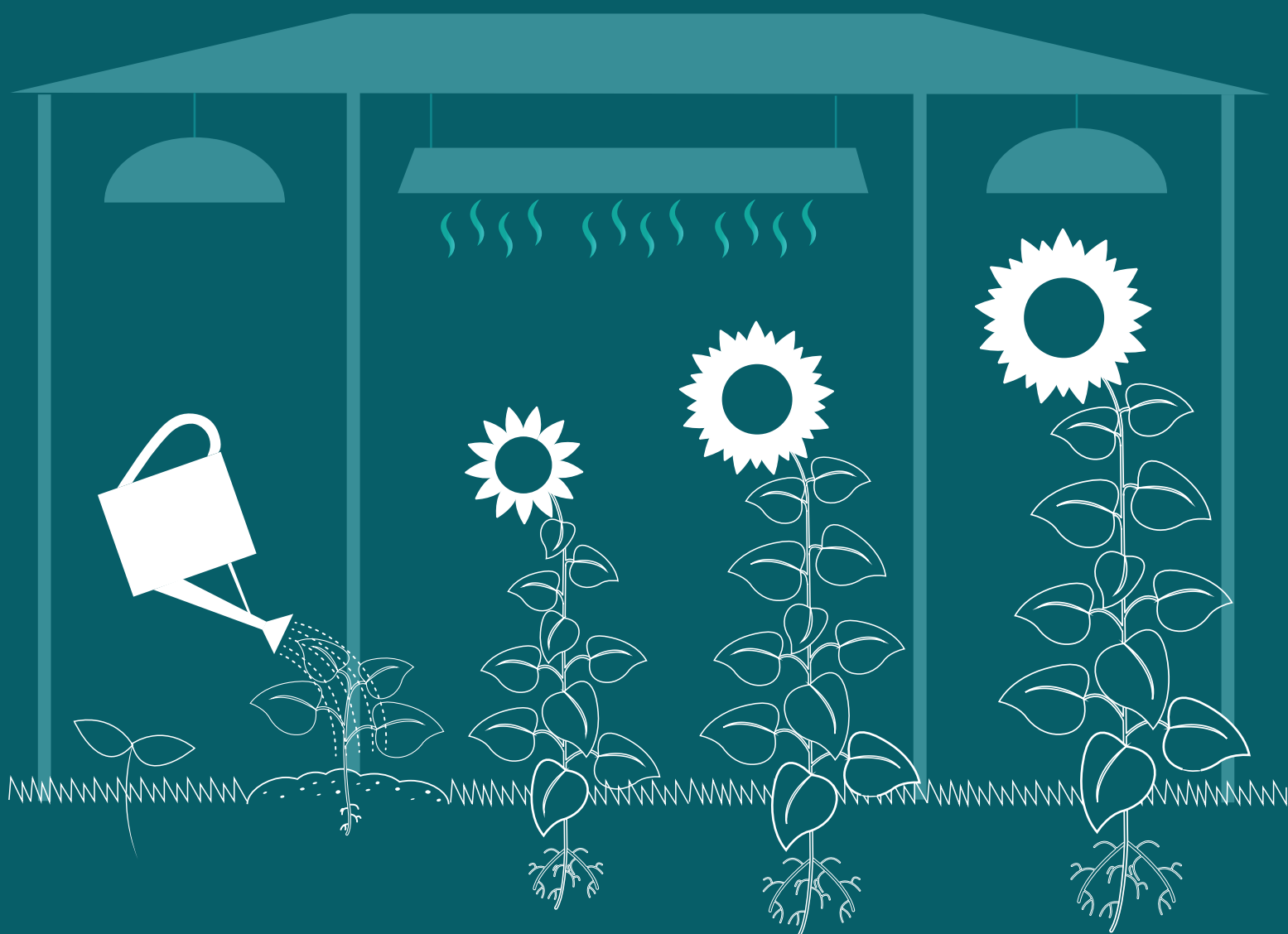


Proposed changes to Children's Centres in Stoke-on-Trent

Consultation Document

January 2022



Background

Stoke-on-Trent City Council is currently undertaking a transformational change programme to improve the way we deliver services to children and families. We have already developed an ambitious strategy to ensure all children get the best start in life, have the best possible education, enjoy good health and grow up feeling loved, nurtured and safe. We have called our strategy [Room to Grow](#). It is the product of our city, a partnership between public, private and voluntary sector organisations. Through this, and the supporting [Early Help and Prevention Strategy](#), we are committed to making sure that children and families receive the right support at the right time to help them to thrive.

We are putting in place a new way of working to make sure that our services are flexible enough to respond quickly and effectively to families as needs change. Our new framework is called Thrive. It will help families to move between and combine different types of support according to their circumstances. It will build on the existing strengths of the family and the supportive networks in local communities.

As an education partnership, we want to create a system that promotes the very highest standards for all children and young people, closes the attainment gap with the rest of the country and allows every pupil in Stoke-on-Trent to reach their full potential. We are committed to strengthening our early years workforce to make sure children have access to the best quality early years education. You can read more about our [Improving Education Strategy](#) online.

We are making these changes in response to emerging government policy and guidance. As we recover from the ongoing pandemic, local authorities must invest in supporting vulnerable children back into education. They must also increase wellbeing support for families and increase focus on the way we support children in the early years from conception to age two. Implementing some of the recommendations from [The Best Start for Life - The Early Years Healthy Development Review Report \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#) by Dame Andrea Leadsom MP, the recent government spending review emphasised the need for local services to join together to create 'family hubs' where families can access a broad range of advice and support.

In line with these recommendations we are proposing to create a network of provision across the city by creating hubs for families and children of all ages. In the first stage of this process, we are proposing to make some changes to the way we organise our children's centres. This is proposed so that we can bring together existing services that make the most difference to children and families and maintain the quality and effectiveness of those services. We are therefore starting public consultation about the proposed changes that will last until 11 February.

Given the financial challenges the council is facing, we have some difficult decisions to make about the way we spend the money that is available to us. We want to make sure that our resources are focused on direct delivery of services to families. Our current budget for Children's Centres is £927,000 gross a year (£3.6m estimated over the next four years) on administrative and running costs of the buildings. This does not include any non-site-specific service that could be based in any site, for example family support. Our initial proposed model prior to consultation will reduce the amount we spend on administration. This will allow us to focus our limited resources on delivering services that best meet the needs of families.

We anticipate that the changes will save £200,000 in the first year and £250,000 from 23/24 onwards (£950,000 over the next four years). More importantly though we think that the changes will allow us to deliver better services that are more flexible and better able to meet the changing needs of families in the future.

Children remain our number one priority and we know that supporting families and young people to thrive as they grow is critical. We have witnessed great strength and resilience during the recent pandemic that we can build on even further through our recovery. As a city council and a wider partnership, we are committed to working together to join our services for the benefit of all children in the city.

We are keen to hear the views of people who use these services, including parents/carers, residents, staff, local voluntary and community sector organisations and other stakeholders so we can be sure that the proposals will meet the needs of our communities now and into the future.

In this document you can find out about:

1. What we are proposing and why
2. Our current delivery model
3. A proposed delivery model
4. How you can have your say on the proposals
5. How your feedback will help
6. Next steps

If you would like this document in an alternative format please get in touch by calling 01782 234234 or by email to ChildrenCentreFeedback@stoke.gov.uk.

1. What are we proposing and why?

As part of our commitment to children in Stoke-on-Trent, we have set out our ambitious plans in a number of key documents. [Room to Grow](#) is our four-year plan for children in the city in which we commit to ensuring that all children in Stoke-on-Trent get the best start in life. This commitment is echoed in our [2021 - 2024 Early Help and Prevention Strategy](#). In addition to the measures in these strategies, this proposal forms part of our ongoing work to improve the way we support children and families in Stoke-on-Trent.

In line with emerging guidance from the government, we are proposing to develop a 'family hub' model to deliver services for children and families. This will effectively become a network of provision that will deliver both building based and outreach service. The aim is also to increase the range of services that can be accessed online.

We propose to retain five centres on the basis that they will continue to operate as Children's Centres and transition into Family Hubs within the government's definition, offering a broad range of services for children of all ages, with services for 0-5yr olds at their core. They are:

- Stoke North
- Tunstall
- Thomas Boughey
- Westfield
- Stoke

We propose to retain a further two centres that we are seeking to transfer to third party organisations by no later than April 2023. While these sites will continue to provide family services from a building base, they may or may not remain legally designated Children's Centres, subject to negotiation with third sector organisations. They are:

- Burslem Children's Centre
- Treehouse Children's Centre

Finally, we are proposing to close three Children's Centres and relocate the services currently offered within them into other local facilities which may include schools and community centres situated in close proximity to the current Children's Centre site. They are:

- Blurton Children's Centre
- The Crescent Children's Centre
- Norton Children's Centre

It is proposed that some services at Blurton Children's Centre will be moved to Stoke Children's Centre as well as being delivered from other community venues close to the existing site. The same is proposed at The Crescent Children's Centre - the ambition being to continue delivery from local sites within the community with some services being relocated

to Westfield Children's Centre. It is proposed that services at Norton Children's Centre will be moved to Stoke North and Tunstall.

Outreach services will continue in the same way, including health visiting and family support services, so that they can still be accessed in local communities. Most importantly, it is proposed that there are no reductions to the number of services available; instead there will be fewer buildings in which they are based.

We think this will allow us to focus our resources on those services that make the most difference to families by reducing spend on administration and the maintenance and management of our buildings. The proposal also aims to build on the changing ways that people use our services.

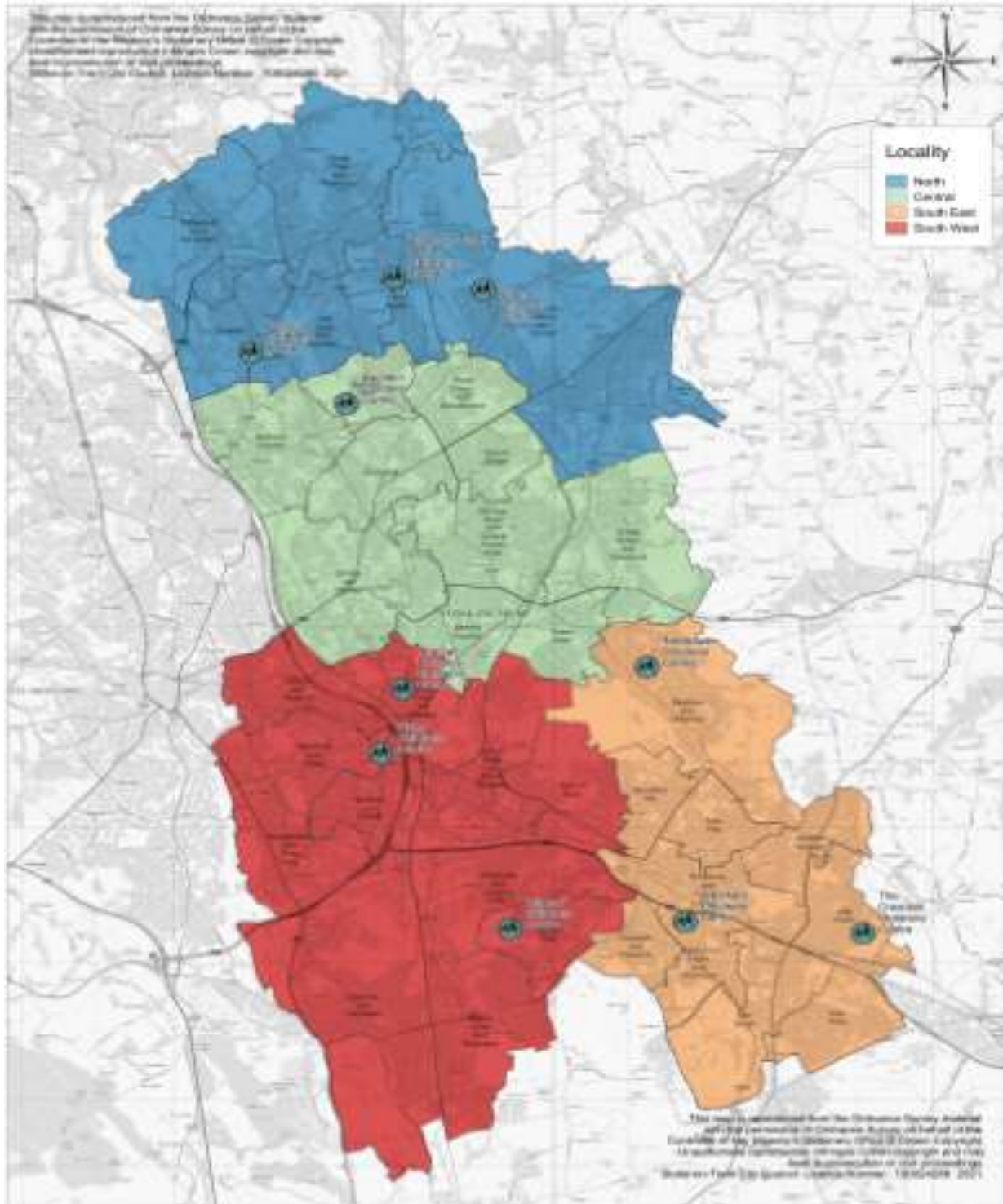
We are committed to continuing to deliver the best quality services in local communities using different facilities and through different means of delivery to ensure that families most in need of help and support can still access it easily. The number of services available in other local venues will increase as part of this proposal to ensure children of all ages continue to receive the right support when they need it most. We are also increasing the support available to parents to ensure they are confident and equipped to support their child's development from pre-birth to adulthood. This includes hosted groups and one-to-one outreach support.

The proposals are based on the following principles:

- Children and families should be supported at the earliest possible stage/age.
- Working closely with cross-sector partners, communities and families is critical to developing genuine joined-up working at a community level.
- Children and their families are involved in designing services and how they are delivered.
- Working in communities and local areas will make sure a focused approach that is based on needs is used to build on the strengths of communities.
- Programmes will be based on evidence and will be tested and refined to meet local needs and inform how services should be delivered in the future.
- Costs benefit analysis and best value for money.

2. Current delivery model

Early Help and statutory Children's Centre services are currently delivered through the city's network of children's centres. Currently each locality is served by at least two children's centres as shown on the map below.



Each centre delivers midwifery clinics, family support and a range of other services that differ between each site. Outreach workers are also based out of the centres but work predominantly in the community, schools and other venues. None of the current services are accessible online, nor do the centres offer digital access to any other online support or resources. All of the centres are currently operated and maintained by the local authority.

Please note: This proposal does not affect the nursery provision at The Crescent Pre-school or Jack in the Box Nursery.

3. Future delivery model

The model will begin with seven existing children's centre sites spread across the city with the ambition to explore options to transfer stewardship to third party organisations.

We intend to create a network of services across the city that is easily accessible to families, no matter where they live. This includes accessing services from a range of other sites such as libraries, schools, health venues and community venues including churches and community centres. This means that families will have more choice and be able to access services nearer to their homes in places that are already familiar to them. We are also investing in better technology with a view to moving some services online. Ways to get online to access services will be made available in more sites including the seven sites that are being retained.

We propose to introduce family advisors to act as a main, single point of contact for families seeking advice and support with a range of issues.

It is proposed that services for children aged 0-5 will remain at the centre of this way of working referred to as a family hub model. They are:

- Midwifery
- Health Visiting
- Perinatal Mental Health support
- Breastfeeding advice and support
- SEND services and
- Children's safeguarding services.

It is proposed that these services will be delivered consistently across each site and through outreach.

It is also proposed that these services will be complemented by a range of specialist services based on local need including a mix of city council services and support from partners including youth provision and mental health support for children and young people. We already know that the needs of families in Stoke-on-Trent differ from one to another. Our future model will reflect local needs and make sure that resources are allocated to match this.

In relation to the sites that are being retained, it is our intention to work towards an approach where some of the sites are run by schools and third sector organisations. A range of other sites will be connected to the 'network' digitally. We intend to create a range of volunteering opportunities for children and adults to participate in delivering support. We are committed to continuous improvement and exploring all options available to us and our partners.

The proposals relate to a reduction in the number of existing children's centres, not to a reduction in services. We propose to include more services in our future 'family hub' model that meet the needs of families and children of all ages.

This will include more:

- Youth provision.
- Hosted parent and baby groups.
- Ages and stages support for parents.
- Play sessions.
- Speech, language and communication support.
- Mental health support for parents and children.
- Support for children at risk of exploitation.
- Drugs and alcohol education and support.
- Support for children at risk of entering the criminal justice system.
- Support with debt and financial exclusion.
- Support to prevent family breakdown.
- Domestic abuse support.

4. How you can have your say

You can have your say by completing the questionnaire attached to this document as **Appendix A**.

You can send a copy of your completed questionnaire to the following address:

Budget 2021, Civic Centre, Glebe Street, Stoke on Trent, ST4 1HH

You can also hand your completed questionnaire in to your nearest children's centre, details of which can be found at www.stoke.gov.uk/directory/5/childrens_centres

You can also access and submit this questionnaire online at Stoke.gov.uk/budget2022

You can also email your feedback to <mailto:ChildrenCentreFeedback@stoke.gov.uk>

In light of the ongoing national Covid19 guidelines, a public meeting will take place virtually via Zoom on:

Wednesday 19th January 2022 from 1pm – 2pm

If you would like to take part in this session please send your email address to ChildrenCentreFeedback@stoke.gov.uk no later than Monday 10 January 2022 at 12noon.

5. How your feedback can help

Your feedback will be used to help Stoke-on-Trent City Council make decisions on the future of Children's Centre provision in Stoke-on-Trent.

A decision on the implementation of these proposals or any alternative proposals will be taken by Cabinet on 15 February 2022.

A summary of all the feedback received will be provided to Cabinet members before that date. You can access the summary via www.stoke.gov.uk/budget2022.

6. Next steps

The table below shows the next steps that will be taken and indicative timescales:

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|---|------------------|
| Consultation begins | 4 January 2022 |
| Consultation ends | 11 February 2022 |
| Cabinet meeting | 15 February |
| Implementation of changes to Children's Centres | 1 April 2022 |

Please submit feedback by midnight on 11 February 2022