) we will work with operators to try and establish a broader commercial network of transport available. We will also allow and encourage bus operators to sell spare seats on school transport..
- viii. Impact on rural communities – broader spread of schools
It has been noted that several comments related to the effect on rural communities. The majority of transport we provide currently is for children living in rural areas owing to the distance they are expected to travel to and from school. These pupils are already generally attending their nearest school. Accordingly we do not expect there to be significant changes in entitlement to free school transport. However, we will monitor this closely with colleagues from our School Admissions Team for the 2015/16 academic years.
- ix. Could academies assist in transport costs if they chose to change their priority admission areas to stop this policy change?
The decision to assist families in transport to and from schools would rest with the academy schools. We are not aware of any schools wishing to provide free transport and they do not receive Department of Education funding for the provision of home to school transport.

Unavailable Walking Routes

Proposal

- 3.21 A number of routes in Essex are currently considered as unsuitable for pupils to walk down. This could be because the route involves busy roads with no footways, or narrow roads. Such routes are therefore disregarded when calculating the distance to school, because it is the nearest safe walking route which is measured. These routes have been reviewed and it has been found that physical or other changes means that a route is no longer considered to be unsafe and it is recommended that these be redesignated. This means that some children would no longer qualify for free home to school transport. The schools affected by these proposals are as follows - Bromfords School, and Grange Primary School where a safe walking route exists across a public park and Forest Hall School (formerly Mountfitchet School) where Church Road is now considered to be safe as a result of the installation of a pedestrian crossing and a pedestrian footway. There is a Member Routes Panel which has been appointed to advise on safe walking routes. They have considered these routes and recommend that they are designated as safe walking routes. The panel have reviewed these routes during the consultation period at the key times of day. A proposal to redesignate a route in Barnston village as safe for walking was not supported by the Member Routes Panel and it is not now recommended that any changes are made in this location
- 3.22 It is proposed to continue with a review of the list of 'unavailable routes' currently held. It is proposed that officers will review the route and if they believe that there is now a potentially safe walking route they will consult with local members and the schools and refer the question to the Member Route Panel. Their recommendation will be referred to the Cabinet Member for decision. If it is decided that a safe walking route is available then it is proposed to give at least a term's notice to those affected. This is a change to the current policy which states that students benefit from continued transport until the end of their education.

Benefits

- 3.23 Increased numbers of children walking and cycling to school thus benefitting their health and wellbeing overall.

Risks

- 3.24 Potential for increased traffic flow and congestion around schools affected where parents choose to transport their children to school.

Response to Consultation

- 3.25 Of the responses received in respect of this option, 22% agreed with the proposal and 29% disagreed with 49% stating they 'don't know'. There were 102 comments made on this proposal through the consultation portal (appendix 2).

Several comments were made through the consultation on this issue and the main themes and responses to those are below:

- i. Impact of phased reduction if families have one sibling entitled to transport and one not
It is acknowledged that withdrawal of support could in some circumstances cause a parent to have siblings attending a different school. This is a question for parents to decide. However, making this provision for siblings could extend the transitional arrangements substantially and would be unfair to other parents who would not receive this support. The Council is are working with operators to establish a wider commercial network of transport at reasonable rates to allow families to purchase seats on vehicles transporting entitled students to and from schools in Essex
Any new network put in place by our operators will need to be commercial and therefore a charge will be made to non entitled students to utilise those services, in the same way as you would be required to pay for a public bus or rail pass. We will work closely with those operators to ensure the price is fair and consistent, based on distance travelled vehicle type etc.
- ii. Potential for bullying and safety considerations of children walking to and from school
Where routes are assessed as being available to be walked it is always with the consideration that the student will be 'accompanied as necessary'. It is for the parent/carer responsible for the child to determine if they feel the child is able to walk to and from school. The County Council will assume in all assessments made that the child will be accompanied, as necessary, and this decision rests with the parent/carer responsible. It should be noted that many children have to walk to school.
- iii. Routine checking of the routes is required to ensure they remain safe
The routes are inspected on a rolling programme and residents can refer directly to us if they feel a route is unavailable and should be reinspected.
- iv. Many representations specific to issues in Barnston Village
This route was reinspected and, despite previous inspections indicating the route was available to be walked, accompanied as necessary, it is no longer proposed to designate this route as safe walking route.
- v. Traffic (speed, volume etc)
All inspections take account of the latest traffic data, traffic counts where they are available and accident statistics for the road in question at the time of inspection.

Children from Low Income Families Attending Selective Schools

Proposal

- 3.26 The Council currently provides transport to students attending selective schools where the family are in receipt of qualifying benefits and the distance criterion is met. No other authority in England makes provision for this group of students.
- 3.27 The consultation document proposed the withdrawal of the provision of transport to low income families with a child attending selective schools from September 2015

on a phased basis – so that the existing criteria would continue to apply all pupils currently receiving this support until they completed this phase of school or left that school.

Benefits

3.28 The risks associated with this proposal are:

- brings the Council's policy in line with Local Authorities in England – Essex is the only authority amongst them currently providing entitlement to transport assistance to this group of students;
- A cost saving. There are currently 77 students qualifying for assistance under this policy, costing £136,000 per annum in transport costs. If withdrawn this would be phased out and the total saving achieved over 5 financial years from 2015-16.

Risks

3.29 The main risk is that it would potentially limit opportunity for pupils from low income families obtaining a place in a selective school from attending and achieving their education potential.

Response

3.30 Of the responses received in respect of this option, 15% agreed with the proposal and 72% disagreed. There were 145 comments made on this proposal through the consultation portal (appendix 2) plus representation from MP's and schools relating to the impact this would have on low income families.

Several comments were made through the consultation on this issue and the main theses and responses to those are below:

- Reduction in opportunity for students from low income families to achieve their potential*
- Decrease in social mobility*
- Potential for a two tier education system where low income families are forced to attend local school*
- Added burden on finances of low income families*
- Lack of opportunity and support for low income families*
- Not inclusive*
- Selective schools are for gifted children, regardless of financial situation*
- Penalising bright children from low income families*
- Finance should not influence who can and cannot attend a selective school*

3.31 Essex is not unique in maintaining some grammar school provisions but it is unique in making provision for free transport. However, it is clear that there is strong public support for continuation of this provision. Having regard to this it is not now proposed to proceed with this proposal.

Transport provided under exceptional circumstances

Proposal

- 3.32 The Council currently use its discretion to provide transport in a number of circumstances to a broad range of families where it considers that there is no entitlement to transport either under the statutory rules or under our policy but where there are exceptional circumstances.
- 3.33 The Council must always be prepared to consider whether any particular case is exceptional – it is unlawful to adopt a blanket policy.
- 3.34 It is proposed to add a means tested assessment as part of this process. Where families earn in excess of the allowances currently made for the provision of child benefit, transport support would not normally be provided on the basis that it is reasonable to expect the family to fund the provision of transport from its own resources. Even here, the Council would have to consider whether there are any exceptional circumstances, although it is anticipated that the numbers of these cases would be very low.
- 3.35 The proposal is that, with effect from September 2014, families whose cases for transport to be provided are agreed to be exceptional would receive funding capped in accordance with the rules below.

Family Income	Support to be offered if case considered to be exceptional
£16,190 and below	Fuel reimbursement at 45p per mile or equivalent transport on existing contract vehicle/public transport ticket;
£16,190 – £30,000	Fuel reimbursement at 45p per mile or a payment of £250 per term towards the cost of transport;
£30,000 – £42,475	fuel reimbursement at 45p per mile or a payment of £150 per term towards the cost of transport;
£42,475 +	No contribution normally made.

One off payments will only be available if a family does not have a vehicle to transport their child to and from school. It would be intended that this one off payment would support the family to make their own arrangements.

Benefits

- 3.36 The benefits associated with this proposal are:
- clear criteria based on finances of the family where an exception applies, allowing self assessment and preventing applications being made where no transport would be provided;
 - continues to support low income families when circumstances happen which are outside of their control;

- provides support in a more flexible way for families;

Risks

3.37 The risks associated with this proposal are:

- We would need to be prepared to make exceptions to the means test in appropriate cases, such as emergency housing issues or medical circumstances.
- A sliding scale of entitlement based on income would mean some residents sit slightly above thresholds for support and could create a 'poverty trap', i.e. threshold set at £16,190. Families earning £16,000 qualify for support families earning £16,300 do not.

Response

3.38 Of the responses received in respect of this proposal, 35% agreed with the proposal and 53% disagreed. There were 117 comments made on this proposal through the consultation portal (appendix 2).

Several comments were made through the consultation on this issue and the main theses and responses to those are below:

- i. Because you earn more doesn't mean you have more disposable income
Currently, the transport offered to those requesting it under our exceptional criteria is usually door to door and does not take account of family circumstances. The provision of transport in this area is extremely costly. The proposal makes the application of this policy fair. By taking account of income levels we can ask families for a contribution towards the cost where it would be appropriate to do so.
- ii. Administration involved – would this process cost more than just providing transport?
The administrative process for exceptional applications is already a lengthy one owing to the amount of evidence gathered. Some entitlement to home to school transport is already means tested and the team are experienced in means testing applications. Officers are confident that this can be introduced without disproportionate effort. Any increase in administration will be mitigated by a likely reduction in the number of applications.
- iii. Child benefit qualification system is unfair
The Child Benefit system is one which has been consulted on and implemented by Central Government. Essex is choosing to use this method as a consistent way of assessing entitlement to transport. The majority of families apply for Child Benefit and therefore should have an understanding of the system prior to its application in Essex.
- iv. Income is frozen or decreasing in most circumstances – how will families afford this?

The payments will be a contribution based on the level of income with those who have lower income having a higher subsidy.

- v. Number of dependents should be taken into account
It is not proposed to the number of dependents into account as this would involve departing from the use of child benefit principles.
- vi. Should change the proposal to support low income families only
The idea of this policy is to support families across Essex but to provide support targeted to those low income families with the highest level of need.

Deadline for Applications for Support in Exceptional Circumstances

Proposal

- 3.39 The Council currently operates an application window for applications made under its discretionary post 16 and exceptional transport policies covering the whole academic year. It is proposed to implement an application window that is open from 1 March until 30 September each year for new starters which then reopens on 1 January to close again on 31 January in each academic year. We would need to accept applications outside this period where someone's circumstances changed (eg a house move or drop in income).

Benefits

- 3.40 The benefits of implementing this change would include:
- improved ability to forecast application numbers throughout financial year and therefore have better control over the cost base;
 - improved management of workload and reduction in administration time across the teams involved in delivering transport services;
 - reduction in costs over the year in the provision of transport under discretionary policies;
 - Potential for increased administration costs if applicants meet window deadlines

Risk

- 3.41 The risks of implementing this change would include:
- People may miss deadlines where support is really required unless the Council undertakes clear communications;
 - People who miss the set deadline for application may not receive transport until the next window opens, regardless of their entitlement;
 - Children could be kept out of school
 - Families where their needs or situation changes may be disadvantaged if their application cannot be considered outside of the application timeframe;
 - Increase in complaints received by the Council.
 - Potential for increased administration costs if applicant meets window deadlines

Responses

- 3.42 Of the responses received in respect of this option, 24% agreed with the proposal and 45% disagreed. There were 57 comments made on this proposal through the consultation portal (appendix 2).

Several comments were made through the consultation on this issue and the main theses and responses to those are below:

- i. Lack of flexibility
Although we will not normally accept applications outside the published application periods, it is recognised that we will need to have consider wholly exceptional cases outside the set deadlines. This could happen if circumstances have changed for reasons beyond the applicants' control– examples of this would be a house fire or transfer to a women's refuge etc.
- ii. Process needs to be VERY clear to all involved
We accept that it is important to ensure that the application deadlines are effectively communicated to the public. There is a communications plan in place to ensure everyone who would apply under the policies affected is informed of this change in time for the implementation of the proposed change
- iii. Some respondents were concerned about the impact of people whose circumstances change (eg if they move house or change unexpectedly).
Criteria will be established to consider applications outside of the set deadlines – families moving into Essex during the closure period will be one of those criteria.

Post 16 Transport

- 3.43 The County Council currently provides transport assistance where a student is attending the nearest establishment offering the principal parts of course they have chosen to study, provided they reside at or beyond three miles or more from that establishment. A charge of £510 per annum is made to each qualifying student, unless they are in receipt of qualifying benefits or equivalent low income, in which case the charge is waived in full. The same criteria are applied to mainstream and SEN students aged between 16 and 19.

Proposal

- 3.44 The duty placed on local authorities in respect of the provision of transport to post 16 students requires a transport policy statement to be prepared and published in each year, by 31 May, disclosing the provision being made by the Council for this group. The Council has a discretion which it can use to offer financial assistance towards a person's reasonable travel expenses.
- 3.45 Many other authorities are now choosing to remove or significantly reduce their offer for post 16 learners with many authorities now choose to charge low income families for their transport assistance.

3.46 The proposals seek to continue to make some provision for this group to support access to education.

3.47 It is proposed that from September 2014 the Council only considers any application for home to school transport assistance for a person of sixth form age on its merits, but assistance would be provided where the following circumstances apply:

i. Low income families

3.48 Provide transport assistance to qualifying low income families, subject to a contribution from the student/parent of £450 per annum. This represents 50% of the average cost of transport provision in Essex. The option will be available to pay this in instalments over the academic year.

ii. Statemented SEN students

3.49 Where a post 16 student has a statement of SEN and is attending the school named within their statements as the nearest appropriate school for their post 16 education – public transport will be promoted for this group and travel training referrals will be made for all students with the expectation that they will be assessed for suitability for training by the end of the first term of post 16 education. A charge for transport will be made on a sliding scale based on the income of the family at the time of application.

iii. Students with SEN who are no longer statemented

3.50 Those students who had a statement of SEN in year 11 who will be attending a school or college to continue their education and require additional support to do so. Support will be provided in the form of a grant which will be on a sliding scale based on income. All applications will be considered based on the evidence provided to support the claim at the time of application.

iv. Other Students

3.51 Other students will be able to purchase public transport tickets from the Local Authority but this will be on a full cost recovery basis and only on existing routes, in place at the time of application, where capacity allows. Bespoke transport or individual taxis will not be provided. Families would be able to take advantage of the bulk purchasing power of the County Council and pay a reduced rate for transport on existing services. This will be trialled in 2014/15 and potentially extended to under 16's from the 2015/16 academic year.

Benefits

3.52 *Benefits:*

- clear policy for the provision of transport for learners;

- ability for all to take advantage of lower public transport costs through County Council bulk purchasing power, not just those who currently qualify for assistance;
- By reducing transport available students will be required to consider the suitability of the course they have chosen to study prior to application to that course. Consideration will need to be made around how they will access that course for the duration of their study within that establishment.
- Reduction in cost for the Council in supporting the provision.

Risks

3.53 The risks associated with this proposal are:

- A potential negative impact on the future skills base across the County as a result of access to on-going education being limited;
- reduced ability of post 16 students to access further education;
- There is evidence that participation decreases in year 13. Any cuts in travel assistance may exasperate this particularly when taking into consideration Raising of the Participation Age, whereby students are required to remain in education employment or training up to the age of 17 currently, increasing to 18 from 2015. If subsidised travel wasn't available there could be a tendency for students to select unsuitable courses on the premise of affordable travel which would in all probability lead to higher dropout rates.
- potential for an increase in those considered NEET in this age group;
- Introducing a change to low income families, may place a barrier in accessing education to students from low income families;
- Door to door service no longer provided – may discourage attendance;
- local bus services may not have the ability to support access to education;
- families may not have the ability to support access to education by transporting their child (drop off/pick up at base or station etc);
- potential increase in administration costs owing to an increase in the number of families who currently would not qualify for assistance, wishing to purchase tickets from the Council;
- Potential increase in congestion around public transport hubs at peak times.

Consultation Responses

3.54 Of the responses received in respect of this proposal, 19% agreed with the proposal and 71% disagreed. There were 137 comments made on this proposal through the consultation portal (appendix 2). It was noted there was no formal responses received from Colleges direct on this issue despite engaging with FEDEC prior to the commencing of the consultation.

Several comments were made through the consultation on this issue and the main theses and responses to those are below:

- i. Potential for increased congestion at peak times of day

This is a risk. However, we hope to mitigate this by encouraging families to purchase public transport tickets through the County Council, the price of which will be reduced owing to the bulk purchasing power of the organisation.

- ii. Discriminates against those in rural areas
It has been noted that several comments related to the effect on rural communities, particularly where learners are travelling some distance to attend post 16 education. We hope to mitigate this by working with operators to create a broader network over the coming years to help support the needs to young people in Essex.
- iii. Consideration of RPA and requirement for learner to remain in education, employment or training
See 3.53
- iv. Should be assisting children to remain in learning, not restricting them
There is no duty on the local authority to make post 16 transport available to its residents. Our proposals do not withdraw support in full but maintain for those who have been identified require the most support, with the addition of transport available at full cost recovery for those that will no longer qualify.
- v. Lack of public transport available
We hope to mitigate this by working with operators to create a broader network over the coming years to help support the needs to young people in Essex.
- vi. Removal of choice for learners
We currently provide transport to around 2500 learners to access post 16 education. This is a very small percentage of the total number in this age group. Choice is not being removed. Learners will still have a choice in which course they choose to study but they will need to understand more broadly how they intend to access that course prior to making a decision.

- 3.55 Many of the comments received were around the implications of the Government's proposal to raise the participation age so that students have to remain in education until they are 17 currently. From 2015 until they are 18. The government has been clear that they do not intend to extend the statutory duties in respect of the provision of transport for pre 16 learners to those in post 16 education. The provision of post 16 transport remains at the discretion of the individual local authority. Many have chosen to remove assistance in full to make the maximum financial saving. These proposals do not withdraw support completely but limit it to those who have been identified as most in need of support in accessing post 16 learning.

4. Policy context

- 4.1 Vision for Essex 2013-17 builds on and replaces the previous EssexWorks Commitment 2012-17 and was adopted by Council on 9th July.
- 4.2 It sets out the Cabinet's vision and priorities for the next four years and this will inform the development of a revised corporate strategy, a new outcomes framework that will guide commissioning decisions and inform the budget setting process.

4.3 It is based on the following principles:

- Spending taxpayers' money wisely;
- Focusing on what works best, not on who does it;
- Putting residents at the heart of the decisions we make;
- Empowering communities to help themselves;
- Reducing dependency;
- Working in partnership;
- Being open and transparent.

4.4 In addition an aim of the Vision is to increase educational achievement and enhance skills

4.5 The recommendations in this report are, in the main, consistent with those principles as follows:

4.5.1 The recommendations for making changes to the home to school transport policies will help to ensure that taxpayers' money is being spent wisely by reducing unnecessary costs

4.5.2 Making the recommendations following an extensive consultation with the general public ensures an open and transparent approach.

4.5.3 It should be noted that some of the risks highlighted within 3.51 relating to post 16 transport provision, in particular the risk of reducing skills if less people can access education, employment or training at post 16 age, may not meet the Vision but could be mitigated through the extension of the transport network within the County to support a broader group of learners.

5. Financial Implications

5.1 This Cabinet report seeks approval to change aspects of discretionary policies within the Council's Home to School Transport Service.

5.2 The current 2013-14 budget for this service is £24.1m. Without any intervention, the forecast budget for 2014-15 would be £24.4m as a result of reflecting changes in demographics and minor contract changes.

5.3 Table one below highlights the cumulative financial savings aligned to each proposal set out in this report for the proposed policy change.

Table One

Proposed Options	Paragraph Ref	Financial Year		
		2014-15 £'000	2015-16 £'000	2016-17 £'000
Withdrawal of use of catchment areas	3.11		238	377
Withdrawal of use of Joint Catchment areas	3.11		27	74
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>3.11</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>265</i>	<i>451</i>
Unavailable Walking Routes	3.21	4	12	20
Exceptional Circumstances	3.31	26	70	114
Introducing deadline for applications*	3.38	15	15	15
Post 16 Policy Changes	3.42	846	2,147	3,166
Total		891	2,509	3,766

*If this decision was taken in isolation then a further saving of £83k could be expected from Post 16 applicants. However these savings are not reflected as they would essentially be double counted as part of the Post 16 Policy Changes.

- 5.4 As a result of these policy changes plus other savings attributable to improved tenders (£0.5m), the Home to School Transport budget for 2014-15 will be £23.0m. This can be found within the Access to Education (£12.8m) and Special Education Needs (£10.2m) policy lines of the Education and Lifelong Learning portfolio.
- 5.5 Section three also highlights changes to the initial proposals following the consultation process. Table two below summarises the cumulative financial savings foregone:

Table Two

Non Delivered Options	Paragraph Ref	Financial Year		
		2014-15 £'000	2015-16 £'000	2016-17 £'000
Selective on Benefits	3.26	0	15	47
Total		0	15	47

- 5.6 Each proposal in section 3 sets out the associated risks and opportunities. Clearly some of these are financial in their nature, such as potential 'phasing in' and increased administration costs, and as such, these could impact on the ability to achieve savings. In mitigation, conservative views have been taken in regards to the level of estimated savings in order to take account of these risks, however, the service must ensure that robust implementation and monitoring plans are put in place to manage these policy changes and the arising risks. This monitoring should be extended to interrelated budgets (such as those covering the administration costs of running the Home to Schools Transport Service) to ensure that as a consequence of these decisions, costs are not incurred or 'shunted' elsewhere within the authority.

- 5.7 The service should also be horizon scanning for any potential legislation changed or future developments which could impact on the ability to deliver these savings. For example the Children and Families Bill going through parliament is proposing to increase the age by which a child or young person may be covered by a SEN Statement to 25 years old, which could impact on Post 16 transport costs and savings. This emphasises the importance of officers to continually monitor the wider legislative framework/ commercial landscape and how this impacts on the council's stated ambition of a simple, fair and transparent transport policy that reduces cost.

6. Legal Implications

- 6.1 The proposed consultation relates to changes to discretionary provision, the main legal implication in terms of the home to school transport proposals is the need to ensure that consultation is comprehensive and carried out in accordance with established legal principles. The proposed consultation of 6 weeks is lawful and complies with statutory guidance. The consultation document must give people enough information to respond to the consultation. Responses to this consultation will need to be considered when a final decision is taken.
- 6.2 The Council will need to ensure it maintains the statutory home to school transport provision, but none of these proposals would impact on the statutory provision.
- 6.3 The Council must prepare an annual travel policy statement for children aged 16-19 who have learning difficulty assessments who in full time education. There is a duty to consult in preparing the annual statement. The statement must be published no later than May each year and applies to the whole of the following academic year.

7 Implications for Staff

- 7.1 There are no staff implications arising from implementation of these changes.

8. Equality and Diversity implications

- 8.1 In making this decision ECC must have regard to the public sector equality duty (PSED) under s.149 of the Equalities Act 2010, ie have due regard to the need to: A. Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act. B. Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. C. Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.
- 8.2 The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

- 8.3 The PSED is a relevant factor in making this decision but does not impose a duty to achieve the outcomes in s.149, is only one factor that needs to be considered, and may be balanced against other relevant factors.
- 8.4 The impact of the recommended changes to home to school transport provision will be across the piece.
- 8.5 We will ensure that the communication on changes recommended is through and accessible to all families and that includes children and carers of families with special educational need where the pupil's SEN makes it harder for them to access services.
- 8.6 The UK is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This requires the UK to develop and undertake all actions and policies in the light of the best interests of the child. In this case there is a clear need to have a sustainable and affordable home to school transport provision which targets resources at those who most in need. The proposed changes protect those families on the lowest incomes.

9 **Background papers**

Consultation Paper
Original Consultation Decision Paper
Responses to consultation.

		AGENDA ITEM 4
		PAF/05/14
Committee:	People and Families Scrutiny Committee	
Date:	4 February 2014	
<u>Essex Children's Centres Decision Call-in</u>		
Enquiries to:	Robert Fox Scrutiny Officer Corporate Law & Assurance 01245 430526 robert.fox@essex.gov.uk	

Purpose of the Paper:

To review the Decision relating to Children's Centres, FP/366/10/13, taken at Cabinet on Tuesday 21 January 20014.

Attached is:

- A - The Notification of the Call-in
- B - The Cabinet Paper

A - Notification of Call-in

Decision title and reference number Forward Plan reference FP/366/10/13 Title of report : Early Years and Childcare : Essex Children's Centres	
Cabinet Member responsible Cllr Dick Madden	Date decision published Tuesday 21/01/14
Last day of call in period 24 January 2014	Last day of 10-day period to resolve the call-in 5 February 2014
Reasons for Making the Call in I wish to call-in this decision on the grounds that: The People & Families Scrutiny Committee received a report on Essex Children's Centres in broad terms in December 2013. There has been insufficient scrutiny undertaken on how the services needs have been mapped across the county, the lack of convenience of access to services including transport, the lack of user-friendliness of the consultation pack for families and the decision to extend the contracts of current service providers for two years.	
Signed: Councillor Melissa McGeorge	Dated: 22/01/2014
For completion by the Governance Officer	
Date call in Notice Received 22 January 2014	Date of informal meeting None held
Does the call in relate to a Schools issue	If yes, date when Parent Governor Reps and Diocesan Reps invited to the

No	meeting N/A
Date of People & Families Scrutiny Committee Meeting (if applicable) 4 February 2014	Date call in withdrawn / resolved

B - Cabinet Paper

AGENDA ITEM 8

Report to Cabinet	Forward Plan reference FP/366/10/13
Date of meeting: 21st January 2013	County Divisions affected by the decision All Divisions
Title of report : Early Years and Childcare : Essex Childrens Centres	
Report by Dave Hill, Executive Director for People Commissioning Enquiries to Dale Evans, Senior Project Manager, Email: Dale.evans@essex.gov.uk , Mobile: 07788 301585 Carolyn Terry, Early Years and Childcare Commissioner for Sufficiency and Sustainability email:Carolyn.Terry@essex.gov.uk mobile: 07825 860004	

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to advise Cabinet of proposals in relation to a restructure of the model for the delivery of Children's Centres in North East, Mid, West and South Essex and seek approval for decisions relating to the delivery model.

2. Recommendations

2.1. Agree to implement a re-structure of the Children's Centre delivery model in North East Essex as follows

- 2.1.1. Close Holland Valley Children's Centre in Clacton.
- 2.1.2. Close ABC Together Children's Centre (formally Willowtree Children's Centre) in Clacton, Manningtree Children's Centre in Mistley, Highwoods Children's Centre in Colchester. These buildings to be used for outreach services.
- 2.1.3. Move to a main site and designated delivery sites model replacing 20 registered Children's Centres with 9 registered Children's Centres (main sites) and 7 designated delivery sites as follows;
 - 2.1.3.1. 9 main sites at Beehive Children's Centre, Colchester, Berechurch Children's Centre, Colchester, Greenstead Children's Centre, Colchester, Little Hands Children's Centre, Colchester, Rainbow Children's Centre, Walton on the Naze, Shrub End Children's Centre, Colchester, St James Children's Centre, Clacton on Sea, Sydney House Children's Centre, Clacton on Sea, Windmill Children's Centre, Harwich
 - 2.1.3.2. 7 designated delivery sites at Birch and Rural Children's Centre, Birch, Colne Children's Centre, Brightlingsea, Discovery Children's Centre, Colchester, Harwich Town Children's Centre, Harwich, New Town Children's Centre, Colchester, St Annes and Castle Children's Centre, Colchester, Hemmington House Children's Centre, Jaywick.

- 2.1.3.3. Changes in the hours of service provision at delivery sites to 5 – 25 hours per week, according to the needs of the community.

2.2. Agree to implement a re-structure of the Children's Centre delivery model in Mid Essex as follows

- 2.2.1. Close Little Lanes Children's Centre, in Braintree and Stock Children's Centre in Chelmsford. These buildings to be used for outreach services.
- 2.2.2. Move to a main site and designated delivery sites model replacing 22 registered Children's Centres with 9 registered Children's Centres (main sites) and 11 designated delivery sites as follows;
 - 2.2.2.1. 9 main sites at Acorn Children's Centre, Halstead; Carousel Children's Centre, Braintree; Chelmsford West Children's Centre, Chelmsford; Chetwood Children's Centre, South Woodham Ferrers; Harlequin Children's Centre, Witham; Larkrise Children's Centre, Great Baddow; Maldon Children's Centre, Maldon; Perryfields Children's Centre, Chelmsford; Seesaw Children's Centre, Braintree
 - 2.2.2.2. 11 designated delivery sites at Beeches Children's Centre, Chelmsford; Bumblebee Children's Centre, Danbury; Chelmsford Central Children's Centre, Chelmsford; Galleywood Children's Centre, Chelmsford; Rainbow Children's Centre, Halstead; Roundabout Children's Centre, Witham; Silver End Children's Centre, Witham; Sunflower Children's Centre, Chelmsford; The Dengie Children's Centre, Burnham-On-Crouch; Valley Children's Centre; Earls Colne; Yellow Brick Road Children's Centre, Great Totham
 - 2.2.2.3. Changes in the hours of service provision at delivery sites to 5-25 hours per week, according to the needs of the community

2.3. Agree to implement a re-structure of the Children's Centre delivery model in West Essex as follows

- 2.3.1. Close Little Buddies Children's Centre in Buckhurst Hill.
- 2.3.2. Close ABC Children's Centre In Harlow and retain building as a designated Children's Centre delivery site
- 2.3.3. Close Sunflowers Children's Centre in Harlow. This building to be used for outreach services.
- 2.3.4. Move to a main site and designated delivery sites model replacing 17 registered Children's Centres with 9 registered Children's Centres (main sites) and 6 designated Children's Centres delivery sites, as follows;
 - 2.3.4.1. 9 main sites; Brambles Children's Centre, Epping, Fairycroft Children's Centres, Saffron Waldon, Hazelwood Children's Centre, Waltham Abbey, Potter Street Children's Centres, Harlow, Spangles Children's Centre, Stansted, Sunrise Children's Centre, Meadows Children's Centre, Harlow, Treehouse Children's Centre, Harlow, and True Stars Children's Centre, Chigwell.
 - 2.3.4.2. 6 designated delivery sites at Abbeywood Children's Centre, Waltham Abbey, Burnt Mill Children's Centre, Harlow, Little Goslings Children's Centre, Great Dunmow, Little Oaks Children's Centre, Loughton and Little Star Centre's Centre, Chipping Ongar and, ABC Children's Centre, Harlow.

2.3.4.3. Changes in the hours of service provision at delivery sites to 15 hours per week

2.4. Agree to implement a re-structure of the Children's Centre delivery model in South Essex as follows

2.4.1. Close Little Treehouse Children's Centre in Castle Point

2.4.2. Close The Ark Children's Centre, Brentwood. This building to be used for outreach services.

2.4.3. Close Laindon Park Children's Centre and the Hills Children's Centre in Basildon and transfer services for both centres to a new designated delivery site, the Limes Children's Centre, 93 New Century Road, Laindon SS15 6AQ

2.4.4. Move to a main site and designated delivery sites main model replacing 27 registered Children's Centres to 10 registered Children's Centres (main sites) and 14 designated Children's Centres delivery sites as follows;

2.4.4.1. 10 main sites at the All About Children's Centre; Highcliffe Children's Centre; Kaleidoscope Children's Centre; Larchwood Children's Centre; Little Handprints Children's Centre; Little Lions Children's Centre; Northlands Children's Centre; Sunnyside Children's Centre; The Oak Tree Children's Centre, Wishing Well Children's Centre operating for 50 hours per week.

2.4.4.2. 14 designated delivery sites at Billericay Children's Centre; Canvey Community Children's Centre; Cherry Tree Children's Centre; Cherrydown Children's Centre; Fryerns Children's Centre, Ladybird Children's Centre; Little Acorns Children's Centre; Little Tewkes Children's Centre; Sea Shells Children's Centre, Startbright Children's Centre, Sunshine Children's Centre; The Limes Children's Centre; The Triangle Children's Centre, Willows Children's Centre.

2.4.4.3. Changes in the hours of service provision at delivery sites to 5 – 25 hours per week.

2.5. Agree that the four Children's Centre contracts held by the current providers (Barnardo's - North East/South, 4 Children - Mid and Spurgeon's - West) will be extended for two years, from 1 April 2014 – 31 March 2016.

3. Background and proposal

3.1. Children's Centres in Essex

3.1.1. Children's Centres are part of ECC's effective early support system for Children, Young People and their Families. This system aims to ensure there is sufficient and high quality provision to prevent the needs of children young persons and families ('CYP&F') escalating into more costly intervention and support a step down from more costly services where appropriate.

3.1.2. This system of support has seen, amongst others, the development of Family Solutions Teams, Divisional Based Intervention Teams and the Family Innovation Fund.

3.1.3. As part of ECC's next stage of transformation, and consistent with the Vision Essex adopted in July 2013 there is a need to improve the way we deliver services and to make savings within this area.

3.1.4. The current contracts for Children's centres are currently held by Barnardo's (North East and South Essex), 4 Children (Mid Essex) and Spurgeons (West Essex).

- 3.1.5. These current quadrant based Children's Centre contracts are due to expire on 31 March 2014 and the imminent expiry of contracts has created an opportunity to reconsider how the service is delivered. In addition, changes to the inspection framework set out in the Ofsted Children's Centre Inspection Handbook (March 2013) recognise the benefits of inspecting services on a cluster basis. These proposals outline Ofsted's ability to inspect on a 'Group' basis with a single inspection report or 'Simultaneously' with up to five centres. This has provided LAs with the opportunity to review their Children's Centre delivery model.
- 3.1.6. Discussions with existing providers about the current contracts identified savings that could be made by continuing to provide the services but reducing the numbers of Children's Centres. It is therefore proposed to achieve efficiencies from Children's Centres by;
- extending the current quadrant contracts for two years from April 2014 – March 2016
 - changing the way that Children's Centres are delivered by implementing a 'main site' and 'designated delivery site' model. Each main site will have linked delivery sites as part of their network of provision.

3.2. The 'main and delivery' site model

- 3.2.1. Main sites are buildings which are proposed to be open to the public for drop in visits and service delivery. Services will be available to families for 50 hours a week; this may be a combination of centre open hours and telephone service operating times and individual centres will be able to advise on the specific service. Website information, including the centre's weekly activity timetable will be available twenty four hours a day.
- 3.2.2. Designated delivery sites will be open for a set number of hours each week. This will vary from site to site and will be open between 5 hours and 35 hours per week based on local need. Please see individual centres for the proposed allocation of hours per week. Website information, including the delivery site weekly activity timetable will be available twenty four hours a day.
- 3.2.3. Outreach services will continue to be provided based on need within the community and will adapt to meet changing family needs. Outreach services are held in community venues such as church halls, village halls, libraries or health centres. Services delivered from these venues are flexible and can change according to local need, therefore they are not included as part of these proposals. This will also apply to targeted one to one support in the home.

3.3. Conclusion

- 3.3.1. There will still be a Children's Centre service provided for all children in Essex
- 3.3.2. The proposals will result in a reduction in the numbers of registered Children's Centres; but there will be no change to the current service specification.
- 3.3.3. The benefits of these proposals include;
- reductions in rental and utility costs for existing registered sites directly let by providers
 - efficiency gains through leaner management, leaner processes and administration of the services through the main sites.

3.3.4. There will also be benefits for service users as the new main site and designated delivery site model will release staff from manning under-utilised buildings and allow for a more flexible staffing model to meet the needs of local communities. This will provide the opportunity to redirect staff time towards more targeted front-line work, supporting vulnerable families and children.

3.3.5. Children's Centre services will continue to be provided at 82 of the current 85 sites

3.4. Changes specific to North East Essex:

3.4.1. As stated in resolution 2.1.1 Holland Valley Children's Centre in Clacton will close.

3.4.2. As stated in resolution 2.1.2, ABC Together Children's Centre (formally Willowtree Children's Centre) in Clacton, Manningtree Children's Centre in Mistley, Highwoods Children's Centre in Colchester will close. The sites will be used for outreach services.

3.4.3. There will be a reduction from 20 registered Children's Centres to 9 registered Children's Centres main sites and 7 designated sites. 6 of the 7 proposed delivery sites are currently registered Children's Centres main sites and will be re-designated as delivery sites.

3.4.4. The proposed registered Children's Centres main sites are detailed below and will operate for 50 hours per week (P/W);

District	Centre Name	Current Hours P/W	Proposed Hours P/W
Colchester	Greenstead Children's Centre	50 (centre open)	50 (No change – centre open)
Colchester	Berechurch Children's Centre	50 (centre open)	50 (No change- centre open)
Colchester	Shrub End Children's Centre	38 (centre open)	50 (centre open)
Colchester	Beehive Children's Centre	44 (centre open)	50 (centre open)
Colchester	Little Hands Children's Centre	40 (centre open)	50 (centre open)
Tendring	Sydney House Children's Centre	50 (centre open)	50 (No change – centre open)
Tendring	St James Children's Centre	50 (centre open)	50 (No change – centre open)
Tendring	Rainbow Children's Centre	31 (centre open) 9 (outreach services)	50 (centre open)
Tendring	Windmill Children's Centre	50 (centre open)	50 (No change-centre open)

3.4.5. The proposed designated delivery sites and operational hours are detailed below. It is proposed that some delivery sites will reduce to 5 – 25 hours per week dependent on community needs;

District	Centre Name	Current Hours P/W	Proposed Hours P/W
Colchester	St Annes and Castle Children's Centre	43 (centre open)	25 (centre open)
Colchester	New Town Children's Centre (Hythe Children's Centre)	45 (centre open)	20 (centre open)
Colchester	Birch and Rural Children's Centre	42.5 (centre open)	5 (centre open)
Colchester	Discovery Children's Centre	37.5 (centre open)	15 (centre open)
Tendring	Hemmington House	10 (centre open)	15 (centre open)
Tendring	Colne Children's Centre	30 (centre open) 10 (outreach services)	20 (centre open)
Tendring	Harwich Town Children's Centre	50 (centre open)	20 (centre open)

- 3.4.6. Outreach services will continue to be provided based on need within the community and will adapt to meet changing family needs. As stated above, there will be outreach services delivered from the ABC Together Children's Centre (formally Willowtree Children's Centre) site in Clacton, Manningtree Children's Centre site in Mistley, Highwoods Children's Centre site in Colchester.

3.5. **Changes specific to Mid Essex:**

- 3.5.1. As stated in resolution 2.2.1 Little Lanes Children's Centre, in Braintree and Stock Children's Centre in Chelmsford will close. The sites will be used for outreach services.
- 3.5.2. There will be a reduction from 22 registered Children's Centres to 9 registered Children's Centre main sites and 11 designated delivery sites.
- 3.5.3. The proposed registered Children's Centres main sites are detailed below and will operate for 50 hours per week;

District	Centre Name	Current Hours P/W	Proposed Hours P/W
Braintree	Harlequin Children's Centre	50 (centre open)	40 (centre open) 10 (telephone service)
Braintree	Acorn Children's Centre	40 (centre open)	40 (centre open) 10 (telephone service) No change – telephone service is in addition to current hours
Braintree	Seesaw Children's Centre	50 (centre open)	40 (centre open) 10 (telephone service)
Braintree	Carousel Children's Centre	50 (centre open)	40 (centre open) 10 (telephone service)
Chelmsford	Chelmsford West Children's Centre	40 (centre open)	40 (centre open) 10 (telephone service) No change – telephone service is in addition to current hours
Chelmsford	Larkrise Children's Centre	42.5 (centre open)	40 (centre open) 10 (telephone service)
Chelmsford	Perryfields Children's Centre	37.5 (centre open)	40 (centre open) 10 (telephone service)
Chelmsford	Chetwood Children's Centre	41.5 (centre open)	40 (centre open) 10 (telephone service)
Maldon	Maldon Children's Centre	38 (centre open)	40 (centre open) 10 (telephone service) 2 additional hours proposed alongside additional telephone service

- 3.5.4. The proposed designated delivery sites and operational hours are detailed below. It is proposed that some delivery sites will reduce to 5 – 20 hours per week dependent on community needs;

District	Centre Name	Current Hours P/W	Proposed Hours P/W
Braintree	Roundabout Children's Centre	42.5 (centre open)	10 (centre open)
Braintree	Rainbow Children's Centre	32 (centre open)	5 (centre open)
Braintree	Valley Children's Centre	40 (centre open)	10 (centre open)
Braintree	Silver End Children's Centre	40 (centre open)	20 (centre open)
Chelmsford	Beeches Children's Centre	42.5 (centre open)	10 (centre open)

District	Centre Name	Current Hours P/W	Proposed Hours P/W
Chelmsford	Sunflower Children's Centre	32 (centre open)	5 (centre open)
Chelmsford	Chelmsford Central Children's Centre	25 (centre open)	10 (centre open)
Chelmsford	Bumblebee Children's Centre	40 (centre open)	10 (centre open)
Chelmsford	Galleywood Children's Centre	14 (centre open)	5 (centre open)
Maldon	The Dengie Children's Centre	41 (centre open)	10 (centre open)
Chelmsford	Sunflower Children's Centre	32 (centre open)	5 (centre open)
Maldon	Yellow Brick Road Children's Centre	40 (centre open)	5 (centre open)

3.5.5. Outreach services will continue to be provided based on need within the community and will adapt to meet changing family needs. As stated above, there will be outreach services delivered from the Little Lanes Children's Centre site, in Braintree and Stock Children's Centre site in Chelmsford.

3.6. **Changes specific to West Essex:**

3.6.1. As stated in resolution 2.3.1, Little Buddies Children's Centre in Buckhurst Hill will close.

3.6.2. As stated in resolution 2.3.2, ABC Children's Centre in Harlow will close and the building retained for use as a designated delivery site.

3.6.3. As stated in resolution 2.3.3, Sunflowers Children's Centre in Harlow will close but the site will be used for outreach services

3.6.4. There will be a reduction from 17 registered Children's Centres to 9 registered Children's Centres main sites and 6 designated delivery Sites

3.6.5. The proposed registered Children's Centres main sites are set out below and will operate for 50 hours per week;

District	Centre Name	Current Hours P/W	Proposed Hours P/W
Harlow	Potter Street Children's Centre	40 (centre open) 10 (telephone service)	40 (centre open) 10 (telephone service)
Harlow	The Meadows Children's Centre	40 (Centre Open) 10 (telephone service)	40 (centre open) 10 (telephone service)
Harlow	Treehouse Children's Centre	40 (centre open) 10 (telephone service)	40 (centre open) 10 (telephone service)
Epping Forest	Hazelwood Children's Centre	50 (centre open)	50 (centre open)
Epping Forest	Sunrise Children's Centre	40 (centre open) 10 (telephone service)	40 (centre open) 10 (telephone service)
Epping Forest	True Stars Children's Centre	40 (centre open) 10 (telephone service)	40 (centre open) 10 (telephone service)
Epping Forest	Brambles Children's Centre	40 (centre open) 10 (telephone service)	No change 40 (centre open) 10 (telephone service)
Uttlesford	Spangles Children's Centre	40 (centre open) 10 (telephone service)	No change 40 (centre open) 10 (telephone service)
Uttlesford	Faircroft Children's Centre	40 (centre open) 10 (telephone service)	No change 40 (centre open) 10 (telephone service)

3.6.6. The proposed delivery sites and operational hours are detailed below. It is proposed that some delivery sites will reduce to 15 hours per week dependent on community needs;

District	Centre Name	Current Hours P/W	Proposed Hours P/W
Harlow	Burnt Mill Children's Centre	40 (centre open) 10 (telephone service)	15(centre open)
Harlow	ABC Children's Centre	40 (centre open) 10 (telephone service)	15(centre open)
Epping Forest	Little Star Children's Centre	40 (centre open) 10 (telephone service)	15(centre open)
Epping Forest	Little Oaks Children's Centre	40 (centre open) 10 (telephone service)	15(centre open)
Epping Forest	Abbeywood Children's Centre	34 (centre open) 16 (telephone service)	15(centre open)
Uttlesford	Little Goslings Children's Centre	40 (centre open) 10 (telephone service)	15(centre open)

3.6.7. Outreach services will continue to be provided based on need within the community and will adapt to meet changing family needs. As stated above, there will be outreach services delivered from the Sunflowers Children's Centre site, Harlow.

3.7. **Changes specific to South Essex:**

3.7.1. As stated in resolution 2.4.1 Little Treehouse Children's Centre in Benfleet will close

3.7.2. As stated in resolution 2.4.2, the Ark Children's Centre in Brentwood will close and the site will be used for outreach services according to community need.

3.7.3. As stated in resolution 2.4.3, Laindon Park Children's Centre and the Hills Children's Centre in Basildon will close. A new designated delivery site, The Limes, 93 New Century Road, Laindon, will be provided and services from the two closed centres will transfer to this designated site.

3.7.4. There will be a reduction from 27 registered Children's Centres to 10 registered Children's Centres main sites and 14 designated delivery sites. 13 of the 14 proposed delivery sites are currently registered Children's Centres main sites and will be re-designated as delivery sites. The 14th site (The Limes Children's Centre) will be available for service delivery from January 2014.

3.7.5. The proposed registered Children's Centre main sites are set out below and will operate for 50 hours per week;

District	Centre Name	Current Hours P/W	Proposed Hours P/W
Basildon	Northlands Park Children's Centre	50 (centre open)	No Change – 50 (centre open)
Basildon	Kaleidoscope Children's Centre	50 (centre open)	No Change - 50 (centre open)
Basildon	All About Children's Centre	50 (centre open)	No Change - 50 (centre open)
Basildon	Sunnyside Children's Centre	42.5 (centre open) 7.5 (telephone service)	No Change - 50 (centre open)
Basildon	Highcliffe Children's Centre	35 (centre open) 10 (outreach) 5 (telephone service)	No Change - 50 (centre open)

District	Centre Name	Current Hours P/W	Proposed Hours P/W
Brentwood	Larchwood Children's Centre	40 (centre open) 10 (telephone service)	No Change - 50 (centre open)
Castle Point	Little Lions Children's Centre	50 (centre open)	No Change - 50 (centre open)
Castle Point	Little Handprints Children's Centre	50 (centre open)	No Change - 50 (centre open)
Rochford	Wishing Well Children's Centre	50 (centre open)	No Change - 50 (centre open)
Rochford	The Oak Tree Children's Centre	42.5 (centre open) 7.5 (telephone service)	50 (centre open)

3.7.6. The proposed delivery sites and operational hours are detailed below. It is proposed that some delivery sites will reduce to 5 – 25 hours per week dependent on community needs;

District	Centre Name	Current Hours P/W	Proposed Hours P/W
Basildon	Billericay Children's Centre	25 (centre open) 25 (telephone contact)	5 (centre open)
Basildon	The Triangle Children's Centre	45 (centre open) 5 (outreach)	10 (centre open)
Basildon	Fryerns Farm Children's Centre	40 (centre open) 10 (telephone service)	15 (centre open)
Basildon	The Limes Children's Centre (currently operating from outreach sites until building refurbishment complete)	20 (outreach Sites) 30 (telephone service)	25 (centre open)
Basildon	Cherrydown Children's Centre	50 (centre open)	15 (centre open)
Basildon	StartBright Children's Centre	10 (centre open) 40 telephone support	5 (centre open)
Brentwood	Cherry Tree Children's Centre	40 (centre open) 10 (telephone Service)	15 (centre open)
Brentwood	Sunshine Children's Centre	40 (centre open) 10 (telephone service)	5 (centre open)
Castle Point	Little Tewkes Children's Centre	40 (centre open) 10 (telephone service)	15 (centre open)
Castle Point	Canvey Community Children's Centre	40 (centre open) 10 (telephone service)	15 (centre open)
Castle Point	Little Acorns Children's Centre	40 (centre open) 10 (telephone service)	10 (centre open)
Rochford	Sea Shells Children's Centre	45 (centre open) 5 (telephone service)	15 (centre open)

District	Centre Name	Current Hours P/W	Proposed Hours P/W
Rochford	Willows Children's Centre	40 (centre open) 10 (telephone service)	15 (centre open)
Rochford	Ladybird Children's Centre	40 (centre open) 10 (telephone service)	15 (centre open)

3.7.7. Outreach services will continue to be provided based on need within the community and will adapt to meet changing family needs. As stated above, there will be outreach services delivered from The Ark Children's Centre in Brentwood.

3.8. In addition, the Cabinet is asked to agree that the four Children's Centre contracts held by the current providers (Barnardo's – North/South, 4 Children – Mid and Spurgeons – West) be extended for two years, from 1 April 2014 – 31 March 2016. This two year extension will allow 30 months for a robust re-commissioning process to be undertaken whilst delivering the required savings in this area and maintaining current service performance levels. It will provide an opportunity to align Children's Centres commissioning with health services to deliver improved outcomes for children and their families and is the most efficient option to achieve savings and minimise disruption to services.

3.9. This proposal will result in the reduced use of delivery sites by Children's Centres. Essex Properties and Facilities will work with the providers to make space within premises available for bookable use by other compatible ECC services, partners and voluntary organisations, avoiding premises costs elsewhere.

4. Consultation

4.1. On 15 October 2013, authority was given on behalf of the Executive Director for People Commissioning to consult on the proposed changes. The consultation ran from 17 October – 5 December 2013 and the consultation document is attached as Appendix 1. This consultation followed an earlier exercise with parents in the Summer of 2013 about the future of Children's Centres; in which the family survey received 597 responses and 49 participants from targeted groups where engaged on their views through 8 focus groups.

4.2. The consultation took place with a wide range of stakeholders including families, staff and partners and a number of different consultation mechanisms were used to enable feedback. Responses to the consultation could be made through online/paper based questionnaires, written feedback, focus groups and face to face briefings between providers and service users, face to face briefings between services users, local district and borough councillors and the Cabinet Member for Families and Children.

4.3. ECC also made the consultation information available in the top 3 community languages spoken in Essex, and had a YouTube video recorded by the Cabinet Member for Families and Children to offer information to those who may find written information difficult to access. The consultation was publicised by ECC to the following groups with the expectation that they cascade and publicise the consultation a) Education Essex (i.e. all schools) b) elected Members c) all children's centre governance groups d) ECC officers/ stakeholders e) Clinical Commissioning Groups

4.4. The number of respondents to the consultation was low in comparison to the total number of families registered as using Children's Centres (as at 31 December 2013).

4.5. Further representations were received following the closure of the formal consultation. These are not specifically considered in the consultation report but officers are satisfied that no new substantive issues have been raised.

4.6. During the consultation period the number of responses received were as follows;

	North East	Mid	West	South
Electronic Responses	349	186	292	192
Emails and Letters	52	34	29	30
Responses received after closure of formal consultation	35	8	13	18
Families registered as using Children's centres (31 December 2013)	15,260	13,058	16,332	19,325

4.7. Both the formal responses to the consultation and additional letters and emails received during the consultation period were recorded and analysed in two reports. (see Appendix 2 - Quantitative Analysis for the responses by quadrant and Appendix 3 - Qualitative Analysis for the whole survey)

4.8. It is clear that there is substantial opposition to the proposed Children's Centre delivery model among those who responded to the survey.

4.9. In relation to the proposed change of opening hours at delivery sites, responses across each quadrant were insufficient in numbers to represent the views of families and professionals.

4.10. The main issues in relation to each quadrant area are set out below which have been summarised from both the Appendix 2 - Quantitative Analysis for the responses by quadrant and Appendix 3 - Qualitative Analysis for the whole survey;

4.10.1. North East Essex

4.10.1.1. Half of family respondents strongly disagree or disagree with the councils proposals 51% (135), whilst professionals generally support the Council's overall proposal to move to a combination of Main sites and designated delivery sites 52% (17)

4.10.1.2. In relation to the ABC Together Children's Centre, the issues that were raised can be summarised as follows;

4.10.1.2.1. 13% (4) respondents disagree with the Councils overall proposal to move to a combination of main site and delivery sites.

- 4.10.1.2.2. 41% (13) of respondents indicated that they had accessed services at another children's Centre.
- 4.10.1.2.3. Respondents mentioned that the Rainbow Centre is too far away from them to travel and that public transport to Walton on the Naze is limited and too expensive. Respondents felt that the centre was not accessible to them and would be better merged with a Clacton Children's Centre.
- 4.10.1.2.4. Respondents that felt that the ABC Centre was well run and easily accessible and would like it to stay open.
- 4.10.1.2.5. Existing Rainbow Children Centre users expressed concerns that parking may be difficult if proposal were implemented.
- 4.10.1.3. In relation to Highwood Children's Centre, the issues that were raised were as follows;
 - 4.10.1.3.1. 78% (18) of respondents who answered the questions about Highwoods Children's Centre, strongly disagree or disagree with the Councils proposals to move to a combination of Main Site and designated delivery Site.
- 4.10.1.4. In relation to Holland Valley Children's Centre, the issues that were raised were as follows;
 - 4.10.1.4.1. 43% (8) family respondents strongly disagree or disagree with the Councils overall proposal. This is only slightly higher than those that agree 37% (7).
 - 4.10.1.4.2. 79% (15) of respondents indicated that they had accessed services at another Children's Centre,
 - 4.10.1.4.3. 42% (8) had accessed services at an outreach site, 16% (3) received one to one support at home,
 - 4.10.1.4.4. 11% (2) do not use services elsewhere
 - 4.10.1.4.5. 32% (6) of family respondents indicated that they didn't know if their usage of Children's Centre services will change if the proposals take effect
- 4.10.1.5. In relation to Manningtree Children's Centre, the issues that were raised were as follows;
 - 4.10.1.5.1. 61% (36) family respondents strongly disagree or disagree with the Councils overall proposal. This is only slightly higher than those that agree 22% (13)
 - 4.10.1.5.2. An equal proportion of respondents have accessed services at another Children's Centre 38% (25) and 37% (24) at an outreach centre with 28% not accessing services elsewhere
 - 4.10.1.5.3. There was no clear indication of whether respondents usage of Children's Centre services will change if the proposals take effect
 - 4.10.1.5.4. A number of responses praised the Children's Centre and raised concerns about losing 'a huge part of the community'. A number of respondents also provided examples of ways in which the centre has helped them and improved their lives. They also mentioned the

information, advice and guidance people receive from the Children's Centre is needed in this area. Most of the responses also mentioned that there is a concern that if the Children's Centre closes, many families will lose the much needed support they received from this centre. This is because people will not be able to travel to other centres such as Windmill Children's Centre, Ramsey because of the expense and distance.

4.10.1.6. Issues raised in North East Essex

4.10.1.6.1. Respondents felt that Children's Centre's should be open from 9am – 5pm. Longer opening and any time before this is not practical or accessible especially for those with preschool children. It is also suggested that if centres wish to open until later then perhaps other Health Services could make use of the buildings

4.10.1.7. Comments from Members

4.10.1.7.1. A The Member for Tendring Rural West division raised concerns about accessibility to other Children's Centres especially for families from the Mistley area, loss of some service delivery i.e. informal one to one drop in and baby clinic and alternative drop in location.

4.10.1.8. ECC Comments on specific issues raised for North East Essex

4.10.1.8.1. Identifying and supporting vulnerable families in the Mistley area (which is directly relevant to services provided from Manningtree Children's Centre) will continue to be a priority. Health services such as baby clinic will continue to be delivered from this building. Local outreach venues will be sourced to meet local need on an on-going basis. Although the proposal is that the building will not continue to be a registered main site for provision of Children's Centre services, this venue will continue as a privately run day nursery and outreach and targeted one to one intervention will continue to be delivered within the local community

4.10.1.8.2. There is a public car park in the vicinity of the Rainbow Children's Centre which can be easily accessed by families. Tendring District Council provides free car parking permits for residents after 10am.

4.10.2. Mid Essex

4.10.2.1. 65% (87) of the respondents to the family consultation were more likely to strongly disagree or disagree with the council's proposals, while 52% (10) of the professional respondents strongly agreed, agreed or neither agreed or disagreed with the Councils proposals.

4.10.2.2. In relation to Little Lanes Children's Centre, the issues that were raised can be summarised as follows;

4.10.2.2.1. 72% (13) of respondents Strongly Disagree or Disagree with the Council's overall proposals.

4.10.2.2.2. Half of the respondents (11) indicated that they had accessed services at another Children's Centre and over a quarter 27% (6) had accessed services at an outreach site.

- 4.10.2.2.3. There was no clear indication as to whether respondent's usage of Children's Centre services will change after April 2014 if the proposals take effect.
 - 4.10.2.2.4. Three respondents requested that alternative services and sessions be delivered in the same area should Little Lanes Children's Centre close
 - 4.10.2.2.5. Respondents felt that it would be a shame to lose the Children's Centre as it was a 'brilliant location' and is a well-run and friendly
 - 4.10.2.2.6. One professional respondent suggested that the site that Little Lanes Children's Centre is proposed to merge with is not realistically a neighbouring centre and is about 5km by road. The same respondent proposed that some services remain at Little Lanes to serve the rural community
 - 4.10.2.2.7. Halstead Town Council raised concerns relating to parents access to transport and travel proposing that cuts were not made to village provision. In addition concerns were raised about greater pressure falling on the Acorn Children's Centre in Halstead as a result of changes to provision in Sible Hedingham and Earls Colne.
- 4.10.2.3. In relation to Stock Children's Centre the issues that were raised can be summarised as follows;
- 4.10.2.3.1. 67 % (2) of respondents had never accessed services from the Stock Children's Centre. 100% (3) of respondents indicated that they had accessed services at another Children's Centre
 - 4.10.2.3.2. There was no clear indication whether the respondent's usage of Children's Centres services will change after April 2014 if the proposals take effect. In addition there was no clear view of the Council's overall proposal due to very small response figures.
- 4.10.2.4. Issues raised for Mid Essex**
- 4.10.2.4.1. A number of general responses were received regarding the opening hours of several different Children's Centres in Mid Essex. Concerns related to working parents being able to access centres before 9 and after 5 and the alignment between reduced opening hours and public transport and the provision of increased telephone support to compensate for reduced hours of opening.
 - 4.10.2.4.2. A general comment was received that many Children's Centres have been purpose built and have key advantages that must not be lost. For example rooms that support equality of access, integral children's play area and garden areas.
- 4.10.2.5. Councillor / Council Comments**
- 4.10.2.5.1. Member for Witham Northern, Councillor James Abbott raised concerns that Little Lanes Children's Centre was being merged with Seesaw Children's Centre concluding that the centres were 5km apart by road and that the proposals merged a village centre with a separate urban location. Cllr. Abbott proposed that Little Lanes Children's Centre remain open to meet the needs of the area.

4.10.3. West Essex

4.10.3.1. Respondents to the family consultation were more likely to Strongly Disagree or Disagree with the Council's proposal (69%, 141), whilst 57% (27) professional respondents strongly disagree or disagree and 40% (19) Strongly Agree, Agree or Neither Agree or Disagree with the proposals.

4.10.3.2. In relation to ABC Children's Centre the issues that were raised as follows;

4.10.3.2.1. 77% (47) of respondents strongly disagree or disagree with the proposal to move to a combination of main and delivery sites.

4.10.3.2.2. 58% (38) of respondents had accessed at another Children's Centre. Over a quarter 29% (19) haven't used services anywhere else.

4.10.3.2.3. 41% (27) felt that they would use Children's Centre services less often, if the proposals were to take effect.

4.10.3.2.4. Harlow Strategic Partnership for Educational Attainment were concerned that the closure of ABC Children's Centre will create issue of equality and access to services for families in need of support in the area as they are likely to feel more isolated than families in more deprived areas.

4.10.3.2.5. Families were concerned that their needs would not be met if this centre was closed and that they would lose the network of support they have created in the area they live.

4.10.3.2.6. One respondent suggested that service users might be willing to make a small contribution for attending the centre in order to keep it open.

4.10.3.2.7. Professionals were concerned that there would be no Children's Centre within walking distance from Old Harlow.

4.10.3.2.8. Respondents were concerned that Potter Street Children's Centre (the proposed main and merger site for ABC Children's Centre services) would not be big enough to cater for the extra service users from ABC Children's Centre.

4.10.3.3. In relation to Little Buddies Children's Centre, the issues that were raised as follows;

4.10.3.3.1. 83% (38) of respondents strongly disagree or disagree with the Council's overall proposal to move to a combination of main and delivery sites, and 11% (5) strongly agree, agree or neither agree not disagree.

4.10.3.3.2. 52% (24) of respondents have accessed services at another Children's Centre and 26% (12) at an outreach venue. 24% (11) has not used services elsewhere.

4.10.3.3.3. 39% (18) have said they will use Children's Centres less often and 11% (5) that they will not use them at all. 17% (8) have stated 'other' did not leave additional comments.

4.10.3.3.4. Epping Forest District Council was concerned about the closure of Little Buddies Children's Centre due to transport accessibility and expense issues for families with buggies and family members with disabilities.

4.10.3.3.5. Respondents were concerned that Sunrise Children's Centre (the proposed main and merger site for Little Buddies Children's Centre services) would not be big enough to cater for the extra service users from Little Buddies Children's Centre. They were also concerned that

public transport will restrict them attending Sunrise Children's Centre and will increase the levels of isolation experienced by families in this area.

4.10.3.4. In relation to Sunflowers Children's Centre, the issues that were raised as follows;

- 4.10.3.4.1. 87% (19) of respondents strongly disagree or disagree with the Council's overall proposal to move to a combination of main and delivery sites.
- 4.10.3.4.2. 65% (15) have accessed services at another Children's Centre and 22% (5) at an outreach venue. . A quarter 26% (6) have not used services elsewhere.
- 4.10.3.4.3. 39% (9) have said they will use Children's Centres less often and 17% (4) don't think there will be any change, if the proposals take effect.

4.10.3.5. **Issues raised for West**

- 4.10.3.5.1. One response suggested that the regeneration and expansion of areas within and just outside of Harlow will result in the demand for Children's Centres in this area increasing.

4.10.3.6. **ECC response to issues raised in the West Essex consultation**

- 4.10.3.6.1. Consideration has been given and proposals developed to ensure that the proposed re-designation and closures have been identified with the aim of delivering the services in areas of deprivation and where families most need them across the West Essex.

4.10.4. **South Essex**

4.10.4.1. 72% (132) of respondents were more likely to disagree than respondents who agreed 26%, (46) with the Council's overall proposal to move to a combination of Main site and Designated delivery sites.

4.10.4.2. In relation to the Ark Children's Centre the issues that were raised can be summarised as follows;

- 4.10.4.2.1. 100% (5) respondents indicated they had used services at other Children's Centres.
- 4.10.4.2.2. 40% (2) of respondents felt they would use Children's Centre services less often but the same amount 40% (2) either would or do use another Children's Centre already.
- 4.10.4.2.3. 60% (3) of the respondents either agreed or neither agreed or disagreed with the Council's overall proposal to move to a combination of main site and designated delivery sites.
- 4.10.4.2.4. One respondent mentioned that the distance from the Ark Children's Centre to the proposed merged site of Larchwood Children's Centre could be quite a barrier for some people

4.10.4.3. In relation to Little Treehouse Children's Centre the issues that were raised can be summarised as follows;

- 4.10.4.3.1. 56% (19) of the respondents indicated they had used services at other Children's Centres.

- 4.10.4.3.2. 29% (10) of respondents felt they would use Children's Centre services less often and a quarter stated they would not use them at all.
- 4.10.4.3.3. 81% (25) of the respondents disagreed with the Council's overall proposal to move to a combination of Main site and Designated delivery sites.
- 4.10.4.3.4. There were several responses regarding the proposed closure of this centre, suggesting that not everyone would be able to drive the 3 miles to the proposed merged site at Little Handprints
- 4.10.4.3.5. A number of responses felt the consultation had not given a valid reason why this Children's Centre is proposed to be closed.
- 4.10.4.4. In relation to the Laindon Park Children's Centre and merger the issues that were raised can be summarised as follows;
 - 4.10.4.4.1. 67% (2) respondents indicated they had used services at other Children's Centres, with 33% (1) using an outreach venue and 33% (1) not using services elsewhere.
 - 4.10.4.4.2. 33% (1) respondent already uses another Children's Centre, 33% (1) will use another centre and 33% (1) respondent was unsure if their usage will change.
- 4.10.4.5. In relation to Sunnyside and Billericay Children's Centres the issues that were raised can be summarised as follows;
 - 4.10.4.5.1. The proposals are fully supported by Billericay Town Council, who note these are for minimal provision and would like to see stronger partnership working with other statutory and voluntary services to build on this provision. Billericay Town Council also commented that there have been previous changes to the centres and staffing levels and hope that there will be no further cuts made beyond those set out in the consultation
- 4.10.4.6. In relation to Canvey Community Children's Centres the issues that were raised can be summarised as follows;
 - 4.10.4.6.1. A number of respondents commented that there was a lack of information in the consultation document and it is therefore not clear what is exactly proposed for this centre.
 - 4.10.4.6.2. Respondents expressed the view that this centre is a much needed part of the community and offers well needed help, advice and support to families to a high quality standard. The respondents state the centre is well resourced and well used and therefore reducing hours will reduce the support people get. The centre also runs sessions helping people gain qualifications to help with careers, the respondents suggest these sessions need to be a set times
 - 4.10.4.6.3. One response also suggests that this centre is important for child minders to use the centre so that under 5s can socialise with other children free of charge. This helps keep childcare costs down, enabling more people to work.
 - 4.10.4.6.4. Canvey Island Town Council responded to the consultation and recognised that although there were no proposed cuts to Children's

Centres the reduced opening hours may impact on the most vulnerable families living within the area. Points raised covered asking what provision will be made for service users unable to travel to the proposed merged site and how will outreach services be monitored to ensure the most vulnerable families are supported. They also queried whether outreach services will be more expensive than centre based service delivery and that there appears to be too many tiers of management/providers and that savings could be achieved by better management and outsourcing reductions

4.10.4.7. In relation to Sea Shells Children's Centres the issues that were raised can be summarised as follows;

4.10.4.8. Respondents disagree with the proposed changes to this centre; they suggested that the proposed reduced hours may result in less people using the centre. They also suggested that centre usage is dependent on the opening hours and proposed changes to hours will particularly affect the parents who work

4.10.4.9. Respondents also expressed the need for the drop in centre as this helps to tackle the high levels of domestic abuse in Great Wakering

4.10.4.10. Concern was raised about limited public transport and the distance to the next nearest Children's Centre and felt that people would not be able to travel this far

4.10.4.11. One respondent also suggests it is very difficult to comment properly when the consultation document is not clear in explaining what delivery arrangements are proposed

4.10.4.12. In relation to Ladybirds Children's Centres the issues that were raised can be summarised as follows;

4.10.4.12.1. 100% (2) respondents felt that the Ladybird Children's Centre has been very supportive and a benefit to families live. It has helped build confidence in children's and their parents lives and should keep operating at its current level

4.10.4.13. In relation to Little Tewkes Children's Centres the issues that were raised can be summarised as follows;

4.10.4.13.1. Respondents expressed their views that the centre provides great opportunities for families and children to learn and has helped children become more confident. It is also the only centre accessible for local families who do not have private transport

4.10.4.14. **Issues raised in South Essex**

4.10.4.14.1. Shotgate Parish Council reviewed the consultation at the Parish Council meeting and the Parish Council object to any closure or shortening of hours

4.10.4.14.2. Brentwood & Ongar Constituency Labour Party Women's Group supported the consultation document statement that the impact of the savings should be achieved in such a way that has the least impact on the services which matter most to families, and commented that savings released from the running of buildings and other overheads

could be re-invested in services that could work from other sites whether other 'main' sites or outreach locations managed by others. However the preparatory research that some service users would be prepared to travel to other nearby locations would only work if there are outreach venues. The distance from The Ark Children's Centre in Sawyers Hall Lane, to the proposed 'merged' site at the Larchwood Children's Centre at Pilgrims Hatch could be quite a barrier.

4.10.4.15. Council / Councillor Comments

- 4.10.4.15.1. Cllr Sargent on behalf of Basildon Borough Council raised the following concerns; Children's Centres in the more affluent areas appear to be seeing a higher number of families than those in the more disadvantaged areas and therefore these centres do not appear to be achieving a focus on the disadvantaged they should. It was felt that merging and/or reducing centres could lead to reduced accessibility for those unable to access services elsewhere due to poor transportation and lower incomes, rather than reducing Children's Centre capacity across the board. It was also felt that this is an opportunity to seek financial contribution from those families that can afford to pay, the consultation focuses on where services will be delivered from and not what these services are.
- 4.10.4.15.2. Cllr Le Gresley commented that the Triangle Children's Centre is far more central and easier to access than the proposed main site of Highcliffe Children's Centre with parking close to Highcliffe being limited.
- 4.10.4.15.3. Castle Point Borough Council commented that a reduction in one of the most vital services for the parents in the borough will place vulnerable families at risk. The proposals for the borough will mean the loss of an excellent Centre, Little Tree House Children's Centre in Richmond Hall, Benfleet. In addition the proposals will result in a reduction in hours by 75 per cent in three other children's centres within the borough. Overall this equates to a reduction of 'drop in' services of some 105 hours per week across the borough.
- 4.10.4.15.4. Cllr David Kendall opposed the proposed changes to the Children's Centre delivery in Brentwood. He commented this would have a major impact on the children's' services provided in Brentwood and will cause the community many problems, and urged that they be reconsidered and that alternative funding streams are fully explored before any changes are made

4.10.4.16. ECC Comments on issues raised in South Essex

- 4.10.4.16.1. This consultation has focused on proposing a service delivery model that is able to quickly respond to local need, and freeing up staff from manning underutilised buildings. Targeting family support to the right areas within a community is a cost effective method of taking services to where they are needed. This approach supports the service provider to provide a flexible intervention that is able to quickly respond to identified local need by focussing use of services on actual services for children and less on buildings and overheads. Services delivered will vary according to the local needs.

- 4.10.4.16.2. Providers will be able to look at seeking financial contributions for services from those families that can afford to pay where this is appropriate.
- 4.10.4.16.3. Identifying and supporting vulnerable families within the quadrant will continue to be a priority. Regular contract monitoring will retain a focus to ensure that services are being targeted to the right families and community groups.
- 4.10.4.16.4. Essex County Council has taken into account a number of factors when developing the proposals; these have included the footfall data of each building usage, the level of need within the Children's Centre area, other centres within the area.

4.10.5. General countywide issues raised

- 4.10.5.1. Concerns were expressed about the increasing demand for proposed merger sites which are in some cases already oversubscribed and have already experienced recent cuts to services.
- 4.10.5.2. Professionals and family respondents were concerned about travel distance, accessibility and expense in relation to proposed closures and merger sites. This was particularly the case for proposed closures in rural areas.
- 4.10.5.3. Many respondents disagree with the reasons for proposed closures being based on levels of deprivation within the area as this does not always relate to the requirement for less support.
- 4.10.5.4. Respondents were disappointed that the consultation document did not provide full and specific details of proposals and the rationale behind the proposals. Many people found that it is not clear from the consultation document how many hours per week each of the centres are currently open and the exact hours they are proposed to be open. Therefore it is difficult for respondents to understand the full extent of the proposed changes or provide informed feedback.
- 4.10.5.5. Respondents felt that the on-line questionnaire was not very user friendly and it does not give full scope to include specific concerns, explain or discuss their comments or views around the proposed changes.
- 4.10.5.6. Respondents felt that the consultation documents were not made readily available to them with only 20-30 paper copies given to Children's Centres especially as some families have no access to the internet. Respondents also suggested that the consultation response period was not long enough. The public needed longer than 7 weeks.

4.10.6. ECC Comments on general countywide issues raised

- 4.10.6.1. It is acknowledged that there is a substantial amount of change in the way some services are delivered and some reduction in opening hours and that this is unpopular with the respondents
- 4.10.6.2. The Children's Centre service providers are charged with delivering services where families most need them across the County. Outreach and targeted one to one intervention will continue to be delivered within the local community and will enable families to continue to access a range of advice and support services through the extensive Essex children's centre network.

4.10.6.3. Families will continue to be able to attend any Essex Children's Centre that would be easily accessible to them under the proposed delivery model. Therefore it will not be necessary for families to travel too much further to access services. Information, Advice and Guidance will continue to be an integral part of service delivery for all families.

4.10.6.4. ECC considers the 7 week consultation period to be a reasonable consultation period because; a) It is building on information already gathered through a previous survey carried out by ECC in May 2013 and July 2013 of Children's Centre service users on future service options b) The whole of the consultation period was within term time thereby maximising respondents' availability and avoiding time lost due to holiday periods.

4.10.7. Response to consultation in each quadrant

4.10.7.1. ECC takes the concerns raised very seriously, especially in relation to the closure of some centres. In response to the issues raised in the consultation feedback, the initial ECC proposals in each quadrant have been reconsidered and revised. The revised elements of proposals are as follows;

4.10.7.2. In North East Essex, 3 of the 4 Children's Centres proposed for closure will close and no longer be registered as a Children's Centres. These buildings will be used as outreach venues.

4.10.7.3. In Mid Essex, 2 of the Children's Centres proposed for closure will close and no longer be registered as a Children's Centres. These buildings will be used as outreach venues.

4.10.7.4. In West Essex, 1 of the 3 Children's Centres proposed for closure will no longer be registered as a Children's Centre, but the building will be retained as a designated delivery site. One of the other Children's Centres proposed for closure will close and no longer be registered as a Children's Centre. This building will be used as an outreach venue.

4.10.7.5. In South Essex, 1 of the 4 Children's Centres proposed for closure will close and no longer be registered as a Children's Centre. This building will be used as an outreach venue.

5. Options

5.1.1. The alternative to taking this decision is to maintain the status quo. However this is not considered sustainable or viable in the long-term because staff resources would be stretched across multiple sites, and this option would not allow the service to make financial savings.

6. Next Steps

6.1.1. If the above recommendations are approved then the new service delivery arrangements will be in place between April 2014 and March 2015.

7. Policy context

7.1.1. Vision for Essex 2013 -17 builds on and replaces the previous EssexWorks Commitment 2012-17 and was approved by Cabinet on 18th June 2013 subject to formal adoption by Council on 9th July 2013.

7.1.2. It sets out the Cabinet's vision and priorities for the next four years and this will inform the development of a revised corporate strategy designed to;

- Increase educational achievement and enhance skills
- Develop and maintain the infrastructure that enables our residents to travel and our businesses to grow
- Support employment and entrepreneurship across our economy
- Improve public health and well-being across Essex
- Keep our communities safe and build community resilience
- Respect Essex's environment.

7.1.3. The Vision for Essex is based on the following principles;

- We will spend taxpayers' money wisely
- Our focus will be on what works best, not on who does it
- We will put residents at the heart of the decisions we make
- We will empower communities to help themselves
- We will reduce dependency
- We will work in partnership
- We will continue to be open and transparent.

7.1.4. The proposal in this report is consistent with those principles as follows;

7.1.4.1. It will spend taxpayers' money wisely by securing contract efficiency savings whilst maintaining current performance levels

7.1.4.2. The proposal has taken into account the consultation feedback received from stakeholders, as part of an open and transparent approach to decision making.

8. Financial Implications

- 8.1. This report seeks Cabinet approval for the re-structure of the Essex's Children's Centres delivery model to a main site and designated delivery site model across each of the four quadrant areas within Essex.
- 8.2. The recommendations outlining changes in the use of some Children's Centres and reductions in the hours of service provision at some delivery sites have been proposed following a period of consultation with a wide range of stakeholders.
- 8.3. An annual saving of £2.24m is to be delivered in 2014/15 and a further £201,000 in 2015/16 as a result of these changes. This is one element of the Children's Centre redesign which the budget and financial strategy has savings of £3m over the period 2014/15 - 2015/16, the precise savings of which will not be validated until contract negotiations are closed. These savings are predicated on new contracts commencing from the 1st April 2014. Any delays to the commencement of these contracts will create additional budget pressure to the Service that will need to be managed within existing resources.
- 8.4. Section 4.10 of the report provides a detailed response back to the comments that arose from the consultation process. It is also recognises how some of the proposals have been adapted following the consultation process. As a result the Service has lost the opportunity to make an estimated cash saving of £95,000.
- 8.5. It is important to note that these savings relate solely to the provision of Children's Centre's delivery model. The initial business case highlighted further savings to the Council of £39,000 relating to savings in reduced rent and utility charges. The proposals in this Cabinet report do not affect the delivery of these savings, which are built into the savings that shall be delivered through the Property Transformation Strategy.

- 8.6. The level of expected savings is based on the successful negotiations of contracts with external providers. It is important that Officers continue to monitor and challenge the operational performance and cost of each of the contracts throughout their life so as to ensure that successful outcomes can be delivered within the agreed financial envelope.
- 8.7. The new delivery model means that a number of Children's Centres will have fewer hours of activity commissioned to them by the Service. It is important that the Service works with the providers of these sites to support them in ensuring that they remain operational viable or that mitigating options are in place so that required services can be delivered in the community.

9. Legal Implications

- 9.1. The legislative framework with which ECC must comply in relation to the provision of Children's Centres is set out in the Childcare Act 2006. These implications address;
 - proposed re-designation of registered Children's Centres main sites to designated Children's Centres delivery sites
 - the statutory obligation to consult and
 - the general local authority consultation obligations
- 9.2. **The proposed re-designation of registered Children's Centres main sites to designated Children's Centres delivery sites**
 - 9.2.1. The provision and purpose of Children's Centres is covered by various duties under the Childcare Act 2006, and the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 (which inserted new provisions into the Childcare Act 2006). Key duties from the Childcare Act 2006 include;
 - 9.2.2. Section 1: to improve the well-being of young children (0-5) in their area and reduce inequalities between them.
 - 9.2.3. Section 3/4: LA, Local Health Services and Jobcentre Plus to work together to improve well-being of young children and secure integrated provision of early childhood services.
 - 9.2.4. Section 5A: Sufficient Children's Centres to meet local need, so far as reasonably practicable.
 - 9.2.5. Section E: LA, Local Health Services and Jobcentre Plus to consider providing services through Children's Centres either on site or advice and assistance to services elsewhere.
 - 9.2.6. A children's centre is defined in the Childcare Act 2006 "*as a place or a group of places;*
 - 9.2.6.1. *which is managed by or on behalf of, or under arrangements with, the local authority with a view to securing that early childhood services in the local authority's area are made available in an integrated way;*
 - 9.2.6.2. *through which early childhood services are made available (either by providing the services on site, or by providing advice and assistance on gaining access to services elsewhere); and*
 - 9.2.6.3. *at which activities for young children are provided."*

- 9.2.7. It follows from the statutory definition of a Children's Centre that Children's Centres are as much about making appropriate and integrated services available, as it is about providing premises in particular geographical areas.
- 9.2.8. Given the breadth of definition of a Children's Centre it is therefore open to ECC to determine how best to organise its Children's Centres. The move to a main and designated delivery site model is within the scope of the legislation and consistent with it.
- 9.2.9. ECC is required to take relevant guidance into account. In this case the relevant guidance is the Department for Education's "*Sure Start Children's Centres statutory guidance for local authorities, commissioners of local health services and Jobcentre Plus – April 2013*" and current Ofsted guidance <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/early-years-and-childcare/for-early-years-and-childcare-providers/childrens-centres/childrens-centres>.

9.3. The statutory obligation to consult

9.3.1. The Guidance provides as follows;

9.3.1.1. *"the Childcare Act places a duty on Local Authorities to secure that such consultation as they think appropriate is carried out before three types of action are taken in relation to a Children's Centre"* the three types of action includes closing a Children's Centre

9.3.1.2. *"when consulting before closing... a local authority should*

9.3.1.3. *Allow adequate time for those wishing to respond to have the opportunity to do so. There is no hard or fast rules on what is an adequate time but local authorities should ensure that those who may wish to respond have a reasonable time to do so.....*

9.3.1.4.Tailor their consultation process to the scale of the potential change for example the consultation on a major change such as closing a children's centre, should be longer and more intense than for a smaller potential change"

9.3.1.5. *"In drawing up a case for closure, local authorities should carefully consider.... Alternatives to closure including the potential for federation with another children's centre... to increase a children's centre's viability"*

9.3.2. The general duty is considered above. In relation to consultation, ECC must take into account the guidance and the requirements in law as follows;

9.3.3. Under section 5D of the Childcare Act 2006 Local Authorities must ensure there is consultation before;

- making a significant change to the range and nature of services provided through a Children's Centre and/or how they are delivered, including significant changes to services provided through linked sites
- closing a Children's Centre; or reducing the services provided to such an extent that it no longer meets the statutory definition of a Sure Start Children's Centre.

9.4. The general local authority consultation obligations

9.4.1. In addition to this statutory duty, the 'best value' duty under the Local Government Act 1999 to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement includes a wide duty to consult when changes to services are proposed. The nature and scope of any consultation depends on the proposals being consulted upon.

- 9.4.2. In all cases consultation must be meaningful and genuine. Ideally this means it will;
- begin when the policy development under consideration is at an early stage;
 - be carried out before a final decision is taken;
 - allow for an appropriate and realistic timeframe for consideration and response;
 - provide consultees with sufficient information to give an informed response to the consultation including reasons for the proposal;
 - include informal ways of engaging with stakeholders, for example e-mail or web-based forums, public meetings, working groups, focus groups and surveys;
 - be reported back to the eventual decision maker, with enough information about the outcome to allow that decision maker to come to a fully informed decision having taken account of the feedback to that consultation.

9.4.3. Both the formal legal, and general overriding principles relating to consultation have been met in relation to this decision.

10. Staffing and other resource implications

- 10.1. There are no ECC staffing implications resulting from this proposal due to all staff being employed by the third party lead body providers.

11. Equality and Diversity implications

- 11.1. In making this decision ECC must have regard to the public sector equality duty (PSED) under s.149 of the Equalities Act 2010, i.e. have due regard to the need to:
- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
 - advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.
- 11.2. The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- 11.3. The PSED covers service users, staff and members of public as a whole who are potentially affected by the proposals addressed in the Report.
- 11.4. The PSED is a relevant factor in making this decision but does not impose a duty to achieve the outcomes in s.149. It is only one factor that needs to be considered and may be balanced against other relevant factors. It is, however, important to demonstrate that it has been considered.
- 11.5. Proposals were screened for Equality and Diversity issues following submission to ECC in June 2013.
- 11.6. The initial Stage 1 Equality Impact Analysis identified a number of potential negative impacts across the county as follows:
- Age – potential medium adverse impact
 - Race and culture – potential medium adverse impact
 - Disability – potential medium adverse impact
 - Gender – potential high adverse impact
 - Pregnancy and Maternity – potential medium adverse impact
 - Socio-economic and/or health inequalities – potential high adverse impact
- 11.7. Further negotiation was carried out between ECC and the providers and further analysis of the data resulted in the mitigation of some of the potential adverse impacts.

- 11.8. The need for further public consultation to explore the remaining potential equalities issues across the county was identified as follows;
- The ability of disabled parents to travel to neighbouring locations to access services in areas where a site is being closed
 - The ability of parents with children with disabilities to travel to neighbouring locations in order to access services in areas where a site is being closed
 - The ability of BME families to travel to neighbouring locations in order to access services in areas where a site is being closed
 - The ability of workless households to travel to neighbouring locations in order to access services in areas where a site is being closed
 - The effect of staffing reductions on women – it will affect women more than men as the current workforce is over 90% female across the County. This has since been mitigated following negotiation with providers resulting in amended proposals and fewer redundancies
- 11.9. The consultation identified that across the county the proposals are less popular amongst groups with relevant protected characteristics than with the respondents as a whole. However as stated above, the low response rates make comparison by protected characteristic difficult as views may not be representative of that group of service users as a whole.
- 11.10. Small numbers of responses mean that views may not be representative of protected characteristic groups of service users as a whole. Overall, the analysis of the public consultation does not appear to identify any barriers to access specific to disability or race/culture.
- 11.11. In relation to protected characteristics, the 300 people that answered questions about the **North East Essex** Children's Centres proposals had the following characteristics:
- In terms of gender the split was 7% (21) male and 93% (279) female
 - There were responses from people in all age ranges; the highest number came from people aged 25-34 year olds 53%, (160) followed by 35-44 year olds 29% (88).
 - 6% (18) of respondents identified as black and minority ethnic, lower than the local average of 12% Colchester and 5% Tendring
 - 6% (18) described themselves as having a disability, or a long-term illness, physical or mental health condition. This is consistent with local demographics and CC registration data.
 - 6% (18) consider that their children have a disability, or a long-term illness, physical or mental health condition. This is consistent with local demographics and Children's Centres registration data.
- 11.11.1. As described in paragraph 4.3 the consultation was published by ECC widely. In addition, the consultation was publicised by Barnardo's in North East Essex via;
- emails to parents directly with consultation form
 - direct telephone contacts with parents
 - information about the website provided to parents to complete online
 - parents being asked directly 1-1 in groups, during home visits and when visiting centres

- Facebook page (115 views)
- publicising at local pre-schools and with partner agencies
- specific targeted groups: Dad's group, Young parents, Baby clinic, New parents at Best Beginnings
- 1-1 support in completing the form with people of Indian, Chinese and Spanish origin

11.11.2. There are also a number of mitigations in place for this quadrant;

11.11.2.1. A proposed solution from Barnardo's that maintains current levels of frontline service delivery (including outreach), through a re-modelled 'Main and Designated delivery Site' service offer

11.11.2.2. Barnardo's will continue to make services available locally through a range of outreach venues, in response to local need

11.11.2.3. ECC are working with Health partners to agree a data sharing mechanism, which would enable Children's Centres to offer services to all pregnant women more efficiently and consistently than is currently the case

11.11.2.4. In addition, another significant mitigation has been put in place since these assessments were completed. The proposals consulted on anticipated the closure of provision from four Children's Centres main sites: ABC Together Children's Centre (formally Willowtree Children's Centre) in Clacton, Manningtree Children's Centre in Mistley, Highwoods Children's Centre in Colchester and Holland Valley Children's Centre in Clacton.

11.11.2.5. The current proposal is to close the service from Holland Valley Children's Centre in Clacton. ABC Together Children's Centre (formally Willowtree Children's Centre) in Clacton, Manningtree Children's Centre in Mistley, and Highwoods Children's Centre in Colchester are also proposed for closure but these sites will be used as outreach venues allowing services to be delivered in specific geographical areas.

11.12. In relation to protected characteristics, the breakdown of the 144 people that answered questions about the **Mid Essex Children's Centres** is as follows;

- 7% (10) of respondents are male and 93% (134) are female
- There were responses from people of all age ranges; the highest number came from people aged 25-34 year olds 46%, (67) and 35-44 year olds 34%, (50)
- 8% (11) of respondents identify as black and minority ethnic. This is consistent with local demographics and ECC registration data
- 7% (10) consider that they have a disability, or a long-term illness, physical or mental health condition. This is consistent with local demographics and ECC registration data
- 3% (5) consider that their children have a disability, or a long-term illness, physical or mental health condition. This is slightly lower than could be expected from local demographics and ECC registration data.

11.12.1. As described in paragraph 4.3 the consultation was published by ECC widely. In addition, the consultation was publicised by 4 Children in Mid Essex via;

- consultation information emailed to all registered parents
- distribution of consultation forms at all centre sessions

- information on display in centres, highlighted at forums and circulated to partners, including Children with Disability teams, Social Care, health colleagues, Job Centre Plus and pre-schools
- encouraging parents to complete during 1:1 home visits
- laptops made available at some centres for parents to use
- promotion at outreach sites including libraries, ACL Beeches close, health clinics and pre-schools

11.12.2. There are also a number of mitigations in place for this quadrant.

11.12.2.1. A proposed solution from 4Children that maintains current levels of frontline service delivery (including outreach), through a re-modelled 'Main and Designated delivery Site' service offer

11.12.2.2. 4Children will continue to make services available locally through a range of outreach venues, in response to local need

11.12.2.3. ECC are working with Health partners to agree a data sharing mechanism, which would enable Children's Centres to offer services to all pregnant women more efficiently and consistently than is currently the case

11.12.2.4. In addition, another significant mitigation has been put in place since these assessments were completed. The proposals consulted on anticipated the closure of provision from two Children's Centres main sites: Little Lanes Children's Centre, in Braintree and Stock Children's Centre in Chelmsford

11.12.2.5. The current proposal is still to close Little Lanes Children's Centre, in Braintree and Stock Children's Centre in Chelmsford but to use these sites as outreach venues.

11.13. In relation to protected characteristics, the breakdown of the 226 people that answered questions about the **West Essex Children's Centres** is as follows:

- In terms of gender the split was 7% (21) male and 93% (207) female
- There were no respondents from the 16-18 year old age range. The biggest proportion of respondents is the 25-34, 50%, (112) year old age range, followed by the 35-44 32%, (73) year old age range.
- 18% (40) of respondents identify as black and minority ethnic (BME). This was the highest proportion of BME individuals from all quadrants.
- 9% (20) of respondents consider themselves to have a disability, or a long-term illness, physical or mental health condition. This is consistent with local demographics and ECC registration data
- 4% (8) of respondents had children which they consider to have a disability, or a long-term illness, physical or mental health condition. This is consistent with local demographics and ECC registration data

11.13.1. As described in paragraph 4.3 the consultation was published by ECC widely. In addition, the consultation was publicised by Spurgeons in West Essex via;

- all centres displaying information and providing hard copies of the surveys
- leaflets with the consultation internet address which were given out at all sessions
- information and links to surveys featuring on all centres' Facebook pages (4568 viewings in total)

- distribution of consultation information to partners including GPs, Midwives, Health Visitors, libraries, district councils, baby and toddler groups, local voluntary sector providers (161 individuals directly contacted in addition to more generic cascading of information)
- targeted groups: Grandparents (and parents at work), Teen parents, SEN/Disability groups. Twins group, Parenting course, Freedom Programme, Community Café, volunteers, ISS (minority ethnic groups), ESOL groups, Local pre-schools and during 1:1/outreach sessions

11.13.2. However there are also a number of mitigations in place for this quadrant;

- 11.13.2.1. A proposed solution from Spurgeons that maintains current levels of frontline service delivery (including outreach), through a re-modelled 'Main and Delivery Site' service offer
- 11.13.2.2. Spurgeons will continue to make services available locally through a range of outreach venues, in response to local need
- 11.13.2.3. ECC are working with Health partners to agree a data sharing mechanism, which would enable children's centres to offer services to all pregnant women more efficiently and consistently than is currently the case
- 11.13.2.4. In addition, another significant mitigation has been put in place since these assessments were completed. The proposals consulted on anticipated the closure of provision from Close provision of service from three Children's Centres main sites: ABC Children's Centre in Harlow, Sunflowers Children's Centre in Harlow and Little Buddies Children's Centre in Buckhurst Hill
- 11.13.2.5. The current proposal is to close Little Buddies Children's Centre in Buckhurst Hill, close Sunflowers Children's Centre in Harlow but use the site as an outreach venue. Close ABC Children's Centre in Harlow as registered Children's Centre and retain the building as a delivery site.

11.14. In relation to protected characteristics, the breakdown of the 192 people that answered questions about the **South Essex Children's Centres** is as follows;

- 6% (11) are male and 94 % (181) are female.
- There were respondents from all age ranges; 47% (91) of respondents are in the 25-34 year old age range. This is consistent with expectations based on local demographics
- 4% (8) of respondents are black and minority ethnic (BME). This is lower that might be expected based on *demographics and CC registration data*)
- 5% (10) of respondents consider themselves to have a disability, or a long-term illness, physical or mental health condition. This is consistent with expected responses based on demographics and CC registration data)
- 8% (15) of respondents have children which they consider to have a disability, or a long-term illness, physical or mental health condition This is consistent with expected responses based on demographics and CC registration data)

11.14.1. As described in paragraph 4.3 the consultation was published by ECC widely. In addition, the consultation was publicised by Barnardo's in South Essex via;

- publicising to families attending targeted and universal services, through home visits and parenting programmes, at stay and play sessions

- specific targeted groups, Young Mums positively Achieving Disability Support groups, Antenatal, Lone Parents Interviews, in areas of deprivation such as Thorney Bay Outreach Site and the BME focused reach group
- staff supporting families to complete the survey
- A link that was posted on Facebook and Twitter accounts (3652 page viewings across the Castlepoint District)
- Centres ensuring that posters were placed to draw attention to the consultation

11.14.2. However there are also a number of mitigations in place for this quadrant.

11.14.2.1. A proposed solution from Barnardo's that maintains current levels of frontline service delivery (including outreach), through a re-modelled 'Main and Delivery Site' service offer

11.14.2.2. Barnardo's will continue to make services available locally through a range of outreach venues, in response to local need

11.14.2.3. ECC are working with Health partners to agree a data sharing mechanism, which would enable Children's Centres to offer services to all pregnant women more efficiently and consistently than is currently the case

11.14.2.4. Some of this risk has been mitigated against through further dialogue and negotiation with providers, resulting in proposals that maintain current levels of frontline service delivery, through a re-modelled 'Main and Designated delivery Site' service offer.

11.14.2.5. In addition, another mitigation has been put in place since these assessments were completed. The proposals consulted on anticipated the closure of Little Treehouse Children's Centre in Castle Point, The Ark Children's Centre, Brentwood.

11.14.2.6. The current proposal is to close the service from Little Treehouse Children's Centre in Castle Point. The proposal is also to close The Ark Children's Centre, Brentwood but to use this site as an outreach venue.

11.15. Nevertheless Members need to make this decision having regard to the potential remaining negative impacts on people who share protected characteristics as follows;

Characteristic	Impact assessed – Initial Stage 1 EQIA contract extension proposals (21-06-13)	Impact assessed – Stage 1 EqIA Children's Centre Property Strategy (23-09-13)	Final Stage 2 Impact assessed following further negotiation with Lead Bodies, further analysis of data and analysis of public consultation findings
Age	Medium	None	None
Disability	Medium	Low	Low
Gender reassignment	None	None	None
Pregnancy and Maternity	Medium	None	Low

Race	Medium	None	Low
Religion or belief	None	None	None
Sex	High	None	Low
Sexual Orientation	Medium	None	None

- 11.16. Although socio-economic characteristics are not protected under equalities legislation, it is clear from the analysis done under that heading that travel is a major issue. This issue should be taken into account as it has the capacity to raise the impact of the proposed changes across all of the protected characteristics affected by restricting access to the new centres and a subsequent reduction in the support available.
- 11.17. Issues included; Widespread lack of car ownership, expensive and infrequent public transport services, services provided at new sites too far from where they were currently located
- 11.18. Further local consultation and monitoring of service user demographics will be required in the future children's centre service, in order to identify whether access to Children's Centre services by workless households and/or families living in rural isolation is impacted by the proposed changes

12. Other Implications and Risk

- 12.1. Article 3.1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child provides: "In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration". It is relevant to this decision and ECC agrees that these interests are central to this decision and must be kept in mind during the decision making process.
- 12.2. It is clearly in the best interests of children to have access to children's centre services as the services provided within these centres contribute to improving the well-being of young children (0-5) in their respective geographical areas and to reducing inequalities between them.
- 12.3. In this case there could be a low adverse impact on children as follows;
- 12.3.1. Children with disabled parents may be affected their ability to travel to neighbouring locations to access services in areas where a site is being closed
- 12.3.2. Children with disabilities may be affected by their ability to travel to neighbouring locations in order to access services in areas where a site is being closed
- 12.4. However, the impact is believed to be proportionate because;
- 12.4.1. The providers will continue to make services available locally through a range of outreach venues, in response to local need
- 12.4.2. Survey respondents with a disability/child with a disability indicated that they would go to another children's centre, an outreach site or would access services in their own home
- 12.4.3. Proposals ensure that services are maintained at current performance levels by releasing staff from manning under-utilised buildings to providing a more flexible service to meet the needs of their local communities

12.5. In response to the consultation feedback;

12.5.1.1. In North East Essex, 3 of the 4 Children's Centres proposed for closure will close and no longer be registered as a Children's Centres. These buildings will be used as outreach venues.

12.5.1.2. In Mid Essex, 2 of the Children's Centres proposed for closure will close and no longer be registered as a Children's Centres. These buildings will be used as outreach venues.

12.5.1.3. In West Essex, 1 of the 3 Children's Centres proposed for closure will no longer be registered as a Children's Centre, but the building will be retained as a designated delivery site. One of the other Children's Centres proposed for closure will close and no longer be registered as a Children's Centre. This building will be used as an outreach venue.

12.5.1.4. In South Essex, 1 of the 4 Children's Centres proposed for closure will close and no longer be registered as a Children's Centre. This building will be used as an outreach venue

13. Background papers

13.1. Appendix 1 – Consultation Document

13.2. Appendix 2 - Quantitative Analysis for the responses by quadrant

13.3. Appendix 3 - Qualitative Analysis for the whole survey

13.4. [Appendix 4 - Equality Impact Assessments by quadrant](#)

Title and name	Signoff/approval
Executive Director Dave Hill	
Assistant Director – Corporate Law (Monitoring Officer) Terry Osborne	
Executive Director for Finance (Section 151 Officer) Margaret Lee	

		AGENDA ITEM 5
		PAF/06/14
Committee:	People and Families Scrutiny Committee	
Date:	4 February 2014	
<u>Increasing Independence for Working Age Adults</u>		
Enquiries to:	Robert Fox Scrutiny Officer Corporate Law & Assurance 01245 430526 robert.fox@essex.gov.uk	

Purpose of the Paper:

To provide the report on the CMA relating to the Increasing Independence for Working Age Adults Transformation project, Ref. FP/488/01/14, dated 24 January 2014.

Report of Councillor David Finch	Forward Plan reference number <i>n/a</i>
Date of final signoff: 24 January 2014	County Divisions affected by the decision: All Divisions
Title of report: Increasing Independence Working Age Adults	
Report by Peter Tempest, Executive Director for Adult Operations	
Enquiries to Lynne.Chandler@essex.gov.uk	

1) Purpose of report

- a) To seek approval, to the release of £569, 000 of project costs to fund development of work-streams leading to decisions in relation to the Increasing Independence for Working Age Adults Transformation project.

2) Recommendations

- a) Agree drawdown of £166,000 from Transformation Reserve to pay for new costs and agree the application of £403,000 of opportunity costs to support the production of a final business case for the Increasing Independence for Working age Adults Project
 - i) Staff costs in relation to general project management and subject matter experts
 - ii) Professional fees
 - iii) Communications including consultations

3) Background and proposal

- a) The Increasing Independence Working Age Adults Transformation project includes a wide range of ECC social care services as follows:
 - i) Adult Operations in relation to Learning Disability and Physical and Sensory Impairment for Working Age Adults
- b) Adult Social Care in relation to the commissioning of housing and accommodation, day care services, carers, physical and sensory impairment services and respite care. Problems have been identified with the way these services are currently provided. The current pattern of expenditure is not

delivering the best outcomes for service users, ECC or their partners. In addition, ECC as a whole faces the challenge of sustaining and improving services with less money. Essex County Council has already saved £365m over the past three years (closing a funding gap equivalent to 37% of our budget), but in the years to 2016-17 we will need to save at least a further £215m per year (around 25% of our budget)

- c) For this reason, ECC is in the process of reviewing the way we manage and commission these services with the overall aim of reducing demand through progression of individuals towards a more independent way of living and working
- d) We are now considering an 'enablement and progression' approach. This means that, in relation to all of the services identified above the focus will shift from simply providing a service for an individual to helping that individual progress as far as that individual can and is appropriate at the time, to carry out the activity for themselves. A range of proposals are being considered
- e) All of the decisions will be the subject of separate decisions and consultation where required or desired. No final decisions have been made yet in relation to any of them.
- f) The funding requested above is required for staff resources involved with:
 - i) Staff costs associated with developing the feasibility of the proposals
 - ii) Carry out any required or desired consultations
 - iii) Professional fees for legal, finance

4) Policy Context

- a) Vision for Essex 2013 -17 builds on and replaces the previous EssexWorks Commitment 2012-17; it sets out the Cabinet's vision and priorities for the next four years and this will inform the development of a revised corporate strategy designed to:
 - i) Increase educational achievement and enhance skills;
 - ii) Develop and maintain the infrastructure that enables our residents to travel and our businesses to grow;
 - iii) Support employment and entrepreneurship across our economy;
 - iv) Improve public health and well-being across Essex;
 - v) Keep our communities safe and build community resilience; and
 - vi) Respect Essex's environment.
- b) The Vision for Essex is based on the following principles

- i) We will spend taxpayers' money wisely;
 - ii) Our focus will be on what works best, not on who does it;
 - iii) We will put residents at the heart of the decisions we make;
 - iv) We will empower communities to help themselves;
 - v) We will reduce dependency;
 - vi) We will work in partnership; and
 - vii) We will continue to be open and transparent.
- c) The proposal in this report is consistent with those principles because it builds community resilience and aims to spend taxpayer's money wisely

5) Financial Implications

- a) The following benefits are projected as possible shown in Table 1 below

	£'000
2014/15	3,583
2015/16	9,869
2016/17	10,321
Total	23,773

- b) As at October 2013 the projected cost of the project were as set out in Table 2.

Table 2: Estimated Project costs – as at October 2013

		2013-14 £'000	2014-15 £'000	2015-16 £'000	2016-17 £'000	Total £'000
Estimated Costs to Complete FBC	Opportunity Costs	403				403
	New Costs	166				166
	Total	569				569
Forecasted Implementation Costs	Opportunity Costs	95	1,346	1,078	1,078	3,597
	New Costs	30	1,505	1,505	1,505	4,545
	Total	125	2,851	2,583	2,583	8,142
Total Investment	Opportunity Costs	498	1,346	1,078	1,078	4,000
	New Costs	196	1,505	1,505	1,505	4,711
	Total	694	2,851	2,583	2,583	8,711

6) Legal Implications

- a) There are no legal implications arising directly from the drawdown of the money.

- b) There are potential legal implications from all of the future decision but these will be addressed on an individual basis as issues come forward for decision

7) Staffing and other resource implications

- a) There are no potential staff implications arising from this decision

8) Equality and Diversity implications

- a) In making this decision ECC must have regard to the public sector equality duty (PSED) under s.149 of the Equalities Act 2010, ie have due regard to the need to: **A** Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act. **B** Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. **C** Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.
- b) The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- c) It is not considered that the recommendation to draw down funding will have a disproportionately adverse impact on persons who share any relevant protected characteristic. Therefore a full Equality Impact Assessment is not considered necessary. The individual decisions will be assessed for equalities impacts as they come forward

Name and Role	Date of approval/signoff
Assistant Director – Corporate Law (Monitoring Officer) Sue Chadwick (joint deputy monitoring officer) for Terry Osborne	19 th December 2013
Executive Director for Finance (Section 151 Officer) Margaret Lee	
Cabinet Member for Finance Cllr David Finch	

