1. Introduction

Swindon Borough Council is committed to involving and consulting parents, carers and stakeholders on the proposal to change the provision of children’s centres and support to families with children under the age of five.

The following five children’s centres will remain unchanged and we will, therefore, not be consulting on these:

- Penhill & Pinehurst
- Moredon
- Drove
- Gorse Hill

(The above four centres are collectively referred to as the Supercluster)

- Parks & Walcot East

We Wish to Hear your Views on the Following Proposed Changes:

a. Two pilot multi-generational family centres to be established in West Swindon, (West Swindon Family Project) and Abbey Meads (Butterflies), using two thirds of their existing funding for a period of up to two years. During this time, the centres would be required to raise funds and work towards reducing the need for funding. As these are no longer children’s centres, these would not be registered with Ofsted any longer.

b. Developing new and creative ways to use existing community facilities/children’s centres in order to improve community spirit, strengthen bonds and enhance children’s lives.

c. The remaining children’s centres would no longer be funded and we would therefore notify Ofsted to de-register as children’s centres by 1st April 2015. This applies to Butterflies (Abbey Meads), Ladybird (Highworth), Eldene, Croft, Salt Way (Middleleaze), Robert Le Kyng and West Swindon Children’s Centres. (Butterflies and West Swindon Children’s Centres to become multi-generational family centres as mentioned in point a. above)

d. On the following pages we explain why the change is necessary, our reasons for proposing the change, what children’s centres do and how you can contribute your views.

2. Why is the Change Required?

2.1 Support Available to Parents and Young Children

Alongside children’s centre services, there is a range of support services available in Swindon for all parents and those who need help.

- Health visitors provide additional support for vulnerable children. The number of health visitors is due to increase from 35 to 52 in April 2015

- Parents and carers of vulnerable children aged 2 can apply for 15 hours of early years’ education per week. Currently, just under 600 are supported, with an additional 400 places by March 2015
• All children aged 3 and 4 are entitled to 15 hours of early education per week. 90% of children currently receive this service. During 2015, early years’ education providers such as nurseries and pre-schools will receive an additional £300 per vulnerable child to ensure that they are all prepared, emotionally and educationally, for starting school.

• There is a range of mother and toddler and self-help groups across Swindon, which are run by parents/for parents. This information will be made available online through the My Care My Support for your Child website for parents/carers, children and young people from September 2014.

2.2 Financial Pressures on the Council

Over the past two years, there have been significant changes in Swindon. Our population of children under the age of five has grown considerably, due to a rising birth rate and the expansion of Swindon in the north and, more recently, in the south.

In the past twelve months alone, there has been significant demand for specialist children’s social work services. The number of children requiring protection from abuse and neglect has increased by almost 50% (from 147 children in March 2013 to 217 children in March 2014). At the same time, referrals to social workers have increased by 25%.

Swindon Borough Council is facing enormous financial pressures, with a projected need for savings of £17.6m during 2015-16. This is likely to continue for 2016-17 and later. Our services for children under 5, including children’s centres, need to support those children and families who are most in need of help and support.

2.3 Recent Changes to Children’s Centres

In September 2013, the Council agreed to reorganise the existing 12 children’s centres into 6 groups (or clusters), with 80% of funding based on the number of vulnerable children in each cluster. At the same time, the funding for children’s centres was also reduced. This is because our vision is to support those children who need help the most. It is also a requirement by Ofsted that there should be greater focus on improving the lives of the most vulnerable families and children. Children’s centres are therefore inspected to review progress around these improvements.

Between January and March 2014, four buildings were no longer used as children’s centres and staff provided outreach services into community groups and families’ homes. These were Croft, Eldene, Greenmeadow and Saplings. None of these buildings are affected by the proposals and all of them are now used by primary schools or early years’ education providers for children under the age of five.
3. Why Have We Proposed This Particular Change?

The four reasons why we have proposed this particular change are as follows:

3.1 Alternative Targeted Support for Children Under Five

We can provide targeted support for children under five as we plan to increase the number of health visitors to 52. The number of places available for vulnerable two year olds receiving 15 hours of early years’ education per week will also increase by 400.

3.2 Keeping Children’s Centres in Areas of Highest Need

The Supercluster was established in April 2014 and the service is now provided by the national charity 4Children (http://www.4children.org.uk/) who specialise in the provision of children’s centres. This cluster has the highest number of vulnerable children in Swindon and also generates high levels of demand for children’s social services.

We also know from our data that many parents in this cluster do not necessarily attend their local centre. For example, many families from black and ethnic minority communities choose to attend Drove Children’s Centre.

We are therefore proposing that:

- The Supercluster stays, but needs to improve its service to reach 100% of vulnerable children
- Vulnerable parents living in central Swindon, Old Town and Wichelstowe would be encouraged to attend Drove Children’s Centre
- Vulnerable parents from the Eldene area would be encouraged to attend the centre in the Parks & Walcot East, which has the second highest number of vulnerable children and is geographically close to Eldene
- We would also negotiate for vulnerable families living in Stratton to attend services located in the Supercluster. Vulnerable families currently attending Salt Way would be encouraged to attend West Swindon Family Centre.

3.3 Multi-Generational Family Centres

It is proposed that there are two multi-generational family centres in Abbey Meads and West Swindon. These require less funding than the current children’s centres in the area and would ensure a geographical spread of provision.

A multi-generational family centre would bring together groups run by parents for parents and families and would also invite wider use by the community, health services and others. Funding would be provided for a co-ordinator and some running costs. The co-ordinator would work with local parents, older people and community groups to recruit volunteers and offer space for groups to meet and support each other. Each centre could charge a nominal fee, fundraise locally, or apply for funding from charitable trusts.
3.4 Developing Innovative Solutions for Community Use of De-Registered Centres

It is proposed that the remaining buildings in Highworth (Ladybird, on site of Westrop Primary School) and Robert Le Kyng continue to remain open for community use and/or early years’ education and community health services, to benefit families with young children. We would particularly encourage innovative use of those facilities. The Salt Way Children’s Centre building could be used for services for disabled children.

4. How Can You Have Your Say?

4.1 What is the Consultation Process?

The Council is committed to engaging with parents, carers, and stakeholders in this important consultation and welcomes views from all parts of our community.

The consultation will take place over a period of 10 weeks from 29th July until 3rd October 2014. We recognise that this involves the summer holidays but children’s centres remain open during the holidays. We will be offering to meet all groups of parents and carers in a range of locations.

The following organisations will be consulted:

- Staff in all children’s centres
- Management and governing bodies of each provider
- Parents with children under five living in each of the existing children’s centres’ catchment areas
- Parents with children under five attending existing children’s centres
- Existing Children’s Centre Advisory Boards
- Ward Councillors
- Staff and managers in Local Authority services and partners

A copy of this consultation document and calendar of consultation events is published separately on http://www.swindon.gov.uk/childrenscentres

We will distribute detailed information to all children’s centres, which will also be available on Swindon Borough Council’s website.

Comments and feedback on the consultation can be submitted in writing, by email or by completing an online survey. This will be advertised in children’s centres and on Swindon Borough Council’s website.

The survey will invite your views on a number of matters, including:

- Changes to the service provision of children’s centres
- Ideas for the future use of buildings for families with children under five where it is proposed that the existing children’s centres are de-registered
- Changing two children’s centres to multi-generational family centres
• The issues that you think the Council needs to think about regarding the new arrangements
• What contribution you could make to supporting parents in the local area e.g. volunteering

5. What Will Happen After the Consultation Ends?

5.1 Results Of The Consultation

The results of the consultation will be presented to Cabinet on 22nd October 2014.

Following Cabinet, a timetable for carrying out the changes will be published by Swindon Borough Council with a potential start date of the new arrangements by 1st April 2015.

Please send your comments by the 3rd October 2014 to:

Joy Kennard
Strategic Commissioner Children & Families
Swindon Borough Council
3rd Floor Wat Tyler West
Beckhampton Street
Swindon
SN1 2JH
Tel: 01793 463169
Email: jkennard@swindon.gov.uk

Or complete the online survey at http://www.swindon.gov.uk/childrenscentres

6. What is the Current Provision of Children’s Centres?

This section of the report provides a summary of the current provision of children's centres, the services they offer and who they support.

We currently have 12 registered children’s centres operating from 10 buildings in Swindon, with 80% of their funding provided for work with vulnerable children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Centre</th>
<th>Provider</th>
<th>Children under 5</th>
<th>Vulnerable children</th>
<th>Current budget 2014/15 (£s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supercluster: Sure Start Penhill &amp; Pinehurst, Gorse Hill, Moredon, Drove</td>
<td>4Children</td>
<td>4,154</td>
<td>1,268 (30%)</td>
<td>764,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parks and Walcot East Children’s Centre</td>
<td>Goddard Park Academy</td>
<td>1033</td>
<td>516 (49%)</td>
<td>264,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Swindon Children’s Centre</td>
<td>West Swindon Children &amp; Family Centre</td>
<td>855</td>
<td>284 (33%)</td>
<td>156,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eldene: Outreach service only - no building</td>
<td>The Children’s Society</td>
<td>865</td>
<td>184 (21%)</td>
<td>113,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salt Way</td>
<td>The Children’s Society</td>
<td>949</td>
<td>184 (19%)</td>
<td>116,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.1 What Services do Children’s Centres Offer?

The provision of services is based on national guidance, the Ofsted inspection framework and the needs of families. Essentially, all centres should provide the following:

- **Access to universal services for all (currently funded at 20%)**

  The main services provided by children’s centres are advice and information to parents about what else is available in the local area and signposting to early years’ education and specialist services. Centres offer the following sessions:
  - Stay and Play sessions for parents/children
  - Healthy eating
  - Breastfeeding
  - Parenting

  Where parents are wishing to find training or employment, links are made with Job Centre, Job Centre plus and adult learning programmes. Although only 20% of the funding is earmarked for these services, a much higher proportion of non-vulnerable families are making use of these services

- **Targeted support for vulnerable families (currently funded at 80% of funding)**

  The targeted services include the following:

  a. **Parenting and family support**, including outreach work, parenting groups and individual work with families to strengthen parenting capabilities.

  b. **Individual and small group support** in response to identified needs within individual families.

  c. **Targeted evidence-based early intervention programmes** can help families achieve positive results where they are at greatest risk of falling behind. Published evaluation will be used to provide evidence that these programmes are effective. In Swindon, children’s centres are delivering baby Steps, a parenting programme developed by the NSPCC aimed at supporting vulnerable parents through pregnancy, birth and beyond.

  d. **Links to specialist services** where children’s centres can refer to health visiting or children’s social care and support children in need and parents whose children have a child protection plan.
6.2 Who do Children’s Centres Support?

Although 80% of the funding is targeted, many children’s centres are not reaching vulnerable families, especially in those areas where there are high numbers of non-vulnerable families who are making use of the centres.

6.3 How do You Define a Vulnerable Family?

Vulnerable families are defined by Ofsted as:

a. Lone parents, teenage mothers and pregnant teenagers.
b. Children from low income backgrounds.
c. Children living with domestic abuse, adult mental health issues and substance abuse.
d. Children 'in need' or with a child protection plan.
e. Children of offenders and/or those in custody.
f. Fathers; particularly those with any other identified need e.g. teenage fathers and those in custody.
g. Those with protected characteristics, as defined by the Equality Act 2010.
h. Children who are in the care of the local authority (looked after children).
i. Children who are being cared for by members of their extended family, such as a grandparents, aunt or older sibling.
j. Families identified by the local authority as 'troubled families' who have children under five.
k. Families who move into and out of the area relatively quickly (transient families), such as asylum seekers, armed forces’ personnel and those who move into the area seeking employment or taking up seasonal work.
l. Any other vulnerable groups or individual families, including those young children and families identified as being at risk of harm by other services – such as adult social care, schools, police and health services.

¹Children and families with protected characteristics may include: those for whom English is an additional language; those from minority ethnic groups; those from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families; those from lesbian, gay and transgender families.