

Overview & Scrutiny

Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission

All Members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission are requested to attend the meeting of the group to be held as follows

Monday 19 February 2024

7.00 pm

Council Chamber, Hackney Town Hall, Mare Street, London E8 1EA

The press and public are welcome to join this meeting in person (noting the guidance below) or remotely via this link:

<https://youtube.com/live/dtIBsWHACTc>

In case of any technical difficulties, a backup live stream link is also provided:

<https://youtube.com/live/TZmpv2NiBuE>

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Dawn Carter-McDonald

Interim Chief Executive, London Borough of Hackney

Members: Cllr Sophie Conway (Chair), Cllr Margaret Gordon (Vice-Chair), Cllr Alastair Binnie-Lubbock, Cllr Eluzer Goldberg, Cllr Lee Laudat-Scott, Cllr Midnight Ross, Cllr Ifraax Samatar, Cllr Anya Sizer, Cllr Sheila Suso-Runge, Cllr Lynne Troughton and Cllr Sarah Young, Jo Macleod, Annmarie Chiromo, Chanelle Paul and Mariya Bham.

Agenda

ALL MEETINGS ARE OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

1 Apologies for Absence

2 Urgent Items / Order of Business

3 Declarations of Interest

4 Super Youth Hub (7.05)

(Pages 9 - 58)

To review plans for the development of a Super Youth Hub in Hackney.

- 5 Children Centres Childcare (Reconfiguration) (7.35)** (Pages 59 - 180)
To scrutinise proposals for reconfiguration of children centre childcare provision (as part of the public consultation).
- 6 Sexual & Reproductive Health of Young People (21.15)** (Pages 181 - 202)
To note the Commission's response and recommendations to local commissioners of sexual and reproductive health care services for children and young people in Hackney.
- 7 Work Programme 2023/24 (21.20)** (Pages 203 - 216)
To note and agree the Commission's work programme for the remainder of the municipal year 2023/24.
- 8 Minutes (21.25)** (Pages 217 - 238)
To note the minutes of the last meeting from 15th January 2024 and note any actions.
- 9 Any Other Business**
To include updates on children and young people related issues from other scrutiny commissions

Access and Information

Public Involvement and Recording

Public Attendance at the Town Hall for Meetings

Scrutiny meetings are held in public, rather than being public meetings. This means that whilst residents and press are welcome to attend, they can only ask questions at the discretion of the Chair. For further information relating to public access to information, please see Part 4 of the council's constitution, available at <https://hackney.gov.uk/council-business> or by contacting Governance Services (020 8356 3503)

Following the lifting of all Covid-19 restrictions by the Government and the Council updating its assessment of access to its buildings, the Town Hall is now open to the public and members of the public may attend meetings of the Council.

We recognise, however, that you may find it more convenient to observe the meeting via the live-stream facility, the link for which appears on the agenda front sheet.

We would ask that if you have either tested positive for Covid-19 or have any symptoms that you do not attend the meeting, but rather use the livestream facility. If this applies and you are attending the meeting to ask a question, make a deputation or present a petition then you may contact the Officer named at the beginning of the agenda and they will be able to make arrangements for the Chair of the meeting to ask the question, make the deputation or present the petition on your behalf.

The Council will continue to ensure that access to our meetings is in line with any Covid-19 restrictions that may be in force from time to time and also in line with public health advice. The latest general advice can be found here - <https://hackney.gov.uk/coronavirus-support>

Rights of Press and Public to Report on Meetings

Where a meeting of the Council and its committees are open to the public, the press and public are welcome to report on meetings of the Council and its committees, through any audio, visual or written methods and may use digital and social media providing they do not disturb the conduct of the meeting and providing that the person reporting or providing the commentary is present at the meeting.

Those wishing to film, photograph or audio record a meeting are asked to notify the Council's Monitoring Officer by noon on the day of the meeting, if possible, or any time prior to the start of the meeting or notify the Chair at the start of the meeting.

The Monitoring Officer, or the Chair of the meeting, may designate a set area from which all recording must take place at a meeting.

The Council will endeavour to provide reasonable space and seating to view, hear and record the meeting. If those intending to record a meeting require any other reasonable facilities, notice should be given to the Monitoring Officer in advance of the meeting and will only be provided if practicable to do so.

The Chair shall have discretion to regulate the behaviour of all those present recording a meeting in the interests of the efficient conduct of the meeting. Anyone acting in a disruptive manner may be required by the Chair to cease recording or may be excluded from the meeting.

Disruptive behaviour may include moving from any designated recording area; causing excessive noise; intrusive lighting; interrupting the meeting; or filming members of the public who have asked not to be filmed.

All those visually recording a meeting are requested to only focus on recording Councillors, officers and the public who are directly involved in the conduct of the meeting. The Chair of the meeting will ask any members of the public present if they have objections to being visually recorded. Those visually recording a meeting are asked to respect the wishes of those who do not wish to be filmed or photographed. Failure by someone recording a meeting to respect the wishes of those who do not wish to be filmed and photographed may result in the Chair instructing them to cease recording or in their exclusion from the meeting.

If a meeting passes a motion to exclude the press and public then in order to consider confidential or exempt information, all recording must cease, and all recording equipment must be removed from the meeting. The press and public are not permitted to use any means which might enable them to see or hear the proceedings whilst they are excluded from a meeting and confidential or exempt information is under consideration.

Providing oral commentary during a meeting is not permitted.

Advice to Members on Declaring Interests

Advice to Members on Declaring Interests

Hackney Council's Code of Conduct applies to all Members of the Council, the Mayor and co-opted Members.

This note is intended to provide general guidance for Members on declaring interests. However, you may need to obtain specific advice on whether you have an interest in a particular matter. If you need advice, you can contact:

- Director of Legal, Democratic and Electoral Services
- the Legal Adviser to the Committee; or
- Governance Services.

If at all possible, you should try to identify any potential interest you may have before the meeting so that you and the person you ask for advice can fully consider all the circumstances before reaching a conclusion on what action you should take.

You will have a disclosable pecuniary interest in a matter if it:

- i. relates to an interest that you have already registered in Parts A and C of the Register of Pecuniary Interests of you or your spouse/civil partner, or anyone living with you as if they were your spouse/civil partner;
- ii. relates to an interest that should be registered in Parts A and C of the Register of Pecuniary Interests of your spouse/civil partner, or anyone living with you as if they were your spouse/civil partner, but you have not yet done so; or
- iii. affects your well-being or financial position or that of your spouse/civil partner, or anyone living with you as if they were your spouse/civil partner.

If you have a disclosable pecuniary interest in an item on the agenda you must:

- i. Declare the existence and nature of the interest (in relation to the relevant agenda item) as soon as it becomes apparent to you (subject to the rules regarding sensitive interests).
- ii. You must leave the meeting when the item in which you have an interest is being discussed. You cannot stay in the meeting whilst discussion of the item takes place, and you cannot vote on the matter. In addition, you must not seek to improperly influence the decision.
- iii. If you have, however, obtained dispensation from the Monitoring Officer or Standards Committee you may remain in the meeting and participate in the meeting. If dispensation has been granted it will stipulate the extent of your involvement, such as whether you can only be present to make representations, provide evidence or whether you are able to fully participate and vote on the matter in which you have a pecuniary interest.

Do you have any other non-pecuniary interest on any matter on the agenda which is being considered at the meeting?

You will have 'other non-pecuniary interest' in a matter if:

- i. It relates to an external body that you have been appointed to as a Member or in

another capacity; or

ii. It relates to an organisation or individual which you have actively engaged in supporting.

If you have other non-pecuniary interest in an item on the agenda you must:

i. Declare the existence and nature of the interest (in relation to the relevant agenda item) as soon as it becomes apparent to you.

ii. You may remain in the meeting, participate in any discussion or vote provided that contractual, financial, consent, permission or licence matters are not under consideration relating to the item in which you have an interest.

iii. If you have an interest in a contractual, financial, consent, permission, or licence matter under consideration, you must leave the meeting unless you have obtained a dispensation from the Monitoring Officer or Standards Committee. You cannot stay in the meeting whilst discussion of the item takes place, and you cannot vote on the matter. In addition, you must not seek to improperly influence the decision. Where members of the public are allowed to make representations, or to give evidence or answer questions about the matter you may, with the permission of the meeting, speak on a matter then leave the meeting. Once you have finished making your representation, you must leave the meeting whilst the matter is being discussed.

iv. If you have been granted dispensation, in accordance with the Council's dispensation procedure you may remain in the meeting. If dispensation has been granted it will stipulate the extent of your involvement, such as whether you can only be present to make representations, provide evidence or whether you are able to fully participate and vote on the matter in which you have a non-pecuniary interest.

Further Information

Advice can be obtained from Dawn Carter-McDonald, Director of Legal, Democratic and Electoral Services via email dawn.carter-mcdonald@hackney.gov.uk

Getting to the Town Hall

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Accessibility

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Induction loop facilities are available in the Assembly Halls and the Council Chamber. Access for people with mobility difficulties can be obtained through the ramp on the side to the main Town Hall entrance.

Further Information about the Commission

If you would like any more information about the Scrutiny Commission, including the membership details, meeting dates and previous reviews, please visit the website or use this QR Code (accessible via phone or tablet 'app')

[Scrutiny Panel](#)



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Children & Young People Scrutiny Commission 19th February 2024 Item 4 - Super Youth Hub	Item No 4
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Outline

This item is to assess local plans to develop a Super Youth Hub in Hackney. Members are invited to review proposals and to ask questions of officers present.

Reports

- Super Youth Hub paper
- Presentation slides
- Slides summarising the Action Research Project

Attending:

- Amy Wilkinson, Director of Partnerships, Impact and Delivery NHS North East London Integrated Care Board & City and Hackney Place Based Partnership
- Nancy Bending-Becket, Project Manager City & Hackney Children & Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing Partnership/CAMHS Alliance/Hackney Education
- Sophie Mcelroy, Senior Programme Manager City & Hackney Children & Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing Partnership/CAMHS Alliance/Hackney Education

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Title of report	City and Hackney's Super Youth Hub Pilot
Meeting for	Children & Young People Scrutiny Commission
Meeting date	19th February 2024
Produced by	Nancy Bending Beckett, Project Manager Nancy.Bending-Beckett@hackney.gov.uk
Authorised by	Amy Wilkinson, Director of Partnerships, Impact and Delivery NHS North East London Integrated Care Board & City and Hackney Place Based Partnership
Allocated time needed	10 minutes to present, 20 minutes for discussion

Report Summary

Super Youth Hub: CYP Scrutiny Paper is shared to update elected councillors on developments of this project and upcoming integrated health and wellbeing for children and young people pilot that will be taking place in London Fields, Shoreditch Park and The City pair of neighbourhoods. The report has been tabled for discussion at the Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission.

Overview of developments and areas of note:

- The final report from the Participatory Action Research completed by a team of 16 young researchers was published in November 2023, which sets out challenges and recommendations around supporting young people's access to and navigation of Health and Wellbeing Services in City and Hackney.
- A 2 year pilot is due to commence in late-Spring 2024, which will introduce an integrated adolescent health and youth work model based around the successful example of this in Tower Hamlets (HealthSpot), and the recommendations from young people in City and Hackney.
- The pilot location has been agreed as the London Fields, Shoreditch Park and The City pair of neighbourhoods, with the Young Hackney Forest Road Youth Hub identified as the space to develop the 'Super Youth Hub' offer.
- The project is supported by the NEL Outcomes Funding - System Transformation Funds for CYP Emotional Health & Wellbeing with a £319,154 investment alongside support from stakeholders from Public Health, Primary Care, Young Hackney, Mental Health, and the Community and Voluntary Sector.
- Three new posts will be recruited through the investment from the NEL Outcomes Funding. These roles will support in coordinating, and delivering the Super Youth Hub model to work in collaboration with existing systems through aligning assets and maximising resources in a range of services.
- The evaluation of the pilot will include a mirror piece of participatory action research to capture the qualitative data and impact on the lives of young residents.

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Executive Summary:

The Super Youth Hub project in City and Hackney addresses the pressing need for integrated health and wellbeing services for young people by streamlining access and overcoming existing fragmentation. Grounded in research and participatory engagement, the two-year pilot will introduce an integrated adolescent health and youth work model based around the successful example of this in Tower Hamlets, HealthSpot¹. Focused on establishing a cohesive system response, enhancing communication strategies, and integrating services into existing youth spaces, the pilot aligns with local priorities and identified health needs. The project is supported by the NEL Outcomes Funding - System Transformation Funds for CYP Emotional Health & Wellbeing with a £319,154 investment alongside stakeholders from Public Health, Primary Care, Young Hackney, Mental Health, and the Community and Voluntary Sector. The evaluation will assess outcomes, changes in ways of working, and value for money, with the overarching goal of empowering young people, improving accessibility, and providing the right support at the right time.

Context & Background:

Integrating health and wellbeing services into spaces that are for young people is a model that is increasing in prevalence. Whilst there has always been health and wellbeing services working with youth services to reach young people, different services have largely worked in siloes contributing to a fragmented system which is difficult for young people (and their families) to navigate and access.

A comprehensive [Literature Review by the Population Health Hub](#) established key areas to collate further information and views from stakeholders. This led to research around the topics of health and wellbeing, alongside extensive engagement with stakeholders. This includes Participatory Action Research (PAR) with a team of 16 Young Researchers (aged 15-19) who were trained by an external research company (3Ps), to complete fieldwork talking with over 230 young people in 23 different settings.

The research findings highlight the health and wellbeing needs of young people in City and Hackney. Young people expressed a strong desire for services and support to be situated in safe and trustworthy spaces. Furthermore, they emphasised the importance of a multidisciplinary and holistic approach of these services, advocating for partnerships across various sectors, including schools, families, technology, public spaces, and health and social care.

The pilot for this Super Youth Hub aims to simplify the avenues for young people needing support and bring positive outcomes for individual young people (including their physical, cognitive, behavioural, and social and emotional development). By focusing on early intervention in key areas around a young person's health and wellbeing needs, the aim is to reduce the potential risk factors for poor health and social outcomes and increase the protective factors in a child's life.

Several factors have spurred the development of this project, these include:

- 1. Feedback from Children and Young People (CYP) showing need for more aligned services, in local and more holistic treatment**

Feedback from young people, as established through the [PAR](#) (which engaged 231 young people), [Surveys](#), and [The Young Future's Commission](#) (which consulted over 2,000 young people in City and Hackney and a further public survey of 126 young adults was completed in 2021), which taken together indicates that services are often difficult to locate, navigate and

¹ <https://wearespotlight.com/health-spot/>

access – and designed around services rather than young people. This insight also showed that young people don't consider health and wellbeing needs individually and it's better if services can treat people holistically and these needs are identified and met in one place.

2. Increasing demand for Mental Health Services

Demand for CAMHS has increased significantly since the pandemic (doubling for certain CAMHS pathways). Estimated prevalence of a diagnosable Mental Health condition has gone from 10% to 18% of CYP in City and Hackney. Currently the local system is managing to treat approximately 40% of this estimate. This means 60% of CYP in C&H have unmet mental health needs. We hope that by providing easier access to early help and intervention services we can prevent needs escalating, reducing the demand on higher tiers of support and more specialist services.

3. Evidence of successful integrated health offers in other London boroughs

There is evidence that an integrated offer works, as there are now multiple [different models](#) of integrated health offers for young people have been established in other London boroughs with positive outcomes reported from service users and professionals (example [here](#) from HealthSpot in Tower Hamlets). We are in position to learn from these existing systems, and use this learning to establish our own.

4. Alignment with local strategic aims for increasing integration of health and care services

Alignment of services also fits with our strategic aim as a place based partnership to better integrate health and care services, and with the integrated framework model for CYPMF I.

5. Identified health and wellbeing needs in data, literature and insight from professionals

Clear health and wellbeing needs (and inequalities) have been identified from data and from the literature review, in addition to feedback gathered from youth work professionals working directly with young people in Young Hackney's Targeted and Universal teams (via forums such as the Young Hackney Children and Young People's Panel (CYPP), Unit meetings, and supervision discussions with service managers). There are systemic inequalities that affect access to health and wellbeing support such as racism and poverty. Over the last 12 months, and back to pre-COVID, records from CYPP have identified increasing needs around emotional wellbeing and mental health, alongside significant delays and barriers to young people being able to access the support they need when they need it, in the places they feel safe, and with the people they want to work with.

The Pilot:

The Project Team has developed a plan for a two-year pilot aimed at assessing the viability and effectiveness of an integrated health offer model. This pilot will involve the introduction of three new coordination, navigation and clinical leadership roles who will be responsible for implementing key components of the proposed model initially within one of the quadrants (pairs of neighbourhoods) of City and Hackney. The pilot programme will primarily focus on developing a system-wide response, comprehensive communication strategies, and integrating services into existing settings.

The phased implementation would broadly be as follows:

- **Year One:** Community building, communications and promotion, and establishing key elements within one quadrant of the neighbourhoods model.
- **Year Two:** Fully functioning programme within one quadrant, evaluating against success criteria, with hopes for the outcome of the development of a roll-out plan to the remaining three pairs of neighbourhoods in City and Hackney. This pilot will involve implementing key components of the proposed model in one of the quadrants (pairs of neighbourhoods) of City and Hackney.

The primary objectives of this pilot programme include:

- Developing a System-Wide Response: The pilot programme will work to establish a cohesive and interconnected system that can effectively address the health and wellbeing needs of young people in the selected quadrant. It will focus on streamlining access to services, ensuring efficient coordination, and improving awareness and understanding of care available.
- Comprehensive Communication Strategies: Effective communication is fundamental to the 'Super Youth Hub' project. The pilot will prioritise the development of robust communication strategies to ensure that young people (alongside their families and the professional network) are well-informed about available services and can easily access the support they need.
- Integrating Services into Existing Settings: The pilot programme will integrate health and wellbeing services into existing settings, such as integrating an Adolescent GP Service into a youth hub. This approach will make services more easily accessible and comfortable for young people.

The goal of this pilot programme is to test and refine the integrated health offer model within the context of City and Hackney, ultimately paving the way for a more comprehensive and youth-centric approach to healthcare for young people in City and Hackney.

The 'Super Youth Hub' project work to create a system-wide **Youth Health and Wellbeing Network**, would encompass the following components:

- Schools: The project supports the role of schools as hubs for young people's access to health and wellbeing support. This involves **enhancing existing structures, coordination, and offering a comprehensive PSHE programme for older young people.**
- Super Youth Hubs: These will be one-stop-shop youth-friendly health hubs within existing youth spaces, **making health services easily accessible and comfortable for young people. This includes the element of an Integrated Adolescent GP Service.**
- Outreach Network: An inclusive and equitable support system for all communities and cohorts, reducing resource inequities and enhancing coordination. This involves **building on existing partnerships and identifying opportunities for collaborative approaches to outreach.**
- Online/Virtual Network: A unified online platform for easily accessible and accurate self-help resources for children and young people. This will involve **collating existing online provision and developing a CYP steering board to support in co-designing and producing communication content.**

- **System Change (incl. Health Settings):** The project will **develop recommendations** for youth-friendly spaces in healthcare settings, fostering collaborative initiatives around Youth Work and Health. It will also work to align visions for future integrated commissioning that meets the needs and wants of young people, their families and trusted adults with a focus on the underpinning key values of the project.

Through evaluation² of costs and benefits of each neighbourhood pair, the initial agreed pair of neighbourhoods to pilot this project has been agreed by the Project's Strategic Steering Board as '**London Fields, Shoreditch Park, and The City**'. This decision ultimately hinged on the development of youth friendly health hub space that builds on existing use provision, and this quadrant being a host to a central and well attended youth provision (Young Hackney's Forest Road Youth Hub) with suitable adaptable space.

A total of £319,154 in funding for the posts (across two years) to realise this pilot was granted via the NEL Outcomes Funding - System Transformation Funds for CYP Emotional Health & Wellbeing. These roles will support in coordinating, and delivering the Super Youth Hub model to work in collaboration with existing systems through aligning assets and maximising resources in a range of services. An overview of these three roles is detailed below:

- **Operational Manager³:**
 - Coordinate the Operational team, and network - managing budget, resources, and overseeing data-recording, evaluation and monitoring;
 - Manage Communications and System Coordinator;
 - Coordinate the training opportunities for practitioners;
 - Seek opportunities for collaboration between partners, and explore avenues for bringing additional resource into the system;
 - Develop the training programme for peer ambassadors alongside the system navigator and clinical lead.
- **System Navigator⁴:**
 - Develop, implement and maintain the Super Youth Hub communication strategy alongside existing comms leads through co-production with young people, ensuring up-to-date information on available opportunities and support for children and young people;
 - Establish and maintain relationships with community groups, leaders, and services to identify collaboration opportunities, emerging themes, and community needs;
 - Support the direct delivery of Super Youth Hub bookings and appointments with clinical staff;
 - Manage and support the Young Advisor and peer ambassadors as required.
- **Clinical Lead⁵:**
 - Provide clinical leadership and operational oversight, and contribute to the achievement of the project goals.
 - Conduct some clinics at the Super Youth Hub physical space, supporting youth workers through consultation to carry out low risk health assessments and develop support plans;
 - Assume clinical risk for high-risk cases, lead and participate in case management

² [SYH: Determining Pilot Location](#)

³ [SYH Ops Manager JD draft](#)

⁴ [System Navigator JD Draft](#)

⁵ [SYH Clinical Lead JD draft](#)

- meetings;
- Hold meetings with Clinical Leads at CAMHS and CFS Clinical Service to discuss complex cases and establish a collaborative structure;
- Provide training opportunities to upskill practitioners in therapeutic practice.

The project focuses on empowering young people, enhancing their access to services, and ensuring they receive the right support at the right time. The overarching project's goals, are focused on the outcomes for young people in City and Hackney, as follows:

- **Empowerment:** Providing young people with greater autonomy over their support needs.
- **Accessibility:** Enhancing access to a wide array of health and wellbeing services, making them more easily accessible for young people.
- **Right Support:** The service ensures that young people receive the right support, at the right time, from the right professionals, in locations that are suitable and comfortable for them.

Super Youth Hub context, vision and impact

Context	Vision	Impact
<p>CYP Feedback through Young Futures Commission and other research indicates that young people find services are difficult to access and navigate, often designed around service needs rather than CYP needs.</p> <p>There has been a significant increase of Demand for Mental Health and Wellbeing Services with certain CAMHS pathways doubling since the pandemic.</p> <p>Evidence Based Practice nationally suggests positive outcomes from integrated health offers i.e. Tower Hamlets' HealthSpot.</p> <p>There is Alignment with Local Priorities to improve CYP outcomes with opportunities to align this project with local programmes.</p> <p>Identified H&W Need of CYP in City and Hackney identified through PH and other service data plus CYP research.</p>	<p>Partnership working across the Health and Wellbeing Services in City and Hackney to pool resourcing and work collaboratively to adequately respond to the increasing demand for emotional wellbeing and mental health services, recognising the support that Early Help and Intervention can have in reducing the demand on higher tiers of support. With a key focus on:</p> <p>Embedding key health and wellbeing services within existing youth settings</p> <p>Sharing best practices and recommendations for youth engagement and developing CYP accessible settings</p> <p>Clear pathways and information available for 16-25 young people</p> <p>Working with and championing the role of Community and Voluntary sector in increasing reach and delivering better services for young people</p> <p>Reaching underrepresented and often excluded cohorts</p> <p>Enhancing online presence and CYP directed communications</p> <p>Reducing pressure on services by considering collectively how to</p>	<p>Improved health and wellbeing of CYP population</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reduction in health inequalities ● Improved health of CYP population ● Quality of life <p>Enhanced quality and experience of care</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● CYP feel more empowered ● Care is personal and joined up ● Care is provided by the right person <p>Value and sustainability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Cost-effective ● Demand well-managed ● Sustainable fit between needs and resources ● CYP Engaged as future leaders

	best invest time and resources to respond to demand.	
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Stakeholders:

The Super Youth Hub pilot is designed to integrate seamlessly within the existing system, realigning current assets and resources for optimal efficiency and impact. The pilot is supported by a range of key service providers, each contributing to the integrated approach of reaching young people effectively through the Super Youth Hub. Below is an overview of the five primary service areas involved in this initiative:

1. **Public Health:** This sector is aligning its services through integrated commissioning approaches, encompassing sexual and reproductive health services, substance misuse, school nursing, and health and wellbeing.
2. **Primary Care:** Local Primary Care Networks (PCNs) are investing in the pilot to provide an adolescent GP service, functioning as an extended access hub. This involvement is crucial in ensuring primary care services are readily accessible to young people.
3. **Young Hackney:** This organisation is pivotal in providing the physical setting for the Super Youth Hub. It will also align its youth workers with the integrated partnership's ways of working, ensuring a cohesive service delivery.
4. **Mental Health:** A significant investment is being made in the Clinical Lead role, which is included in the funding bid. This role will be responsible for oversight and clinical leadership. The mental health sector is also exploring opportunities for offering clinics within the Super Youth Hub and enhancing partnership working.
5. **Community and Voluntary Sector (CVS):** Collaboration with CVS partners is key to responding to community needs through outreach. The sector plays a role in delivering services within the Super Youth Hub, as well as receiving outreach services in various community settings as needed.

Please note that this list represents the core service areas; it does not encompass the wider stakeholder network, which also plays a vital role in supporting and developing the Super Youth Hub initiative.

Outcomes and Evaluation:

The evaluation of the Super Youth Hub pilot is designed to be formative, aiming to guide the project's future direction and demonstrate its value for money. The key focus is on assessing the impact and outcomes for young people and communities. This comprehensive evaluation will support the Project Team in understanding key learnings and will be made accessible to CYP and their families, to demonstrate tangible changes resulting from their input. Furthermore, the evaluation will serve as a validation tool for resources and alignment from services and professionals, crucial for securing long-term stakeholder buy-in.

The evaluation will address several critical questions:

1. What are the outcomes for residents, including CYP's awareness of services, confidence in accessing services, and experiences of services?
2. How has the project impacted or changed ways of working, considering organisational structures and referral processes?
3. Does the model provide value for money, considering both short-term costs and long-term benefits?

The Super Youth Hub pilot aims to create happy and healthy children and young people who have autonomy over their health and can access support as needed. The expected impact includes improved health and wellbeing of the CYP population, enhanced quality of life, and reduction in health inequalities. The pilot also seeks to enhance the quality of care, making it more personalised and joined-up, and ensuring it is provided by the right person at the right time.

The project will use outcome-based metrics to assess effectiveness, focusing on improved accessibility, changed ways of working and service user satisfaction. This data will be collected through various IT platforms like EMIS Community, Mosaic, RIO, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the pilot's impact. The outcomes and benefits will be framed within the context of improving physical and mental health, increasing social connection, addressing health inequalities, and enhancing the overall experience of care for CYP.

Logic Model Summary

Priority	Mechanisms of Change	Outcomes
System Navigation and Autonomy	Coordinated CPD opportunities for professionals across the network. Co-production with young people around service delivery, and communications. Establishment of an integrated youth health hub.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Empowered Young People: Through co-production and relationship building. - Personalised and Joined-Up Care: Established through a collaborative multidisciplinary approach. - Decreased Duplication of Services - Increased Satisfaction of Care
Accessible Services and Increased Awareness	Establishing a unified online platform and targeted outreach. Workshops, communications, and training. Improved access to information and support. Continuation of the Community Wellbeing Van outreach, and supporting the development of detached youth work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improved Online Accessibility - Increased Awareness of Rights - Enhanced Health Literacy - Increased Access to Mental Health Support
Reduced Need for Higher-Tiered Support	Early help wellbeing interventions based on 5 to Thrive. Integration of health outreach through detached youth work. Focus on PSHE and targeted programmes for different age cohorts. Strengthening partnerships with communities. Offering a programme of wellbeing workshops.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Early Intervention Support: Reduced waiting times and increased attendance. - Cost-Effectiveness and Managed Demand: Allocating resources systematically. - Increased Capacity for Engagement: Meaningful engagement with child, youth, and family. - Reduced Health Inequalities: Improved access for under- or over- represented groups. - Improved Physical and Mental Health: Addressing identified health needs and inequalities.
Integrated Working and System Alignment	Mapping and understanding mechanisms for message distribution. Colocating multi-agency teams within the Super Youth Hub. Upskilling youth workers for therapeutic interventions. Investment in a System Navigator role.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Breaking Down Silos: Establishing a network of services and multi-agency working. - Care in the Right Place at the Right Time: Coordination of services and improved data mobilisation. - Future Workforce and Co-Production: Development of employability opportunities for young people. - Enhanced Community Engagement: Strengthening partnerships and outreach.

	Strengthening relationships between the community and voluntary sector and statutory services.	
Young People Engaged as Future Leaders	<p>Establishment of a CYP steering board.</p> <p>Coordination of opportunities for multi-agency working.</p> <p>Working with partners and young people for policy recommendations.</p> <p>Employment of a Young Advisor for co-production.</p> <p>Promotion of skill-building and employability opportunities.</p> <p>Enhancement of transitions between 16-25 i.e. takeover days and drop-ins</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Responsive Services to Youth Voice: Agile response to young people's needs. - Confident Young People: In accessing education, training, and employment support. - Young Advisors Driving Co-Production: Evidenced value in the role within the team. - Meaningful Involvement in Decision-Making: Practices reflecting the engagement of children, youth, and families. - Improved Pathways into Adulthood: Targeted programmes and workshops for 16-25 age groups. - Enhanced Quality of Life: Improved health and wellbeing outcomes. - Engaged Future Leaders: CYP Steering Board and involvement in decision-making.

Full logic model can be found here: [Logic Model](#)

Risks and Mitigations:

A comprehensive risk analysis, integral to the development of the Super Youth Hub pilot, has identified key areas for mitigation to ensure the project's success. To ensure sustainability, the project is embedded within the existing system, leveraging a realignment of current assets and resources. This approach not only maximises efficiency but also fortifies the pilot against potential resource-related challenges. The risk of overlooking underrepresented voices is being addressed through proactive co-production and engagement with community leaders and CVS organisations. This strategy ensures that diverse perspectives and needs are central to the project's development and execution. Additionally, maintaining robust stakeholder engagement is a priority, achieved through clear project planning and ensuring stakeholder representation in steering groups. This measure is designed to foster continuous support and collaboration, crucial for the pilot's successful implementation and outcomes.

Sustainability:

The purpose of the pilot is to test the integrated model in one quadrant of the borough over two years (allowing time for the model to be structured and embedded across this time to be able to fully evaluate its success). The outcome, impact and findings of the pilot will provide evidence for future direction, with the hopes of expanding across the remaining three pairs of neighbourhoods. The model for this pilot has been developed and designed around the alignment of existing resources in a range of services in order to provide added value to existing teams. This has been in part to ensure the sustainability of the design. There have been discussions with stakeholders as part of the design about how the three funded roles might be jointly resourced if the pilot has been successful and this will be explored further throughout the 2 years.

'Super Youth Hub' Project

Establishing a youth health and wellbeing network for City and Hackney

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Overview

Why the project came about:

Young people told us that services are difficult to access and navigate, and we know that the demand for support outweighs the supply particularly around mental health.

What the project is trying to achieve:

The project aims to improve young people's (those aged 11-25) autonomous and independent access to health and wellbeing support.

Participatory Action Research Report

Themes	Summary of Findings
Connections	Build on YP's trusted relationships to support interventions, and develop relational skills of professionals working with young people.
Accessibility	Work with YP to co-produce communications through avenues they use and engage with, and consider what information is available ahead of access.
Quality & Integration	Improve the understanding, and accessibility of CAMHS services, and enhance the integration of and promotion of health and wellbeing services in schools.
Comfort	Ensure that the physical spaces that CYP access services are accessible and comfortable, and embed promotion of healthy lifestyles.
Youth Hubs	Use Youth Hubs as a space to integrate and offer services through, building on the trusted relationships with youth workers. Consider ways to improve safety of physical locations including outdoor spaces and parks.

CONTEXT

- **CYP Feedback** through Young Futures Commission and other research indicates that young people find services are difficult to access and navigate, often designed around service need rather than CYP need.
- There has been a significant increase of **Demand for Mental Health and Wellbeing Services** with certain CAMHS pathways doubling since the pandemic.
- **Evidence Based Practice** nationally suggests positive outcomes from integrated health offers i.e. Tower Hamlets' HealthSpot.
- There is **Alignment with Local Priorities** to improve CYP outcomes with opportunities to align this project with local programmes.
- **Identified H&W Need** of CYP in City and Hackney identified through PH and other service data plus CYP research.

VISION

Partnership working across the Health and Wellbeing Services in City and Hackney to **pool resourcing** and work collaboratively to adequately respond the increasing demand for emotional wellbeing and mental health services, **recognising the support that Early Help and Intervention** can have in reducing the demand on higher tiers of support. With a key focus on:

- Embedding key **health and wellbeing** services **within existing youth settings**
- **Sharing best practices and recommendations** for youth engagement and developing CYP accessible settings
- Clear **pathways and information available for 16-25 young people**
- **Working with and championing the role of Community and Voluntary sector** in increasing reach and delivering better services for young people
- Reaching **underrepresented and often excluded cohorts**
- Enhancing **online presence and CYP directed communications**
- **Reducing pressure on services** by considering collectively how to best invest time and resources to respond to demand.

IMPACT

Improved health and wellbeing of CYP population

- Reduction in health inequalities
- Improved health of CYP population
- Quality of life

Enhanced quality and experience of care

- CYP feel more empowered
- Care is personal and joined up
- Care is provided by the right person

Value and sustainability

- Cost-effective
- Demand well-managed
- Sustainable fit between needs and resources
- CYP Engaged as future leaders

Components:

Schools:

Supporting the role of schools as hubs for young people's access to wider health and wellbeing support, with a focus on enhancing existing structures, coordination, and offering a fuller PSHE programme for older young people.

Key Outputs:

- Extra-curricular 15+ PSHE Programme.
- Streamlined communication pathways.

Super Youth Hubs:

Creating one-stop-shop youth-friendly health hubs within existing youth spaces, making health services easily accessible and comfortable for young people.

Key Outputs:

- Key CYP health services delivered from one location.
- CYP Steering Board.

Outreach and CVS:

Establish an inclusive and equitable support system for all communities and cohorts, reducing resource inequities and enhancing coordination.

Key Outputs:

- Health services delivered in response to specific cohorts.
- Key information and support in reaching support.

System Change incl. Health Settings:

Supporting and coordinating system change to more integrated and equitable ways of working, and developing through co-production a set of recommendations for developing youth-friendly spaces in healthcare settings.

Key Outputs:

- Recommendations for future integrated practise.

Online/Virtual Network:

Increasing awareness and understanding of services through connecting communications strategies and co-producing content with young people.

Key Outputs:

- CYP Co Produced Comms, inc. a CYP H&W Influencer.
- Unified online resources/calendar.

Underpinning Values:

Co-production and Empowerment	Holistic	Inclusive	Reflective Practice	Partnership Approach
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Outcomes Funding

Item	Quantity	Cost
System Navigator	1 x FTE PO3	£59,220
Operational Manager	1 x FTE PO6	£69,920
Clinical Lead	1 x 0.4 FTE NHS Band 8a (no overheads incl.)	£30,437
TOTAL	-	£159,577

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This would be for a two-year phased pilot (April 2024-2026), which would broadly be as follows:

- **Year One:** A soft launch in April 2024 to focus on community building, communications and promotion, and establishing key elements within one quadrant of the neighbourhoods model.
- **Year Two:** Fully embedded programme within one quadrant, evaluating against success criteria, with the hoped for outcome a roll-out plan to the remaining three pairs of neighbourhoods in City and Hackney.

These three funded roles will support in coordinating, and delivering the Super Youth Hub model that works in collaboration with existing systems through aligning and including budgets in a range of services i.e. HCVS, Health and Wellbeing, School Nursing, Youth Work.



Local and National Initiatives

- National funding for ‘CYP MH Hubs’;
- ELFT Discovery College;
- National funding for Youth Workers in Hospital pilot;
- Neighbourhoods Programme;
- Place Based Work;
- Children and Family Hubs;
- 16+ Transition Networks: 16-25 Network / 16+ Network / Pathways / Project Hackney - Transition Booklet.

Pilot Location

- Considerations: Suitable Space, Interest, Population, Service Engagement, CYP Feedback

This has been agreed to be **London Fields, Shoreditch Park, and The City** pair of neighbourhoods to align with the central objective of creating an accessible youth health hub in an existing, well-used, and adaptable youth setting.

Questions and Discussion

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City and Hackney 'Super Youth Hub' Project

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Participatory Action Research
Report and Findings



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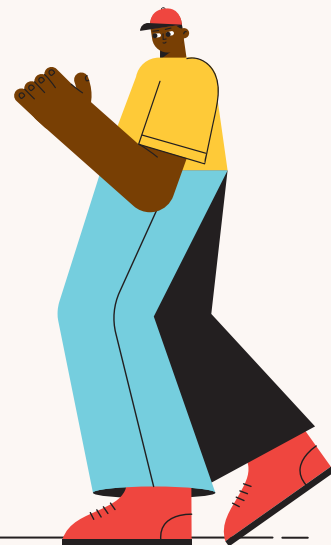
Research Methodology,
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01



Introduction

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Project brief and context

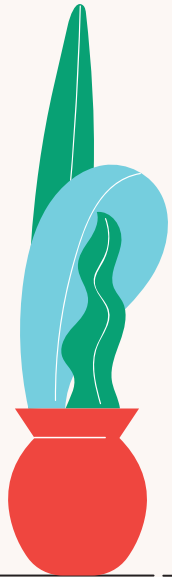


Project Brief

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In collaboration with City and Hackney the organisation 3Ps undertook a comprehensive project throughout 2023 aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of young people's requirements concerning youth health and well-being services.

This was project came about in response to young people telling us that health and wellbeing services in City and Hackney were hard to navigate and designed around services rather than service users.



Key Questions

The 3Ps team were provided with a detailed literature review (written by Population Health Hub) that identified areas where more data was needed in relation to creating a 'Super Youth Hub' for City and Hackney. The identified areas were:

- What are the **perceptions and barriers** to accessing current support, what are **CYP's experiences**
- How we could make local **healthcare services easier to access and better suited to the needs** of CYP
- How to **engage with diverse cohorts** of young people specifically Charedi CYP, LGBTQ+ CYP
- What would an **integrated healthcare offer** look like, what services would it include, where would it be



02

Process

Research Methodology,
Recruitment



Research Methodology



Recruitment



Role advertised through schools and youth settings with support from Young Hackney. 30 applications received. 2 recruitment days and 16 young researchers recruited.



Training



4 training days covering: participatory approaches; research tools; methodology, and; fieldwork planning. Research questions were determined by the young researchers in these sessions.



Fieldwork



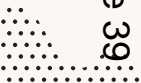
April - July 2023, reaching 231 young people across 23 different provisions in City and Hackney



Analysis



2 analysis sessions held mid-fieldwork to refine research questions and target second phase of fieldwork. Final 2-day analysis sessions where overall themes, findings and recommendations were created. Findings presented and validated.



Young Research Team

Demographics of the group captured through an anonymous survey.

16

Number of Young Researchers recruited. 13 still engaged at end of the project.

17% SEND

83% identified as having no additional needs.

15-18

Age of young researchers at the start of project.

75% Global Majority

A very mixed group from varied backgrounds.

83% Female

17% Male, 0% identified as non-binary

36% Clissold Park

6 of the 8 neighbourhoods represented (not London Fields and Springfield Park)



03

Key Findings

Analysis, themes and
recommendations

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Fieldwork Demographic Data

Demographics of participants in the research were captured through an anonymous and optional form.

231

Young people reached through fieldwork

10-19

Age range of participants

54%

Identified as female. 46% as male.

45%

Added some data to demographics sheet.

E9

Was the most common postcode of participants given (although only 24 gave postcode information)

5

told us that they have special educational needs (in addition, two sessions were delivered specifically with SEN YP).

21

told us they were entitled to free school meals

75%

Of session attendees from Global Majority

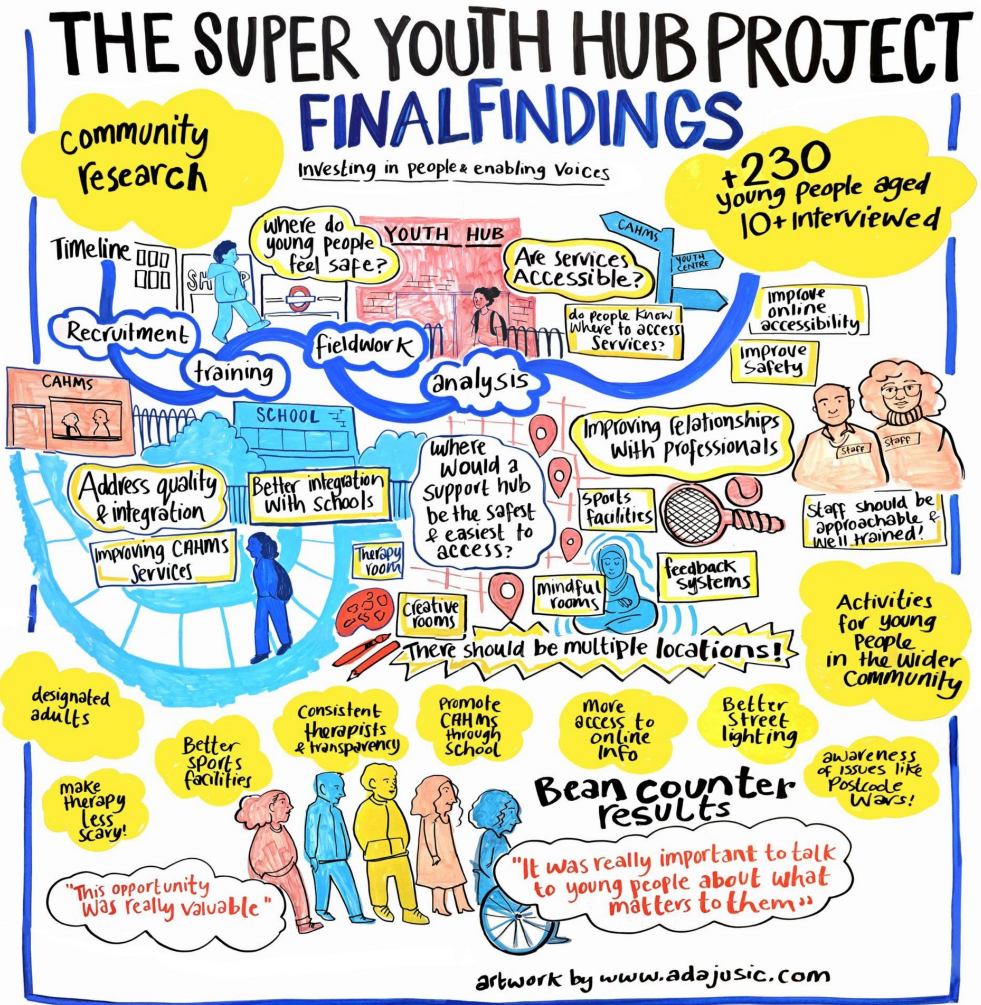


105 Fieldwork session attendees added data to the demographic sheets.



What were the findings?

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Key Themes and Findings

Themes	Summary of Findings
Connections	Build on YP's trusted relationships to support interventions, and develop relational skills of professionals working with young people.
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Connections

The role of friends and trusted adults in a young person's life and how professionals can build relationships with CYP



Sub-Themes

Findings

Fostering stronger bonds

Improving relatability & relationships

- Young people identified cultural barriers to asking for help or talking about problems.
- Young people identified the difficulties in opening up to professionals and the value of relationship building.



Recommendations

- Services should consider offering young people the option to **bring a trusted person to appointments**
- There should be a drive to **increase diversity of staff in health and wellbeing services**
- Reassurance for young people around the **confidentiality of spaces and services**
- Build on **existing activities and social environments** for young people to aid connection
- Explore opportunities for **family involvement** and how they can also provide support
- Staff should be able to appropriately **communicate with young people and be approachable**
- More **transparency on what to expect** from services
- **Increased communication between services** to ensure the right support for the YP



Accessibility

How young people are able to find, navigate, access and use services.



Sub-Themes

Findings

Improve online accessibility

Improve accessibility to services

- Young people aren't aware of online directories of services, and generally aren't following service social media and websites.
- Young people said that online options can improve accessibility in situations where physical services can not be accessed.
- Young people told us that they are often afraid to access services due to fear of the unknown, and feel they don't have clarity on complaints processes which hinders quality of service.

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Recommendations

- **Easy lines of communication** e.g. online forms for quick sign-ups, chat functions on websites etc.
- Utilisation of the **right social media platforms** to reach a wider audience (e.g. working with influencers on TikTok)
- Still having **in person services** available for those who want them
- **Online feedback forms** to help improvements
- Waiting time reduction through **more staffing or bridging services during the wait time**
- Family solutions - **increase information reaching young people via parents** being conscious of cultural sensitivities
- Offer the **possibility of other designated adults** (not parents) if safeguarding issues arise



Address Quality & Integration

Reflections on CAMHS and how services can be embedded within schools and promoted effectively



Sub-Themes

Findings

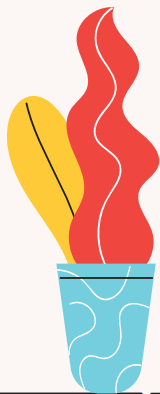
Improve CAMHS services

Better integration of services in schools

- Young people want a 'smoother process' with starts and finishes with services.
- Young people think that CAMHS is understaffed with very long waiting lists.
- Young people think that direct signposting and active promotion of services within schools is needed. They say that posters and passive advertising is not helpful.

Recommendations

- **Consistency in clinicians and other frontline staff** to maintain and develop trust
- More **transparency about the process**, expectations and confidentiality
- **Better relationships between CAMHS and schools**
- **Longer sessions** to help get the most out of the process
- **Promote services actively** through assemblies and form time - not just posters
- **CYP should be able to speak to teachers that they trust**
- **Making PSHCE days more frequent and impactful**, introducing services in these sessions
- Bringing in **external providers to talk about issues/promote services** as this is more engaging



Think About Comfort

How we can create more comfortable spaces for young people, and embed health messaging



Sub-Themes

Findings

Create comfortable spaces

Building healthy lifestyles in youth hubs

- Holistic approach is needed that promotes mindfulness, sleeping and diet
- Need for a commitment to diversity and inclusion so that no groups feel alienated
- Some issues with reporting and responding to issues and discrimination within youth hubs



Recommendations

- **Ensuring that inclusion is a priority** and that all groups are respected and included
- **Learn from other successful services** to see what works well for certain people
- **Mechanisms for feedback** in place - someone to speak to easily
- **More recreational rooms/spaces** to encourage self growth e.g quiet rooms, gyms
- More education on how to form **healthy coping strategies**
- More range of **sports activities** on offer through the hubs
- More **awareness of health benefits/ discounts** that are available for young people e.g. free gyms for young carers
- More **education on substance misuse** but less centred on 'don't do drugs' mantra and more understanding around addiction and help



Youth Hub Provision

The perception of safety in the community and how youth hubs can offer 'safe spaces'



Sub-Themes

Findings

Improve safety of locations and open spaces

Super Youth Hub

- Opinion on the safety of parks is divided however young people feel there are measures that could be taken to increase safety
- Young people want to feel safer in places they grew up in and feel more sense of community
- Young people feel that one main central hub would be useful with other bases around the borough so that it would be accessible for everyone
- Young people identified parks and playgrounds as effective places to create connections

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Recommendations

- **Improved lighting and CCTV** to increase safety with consistent park rangers on duty
- **Stronger community links** where youth hubs are
- **Central access to information through online means**
- **Mindfulness spaces** - both religious and non-religious
- **Convenient times around school timetable** with extra support during exam season
- **Increased conversations around sexual relationships**, sexual abuse and relevant services available
- **Varied opportunities and activities** e.g trips, sports, awards
- Open **feedback system**





Our Young Researchers also used their research
with young people to explore the idea of a
'Super Youth Hub'

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This is what they found...

Recommendations for a Super Youth Hub

How can we engage with and involve our diverse CYP population in the development of a SYH?

- Create **safe and comfortable spaces** for culturally diverse youth to discuss their struggles.
- **Train staff in conflict resolution** and ensure **diversity among the staff** to enhance representation.
- Establish **accessible feedback systems** for issue resolution.
- **Link community services** to the SYH to increase diversity.
- **Foster relatability** between researchers/designers and CYP.

How can staff at a SYH help CYP feel welcome, listened to, and engaged?

- Promote **transparency about the service** process.
- **Encourage longer interactions** to build connections between professionals and young people.
- Ensure **approachable and confidential communication**.
- Maintain **consistent staff** to build trust.
- Provide **recreational areas** like playgrounds for building connections.

What services and approaches to delivering services should be available at a SYH?

- Offer **online signup forms and information** about services.
- **Promote services in schools** and **diversify family solutions**.
- **Centralise and promote services online**.
- Use **influencers and social media** for promotion.
- **Enhance Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)**.
- Create **comfortable spaces** and improve **online accessibility**.
- Provide **gyms, sexual health services, and physical health services**.
- Improve **confidentiality**, decrease **wait times**, and offer **feedback systems**.
- Offer **diverse activities** like sports, art, music, trips, exam preparation, and gaming.
- Invest in **spiritual well-being spaces** and meditation/**mindfulness activities**.



Where should a SYH be located?

- Choose a **location that makes CYP feel safe** with **ample lighting, CCTV, and park rangers**.
- Ideally, situate the SYH in or **connected to a park** for familiarity and comfort.
- Ensure **accessibility during convenient times** for students.
- Consider the **safety of parks** like Clissold Park and Victoria Park.

What would a SYH space look like?

- Offer a **range of activities**, including sports, art, music, mindfulness, trips, exam support, and gaming.
- Maintain **updated facilities** and incorporate **award programmes**.
- Create **different spaces for quiet/prayer, socialising, and recreational activities**.
- Provide **services related to sex and relationships education, recreational rooms, and sports facilities**.
- Consider **multiple hubs as part of a central system, online support, and draw inspiration from organisations** like Concorde, Mouth That Roars, Project Indigo, and Hackney Ark.



04

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Learning

Informing future research



Learning from Co Production



Youth Voice

We have learnt that YP are open to, and are able to share experiences, awareness, and concerns with other young people. We now have a group of excellent young researchers who have been trained and could be employed again to amplify youth voices in the future.

Recommendations:

- Commitment to hearing the voices of YP through participatory research processes
- Explore further opportunities for employing the YRs to conduct more research with other teams



Skills and Opportunities

A significant impact of this this project has been the opportunity and ability to employ the YRs which fosters financial independence whilst giving work experience.

Recommendations:

- Develop projects that provide employment opportunities for young people to gain work based skills and experience





Learning from Process

Data



Understanding the population being looked into is a key part of the research process. There were some times where data collection was challenging due to the effort made to reach as many groups as possible. Additional factors that affected the data collection could have been the questions being asked, session location, etc.

Recommendations:

- Consider alternative research methods to help encourage engagement from different groups
- Working with schools, parents and more of the voluntary sector to widen the reach of our participants
- Strengthen the initial mapping process to help frame the fieldwork

Timing



There were some challenges around delivering to a specific schedule and the time that the research was being completed. There was also difficulty around finding consistent touch points with the research and project teams.

Recommendations:

- Avoiding holidays and exam periods when working with YP in education
- Set up fieldwork sessions in advance so that teams can be allocated to deliver and prepare beforehand

Project Team



One of the challenges in this process was delays in the project team recruitment at the start.

Recommendations:

- Having the project team recruited as soon as possible
- Clearly defined roles between project team, and research team
- Expectations of researchers need to be clear and reinforced throughout the process

“It was really important to talk to young people about what matters to them” Young Researcher

‘Undertaking a participatory research project with young people is an invaluable endeavour for City and Hackney. Not only does it empower young people by giving them a voice and platform to express their perspectives and concerns, but it also fosters a stronger sense of community engagement and ownership. Moreover, such projects build trust and credibility among our youth, bridging the gap between generations and creating a more inclusive environment. By actively involving young people in research, we not only gain a deeper understanding of their unique needs and aspirations but also foster a sense of responsibility and active citizenship within our community, and presenting City and Hackney as a vibrant and responsive local authority.’



Thanks!

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A huge thank you to all the people involved in making this happen. Particularly to our team of Young Researchers:

Ajay Aluku, Dorothy Gray, Dyani Kosuge-Kabir,
Isabel Katesmark-Jones, Kylan Can, Lena Kesraoui, Maria Oboise,
Max Shepherd, Nikolas Woke, Phoebe Kaye, Sara Lazzari,
Silan Gurelden, Skye Joseph, Tabassum Noshin, Zaidat Fagbamila

Download and read the full report here:

www.3ps.org.uk/city-and-hackney-participatory-research-project-2023/



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<p>Children & Young People Scrutiny Commission</p> <p>19th February 2024</p> <p>Item 5 - Reconfiguration of Childcare at Children's Centres</p>	<p>Item No</p> <p>5</p>
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Outline

On January 22nd [a report](#) Cabinet set out a number of proposals for the reconfiguration of childcare provided across 11 children centres in Hackney and to agree a [public consultation](#). The consultation would run from 31st January 2024 to 24th April 2024. The recently published [Affordable Childcare Commission](#) report (2024) was included in these papers.

The Children & Young People Scrutiny Commission has agreed to participate in this public consultation process and have invited officers to this meeting to present these proposals and to respond to member questions.

The Commission has also invited a number of parent group representatives to the meeting to present their initial response to the proposals.

The Commission will review all the submissions together with the evidence received at the meeting, and will make a formal submission to the children centre consultation.

Attending the meeting:

Jacquie Burke, Group Director for Children and Education
 Paul Senior, Director of Education and Inclusion
 Donna Thomas, Head of Early Years, Early Help & Wellbeing
 Sarah Bromfield, Head of Children's Centres & Early Help
 Lolita Brown, HR Operations Lead Education
 Laura Stagg, Parent Engagement System Leader

Parent Representatives:

Beatrice Hackett, Parent representative Seerbright CC
 Natalie Aguilera, Parent representative Fernbank CC
 Yuliua Keselman, Parent representative Seerbright CC

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Title of Report	Children’s Centres Consultation	
Key Decision No	CE S293	
For Consideration By	Cabinet	
Meeting Date	22 January 2024	
Cabinet Member	Mayor Caroline Woodley	
Classification	Open with Exempt Appendix	
Ward(s) Affected	All	
Key Decision & Reason	Yes	Significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards
Implementation Date if Not Called In	31 January 2024	
Group Director	Jacquie Burke, Group Director of Children and Education	

1. Cabinet Member's introduction

- 1.1. We take pride in being one of the highest investors in children’s centres in London, and to secure their sustainability into the future, we will ensure we make the best use of them. We have broadened 4 children’s centres into Children and Family Hubs to bring together services to improve access, connections between families, professionals and providers, and put relationships at the heart of support to families. Universal services for babies in the first 1001 days will remain a focus of the hubs. Support will be put in place for families with children aged 0-19 as part of an integrated system of support.
- 1.2. Respondents to the recent Children and Family Hubs consultation commented on provision and support needed for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and their families. We are committed to supporting this cohort of children through the development of early years Additional Resource Provision (ARP) in the north and south of the borough to support children to thrive.
- 1.3. As Mayor and as an administration, we know how important it is to give children the best start in life irrespective of their starting point. We take great pride in building an inclusive culture. If we can get it right in Early Years, with access to high quality early childhood education, our children will grow in

self-esteem, creativity, curiosity with a desire to learn, with a sense of pride growing up in the borough. We want every child to be healthy, happy and ready to learn.

- 1.4. We have been lobbying the Government to relook at the funding formula for the provision of early childhood education for eligible 2, 3 and 4 year olds which has been underfunded for years, with an impact on sustainability. The imminent national expansion of the funded entitlement to all 2 year olds in working households from April, and babies from 9 months in eligible working households from September, along with the findings of an independent review of our children's centres, and the independent commission into affordable childcare set up as part of our 2022 manifesto commitment with a focus on understanding the challenges families, providers and the Council are facing in the provision of early childhood education, have identified opportunities to sustain provision.
- 1.5. The proposals in this report are informed by the findings of the independent reviews.
- 1.6. Any proposed changes to current provision needs to be financially sustainable, address inefficiency, and help to contribute to the Council's overall financial position noting that much work still needs to be done to close an estimated budget gap of circa £57m for the 2024/25 to 2026/27 period.

2. **Group Director's introduction**

- 2.1. In April 2023, Hackney Education commissioned an independent review of the early education and childcare provision delivered by the 11 Children's Centres funded by the Council to provide subsidised childcare.
- 2.2. The contract was awarded through the CCS Management Consultancy Framework (MCF 3), RM6187 as a Direct Award, assessed as low risk by Procurement. The use of the Management Consultancy Framework MF3 via the Crown Commercial Services supported compliance with the Public Procurement Rules and the Council Standing Orders requirements. By using the CCS marketplace, we were able to quantify and qualify the best preferred supplier and provide detailed best value for money offers.
- 2.3. The review took place over a 10 week period after the initial mobilisation in April. The purpose of the review was to support the Council to:
 - identify solutions to achieve sustainability impacted by £1.07m budget deficit from a reduction in nursery fees in the last few years, and increased operational cost,
 - identify opportunities to meet savings factored into the Council's medium term financial plan (MTFP) for 2024/25; 2025/26, and 2026/27, and

- provide an opportunity to examine the potential impact of the proposed national early years reform to expand the 15 hours funded early years entitlement to working parents with 2 year olds in April 2024, babies from 9 months old September 2024, expanding the entitlement to 30 hours in September 2025 to all children from 9 months old in eligible working households.
- 2.4. An outcome of the review was to identify how the Early Years service could deliver childcare differently to become more financially sustainable in the future, whilst also delivering £1.1m remodelling in 2024/25, £1m 2025/26 and further £1.9m MTFP savings by 2026/27, totalling £4m over 3 years.
- 2.5. The review confirmed that the current model of provision is financially unsustainable, and identified three levers to improve sustainability. The review outlined a number of next steps including a public consultation as part of wider service remodelling with interdependencies with the development of children and family hubs, the expansion of the funded early years entitlement, and the independent commission into affordable childcare which looked at the wider factors impacting the childcare sector, and not just Council provision.

3. **Recommendations**

Cabinet is recommended to agree that:

- 3.1. **A 12 week statutory consultation and engagement period on the restructuring of early education and childcare provision delivered by the children’s centres funded by the Council to deliver subsidised childcare, as a means to achieving greater efficiency. The consultation is scheduled to commence on 31 January to 24 April 2024.**
- 3.2. **Following the conclusion of the consultation, to consider the results of the consultation and recommendations on the restructuring of early education and childcare provision.**

4. **Reason(s) for decision**

- 4.1. The Childcare Act 2006 at s5(d) imposes a legal duty on a Local Authority to consult before making any significant change in the services provided through a children’s centre and before anything is done that would result in a children’s centre being closed.
- 4.2. The purpose of the consultation is to propose changes to the way children’s centres deliver early education and childcare in the future. The reason for the proposed change is to improve the sustainability of the centres. If we do not make changes, the current deficit of £1.07m across the children’s centres is likely to continue to increase. If we do not make decisions now, it

may mean more far-reaching proposals at a later date. Making unpopular decisions now is intended to reset the way early education and childcare is delivered in order to achieve greater efficiency, and maximise opportunities to increase occupancy to maintain viability.

- 4.3. The consultation is intended to give service users, staff and anybody impacted by the remodelling of the service, an opportunity to shape the proposals.

5. **Details of alternative options considered and rejected**

- 5.1. The alternative options to the remodelling proposed in the consultation document are referenced in section 6.15 to 6.17 of this report.

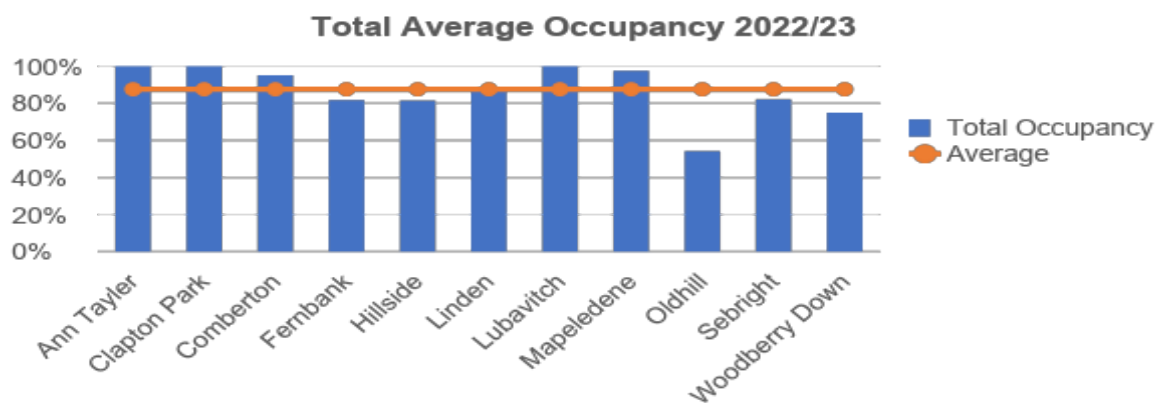
6. **Background**

Policy Context

- 6.1. Hackney Council's budget planning analysis benchmarked high areas of spend and budget pressures. It highlighted that in 2021/22 Hackney spent on average £666.00 per child aged 0-4 years, which is the 2nd highest in London when compared to a statistical neighbour average of £242.00 per child. This is an increase from 2020/21 where Hackney spent on average £657.00 per child, compared to a neighbour average of £279.00.
- 6.2. E&Y were awarded the contract through the CCS Management Consultancy Framework (MCF 3), RM6187 as a Direct Award, assessed as low risk by Procurement, to engage an external consultancy to review the 11 children's centres funded by the Council to deliver subsidised childcare. The purpose of this review was to:
 - identify solutions to achieve sustainability impacted by £1.07m budget deficit, from a reduction in nursery fees in the last few years, and increased operational cost,
 - identify opportunities to meet savings factored into the Council's MTFP for 2024/25; 2025/26 and 2026/27, and
 - provide an opportunity to examine the potential impact of the proposed national early years reform to expand the 15 hours funded early years entitlement to working parents with 2 year olds in April 2024 and babies from 9 months old in September 2024, expanding to 30 hours from September 2025 to all children from 9 months old in eligible working households.
- 6.3. The E&Y Report identified that the current model for delivering childcare provision is not financially sustainable. Based on current fees and expenditure, even if the centres were at 100% occupancy, and fully occupied

by Band 5 families with a minimum income of £100k they would not be financially self-sustaining.

- 6.4. The report identified ten opportunities for future financial sustainability of the nursery provision that broadly relates to reducing expenditure, increasing income and redefining the model of delivery.
- 6.5. 5 centres were identified by the review as operating below the average 88% occupancy, set out below. The centres exceeding average occupancy are popular with local families, may have a unique selling point such as Forest School, or appeal to a particular section of the population. These centres also have a clear approach to managing part time places where families can attend 2 or 3 days per week avoiding odd days that are difficult to fill. The exception is Lubavitch which offers full time places that eases some of the allocation pressures but is not necessarily aligned to accessibility principles due to the absence of part time places. The proposed closure of Hillside and Fernbank in 2021 may have impacted demand at these settings.



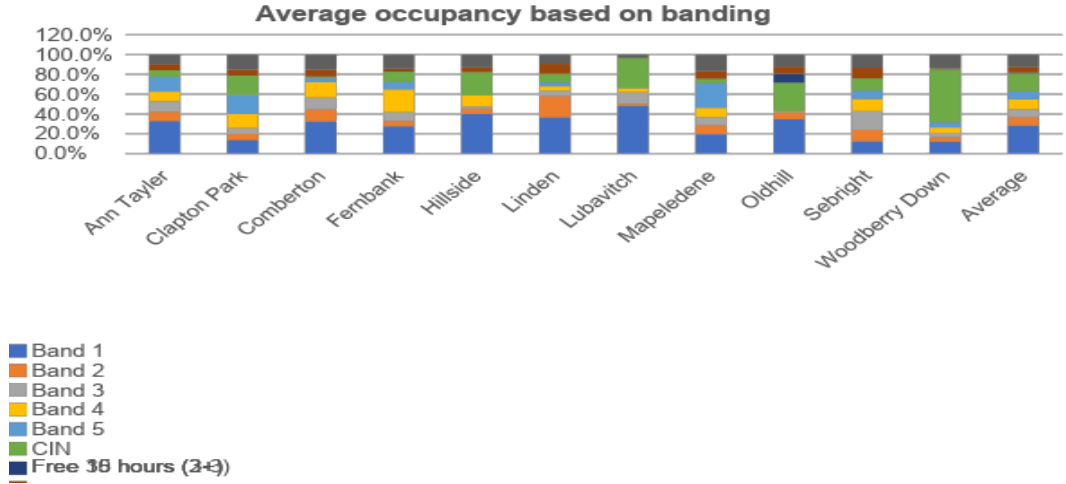
- 6.6. The fee structure is based on 5 income bands. The subsidy is weighted towards lower income families, with the greatest subsidy allocated to families on Band 1 & 2, though all families receive a level of subsidy in addition to the 15 or 30 hours funded early years entitlement. The bandings were extended in 2020, with phase 2 planned for 2021 to reduce the subsidy significantly to Band 4, and withdraw from Band 5. However, this was paused due to Covid and the subsequent financial pressures on families.

6.7. Childcare Bands

Hackney Childcare Bandings	Household Income
Band 1	Less than £34,000
Band 2	£34,000 - £54,000
Band 3	£55,000 - £70,000
Band 4	£70,000 - £99,000

Band 5	Over £100,000
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6.8. The bandings significantly vary across centres, the highest percentage Band 1 is 48% at Lubavitch, compared to the highest percentage of Band 5 families at 25% in Mapledene. Oldhill, Hillside and Lubavitch have no Band 5 families impacting income levels. Circa 30% of families at Oldhill and 53% at Woodberry Down are on a child in need plan.



Childcare Sufficiency

6.9. The Council has a duty to ensure that there are sufficient early education and childcare places for eligible 2, 3 and 4 year olds to take up their funded 15 and 30 hours early years entitlement. The Council is also required to ensure that there is sufficient childcare to enable parents to take up or remain in work, or to undertake education or training to assist them in obtaining work. The Council does not have a duty to provide this provision themselves, but to support access and quality across the sector, and broker places between parents, carers and settings.

6.10. The last childcare sufficiency assessment was completed in June 2022 and showed, along with the snapshot review in 2023, that there are sufficient childcare places. The childcare sufficiency assessment will be refreshed this year; however, a recent survey of settings in planning for the expansion of the early years entitlement in April, has identified surplus places. The Childcare Sufficiency Duty Report can be accessed here: <https://www.hackneyservicesforschools.co.uk/extranet-document/hackney-childcare-sufficiency-duty-report-2022>

6.11. Demand for childcare has been impacted by a reduction in the 0-4 population, down from 20,375 children in 2018 to 18,840 children 2022/23. The decline in the 0-4 population is projected to further dip to 18,389 between 2026/27 and 2030.

- 6.12. There are 500 surplus nursery places in schools, and over 600 surplus places in reception classes. The proposal to close 4 schools by September 2024 will remove 105 surplus reception places.
- 6.13. Schools are well placed to create new childcare places in the future should they be needed, with some schools such as Holy Trinity and Gainsborough already providing childcare for babies. To support transition from early years to primary, the Department of Education launched a national wraparound childcare programme for primary schools to extend childcare support to working parents from September 2024, with access to £289m start-up funding over 2 academic years.

Options

- 6.14. School based centres collectively overspent by circa £400k and the Early Years budget by circa £700k in 2022/23, totalling £1.07m. A further £666k overspend is currently predicted in this financial year. The cost of the nurseries represents 59% of the Council funded Early Years budget. Whilst this is not proposed, Cabinet may wish to close all children's centre nurseries and repurpose some of the budget to support vulnerable and disadvantaged children, supporting the private, community and independent sector to meet demand.
- 6.15. The option to significantly increase fees to recover a greater portion of expenditure if implemented, may discourage families from accessing the children's centre provision, and therefore have a negative impact on occupancy. The provision may also become affordable to higher income families at the exclusion of lower income families. We have seen a reduction in higher income families since introducing the new fee bands and post Covid. For this reason this option is not being acted on as suggested. Instead, annual increases to nursery fees will continue to be subject to inflation and in doing so will continue to significantly taper the subsidy to higher fee bands.
- 6.16. Opportunities identified during the review in collaboration with a stakeholder reference group to test and refine 3 levers to reduce expenditure, increase income and refine the model are set out in the executive summary of the E&Y Report: Appendix 1, attached to the exempt appendices section of this report.
- 6.17. As part of the SEND Strategy 2022-25, and the Early Years Strategy 2021-26, one centre in the north of the borough is in scope to reprovision by 2025 into an Additional Resource Provision (ARP) to support children with complex needs. Respondents to the recent 2023 Children and Family Hubs consultation commented on SEND provision and support needed for children and their families. The intention is to align the ARP with best SEND practice in accordance with the requirements of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), and replace subsidised childcare places with term time funded 15 and 30

hours Early Years Entitlement places for 2, 3 and 4 year olds with additional needs, alongside mainstream children.

- 6.18. Comet Nursery School and Children's Centre in the south of the borough is currently in scope to develop an ARP, subject to Cabinet capital funding received March 2023.
- 6.19. The executive summary of E&Y Report and the identified opportunities Appendix 1, is attached to the exempt appendices section of this report.

Proposal

- 6.20. The E&Y Report sets out the case for change for the future sustainability of the Children's Centres, the changes proposed are notable. Accordingly, implementation of any of the opportunities require due process. E&Y executive summary report Appendix 1, is attached to the exempt appendices section of this report.
- 6.21. E&Y, as part of the independent review of children's centres, estimated income from the expanded funded early years entitlement. The modelling estimated that the Council could receive an extra £1.6m for 2 year olds in April 2024, and a further £2m in September 2024 for children from 9 months old. Whilst a generous hourly rate has been confirmed for 2024, a service reset is still required as set out in E&Y's review, and is dependent on a number of factors. Our current hourly rate allocation is lower than neighbouring boroughs, and does not at present cover the full cost of running the service. The estimated income is dependent on centres being fully occupied, which has not been achievable for most centres in recent years. Any additional income will need to take account of the current budget deficit. In addition, there are wider factors impacting sustainability - national shortage of nursery staff, escalating utility, food and service costs, and business rates noted in the commission into affordable childcare report.
- 6.22. The proposed changes subject to consultation are to:
- Taper the childcare subsidy from April 2024 replaced by the expanded funded entitlement when 2 year olds will be eligible for 15 hrs.
 - Further taper the childcare subsidy from Sep 2025 when most children from 9 months in working households will be eligible for the 30 hours funded early years entitlement.
 - Move from 11 children's centre nurseries to 8 children's centre nurseries offering early education and childcare subsidised by the Council. The proposals are set out below:

Hillside Children's Centre:

- We propose to change Hillside Children's Centre into an early years Additional Resource Provision (ARP), a specialist nursery delivering term-time early education and care for children aged 2 to 5 years with special educational needs or a disability (SEND).

Oldhill Children’s Centre:

- We propose to change Oldhill Children’s Centre to provide nursery places for children 6 months to 3 years old, phasing out places for 4 year olds.

Fernbank Children’s Centre:

- We propose to invite alternative providers to take over the management of Fernbank Children’s Centre. If a suitable alternative provider cannot be sourced by Autumn 2024, we propose to close Fernbank Children’s Centre by August 2025.

Sebright Children’s Centre:

- We propose to invite alternative providers to take over the management of Sebright Children’s Centre. If a suitable alternative provider cannot be sourced by Autumn 2024, we propose to close Sebright Children’s Centre by August 2025.

Consultation

- 6.23. The consultation is proposed to run for 12 weeks commencing the 31 January to 24 April 2024 with an outcome report to be presented to Cabinet in the Summer term. The proposals are subject to CYP Budget Scrutiny in February.
- 6.24. The primary target audience for the consultation is service users, staff, and anybody impacted by the remodelled service. The consultation will give stakeholders the opportunity to shape the proposed ARP, the proposed term time provision and influence decisions about an alternative provider to manage the proposed centres.
- 6.25. The consultation design outlines the methods for consultation activities, paying heed to the Gunning/Sedley Principles, the Equality Act, and the Council’s Engagement Principles.
- 6.26. The recent consultation on the Children and Family Hubs and Start For Life Offer will offer supplementary insights to this consultation. Notably, feedback from that consultation indicated that some parents were concerned about changes to nursery provision.

[Children & Family Hubs Consultation Report](#)

- 6.27. The proposed changes align with the proposed reduction of Council subsidy, to be incrementally replaced with the expansion of the 30 hours funded entitlement to eligible babies 9 months plus from September 2025, when the remodelled service, if implemented, will be fully realised 2025/26.
- 6.28. In 2021 Hackney Council proposed changes to two Children’s Centres - Fernbank and Hillside. This led to intense community opposition, and the proposed closures were paused to enable independent review and a wider

engagement which is planned to commence on 31 January, subject to Cabinet approval.

- 6.29. The changes proposed in this consultation aim to help the Council achieve the MTFP, and reshape services in accordance with the Early Years Strategy to support outcomes for all children, narrowing the gap between the most disadvantaged children and their peers. Early Years have a number of national and local interdependencies such as the:
- i) The Hackney Independent Commission into Affordable Childcare, which concluded in November 2023.
 - ii) The development of 4 Children and Family Hubs and the Start for Life programme funded by the Department for Education (DfE). Hackney will receive £3.9m over 3 years commencing 2022/23. This funding is primarily to support children under 3 years, it cannot be used for early education and care, and is dependent on successful implementation of the delivery plan. 4 children's centres have been designated as Children and Family Hubs - Ann Tayler, Woodberry Down, Linden, and Daubeney.
 - iii) Expansion of the Early Years Funded Entitlement April 2024, requiring a restructuring of the infrastructure in order to manage the expanded termly early years census and payments to settings.

Equality impact assessment

- 6.30. Vulnerable and disadvantaged families, as well as speakers of other languages, may need additional support to engage with the consultation or be engaged via non-traditional means. Support will therefore be provided by the Children's Centres and Family Hubs. The Equality Impact Assessment will be finalised following the public consultation, and prior to any decision on the implementation of the proposed changes, to ensure that the Council remains compliant to its duties under the Equality Act 2010 in relation to those with protected characteristics. This is a reflection of the fact that Equality Impact Assessments are an iterative process.
- 6.31. Consideration has been given to the children, families and staff from diverse backgrounds with protected characteristics affected by the proposals. A significant number of children accessing children's centres are of Black and Global Majority heritage, and, or have been assessed as being, in need of early help. The proposals are intended to prioritise support to marginalised and vulnerable children and families with the creation of SEND provision, child in need places, and enable lower income families to continue to access early education in order to reduce inequalities in child development, and school readiness.

Sustainability

- 6.32. The proposed changes to children's centres will support the ongoing financial and physical sustainability of children's centres, 4 of which have broadened into children and family hubs to support children and families with children 0-19 as part of an integrated system of support. The DfE has made £3.9m available over 3 years (2022/23 - 2025/26) to support parenting. This funding however cannot be used for childcare which is funded via the DSG.

Risk assessment

- 6.33. Risks associated with the consultation relate to the potential for significant public opposition from residents committed to maintaining the current portfolio of children's centres. Risks associated with the proposed changes to the children's centres are:
- A risk to affordability should the expansion of the free entitlement not materialise in 2024/2025 and 2025/26, or the future funding rate fails to cover the cost of the service.
 - A risk to Hackney's childcare sufficiency duty if Hackney is unable to meet potential future demand for childcare places as a result of the expansion of the Early Years Entitlement. However, there remains a significant reduction in demand for school nurseries and reception places, surplus places across the sector, and a change in how families use childcare post covid.
 - Risk of doing nothing to the sustainability of the service as well as the medium term financial plans.

7. Comments of the Interim Group Director, Finance

- 7.1. This report proposes a statutory consultation period to outline changes to our current subsidised childcare offer within Hackney Children's centres. The Early Years budget is currently predicted to overspend by £666k this financial year and also exceeded its budget by circa £1.07m in 2022/23. The provision represents a substantial area of expenditure within our Early Years provision.
- 7.2. The independent review of the service by E&Y identified that the current model of provision is not financially sustainable with a wider transformation of the service recommended. Any rationalisation of our current offer and addressing the unsustainable model would both improve value for money and the efficiency of our annual investment in the service. Any changes to the current offer needs to be financially sustainable, address inefficiency in our expenditure/income and help to contribute to the Council's overall financial position noting that much work still needs to be done to close the budget gap which was estimated at the start of the financial year as circa £57m over the period 2024/25 - 2026/27. The Council's medium term

financial plan is in the process of being updated to take account of the budget proposals put forward for approval to date, including those in relation to children's centres and to include the year 2027/28 to provide an updated budget gap estimate.

- 7.3. Paragraph 2.4 sets out estimated savings in respect of children's centres put forward to date. However further work needs to be undertaken on the financial impact of the various options and consideration needs to be given to identifying further savings given the budget gap that remains and the need to revisit all areas of discretionary spend.

8. **VAT implications on land and property transactions**

- 8.1. NA

9. **Comments of the Acting Director of Legal, Democratic and Electoral Services**

- 9.1. Cabinet is asked to approve the recommendation that the Council embark on a consultation with residents about making changes to some of its 11 children's centres.

- 9.2. In making this decision Cabinet should be aware of the following;

- **The Council is under a duty to ensure sufficient childcare places within its area;**
- The Childcare Act 2006 imposes various legal duties on the Council. Section 6 imposes a duty to secure sufficient childcare for working parents. Section 7 imposes a duty to secure early years provision free of charge. Regulations made under it set out the type and amount of free provision and the children who benefit from free provision. Section 12 imposes a duty to provide information, advice and assistance to parents and prospective parents.
- The Council is under a duty to ensure Best Value and has fiduciary duties towards its residents.
- s 1(1) Local Government Act 1999 imposes a duty to "make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness". The Council has fiduciary duties towards residents. It is required to consult before making changes to service provision at or closing a children's centre.
- The Childcare Act 2006 at s5(d) imposes a legal duty on a Local Authority to consult before making any significant change in the

services provided through a children's centre and before anything is done that would result in a children's centre being closed.

9.3. **The Council must have due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty** S149 (1) Equality Act 2010 (EqA 2010) imposes the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) on the Council.

- This requires public authorities to have "due regard", at every stage of decision making, to:
- The need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the EqA 2010.
- The need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. This involves having due regard to the needs to:
 - remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic;
 - take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it; and
 - encourage persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

9.4. Compliance with the PSED may involve treating some people more favourably than others, but this does not mean that conduct that would otherwise be prohibited by or under the EqA 2010 is permitted.

- The need to foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it. This includes having due regard to the need to tackle prejudice and to promote understanding.

9.5. The Council must ensure that all required consultations are properly undertaken in accordance with relevant law and guidance. The relevant guidance is the Sure Start children's centres statutory guidance, April 2013. The Council must have regard to this guidance when exercising its functions under the Childcare Act 2006. Having regard to the guidance means it must take it into account, and should not depart from it unless we have good reason for doing so.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - E&Y Executive Summary Report (Exempt)

Appendix 2 - [Affordable Childcare Commission Report](#)


Appendix 1 is exempt under paragraph 3, Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person including the authority holding the information). Disclosure would be likely to prejudice the commercial interests of any person including the Council and the public interest in not disclosing the information outweighs the public interest in disclosing it.

Background documents


1. [Children and Family Hub Consultation Report June 2023](#)

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Children's Centre Childcare Consultation

 **Deadline for responses**
24 April 2024

Share your views:

 Visit bit.ly/childrens-centre or consultation.hackney.gov.uk
by **24 April 2024, 11:59pm**

Printed surveys and consultation proposals are available at your local children's centre.



Scan to
take part

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Please read the information provided below.

This gives background information and explains the proposals in more detail.

If you wish to comment on the proposals please do so by **24 April 2024, 11:59pm.**

Children's Centre Childcare Consultation

The Council proposes to make changes to the way some of its children's centres deliver nursery provision to children aged between 6 months and 5 years. These include the addition of a specialist provision for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

What are we consulting on?

- **Hillside Children's Centre:**
We propose to make changes to Hillside Children's Centre and for the centre to become an Additional Resource Provision (ARP) for early years. Hillside currently has 41 universal full time places for children aged 6 months to 5 years. We propose to make Hillside an Additional Resource Provision (ARP), a specialist nursery delivering term-time early education and care for children aged 2 to 5 years with special educational needs or a disability (SEND). 24 ARP places would be available to children with SEND. In addition to the ARP, 17 universal term-time places for children without SEND aged 2 to 5 years would be available for 38 weeks of the year. Paid for holiday places and wraparound care at the beginning and end of the day is also being proposed.
- **Oldhill Children's Centre:**
We propose to make changes to the services currently delivered at Oldhill Children's Centre. The centre currently has universal full time nursery provision for 60 children aged 6 months to 5 years and this would change to term time places for up to 60 children aged 6 months to 3 years. These places would be funded by the early years entitlement and fees. Additional paid for holiday and wrap-around care at the beginning and end of the day would also be available.
- **Fernbank Children's Centre:**
We propose to invite alternative providers to take over the management of Fernbank Children's Centre. If a suitable alternative provider cannot be found by Autumn 2024, we propose to close Fernbank Children's Centre by August 2025.
- **Sebright Children's Centre:**
We propose to invite alternative providers to take over the management of Sebright Children's Centre. If a suitable alternative provider cannot be found by Autumn 2024, we propose to close Sebright Children's Centre by August 2025.

Background and context

Hackney Education commissioned an independent review of the nursery provision provided by 11 children’s centres (Ann Tayler, Clapton Park, Mapledene, Woodberry Down, Hillside, Fernbank, Oldhill, Lubavitch, Sebright, Linden and Comberton). These 11 children’s centres are currently funded by the Council to subsidise the cost of childcare, making it more affordable for parents who are able to access these nurseries.

This means that, no matter their household income, all parents of children who attend the 11 children’s centres receive subsidised childcare.

We commissioned Ernst & Young (EY) to deliver the review and identify ways to achieve financial stability for the 11 children’s centres, identify opportunities for savings, and to explore the impact of the proposed national government reform of funded early years entitlement (2024/2025).

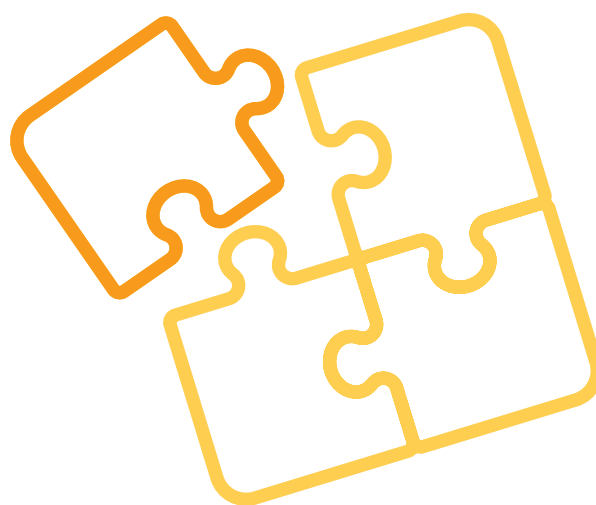
The review took place from April to June 2023 and identified how the Local Authority could deliver childcare differently to become more efficient, and financially sustainable in the future, taking into account the current £1.07m deficit across the centres.

The Council’s financial planning has identified a funding gap of £57m savings required across the Council by 2026/2027. The service needs to deliver £1.1m in savings in 2024/25, a further £1m in 2025/26 and further savings of up to £1.9m in 2026/27.

The independent review found that the current model of provision is not financially sustainable. EY identified 10 opportunities that could be used to make the service more sustainable. The opportunities were grouped into three categories: reducing expenditure, increasing income, and redefining the model.

The review did not include children’s centre nurseries that are not funded by the Council and do not offer subsidised childcare (Morningside, Gainsborough, Minik Kardes, Ihsan, Daubeney, Comet Nursery School and Wentworth Nursery School.) The 5 non-Council funded children’s centres and 2 nursery schools, provide early education and, or childcare funded by the Early Years Funded Entitlement for eligible 2, 3 and 4 year olds, and charge fees at market rate.

We previously consulted on proposals to close two children’s centres in the north of the borough in 2021. During the 2021 consultation, parents asked us to consider inviting alternative providers to take over management of children’s centres before proposing to close centres. This request from parents has shaped our current proposals. The 2021 consultation was paused to allow wider public engagement into the provision of childcare.




Since the paused consultation in 2021 the Council:

- Established an independent Commission into Affordable Childcare, to explore how to achieve better access to affordable high quality early years provision in Hackney. The Commission brought together parents and carers, childcare providers, and other members of the local communities, who looked at local childcare provision, challenges, risks, and costs, as well as ways to maximise the support available for families in the borough. The findings of the Commission align with the findings of the children's centre review. The Hackney Commission's report can be accessed here

 bit.ly/Affordable-Childcare-Commission

- Commissioned an independent review of Children's Centres. The findings have informed these proposals. You can access the report here:

 education.hackney.gov.uk/content/childrens-centres-consultation-2024

- Began developing four Children & Family Hubs in the borough, offering integrated family support services to meet families' social care, education, mental and physical health needs. As part of this work, the Council was selected to receive £3.9m funding over 3 years from the Department for Education and Department for Health and Social Care for a Start for Life programme, included in the hubs, which focuses on supporting the first 1001 days of a child's life, from conception to age two. This programme will focus on services for new parents and their babies and young children, such as perinatal mental health and parenting support, parent infant relationships, infant feeding, early language and home learning advice. The hubs have been designated following a consultation in the summer of 2023. You can find the results of this here

 bit.ly/cfh-hackney



Central Government expansion of funded childcare for working parents

In March 2023, the government announced the expansion of funded childcare for working parents. From April 2024, working parents of two-year-olds will be able to access 15 hours of funded childcare. From September 2024, 15 hours of funded childcare will be extended to include all children from the age of 9 months for working parents. From September 2025, working parents of children aged 9 months and over will be entitled to 30 hours childcare per week right up to their child starting school.¹

Due to the expansion of funded childcare for working parents, we will replace the Council subsidy to children's centres with:



the expanded 15 hours funded early years entitlement to:

- 2 year olds in working households from April 2024, and
- babies aged 9 months in working households from September 2024.



the expanded 30 hours funded entitlement to

- all children from 9 months old in eligible working households from September 2025.

In preparation for the expansion of the government childcare entitlement for working parents, we assessed our childcare places to confirm that we have enough places for children to take up their funded entitlement in April. We know that the new funding rates from the government will be more generous than the current funding rates which may help to make the centres more financially sustainable in the short term. However, this funding could be reduced in future years.

Why are we consulting?

We are consulting service users, staff and anyone who could be affected, on proposals to make changes to the way some of our children's centres deliver nursery provision in the future. These changes have been proposed to improve the sustainability of the centres. If we do not make changes, the current deficit of £1.07m across the children's centres is likely to continue to increase and we might have to make more far-reaching proposals at a later date. By making decisions now, even if they are unpopular, we aim to deliver an effective and efficient early education and childcare service, with centres that can retain a high level of occupancy.

The consultation gives service users and staff an opportunity to share their views and shape the proposals further. The views of service users and staff will influence the proposed changes to Oldhill Children's Centre, the shaping of Hillside ARP, and inform the types of provider that should be invited to apply to manage Fernbank and Sebright Children's Centres, if this proposal is taken forward.

We engaged EY through the Council's Management Consultancy Framework to undertake an independent review of the Children's Centres. The intention of the review was to:

- identify solutions to achieve sustainability impacted by £1.07m budget deficit from a reduction in nursery fees in the last few years, and increased operational cost,
- identify opportunities to meet the £4m savings factored into the Council's mid-term financial plans; and
- provide an opportunity to examine the potential impact of the national early years reform to expand the 15 and 30 hours funded early years entitlement to working parents.

1. The Education Hub – Free childcare: How we are tackling the cost of childcare
bit.ly/cost_of_childcare

EY worked with the children centres managers, school leaders, and stakeholders representing children in need and those with SEND over a 10-week period to understand the current service, how this could be improved and whether there are opportunities to remodel the provision.

The review identified that the current model for delivering childcare provision is not financially sustainable based on the current fees and expenditure. It found that even if the centres were at 100 % occupancy, and fully occupied by families on the highest fee band (Band 5, that is those on an income of at least £100k) they would still not be financially self-sustaining.

EY looked at the national expansion of the funded early years entitlement due to be implemented in April 2024, and found that its implementation could increase nursery income by up to £5m by 2025/26, which could reduce the current level of subsidy of £6.7m. However, it also found that the funded places will not fully meet the cost of the provision if we do not take steps to make the service more efficient by reducing costs.



The estimated income from the expanded funded early years entitlement is dependent on:

- Receiving an adequate early years entitlement funding formula from the government to cover the full cost of the service next year and in coming years. The current funding from the government does not meet service costs.
- Full occupancy of the centres is critical to achieving the required income to meet running costs. Only 4 of the 11 centres are currently reaching full occupancy: Lubavitch, Ann Tayler, Clapton Park and Mapledene. Their high occupancy rates are attributed to their ability to manage their admission register and the popularity of these centres.

Occupancy at children’s centres has been impacted by a reduction in the 0–4 population, down from 20,375 children in 2018 to 18,840 children 2022/23. The decline in the 0–4 population is projected to further dip to 18,389 between 2026/27 and 2030/31.²

We have 500 surplus nursery places in schools, and over 600 surplus places in reception classes (21 % surplus). To reduce the reception surplus the Cabinet decided to close 4 schools in Hackney by September 2024, removing 105 places and reducing the reception surplus to 17 % by 2029 (based on current projections).

2. Further information can be accessed on [ons.gov.uk](https://ons.gov.uk/population-estimates) population estimates: bit.ly/population-mid-2020

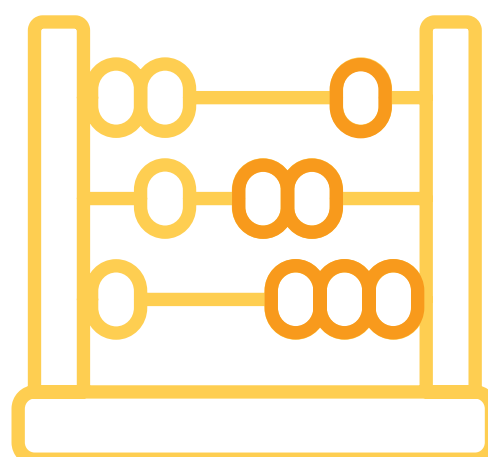
Proposed changes to Children’s Centres

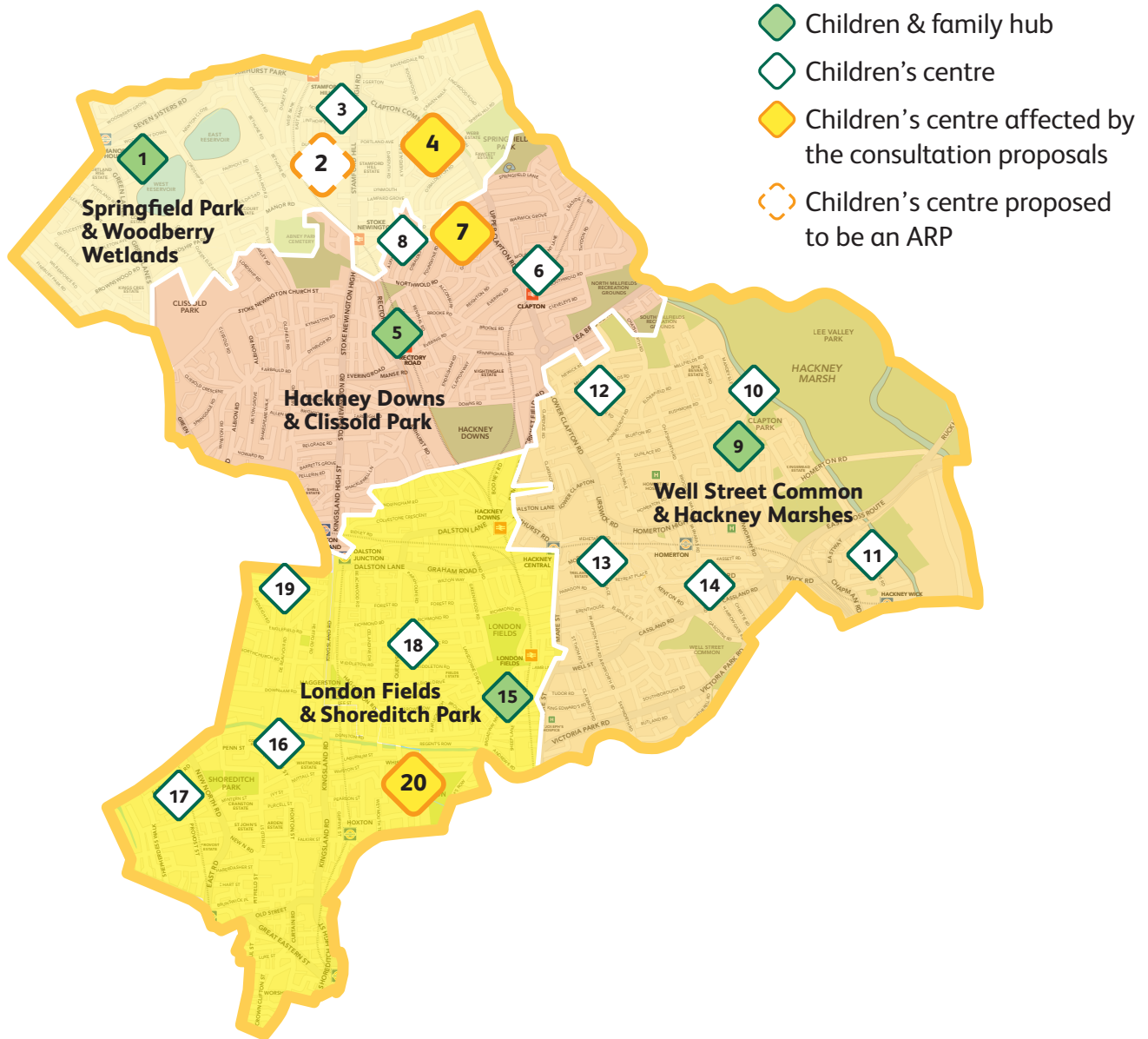
The proposed changes aim to rationalise children’s centres in order to secure sustainability into the future and meet the needs of children in Hackney. This includes the proposal to provide a much needed new specialist provision for children with SEND.

Current children’s centre and nursery provision

Neighbourhoods area	Springfield Park and Woodberry Wetlands	Clissold Park and Hackney Downs	London Fields and Shoreditch Park	Well Street Community and Hackney Marsh
Designated children and family hubs (*full time subsidised childcare x 3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Woodberry Down* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linden* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ann Taylor* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daubeney
Satellite children’s centre nurseries (full time subsidised childcare x 8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hillside • Oldhill • Lubavitch 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fernbank • Comberton 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mapledene • Sebright 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clapton Park
Satellite children’s centres – nurseries not subsidised		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ihsan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minik Kardes • Comet Nursery School, ARP and Children’s Centre 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gainsborough • Morningside • Wentworth Nursery School and Children’s Centre
Satellite children’s centre – no nursery	–	–	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comet@ Thomas Fairchild 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Millfields

Total number of settings:				
Neighbourhoods area	Springfield Park and Woodberry Wetlands	Clissold Park and Hackney Downs	London Fields and Shoreditch Park	Well Street Community and Hackney Marsh
Private nurseries (including children's centres)	22 (including 4 children's centres)	36 (including 3 children's centres)	23 (including 4 children's centres)	15 (including 5 children's centres)
Playgroup	4	2	1	4
Independent schools with nurseries	16	2	1	0
Childminders	32	36	32	34
Maintained nursery schools	–	–	1	1
Maintained primary schools with nursery classes	8	15	15	14
Primary free schools and academies with nursery classes	1	2	1	–
Total settings	83	93	74	68





**Neighbourhoods area
Springfield Park & Woodberry Wetlands**

- 1. Woodberry Down Children & Family Hub
- 2. Hillside Children's Centre
- 3. Lubavitch Children's Centre
- 4. Oldhill Children's Centre

**Neighbourhoods area
Well Street Common & Hackney Marshes**

- 9. Daubeny Children & Family Hub
- 10. Clapton Park Children's Centre
- 11. Gainsborough Children's Centre
- 12. Millfields Children's Centre
- 13. Morningside Children's Centre
- 14. Wentworth Nursery School & Children's Centre

**Neighbourhoods area
Hackney Downs & Clissold Park**

- 5. Linden Children & Family Hub
- 6. Comberton Children's Centre
- 7. Fernbank Children's Centre
- 8. Ihsan Children's Centre

**Neighbourhoods area
London Fields & Shoreditch Park**

- 15. Ann Tayler Children & Family Hub
- 16. Comet Nursery School & Children's Centre
- 17. Comet at Thomas Fairchild
- 18. Mapledene & Queensbridge Children's Centre
- 19. Minik Kardes Community Nursery
- 20. Sebright Children's Centre

Proposed service

Neighbourhoods area	Springfield Park and Woodberry Wetlands	Clissold Park and Hackney Downs	London Fields and Shoreditch Park	Well Street Community and Hackney Marsh
Maintain full day care 0–5yrs at 8 centres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Woodberry Down Children and Family Hub (9 new places for babies) • Lubavitch • Oldhill 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linden Children and Family Hub • Comberton 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ann Tayler Children and Family Hub • Mapledene 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clapton Park
Maintain non-Council funded children’s centres nurseries and nursery schools		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ihsan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minik Kardes • Comet Nursery School, ARP and Children’s Centre 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gainsborough • Morningside • Daubeney Children and Family Hub • Wentworth Nursery School and Children’s Centre
Restructure by 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hillside (41 places) Develop into ARP for children with special needs, maintaining mainstream places for 2, 3 and 4 yr olds to access early years entitlement • Oldhill (60 places) Maintain places for vulnerable children with market rate places for children 0–3 yrs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fernbank (60 places) Explore alternative provider, close if unsuccessful 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sebright (45 places) Explore alternative provider, close if unsuccessful 	

Hillside Children’s Centre: Proposal to change Hillside Children’s Centre into an early years Additional Resource Provision (ARP).

Hillside Children’s Centre is well placed to be developed into an early years Additional Resource Provision for children with special educational needs. We are proposing to change it into an ARP because it is a suitable size and location to meet need in the north of the borough. The proposal to develop an ARP is part of the SEND Strategy. Respondents to the Children and Family Hubs consultation last summer, requested more support for children with SEND; restructuring Hillside aims to meet the need for more SEND support.

Transition into an ARP would begin in September 2024 at the earliest, but will not be fully completed until September 2025. ARP’s must be managed by a school in order to draw down funding from the Dedicated Schools Grant. The ARP would therefore be attached to a school with significant experience in managing effective early years provision.

A cohort of children will leave to go to school and will be unaffected by the changes. 24 term time places would be available for 2, 3 and 4 year olds with SEND, and 17 term time universal places would remain for 2, 3 and 4 year olds without SEND. Wraparound care would be available at the start and end of the day, alongside holiday provision.

The baby room may be retained in the short term for existing children to support transition from the children’s centre into an ARP, until the children turn 2 years, to prevent disruption to the youngest children. However, we propose not to retain baby places in the long term and this will mean the loss of baby places. Children who are unable, or do not wish to retain a place at Hillside, would be supported to find a place at an alternative setting.



Oldhill Children's Centre: Proposal to restructure Oldhill Children's Centre to provide early education and care to children 6 months to 3 years old.

Currently, Oldhill Children's Centre offers 60 full-time places for children aged 6 months to 5 years. We are proposing to move to term-time places available to children aged 6 months to 3 years. Families would be able to pay for wrap-around care at the beginning and end of the day and for holiday provision. This is a significant change to the current all year provision and will impact current and future families.

Children in need of support would continue to be funded to access places through the current early help system that is managed via the family support teams. 4 year olds would apply for a funded early years entitlement place in Oldhill School, or at an alternative school.

The proposals would not affect children who are currently enrolled at Oldhill. We would phase out places for 4 year olds; children at Oldhill would continue to access the nursery until they leave. The phasing out of places for 4 year olds is likely to impact future families who would be required to apply for a place at a school nursery class before their child's 4th birthday, and would need to take up that place at the September or January intake. It is not unusual for children to leave their early years setting at 3 ½ years to take up a place in a school nursery class.



Proposals related to Fernbank Children's Centre and Sebright Children's Centre

We recognise the impact of these proposals on children and their families and will commit to supporting families through the process as much as is possible. Each centre will be allocated an officer to work closely with them to identify the needs of parents and carers, identify vacant places and help find a place in an alternative setting.

Fernbank Children's Centre: Proposals to invite expressions of interest from alternative providers to manage Fernbank Children's Centre and if an alternative provider is not found, to close the centre.

We propose to close the centre, unless an alternative provider can be found by Autumn 2024 to take over its management by 2025. We intend to invite expressions of interest from alternative providers to manage Fernbank Children's Centre. This process will follow the Council's procurement tender process advertising the opportunity, and inviting expressions of interest. Staff and service users would be kept informed of the outcome of the tender process. The chosen provider would be expected to deliver places with market fees.

If an alternative provider cannot be secured by Autumn the centre will be closed. The staff consultation process would commence with a view to closing the centre by August 2025 to support transition of existing children to new settings at key transition points.

This process would be managed through the Council's procurement framework and staff and service users would be kept informed of the outcome of the tender process.

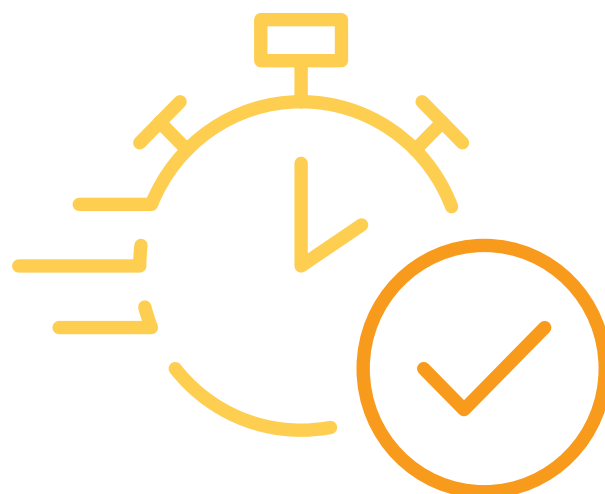
Sebright Children's Centre: Proposals to invite expressions of interest from alternative providers to manage Sebright Children's Centre and if an alternative provider is not found, to close the centre.

We propose to close the centre, unless an alternative provider can be found by Autumn 2024 to take over its management by 2025. We intend to invite expressions of interest from alternative providers to manage Sebright Children's Centre. This process will follow the Council's procurement tender process advertising the opportunity, and inviting expressions of interest. Staff and service users would be kept informed of the outcome of the tender process. The chosen provider would be expected to deliver places with market fees.

If an alternative provider cannot be secured by Autumn 2024, the centre will be closed. The staff consultation process would commence with a view to closing the centre by August 2025 to support transition of existing children to new settings at key transition points. This process would be managed through the Council's procurement framework and staff and service users would be kept informed of the outcome of the tender process.

Proposed timeline

Date	Event
31 January – 24 April 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12 week consultation
Summer 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The consultation report will be published. • Feedback on the consultation will be considered by Cabinet.
April – September 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The national expansion of the funded early years entitlement will begin. • At this point, the current childcare subsidy would start to be reduced and replaced by the funded early years entitlement.
Summer 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin tender process for Sebright and Fernbank Children’s Centres, after Cabinet decision.
Autumn 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appointment of a new provider, if found. • If unable to find an alternative provider, staff consultation on proposals to close the centre (s) would begin.
Summer 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close centre(s)
September 2024 – September 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restructure Hillside to form an ARP, working towards transition to the new service from September 2024 to full implementation by September 2025. • Restructure of Oldhill Children’s centre, with full implementation by September 2025



How were the children’s centres included in the proposals selected?

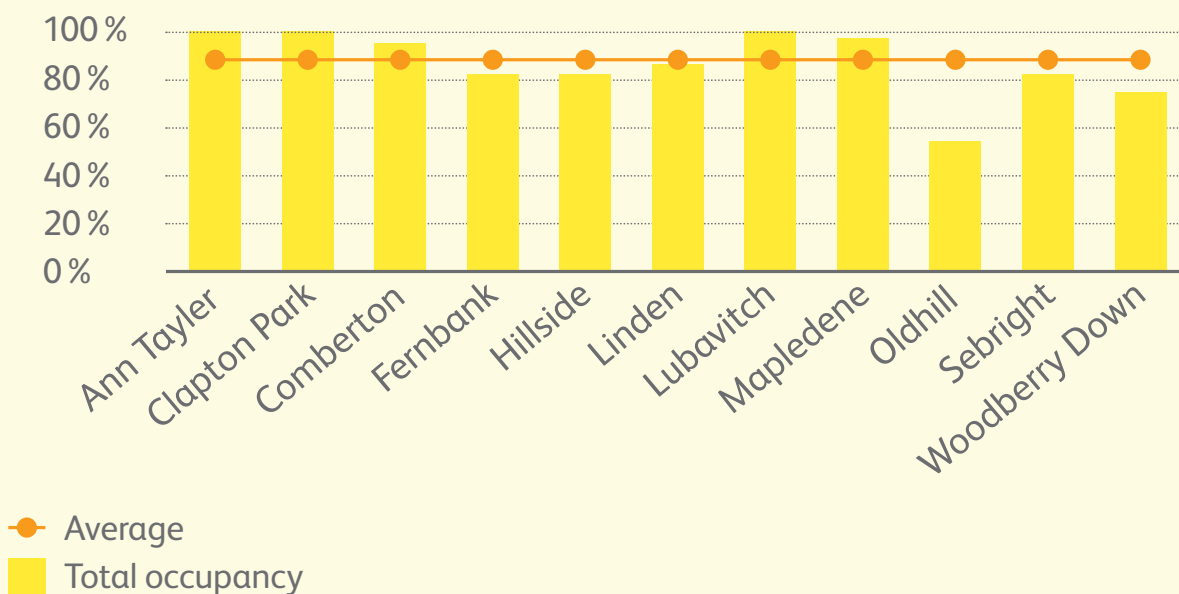
In the independent review, 5 centres were identified by the review as operating below the average 88% occupancy:

1. Oldhill
2. Hillside
3. Fernbank
4. Sebright, and
5. Woodberry Down

These Centres were looked at in more detail to understand the families who were accessing the nursery, and the challenges experienced by the leadership team in running the provision.

Three centres – Oldhill, Hillside and Fernbank – are in very close proximity. Making significant changes to all three centres presented a risk to having sufficient childcare places in the locality. The options were based on working towards maintaining sufficient provision to support children’s outcomes, and to enable parents to work. Reducing the childcare provision will reduce surplus places and support the remaining children’s centres to optimise occupancy.

Total average occupancy 2022/23



1. Oldhill Children's Centre

Oldhill supports marginalised, low income families who would benefit most from joined up services delivered as part of the school and children's centre. 71 % children are of Black and global majority heritage, 39 % assessed as being in need, 1 % are above average income. Maintaining the children's centre, and rationalising cost by changing the age range and configuration of places would sustain both the children's centre and the school where the children's centre is co-located by removing surplus places. The proposed changes would enable the Centre to continue to support children from marginalised communities, those in need, and those from lower income households with a yet to be defined number of places for higher income families to maintain a social economic mix and income levels. The decision on the number of places will be made following the consultation. Removing places for 4 year olds adds flexibility to increase places for younger children should they be needed. The subsidy is proposed to continue to be used to support the most disadvantaged children, alongside places for higher income families. The Effective Provision of Preschool Education study, found that disadvantaged children benefit significantly from good quality preschool experiences, especially when they are educated with a mixture of children from different social and economic backgrounds.³

2. Hillside Children's Centre

Hillside is well located in the Stamford Hill area, in a suitable size building owned by the Council to develop into an ARP. 66 % children are of Black and global majority heritage, 24 % assessed as being in need, 12 % above average income. Term-time SEND and universal places would continue to be maintained to meet early education, SEND and childcare needs.

3. Fernbank Children's Centre

Fernbank is located in a building that is not owned by the Council. This carries the risk of a potentially unaffordable lease, which has been subject to ongoing negotiation over a number of years. 39 % children are of Black and global majority heritage, 10 % assessed as being in need, 44 % above average income. The proposal presents an opportunity for an alternative provider to take over this provision and negotiate a lease. If an alternative provider is not found, it is proposed that the centre will close. In the event that it is closed, the Council is satisfied that there are sufficient surplus places locally, within the wider sector, for children who can no longer access it. Vacancies across the childcare sector will continue to be monitored to ensure that the Council continues to meet its duty to ensure that there are sufficient places.

3. The study can be accessed here: The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project bit.ly/eppe_project

4. Sebright Children's Centre

Sebright is located on the border with Tower Hamlets and attracts out of borough families. It is in close proximity to Mapledene Children's Centre which is at full capacity in comparison. 46 % children are of Black and global majority heritage, 12 % assessed as being in need, 40 % are above average income. The proposal presents an opportunity for an alternative provider to take over this provision. If an alternative provider is not found, it is proposed that the centre will close. In the event that it is closed, the Council is satisfied that there are sufficient surplus places within the wider sector that parents could access. Vacancies across the childcare sector will continue to be monitored to ensure that the Council continues to meet its duty to ensure that there are sufficient places.

5. Woodberry Down Family Hub

Woodberry Down Family Hub is the only maintained nursery offering full day care in the far north of the borough, and supports a significant number of families living in hostels and temporary accommodation.

The Council has been working with Berkeley Homes property developers towards a timeline since 2014 to relocate the existing Children's Centre Lilliput building to fit in with the wider regeneration programme to transform one of the most deprived areas, into a new sustainable neighbourhood that offers high quality new homes, and economic opportunities. The new nursery extension was completed in August 2023.

Phase 2 of the extension is due to be completed in March 2024. 9 new baby places have been created and efficiency measures such as changing the way the admissions register is managed, and how part time places are allocated to minimise unoccupied places, have already commenced as part of its new Children and Family Hub status.




<https://news.hackney.gov.uk/first-two-children--family-hubs-open-their-doors-in-hackney/>

The recent capital investment means that closure is not an option for the regeneration of the area.

In addition to the proposed restructuring, the Council will consider opportunities to:

- Reduce the use of agency staff, therefore providing better value for money and improving the consistency of care
- Facilitate more efficient and effective building maintenance, by streamlining costs
- Improve budget management and governance with improved systems.
- Target the use of Council childcare subsidy to support low income, disadvantaged and vulnerable children to access provision at children's centres.

How to take part

You can share your views by completing the online survey at  bit.ly/childrens-centre or consultation.hackney.gov.uk

Paper surveys are available at your local children's centre.

The consultation will close on **24 April 2024, 11:59pm.**

If you need any information on this website in a different format please email

 consultation@hackney.gov.uk

We'll consider your request and get back to you within 5 working days.

Who do we need to hear from?

We welcome views from all residents. We would particularly like to hear from parents and carers of children who use children's centres and future users of children's centres, and professionals who support families.

What happens next?

We welcome all views and comments on the consultation proposals. No decision will be made on the proposals until after the consultation has closed. All responses to the consultation will be taken into consideration.


The responses to the consultation will be analysed, reported and shared on public platforms. The final decision on the proposals will be made by the Cabinet in Summer 2024.



Children's Centre Childcare Consultation

 **Deadline for responses**
24 April 2024

Share your views:

 Visit bit.ly/childrens-centre or consultation.hackney.gov.uk
by **24 April 2024, 11:59pm**

Printed surveys and consultation proposals are available at your local children's centre.



Scan to
take part

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Please read the information provided below.

This gives background information and explains the proposals in more detail.

If you wish to comment on the proposals please do so by **24 April 2024, 11:59pm.**

Children's Centre Childcare Consultation

The Council proposes to make changes to the way some of its children's centres deliver nursery provision to children aged between 6 months and 5 years. These include the addition of a specialist provision for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

What are we consulting on?

- **Hillside Children's Centre:**

We propose to make changes to Hillside Children's Centre and for the centre to become an Additional Resource Provision (ARP) for early years. Hillside currently has 41 universal full time places for children aged 6 months to 5 years. We propose to make Hillside an Additional Resource Provision (ARP), a specialist nursery delivering term-time early education and care for children aged 2 to 5 years with special educational needs or a disability (SEND). 24 ARP places would be available to children with SEND. In addition to the ARP, 17 universal term-time places for children without SEND aged 2 to 5 years would be available for 38 weeks of the year. Paid for holiday places and wraparound care at the beginning and end of the day is also being proposed.

- **Oldhill Children's Centre:**

We propose to make changes to the services currently delivered at Oldhill Children's Centre. The centre currently has universal full time nursery provision for 60 children aged 6 months to 5 years and this would change to term time places for up to 60 children aged 6 months to 3 years. These places would be funded by the early years entitlement and fees. Additional paid for holiday and wrap-around care at the beginning and end of the day would also be available.

- **Fernbank Children's Centre:**

We propose to invite alternative providers to take over the management of Fernbank Children's Centre. If a suitable alternative provider cannot be found by Autumn 2024, we propose to close Fernbank Children's Centre by August 2025.

- **Sebright Children's Centre:**

We propose to invite alternative providers to take over the management of Sebright Children's Centre. If a suitable alternative provider cannot be found by Autumn 2024, we propose to close Sebright Children's Centre by August 2025.

Background and context

Hackney Education commissioned an independent review of the nursery provision provided by 11 children’s centres (Ann Tayler, Clapton Park, Mapledene, Woodberry Down, Hillside, Fernbank, Oldhill, Lubavitch, Sebright, Linden and Comberton). These 11 children’s centres are currently funded by the Council to subsidise the cost of childcare, making it more affordable for parents who are able to access these nurseries.

This means that, no matter their household income, all parents of children who attend the 11 children’s centres receive subsidised childcare.

We commissioned Ernst & Young (EY) to deliver the review and identify ways to achieve financial stability for the 11 children’s centres, identify opportunities for savings, and to explore the impact of the proposed national government reform of funded early years entitlement (2024/2025).

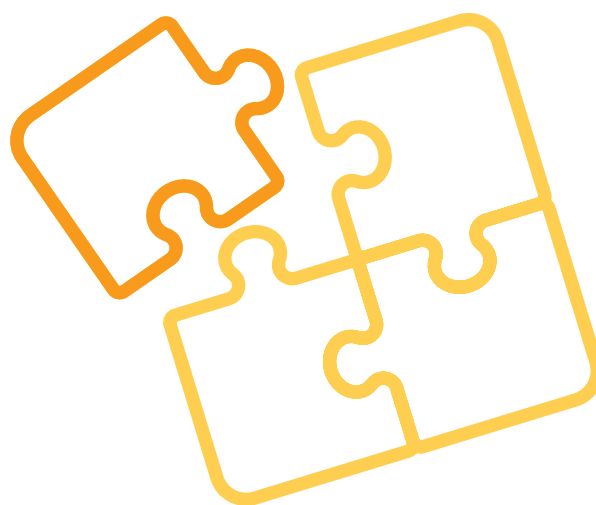
The review took place from April to June 2023 and identified how the Local Authority could deliver childcare differently to become more efficient, and financially sustainable in the future, taking into account the current £1.07m deficit across the centres.

The Council’s financial planning has identified a funding gap of £57m savings required across the Council by 2026/2027. The service needs to deliver £1.1m in savings in 2024/25, a further £1m in 2025/26 and further savings of up to £1.9m in 2026/27.

The independent review found that the current model of provision is not financially sustainable. EY identified 10 opportunities that could be used to make the service more sustainable. The opportunities were grouped into three categories: reducing expenditure, increasing income, and redefining the model.


The review did not include children’s centre nurseries that are not funded by the Council and do not offer subsidised childcare (Morningside, Gainsborough, Minik Kardes, Ihsan, Daubeney, Comet Nursery School and Wentworth Nursery School.) The 5 non-Council funded children’s centres and 2 nursery schools, provide early education and, or childcare funded by the Early Years Funded Entitlement for eligible 2, 3 and 4 year olds, and charge fees at market rate.

We previously consulted on proposals to close two children’s centres in the north of the borough in 2021. During the 2021 consultation, parents asked us to consider inviting alternative providers to take over management of children’s centres before proposing to close centres. This request from parents has shaped our current proposals. The 2021 consultation was paused to allow wider public engagement into the provision of childcare.




Since the paused consultation in 2021 the Council:

- Established an independent Commission into Affordable Childcare, to explore how to achieve better access to affordable high quality early years provision in Hackney. The Commission brought together parents and carers, childcare providers, and other members of the local communities, who looked at local childcare provision, challenges, risks, and costs, as well as ways to maximise the support available for families in the borough. The findings of the Commission align with the findings of the children's centre review. The Hackney Commission's report can be accessed here

 bit.ly/Affordable-Childcare-Commission

- Commissioned an independent review of Children's Centres. The findings have informed these proposals. You can access the report here:

 education.hackney.gov.uk/content/childrens-centres-consultation-2024

- Began developing four Children & Family Hubs in the borough, offering integrated family support services to meet families' social care, education, mental and physical health needs. As part of this work, the Council was selected to receive £3.9m funding over 3 years from the Department for Education and Department for Health and Social Care for a Start for Life programme, included in the hubs, which focuses on supporting the first 1001 days of a child's life, from conception to age two. This programme will focus on services for new parents and their babies and young children, such as perinatal mental health and parenting support, parent infant relationships, infant feeding, early language and home learning advice. The hubs have been designated following a consultation in the summer of 2023. You can find the results of this here

 bit.ly/cfh-hackney



Central Government expansion of funded childcare for working parents

In March 2023, the government announced the expansion of funded childcare for working parents. From April 2024, working parents of two-year-olds will be able to access 15 hours of funded childcare. From September 2024, 15 hours of funded childcare will be extended to include all children from the age of 9 months for working parents. From September 2025, working parents of children aged 9 months and over will be entitled to 30 hours childcare per week right up to their child starting school.¹

Due to the expansion of funded childcare for working parents, we will replace the Council subsidy to children's centres with:



the expanded 15 hours funded early years entitlement to:

- 2 year olds in working households from April 2024, and
- babies aged 9 months in working households from September 2024.



the expanded 30 hours funded entitlement to

- all children from 9 months old in eligible working households from September 2025.

In preparation for the expansion of the government childcare entitlement for working parents, we assessed our childcare places to confirm that we have enough places for children to take up their funded entitlement in April. We know that the new funding rates from the government will be more generous than the current funding rates which may help to make the centres more financially sustainable in the short term. However, this funding could be reduced in future years.

Why are we consulting?

We are consulting service users, staff and anyone who could be affected, on proposals to make changes to the way some of our children's centres deliver nursery provision in the future. These changes have been proposed to improve the sustainability of the centres. If we do not make changes, the current deficit of £1.07m across the children's centres is likely to continue to increase and we might have to make more far-reaching proposals at a later date. By making decisions now, even if they are unpopular, we aim to deliver an effective and efficient early education and childcare service, with centres that can retain a high level of occupancy.

The consultation gives service users and staff an opportunity to share their views and shape the proposals further. The views of service users and staff will influence the proposed changes to Oldhill Children's Centre, the shaping of Hillside ARP, and inform the types of provider that should be invited to apply to manage Fernbank and Sebright Children's Centres, if this proposal is taken forward.

We engaged EY through the Council's Management Consultancy Framework to undertake an independent review of the Children's Centres. The intention of the review was to:

- identify solutions to achieve sustainability impacted by £1.07m budget deficit from a reduction in nursery fees in the last few years, and increased operational cost,
- identify opportunities to meet the £4m savings factored into the Council's mid-term financial plans; and
- provide an opportunity to examine the potential impact of the national early years reform to expand the 15 and 30 hours funded early years entitlement to working parents.

1. The Education Hub – Free childcare: How we are tackling the cost of childcare
bit.ly/cost_of_childcare

EY worked with the children centres managers, school leaders, and stakeholders representing children in need and those with SEND over a 10-week period to understand the current service, how this could be improved and whether there are opportunities to remodel the provision.

The review identified that the current model for delivering childcare provision is not financially sustainable based on the current fees and expenditure. It found that even if the centres were at 100 % occupancy, and fully occupied by families on the highest fee band (Band 5, that is those on an income of at least £100k) they would still not be financially self-sustaining.

EY looked at the national expansion of the funded early years entitlement due to be implemented in April 2024, and found that its implementation could increase nursery income by up to £5m by 2025/26, which could reduce the current level of subsidy of £6.7m. However, it also found that the funded places will not fully meet the cost of the provision if we do not take steps to make the service more efficient by reducing costs.



The estimated income from the expanded funded early years entitlement is dependent on:

- Receiving an adequate early years entitlement funding formula from the government to cover the full cost of the service next year and in coming years. The current funding from the government does not meet service costs.
- Full occupancy of the centres is critical to achieving the required income to meet running costs. Only 4 of the 11 centres are currently reaching full occupancy: Lubavitch, Ann Tayler, Clapton Park and Mapledene. Their high occupancy rates are attributed to their ability to manage their admission register and the popularity of these centres.

Occupancy at children’s centres has been impacted by a reduction in the 0–4 population, down from 20,375 children in 2018 to 18,840 children 2022/23. The decline in the 0–4 population is projected to further dip to 18,389 between 2026/27 and 2030/31.²

We have 500 surplus nursery places in schools, and over 600 surplus places in reception classes (21 % surplus). To reduce the reception surplus the Cabinet decided to close 4 schools in Hackney by September 2024, removing 105 places and reducing the reception surplus to 17 % by 2029 (based on current projections).

2. Further information can be accessed on ons.gov.uk population estimates: bit.ly/population-mid-2020

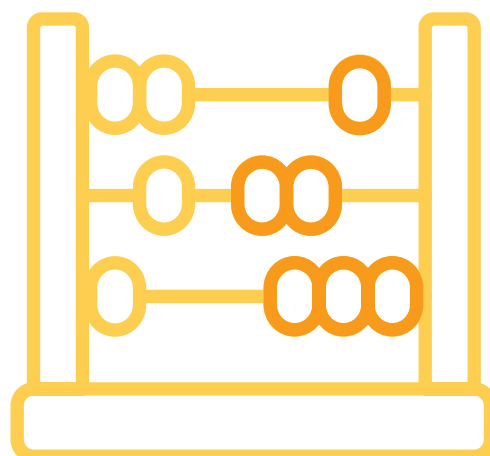
Proposed changes to Children’s Centres

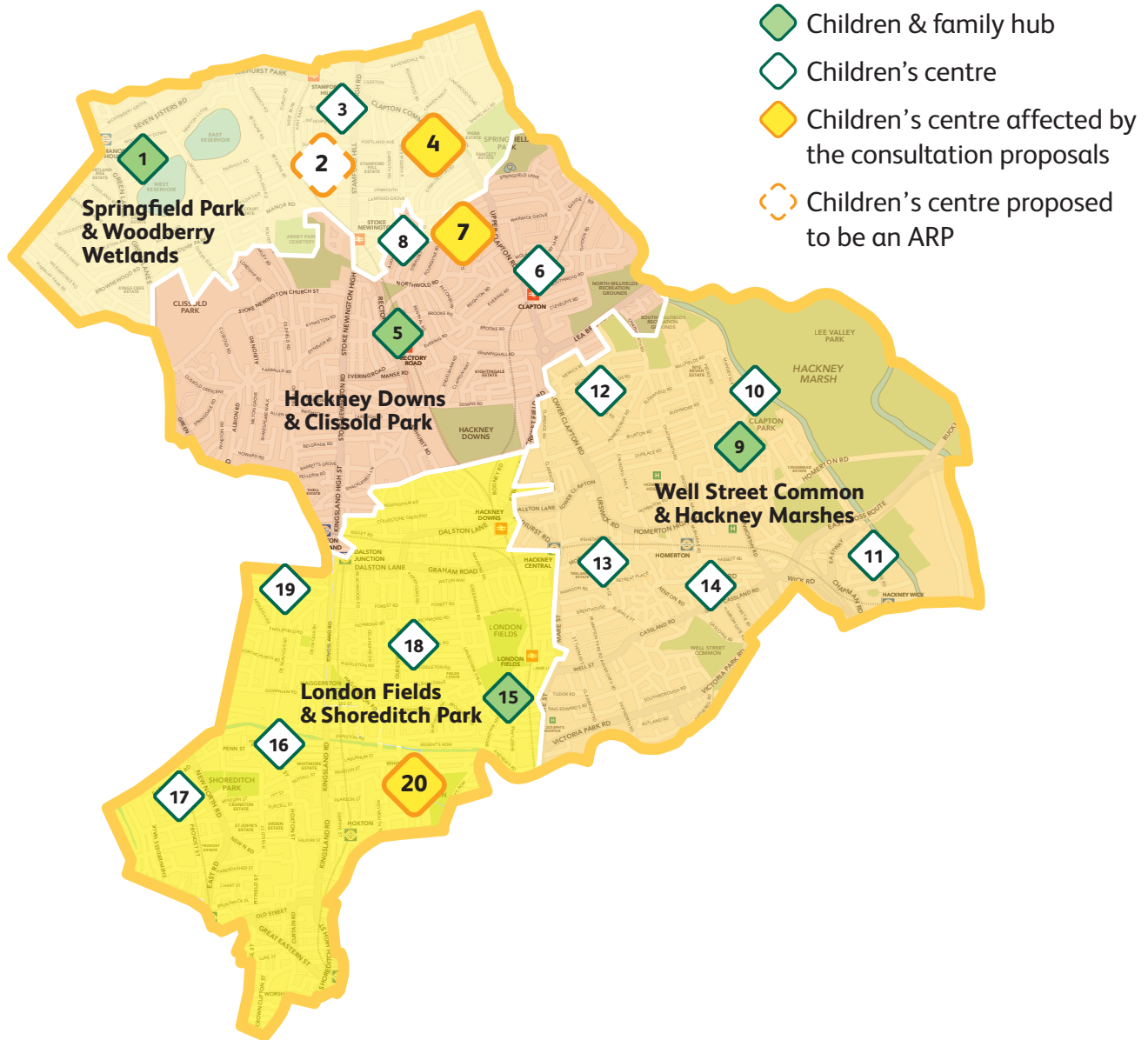
The proposed changes aim to rationalise children’s centres in order to secure sustainability into the future and meet the needs of children in Hackney. This includes the proposal to provide a much needed new specialist provision for children with SEND.

Current children’s centre and nursery provision

Neighbourhoods area	Springfield Park and Woodberry Wetlands	Clissold Park and Hackney Downs	London Fields and Shoreditch Park	Well Street Community and Hackney Marsh
Designated children and family hubs (*full time subsidised childcare x 3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Woodberry Down* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linden* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ann Taylor* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daubeney
Satellite children’s centre nurseries (full time subsidised childcare x 8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hillside • Oldhill • Lubavitch 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fernbank • Comberton 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mapledene • Sebright 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clapton Park
Satellite children’s centres – nurseries not subsidised		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ihsan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minik Kardes • Comet Nursery School, ARP and Children’s Centre 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gainsborough • Morningside • Wentworth Nursery School and Children’s Centre
Satellite children’s centre – no nursery	–	–	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comet@ Thomas Fairchild 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Millfields

Total number of settings:				
Neighbourhoods area	Springfield Park and Woodberry Wetlands	Clissold Park and Hackney Downs	London Fields and Shoreditch Park	Well Street Community and Hackney Marsh
Private nurseries (including children's centres)	22 (including 4 children's centres)	36 (including 3 children's centres)	23 (including 4 children's centres)	15 (including 5 children's centres)
Playgroup	4	2	1	4
Independent schools with nurseries	16	2	1	0
Childminders	32	36	32	34
Maintained nursery schools	–	–	1	1
Maintained primary schools with nursery classes	8	15	15	14
Primary free schools and academies with nursery classes	1	2	1	–
Total settings	83	93	74	68





**Neighbourhoods area
Springfield Park & Woodberry Wetlands**

- 1. Woodberry Down Children & Family Hub
- 2. Hillside Children's Centre
- 3. Lubavitch Children's Centre
- 4. Oldhill Children's Centre

**Neighbourhoods area
Well Street Common & Hackney Marshes**

- 9. Daubeny Children & Family Hub
- 10. Clapton Park Children's Centre
- 11. Gainsborough Children's Centre
- 12. Millfields Children's Centre
- 13. Morningside Children's Centre
- 14. Wentworth Nursery School & Children's Centre

**Neighbourhoods area
Hackney Downs & Clissold Park**

- 5. Linden Children & Family Hub
- 6. Comberton Children's Centre
- 7. Fernbank Children's Centre
- 8. Ihsan Children's Centre

**Neighbourhoods area
London Fields & Shoreditch Park**

- 15. Ann Tayler Children & Family Hub
- 16. Comet Nursery School & Children's Centre
- 17. Comet at Thomas Fairchild
- 18. Mapledene & Queensbridge Children's Centre
- 19. Minik Kardes Community Nursery
- 20. Sebright Children's Centre

Proposed service

Neighbourhoods area	Springfield Park and Woodberry Wetlands	Clissold Park and Hackney Downs	London Fields and Shoreditch Park	Well Street Community and Hackney Marsh
Maintain full day care 0–5yrs at 8 centres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Woodberry Down Children and Family Hub (9 new places for babies) • Lubavitch • Oldhill 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linden Children and Family Hub • Comberton 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ann Tayler Children and Family Hub • Mapledene 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clapton Park
Maintain non-Council funded children’s centres nurseries and nursery schools		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ihsan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minik Kardes • Comet Nursery School, ARP and Children’s Centre 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gainsborough • Morningside • Daubeney Children and Family Hub • Wentworth Nursery School and Children’s Centre
Restructure by 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hillside (41 places) Develop into ARP for children with special needs, maintaining mainstream places for 2, 3 and 4 yr olds to access early years entitlement • Oldhill (60 places) Maintain places for vulnerable children with market rate places for children 0–3 yrs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fernbank (60 places) Explore alternative provider, close if unsuccessful 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sebright (45 places) Explore alternative provider, close if unsuccessful 	

Hillside Children’s Centre: Proposal to change Hillside Children’s Centre into an early years Additional Resource Provision (ARP).

Hillside Children’s Centre is well placed to be developed into an early years Additional Resource Provision for children with special educational needs. We are proposing to change it into an ARP because it is a suitable size and location to meet need in the north of the borough. The proposal to develop an ARP is part of the SEND Strategy. Respondents to the Children and Family Hubs consultation last summer, requested more support for children with SEND; restructuring Hillside aims to meet the need for more SEND support.

Transition into an ARP would begin in September 2024 at the earliest, but will not be fully completed until September 2025. ARP’s must be managed by a school in order to draw down funding from the Dedicated Schools Grant. The ARP would therefore be attached to a school with significant experience in managing effective early years provision.

A cohort of children will leave to go to school and will be unaffected by the changes. 24 term time places would be available for 2, 3 and 4 year olds with SEND, and 17 term time universal places would remain for 2, 3 and 4 year olds without SEND. Wraparound care would be available at the start and end of the day, alongside holiday provision.

The baby room may be retained in the short term for existing children to support transition from the children’s centre into an ARP, until the children turn 2 years, to prevent disruption to the youngest children. However, we propose not to retain baby places in the long term and this will mean the loss of baby places. Children who are unable, or do not wish to retain a place at Hillside, would be supported to find a place at an alternative setting.



Oldhill Children's Centre: Proposal to restructure Oldhill Children's Centre to provide early education and care to children 6 months to 3 years old.

Currently, Oldhill Children's Centre offers 60 full-time places for children aged 6 months to 5 years. We are proposing to move to term-time places available to children aged 6 months to 3 years. Families would be able to pay for wrap-around care at the beginning and end of the day and for holiday provision. This is a significant change to the current all year provision and will impact current and future families.

Children in need of support would continue to be funded to access places through the current early help system that is managed via the family support teams. 4 year olds would apply for a funded early years entitlement place in Oldhill School, or at an alternative school.

The proposals would not affect children who are currently enrolled at Oldhill. We would phase out places for 4 year olds; children at Oldhill would continue to access the nursery until they leave. The phasing out of places for 4 year olds is likely to impact future families who would be required to apply for a place at a school nursery class before their child's 4th birthday, and would need to take up that place at the September or January intake. It is not unusual for children to leave their early years setting at 3 ½ years to take up a place in a school nursery class.



Proposals related to Fernbank Children's Centre and Sebright Children's Centre

We recognise the impact of these proposals on children and their families and will commit to supporting families through the process as much as is possible. Each centre will be allocated an officer to work closely with them to identify the needs of parents and carers, identify vacant places and help find a place in an alternative setting.

Fernbank Children's Centre: Proposals to invite expressions of interest from alternative providers to manage Fernbank Children's Centre and if an alternative provider is not found, to close the centre.

We propose to close the centre, unless an alternative provider can be found by Autumn 2024 to take over its management by 2025. We intend to invite expressions of interest from alternative providers to manage Fernbank Children's Centre. This process will follow the Council's procurement tender process advertising the opportunity, and inviting expressions of interest. Staff and service users would be kept informed of the outcome of the tender process. The chosen provider would be expected to deliver places with market fees.

If an alternative provider cannot be secured by Autumn the centre will be closed. The staff consultation process would commence with a view to closing the centre by August 2025 to support transition of existing children to new settings at key transition points.

This process would be managed through the Council's procurement framework and staff and service users would be kept informed of the outcome of the tender process.

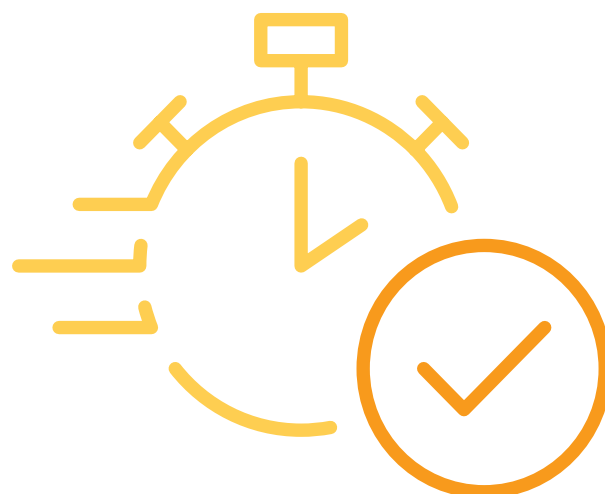
Sebright Children's Centre: Proposals to invite expressions of interest from alternative providers to manage Sebright Children's Centre and if an alternative provider is not found, to close the centre.

We propose to close the centre, unless an alternative provider can be found by Autumn 2024 to take over its management by 2025. We intend to invite expressions of interest from alternative providers to manage Sebright Children's Centre. This process will follow the Council's procurement tender process advertising the opportunity, and inviting expressions of interest. Staff and service users would be kept informed of the outcome of the tender process. The chosen provider would be expected to deliver places with market fees.

If an alternative provider cannot be secured by Autumn 2024, the centre will be closed. The staff consultation process would commence with a view to closing the centre by August 2025 to support transition of existing children to new settings at key transition points. This process would be managed through the Council's procurement framework and staff and service users would be kept informed of the outcome of the tender process.

Proposed timeline

Date	Event
31 January – 24 April 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12 week consultation
Summer 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The consultation report will be published. • Feedback on the consultation will be considered by Cabinet.
April – September 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The national expansion of the funded early years entitlement will begin. • At this point, the current childcare subsidy would start to be reduced and replaced by the funded early years entitlement.
Summer 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin tender process for Sebright and Fernbank Children’s Centres, after Cabinet decision.
Autumn 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appointment of a new provider, if found. • If unable to find an alternative provider, staff consultation on proposals to close the centre (s) would begin.
Summer 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close centre(s)
September 2024 – September 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restructure Hillside to form an ARP, working towards transition to the new service from September 2024 to full implementation by September 2025. • Restructure of Oldhill Children’s centre, with full implementation by September 2025



How were the children’s centres included in the proposals selected?

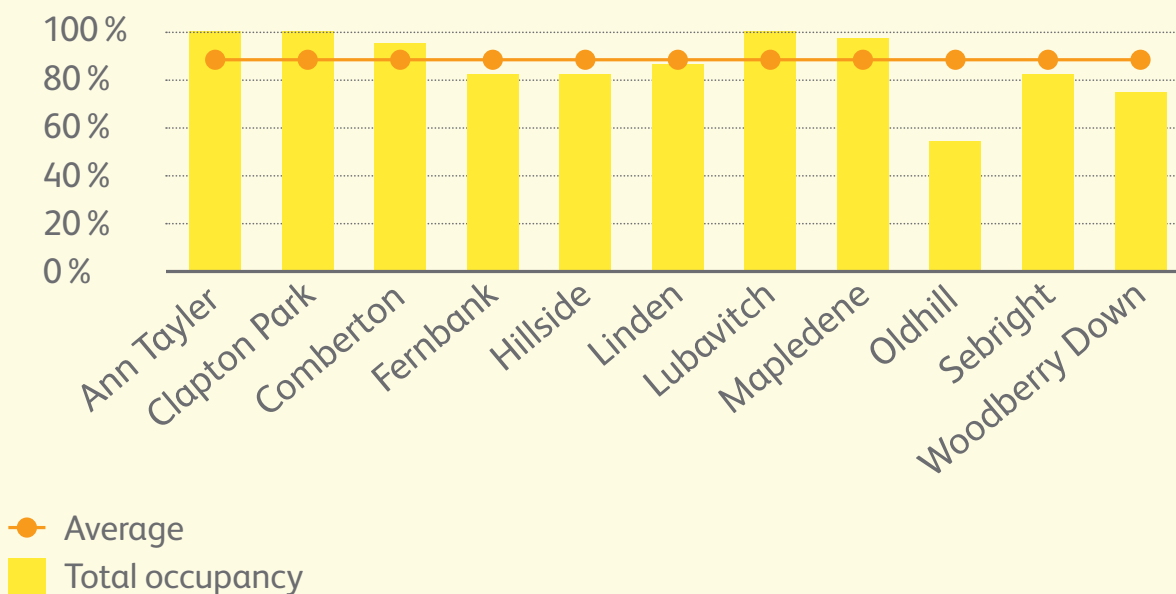
In the independent review, 5 centres were identified by the review as operating below the average 88% occupancy:

1. Oldhill
2. Hillside
3. Fernbank
4. Sebright, and
5. Woodberry Down

These Centres were looked at in more detail to understand the families who were accessing the nursery, and the challenges experienced by the leadership team in running the provision.

Three centres – Oldhill, Hillside and Fernbank – are in very close proximity. Making significant changes to all three centres presented a risk to having sufficient childcare places in the locality. The options were based on working towards maintaining sufficient provision to support children’s outcomes, and to enable parents to work. Reducing the childcare provision will reduce surplus places and support the remaining children’s centres to optimise occupancy.

Total average occupancy 2022/23



1. Oldhill Children's Centre

Oldhill supports marginalised, low income families who would benefit most from joined up services delivered as part of the school and children's centre. 71 % children are of Black and global majority heritage, 39 % assessed as being in need, 1 % are above average income. Maintaining the children's centre, and rationalising cost by changing the age range and configuration of places would sustain both the children's centre and the school where the children's centre is co-located by removing surplus places. The proposed changes would enable the Centre to continue to support children from marginalised communities, those in need, and those from lower income households with a yet to be defined number of places for higher income families to maintain a social economic mix and income levels. The decision on the number of places will be made following the consultation. Removing places for 4 year olds adds flexibility to increase places for younger children should they be needed. The subsidy is proposed to continue to be used to support the most disadvantaged children, alongside places for higher income families. The Effective Provision of Preschool Education study, found that disadvantaged children benefit significantly from good quality preschool experiences, especially when they are educated with a mixture of children from different social and economic backgrounds.³

2. Hillside Children's Centre

Hillside is well located in the Stamford Hill area, in a suitable size building owned by the Council to develop into an ARP. 66 % children are of Black and global majority heritage, 24 % assessed as being in need, 12 % above average income. Term-time SEND and universal places would continue to be maintained to meet early education, SEND and childcare needs.

3. Fernbank Children's Centre

Fernbank is located in a building that is not owned by the Council. This carries the risk of a potentially unaffordable lease, which has been subject to ongoing negotiation over a number of years. 39 % children are of Black and global majority heritage, 10 % assessed as being in need, 44 % above average income. The proposal presents an opportunity for an alternative provider to take over this provision and negotiate a lease. If an alternative provider is not found, it is proposed that the centre will close. In the event that it is closed, the Council is satisfied that there are sufficient surplus places locally, within the wider sector, for children who can no longer access it. Vacancies across the childcare sector will continue to be monitored to ensure that the Council continues to meet its duty to ensure that there are sufficient places.

3. The study can be accessed here: The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project bit.ly/eppe_project

4. Sebright Children's Centre

Sebright is located on the border with Tower Hamlets and attracts out of borough families. It is in close proximity to Mapledene Children's Centre which is at full capacity in comparison. 46 % children are of Black and global majority heritage, 12 % assessed as being in need, 40 % are above average income. The proposal presents an opportunity for an alternative provider to take over this provision. If an alternative provider is not found, it is proposed that the centre will close. In the event that it is closed, the Council is satisfied that there are sufficient surplus places within the wider sector that parents could access. Vacancies across the childcare sector will continue to be monitored to ensure that the Council continues to meet its duty to ensure that there are sufficient places.

5. Woodberry Down Family Hub

Woodberry Down Family Hub is the only maintained nursery offering full day care in the far north of the borough, and supports a significant number of families living in hostels and temporary accommodation.

The Council has been working with Berkeley Homes property developers towards a timeline since 2014 to relocate the existing Children's Centre Lilliput building to fit in with the wider regeneration programme to transform one of the most deprived areas, into a new sustainable neighbourhood that offers high quality new homes, and economic opportunities. The new nursery extension was completed in August 2023.

Phase 2 of the extension is due to be completed in March 2024. 9 new baby places have been created and efficiency measures such as changing the way the admissions register is managed, and how part time places are allocated to minimise unoccupied places, have already commenced as part of its new Children and Family Hub status.




<https://news.hackney.gov.uk/first-two-children--family-hubs-open-their-doors-in-hackney/>

The recent capital investment means that closure is not an option for the regeneration of the area.

In addition to the proposed restructuring, the Council will consider opportunities to:

- Reduce the use of agency staff, therefore providing better value for money and improving the consistency of care
- Facilitate more efficient and effective building maintenance, by streamlining costs
- Improve budget management and governance with improved systems.
- Target the use of Council childcare subsidy to support low income, disadvantaged and vulnerable children to access provision at children's centres.

How to take part

You can share your views by completing the online survey at  bit.ly/childrens-centre or consultation.hackney.gov.uk

Paper surveys are available at your local children's centre.

The consultation will close on **24 April 2024, 11:59pm.**

If you need any information on this website in a different format please email

 consultation@hackney.gov.uk

We'll consider your request and get back to you within 5 working days.

Who do we need to hear from?

We welcome views from all residents. We would particularly like to hear from parents and carers of children who use children's centres and future users of children's centres, and professionals who support families.

What happens next?

We welcome all views and comments on the consultation proposals. No decision will be made on the proposals until after the consultation has closed. All responses to the consultation will be taken into consideration.

The responses to the consultation will be analysed, reported and shared on public platforms. The final decision on the proposals will be made by the Cabinet in Summer 2024.



Sebright, Fernbank, Hillside and Oldhill Parents & Carers' Feedback on Children's Centre Consultation Documents and Process

9th February 2024

We ask that the scrutiny commission notes the following:

Headlines

- Hackney council is proposing to cut approx 148 full-time affordable childcare places by changing provision in four trusted children's centres, this amounts to a cut of over 25% of total spaces. The argument for closures appears to rest on the occupancy data that the council suggests is due to surplus places, but we would argue that no one is suggesting that there is surplus affordable child care! As clearly covered in parents and carers' statements - and the proposal itself where it mentions families coming from out-of-borough - people are willing to travel vast distances across the borough, *or even move*, to secure affordable childcare. The idea that these subsidised spaces are not being taken up because they are not required is, frankly, absurd. It is purely down to management of admissions places and the lack of visibility of the centres. One of the three key demands of the last campaign was that *the council must do more to advertise children's centre nurseries to make sure families were aware of them*. We have seen no evidence that the council has tried to do this. This should have been a key action undertaken by the council in the last two years, since the 'paused' 2021 proposals.
- The proposals include no information about possible staff redundancies - where we're looking at over 40 staff (including support staff) over the two centres proposed for closure alone. Almost all staff are women and many are people of the Global Majority. Why are they looking at making committed, experienced staff redundant during a recruitment and retention crisis where the government is so desperate for Early Years workers [that it is offering £1000 to new childcare staff?](#) The childcare sector in London is experiencing severe staffing shortages, with ongoing challenges related to recruitment and retention. There has been a considerable reduction in the number of childminders operating in England, [with London seeing the largest fall](#).
- A huge increase in demand is coming due to the expansion of funded childcare, along with a big increase in funding (providers will get double what they got for 2 year olds, and even more for babies), and then again in September 2025 when all under-5s will get 30 free hours. Added to this, a likely change in government to a Labour government that has committed to increasing provision of affordable childcare, so in all likelihood more investment to come - it makes no sense to close now when there is so much change to come that will likely have a huge impact on the sustainability of these centres. In the proposal the council itself states '*We know that new funding rates from the government will be more generous than current funding rates which may help to make the centres more financially sustainable in the short term*'. The proposals then go on to suggest that the rates *could* be reduced in future years - so is the rationale that the council is shutting nurseries now, just in case?
- We are aware that the council has £150 million in reserves. We understand that there is a budget crisis, but we ask that you don't *choose* to cut vital services in centres that are pillars of the community and make a profound difference to young children's outcomes now and in the future! We ask that instead the council continue to invest in children's futures with subsidised childcare places - **particularly for vulnerable**

families who may not be able to access childcare otherwise. Once we close these children's centres they are gone forever. There's no reopening them.

- These proposed closures/changes in provision are not in line with National Labour Party policy - and Hackney is a Labour-led council after all -, which is for the increase of provision of affordable childcare and this is a key commitment outlined in [Stronger Together. Labour is looking at giving more support for poorer families](#), which is exactly what the council-subsidised spaces currently do. For the lowest-income families (those with a household income of under £34,000 per annum - Band 1) the cost for a full-time place at a Children's Centre for an under-2 is £207 a week, whereas the average cost of a full time place in inner London is £394.58 a week ([Coram Childcare 2023 Survey Report](#)).

How we want you to read this submission

There is a lot of information provided here. Under unfair (and, we suggest, unconstitutional) time pressure, a group of working parents have been asked to respond to a rushed, badly structured and disorganised consultation.

It has been hard. In the interest of supporting the Scrutiny Committee to do its job, we have included all the analysis that different people have undertaken. This means that there will be different structures, approaches and perhaps some repetition. We have had teachers, bankers, trainers and consultants working on this.

Please read it all so that you benefit from their hard work, care and insight. We hope that this will lighten your load and support you to challenge what will disadvantage the youngest and most vulnerable in our borough.

Where we are now

The problems with this process are deep and wide ranging. They start with the initial scope of research undertaken and its lack of rigour and quality, and go all way through to how the council has chosen which course of action to take. None of this makes sense and the process is not transparent. There cannot be meaningful engagement in the current consultation process because all of the information has not been made available. A full Equality Impact Assessment does not appear to have been undertaken.

As a group of working parents of pre-school children we have worked tirelessly to find, absorb, understand and analyse the council's approach since these proposed closures were announced. This has been very hard with such short timescales.

So much is at stake here. The provision of quality early years education, especially for families on low incomes, changes a child's trajectory in life. The evidence is clear here that the quality of provision at the affected Children's Centre nurseries is much needed (<https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/inequality-in-early-years-education/>) **and the question should be how to expand provision, not reduce it.** These centres act as

anchors in their respective communities. We have statements from parents and carers to support this (also attached).

We wanted to be able to provide the committee with a full integrated analysis of all the problems (there are so many) but time was against us (it's hard not to feel that this is intentional to avoid scrutiny - we certainly hope this is not the case). As a consequence, below are four different people's analysis of the main issues, either overall or, report by report. At the end of the document there is a table of everything that we found. This may involve repetition but we ask that you read everything.

There are significant issues with how Hackney residents are being consulted on these proposals and specifically the proposed closures of the Children's Centres. There is also a significant lack of information about what data underpins the proposals. Without this information it is very difficult to give a meaningful response to this consultation. Some examples are as follows (many more in the analyses below):

- It is unclear what, if anything, has been done by the council over the last two years - since the council last proposed closures due to occupancy levels - to advertise children's centres, and to increase occupancy levels by helping all Children's Centre nurseries manage their wait lists/admissions, and, part time places to ensure they reach full occupancy. **This should have been a priority over the last two years.** It seems grossly unfair that Lubavitch - a centre that serves the Charedi community - appears to have escaped proposed closure almost purely due to the fact that it has 100% occupancy - but the reason for this is that children are not allowed to attend part time and therefore all children attend full time. This doesn't offer families the flexibility they often need and therefore isn't serving the community as, perhaps, it should. This is just one of many issues with the rationale used.
- It is unclear as to exactly *how* and *when* the occupancy data used in the proposals was calculated.
- The reports do not appear to accurately reflect the occupancy data held by at least some children's centres for 2022/23 or the work that has gone into increasing occupancy since the last set of proposed closures. Fernbank, for example, is currently at 98% occupancy and had an average occupancy of 88% in 2022-23. This is important as it seems to be the main way the centres chosen for closure were picked.
- The consultation documents are not clear about the scope to influence through the exercise as is recommended in best practice.
- A meaningful consultation on a topic of this nature should be proactively seeking views from relevant stakeholders - there has been no active engagement with parents & carers at the affected centres or members of the 2021 campaign group, despite the letter parents from the council (attached) communicating the decision to 'pause' the closures, that included assurances that they would do so.
- It is not clear whether the budget cut to Early Years Services is commensurate with cuts across the whole budget. If it is not, we would like to understand on what basis the decision that cuts were necessary for the youngest and most vulnerable residents of Hackney was made, when the proposal itself states that the funding that is coming will make an impact on the sustainability of the centres.

- The reports make reference to the centres covering expenses but are unclear as to whether this is with or without the subsidy that they currently have. This lack of clarity means that it is very difficult for the centres to do their own modelling. In the case of Sebright, The Blossom Federation could become the alternative provider. Surely this is preferred to a private provider. How has this not been considered?
- The consultation documents contain insufficient information about/references to the data on which decisions have been based:
 - The documents lack detail on the expected costs and benefits of the proposals or as compared to alternative models explored. Where financials are covered, they are confusing and it's not clear that costs relate to what provision (see below).
 - The EY report lays out 10 different options for reducing expenditure, increasing the income and redefining the model and the council seems to have explored none of them except closures.
 - No information has been given about the numbers of families affected by these closures. We estimate it will be 200+, given that the 148 places are full time places and many families will be accessing childcare on a part-time basis. There is also no information of how it will affect provision at different ages e.g. Fernbank has one of Hackney's largest provisions for under-2s (24 spaces) so closing this centre may mean more spaces for under-2s proportionally are being lost - what sense does this make when this is where we are likely to see the greatest increase in demand coming up to September 2025? The proposal to close/change the provision at four Children's Centres, which currently offer excellent services and care to local families, will make the lives of over 200 families worse and less supported. These centres have been serving local people for decades and are trusted by the community. Closing these centres will increase inequality and division in an area of the borough that is already struggling with these problems.
 - Hillside and Oldhill will move to term-time provision, with suggestions that Hillside and Oldhill may offer outside term-time/wrap-around care provision are mentioned with no information about the costs of this provision.
 - Very little information has been given about the other options considered in the development of these proposals and the rationale as to why these options have been discounted often makes no sense.
 - The map included in the strategy and consultation is at best, not fit for purpose and at worst, misleading in terms of how it illustrates availability of existing childcare provision across Hackney. For example, it does not include any detail of the ages provided for (e.g. some settings do not offer childcare for under twos), quality of provision, hours of operation (i.e. full time v part time, term-time or year-round), nor the cost of places. Anyone answering the consultation would not necessarily know what this means and could assume there is sufficient provision when agreeing/disagreeing with the proposals to close the centres.
 - Why is there not a central system of some kind for managing places - there are huge waitlists (3 years at some!) for places at most Children's Centre

nurseries but no formal system for advising parents of places at centres nearby - this makes no sense! If occupancy of the nurseries is the biggest factor then why haven't the council's efforts gone into helping centres manage occupancy?

Some serious - potentially Constitution-breaching - process issues from the outset:

- The council withheld the publishing of the proposals until after the Cazenove by-election so that constituents were not made aware of the closure of a vital service in their community - Fernbank Children's Centre nursery - ahead of the election.
- In delaying the publication of the proposals, they breached the Constitution, which clearly states that *'the Council will make copies of the agenda and reports open to the public available for inspection at Hackney Town Hall and on the Council website at least five clear working days before the meeting'*. At the Cabinet meeting, Mayor Woodley stated that she said the proposal was published one day shy of the required date but, given the proposal went live on the evening of Friday 19th January, **the breach was actually 4 working days**. This matters as we did not have enough time to mobilise or organise for a Councillor to ask any questions in the meeting.
- During the Cabinet meeting, Mayor Woodley stated, *"it's obviously not an ideal situation, but the alternative was to delay a month and that might have threatened the amount of time we were dedicated to consultation and we are maximizing to the full 12 weeks"*. <https://www.youtube.com/live/NDE1AR9IsSA?si=SjaZVfdwETPzLFNk> (14:30). We are still waiting on a clear explanation as to why postponing the item until February's Cabinet meeting would not simply have moved the start date of the proposed 12 weeks consultation period rather than reduced it, despite many emails to the Monitoring Officer, Governance Officer and the Mayor.

Analysis 1

- There are at least 4 reports floating around – it is practically impossible for members of public to read and review all. Some of them have contradictory information
- These reports are:
 - o EY summary report (pdf created as of 11 Jan 2024)
 - o Cabinet Report (22 Jan meeting)
 - o Consultation paper- consultation paper
 - o CAC – commission on affordable childcare (Nov 2023)
- The EY report was not actually suggesting the closure of 3 children’s centres, and provided the council with 3 recommendations which never were clearly outlined in any of the documents (including the consultation paper)
- The EY report provides 11 recommendations for the council (see deliverability in brackets, with high being easy)
- **Lever 1 reduce expenditure**
 - Reduce staff costs (central pool of staff), less agency staff (medium)
 - Reduce building and mgmt. cost (coming from one place, economies of scale) (high)
 - Improve budget mgmt. and governance, key metrics, transparency and etc (high)
- **Lever 2 (increase income)**
 - o Increase target occupancy: Get to 95% occupancy levels, reduce part time flexibility (Medium)
 - o Implement gnt reform (additional£5.2 min fees by the end of 25/26) (high)
 - o Targeted subsidy bandings (Medium)
 - o Increase fees (risk fewer people taking up spots) (Medium)
 - o
- **Lever 3: Redefine the model**
 - o Remove childcare subsidy -- > so just force them to be loss making (low)
 - o **Reduce subsidy from 3 or 4 centres (this is the only thing that’s being done) (medium)**
 - o Deliver the subsidy through an alternative model (medium)
 - o Cease delivery of childcare within Children's Centres (low)

The council only goes for reducing the subsidy for 3 or 4 centres (with a hint of just removing the subsidy / or changing delivery for all of them in the future. They only mention other EY Recommendations in the end of the consultation as points below. Which also could be referred to Wodberry Downs Family hub only.

See excerpt below (p. 18 of consultation paper).

“In addition to the proposed restructuring, the Council will consider opportunities to:

- Reduce the use of agency staff, therefore providing better value for money and improving the consistency of care
- Facilitate more efficient and effective building maintenance, by streamlining costs
- Improve budget management and governance with improved systems.
- Target the use of Council childcare subsidy to support low income, disadvantaged and vulnerable children to access provision at children’s centres. “

Further issues (Cabinet Report)

- A decision has been made to remove provision of the extended services at Sebright by end of March and our view is this definitely wasn't included in the hub consultation. The council should have consulted on that.
- The council hasn't finalised equality impact assessment p.10 of Cabinet Report and won't until consultation is over, a lot of this about equality of access and the council has not done its homework.
- The council doesn't engage us (p.41 of CAC report) supports that
 - o No evidence of site visits, engagement with parents carers, and other stakeholders
- The Cabinet Report report claims that after 2021 consultations parents at Fernbank and Hillside suggested asking alternative providers □ this is not true. The parents at Fernbank and Hillside involved in the 2021 campaign have asked the council (specifically Donna Thomas, in an email dated Thursday 1st February) to remove this reference from the consultation documents. The council declined. They continue to feel aggrieved that this information is being presented as if these parents support bringing in alternative providers - **they do not and we do not this time round either**. It was the fact that the council hadn't even explored that option that was a clear red flag to them that the council hadn't undertaken its statutory duty to explore all options ahead of proposing closures - and this is why it was mentioned in meetings.
- Definition of what's sustainable
 - o where is the P&L for all centres ?
 - o For non profitable organisations breakeven should be enough !
 - Fernbank and Sebright were both in surplus
 - o CAC report implies inefficient use of funds / cost structures at the centres due to council procurement procedures (HR system CAC p.30, other expenses p. 31)
- The EY engagement was not offered for tender – WHY ? Why is it considered low risk
 - o Conflict of interest issues with ex education partner also focusing on private equity
- Cabinet Report / Consultation paper conclusions are contradictory (even at 100% occupancy with band 5 parents the centres are not sustainable □ 100% occupancy is key to breakeven □ how will alternative providers be able to fix it. Band 5 parents pay exactly what an average full time palace for an under-two costs in inner city London - £395! ([Coram Childcare 2023 Survey Report](#)).
- Cabinet Report and CAC Key graphs in the report are impossible to read □ decision made on incomplete information, and not accessible to everyone
- Demographic data is not reconcilable with any of the cited sources
 - o Please provide the exact data sets
 - o Also population declines are not going to be drastic according to any sources
 - o The report seems to make a big deal out of it, but we seem to be either at the troth or getting to the troth of these projections
 - o Also projects are very likely to be based on pandemic affected data (the page that opens when using the link to the ONS data states that this is NOT the latest data set)

- <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/annualmidyearpopulationestimates/mid2020>
 - Different reports refer to different projects ONS and GLA
- Data seems to be misused
- Per head spending data is not explained / backed up
- Report claims there are additional steps for future “sustainability” □ none are explained in a clear / concrete fashion OR backed up with projections and calculations
 - No solutions offered apart from cost savings from closure !
- EY’s modeling of per year cost savings double by year 3 □ this implies closing another 3 centres
 - There is a very small print insinuation in Cabinet Report report that the council might shut down all 11 children’s centres
 - Implies divide and conquer type of strategy !
- Report cites availability and sufficiency of places □ but what about quality and access (also references in CAC)
 - CAC report states that CC’s have level 3 qualifications, not required by private nurseries. This raises implications about quality. CAC report seems to recognise that CC’s are viewed as better quality from the standpoint of parents
 - CAC report mentions things such as lack of facilities to make hot lunches at private nurseries _-> again indication of higher quality at CCS
 - CAC report talks a lot about staff churn -> we have very little of it at CCs
- For Sebright specifically, I think we need to press with the additional question of what the council is doing to make sure they can address reversal in their perceived demographic changes if the building is redeveloped sold and etc.

Analysis 2

- *"The proposed reform changes is expected to have a potential impact on demand for childcare placements, with the greatest shift expected to be for two year olds 30 hour care, which will benefit a high number of families." page 2 SC5*
 - If demand for childcare placements is likely to increase and 3 childcare centres are being closed, then later on the council will struggle to meet its duty of ensuring there is enough childcare provision in the borough.
- "The government reform, if introduced as proposed, could deliver the savings required by the council, however this is dependent on the uptake of places, as well as centres delivering against forecast occupancy and income aligned to existing composition of use. The reform would not address the underlying challenges the council is experiencing in delivering childcare." under 3.5, page 8
- If the government reform is implemented, then the council would achieve the required savings, therefore what is the rationale for closing childcare provision?
- Lever 1 table - reduce expenditure, opportunity 2 "Reduce Building Maintenance and Management Costs" offers a solution to "Utilise a Corporate Landlord Model, whereby budgets relating to buildings (such as repairs and maintenance) are managed centrally by property services to drive efficiency, rather than individually by each centre manager" under 4.1 page 9. This opportunity has high deliverability.

- Has the council together with EY estimated the potential savings gained by implementing this opportunity?
- *Full occupancy of the centres is critical to achieving the required income to meet running costs. Only 4 of the 11 centres are currently reaching full occupancy: Lubavitch, Ann Talyer, Clapton Park and Mapledene. Their high occupancy rates are attributed to their ability to manage their admission register and the popularity of these centres.*
 - Why haven't **all centres** been helped to manage their admissions register since 2021?
 - Why is occupancy not higher at Sebright - it has a waiting list
 - Why is the admission process at Sebright not as good as Ann Taylor and Mapledene? Can the admission register of Sebright be improved?
 - How can some centres have occupancy over 100%? Are ratios being observed? Lubavitch only has full occupancy as children are only allowed to attend full-time. There are no part-time places. This does not serve the community best.
- *“ The Commission brought together parents and carers, childcare providers, and other members of the local communities, who looked at local childcare provision, challenges, risks, and costs, as well as ways to maximise the support available for families in the borough.”* Is this group representative of the general public? Did this commission bring any parents from affected nurseries such as Fernbank or Hillside?
- If demand for childcare placements is likely to increase and 3 childcare centres are being closed, then later on the council will struggle to meet its duty of ensuring there is enough childcare provision in the borough. Also if demand is increasing then occupancy rates are likely to increase.

Analysis 3

- There is a legal obligation to consult when proposals are at a formative stage and to be open with relevant information reasonably required to evaluate any proposals (enshrined in the Gunning principles - mentioned at 6.25 but not acted upon).
- However, there are no alternate options being consulted on (see 'Options' 6.14-17) nor any guidance given as to what information is being sought and how it might influence the decision-making process, and the E&Y report that has determined the proposals has been restricted as an exempt, non-public appendix. It appears to fail the grounds for a legal consultation, and fails to account for what would happen if consultation responses are overwhelmingly against the proposals or how a decision will be arrived at / key factors in its resolution.
- Equalities - does this target low income families and jeopardise (by privatisation) their access to provision?
- Note the Impact Assessment has not been done as it is not included (!). Surely crucial to assessing the proposals? (See 6.30)
- There are lots of stated aims in these sections but no details as to how these risks and intentions are being supported or protected by the proposals.
- See 6.21 and elsewhere - 'any additional income will need to take account of the current budget deficit'. It seems to imply that education income is being earmarked to fill funding deficits elsewhere in the (Council) budgets...?
- More on the consult doc - its unclear how these proposals address any of the legal obligations (e.g. the PSED) detailed in section 9 because there is no risk assessment or any material that explicitly responds to these duties / responsibilities and details how these proposals align with these responsibilities. (Check responsibilities in Guidance, 9.5).

- Thanks for sending the E&Y doc. Wow. Some comments (sorry again of repeating the obvious, these are my notes):
- It seems to suggest (I guess obviously) that demand will rise (SC2). And that though demand is there it is not financially sustainable under current funding models, but (see below) these models even under the Conservatives will improve. Main conclusion across report appears to be that unless Centres are subsidised (by LA provision) no private provider would take it on (one might presume) and therefore the provision would be lost. This seems a key argument - that the LA / Council is trying to abnegate its responsibility for provision because it is not (currently) profitable - provision however that it is legally obliged to provide. Further that the report outlines a raft of efficiency and organisational savings and methods to increase revenue, all of which are untested...why consult now after paying for this advice?
- It suggests (p.5) that better management would increase viability (e.g. provision of part time places) - has this been rolled out in the Children's Centres in the consultation - and if not, why not? Isn't that the purpose of the E&Y consult / that would make the Centres more financially viable?
- 3.3 suggests that the funding model is out of date and that the council needs to review it. Has this been done? What is the target occupancy? This section clearly outlines the necessity of subsidy (and why commercial management of the centres would fail, removing provision). (See also 3.5 table, age 3-4).
- 3.5 - Government Reform. I'd be asking what Labour are going to do about this - if the future looks bleak under the Tory financial / funding model, shouldn't we assume this will be redressed (in 2024) by an incoming Labour govt...? Even existing government reform, it is claimed here, would deliver the necessary cost savings (p.8, top) albeit connected to occupancy - which, as above, could potentially be raised by managing part time places better (and is forecast occupancy based on current or predicted uptake - which is somewhat unknown, acknowledged elsewhere).
- P.9,10,11 - there are a range of cost cutting / revenue increasing proposals suggested here (most with high achievability) - have these been actioned? If not, what consult now (given the risks to legal obligations, PSED, access etc.)? P.11, risks in box 10 seem very relevant (privatisation even if secured, would not be a controllable cost - i.e. high risk / expensive way to fulfil obligations)
- Most importantly there is no relation between the proposals and the E&Y report on which it is based. Why is there no detail on how the proposals respond to / account for the suggestions made in the report?
- Hackney is the 2nd highest performing LA in the country. If it doesn't have provision for children, then our school numbers will drop further and damage the provision for our children and families. I don't understand the decision making and think a new government will reverse all this anyway!

The context of increasing entitlements to childcare -changes to the entitlement funding and a increase in this from the government to Hackney, they are concerned about meeting capacity, especially as from September children from 9 months are eligible for 15 hours of free childcare. If they are concerned about capacity, why are they reducing services? This isn't clear. The downstairs rooms at Sebright which will be vacant as the alternative provision relocates to Daubney could be used for babies and the youngest children.

Hackney reports -Council Childcare Sufficiency Duty Report dated 2022. that is trying to prove that they are fulfilling their statutory duty to provide enough childcare spaces. Is some of the dates and data they use (or not use) that got to me. If report is dated 2022 (month is not even mentioned) so data might have been collected the year before in 2021? Fernbank and Hilside had low admissions levels on that year due to proposed closures as they would not accept new referrals.(low admission levels appeared in another report). It would take

minimum 6 months to rebound, possibly longer. Also they use data.london.gov projectios of children populations FROM 2019 (!) in this report which may not be factual as birth rates has slightly increased during Covid in 2021 nationally (ONS.gov.uk). I think in London birth rate increased even more... Using outdated data fits the purpose and supports the plans for closure -



<https://www.hackneyservicesforschools.co.uk/extranet/hackney-childcare-sufficiency-assessment>

'The fact that even if the centres were at 100% occupancy, and fully occupied by families on the highest fee band (Band 5, that is those on an income of at least £100k) they would still not be financially viable' (EY summary report, p12) is used to justify decisions but this statement isn't evidenced in any way - is this really the case for all centres? Regardless of how many spaces they have for, say under-2s, where the fees are higher?

Children's Centre Childcare Consultation full analysis


<p>Pdf p.3</p>	<p>Alternative providers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The council does not hash out what that would like look. Privately run nurseries. • The report claims that even if the centres were at "assumed" capacity (which we challenge) and filled with parents in earnings band 5 they still won't be viable. • Band 5 earnings . Band 5 fees for under 2's are (no gnt support) are at 0 £434.00 which is above inner London average quoted by Coram at £394.58 • This is a contradiction in the report (meaning how could an alternative provider do it cheaper ?) (see p.7 for exact quote) 	
<p>Pdf p.4</p>	<p>EY was commissioned to identify ways of achieving financial stability</p>	<p>FOI on costs of ey comission</p>
<p>P4</p>	<p>Current deficit of £1.07m – where is the detail. Who contributes to that deficit and how</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Schedule of savings for early years - 2024/2025 : £1.1 million - 2025/2026: £1 million - 2026/2027: £1.9 million. How these numbers were calculated ? - Why do they go down, and how can £1.1 million turn to £2 million by 20206/2027 □ this implies closure of 3 additional centres 	<p>FOI request on £1.07 million calculation Also calculation of projected deficit (/ savings)</p> <p>Key question how can these savings be doubled by year 3</p>

<p>p. 4</p>	<p>EY 10 “opportunities”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1) reducing expenditure - 2) increasing income - 3) redefining model (<i>what is that ?</i>) - 	<p>FOI request on the funding of centres not funded by council (commit / wentworth) who runs them ?</p> <p>No clear description of opportunities or even groups of opportunities apart from vague references to cost savings and increasing income ?</p>
<p>p.4</p>	<p>During the 2021 consultation, parents asked us to consider inviting alternative providers to take over management of children’s centres before proposing to close centres. This request from parents has shaped our current proposals. The 2021 consultation was paused to allow wider public engagement into the provision of childcare</p>	<p>The parents at Fernbank and Hillside involved in the 2021 campaign have asked the council to remove this reference from the consultation documents. The council declined. They continue to feel aggrieved that this information is being presented as if these parents support bringing in alternative providers - they do not and we do not this time round either. It was the fact that the council hadn't even explored that option that was a clear red flag to them that the council hadn't undertaken its statutory duty to explore all options ahead of proposing closures - and this is why it was mentioned.</p>
<p>p.5</p>	<p>Commission into Affordable Childcare, to explore how to achieve better access to affordable high quality early years provision in Hackney.</p>	<p>Conflict of interest ? (June O’Sullivan OBE)</p>
<p>p.5</p>	<p>Began developing four Children & Family Hubs in the borough, offering integrated family support services to meet families’</p>	

p.6	<p>Due to the expansion of funded childcare for working parents, we will replace the Council subsidy to children's centres with:</p> <p> the expanded 15 hours funded early years entitlement to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 year olds in working households from April 2024, and • babies aged 9 months in working households from September 2024. <p> the expanded 30 hours funded entitlement to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all children from 9 months old in eligible working households from September 2025. 	<p>It is not clear what this means in practice. We need to see:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Under the current model what do centres get - Under the suggested new replacement of the subsidy, what funding would the centres get
p.5	<p>In preparation for the expansion of the government childcare entitlement for working parents, we assessed our childcare places to confirm that we have enough places for children to take up their funded entitlement in April. We know that the new funding rates from the government will be more generous than the current funding rates which may help to make the centres more financially sustainable in the short term. However, this funding could be reduced in future years.</p>	<p>Where is the data coming on enough places for children</p> <p>Below is a counter argument to closing children's centres</p> <p>CONTRADICTION = Commission on affordable childcare states that sufficiency = access / affordability</p>
p.6	<p>These changes have been proposed to improve the sustainability of the centres</p> <p>By making decisions now, even if they are unpopular, we aim to deliver an effective and efficient early education and childcare service, with centres that can retain a high level of occupancy</p>	<p>Closing children's centres doesn't reflect the wording of sustainability</p> <p>FOI – calculations on occupancy rates</p> <p>NO waiting list data was considered</p> <p>Apart from closing the centres what are the proposals ?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clear and well articulated - All other points made are vague and don't actually really say anything
p.6	EY engagement	FOI on costs of EY, and staff who worked on the engagement
p.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - identify solutions to achieve sustainability impacted by £1.07m budget deficit from a reduction in nursery fees in the last few years, and increased operational cost, - identify opportunities to meet the £4m savings factored into the Council's mid-term financial plans 	<p>£ 4 million of savings over 3 years (£1.07 in one year</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Detail on savings comes later
p.7	EY worked with the children centres managers, school leaders, and stakeholders representing children in need and those with SEND	There was not meaningful engagement with parents

		<p>Where did this come from? Please evidence NO ENGAGEMENT at all FOI on what they call engagement</p>														
<p>p.7</p>	<p>EY looked at the national expansion of the funded early years entitlement due to be implemented in April 2024, and found that its implementation could increase nursery income by up to £5m by 2025/26, which could reduce the current level of subsidy of £6.7m.</p>	<p>This is a contradiction to the thesis (why not try it out) and keep the centres running</p>														
<p>p.7</p>	<p>The estimated income from the expanded funded early years entitlement is dependent on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Full occupancy of the centres is critical to achieving the required income to meet running costs <p>EY worked with the children centres managers, school leaders, and stakeholders representing children in need and those with SEND over a 10-week period to understand the current service, how this could be improved and whether there are opportunities to remodel the provision.</p> <p>The review identified that the current model for delivering childcare provision is not financially sustainable based on the current fees and expenditure. It found that even if the centres were at 100% occupancy, and fully occupied by families on the highest fee band (Band 5, that is those on an income of at least £100k) they would still not be financially self-sustaining.</p> <p>The estimated income from the expanded funded early years entitlement is dependent on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receiving an adequate early years entitlement funding formula from the government to cover the full cost of the service next year and in coming years. The current funding from the government does not meet service costs. • Full occupancy of the centres is critical to achieving the required income to meet running costs. Only 4 of the 11 centres are currently reaching full occupancy: Lubavitch, Ann Tayler, Clapton Park and Mapledene. Their high occupancy rates are attributed to their ability to manage their admission register and the popularity of these centres. 	<p>the two statements about full occupancy on the same page contradict each other, unless I misread something</p>														
<p>p.7</p>	<p>Occupancy at children’s centres has been impacted by a reduction in the 0–4 population, down from 20,375 children in 2018 to 18,840 children 2022/23. The decline in the 0–4 population is projected to further dip to 18,389 between 2026/27 and 2030/31.2</p> <p>This is ONS data</p> <p>MYE2: Persons by single year of age and sex for local authorities in England and Wales, mid-2022 This worksheet contains one table. Freeze panes are turned on. To turn off freeze panes select the 'View' ribbon then 'Freeze Panes' then 'Unfreeze Panes' or use [Alt W, F] Please choose from the links presented in the cells below to e-mail us your opinion on this table: This met my needs, please produce it next year I need something slightly different (please specify) This is not what I need at all (please specify)</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Code</th> <th>Name</th> <th>Children born in Geography</th> <th>All ages 0</th> <th>2022</th> <th>2021</th> <th>2020</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>E09000012</td> <td>Hackney</td> <td>London Borough</td> <td>261,491</td> <td>3,609</td> <td>3,409</td> <td>3,181</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Figures don't tie !</p>	Code	Name	Children born in Geography	All ages 0	2022	2021	2020	E09000012	Hackney	London Borough	261,491	3,609	3,409	3,181	<p>Is 18,389 projection for 2030/2031 Or 2026/2027</p> <p>The overall decrease from 2022/2023 to whatever number in the future is -2%. This is not that much, given that they are getting rid of 25% of council run places. Data is missing here</p> <p>CAGR (compounded annual growth rate / decline) over 8 years (from 2022/2023) is (-0.3%) CAGR for 4 years is (- 0.6%) (that's absurd)</p> <p>Is this a high enough number to consider statistically significant (have demographic projections even been considered)?</p> <p>Checked their link and the numbers are based on mid 2020 numbers for GLA.</p>
Code	Name	Children born in Geography	All ages 0	2022	2021	2020										
E09000012	Hackney	London Borough	261,491	3,609	3,409	3,181										

		<p>I found ONS data that actually doesn't support this. Does anybody know ONS inside out ?</p> <p>I found a data set that shows that there are actually more kids in hackney now than before</p>
p.7	We have 500 surplus nursery places in schools,	<p>Issue with school nursery places</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - School close at 3:30, not all schools provide clubs (point raised in affordable childcare report) - Majority of holiday providers don't take 4 year olds (until the child is in reception place) - And will not take 3 year olds - Overall off school holidays and etc take up around 14 weeks of the year - Impossible to cover
p.10	<p>Map of childrens centres <input type="checkbox"/> map over poverty indicators</p> <p>https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/dvc1371/#/E09000012</p>	Haggerston = one of the highest deprivation areas in hackney bright red
p.14	<p>This process will follow the Council's procurement tender process advertising the opportunity, and inviting expressions of interest. Staff and service users would be kept informed of the outcome of the tender process. The chosen provider would be expected to deliver places with market fees.</p> <p>The staff consultation process would commence with a view to closing the centre by August 2025 to support transition of existing children to new settings at key transition points</p>	<p>What are parents supposed to do if they can't afford the fees ? 60% earning below average income, how is average defined ?</p> <p>What about staff retention during the period ?</p> <p>NO definitions of key transition points for children</p>
p.16	<p>Data for the chart</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - comment on how occupancy was calculated - including ann taylor at 102% 	<p>Children's centres around Sebright are full with very long waiting list. See email as of 6 may 2022 for mapledene application</p> <p>(how far is acceptable commuting time for parents ?)</p> <p>Is there an access point to make here (aka what's the maximum commute they think is acceptable?)</p>

	<p> Pamela Phipps <pamela.phipps@hackney.gov.uk> to me ▾</p> <p>Hi Yuliya</p> <p>I am well thank you, hope you are well too. We have put Chiara on our waiting list. There is about a year to 18 month waiting list presently. We will be in touch as soon as a place becomes available</p> <p>Kind regards Pam</p> <p>Pamela Phipps (a.k.a Dushi) Centre Manager Mapledene Children's Centre 54 Mapledene Road London E8 3LE 02072498139/07810586914</p> <p>Reducing the childcare provision will reduce surplus places and support the remaining children's centres to optimise occupancy.</p>	
<p>p.1 8</p>	<p>Sebright is located on the border with Tower Hamlets and attracts out of borough families. It is in close proximity to Mapledene Children's Centre which is at full capacity in comparison.</p>	<p>Where are 50 sebright kids expected to go if Mapledene is in full capacity? Is sebright being punished because it's located in Haggerston and artificial borders drawn between boroughs ?</p>
<p>p.1 9</p>	<p>In addition to the proposed restructuring, the Council will consider opportunities to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduce the use of agency staff, therefore providing better value for money and improving the consistency of care - Facilitate more efficient and effective building maintenance, by streamlining costs - Improve budget management and governance with improved systems. - Target the use of Council childcare subsidy to support low income, disadvantaged and vulnerable children to access provision at children's centres. 	<p>Reducing agency staff – ask Sebright on usage of agency staff</p> <p>There is a shortage of early childcare professionals (see bbc article).</p> <p>https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-68128705</p> <p>No specific examples of 3 other bullet points provided -aka no plans no how</p>

CE S293 Childrens Centres Childcare Consultation

<p>p.1</p>	<p>Hubs</p>	<p>What are they/ where are they ?babies 1001 days were taken care of by children's centres why hubs ?</p>
<p>p.1</p>	<p>SEND provision</p>	<p>CCs and SEND offer (no kids and etc)</p>
<p>p.1</p>	<p>As Mayor and as an administration, we know how important it is to give children the best start in life irrespective of their starting point. We take great pride in building an inclusive culture. If we can get it right in Early Years, with access to high quality early childhood education, our children</p>	<p>FOI impact report</p> <p>Hackney is the 2nd highest performing LA in the country. If it doesn't have provision for children, then our school</p>

	will grow in self-esteem, creativity, curiosity growing up in the borough.	numbers will drop further and damage the provision for our children and families. I don't understand the decision making and think a new government will reverse all this anyway!
p.2	£57 budget deficit	What are other cuts ? or how is the council planning on actually closing this deficit. No mention made of council reserves. This is a time to use those to safeguard community assets
p.2	The contract was awarded through the CCS Management Consultancy Framework (MCF 3), RM6187 as a Direct Award, assessed as low risk by Procurement.	Direct award means the contract didn't go to tender, aka was awarded without competition
p.3 2.4	An outcome of the review was to identify how the Early Years service could deliver childcare differently to become more financially sustainable in the future, whilst also delivering £1.1m remodelling in 2024/25, £1m 2025/26 and further £1.9m MTFP savings by 2026/27, totalling £4m over 3 years.	Key question here is we are aiming to practically double the cost savings by year 3. Where is the money going to come from ? What are the next casualties Sebright's subsidy has remained flat for 13 years at they had a £63k surplus in 22/23. Given rising costs this is akin to profit. Unless this refers to without subsidy in which case the report needs to be clearer.
p.3 6	The review confirmed that the current model of provision is financially unsustainable, and identified three levers to improve sustainability.	The only lever the council has chosen is closure. Why did the council chose not to try the other report suggestions.
p.4 6.1	Hackney Council's budget planning analysis benchmarked high areas of spend and budget pressures. It highlighted that in 2021/22 Hackney spent on average £666.00 per child aged 0-4 years, which is the 2nd highest in	Notes £666 x 18440 children (0-4) = £12.3 million Is it the figures for all children or just the ones in hackney centres ? How is this calculated ? How is this compared to kids in comets, or school nurseries ?
p.4 6.3	Ey saying that even if we all paid 100% the children's centres still not sustainable	So what alternative provision is still not feasible !
p.5 6.5	The centres exceeding average occupancy are popular with local families, may have a unique selling point such as Forest School, or appeal to a particular section of the population. These centres also have a clear approach to managing part time places where families can attend 2 or 3 days per week avoiding odd days that are difficult to fill.	If this is the only difference, why not apply this model to all children's centres? Is this the reason why people actually choose these children's centres, or is it the reason why these children's centres have a higher % of higher income families,
p.5	Graph with occupancy	FOI underlying data

<p>p.6, 6.8</p>	<p>Graph with income levels, what is the last band – can't read data</p> <p>Woodberry Down are on a child in need plan.</p> <p>Average occupancy based on banding</p> <p>Legend:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Band 1 Band 2 Band 3 Band 4 Band 5 GIN Free 38 hours (3-4) 	<p>DATA is incomplete, FOI underlying data</p> <p>The council needs to work out what they want from these centres! Is it that they are 'profitable' or it that they serve the community and include a range of earners? What have the centres been told about how to manage the number of bands 1-5 families? In the cases of eg Mapledene and Ann Tayler, with high numbers of Band 5 parents - is this suggesting that this is what the council want? Or is it solely occupancy? Lubavitch requires full time attendance and therefore has 100% occupancy and has therefore escaped closure - but is this restriction best serving the community? It's also worth noting that this centre exclusively serves the Charedi community.</p>
<p>p. 66. 9</p>	<p>The Council is also required to ensure that there is sufficient childcare to enable parents to take up or remain in work, or to undertake education or training to assist them in obtaining work. The Council does not have a duty to provide this provision themselves, but to support access and quality across the sector, and broker places between parents, carers and settings.</p>	<p>GUARDIAN ARTICLE ON Private equity https://www.theguardian.com/money/2023/aug/04/childcare-sector-england-not-playground-private-equity-experts-say</p>
<p>p.6, 6.1 0</p>	<p>The last childcare sufficiency assessment was completed in June 2022 and showed, along with the snapshot review in 2023, that there are sufficient childcare places. The childcare sufficiency assessment will be refreshed this</p>	<p>Sufficiency is not affordability or access (see AR p.</p>
<p>p.6, 6.1 0</p>	<p>GLA report is based on 2019 data ! This is old and I think contradicts the trends from ONS Data asset</p>	<p>Can we contact Ons to see how the two data sets work together, is there an update to gla data</p> <p>Who runs GLA data</p>
<p>p.6. 11</p>	<p>Source of data</p>	<p>Why can't I get the same population data form GLA tool ? GLA Population Projections (london.gov.uk)</p>
<p>p.7</p>	<p>Schools are well placed to create new childcare places in the future should they be needed, with some schools such as Holy Trinity and Gainsborough already providing childcare for babies.</p>	<p>Schools are only open during term time and have shorter hours - and have no holiday places for babies! This is not replacing like with like.</p>


		Baby room fees in holy trinity are £450 per week. This is not affordable https://holytrinity.hackney.sch.uk/preschool/fees-and-funding/
p. 7 6.1 3	support transition from early years to primary, the Department of Education launched a national wraparound childcare programme for primary schools to extend childcare support to working parents from September 2024, with access to £289m start-up funding over 2 academic years.	Why not use this funding for children's centres ?
p.7, 6.1 4	School based centres collectively overspent by circa £400k and the Early Years budget by circa £700k in 2022/23, totalling £1.07m. A further £666k overspend is currently predicted in this financial year. The cost of the nurseries represents 59% of the Council funded Early Years budget.	Where do these numbers come from. Schools based centres ? Is this just the children's centres? But what is the early years budget?
p.7, 6.1 4	Cabinet may wish to close all children's centre Nurseries School based centres collectively overspent by circa £400k and the Early Years budget by circa £700k in 2022/23, totalling £1.07m. A further £666k overspend is currently predicted in this financial year. The cost of the nurseries represents 59% of the Council funded Early Years budget. Whilst this is not proposed, Cabinet may wish to close all children's centre nurseries and repurpose some of the budget to support vulnerable and disadvantaged children, supporting the private, community and independent sector to meet demand.	Casually dropping in that the council might choose to close all the children's centres with no information as to what this will achieve or the impacts is outrageous.
p. 7 6.1 5	They are saying they wont' increase the fees because higher income families leave.	So what would happen if they put all these into private hands?
p. 7 6.1 7	SEND	Not sure what to make out of it
p.8	section of this report. E&Y, as part of the independent review of children's centres, estimated income from the expanded funded early years entitlement. The modelling estimated that the Council could receive an extra £1.6m for 2 year olds in April 2024, and a further £2m in September 2024 for children from 9 months old. Whilst a generous hourly rate has been confirmed for 2024, a service reset is still required as set out in E&Y's review, and is dependent on a number of factors. Our current hourly rate allocation is lower than neighbouring boroughs, and does not at present cover the full cost of running the service. The estimated income is dependent on centres being fully occupied, which has not been achievable for most centres in recent years. Any additional income will need to take account of the current budget deficit. In addition, there are wider factors impacting sustainability - national shortage of nursery staff, escalating utility, food and service costs, and business rates noted in the commission into affordable childcare report.	Why would this not be used to plug the deficit?
P.1 0	The development of 4 Children and Family Hubs and the Start for Life programme funded by the Department for Education (DfE). Hackney will receive £3.9m over 3 years commencing 2022/23. This funding is primarily to support children under 3 years, it cannot be used for early education and care, and is dependent on successful implementation of the delivery plan. 4 children's centres have been designated as Children and Family Hubs - Ann Tayler, Woodberry Down, Linden, and Daubeney.	
P. 10	Vulnerable and disadvantaged families, as well as speakers of other languages, may need additional support to engage with the consultation or	How do the suggest that The Equality Impact Assessment will be used to influence decisions?

6.3 0	be engaged via non-traditional means. Support will therefore be provided by the Children’s Centres and Family Hubs. The Equality Impact Assessment will be finalised following the public consultation, and prior to any decision on the implementation of the proposed changes, to ensure that the Council remains compliant to its duties under the Equality Act 2010 in relation to those with protected characteristics. This is a reflection of the fact that Equality Impact Assessments are an iterative process.	
P.1 0 6.3 1	Consideration has been given to the children, families and staff from diverse backgrounds with protected characteristics affected by the proposals. A significant number of children accessing children’s centres are of Black and Global Majority heritage, and, or have been assessed as being, in need of early help. The proposals are intended to prioritise support to marginalised and vulnerable children and families with the creation of SEND provision, child in need places, and enable lower income families to continue to access early education in order to reduce inequalities in child development, and school readiness.	HOW IS THIS DONE ?
P.1 3	The Council must have due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty S149 (1) Equality Act 2010 (EqA 2010) imposes the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) on the Council.	Has this been done? Can’t see

Commission on affordable childcare

P.4	the cost of childcare rose above inflation and staff turnover remained above 30% Currently, Hackney remains one of the 60% of councils which say they have sufficient places to meet their child population. However, it is worth noting that sufficiency does not include affordability or quality, nor does it focus on future provision	Key point that sufficiency doesn’t mean affordability or quality
p.5	We also know that childcare providers have been operating under enormous pressure in recent years, putting some provision at risk of closure, and that a lack of access to affordable childcare can for some parents and carers be a driver into disadvantage and poverty.	Quote from Mayor (Need more research on quality of public vs private childcare
p.5	Author: June O’Sullivan OBE,	Runs LEYF charity (looked up charity accounts, 2023 accounts in deficit, so are 2021)
p.9	A recent Early Years Alliance survey (2022) found that 25% of private nurseries in the UK live ‘hand to mouth’ and Ofsted (2022) confirmed a decline in the numbers of settings especially in areas of disadvantage.	
p.9	A 2021 Freedom of Information request by the Early Years Alliance found that the Department for Education (DfE) acknowledged that hourly funding for childcare places would need to be increased by at least one-third in order to meet the costs of provision (Early Years Alliance 2022). The result is that	

	parents continue to make up the shortfall and childcare has become very expensive.	
	Children under 2 cannot access any support so parents have to pay the full costs which are highest in London. This has resulted in the UK being the third most expensive country for childcare, according to the most recent OECD figures. Over the past year childcare costs have risen by nearly 6 percent, taking the average price of a full-time nursery place for a child aged under two to £14,836 per year. Fees reach up to two thirds of the median wage and one in four parents say the cost of their childcare is now more than 75% of their take-home pay.	
P10	Parents also pushed for flexibility to enable them to adjust their work patterns as the 30 hours does not help everyone to meet their family requirements and allow for flexibility or working from home (Chen and Bradbury, 2020).	
p.10	The current situation facing nurseries also affects childminders. According to the National Day Nurseries Association (2023) there was a 50% increase in nursery closures and a significant drop in childminding numbers. This is because the combination of 20% higher costs, inflation, recruitment crisis and low funding proved to be too much for providers.	
P10	The research showed that 68% of providers were experiencing staffing issues in the past year and of those settings which had staff leave, 65% said that “better pay” was a reason. Sadly, closures are most likely to take place in areas of deprivation, for example in 2022-23, 37% of the nursery closures were in the 30% most deprived areas of England. Councils warned of a continual decline in nurseries. Ofsted data also revealed a net loss of 302 nurseries and preschools between August 2021 and August 2022.	
P10	Consequently, the Council will require more sophisticated market managers and commissioners with a clearer understanding	WHAT DOES THIS MEAN ?
p.11	Hackney may consider there are sufficient places at the moment but they would do well to pay attention to the recent research from the LGA (2022) which highlighted that nine out of ten Councils feared closure of settings would put Government childcare expansion plans at risk and were worried about whether the extra funding for Councils announced in July to deliver the rollout of 15 hours of funded childcare to all 2 year olds from April 2024 and 30 hours of for all children aged nine months and above from 2025 would be enough to prevent the situation worsening.	The council’s actions are at odds with government policy
p.14	These 11 Children Centres are based across the borough and provide places for 605 children.	CLOSING OUR 3 RESULTS IN 25% IN AFFORDABLE CHILDCARE PLACES
p.15	Occupancy data	WHERE DID THIS INFO COME FROM

p.16	In addition, the plan is to work with partners to broaden the role of the 6 multi-agency Children's Centres into children and family hubs, with particular attention to:	But there are only 4 hubs
p.18	Graph impossible to read	
p.23	<p>The median cost of childcare by local authority is published by the Department of Education and comes from the Early Years survey of parents. The lowest cost of childcare amounts to 25% of a person's median income. For the purpose of this Commission we have defined "affordable" as 25% of a person's salary. However, it is worth noting that this may still be unachievable for single and low income parents.</p> 	
p.29	Private childcare providers claim they have a hard time competing with council nurseries due to subsidies	Case for conflict of interest ? esp that June the baroness authored the report and her relationship to Leyf
p.29	Staff turnover of 40% across sector	The children's centres have far lower staff turnover. Low staff turnover is linked to improved speech and language in children https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/CECIL-Report-Summary.pdf - page 11
p.30	The Children Centre Managers were particularly concerned because Hackney Council policy is that all staff in Children's Centre must be Level 3 qualified staff. This is the group that is particularly hard to recruit. The Ofsted ratio is for 55% of the staff to be Level 3 and above and that ratio of qualified to unqualified staff is part of the recent DfE consultation which has just released its findings and rejected the proposed change to decrease the proportion of qualified to unqualified staff.	As per https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/inequality-in-early-years-education The recommendation is that children benefit from Level 3 qualified staff
p.30	The Children Centre Managers were unhappy that they must recruit agency staff from delegated Hackney HR traded services which was costly and compounded the staffing cost limitations placed on them. The Matrix HR system was not flexible and over-subscribed as all Children's Centres in Hackney use the same temporary staff pool. Staff did not appear to have flexibility in their contracts either and this limited the ability to meet the versatility parents needed.	This is in contradiction to p.19 of the consultation paper So they force CC's to use the costly system that Hackney themselves manage. Is question of profitability a question of broken procurement ?
p.31	Children Centre Managers had an uneven grasp of how to manage the business of childcare but were also somewhat hamstrung by Council rules about procurement. This was also an issue for the increasing burden of maintenance costs of their buildings. For example the cost of the annual statutory Portable Appliance Testing and boiler checks are paid by the settings in Hackney buildings.	Whose agenda is this ? and are we looking at council forcing CC's to use their contracts ((how are these contracts priced? Procurement issues ?) What steps have been taken to support the centres?

p.32	Providers were uncomfortable not providing a hot meal for children, many of whom were coming to nurseries from families living in poverty. Increased obesity levels in Hackney, especially among children from disadvantaged families reflect the growing issue across the UK and worldwide. This was also an issue discussed by Children Centre Managers some of whom already employed a chef and had a suitable kitchen	HEALTH IMPACT assessment. So private nurseries don't have sufficient cooking facilities potentially Meals are also charged for in other settings
p.32	The findings from the recent LEYF Chef report was helpful in identifying why training the chefs improved staff, parents and children knowledge about food choices and healthy eating and guided their decisions on what children need, better food cost efficiency and decreasing	Whose agenda is it ?
p.32	Lack of wrap around care for holidays	
p.34	Lack of funding for send	
p.35	Housing commission, repurposing buildings These challenges led to an interesting conversation about repurposing buildings. For example, using shops, flexible workspaces and more effective use of co-located spaces to accommodate community groups. We also examined how we could be more innovative and co-locate nurseries with elderly care homes and repurpose High St buildings with roof gardens as well as ensuring multiple use buildings become part of some housing plans	Health and safety issues ? Also does this imply that council continues ownership of buildings
p.39	500 spare nursery places in school nurseries (cross reference)	
p.41	However, there appears to be a disconnect between what the Council says it is doing and the lived experience of many of the parents and providers. There was a strong sense that despite a willingness to commit to change, parents and providers felt that the change appeared to be what the Council wanted, not the change recommended by parents and providers. That said, there was a recognition that the Council must operate within external policy and budget constraints that hamper their best of intentions.	This is to the point that the council doesn't seem to want to engage to key parties

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Analysis 4

Children's Centres Childcare Consultation – notes

COMMITMENTS / CLAIMS MADE

“We have broadened 4 children's centres into Children and Family Hubs to bring together services to improve access, connections between families, professionals and providers, and put relationships at the heart of support to families.”

- “Family hubs” are a recent central Government initiative, targeted to pregnant people, 0-19 yr olds, or up to 25 year olds with SEND, and parent or carers of a 0 to 19 yr olds, or up to 25 with SEND.[1]
- They appear to attempt to lever a number of pre-existing services (“housing and debt advice, youth services and other services run by charities” into single venues, where perhaps these were once in dedicated spaces). [2]
- Where they take over existing children's and Sure Start centres this “broadening” might rather be described as a dilution of these spaces, away from their previous focus on Early Years support for 0-5 year olds.

• “The Start for Life programme funded by the Department for Education (DfE)” will see “Hackney receive £3.9m over 3 years commencing 2022/23.”

• Hackney is one of 75 LAs selected as eligible by the Government.[3]

32. “This funding is primarily to support children under 3 years, it cannot be used for early education and care” “This funding however cannot be used for childcare which is funded via the DSG.”

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- This true? Is entitlement funding through the DSG then?

• Funding is “dependent on successful implementation of the delivery plan.”

• 4 children's centres have been designated as Children and Family Hubs - Ann Tayler, Woodberry Down, Linden, and Daubeney.

“Universal services for babies in the first 1001 days will remain a focus of the hubs.”

- “1001 days” may refer to the 1001 Movement – which focuses on conception to age 2.
 - The language used which can suggest a focus on the rights of the child from conception – rather than pregnant women – is concerning in the current context of abortion rights under threat.

- The Government published a policy paper on “the critical 1001 days” in March 2021, with plans to champion Family Hubs and “seamless support for families: a coherent joined-up Start for Life offer” and “family hubs as a place for families to access Start for Life services”
 - Notably this is identified as a stage where social support services provided by the council, and national - NHS services, particularly need to intersect.
 - The language used was interesting – suggesting a “for us by us” approach, and universal provision, but perhaps disguising simply more privatisation
 - “We intend to support local partners across the country to establish Parent and Carer Panels that join up with parents, carers, professionals and civil society to co-create brilliant Start for Life Universal and Universal+ offers for their local communities that reflect the lived experience of the baby.”
 - How can something be “Universal plus”!??

SEND

Commitment to supporting children with SEND “through the development of early years Additional Resource Provision (ARP) in the north and south of the borough [Comet Nursery School and Children’s Centre in the south and Hillside Children’s Centre] to support children to thrive.”

- The intention is to align the ARP with best SEND practice in accordance with the requirements of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), and replace subsidised childcare places with term time funded 15 and 30 hours Early Years Entitlement places for 2, 3 and 4 year olds with additional needs, alongside mainstream children.”
 - Can't follow this at all
 - What do SEND parent campaigns in Hackney think of the proposals?

INCLUSION

“A significant number of children accessing children’s centres are of Black and Global Majority heritage, and, or have been assessed as being, in need of early help.”

- Find specific statistics for the childrens centres planned for closure?

The proposals are intended to **prioritise support to marginalised and vulnerable children and families** with the creation of SEND provision, child in need places, **and enable lower income families to continue to access early education”!!**

Commissioned reports

Independent review of our children’s centres,

“The contract was awarded through the CCS Management Consultancy Framework (MCF 3), RM6187 as a Direct Award, assessed as low risk by Procurement. The use of the Management Consultancy Framework MF3 via the Crown Commercial Services supported compliance with the Public Procurement Rules and the Council Standing Orders requirements. By using the CCS marketplace, we were able to quantify and qualify the best preferred supplier and provide detailed best value for money offers. “

Independent Commission into Affordable Childcare, which concluded in November 2023.

“have identified opportunities to sustain provision”[in the private sector]

- Why have these not been modelled as alternative ways of running the children’s centres/ council owned provision?

“sophisticated market managers and commissioners with a clearer understanding and ability to navigate the demand and supply given up to 80% of places will be implicated in the expansion plan.”

The Commission notes:

“according to the LGA (2023) some councils have been worried by the growth of big chains in their areas and their limited ability to manage and control them from either undercutting local, well-established provision or growing at an unsustainable rate.”

“Hackney Council policy is that all staff in Children’s Centre must be Level 3 qualified staff. This is the group that is particularly hard to recruit... The Ofsted ratio is for 55% of the staff to be Level 3 and above...”

Then recommends “Early Years Service reviews the policy that all Children Centre staff must be Level 3 qualified staff, a group that is particularly hard to recruit and who are not always of the highest calibre.”

-Not clear on what basis that higher qualified are being argued to be lower calibre, and I do not agree with deregulation! However it is not clear why the proposals are not considering this (considering privatisation will make this inevitable anyway), and also why they are not considering some of the proposals re the spending on agency staff at the children’s centres used atm? [need to read in more detail]

RATIONALE

Make money

“maximise opportunities to increase occupancy to maintain viability”

“needs to be financially sustainable, address inefficiency, and help to *contribute* [my italics] to the Council’s overall financial position”

- Does the closure plan make money by renting out the spaces or are those planned to be closed currently rented from other providers (at high cost)?

Places not needed/ Surplus provision

“The estimated income is dependent on centres being fully occupied, which has not been achievable for most centres in recent years.”

6.10: The Childcare Sufficiency Duty Report suggests surplus places
<https://www.hackneyservicesforschools.co.uk/extranet-document/hackney-childcare-sufficiency-duty-report-2022>

To read - is this correct? What cost and quality are these places?

Loss making?

“Our current hourly rate allocation is lower than neighbouring boroughs, and does not at present cover the full cost of running the service.”

Existing debt?

“Any additional income will need to take account of the current budget deficit.”

Why have the nurseries been running at a loss previously, and what reasoning has changed for no longer allowing them to continue to cost something – considering the subsidised provision they provide.

Nursery staff shortage

“In addition, there are wider factors impacting sustainability - national shortage of nursery staff”

- The shortage of staff nationally in order to fulfil the demand is due to poor pay and conditions. The Affordable childcare report commissioned by Hackney itself raises “65% said that “better pay” was a reason” for staff leaving settings.[4]
- A new recruitment campaign, launched this week by Gov seems unlikely to help this, unless it also contains national pay scales?!
- The council nurseries have better terms and conditions and pay – this is one of the reasons they cost more to run but also one of the reasons that this shortage is not a reasonable concern to cite!

Rising costs

“...escalating utility, food and service costs, and business rates noted in the commission into affordable childcare report.”

These were mentioned, however the report had proposals to address the business rates issue.

Plan to expand places in schools in future

“Schools are well placed to create new childcare places in the future should they be needed, with some schools such as Holy Trinity and Gainsborough already providing childcare for babies.”

- There have been reports Labour is “considering” creating thousands of nursery places inside existing primary schools in England[5]
- Clear policy plans have not been announced, a review commissioned from former Ofsted head Sir David Bell is not published, he talks vaguely about reform.

“To support transition from early years to primary, the Department of Education launched a national wraparound childcare programme for primary schools to extend childcare support to working parents from September 2024, with access to £289m start-up funding over 2 academic years. “

- This is intentionally misleading?
- This funding is for providing wrap around clubs before and after school.[6] As such it only covers Early Years in that it covers primary school children who are in reception and still in the Early Years (4-5yrs) stage.
- Early years is part of primary provision at present – the Early Years Foundation statutory Framework is for up to age 5 and so also taught in Reception .
- It doesn't represent funding to support expanding nursery or pre-school (3-4 year old provision!

“Alternative options” considered (6.15 to 6.17)

- **Close them all**“Cabinet may wish to close all children’s centre nurseries and repurpose some of the budget to support vulnerable and disadvantaged children, supporting the private, community and independent sector to meet demand.
- **Fee increase** – “significantly increase fees to recover a greater portion of expenditure if implemented, may discourage families from accessing the children’s centre provision, and therefore have a negative impact on occupancy. The provision may also become affordable to higher income families at the exclusion of lower income families.”

- “We have seen a reduction in higher income families since introducing the new fee bands and post Covid. For this reason this option is not being acted on as suggested.”

– Is this true and for what other reasons could this be?

- Who were the stakeholders for the modelling they describe? Check the modelling at “the executive summary of the E&Y Report: Appendix 1, attached to the exempt appendices section of this report.”

1. Hillside Children’s Centre:

- We propose to change Hillside Children’s Centre into an early years Additional Resource Provision (ARP), a specialist nursery delivering term-time early education and care for children aged 2 to 5 years with special educational needs or a disability (SEND).

Oldhill Children’s Centre:

- ○ We propose to change Oldhill Children’s Centre to provide nursery places for children 6 months to 3 years old, **phasing out places for 4 year olds.**
- What does this mean – surely it’s 3-4 year olds they would be cutting (as 4-5 is Reception)

Fernbank Children’s Centre:

- ○ We propose to invite alternative providers to take over the management of Fernbank Children’s Centre. If a suitable alternative provider cannot be sourced by Autumn 2024, we propose to close Fernbank Children’s Centre by August 2025.

Sebright Children’s Centre:

- ○ We propose to invite alternative providers to take over the management of Sebright Children’s Centre. If a suitable alternative provider cannot be sourced by Autumn 2024, we propose to close Sebright Children’s Centre by August 2025.

[1] <https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2024/01/10/family-hubs-everything-you-need-to-know/>

[2] <https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2024/01/10/family-hubs-everything-you-need-to-know/>

[3]

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/infants-children-and-families-to-benefit-from-boost-in-support>

[4] <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1wn3zCbceBMHT2kKo5hhKlv3kCWDYClpC/view>

[5]

<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2023/dec/28/labour-plans-thousands-nursery-places-english-primary-schools>

[6]

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/653a3aa280884d0013f71b8e/National_wraparound_childcare_programme_handbook_a_guide_for_local_authorities.pdf

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PARENTS & CARERS' STATEMENTS - 9TH FEBRUARY 2024

X and X (parents with a child at Fernbank):

Our first child began at Fernbank when she was six months old. I run a Hackney based, female-founded business on Hackney Road. Like most independent business owners, (especially women) the thought of paying for extortionate childcare costs and not being able to be at home with my child was a daunting life decision to make... until we met the wonderful staff and carers at Fernbank Children's centre. It's thanks to them and their second-to-none care of our daughter I was able to grow my business and my partner (also an independent business owner in Hackney) could feel safe in the knowledge our child would have an excellent start to her first years.

We lived in Dalston but walked the three mile round trip (six miles in total daily) to Fernbank: being the only centre with spaces and affordable childcare we could find and on the recommendations of other local parents. A month ago we moved, solely to be closer to Fernbank, and for our second child to start there in the coming months as both our business expanded.

The news of potential closure has shattered us. Without Fernbank and its incredible staff, I'm not sure how we would have raised/ will raise two small children and two businesses, it doesn't bear thinking about. We are indebted to Fernbank, its potential closure (and severe lack of alternatives nearby) being horrifically detrimental to our local businesses and lives.

X (parent with a child at Fernbank):

Fernbank Children's Centre is amazing for our family. The care and education my son receives there is vital to us and so enriching for my son. The staff are warm and caring, dedicated and experienced, and I never worried about leaving my son there when I returned to work, especially since I had time to get to know staff beforehand as we regularly attended stay and play sessions in Fernbank, as well as at other Children's Centres, while I was on maternity leave. The nursery has given him access to things I cannot provide at home such as garden space and time with his peers, plus he receives an amazing variety of food and exposure to other cultures and ideas. I see him coming home with new knowledge constantly, new songs, new understandings of things, good practices and wonderful friends.

My husband died last year leaving me to suddenly be the sole carer of our son. The staff at Fernbank have been so supportive during this unimaginable time, particularly his key worker, Paulette, and Laura from the management team. The role they have played has been invaluable, they even ensured we had access to their book library where they have books for children around death and loss specifically suitable for his young age. I was so fortunate to be in the position of having my son in a nursery where the fees immediately were reduced to match my new unexpected change in household income, meaning I didn't have to consider changes to

my working hours or find a new childcare solution at a time when offering stability to my son is so important, as is my need to not reduce my household income further by changing my ability to work full time. The proposed closures bring an added stress of potentially more upheaval at an already difficult time, along with financial difficulties around childcare and employment as a single income household.

Aside from the impact on my family, I oppose the proposed closure for the impact it will have on all families, both now and in the future, who should have access to this wonderful Centre.

I also have concerns around staff redundancies. It seems incomprehensible to propose making committed, experienced staff redundant during a recruitment and retention crisis when the government is so desperate for Early Years workers that it is offering £1000 incentives for new childcare staff.

X (Parent of a child at Hillside):

I chose this nursery because it was the only one where we visited and she felt right at home. I was talking to the manager and the other children were actually going for a nap. My daughter almost fell asleep in her future career's arms, named Kombe. A lot of people call her mama Kombe because she has such maternal instincts that you can feel and see it straight away. Her key person was Zohre, who loved my child like a mom would, being proud of her achievements and cuddling her whenever she needed it (my daughter is more sensitive and needs more relatedness, more cuddles sometimes, she always gets them). Then she loves Amanda, who is young and cool, she dances and sings with them, challenges her to be independent. I just can't thank them enough.

We had an independent person reviewing her growth and abilities and she aced every task she put in front of her, every situation, she has developed in the best way possible, I am so happy we decided to have found this place (had to find it on google maps, not much info on other sites).

She transitioned to the big room without issues and her new person is Marcey and she got attached to her quite fast, she does sneak in other places to see her other favourite people. Gladys, Marva and Majlinda are very welcoming in the reception area, friendly and helpful, we always have little chats about my daughter, share impressions and pictures from our holidays. We even share or exchange toys by asking them to do that for us and they're always happy to do it. Yes, I do know all of their names because they became our family, they care about our little bundle of joy and make her day wonderful, always coming home with a smile on her face, a few times she wanted to stay there even longer. The staff themselves are a family and you can see it just by their interactions.

We know each other as parents as well and even formed a small group that meetup, go to the park, events together, share ideas, toys, clothes and resources, and have the most amazing playdates. We are a tight community that you wish to dismantle and bring not only sadness but

higher costs, forcing us to go private (if you can afford it, which we can't) right when you promised us more free hours..

We think the decision to make these changes was taken before exploring different solutions instead of the ones proposed. Have you tried to look into what other councils did? For instance, councils like Richmond upon Thames, Merton, Croydon, Sutton, and Kingston upon Thames signed a Memorandum of Understanding for cooperation and shared services. Sharing resources between themselves in order to not fire anyone and still have cost reductions? Merging different services doesn't mean you need less people, just cost reduction ideas like buying bulk.

The documents you provided are not inclusive, no description added to pictures, impossible for any disabled person to read them (even by using software designed for it), and images that are blurry so even the ones that do not have a disability are not able to see the data provided. Chat GPT maybe could have helped with some new proposal ideas but will never know, it cannot upload the PDF...

All of this made us feel sad and outraged and then to top it up, you tried to make Ora, Head of Centre at Fernbank, redundant before the consultations even began? What are we supposed to expect next? I can tell you what we expect: for the council to back us up in front of the government and either pull from its reserve, or find better solutions whilst collaborating and learning from others. I know for sure there is a Slack platform, used by different councils to collaborate, please use it..

X (Parent of child at Fernbank):

When our son was a few months old we began asking around for recommendations of local nurseries to send him to. Fernbank came highly recommended by several of our neighbours whose children have all been there in years gone by. They all mentioned the fantastic staff and amazing facilities including the wonderful outside space and forest school.

As soon as we stepped inside Fernbank for our first visit we instantly had a warm welcoming feeling. The staff were smiling, all the children were happy and busy in their activities. This was not always common when we were looking around other local places.

It's very important to us that our son is exposed to children from all kinds of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, and other places we'd visited were far less diverse, likely due to the high fees, making them inaccessible to many local families.

We are a working family, both parents work in the creative industry full time, one is self-employed, so we needed to find somewhere that we could afford, with an atmosphere that felt safe and comfortable, and where we believed our son would be amongst a true reflection of society, not a privileged minority.

Since starting our son's confidence and abilities have come on leaps and bounds, we never have any concerns and know he's in very safe hands, receiving lots of attention and care, not to mention an amazing menu of nutritious and varied meals every day.

He comes back home every evening with a spring in his step and we can see he's had a fun-filled day with his friends and the staff who clearly care deeply for all the children in their care.

My son and I were also very lucky to be able to go to the 'stay and play' at the Children's Centre before he started nursery full time, while I was on maternity leave. We're very grateful that this was possible, he was able to get used to the building and meet some of the staff, and it allowed me as a nervous first-time mother to feel comfortable and safe leaving him there in the nursery when the time came.

The thought of losing affordable places like Fernbank in Hackney is truly devastating. It is going to drive many families out of the area, and force some parents to stop working if there are no affordable places for their children to go during the day.

X (Parent of two children at Fernbank):

Our two year old daughter and five year old son (who has now moved on to school) owe a huge part of their wellbeing to the nurturing care and professionalism provided by the staff at Fernbank. I'll never forget our first visit there and seeing the centre manager welcome every single child and parent by name as they came through the door. Centres like Fernbank, Hillside and Sebright are beacons of light in our communities - where parents of all incomes can bring their children for guaranteed quality of care. What better use of council money than to help give every child the best possible start? Hackney will be worse off in every sense if these centres close and we implore the council to (once again) reconsider their proposals.

X (parent with a child at Fernbank):

There are limited affordable childcare options in the area. Fernbank offers this. Along with a great space and some wonderful staff members.

The closure of the children centres feeds the hands of the private sector.

It limits the choices and availability for parents and will massively impact struggling, working parents.

There are long waiting lists for the other local children centres so you are giving the parents no options impacting both them and the children.

X - Parent with a child at Fernbank:

Our daughter, who was 6 months old at the time, has two siblings who went to Fernbank. With most of the staff serving long tenures at the nursery, it was a familiar community worth moving close by for. We had previously visited many nurseries close to where we were before deciding

to move. Not one of the private nurseries we had visited compared to the commitment of care, community and diversity that Fernbank offers. As our daughter would spend a third of her time at nursery, the choice is not a light decision to make. The staff at Fernbank are incredibly hard working and skilled carers that we trust completely. Fernbank has exceeded our expectations as a nursery. Beyond the attention and care that the staff provide to all the children, there is a real sense of community. Because of the socio economic diversity at the nursery, I have met parents from diverse backgrounds and cultures. Much of the reason for why Fernbank is unique in its tiered pricing, and therefore less exclusive. What stands Fernbank out is that everyday our daughter learns about the importance of diversity and community, how to treat her peers with compassion and equality, and celebrate different cultures. No other nursery that we visited could come close in comparison providing anything similar for our daughter. Each member of staff that I have had the pleasure of engaging with, are exceptionally loyal, committed and keen to work on our daughter's development. Without their attuned care and attention to her growth, we as her parents would not have been able to be as productive as we are. Each day I drop my daughter with ease, knowing that she is in the best care we can get. This means we are able to work in the day tackling other issues at ease knowing we won't need to worry about our daughter. Fernbank's commitment to our daughter has been paramount to her development; her confidence, ability to socialise and handle herself amongst her peers, empathise, be independent and motivated to learn. Mostly run by women from all different backgrounds and ages, it would be an absolute devastating move to dismantle this community and the care that they have managed to successfully build and manage over such a long period of time.

X (parent with a child at Hillside):

We came across Hillside Children's Centre quite randomly as my wife attended an adult training course there and noticed that there was childcare provided in the centre. We had visited a few different private nurseries in and around Stoke Newington and Stamford Hill none of which were ideal in terms of waitlists, outdoor areas or opening hours. On our initial visit to the centre I was immediately taken with how open and friendly the staff were and with the warm environment the centre provided. He has been there 4 days a week since 11 months old and has now just turned 3 and entered the preschool room. It was definitely one of the best decisions we've ever made to sign our child up to Hillside. Kombe, Amanda, Zohre and all of his carers have been wonderful and given him so much love and encouragement, and patience when he speaks quietly, or when he had trouble learning to walk. The joy that Zohre and her colleagues showed when he started to walk without being held, it was truly like he was their own son. The Hillside team made a special effort to encourage us to get a referral to a physio for his walking, which we needed as first time parents. The team followed all of the physio's recommendations, and followed all of the exercises our child needed to do, and even welcomed the physio to observe him at Hillside.

As a boy with a good appetite he loves eating the varied and healthy food chef Andrew and the Hillside kitchen provides. My wife spoke to someone who works at Hillside occasionally who said that she loves working there in part because of the food! Judging by the menus at some

private centres and how pleased our son is with telling us with what he ate, we know that not all nursery children are so lucky!

A big part of who we are as a family is being open to children and adults from all different backgrounds and Hillside is really such a wonderful mix of the families that live in Hackney. From the moment we walk into Hillside in the morning and drop him off and get our welcome from Gladys or Marva or Majinda or whoever lets us in, we know that we're leaving him in the best possible care, and with people who will look after him and support his growth and learning. It would be such a horrendous shame to not keep the centre open, and deprive lower income earners and the whole community of the fantastic care provided by the staff at Hillside, which should serve as a beacon for other nurseries, never stopped.

X & X (parents with a child at Fernbank):

My husband and I have been out of work for 8 months, we are both freelancers and whereas I have been on statutory maternity leave until September, there has been close to no income in our household for a while. The fact that Fernbank allows us to pay the lower fee gives us a better chance to try to get back on our feet faster than if we'd wait until both of us found jobs paying enough to support the extortionate costs of private nurseries.

This is our first baby and Fernbank was the first nursery we visited out of a handful and the one we chose. We are vegan and use cloth nappies and our choices are well accommodated and respected, this is something that we'd have to fight for in private nurseries.

We love the diversity and plurality of backgrounds in the nursery and we know Fernbank is proud to have such a range of children attending. This is a great foundation to build tolerant and empathetic humans and should be highlighted as one of the most important things of our public nurseries.

Our daughter started a week before we were sent the heartbreaking email about the closures, and it took that long to be sure the staff is a great loving family that takes such good care of our baby. We cannot imagine having to look for another option, nor can we fathom the impact this is going to have in the staff's lives. It is truly unbelievable that such cuts are being done under a labour council.

X and X (parents with a child at Fernbank):

Fernbank Children's Centre has been an incredible nursery for our child to attend, and of huge value to our family. We chose to send our daughter because of the direct access to the garden from all rooms, something that is incredibly rare even in private settings, and we kept her there because of the impeccable care and loving warmth the staff provide the children.

The stand-out factor for us however when choosing our childcare setting, which IS STILL very important to us, is that our child gets to socialise with children who come from different backgrounds, both culturally and economically - especially in her early years when their brains are developing so much. This environment is something that we believe would have been different if we had sent her to a nursery where fees are fixed.

Fernbank embodies what we strongly believe affordable childcare brings to a community, raising a group of children who are naturally accepting and without fear of people who are different to them. Weaving into the fabric of their understanding that we are all unique and different, and come from different circumstances, but that we can still live and love alongside each other.

We cannot thank Fernbank enough for providing this environment, celebrating children from all backgrounds and marking holidays from all faiths in equal standing. As a mixed race and multi-faith couple it has given us an enormous sense of belonging, so I can only imagine the level of acceptance our child must also feel.

In an increasingly polarising society we cannot see a more important mission as affordable nurseries like Fernbank especially in a community such as Hackney. The non-prioritisation of affordable childcare is short-sighted for the future citizens that are being raised here and therefore, for this reason – and so many more - we strongly oppose the plans for closure of any affordable childcare settings.

X & X (parents with a child at Hillside):

Our son started at Hillside when he was nine months old and has flourished during the year he has spent there. Unlike many of the privately-run nurseries we visited, Hillside emanated a sense of warmth, stability, and professionalism. Instead of being greeted by temporary agency staff, we met staff who have been there long enough to know not just the names of all the children, but also those of their parents and older siblings who had previously attended the centre. The staff in the baby room (Zohre, Christine, Solange, Elizabeth and others) demonstrate, on a daily basis, that they are not just invested in our son's safety, but also in his happiness and emotional and physical development; they encouraged him to take his first steps, eat with a fork, and babble his first words. It is also amazing to witness him learn about himself and the world around him among such a diverse group of children. Most importantly, Hillside's continued opening as a children's centre for ages 0-5 is crucial to ensuring there are affordable childcare options in this area of Hackney. The fees in privately-run nurseries were often so extortionate that it would make no financial sense for both of us to return to work. Childcare costs contribute significantly to women not returning to paid employment after becoming mothers, which in turn fuels the gender pay gap and maintains a glass ceiling for women in the workplace. As such, adequate and affordable childcare is an absolute necessity in a borough that strives for equality, diversity & inclusion.

X & X (parents with a child at Hillside):

Our son attended Hillside for 2 years from the age of three until he started school last year. He is still friends with a number of the children he met there. Hillside is an incredible nursery, with dedicated, skilled staff, many of whom have worked there for years. Our son loved every minute of his time and always came home happy and nourished. His key person, Joycelyn, was just wonderful and helped our son develop and grow throughout his time at the nursery. We were part of the previous campaign to keep the nursery open and can't tell you how disappointed and angry we are that this is now happening again. Despite what has been put forward by the Council, there is a genuine lack of affordable childcare in this area of Hackney. We would have really struggled to find any kind of affordable high-quality childcare without Hillside as an option. Hillside welcomes children and families from all backgrounds and income brackets, creating an amazing environment that is both inclusive and dynamic. We strongly urge the council not to close this vital community resource and to invest in the future of its children and families.

X and X (parents of a child at Fernbank):

My daughter is our first child and I was very careful and did a lot of research when choosing her nursery. Before discovering Fernbank, I went to see 7 nurseries but struggled finding a place that I felt great about. Before starting nursery school there, I took my daughter to their stay and play sessions as they offered the most interesting sessions from music class to muddy play sessions, so when I discovered that there was a nursery connected to the children's centre, I knew immediately, it was going to be a good place. Moreover, someone I met through the stay and play session told me that their daughter goes to Fernbank and they really love what they do. My daughter started Fernbank when she was 8 months old and I've always appreciated how great the nursery is. All the staff are so passionate and experienced, my daughter loves their big garden and with their well thought out curriculum, she has developed so much and made lovely friends. There is a very good diversity in the school and they celebrate everyone's culture, something we dearly cherish and know we may not get such a diverse mix of cultures in a private nursery. Losing such a life affirming place like this creates such disbelief about what Hackney council looks for in the future for communities. It creates worry and undue anxiety for both young parents and people who want to be parents in the near future. We want Fernbank to stay indefinitely as a core pillar of our community so it can nurture and care for our kids.

X and X (parents of child at Fernbank):

When I had my daughter I found myself really understanding what my mum used to say to me, 'We just want the best for you'. This really echoed in my mind when we started to look for a nursery place for her.

I found out about Fernbank through a friend, who's daughter attends the centre. I remember my first visit, I walked in and had an immediate sense of calm and warmth. I just knew that the nursery would offer my daughter the best care. Fernbank has been a brilliant place where I have

seen our child thrive. I have complete faith and trust in the staff that look after her. Ola has been there for ten years and I can tell how much she is committed to the children's development. Knowing that our child is in such kind hands has made it easier for me to return to work. It's not easy juggling work and kids, but knowing that your child is being well looked after makes the emotional adjustment a lot easier. Without Fernbank I am not sure where our child would be, probably a private nursery that we would only just about afford for a year until our mortgage rate increases. Closing special centres like Fernbank are just another example of unnecessary cuts that kill services at the heart of the community. Ultimately, Fernbank is irreplaceable, my heart sinks every time I even think of the prospect of it not being there.

X and X (parents with child at Fernbank):

When we started searching for nurseries we hadn't realised what a huge challenge it would be. We visited around 7 in the area, and even started our child at one, a private space that we were deeply disappointed in from the start. After removing our child from there, we came across Fernbank – and what an incredible difference we found there. From the moment we stepped through the door for our show round we knew it was the right place for our child – warm, friendly, accepting, fun and professional. Our child started at Fernbank at the age of one, and at every stage she has been so happy to go there, and we have felt informed and supported each step of the way. The team there work tirelessly to ensure that every child feels a sense of safety and belonging, and the personal nature of the interactions with staff across the board make it such a special place.

Fernbank is a place that welcomes and embraces children and parents from across Hackney's diverse community, and that is something that should be championed and developed. The idea that Hackney council would consider closing such a space is heartbreaking and makes us wonder what they expect so many parents to do in terms of childcare – as there simply won't be enough places for the children to go. We can't imagine our child's early years without Fernbank and all of the wonderful staff, children and parents who make up the community there, and we can only hope that the centre can remain open and continue to serve the people who love it so dearly.

X and X (2 children previously at Fernbank):

When we decided to have children we were still fairly young and hadn't thought ahead about the finer details of childcare costs. As two lower income earners with no family support or network in the area, we felt so daunted once we started looking into the local nurseries.

A friend of a friend recommended Fernbank as her child was there. I saw a few nurseries, and whilst some of these had more modern buildings and equipment, the heartfelt approach we got from Fernbank and its staff meant we immediately knew that was where we wanted our child to go. When we had a second child five years later, there was no question or discussion of where she would go. Knowing the same loyal staff would be looking after her was so reassuring. Families with multiple kids return time after time, and often outside of the borough, because of the Fernbank team and the care they offer.

People need affordable childcare more than ever. Affordable does not mean our children receive a lesser service. We still recommend the nursery and have a few friends with children there at present. The staff are so much more than nursery teachers, from the office team to the chefs - they go above and beyond.

I'll never forget their dedication and perseverance in the face of Covid and 2022's threatened closure. We showed up for them then, and we'll keep showing up for them when they need us, as they do for our kids.

X (parent of children who previously attended Fernbank):

When I found out I was pregnant with twins I soon knew childcare costs would be prohibitive and would even potentially stop me returning to work, so early on in maternity leave I scouted out Fernbank Nursery and got my boys on the waiting list. I delayed returning to work to secure my place as I could only afford to send my children there. Once they were in I felt like I had hit the jackpot! The nursery gave them an incredible start in education, they were happy and cared for by the fantastic staff. The space is great and the outdoor forest school area is so important to many of us who do not have gardens.

Having been part of the initial campaign to save Fernbank I'm devastated we are here again. Private Childcare is astronomical in Hackney and even as someone who would be considered a good earner I couldn't afford the average cost of the private nurseries. How can we let early childcare provision become the domain of the rich? In such a diverse place as Hackney we must have affordable childcare.

X (parent of a child at Hillside):

My 2.5-year-old daughter has been attending Hillside Nursery since last October, which coincided with our move to Stoke Newington. We visited several nurseries, including some private ones, but Hillside Nursery was definitely our top choice. At home, we speak Turkish, so the nursery provided our daughter with her first exposure to English. The staff was incredibly welcoming and warm right from the start. Since we don't have any family nearby, having the nursery felt like a blessing; they became like an extended family to us.

Our daughter's English skills have improved significantly, and she has adapted well to the routines at Hillside. The various activities and outings, such as visits to the library, have greatly contributed to her education. Her time at Hillside has made her more self-sufficient and helpful, which has been wonderful to see. Initially, like many parents, I was hesitant about sending my child to nursery, but thanks to Hillside, I now feel confident knowing that she enjoys her time there.

She adores her friends and teachers at Hillside, and she talks about them every day. One of the beautiful aspects of Hillside is its inclusivity, as it already accommodates SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) children. I believe maintaining a mixed nursery environment is important, as converting Hillside solely for SEND children would deprive families like ours of a

valuable resource. Finding a good, affordable nursery isn't always easy, and Hillside has been a blessing in that regard.

X - attends class at Fernbank Children's Centre - hoping to send LO in August:

After much research and a handful of visits to nurseries in the area, I quickly became set on Fernbank. Not only is it one of the only local nurseries to differentiate fees according to household income (so precious to me as a single parent) but the environment and staff, when I visited, were, by far, the best I'd come across. Until visiting Fernbank, I'd become incredibly worried that I wasn't going to be able to afford anything of good quality for my daughter. As a result of choosing this nursery as my nursery of choice, I started attending the music class on Mondays so my daughter would recognise someone when she settled in 6 months time. No other nursery I know offers anything like this. The sessions there are so warm and cheerful and the babies/toddlers get free fruit and drinks too. To hear that Fernbank's future is uncertain is, quite honestly, filling me with dread and I urge the council to think closely about the lives this decision will be effecting

X and X (parents of a child at Fernbank nursery):

We have a son who joined Fernbank at 2 years old. He has been at the nursery for 1.5 years. We were extremely anxious as our child was born during covid, therefore had restricted access to meet and socialise with other children. We were not sure at first where to send him. However, When the restrictions were lifted and children could attend stay and play sessions, Fernbank was one of our favourite places to go every week. The staff at Fernbank made him feel so welcomed and it made him feel very safe and comfortable. We could see the amazing changes in his confidence and social skills.

The staff are all so warm and friendly and are always happy to make time for the parents and children. When our son started the nursery, settling in was very difficult for him. However, the staff at Fernbank were very supportive and accommodated his needs and made us feel very reassured as parents. 1.5 years later, our son is the happiest little boy and loves going to nursery and being around the children and staff. He has built special bonds with a lot of the staff and his peers, and it is so nice to witness this daily. The team there work endlessly to make sure the children feel a sense of belonging and their needs are met. Our son has speech delay and the staff at Fernbank have put everything in place to support him and his needs, so he always feels included. We love how inclusive and diverse the nursery is and we are gutted to hear the sad news of the council wanting to close the children centres down. We really hope that the centres can remain open and continue to support the community.

X (parent to 4 children, all of whom attended Fernbank CC):

After visiting many nurseries in our local area (islington) which did not appeal to me, I decided to start looking at nurseries which were on route to work (in Hackney) as I worked for Hackney Council, it is then that I discovered Fernbank. After making a call to Fernbank & having a warm

conversation with the Administrator I quickly arranged to visit Fernbank for a viewing. On our visit to Fernbank my son & I were met with such warmth & attention to detail from not only the room staff but also from those who appeared to work in the office. Having visited many nurseries previously this is not something that we had experienced, during the visit the room staff interacted with my son & I noticed how comfortable he was made to feel, it was then that I knew that Fernbank was the nursery for us! The outdoor area at Fernbank was a bonus as it seemed to be one of the best outdoor areas I had seen! There was never any question as to where my other children would attend, it would always be Fernbank, even with Covid & working from home I still opted to send my last child to Fernbank, as I knew that being a victim of lockdown he would receive the love care & attention that he required.

I have had 4 children at Fernbank from 2008 - 2022, staff at Fernbank are more than just staff, they become members of extended families, they are always supportive & there for advice when needed. I can honestly say that I can not take full responsibility/credit for the amazing individuals my children have become as staff at Fernbank played a big part in raising my children.

Although my children are now all in school, I was devastated to hear that there are yet again plans to close Fernbank. I was part of the 1st campaign to save Fernbank & Hillside and can not believe we are here again. Finding affordable child care is paramount to families, especially as we are in the middle of a cost of living crisis, affordable child care is something that Fernbank offers. Although my family no longer attends Fernbank, I will assist those trying to save it. We were successful last year & I pray we are successful again!

X (parent of a child at Fernbank):

As a first time parent Fernbank has provided me with the assurance and care that I was looking for in a nursery. The highly experienced staff and their tenure at the nursery is unique and provides for a warm and familial environment. It is such a leaned on local resource for childcare it is unfathomable the council now wishes to close it. It is apparent via other testimonials how highly regarded it is, and I think it such a waste of opportunity that over the last 3 years, the council has focused its efforts on effecting its closure rather than considering a real viable business plan to keep the centre running. Needless to say for those on limited income Fernbank is a lifesaver, but also for those parents like me on the top band income. Working 5 days a week, even as a high fee earner, I am left with little money at the end of the month. Other nurseries would see me in a monthly deficit after outgoings. Fernbank has provided the opportunity for me as a new mother to continue to work and live in Hackney and in turn invest back into the borough, and I am truly grateful to Fernbank for that. As said, the fact that the council has provided 6 months notice for Fernbank and other centres to source substantial funding, rather than put a notice out for investment 3 years ago is acting in such bad faith and not in the interests of Hackney families. I really hope that a solution is found to keep such a diverse and caring nursery like Fernbank open so that families may continue to benefit from what it has to offer, and keep mums like me in the workplace and not priced out of Hackney.

X and X (parents of a child at Sebright):

We were so fortunate to find Sebright Children's Centre and eventually get a place there for our oldest daughter when she was 2 (now 7 years old).

Before that she went to a community college nursery. We could not afford any other childcare options in the area and still at that point considered ourselves lucky. But being linked to a community college meant that one of us could not go back to full time employment, as we had no way of managing childcare during holidays prior to getting a spot at Sebright.

Getting a place at Sebright was a true blessing! We could afford the fees and not worry about 14 weeks of school holidays without any cover. But beyond that the staff members have always been loving, caring, understanding and accommodating to us.

Our younger daughter was born in 2020. After our experience with our first child, we only wanted our daughter to go to a Council run nursery . Due to Covid we had to move around for the first 1.5 years of her life, but we were moved back to the area in 2022. We immediately contacted Sebright, and they were able to allocate a place for our younger daughter. It was very well worth the wait ! We felt as if we never left. Practically all the staff members were still there four years later. It was just amazing to see so many familiar faces and know that the staff are happy to work and stay at our lovely Sebright.

The council's decision to close the centre is devastating, unfair and short sighted. We are hoping to do whatever we can to overturn it !

X (parent of a child at Sebright):

I visited a lot of local nurseries in my area while looking for one for my son and nowhere has been as warm and welcoming as at the Sebright Centre. We were on the waiting list for months, but in all honesty, this was the only place I wanted my son to go. When my son got a place, we were delighted and our experience so far has been such a beautiful and joyful story.

It's a beautiful and joyful story every day as I drop off my son and pick him up. We're welcomed with the biggest smiles at Reception, followed by the warmest welcome by the nursery staff. They always have kind words for the kids and always take the time to talk to the parents. They know the kids well and they look after them with precision, attention and a lot of tenderness. The quality of their care is of a very high standard and they do it with a dedication that I admire so much.

Not only do we feel loved at Sebright, but we feel safe. I know that my son is happy and in good hands, and I can see that in his eyes at the end of each day spent at the nursery.

The Sebright Centre contributes massively to the personal balance of my family life. Raising a kid in London is hard and can feel lonely. Thanks to the Sebright Centre, I feel supported by the staff and also by the community of parents that I speak to every day. I can't imagine my everyday life and the ones of families around me with the Sebright Centre. It would be a

massive loss and I'm convinced it would have a huge impact on the balance and health of the kids and their parents.

Why close a centre such as Sebright that has become a vital social and educational pillar for a whole community?

I urge you to reconsider this decision and keep the Centre open. My son and all the other kids deserve a high-quality education just like the one they're getting now.

They all deserve that we invest in their future.

X and X (parents with a child at Sebright):

Our 10 year old son attended Sebright Children's Centre from the age of 1 until reception. He loved his time at the centre and we only have good memories.

Fast forward 7 years and we were back at Sebright to put our daughter's name on a waiting list. It was so reassuring to learn that most of the staff members still work at Sebright today and we would be leaving our daughter in the hands of dedicated carers we know and trust. It made the return to work much easier.

While Sebright feels the same, we witnessed many improvements over the years, particularly in the expanded range of community services now offered which benefits the wider community.

It is truly heartbreaking to think that our children's centre faces potential closure and families face the ordeal of finding alternative care for their children.

X (parent with child at Sebright):

I first went to Sebright Childrens' centre when my son (now 9) was just a few weeks old in February or March 2014.

The centre offered sessions for babies (including newborns) where you could go, sit in a lovely, colourful, calm environment, meet other mums but also focus on your baby, and learn about what they needed.

The subjects of the sessions varied but included sessions on introducing solid foods, music with Corin, making footprints and handprints and plenty of time to talk, feed your baby in a comfortable feeding chair and explore sensory toys/lights and lots of books.

I was given a book to keep milestones and memories relating to developmental progress with a photo of Woody on it and his name, and made to feel welcome, cared for, and that I had somewhere to go and be with my baby that was free and that was outside our flat.

Over the years that followed Sebright Childrens' Centre opened up to me many opportunities for me and my children, which ranged from becoming interested in music (Corin was so great with my sons that we hardly missed a weekly session for the next 5 years whether he was at Sebright or Comet Childrens' Centre) to cooking more healthily after we attended Sebright cooking courses, trying our exercise outside in the park with a coach and a group of other mums and, perhaps most importantly for me downstairs, being able to explore the stay and play sessions, messy play sessions, and even baby yoga.

For me I have no doubt that being able to go to these things made a huge impact on me being able to stay happy and cope with my two young children and avoid post-natal depression and much anxiety caused by lack of space/facilities that I could provide them in our home.

I am aware that these sessions supported many other parents too, lots of who were vulnerable and in need in lots of different ways. It provided a place where everyone was welcome and could feel that their children were part of a loving, caring community, and also where we could enjoy our children and meeting each other.

I continued going to Sebright at Stay and Plays until my son could start in Red Room in the nursery part time, and then used to go when I wasn't working part time with him, and my second son, born in 2017 (who also went to nursery at Seabright).

We loved the nursery staff straight away and how caring they were to our children and all of the children. They seemed to really enjoy being with the babies and each other, you could tell straight away that they had worked together a long time and knew and supported each other well. They worked as a team and as my son said recently, as they got older 'it was like a cross between home and school' at nursery, with learning and development important but also a cosy and comfortable environment that made having to collect them in the winter at 5.30 after a long day at work less painful.

They supported families who were going through difficulties as well (who were referred to the centre for childcare) and I saw children really grow and be happy in the environment. Lockdown was a really difficult time for a lot of us but Sebright was there for me when as a key worker I had to go to work in the Borough Emergency Control Centre and it meant that our son could continue to go to nursery and make relationships and learn outside of our home.

So many of my friends and my families' friends come from Sebright, and I want the excellent staff there to be able to keep working there and doing amazing work with families and children.

I really feel that investment in early years and under 5s both in terms of children's learning but also in terms of their community cohesion cannot be underestimated and want other families to be able to be part of Sebright for many years to come.

X and X (parents of children at Sebright nursery):

Sebright Children's Centre has been a vital part of our lives since our twins were just 3 weeks old.

We visited the centre every week for health visitor appointments due to one twin being incredibly unwell. I felt safe and supported by staff right from the start at an extremely difficult time. Now, almost 3 years later I reminisce with Betty about how tiny they were then and how they've turned into energetic, crazy toddlers.

Sebright Nursery saved us when the boys turned 1. We were suddenly without childcare after being severely let down by another nursery 24 hours before my return to work after maternity leave. Susan showed us around at short notice and managed to find space for us almost immediately that ensured I was able to return to work.

The boys have been in each nursery room, thriving more and more each day from the education, love and support shown by the staff here.

We have built connections here right from the start and the sense of community is undeniable. To lose such a pivotal part of the community would be devastating.

X (parent of child at Sebright):

If you can believe it, I myself was born locally just over 40 years ago and attended Sebright primary school along with my siblings. When I had my first daughter, I was a nanny and fortunately never needed childcare... quite a few years later and now a primary school teacher I no longer have the comfort of taking my second baby to work. Sebright children's centre for many years was in the backdrop to our uncertain life. When my oldest began Haggerston school over the road, Sebright children's centre was her first choice in gaining knowledge and skills from the early years staff for her Duke of Edinburgh volunteering. Eventually they became my child's first set of caregivers away from home in 2022, the centre was affordable for myself especially compared to the cost of other providers. Sebright children's centre is not just a childcare solution, they are a loving, caring group of people who go out of their way to ensure the peace of mind we all need to maintain the day-to-day duty of work. Sebright children's centre has also scaffolded the SEN procedure and supported me in my role as a mother not a teacher in understanding how best to support my muffin moving forward. She is an amazing little person who may not be able to say it (yet), but going to Sebright children's centre for nearly two years and fully being able to explore in her local familiar environment of Haggerston Park area better her understanding and makes her so happy. Hearing the news of possible closure was overwhelming, as for a lot of the children and babies at Sebright unlike others, they were born during such isolated times of covid the centre means that little be more.

X & X (Sebright parents):

The decision to put our child into nursery was a difficult one for us as she was only just turning 6 months old, but it was necessary in order for Mum to return to work. The private nurseries in the area were either unaffordable for us, or wouldn't accept children so young, and the other Council subsidised nurseries close by were fully booked with long waiting lists. Luckily, at the last moment, a space opened up in the baby room at Sebright and for this we will be forever thankful.

At first we worried that our child might have difficulty settling, especially with all the uncertainty surrounding Covid lockdowns. Thankfully she settled straight away and hasn't looked back since. From our first visit it was clear what a warm and safe environment has been created at Sebright. The staff and carers have been so welcoming, nurturing and professional, we couldn't have asked for more. Under their care our child has developed into a smart, happy and confident little girl who is excited every day to be dropped off at the centre.

As a small family, living away from home, the stability and sense of community Sebright has given us has been such a positive in our lives. The great location set in the green surrounds of Haggerston Park is one of the things we really appreciate, living as we do on a busy road with lots of traffic. It's so important to us for our child and all the children to be able to take trips to the Hackney farm, The Forest School and the green fields surrounding the Nursery without even leaving the park, not to mention the hours spent in the new playground with all her friends and their parents and carers.

We honestly don't know what we'd do without Sebright and would be devastated for other children not to be able to benefit, as we have, from the dedication of its staff and all the wonderful services it has to offer families in the community.

X and X (Sebright parents):

The news that the future of Sebright Children's Centre is in doubt is troubling. My son attends a couple of days a week. The nursery has been crucial to his development over the last three years. Not to mention the close relationships he has cultivated with the staff and other children, the benefits of having social interaction with people outside of the home. The benefits to us, his parents, to be able to entrust him to the care of the wonderful nursery staff so that we may continue to work.

Access to childcare allows parents to remain economically active. Is it cheaper in the short term for the state to support an adult who is unable to work than to subsidise their childcare? No access to childcare is a disincentive to having children. This feeds into the longer term demographic problem of an ageing population and all its associated challenges.

Sebright Children's Centre is a crucial cog in the local infrastructure. Closing it would be detrimental to the local community and economy. Investing in and supporting it will have benefits which far outweigh the costs.

It can't be overstated, investing in children now will yield exponential returns for us all in the future.

X (Sebright parent):

Choosing a nursery place for a child is a difficult decision to make. Having visited many nurseries stepping into Sebright made the difference and made the decision easy. I instantly knew that my daughter would be looked after in a safe, nurturing and caring environment. Entering the building feels like a warm hug. The staff are all so warm and generous and genuinely care for the children and are experts at what they do.

It is so important to be able to provide affordable childcare provision and Sebright has been able to do this. As it is means-tested it allows all children to access the same care and opportunities. We are hugely saddened and disappointed that this wonderful place is under threat.

My family has accessed the centre from birth to starting school. I have attended stay and plays with both my children and my daughter attended the nursery for two years leaving to attend school. We have had health visitor meetings at the centre and as a parent I have felt fully supported by the services they have offered and provided me. The stay and play activities are varied, imaginative, thoughtful, brilliantly staffed and well attended. It would be a travesty if this provision and the opportunities these provide were lost to children and parents.

Sebright is a vital provider for the critical early formative years and has given both my children a hugely important foundation in their childhood which will serve them both throughout their lives. I hope other children will be able to have the same opportunities they have had at a thriving Sebright Children's Centre.

X & X (Sebright parents):

Our son is now 3 1/2 and started Sebright at 11 months. He was born during Covid and being a first time Mum was a daunting prospect at the time. When restrictions were lifted we used the centre's baby groups and I instantly felt welcomed and supported by the staff, something I didn't experience at private baby groups.

Moving forward 6 months and looking for a nursery place for our son, Sebright was our first choice.

He settled in straight away I believe that was very much down to the staff's experience, care and warmth.

Sebright made it possible for me to go back to work and has created a safe space for my son to flourish. Something I can't thank the Sebright children's centre and staff enough for.

X and X (Sebright parents):

We first came across Sebright through the Children centre provision. Our eldest daughter being born 3 months ahead of the pandemic and my workplace going bust just a month before the first lockdown, I (the mother) had been her main carer since birth.

Knowing little to no other parents back then, I was grateful for the stay&play sessions which offered much welcome practical and mental health support as well as social interactions for myself and my baby.

Our daughter, now aged 4 years, was offered a place at Sebright nursery at 14 months old. She started alongside her 'first' friend whom she met at stay&play and they remain inseparable to this day.

Having access to affordable yet qualitative childcare in the borough meant I (the mother) could focus on my job search while knowing my daughter was in the best hands. We were subsequently offered a place for our youngest at 10 months (now 14) - which not only gave us a sense of continuity but the opportunity for them to spend as much time as possible together.

Both our children are thriving at Sebright. Staff have been an essential part of their development, growth and self confidence. Across all rooms, we've had only the most amazing experience. The level of care, kindness and professionalism demonstrated by all staff across the board is unprecedented.

Sebright quickly became a pillar in our family life. Being away from any relatives, the close knit community fostered by nursery has provided us with great support and reassurance over the years. Fast forward 3 years, the friends and support network we've established thanks to Sebright are paramount in both our lives and that of our children.

The threat of closure to Sebright is nerve-racking and utterly upsetting. We strongly oppose it and support the campaign to save it with all our hearts.

X and X (Sebright parents):

Securing a place for our child at Sebright was an amazing stroke of luck that I will always be grateful for. When I put her name on the list, only because some other mums I was with did,

little did I know what a wonderful place it was. Another unexpected factor was that when she finally started there 10 months later we were in the middle of a pandemic. Yet, even during this incredibly difficult time, the staff at Sebright did an unbelievable job. Our settling-in week demonstrated that this was going to be a safe and comforting place for our child with an incredible team - many with years of experience - fostering a genuine sense of family and community.

During those initial six months of restrictions, the service they provided was nothing short of remarkable. They worked so hard to stay open, offering vital support to working parents like myself. And for that, I'll always be grateful.

Now, the future of this incredible centre hangs in the balance, offering not just childcare, but essential support and affordable care for young families in our community. Its closure would be a devastating loss. That's why I'm campaigning to save it. Together, let's keep our beloved Sebright safe from closure.

X (Sebright parent):

I came across Sebrights Children Centre in 2018 when my first daughter was born and I was wondering what child care provider would be best when I went back to work. We had a really bad experience with another nursery, privately operated, and after I decided I did not want her to go there.

Incredibly upset I went to Sebrights and explained what had happened. They could not have been kinder or more caring and somehow found a place for my daughter to start within in the month. Not only is it a place we can actually afford but the staff treat you like family. Myself, my partner, my mother, my sister and my elder daughter who used to go are all treated like long lost friends when we visit. The low turnover of staff speaks volumes about the kind of place it is to work and be a part of.

By closing down this place, we will end up forcing families to go to the kind of private nurseries I had such a bad experience with in the first place, and those will be the lucky ones who might have financial assistance like I did. I imagine for a large percentage of others, child care at a nursery will be removed from the table as a viable option.

X & X (Sebright parents):

Sebright children centre and nursery has been a key pillar for our family since our son was born. Initially I was very grateful having such a magnificent centre nearby when on maternity leave, feeling connected to a wider network of parents and carers. The weekly offer ranging from lively music hour, stay & play as well as health visitor support, was such an immense help which I would not want to have missed.

When we received the offer of being able to send our little boy to day care at Sebright, it was a such a great relief for us, having heard only good things about staff in advance from other parents, as well as having met very kind and welcoming people at the centre beforehand. At first it can be quite daunting sending little ones off on day care, Sebright nursery has given us the confidence and support we needed. From the very first day, our little son was very warmly received and taken care off, he is very much enjoying going to nursery to spend time with his lovely carers and friends.

Having been given a more affordable childcare option was and is very helpful to us, as many private childcare providers are simply overpriced. A facility such as Sebright is an essential and vital asset to young families like ourselves, forming a key pillar for the neighbourhood. Places like this help to foster a healthy and lively community, it would be a devastating loss to see Sebright Centre shut its doors due to an ill informed and short sighted decision of the council trying to close such a key facility. We strongly oppose a potential planned closure and will support any efforts made to keep Sebright Centre open.

X and X (former parents at Sebright):

Despite living less than a quarter of a mile from Sebright Children's Centre, so high is the demand for spaces at the nursery that we had to wait until our oldest child was two and a half before a space became available. She had previously attended a private nursery over a mile away because this was the only nursery place we could secure. Being offered a place at Sebright, so close to home, made our lives considerably easier. Our daughter loved her time at Sebright. The small class size enabled her to make several friends whom she remains close to today, five years after she has left the Centre. As parents we particularly enjoyed the continuity of staff Sebright provides, something that had been lacking at our private nursery– it is always so much easier to drop off an anxious child in the morning when they have familiar faces there to welcome them with open arms and a big cuddle.

Our second child was able to start at Sebright when she turned one because of the Centre's policy of giving preference to siblings. With the fees being means tested, we were able to afford to have two children under three in the nursery, while we both worked as parents, something that we would not have been able to do in a private nursery.

Our third child suffered with separation anxiety and Sebright Children's Centre gave him additional care to help him settle and separate from us each day. When he was three years old he was diagnosed with Type 1 Diabetes. The Children's Centre quickly sent staff on training courses to enable him to return into their care within two weeks of discharge from hospital. Were it not to have been for the staff at Sebright Children's Centre, and their willingness to meet our child's additional needs, one of us would have had to give up work. Thank you Sebright Children's Centre, for looking after all 3 of our children. You will always be in their hearts.

X and X (Sebright parents):

We first visited Sebright Children's Centre when our son was 4 days old. It was our first time venturing outside after coming home from the hospital, to go to a breastfeeding drop-in, which we ended up attending for at least once a month from that day, for a whole year.

Looking back, that visit was a lifeline. We were deep in the haze and anxiety of new parenthood, but from our very first interaction with Betty at reception and the subsequent visits to the centre for play activities and breastfeeding drop-ins, everything we saw of Sebright was positive and heartwarming and we knew we wanted our little boy to go to nursery here.

Finding quality and affordable childcare is so difficult that I (Mum) actually went back to work without having a childcare provision in place. After a terrible experience with a private provider and over a year on the waiting list for Sebright, we were overjoyed to eventually be offered a place - not only because it was an option that was more affordable for us, but also because every person we encountered at the centre was warm, kind and reassuring.

From the first week of settling in, Rita and the red room team have been amazing. Our happy, friendly and curious boy loves going to nursery, which is a testament to the love and care he gets there. Every morning when we drop him off, we leave feeling confident and grateful that our son is in the best hands.

The council's plan to close the centre is heartbreaking, not only for the loss of the nursery but also for the loss of such a vital service to the community, the impact of which will affect people's mental health, professional prospects and overall sense of wellbeing. The option of the centre being taken over by another provider is just as bad. Hackney is in no way at a loss for expensive privately run nurseries that don't give anything back to the community, there's more than enough of those already. Affordable, quality childcare on the other hand is difficult to find so we wholeheartedly oppose the council's short sighted and ill considered decision, and will do whatever we can to help the campaign to stop the closure!

X (former parent at Sebright):

Sebright is a hugely important place for our family.

Our eldest son (now 12) was there from the age of 11 months until the age of 4.

Our youngest son, now 8, was in Sebright from the age of 7 months until 4 years old.

The care that both of our kids received in Sebright was phenomenal, and it has marked both of our boys' relationship with organised education in the most positive way. Both of them grieved having to say goodbye to their teachers at Sebright.

Having access to affordable childcare in our local area, as was the case with Sebright, meant that I (the mother) could afford to go back to work, something that was important for my mental health and for my professional development.

Furthermore, the day centre was a life saver for me during my maternity leave. The sense of community that was available there (for the kids and for myself) during my maternity leave, was essential for my maternal wellbeing and for healthy development of our kids' social skills. We all still have friends and support networks that we have met during our time in Sebright.

Community spaces like Sebright, as well as affordable childcare at such an excellent level are absolutely essential for our local area.

Closing down Sebright is a huge mistake. It is essential for the wellbeing of our local community and the professional development of local parents.

I urgently urge you to reconsider your decision to close down Sebright and to keep this important local institution alive.

X (Sebright parent):

We have a child at the nursery and have been overwhelmed by the friendliness and caring nature of the staff and the family atmosphere of the centre. Our daughter has been cared for by all the staff with such kindness, and with specific attention to her development, personality and wellbeing. It feels like a second home. We are full of sadness that the nursery and centre overall may close as we feel that it is vital that high quality care remains for children from all social and economic backgrounds, something lacking in the borough.

X and X (Sebright parents):

Sebright Children's Centre became part of our lives soon after our twin daughters were born. Two weeks after their birth we were lucky to have been given places at the baby massage course led by Itadal. This was a brilliant course that gave us invaluable support in those early days and it was a great way to meet other parents. Shortly afterwards we started attending regular breast feeding appointments with Lorraine, which were essential to support us with breast feeding our twins. It is amazing how instrumental all these services were to give us confidence as parents and also to give us a sense of community in those early weeks. Soon we were going to the centre several times a week for various reasons: health visitor appointments, adult-learning Henry workshop led by Nivi, the Christmas parties with Moses as father Christmas, various stay-and-play sessions, music with Corin, always with a warm welcome from Betty and Mary. We were part of that community, it was like our second home.

We registered our interest at several nurseries near us as soon as we could. Sebright, of course, was amongst our choices. We knew how hard it would be to secure places for twins in a

nursery, particularly one we could afford, and we both wanted to return to work. We were very grateful that we were given part-time places at Sebright.

Two years on and we continue to have only great things to say about Sebright. The everyday care our daughters receive from their Early Years educators is phenomenal. Simone, Rita, Nicky, Rushba, Abi, they all have an impressive record of years of experience working with children and their families, and you can tell. They show they care and they have the experience to back it. Our daughters love them and they love their little friends as well.

It was a great shock to learn the children's centre and nursery might be closing. This seems careless and short-sighted. This feels utterly wrong. Hackney families need places like Sebright to foster a sense of community, to support them in their early years of parenthood. Hackney parents need affordable nurseries to allow them to go back to work. Sebright is central to our lives. It is a warm, welcoming, diverse, caring environment. We strongly oppose these proposals.

X and X (Sebright parents):

Our daughter moved to Sebright in the summer of 2022, when she was two and a half. She had previously attended a private nursery. This nursery was taken over by new providers a few months into our child's time there. There was a rapid deterioration in the quality of care they offered. This included safeguarding issues. We saw a huge churn in staff, as new, inexperienced employees joined, only to leave after a handful of weeks. Its costs were high and continued to rise, which threatened our ability to both return to work. There has never been a day since she started at Sebright that we have regretted her being there.

At Sebright she is safe and happy. She loves learning and is encouraged and supported in this. She is cared for by teachers who we know have worked in the same place for many years. This makes an inconceivably big difference. We value the stability this brings, but also the wealth of experience and knowledge each staff member possesses. All of this would disappear if Sebright were to be closed. It would be such a loss to the local community.

Alongside that, it is one of the most friendly, welcoming places we have ever set foot in. Everybody there knows our daughter's name. Everybody there greets you with a smile. You only need to spend five minutes at Sebright to know how important a role it plays in the lives of hundreds of people in Hackney, just as it plays such an important role in the life of our family.

X, Hillside parent:

Our son started at Hillside at 11 months old, and as first-time parents we were pretty clueless about a lot of things. It was only thanks to the staff's stellar caregiving that we worked out he had a dairy intolerance, and as we didn't have much in terms of a support network, it was invaluable to us that we could count on the expertise and love of all caregivers, be it with minor

illnesses, major milestones, and everything in between. I am so grateful that our child could spend his early years in such a loving and supportive environment, where everyone's differences are celebrated, curiosity is nurtured, and kindness is the golden rule.

Many staff have been at Hillside for a number of years, and that is a testament to their dedication and investment in the centre. You could tell that everyone cares deeply about each child no matter what, and that this is not just a job for them, it's a vocation. I loved hearing Marva's stories of full-grown adults saying hello to her and thanking her for caring for them as babies, and I really hope our son will be able to do the same one day.

I could never have afforded to go back to work if it wasn't for Hillside and their reasonable childcare fees. This was a lifesaver for me, and the best possible start to our child's social life we could hope for. Looking back I am glad that we couldn't afford the posh nurseries, as this would have probably been depressingly homogeneous and not at all what we love best about Hackney!

X (parent of child who formerly attended Hillside):

Hillside Children's Centre is an indispensable childcare resource in Hackney. The level of care offered and accessibility because of long opening hours and affordable fees must continue. Our son attended from the age of 11 months until he started primary school in September 2022. We found the centre and people working there to be warm, caring and passionate caregivers. They consistently offered excellent childcare support that we could not have done without. The long daily opening hours and affordable fees and location allowed us both to continue to work whilst our child attended Hillside. This would not have been possible without Hillside. We can attest to the importance of Hillside and other centres like it in supporting ordinary people striving to live their lives in the borough.

We feel that the learning support that our child received at Hillside was well structured and diligently applied within the setting. This gave our son an excellent start in his education and a firm grounding from which to transition to primary school.

It was such a proud moment for us when our son graduated from Hillside. We were able to share that moment with his peers, other parents and the staff at the centre and reflect upon his time at Hillside as well as the importance of the setting for so many people in the community. We strongly support Hillside, Fernbank and Sebright Children's Centres and urge Hackney council to keep these centres open so that they can continue to offer affordable, accessible childcare in Hackney. Thank you.

X (Sebright parent):

Back in 2009 when I had my eldest daughter, now aged 15, I was attending weekly classes and when she was about 6 months I became stuck for childcare but once speaking with my health

visitor and expressing how I wouldn't be able to attend my classes anymore he was able to get me into a 3hr drop off session once a week so I could attend these. Once she was regularly attending I was then offered a space in the baby room. 2 years later my second eldest was born and due to having sibling preference she was also offered a place at Sebright. Both my eldest daughters attended Sebright until they went to Primary school.

I then had my son in 2016 and applied straight away hoping to get a space. It took nearly a year as I no longer had any other child in the nursery but eventually got a space and he also attended Sebright until Primary school.

Sebright has also been the place I attend when my children needed to have their development reviews and my son who needed speech therapy so it has always been somewhere I've been to for many years and what I liked about it the most was that the staff turnaround was minimal as fast forward to 2023 my youngest finally got her place in the blue room after being on the waiting list for nearly 2 years and all the nursery staff were still there including the general staff like Moses, Betty, Mary, Victoria and Juliet.

My youngest was in a private nursery whose staff turnaround was ridiculous and they were not extremely professional or welcoming once you had signed the contract. The fees were extortionate at £95 a day and the rules and policies they had were made up by the day when you challenged everything. Imagine having to pay for 8 days in a month (2 days a week) and them having staff training on 4 of your days but you still had to pay for it! Then closing for 2 weeks in the Summer and you still having to pay for it! Them closing when schools did for Xmas and you still having to pay for all those days they are also closed and you having to find alternative childcare because you still have to work! With Sebright you were given everything from the beginning and explained everything by Susan and I don't know if I would have honestly been able to continue working if she remained at the private nursery.

Both my youngest children have needed speech therapy and having Flavia as a Senco lead for over 10 years is reassuring as she is experienced in what she does and has helped with their development.

My daughter who attends now also has the same key worker my son had when he was there so we also have a good relationship as she has known me for over 7yrs.

My son actually said he wanted to go back to nursery as he missed it.

Closing the centre would be a great loss to Hackney parents like myself who has used this centre for various things like development reviews, baby classes, speech and language therapy, breast feeding classes, stay and play and childcare over the past 15 years.

X and X (Sebright parents):

I wanted to write a few lines to explain how important Sebright nursery is to the local community. It is an invaluable resource providing advice, classes, and looking after our local children in a safe, nurturing space for learning, play and exploration.

Please reconsider the closure!

X & X - Parents with children at Fernbank Nursery:

When I visited Fernbank I immediately knew that I wanted my boys to attend there, and this is even before I had viewed any other nurseries. The centre has such a welcoming atmosphere and is very 'homely' - this wouldn't be the case if it didn't have such amazing staff. We also had the pleasure of attending their stay and play groups before they started the nursery and continued to attend when they were initially part time.

My older son has been in all three classes and I can confidently say that all of the staff are great. Fernbank is like a family, there is a genuine connection between the staff and the children - my boys run to the office nearly every morning to say hello to Laura, Ora and Pursha before going into the classroom and receiving a warm greeting from the teachers, who are all very dedicated and passionate.

The nursery has great facilities, in particular the large outdoor space that includes a forest garden, which is a luxury for many nurseries. The children also get taken out quite a bit to local parks, as well as shops. My youngest has been to a pet shop where they got to see the animals which he loved and also the local corner shop where he got to choose some fruit and pay the cashier.

The diversity of cultures within the nursery amongst the children and staff is something that should definitely be celebrated and it played a significant part in why I chose the nursery. The education that they receive is extremely good - I regularly see my boys come home with new pieces of knowledge, the most recent being Chinese New Year.

The low staff turnover and the longevity of the majority of the staff says a lot about the type of environment is. Many of them have been there over a decade and some over 20 years. This speaks volumes about the dedication and experience of the staff. It's also extremely positive for the children in terms of stability. I think it would be very hard to find a nursery that has such a low turnover.

Fernbank has been a lifesaver! It is an incredible nursery for my boys and all of the children that attend. It's devastating to think that we might lose such an amazing and positive setting for them that is affordable. Do not close any of the Children's Centres!!!

X and X (Sebright parents):

After our child was born, we were in Spain as our family network could support us and make things easier for us to be able to work. After several months of waiting, we received an email from Sebright. Finally, we could take our child to daycare!

We were still scared because of the pandemic, but the atmosphere at Sebright immediately reassured us that our little one was safe and well cared for. Thanks to that, we could return to London and be able to work without worrying about her well-being.

At the daycare, they not only took care of our child but also played a crucial role in getting to know more parents and forging relationships with many people in the neighbourhood. Now that we are considering looking for another home, we cannot imagine moving away from here, where our daughter and we have found all our friends.

The closure of the centre is not only a problem for the children and their parents but also comes with layoffs and a lack of much-needed attention for future parents in the area. This patch in the council economy won't be a solution in the long run.

X & X (Fernbank parents):

After a difficult time trying to find a nursery due to waiting lists, prohibitive expensive, or poor options we were incredibly lucky that Fernbank started accepting children again in 2021 so we signed up our son straight away and he started when he was ~10 months old.

The centre is staffed by people who clearly care deeply about the children, their development and well being. We were worried if we were doing the best thing for our son at first but this feeling quickly disappeared as he flourished in the environment.

He loves the large outdoor space which is a scarcity for nurseries in Hackney.

The consistency of the staffing has also benefited his confidence, and I'm very aware that private nurseries rarely manage to provide this.

It's impossible not to realise the tremendous benefit Fernbank provides the community seeing how well he and his friends have developed in the last 2 years. I cannot believe that closing this nursery or others will improve Hackney's balance sheet long term, or improve the lives of its constituents. It will simply be a loss that will be more expensive to replace in the long run, and will push financial and social costs onto later years.

X (Sebright parent):

It's difficult to say how much I have relied on, and how much my family have benefitted from the support my child and I have received from the amazing staff and provision at Sebright. I remember going into Sebright Children's Centre for the first time on a really hot day for "singing with Corin". Having somewhere to be able to get out of our flat on a hot day, with a small baby,

sleep deprived and struggling with post-natal depression was a huge blessing. The friendly welcome from Mary as soon as we walked in, and the other staff in the centre made it feel like a safe place and although at the time I was struggling with leaving our flat on most days, I began taking our then baby to stay and plays at Sebright. Through this I found out that there was nursery provision upstairs and when I applied I couldn't believe we had got a place. I had tried to get a place at other nurseries including Ann Taylor and been told we wouldn't get a place. I didn't know about Sebright's nursery provision until a member of staff mentioned it.

If our child hadn't been given a place at Sebright my salary wouldn't have been as much as the childcare and therefore I wouldn't have been able to justify going back to work. Having the additional provision on site at Sebright, in the same place as the nursery is really important. For example on more than one occasion our health visitor arriving for her clinic there spotted me and my child arriving at nursery. When she spotted us she insisted we come into the surgery for appointments with her. I had found it so difficult trying to get an appointment through the GP surgery with her that I had given up as it just seemed too difficult. It was through this process that the health visitor referred our child to speech therapy, which has done wonders for him and also for assessment with the social communication clinic.

The staff at Sebright are all amazing, Betty, Mary, Heena, Rita, Sam, Simone, Susan, Juliet everyone. They have looked after our child in the nursery since he was 9 months old and throughout that time he has nearly always had the same key worker. The staff who my child rightly calls "his teachers", which is of course exactly what they are, are hard working, loving, reliable and genuine experts at what they do. They have many many years of experience. They might not be as good at self promotion as some other providers but they really do do an amazing job and stop families falling through the cracks. They have helped our family so much and I really hope that other families in the future are able to benefit from their expertise and care.

X (teacher) X (GP) parents of a child who used to attend Fernbank:

Our search for a nursery for our daughter started with a panic. We put our daughter on a wait list for Comberton and the local children's centres at 12 weeks old, at 9 months we were told she was still on a wait list and there was no guarantee that she would be offered a place at 12 months when Jane's maternity leave ended. Luckily through word of mouth we heard about Fernbank and were relieved when they had a place. Once there our daughter experienced the most incredible loving, varied and stimulated care. We picked her up each day and she was full of excitement about the things she had done. Whenever we walked into Fernbank the love, dedication and expertise of all the staff was clear to see. We have recently moved to Manchester. Here there is nothing like Fernbank, parents' only option is private nurseries which are incredibly expensive and as a result do not reflect the communities they should serve. Hackney should be proud of its nursery care provision and should protect it.

X & X, parents of a child at Fernbank CC:

Our child started full-time at Fernbank aged 11 months, we struggled to find good quality childminders and private nurseries in the area were unaffordable for us. Our child has really thrived with Fernbank providing him a secure social environment through Covid, and now preparing him for a smooth transition into school reception. Our child is particularly enjoying Fernbank's fantastic phonics programme, which we know other private nurseries don't provide.

We have also seen Fernbank grow as a community in this time, beating the threat of closure and now running at full capacity with a close knit group of staff and parents. The closure would have an irreversible and terrible impact on this thriving community. The staff at Fernbank are so caring of all the parents and children, teaching cultural diversity, helping with special needs and trained in specific health areas. We want to particularly thank Joe (our son's key person almost since he started nursery), who gives us unconditional support and care every single day, helping us when we have questions regarding our son's development. Fernbank benefits from a stable and mutually supportive staff team which we know just does not happen under private provision in London. The nursery also has a wide ranging and highly nutritious menu!

Fernbank provides a stable environment.

Fernbank cares for their parents & children.

Fernbank celebrates cultures.

Fernbank prepares children for school.

Fernbank builds community.

X, parent of a child at Fernbank:

Following a redundancy, at the same time that our daughter was born, my partner chose to start his own business. And it is only due to access to a means-tested, affordable community nursery that we have been able to navigate the uncertain time of starting a new business for him as I was able to afford full time childcare whilst I went back to work.

Beyond the direct financial assistance it provides to our family, Fernbank also provides a quality of care that cannot be matched by private nurseries. The long tenure of the staff is felt as soon as you walk in the door. They exude confidence, experience, care and tenderness. It is crazy that given the shortage in early years staff this cohort of loving, talented, highly experienced and knowledgeable staff are going to be let go and with them these very much needed skills will leave the borough.

We also chose Fernbank for the diversity of its children, parents and staff. This is highly important to us as a culturally mixed family and impossible to get in a private nursery in an ever more gentrified and segregated Hackney.

We are also planning for a second child and the threat of closure makes us anxious about how we are going to continue to afford childcare. We are heartbroken that even if we could afford a

private nursery, we would be paying more and our second child would still not receive the same quality of care.

It is also difficult to understand how the closure of three affordable community nurseries is being proposed in a Labour run council, at a time of a cost of living crisis and deepening poverty. The recently elected Mayor got elected on a ticket of anti-racism, economic justice and inclusivity. Affordable childcare is at the heart of all these issues.

X and X, parents of two children at Hillside:

Hillside gives our two children a childcare setting that has a combination of affordability, diversity and warmth which we simply could not find elsewhere within easy reach of home. It's a home from home for our kids, 4 and 1, and it gives them a grounding in everything that's brilliant about Hackney: people from all backgrounds and with different abilities, including SEND, learning together, playing together, working together. From the staff to the babies in the baby room to chef Andrew in the kitchen, it's a unique family. Don't ruin one of Hackney's best assets. Nurture it, like it nurtures our children.

X and X, parents of a child at Fernbank Nursery:

Our daughter joined Fernbank when she was one year old. When we were in search of a nursery place we visited Fernbank. It was at the end of Covid so visiting care settings become available again. As soon as we walked through nursery door we knew this was a good nurturing environment we wanted our daughter to be in. The Fernbank staff team have been so resilient and the nursery rebounded so quickly after first attempt to close the service. There is so many wonderful testimonies about staff team professionalism, caring nature and about the wealth of knowledge and expertise they have. All of that is lost when nursery will be closed.

Both my husband and I are consider ourselves as front line workers. We are working for local authority in central London in day service provision for vulnerable adults (people with learning disability and mental health). We are both in full time employment so we should be able to afford a childcare for our only child without any problem. The reality is that we break even at the end of each month. When we reflect back on time my daughter started nursery, we are 100% positive that we would not be able to afford a nursery fees with private early setting and remain in full time employment. The choice we would have to make would be between one of us working less days or me giving up my work.

We are on band 3 in nursery fee structure so possibly one level lower than NHS nurses (or the same band?) and one level lower than teachers giving that both parents working as nurses or teachers. I purposely emphasise this as lots of Hackney families who are also front line workers will struggle to afford a childcare in the future if council go ahead with closures! There is always lots of promises made by politicians and policy makers on local and national level to help or to support front line staff. All it feels like empty promises where there is no commitment to continue affordable childcare...

X, parent with a child at Fernbank:

My son joined Fernbank when he was three years old and I was finally able to get back to work. With free hours for three year olds this meant I could actually earn money rather than lose it all in nursery fees. It is a huge thing leaving your child for 8 hours a day but I could do that with absolute peace of mind that he was cared for, listened to and inspired.

The moment I stepped into Fernbank I knew it was the right place for my son, we were completely welcomed and it felt like a really joyful place to be. Then we saw the garden!. To have access to so much outside space in an inner city Nursery is incredible.

He absolutely loved his time there and was fully prepared for then joining reception class at Jubilee Primary School the following year. I fully believe that his time at Fernbank made the transition to primary school so easy and a really happy experience.

The staff at Fernbank work so hard and do so because they genuinely love their jobs, despite not being remunerated for it. So much effort goes into celebrations of all cultures and everyone's birthday is celebrated. The graduation event for the leavers was just amazing. They make sure every child feels included and full of confidence to step into the world.

It is beyond belief that closing these Nurseries down is even being considered. These places are part of the vital infrastructure Hackney needs in order for people to live here. Our community and our children need these Nurseries.

Hackney Education

Hackney Council
1 Reading Lane
Hackney
London
E8 1GQ

Parents and carers of children,
attending Fernbank and Hillside
Children's Centres

020 8820 7631

Annie.Gammon@hackney.gov.uk

17 November 2021

Dear parent/carer,

We are writing to tell you that we've decided to pause our proposals to close Fernbank and Hillside following the recent public consultation.

We know how important these high quality centres are to you and your family. We also recognise that you are likely to have responded to the consultation we have just been running. We will be reviewing and summarising the feedback we have received.

We have, during the past weeks, heard points made by parents, carers, staff and others who have responded about the value of the centres to them and have raised concerns about the consultation process.

We write to inform you that taking all these points into account, and having listened carefully to the concerns raised by parents and others at meetings, the council has decided to delay a decision about any closures. This will be until a wider review of borough-wide provision – including further public engagement – can take place next year.

Our excellent staff – who so many of you have told us provide brilliant support and care to your children – have been told this directly today and will receive a letter today also.

We will be meeting again with staff over the coming weeks and months to talk further with them about potential developments of children's centre provision.

We do know that a future review will have to consider how the Council meets its duty to provide sufficient childcare places, provides vital child and family support through children's centres, and manages the impact of falling numbers of children accessing childcare and early

education. With government funding continuing to be reduced, any alternative proposals will still require some difficult decisions.

I hope this letter gives you reassurance. We'll be back in touch in the coming months about that engagement process next year, and I look forward to working with many of you to understand how we can continue to deliver quality services to Hackney's children.

Yours sincerely



Annie Gammon
Director of Education, Hackney Education



Donna Thomas
Head of Early Years, Early Help & Well-being



Children & Young People Scrutiny Commission 19th February 2024 Item 6 - Sexual and Reproductive Health	Item No 6
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Outline

The Commission assessed the draft Sexual & Reproductive Health Strategy together with plans to discontinue the CHYPS Plus Service (dedicated sexual and reproductive health services for young people).

The Commission has produced a response together with a number of recommendations which members are asked to note. This has been formally submitted to the Cabinet member for health, adult social care, voluntary sector and culture for a response, and when received will be published in a future agenda.

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Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission

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martin.bradford@hackney.gov.uk

Tel: 0208 356 3315

November 17th 2023

To:

Cllr Christopher Kennedy

(Cabinet Member for Health & Adult Social Care) &

Cllr Anntionette Bramble

(Cabinet Member for Children, Education & Social Care)

Dear Cllr Kennedy & Cllr Bramble,

Sexual and Reproductive Health Services for Young people in Hackney

Thank you for attending the Children & Young People Scrutiny Commission meeting on 14th September 2023 where members discussed the draft City & Hackney Sexual Health Strategy and the discontinuation of the CHYPS Plus service. Members would also like to thank officers from across the council, local stakeholders as well as external guests for their excellent contributions which made for an open, informative and positive discussion of this important issue. A full public record is available through the published [draft minutes](#) and [video recording](#) of the meeting.

The Commission understands and appreciates the difficult decisions that Cabinet members and officers are often required to make in relation to future service provision, particularly when funding pressures from government continue to be so challenging. In this context, the Commission would particularly like to thank Public Health officers for their open and frank engagement with members which has supported a positive and hopefully productive scrutiny process and which is hoped will bring positive outcomes for young people's sexual and reproductive health in Hackney.

A central aim of the scrutiny function is to engage and listen to the young people and to make sure their interests and views are heard and recognised within local decision making. Representatives from Hackney Youth Parliament, Hackney of Tomorrow and Hackney Young Futures have all contributed to this scrutiny process and have provided positive and insightful views on the priorities and preferences for the future of local sexual and reproductive health services. These groups of young people have also provided a strong and powerful commentary on the varying quality of relationship and sex education in schools and the decommissioning of the CHYPS Plus service, both of which have been captured and presented here for consideration by decision makers to support ongoing development and improvement of sexual and reproductive health services for young people in Hackney.

Overview & Scrutiny

As agreed at the scrutiny session, the Commission has reviewed all written submissions together with the verbal evidence provided at the meeting and drawn a number of conclusions and recommendations (attached) which it hopes will further inform the development of sexual and reproductive health services for young people across Hackney. The Commission would welcome a response via the usual Cabinet member and scrutiny process.

The Commission also welcomes the Cabinet member for Health, Adult Social Care, Voluntary Sector and Culture commitment that the Cabinet Procurement and Insourcing Committee will look further into the decommissioning of the CHYPS Plus service, and look forward to understanding what future lessons may be learnt from this process.

Once again, the Commission would like to thank you and your officers for your cooperation and support for this scrutiny process.

Yours faithfully.

Cllr Sophie Conway
Chair, Children and Young People
Scrutiny Commission

Cllr Margaret Gordon
Vice Chair, Children and Young People
Scrutiny Commission

cc:

- Dr Sandra Husbands
- Chris Lovett, AD of Public Health
- Carolyn Sharpe, Consultant in Public Health
- Jacquie Burke, Group Director for Children & Education
- Diane Benjamin, Director of Children's Social Care
- Paul Senior, Interim Director of Education
- Ben Bradley, Head of Mayor, Cabinet & Civic Support and Member Casework

1. **City & Hackney Draft Sexual Health Strategy (and action plan)**

The Commission welcomes the draft [City & Hackney Sexual Health Strategy](#) and supports its ambition to ensure that all residents are able to enjoy healthy and fulfilling sexual relationships through the support of high quality and accessible sexual and reproductive health services. The strategy provides a clear direction of travel setting out local priorities which local services will be expected to work towards. Through its other work in this field (e.g. support for young parents, sex and relationship education in schools) the Commission is aware that some residents face significant barriers in accessing the sexual and reproductive health services that they might need, therefore the prioritisation of vulnerable communities and efforts to inequalities within the strategy is particularly welcome.

This strategy, together with the [Director of Public Health Annual Report 2022/23](#), also underlines the centrality of young people within local sexual and reproductive healthcare systems. Not only does Hackney have a relatively young population (54% of residents are aged 15-44 years), young people in Hackney have high levels of sexual and reproductive health needs as is clearly illustrated through higher rates of sexually transmitted infections (STI) and reinfections, abortions and teenage pregnancy compared to London and nationwide averages. Indeed, some of these indices of sexual and reproductive need among young people are amongst the highest in England.

With lower levels of sexual and reproductive health knowledge, skills and experience young people are more susceptible to poorer outcomes. Such poor sexual and reproductive health outcomes can be exacerbated by other vulnerability factors for young people such as experience within local care and youth justice systems, personal drug use, teenage parenthood, sexuality and ethnic minority grouping. Therefore, the additional focus that the Annual Public Health report brings to the understanding of the sexual and reproductive needs of young people, and what local services must do in address these, is therefore important and timely.

The Commission looks forward to hearing further about the outcomes of the strategy consultation and the feedback that partners and of course young people themselves have provided in response. Given the complexity of the commissioning landscape for provision for sexual and reproductive health services and the ongoing financial and budgetary challenges face by Public Health, the council and wider partnership, the Commission particularly welcomes the Commitment to develop an accompanying action plan, as this will demonstrate how all stakeholders will be engaged in the delivery of the agreed aims and priorities and how local resources will be utilised to greatest effect.

It is in this context that the Commission has highlighted a number of areas that pertain to young people's sexual health, which may require some further consideration in the planning and delivery of service improvements. These are highlighted below.

1. a) Young Peoples' Access to Sex and Relationship Education

Access to comprehensive, high quality and inclusive sex and relationship education in schools is the cornerstone of good sexual and reproductive health among young people and the Commission welcomes that this remains a key priority within the draft City & Hackney Sexual Health Strategy. It is clear however, that a number of significant challenges need to be addressed to deliver on this ambition given the concerns raised by contributors to this scrutiny session in relation to the consistency, quality, and inclusivity of sex and relationship education being delivered across local schools.

Whilst publicly funded schools¹ are required to teach relationship and sex education (RSE) and have regard to the [guidance \(2019\)](#), this subject is part of the broader personal, social and economic education (PSHE) curriculum which is *non-statutory*. Schools therefore have greater flexibility in the development and delivery of RSE curricula which inevitably leads to significant variations in the scope and content of individual school teaching programmes. This was confirmed in the evidence presented to the Commission, with local stakeholders and young people themselves reporting wide ranging variations in the approach and time devoted to RSE among local schools, which resulted in lessons of varying quality and outcomes for children and young people.

Whilst there is undoubtedly good practice, where local schools have a comprehensive programme of RSE which is integrated into the broader curriculum and which utilises the skills and expertise of both teachers and external professionals, it is clear that this approach is far from universal. For the most part, particularly in secondary schools, it would appear that RSE is predominantly delivered through termly drop-down sessions, which has led to a more selective and narrower approach, and, in the words of a number of contributors, has supported a 'tick-box' approach to teaching this subject.

From [previous work](#) in this area, the Commission understands that leadership is central to a comprehensive and effective programme of RSE being delivered in schools. Yet it was clear from the evidence of local stakeholders that there were concerns around the consistency of approaches taken to the delivery of the RSE curriculum locally by local schools. Of particular note was the evidence from the local specialist sexual health service, which, with extensive experience in supporting the sexual health needs of local young people, clearly identified that the delivery of sex and relationship education in schools to be a local '*service gap*', highlighting the lack of clarity and purpose which underpinned the RSE curriculum in local schools.

Local variations in approach to teaching RSE in local schools was further illustrated by Young Hackney's Health and Wellbeing Team's (HWBT) evidence to the Commission, where it was noted that whilst it had a presence in almost every educational setting, the degree to which its skills and expertise were utilised by schools varied widely. The HWBT noted that whilst some schools regularly and consistently commissioned them to provide RSE sessions throughout the year, other schools used their services more periodically. The HWBT also noted that there were

¹ Maintained schools, academies and free schools.

marked differences in the nature and breadth of RSE sessions they were requested to deliver, with some schools happy for the session to cover a broad range of RSE content whilst others were more restrictive about what issues or topics that could be covered.

The HWBT are highly experienced practitioners delivering over 1,100 sessions across local schools in 2022/23, and whilst it is recognised that there are other experts in this field which can equally support schools, it is disappointing to the Commission that schools are not fully utilising the skills, experience and local knowledge that this team can contribute to local RSE programmes. The HWBT also noted that whilst teacher training was part of their RSE offer to local schools, relatively few had directly engaged them to train staff. Whilst the Commission agrees with local ambitions to increase uptake of the HWBT offer among local schools, these ambitions need further clarity and focus, and should be informed by analysis of current service uptake and utilisation by local schools.

Whilst schools can (and clearly do) contract other specialist providers to provide RSE input into local RSE curriculums, it was acknowledged that this subject is primarily delivered through existing teaching staff who may have varying skills, experience or interests in this field. Inevitably, this may result in RSE programmes and lessons of varying quality. This point was made very clearly in the Commission's focus groups, where young people frequently linked the quality and content of their RSE lessons to the engagement and support of particular members of staff.

SRE in schools was a key area of discussion in the Commissions' focus groups with young people from Hackney Youth Parliament, Hackney of Tomorrow and Young Futures. In the focus groups there was a general perception that whilst RSE taught in schools adequately covering the basics of biological sex education, there were wide variations as to what was taught about sex and relationships which left young people with significant gaps in their knowledge and understanding. Across the focus groups young people consistently identified a number of elements that were poorly covered or missing from local RSE curricula in schools, which included:

- A lack of focus on *personal* and *sexual relationships* and how to manage the complexities that these may bring to young people's lives;
- LGBT identities and how these intersect with sex and relationship issues were generally poorly covered;
- Inadequacy of curricula in meeting the sexual and reproductive health needs of neuro-diverse children and other children with SEND;
- Fertility, menstruation and women's health issues were inconsistently covered;
- Insufficient focus on maintaining personal sexual and reproductive sexual health, what services were available to support them, how they could access them and what might be expected if they did.

In talking to young people about their sexual and reproductive health needs and the evident mismatch in the nature and content of RSE programmes, this led the Commission to question the degree to which schools actively involved local specialist sexual and reproductive health practitioners or indeed their pupils, in identifying needs to help shape and inform their programmes of study.

It is important for the Commission to acknowledge that the concerns around the content, consistency and quality of SRE programmes in schools, are not just concerns for Hackney, as it is clear that this is also a national concern. As has been made clear in national research ([for example in the field of fertility and reproductive ehealth](#)), there are wide variations in what pupils are being taught about sexual and reproductive health which has led to significant gaps in young people's knowledge and understanding.

Similarly, the Commission also recognises that schools face a unique set of challenges in the delivery of RSE programmes to pupils. Firstly, providing a comprehensive, balanced and sensitive programme of RSE to pupils in the context of multiple and competing demands of the national curriculum and in the face of increasing resource pressures, is undoubtedly challenging. Secondly, the Commission also acknowledged that the content of RSE study programmes has, once again, become increasingly politicised, as exemplified by the [Prime Minister announcing a review](#) into the statutory RSE guidance '*... to ensure that schools are not teaching inappropriate or contested content in relationships, sex and health education.*' This creates further uncertainty and undermines the confidence of schools and teachers to deliver RSE programmes which effectively respond to the needs of pupils in their care.

In summary, the Commission welcomes the prioritisation of SRE in the draft sexual health strategy, and looks forward to greater clarity on how it intends to work with schools, sexual and reproductive healthcare providers and of course young people themselves, to help improve the consistency, quality and inclusivity of local programmes of education. Within this commitment, it is important to understand how schools can be supported to include the voices of young people to greater effect in SRE planning, and to guide and inform not only what is taught, but how it is taught. The Commission would also welcome further details on how the sexual health strategy and action plan intends to improve the interrelationships and connectivity between sexual and reproductive health providers, but particularly the relationship between schools and local sexual and reproductive health practitioners, as this can ensure that RSE in schools is truly grounded within a detailed knowledge and understanding of local young people's sexual and reproductive health needs.

The Commission would also like to draw Commissioner's attention to the growing number of children who are not in full-time mainstream education, and who are, for the most part, likely to miss out on local sexual and reproductive education programmes. There are a significant number of children (c1,200-1,500) mainly from the Orthodox Jewish community, who are receiving a predominantly religious education which excludes traditional sex and relationship education teaching. In addition, there are a further 300 children who are electively home educated by their parents, of which little is known about the sex and relationship education they receive. Furthermore, between 2,000-3,000 children move into or out of local schools each year, which given the way that RSE is predominantly taught (through drop down termly/yearly sessions), there is strong possibility that such children may miss parts of RSE teaching programmes.

Finally, the Commission fully acknowledges the growing role of digital and other social media in young people's education and learning around sexual and reproductive health, indeed many of the young people that the Commission spoke to highlighted their use of social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram as important sources of sexual and reproductive health advice and information. These sources of information are of course valuable in their own right, but in an age of information saturation and misinformation, it is often difficult to assess the veracity of the information that young people may be obtaining through social media. In this context, the role of RSE programmes in schools becomes evermore important, not only as being a *trusted brand* of education and advice but also as a medium which can be better shaped around the needs of young people themselves.

1. *b) Further integration of sexual and reproductive health service provision*

From the evidence presented to the Commission, it is evident that the landscape of sexual and reproductive health for young people is complex, where there are a number of agencies commissioning multiple services across health, education and primary care settings. Officers acknowledged the need for further service integration at the meeting, and this is reflected in the priorities of the sexual health strategy itself. The Commission suggests that there is evidence of the need for further integration and collaborative provision in a number of key areas.

Firstly, as previously identified above, feedback from providers and from young people themselves would suggest the need for improved partnerships between tier 1 (schools and education settings) and tier 2 providers (sexual health services, pharmacies, Young Hackney, primary care). More collaborative partnerships between schools and other more specialist providers may help to improve the quality and consistency of RSE programmes which better reflect local sexual and reproductive health needs of young people and improve signposting for further advice, help or support.

The local sexual health service is *pivotal* to the local system of sexual and reproductive health care provision. The skills, knowledge and experience which accrue within this setting provide invaluable insight into the *local* needs and experiences of young people's sexual and reproductive health which can guide and inform other local service provision. Equally however, other local services hold similarly useful insight into the needs, priorities and preferences of local young people which may be of similar utility to the sexual health service and may assist in service planning and design. Given the prioritisation of young people's sexual health within the DPH report and in light of the discontinuation of CHYPS Plus, the Commission would welcome plans to support further collaborative working between the sexual health service and other local young people's services, in particular the Health and Wellbeing team and the broader Young Hackney Service. Improved collaboration may bring opportunities for service development as well as increasing awareness, reach and utilisation of sexual and reproductive health services within the local networks of young people.

Improved collaboration across local sexual and reproductive health care systems needs to be supported through more developed local organisational infrastructure.

In this context, the Commission is seeking further clarity and assurance within the forthcoming action plan, as to how the local Sexual and Reproductive Health Forum will support further integration and assist the development of collaborative partnerships to better meet the needs of young people as well as delivering on the wider ambitions of the sexual health strategy. It may well be that further organisational infrastructure is needed which can further assist service integration, and improve services for young people and deliver on the ambitions of the sexual health strategy.

1. c) Communication of information and advice for young people

Following on from the above, in acknowledging the complexity of the sexual and reproductive health care landscape for young people, it is the view of the Commission that young people need further information to help them navigate local provision and to identify those services which are best placed to meet their needs. Indeed, the provision of comprehensive information and advice about local services is central to promotion and maintenance of good sexual and reproductive health among our young people.

From the Commission's focus groups it was apparent that there was some uncertainty among young people as to where they would go for information about local sexual and reproductive health care services, with young people citing a wide ranging number of sources. More specifically, discussions with young people suggested that in terms of information needs, there was a desire for greater clarity about:

- The range of sexual and reproductive health services available locally;
- Where services were located and how they can be accessed; and
- What might be expected when young people use sexual and reproductive health services.

The Commission acknowledged the excellent work of the Health & Wellbeing Team in collating local sexual and reproductive health information through a [dedicated webpage](#). Young people that the Commission spoke to underlined the importance of social media in connecting and signposting young people to local information, and in this context would welcome further clarity within the action plans as to how local service information (such as that provided through the HWB team) will connect to digital social media platforms (facebook, Instagram, Tiktok) predominantly used by local young people, and which are central to local website traction. The development of a super youth hub might provide a further opportunity to reflect on how young people may be engaged on sexual and reproductive health issues, as part of a broader health and wellbeing approach.

The Commission agrees with outcome targets within the strategy which seek to ensure that information is designed in acceptable and appropriate forms for young people with vulnerabilities, particularly those aged under 16, looked after children and care leavers, LGBT young people and those young people who are neurodivergent or have additional needs. Young people that the Commission spoke to also highlighted that the information needs of young people who are neuro-divergent differ from those of other young people, and recommended the use

of video recordings to further explain what services might be available from local clinics, how they could access them and what might happen if they needed to use them. Such a development may have wider benefits to young people more generally.

With such a complex landscape of provision spanning education, health, social care and the voluntary sector it is undoubtedly difficult for young people to navigate given their relative lack of experience. In this context, an integrated sexual and reproductive communications strategy may facilitate quicker and more effective signposting of young people to appropriate services for their needs.

1. d) Addressing inequalities - outreach

The sexual health strategy and underpinning needs assessment highlights local inequalities in sexual and reproductive health outcomes for young people and a number of sub-cohorts including, young men, young people from LGBT communities and young people from ethnic communities. The Commission welcomes plans within the strategy to better understand the needs of those communities experiencing disproportionately higher levels of sexual and reproductive ill-health or those groups which may be underserved by current provision.

Evidence from the sexual health service in this scrutiny exercise on the difficulties of local outreach, and its success in reaching vulnerable groups was made clear to the Commission. Here officers suggested that delivering outreach services was of dubious value as this tended to engage a static population and there were challenges of delivering services confidentiality in these settings, particularly in relation to youth hubs. In order to address the inequalities in needs and access for STI and contraception, the Commission would welcome a clearer concept and understanding of targeted outreach and how this links back to referral to advice, support to mainstream services would be welcome in the action plan.

1. e) Associated emotional and mental health support

Young people's sexual and reproductive health needs are not solely clinical, indeed, as was made clear in the evidence to the Commission young people often present with multiple concerns, which may include anxiety, mental health or drug use. From previous work, the Commission is all too aware of increased prevalence of mental health concerns among young people and is concerned of the possible repercussions for sexual and reproductive health given the associations that anxiety, stress and depression has with sexual risk taking behaviour. In this context, the Commission is seeking further assurance and clarity as to how young people may access support.

With such a broad range of possible access points within the local sexual and reproductive health care system, providers may have varying levels of experience and knowledge of working with young people, pathways to access emotional and mental health support may not always be consistent. For example, young people accessing sexual services who may be presenting with mental health or emotional needs, Health Advisers are at hand to assess and refer on to more specialist support if necessary. Young people accessing sexual and reproductive health services

through other routes, such as for example local pharmacies or other outreach settings, opportunities to engage, assess and refer for emotional support are more limited. In this context, the Commission would welcome further clarity (within the action plan) as to how further collaboration and integration between mental health/emotional wellbeing providers and sexual and reproductive health providers can be supported across local systems (such as CAMHS, voluntary sector organisations).

2. Decommissioning of CHYPS Plus

The CHYPS Plus service (at the Homerton Hospital) has been commissioned by City & Hackney Public Health to provide a holistic clinical and wellbeing service for young people, including dedicated sexual and reproductive health advice and treatment since 2016. In May 2023, following significant and ongoing concerns around performance, the decision was taken to expire the CHYPS Plus contract, therefore after a short transitional extension, the service will end on the 30th November 2023. Whilst the Commission understands the necessity for the Public Health team to take action to ensure that resources are used effectively and in the best interests of young people, a number of concerns remain around the consultation process underpinning this decision and possible equalities implications of this process. In addition, the Commission is seeking further reassurance from Commissioners about the anticipated impact and proposed mitigations that this decommissioning decision will have on young people.

2 a) Demographic data and Consultation with CHYPS Plus users

The Commission fully understands the need for PH to take action, as evidence presented to us indicates that CHYPS Plus service has not performing to agreed contract levels in relation to: the total number of young people attending clinics; the uptake of services by under 18 year olds; undertaking outreach, and: the provision of extended health and wellbeing services (smoking cessation, weight advice, onward service referral). Furthermore, contract underperformance has been both significant (i.e. reaching just 33% of agreed attendance target) and ongoing (where concerns pre-date Covid).

The Commission suggests however, that there are two significant gaps in local information which are important to future planning and decision making around CHYPS Plus service and future provision of young people's sexual and reproductive health services. Firstly, it is understood that, aside from age data, there is very limited demographic or service use data about those young people who currently attend the CHYPS Plus service. In this context, there is a limited understanding of the demography of the young people who are using the CHYPS Plus service, whether they have specific vulnerabilities or what their sexual and reproductive health needs actually are. Secondly, there has been no consultation or engagement with existing users of the CHYPS Plus service, so again, nothing is known about how these young people will be impacted by the closure, and in particular, what their future patterns of sexual and reproductive health service use might look like in response to the closure.

Without a range of demographic data on service users there can be no meaningful equalities impact assessment to assess whether the decision to discontinue the CHYPS Plus service disproportionately impacts on certain groups of young people (e.g. young people from LGBT communities, some ethnic grouping). Also, as there is a limited understanding of why young people attend CHYPS Plus, the services that they use or indeed, how they might be impacted by its closure, the Commission also questions whether assurances that remaining service provision will adequately meet their needs can realistically be given, as it is not clear how mitigations for this cohort can be planned for when their demographics and sexual and reproductive health needs broadly remain unknown.

Given the paucity of CHYPS Plus service data, the numbers of young people directly impacted by the prospective closure of CHYPS Plus is difficult to determine, but a conservative estimate of the physical attendances (and excluding telephone or on-line contacts) would put this at between 250-300.² Whilst this number may appear relatively small, without knowing the demographics or sexual and reproductive health needs or future service preferences of this cohort, it is difficult to assess how their future needs may be met within the remaining service configuration.

[Addendum: The Commission has been notified that additional data on the demographic characteristics of CHYPS Plus users is available to Public Health, details of which will be provided in the formal response to these recommendations]

2. b) Remaining sexual and reproductive health service provision outside CHYPS Plus

Aside from dedicated young people provision through CHYPS Plus a broad range of services are commissioned locally (via NHS, Council and ICB processes) that meet the sexual and reproductive health needs of people more widely. In this context, despite the discontinuation of the CHYPS Plus service, officers assured the Commission that the sexual and reproductive health needs of young people would still be met through these remaining services.

The discontinuation of CHYPS Plus will not affect all young people who are current users of sexual and reproductive health services, as evidence presented to the Commission indicated that significant numbers of young people from City & Hackney already accessed alternative sexual and reproductive health services including those provided by the mainstream sexual health service (at the Homerton), Sexual Health London³ or through other clinics outside of Hackney⁴. In addition, officers also cite primary care services (General Practitioners and Pharmacists) as additional options for which young people may also receive some elements of sexual and reproductive healthcare (though not all). Whilst these services present a wide range of service options, all of which will remain after the discontinuation of CHYPS Plus, some aspects of these services remained a concern to young people that the Commission

² Most recent data suggests that there were 674 recorded annual *attendances* at CHYPS Plus

³ Sexual Health London is an online STI and Emergency Contraception Service available to all adults aged 16 and over.

⁴ Sexual health services are open access, therefore depending on the reason for a visit, patients have the right to access any clinic, not just in their own area.

spoke to, and would therefore like further assurance around future utilisation of these services by young people, and in particular for some specific cohorts.

It is clear that for many young people, sexual and reproductive health services offered through primary care settings present a number of challenges, particularly in respect of service accessibility, acceptability and confidentiality. Young people indicated there were a number of factors which would inhibit them visiting their GP for sexual and reproductive health advice, which included; difficulties and delays in getting appointments; discomfort with speaking to a GP about sexual health issues and a preference to engage with 'specialist' practitioners. Looked after children and care leavers that the Commission spoke to also had particularly strong reservations about using their GP for sexual and reproductive health services, given the rights of other related practitioners to access to general practitioner information and how this information may be used.

The Commission also noted Hackney Healthwatch's mystery shopper exercise, which recorded similar concerns by young people for the distribution of free emergency hormonal contraception by local pharmacists. Young people reported widespread inconsistencies in the administration and supply of EHC where it was reported that 2 in 5 pharmacists charged for this free service, the lack of private space for young people to share confidential information, and the inconsistency of information and advice proffered. Young people that the Commission spoke to also echoed concerns about the lack of confidentiality in pharmacy settings, and the need for further clarity about the role of local pharmacists in reproductive health service provision and what information, advice and services they could expect to receive they could expect to receive in this setting.

2. c) Service access by Under 16's and Under 18's

Adolescents under the age of 16 and to a lesser degree those aged under 18, face a range of sexual and reproductive health challenges as they begin to initiate intimate and sexual relationships. With relatively little experience, knowledge or skills on how to protect themselves, adolescents are at a higher risk of unwanted pregnancy, unsafe abortion and sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS. This same lack of experience can also mean that adolescents may also be vulnerable to exploitative or coercive personal and sexual relationships. As a consequence, these young people require expert support and guidance by staff who are specifically trained to support their needs, help them to build positive and healthy sexual relationships and where needed, identify potential safeguarding concerns, which in part, is why such dedicated young peoples services such as CHYPS Plus were initially commissioned. Therefore, although numbers utilising current provision may be relatively low, the Commission is looking for specific reassurance that remaining services, and staff within them, can appropriately meet the needs of under 18's and under 16s, given the connected vulnerabilities of these age groups of children.

When the Commission spoke to young people as part of this scrutiny exercise, the physical accessibility (as in the location of the clinic) and opening times (after school) were important to young people. The CHYPS Plus service currently offers *appointment free access* from 12.00pm until 5.30pm daily (5pm on Friday) which

enables young people to access sexual and reproductive health services after school or college, which correlates with those needs explicitly identified by young people the Commission spoke to. When this service is discontinued (and before any alternative service that may be offered through the super-youth hub can be put in place), access to sexual health advice and treatment for young people will be through four clinics [operated by HUHT](#), where it is noted that in total there are just 4 evening sessions (which operate beyond 4pm), three of which are on the same day (Wednesday). It is also important to note that for U16's physical clinic access will be the only service option available, as Sexual Health London which provides online access to STI testing and emergency contraception is not available to this cohort of young people.

In the context of the above, the Commission is seeking a Commitment from local commissioners to develop and improve access to local sexual and reproductive health services to U16's and more broadly the under 18's cohort of young people after the discontinuation of CYPS Plus service on 30th November. The Commission is particularly keen to hear of how commissioners and providers will work together to improve accessibility of sexual and reproductive health services with greater access at after school hours sessions. Evidence presented to the Commission also suggested that under 18's access to sexual and reproductive health services are prioritised in many other health authority areas, where this group can access services without a prior appointment, and would welcome plans on how priority can be similarly afforded to this group of young people (and especially under 16's) across clinics in Hackney.

2. d) Dedicated young people provision

Within the Commission's focus groups, young people had strong reservations about the loss of dedicated sexual and reproductive health service provision. Amongst young people who had experience of CHYPS Plus *and* those who did not, there was broad agreement that dedicated provision was more attractive and acceptable than generic services because it was implicit that these services would be operated by practitioners who *understood* young people's lives and were *empathetic* of their concerns, and of course, were *experienced* in dealing with the sexual and reproductive health needs of young people. In addition, young people also suggested that dedicated services encouraged access, as it allowed them to attend out of the 'gaze of adults', which some indicated would make them feel 'judged' and create an 'awkward' or 'intimidating' atmosphere.

Whilst many people, regardless of their age, may find their first experiences of sexual and reproductive health services awkward and intimidating, the Commission would like to echo some of the 'expertise' concerns that young people had about the loss of dedicated provision. With the discontinuation of the CHYPS Plus service there is a real possibility that existing staff will move on to other services and that this will lead to a loss (or dilution) of local skills, expertise, and experience in supporting young people's sexual and reproductive health needs. In the context of widespread recruitment difficulties in NHS service, the Commission is seeking further reassurance as to how these skills and experience of staff in the CHYPS Plus service will be retained within the remaining sexual and reproductive health care system.

In terms of future commissioning arrangements and the possible inclusion of dedicated sexual and reproductive health service provision for young people, further questions remain which need further clarification from local Commissioners. Whilst the case has been made that this specific contract for dedicated sexual and reproductive healthcare provision through the local provider has not proved effective or value for money, the case against the *model* of dedicated sexual and reproductive health care service provision for young people has not. Those conditions which underpin the need for dedicated provision for young people (e.g. sexual and reproductive health inequalities, vulnerability of this group and wide ranging access barriers) still exist, and this model is still widely used across London boroughs, including in our neighbouring boroughs of [Camden & Islington](#), [Haringey](#), [Newham](#) as well as a more extended well being model in [Tower Hamlets](#). Further clarification is therefore whether future commissioning arrangements, including that for the super youth hub, will include dedicated sexual and reproductive health care services.

2. e) Young people friendly Services

With the discontinuation of CHYPS Plus taking place at the end of November 2023, and plans for a 'super youth hub' still at an early stage,⁵ Members of the Commission are requesting greater clarity about what constitutes a 'young person friendly' service and further reassurance that remaining sexual and reproductive health service provision would be sufficiently attuned to the needs of young people so that services are delivered in a way which is both accessible and acceptable to their needs. Whilst this predominantly relates to sexual health services, this also has relevance for wider points of service access such as through Pharmacies and General practice (noting the earlier concerns of young people).

The Commission's focus groups asked young people for their views about accessing sexual and reproductive health services, and what features they considered would make these 'young people friendly' and encourage young people to attend. Analysis revealed consistent themes in these responses about what was considered 'young people friendly' sexual and reproductive health service which included:

- *Confidentiality* - wanted reassurance about the confidentiality as they held genuine anxieties about attending sexual and reproductive health services (first time user, not knowing what to expect, who might see them);
- *Friendly & empathetic* - young people wanted service to be positive, open and welcoming and not to feel judged, and wanted to be supported by staff who understood and were experienced in meeting young people's needs;
- *Accessibility* - that services were available in easy to access locations, and at times which best suited them (after school, evenings) in a format which gave them choice (both walk-in and appointments);
- *Holistic* - where young people are able to talk about different but connected aspects of their lives and not just sexual and reproductive health, especially relationships.

Consulting and engaging with young people is clearly instrumental in ensuring that services are designed and delivered in formats which are both accessible and

⁵ Which may include sexual and reproductive health service provision - and funding decision not known as yet.

acceptable to them. Whilst the Commission welcomes the consultation exercise which has been undertaken with young people to support the development of the planned super youth hub, further reassurance is required that the broader range of sexual and reproductive health services outside CHYPS Plus are 'young people friendly' and can appropriately respond to their needs. In this context, the Commission was interested to learn of the [You're welcome](#) accreditation for young person friendly services which some of our neighbouring boroughs have already adopted, and would recommend that local sexual and reproductive health services are encouraged to seek such accreditation.

2. f) Finance and budget savings associated with closure of CHYPS Plus

The Commission would welcome further clarity on how the £540,146 savings from the decommissioning of the CHYPS Plus service will be used. Whilst officers indicated that plans for a Super Youth Hub may contribute to future sexual and reproductive health service provision for young people, it is noted that funding for this project is being sought through external rather than public health sources (IC). Whilst officers suggested that there was no connection between proposals to discontinue the CHYPS Plus and the need for Public Health to find savings to contribute to the £57m council wide savings required in the proposed 2023/24-2025/26 Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), it remains unclear whether if any of these funds would be available for future investment in sexual and reproductive health services for young people. In particular, the Commission would welcome further financial clarity on the following:

- If there will be transitional support for remaining sexual and reproductive health services after the discontinuation of CHYPS Plus service e.g. to support services becoming more young person friendly, more accessible opening times for young people.
- Updated advice, information and signposting for young people needing sexual and reproductive health services reflecting the closure of CHYPS Plus and other alternative services available;
- How additional commitments⁶ to improve sexual and reproductive health services made within DPH Annual Report will be funded.

⁶ These include: the provision of services for individuals unable to access mainstream services, particularly those who are vulnerable; improving young people's visibility and access to services; improving referral pathways to and from sexual health services.

Recommendations

Discontinuation of CHYPS Plus

1. The Commission recommends that PH Commissioners continue to engage with Homerton University Hospital Trust (HUHT) to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the profile CHYPS Plus service users. With a more detailed understanding of the demography and service needs of users, Commissioners will be better placed to assess the equalities implications of the discontinuation of CHYPS Plus and to more effectively plan and deliver service mitigations that ensure that young people's sexual and reproductive health needs will continue to be met within the wider sexual and reproductive healthcare system.
2. To facilitate improved understanding of the sexual and reproductive health needs of young people and future service commissioning for young people, the Commission recommends that additional data monitoring and reporting requirements are built into existing/new sexual health service contracts with Homerton University Hospital Trust (HUHT). As a minimum, contracting arrangements should require the provider to regularly report on sexual health service usage by under 18's and Under 16's age groups, their demography (gender, ethnicity) and primary presenting sexual and reproductive healthcare needs.
3. As there is no defined timeline between the ending of the CHYPs contract and the establishment of the super youth hub (which is also contingent on external funding) the Commission is mindful of how the needs of vulnerable groups of young people will be met in the interim, particularly those aged under 16 years of age, looked after children/ care leavers and young people with SEND. The Commission recommends that additional monitoring takes place during this interim period to ensure that at-risk and high priority groups of young people continue to access local sexual and reproductive health services or note any changing patterns in service use. If necessary, the Commissioners should consider some form of transitional support until the Super Youth Hub is agreed and operational.

Ensuring services are 'young people friendly'

4. With the discontinuation of dedicated young people's provision, the Commission is seeking assurance from Commissioners as to how specialist knowledge and experience accrued through the operation of CHYPS Plus will be retained in the sexual health clinic, and that in the wider sexual and reproductive health system remaining services are open, welcoming and 'young people friendly'. In particular, the Commission would welcome further clarity on:
 - a) How knowledge, skills and experience of existing CHYPS Plus staff will be retained within the local sexual and reproductive health care system;
 - b) Plans to develop and/ or extend staff training to ensure that there is sufficient awareness and understand of adolescent sexual and reproductive health needs across local systems;

- c) The role of the Hackney Sexual Health Forum in establishing key principles and standards in meeting the sexual and reproductive health needs of adolescents across all local providers.
5. In line with provision elsewhere in London, it is recommended that Commissioners support and encourage key local sexual and reproductive health care providers to apply for and work towards [You're Welcome](#) accreditation, which supports the development of youth friendly health and care services.
6. [Recommendation from young people - endorsed by the Commission] To further increase knowledge and understanding of sexual and reproductive health care provision through HUHT, the Commission recommends that short video presentations are developed to enable young people to know what to expect when visiting local clinics. Young people indicated that this would help explain where services were located, what services were available and what might be expected in a typical visit. This would help to reduce pre-attendance anxiety, particularly among neuro-divergent young people.

Supporting service access by Under 18's and Under 16's

7. Whilst there are a broad range of alternative services for young people, the Commission remained concerned about young people aged Under 16 and Under 18's access to sexual and reproductive health services after the discontinuation of CHYPS Plus. Therefore, in line with a number of other authorities, the Commission recommends that Commissioners work with Homerton University Health trust (HUHT) to establish systems in which local clinics prioritise access to all young people aged under 18 (e.g. no appointments required).

Sexual Health Strategy - Sexual & Reproductive Health Education

8. Whilst the sexual health strategy acknowledges the importance of sexual and reproductive health education, the Commission would welcome further clarity and detail within local action planning by Commissioners as to how the quality, breadth and consistency this is covered with RSE programmes in schools. In particular, the Commission would recommend that PH Commissioners work with local RSE Primary and Secondary School Network (and schools directly) to:
 - a) Consider ways in which the voices on young people can be included within the planning and design of RSE curricula in schools so that these better reflect their sexual health needs and priorities of their pupils;
 - b) Ensure that there is improved connections and communication pathways between schools and other local sexual and reproductive health care providers which can be reflected in local curricula, so that:
 - i) Schools have a more developed understanding of sexual and reproductive health needs of local young people;
 - ii) There is improved awareness of the breadth of local service provision and how local services can be accessed;
 - iii) There opportunities for further specialist input into local RSE curricula are maximised.

9. The Commission greatly values the Young Hackney's Health & Wellbeing Team and welcomes the commitment of PH Commissioners for their continued support of their sex and relationship education work with local schools and other educational settings. Further clarity on the ambitions for the HWB team, beyond an expected increase in the number of education sessions delivered, is however needed. In particular, the Commission is seeking further assurance as to how local Commissioners can support the HWBT to extend its reach and to both broaden and deepen RSE education provision in local schools and other education settings. As part of this process, it will be important to understand the current patterns of utilisation and nature of the content delivered by the HWBT across local educational settings to help identify potential gaps in local provision.
10. The Commission was disappointed to learn of the poor take up of the HWBT's RSE training offer to local schools. As a first step, the Commission recommends that further consultative work is undertaken with schools to understand the reasons for this, which may guide and inform future service planning and delivery of the HWBT training offer.
11. There is growing evidence of the importance of peer-to-peer education in delivering effective and positive health messaging across networks of young people. This was substantiated in the Commission's focus groups with young people, some of whom described very positive experiences of this method of RSE education delivery. In this context, it is recommended that Commissioners should explore (in collaboration with local health and education providers) how the use of peer education can support ambitions to improve and extend the quality of RSE across educational settings.

Further integration and collaboration with partners

12. It is clear that further integration within the sexual and reproductive health care system and improved collaboration with partner agencies is central to the delivery of many of the ambitions and priorities set out in the strategy, and the Commission would welcome greater clarity within the action plan as to how SRH services and their partners will be supported in this locally: In particular:
 - a) Improvements to collaborative pathways and networks between between tier 1 and tier 2 providers;
 - b) How existing infrastructure (such as the Sexual Health Partnership Board, SRE Schools Forum) can be adapted and improved to support more integrated working;
 - c) How local commissioning frameworks support and encourage collaborative working.

Communications for young people

13. To help young people navigate sexual and reproductive health care services, the Commission recommends that an integrated sexual and reproductive communications strategy is developed to facilitate quicker and more effective

signposting of young people to appropriate services to meet their needs. The HWBT information on the YH website provides the kernel of such information - and further consideration is needed as to how this links to digital social media platforms (as part of broader young people's wellbeing).

Future funding

14. Whilst the discontinuation of the CHYPS Plus service and the need for PH Team to contribute savings for the MTFP; the Commission would welcome further clarity as to whether some element of the £540k savings will be used to support the following:
- a) Transitional support for remaining sexual and reproductive health services after the discontinuation of CHYPS Plus service e.g. to support services becoming more young person friendly, more accessible opening times for young people.
 - b) Updated advice, information and signposting for young people needing sexual and reproductive health services reflecting the closure of CHYPS Plus and other alternative services available;
 - c) Additional commitments⁷ to improve sexual and reproductive health services for young people made within DPH Annual Report.

General

15. It is recommended that Public Health return to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission from December 2024 to update members:
- On progress against any recommendations set out above which are agreed by the Cabinet member;
 - How the Sexual Health Strategy is being delivered to further support the sexual and reproductive health needs of young people in Hackney.

⁷ These include: the provision of services for individuals unable to access mainstream services, particularly those who are vulnerable; improving young people's visibility and access to services; improving referral pathways to and from sexual health services.

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Children & Young People Scrutiny Commission 19th February 2024 Item 7 - Work Programme	Item No 7
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Outline

To note any changes and agree the work programme for the remainder of the municipal year 2023/24.

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Children & Young People Scrutiny Commission Work Programme 2023/24 (rolling to 2024/25)

FORWARD PLAN ON A PAGE - Confirmed - **To be Confirmed**

Municipal Year 2023/24

June 27th 2023	September 14th 2023
School Estates Strategy - School Closures and Mergers (HE)	Sexual Health Services for CYP (PH)
Childcare Sufficiency Strategy (HE)	Recruitment & Retention of Foster Carers - draft report
Work Programme - Consultation Reporting 2022/23	Work Programme
November 30th 2023	December 18th 2023
Pupil movement report (EHE, AP, Exclusions and SchoolMoves) (HE)	Children and Families Annual Report (CSC)
Update on School Exclusions report recommendations? (HE)	Joint Budget Monitoring Session - Children & Families and Hackney Education
Alternative provision strategy (Confirmed, checking format/content with K Thompson)	School Behaviour Policies - Scoping Report
January 15th 2024	19th February 2024
CHSCP Annual Report	Future of Children's Centres - to link in with public consultation
Cllr Antionnette Bramble - Cabinet Q & A (FSM and Childhood food poverty, School Estates Strategy - support for children, parents and staff at closing schools)	Super Youth Hub
March 11th 2024	May 22nd 2024
School Absence and Emotional Based School Avoidance (EBSA) - CAMHS/SEND/CSC	Disabled Children Service - with DCS, ASC, NHS
School Attainment - Attainment Gap	SEND Joint Area Action Plan
	Update: Unregistered Educational Settings (brief) Move to May 2024 (TBC)

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Children & Young People Scrutiny Commission Work Programme 2023/24 (rolling to 2024/25)

Municipal Year 2024/25

June 2024 (TBC)	July 2024 (TBC)
Housing Support for Care Leavers (f/u with Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission)	School Places and School Place Planning / School Admissions
Youth Justice Strategy (with Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission)	Childcare Sufficiency Report (wraparound childcare funding /provision / school breakfast clubs after school clubs - Hackney to receive £913k in 2024/25) Introduction of free childcare.
September 2024 (TBC)	October/ November 2024 (TBC)
Health of Looked after children ??	Autistic Spectrum Disorder
Extended HV Service young parents (will be operational for a year)	Pupil Movement
November/ December 2024 (TBC)	January 2025 (TBC)
Children's Social Care Annual Report	Sexual Health Services for Young People - follow up
Joint Budget Monitoring Session - Children & Families and Hackney Education	CHSCP Annual Report
February /March 2025 (TBC)	March / April 2025(TBC)
Early Help Strategy -: integrated partnership offer (other statutory providers and CVS) single-point of access (CSC/SEND/CAMHS) - Data monitoring - evaluation of impact. Also consent. Also a culturally sensitive offer.	Pupil Attainment
Vaping (and Substance) among CYP <u>or</u>	Access to Sports and Physical Activity (support 10 by 10 pledge inc teamsport, swim and bike)

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Children & Young People Scrutiny Commission Work Programme 2023/24 (rolling to 2024/25)

Deferred to 24/25

<p><u>Vaping among children and young people</u> Explore the uptake and impact (health and otherwise) of vaping on young people and how local services are supporting prevention (illegal use). Young people have reported</p> <p>or</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Public Health Team - Young Hackney HWB - Licensing representative - efforts to prevent illegal sales - test purchase data - External
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<p><u>Access to Physical Activity Sport</u> To assess young people's access to sport/ physical activity in relation to the Mayoral pledge of '10 by 10' (inc teamsport, swim and bike). Including possible links to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Possible decline of PE in school curriculum and after school clubs; - Accessibility and range of sports clubs; - Possible inequalities in access; - Local childhood obesity data. 	
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Further items for consideration / to schedule	
<p>Mayor Caroline Woodley - Cabinet Q & A (Childcare Commission, Family Hubs, Graduated response)</p>	<p>School Estates: increasing in borough SEND provision: graduated response, ARP provision (links to AP strategy)</p>
<p>Outcomes of Ofsted inspection of Children's Social Care (ILACS) - Spring 24?</p>	<p>Childhood Immunisations - measles spike - Hackney has one of the lowest take up rates MMR vaccination</p>
<p>Outcomes of Ofsted/ Care Quality Commission Area SEND inspection spring/summer 2024?</p>	<p>Foetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASDs)</p>
<p>Kinship Carers</p>	<p>Integrated commissioning CYP services - CSC and SEND</p>

Children & Young People Scrutiny Commission Work Programme 2023/24 (rolling to 2024/25)

Speech and Language Therapy - access to assessment and support.	Safer Schools Policing (with Living in Hackney)
School Nursing Service (key decision in March 2024)	Childcare Commission report (published January 24 - possible roundtable)

Meeting 1	Item title and scrutiny objective	Directorate – Division – Officer Responsibility	Preparatory work to support item
<p><u>Meeting Date:</u> Tuesday 27th June</p> <p>Deadline for reports: 16th June 2023</p> <p>Publication 19th June 2023</p>	<p><u>School Estates Strategy</u> To review the School Estates Strategy proposal to informally consult on the closure of two primary schools (De Beauvoir and Randal Cremer) and the merger of a further four primary schools (Baden Powell with Nightingale and Colvestone with Princess May). To inform a response to the informal consultation which closes on the 16th July 2023.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Paul Senior, Director of Education and Inclusion ● David Court, Head of School Organisation and Commissioning ● Laura Stagg, Parent Carer Engagement System Leader ● Parents Groups - to be confirmed ● Hackney NEU - to be confirmed 	-
	<p><u>Childcare Sufficiency</u> It is a statutory requirement for members to review local childcare sufficiency reports which are produced bi-annually. The Commission reviewed the full assessment report in 2022 and will therefore review an update in 2023.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Donna Thomas, Head of Early Years, Early Help & Well-being ● Tim Wooldridge, Early Years Strategy Manager ● Paul Senior, Interim Director of Education and Inclusion 	
	<p>Development of new CYP Work Programme for 2022/23</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Commission/ Scrutiny officer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To consult local stakeholders ● Meet with service Directors ● Collate topic suggestions ● Informal meeting with Commission

Children & Young People Scrutiny Commission Work Programme 2023/24 (rolling to 2024/25)

Meeting 2	Item title and scrutiny objective	Directorate – Division – Officer Responsibility	Preparatory work to support item
<p>Meeting Date: Thursday 14th September 2023</p> <p>Papers deadline: 4th September 2023</p> <p>Agenda dispatch: 6th September 2023</p>	<p><u>Sexual and Reproductive Health of Children & Young People</u> To review sexual and reproductive health provision in context of draft sexual health strategy and the discontinuation of CHYPs Plus service.</p>	Public Health as service commissioners with contributions from: Homerton Hospital, Young Hackney, British Association of Sexual Health & HIV, Healthwatch.	Focus groups with children and young people: -Hackney Youth Parliament -Care Council -Young Futures
	<p><u>Recruitment and Retention of Foster Carers</u> Update on Commissions report - draft report with draft recommendations and proposals for consultation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Commission ● Scrutiny Officer 	
	<p><u>School Estates Strategy</u> To note the Commission's consultation response to proposals to close 2 schools and merge 4 others.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Commission ● Scrutiny Officer 	
	<p>To note responses to the Commission</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - FSM and Childhood Food Poverty (LBH) - Unregistered Settings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Commission ● Scrutiny Officer 	
	<p><u>Work programme 2023/24</u> To continue discussions on future work programme items for 2023/24</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Commission ● Scrutiny Officer 	

Children & Young People Scrutiny Commission Work Programme 2023/24 (rolling to 2024/25)

Meeting 3	Item title and scrutiny objective	Directorate – Division – Officer Responsibility	Preparatory work to support item
<p>Meeting Date: 30th November 2023</p> <p>Papers deadline: 20th November 2023</p> <p>Agenda dispatch: 22nd November 2023</p>	<p><u>Pupil Movement (45)</u> Standing item; To review pupil movement year 10 movement rates (off-rolling), School Moves, Elective Home Education, Exclusions numbers of children in Alternative Provision.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Paul Senior, Director of Education ● Katherine Cracknell, Head of Wellbeing & Education Safeguarding ● David Court, AD School Estates Strategy ● Billy Baker, Pupils Out of School ● Donna Thomas, Head of Early Years, Early Help & Wellbeing 	
	<p><u>Outcome of School Exclusions (45)</u> Review follow up of recommendations made from 2021 review. Last update was received 10 months ago (January 2023).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Paul Senior, Director of Education ● Katherine Cracknell, Head of Wellbeing & Education Safeguarding ● Donna Thomas, Head of Early Years, Early Help & Wellbeing 	
	<p><u>Alternative Provision Strategy (30)</u> In view of recent updated guidance, to receive an update on plans to develop a new Alternative Provision Strategy. (May be taken within Outcome of School Exclusions as recs cover this area).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Paul Senior, Director of Education ● Karen Thompson, Alternative Provision Commissioner 	
	<p><u>Work programme 2023/24</u> To continue discussions on future work programme items for 2023/24</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Commission ● Scrutiny Officer 	

Children & Young People Scrutiny Commission Work Programme 2023/24 (rolling to 2024/25)

Meeting 4	Item title and scrutiny objective	Directorate – Division – Officer Responsibility	Preparatory work to support item
<p>Meeting Date: 18th December 2023</p> <p>Papers deadline: 5th December 2023</p> <p>Agenda dispatch: 8th December 2023</p>	<p><u>Children’s Social Care Annual Report (45)</u> Standing Item: to review children’s social care activity for the period April 2022 to March 2023.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Diane Benjamin, Director of Children's Social Care 	
	<p><u>Budget Monitoring (45)</u> To further support the alignment of these directorates, the Commission will review in-year budgets for both Hackney Education and Children’s Social Care. These have previously been taken separately.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Vernon Strowbridge, Interim Director of Finance ● Sajeed Patni, Head of Finance Children & Families 	
	<p><u>School Behaviour Policy - Scoping report (30)</u> To agree to the terms of reference for the Commission's review of school behaviour policies.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Commission ● Scrutiny Officer 	
	<p><u>Work programme 2023/24</u> To continue discussions on future work programme items for 2023/24</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Commission ● Scrutiny Officer 	

Children & Young People Scrutiny Commission Work Programme 2023/24 (rolling to 2024/25)

Meeting 5	Item title and scrutiny objective	Directorate – Division – Officer Responsibility	Preparatory work to support item
<p>Meeting Date: 15th January 2024</p>	<p><u>City & Hackney Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report (45)</u> Standing item: to review CHSCP Annual Report 2022/23</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Jim Gamble, Independent Safeguarding Commissioner, CHSCP ● Rory McCallum, Senior Professional Adviser 	
<p>Papers deadline: 3rd January 2024</p>	<p><u>Cabinet Q & A (45)</u> Topic for questioning - a) School Closures implementation (primary school places apps close 15/1) - support to children, families, schools b) FSM and childhood food poverty - preparations post July 2024 end of Mayoral FSM provision)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Cllr Anntionette Bramble, Cabinet member for Children, Education and Children's Social Care 	
<p>Agenda dispatch: 5th January 2024</p>	<p><u>Work programme 2023/24</u> To continue discussions on future work programme items for 2023/24</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Commission ● Scrutiny Officer 	

Children & Young People Scrutiny Commission Work Programme 2023/24 (rolling to 2024/25)

Meeting 6	Item title and scrutiny objective	Directorate – Division – Officer Responsibility	Preparatory work to support item
<p>Meeting Date: 19th February 2024</p>	<p><u>Future of Children’s Centres (90) (PROVISIONAL)</u> - To review future plans for Children’s Centres.</p> <p>Cabinet report expected in January 2024.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Paul Senior, Director of Education ● Donna Thomas, Head of Early Years, Early Help & Wellbeing 	<p>To link with any agreed public consultation - date to be agreed.</p>
<p>Papers deadline: 6th February 2024</p>	<p><u>Super Youth Hub (30)</u> To scrutinise plans for a proposed development of a health and wellbeing hub. (Pilot 24/24 subject to funding confirmation).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Amy Wilkinson ● Nancy Bending-Becket ● Sophie Mcelroy 	
<p>Agenda dispatch: 9th February 2024</p>	<p><u>Work programme 2023/24</u> To continue discussions on future work programme items for 2023/24</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Commission ● Scrutiny Officer 	

Children & Young People Scrutiny Commission Work Programme 2023/24 (rolling to 2024/25)

Meeting 7	Item title and scrutiny objective	Directorate – Division – Officer Responsibility	Preparatory work to support item
<p>Meeting Date: 11th March 2024</p> <p>Papers deadline: 27th February 2024</p> <p>Agenda dispatch: 1st March 2024</p>	<p><u>Pupil Attainment - Attainment Gap (45)</u> The Commission reviews pupil attainment annually - with a specific focus on the attainment gap between cohorts of young people. The Commission has requested details of actions taken by schools and local authorities to address the local attainment gap.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Paul Senior, Director of Education ● Jason Marantz, Assistant Director, School Standards and Improvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agree external input.
	<p><u>Pupil Absence & Emotional Based School Avoidance (75)</u> To review persistent (10%) and severe (50%) absence rates in schools, and assess how the local partnership (schools, HE, SEND, CAMHS and CSC) is supporting children and families to reduce EBSA. Also to review how local services are performing in context of new guidance (Sep 2023).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Paul Senior, Director of Education ● Joe Wilson, AD for SEND, Inclusion ● CAMHS ● CSC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To consult/ involve school heads ahead of/ or at the meeting - Anna Freud Centre
	<p><u>Work programme 2023/24</u> To continue discussions on future work programme items for 2023/24</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Commission ● Scrutiny Officer 	

Children & Young People Scrutiny Commission Work Programme 2023/24 (rolling to 2024/25)

Meeting 8	Item title and scrutiny objective	Directorate – Division – Officer Responsibility	Preparatory work to support item
<p>Meeting Date: May 22nd 2024</p> <p>Papers deadline: 12th May 2024</p> <p>Agenda dispatch: 14th May 2024</p>	<p><u>SEND Area Action Plan (60m) (TBC)</u> (Standing item) Implementation of SEND Strategy - agreed to follow up from 22/23. This is a partnership strategy and action plan for which all bodies are accountable via the SEND partnership board.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Paul Senior, Director of Education - Joe Wilson, AD SEND & Inclusion - Sarah Darcy, NHS - Diane Benjamin/Steve Jahoda, CSC/ Disabled Children Service 	
	<p><u>Disabled Children Service (75m)</u> To review service provision with a focus on transitional preparation and support - noting the number of children who do not reach the threshold for adult social care. Also noting this is a high spend service.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Diane Benjamin, Director of Children's Social Care - Kiran Box, Head of Disabled Children Service - Nadia Sica - Sarah Darcy - Georgina Diba 	
	<p><u>Unregistered Educational Settings(15)</u> An update on the Commission's recommendations - review progress in regulatory oversight.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Jim Gamble, Independent Safeguarding Commissioner, CHSCP ● Rory McCallum, Senior Professional Adviser ● Paul Senior, Director of Education 	Deferred from January 2024
	<p>Work programme 2023/24 To continue discussions on future work programme items for 2023/24</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Commission ● Scrutiny Officer 	

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Children & Young People Scrutiny Commission 19th February 2024 Item 8 - Minutes	Item No 8
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Outline

To note and agree the minutes of previous meetings:

- 15th January 2024.

To note any actions or matters arising:

- Letter to DfE in regard to Local Safeguarding Children arrangements 15th January;
- Written responses to questions from 18th December.

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London Borough of Hackney
Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission
Municipal Year 2023/24
Date of Meeting Monday 15 January 2024

Minutes of the proceedings of the
Children and Young People
Scrutiny Commission held at
Hackney Town Hall, Mare Street,
London E8 1EA

Chair	Councillor Sophie Conway
Councillors in Attendance	Cllr Alastair Binnie-Lubbock, Cllr Sheila Suso-Runge and Cllr Sarah Young
Apologies:	Cllr Lee Laudat-Scott, Cllr Ifraax Samatar and Cllr Lynne Troughton
Co-optees	Andy English
In Attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cllr Anntionette Bramble, Statutory Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Education, Young People and Children’s Social Care• Cllr Caroline Woodley, Cabinet Member for Families, Early Years, Parks & Play (On-line)• Jacque Burke, Group Director Children and Education• Paul Senior, Director of Education and Inclusion• Jim Gamble, Independent Safeguarding Commissioner• Jason Marantz, Assistant Director, School Standards and Improvement
Members of the Public	None
Recording:	https://youtube.com/live/v7bYsQD8NgM
Officer Contact:	Martin Bradford (martin.bradford@hackney.gov.uk) ☎ 020 8356 3315 ✉ martin.bradford@hackney.gov.uk

Councillor Sophie Conway in the Chair

1 Apologies for Absence

- 1.1 Apologies for absence were received from:
- Cllr Lee-Laudat Scott;
 - Cllr Lynne Troughton;
 - Cllr Ifraax Samatar.

- 1.2 Members connecting on-line:
- Cllr Margaret Gordon (Vice Chair)
 - Cllr Anya Sizer
 - Chanelle Paul (Co-opted Member)

2 Urgent Items / Order of Business

2.1 The Chair indicated that an item on Unregistered Educational Settings was scheduled for this meeting, but as the council is in a pre-election period due to the current by-election being held in Cazenove ward, it was agreed to defer this item to a later date (May 2024) given the significant community interest in that ward in this subject.

2.2 The Chair also reminded members to avoid conversations which may specifically concern issues relating to Cazenove ward.

2.3 There were no late items and the business of the meeting was as published.

3 Declarations of Interest

3.1 The following declarations were received:

- Jo Macleod was governor at a school in Hackney and was a parent of a child with additional needs.
- Cllr Anya Sizer was a parent of a child with SEN.

4 City & Hackney Safeguarding Children Partnership - Annual Report (19.05)

4.1 The City and Hackney Safeguarding Children Partnership (CHSCP) annual report is a standing item within the Commission's work programme. This report allows the Commission to have oversight of local child safeguarding work which can in turn guide and inform topics selected for future scrutiny.

4.2 The Chair thanked Jim Gamble, Independent Commissioner for Child Safeguarding for the CHSCP annual report which provided a comprehensive account of safeguarding activity across Hackney. The Independent Commissioner thanked all local agencies for their contributions to the 2022/23 report and highlighted the following key issues to members present:

- The report detailed progress against key safeguarding priorities. The report primarily responded to CHSCP priorities for 2022/23, including staff wellbeing. The wellbeing of the local workforce was critical in delivering high quality services and in the effective safeguarding of local children. A staff safeguarding survey revealed that there was much willingness to engage with CHSCP and staff on the whole indicated that they were well supported by their line managers.
- There was a need for safeguarding organisations to engage further with local housing providers and with voluntary sector organisations to raise awareness, extend networks of good practice and support information sharing.
- Child Q update report response was disappointing in that the police did not acknowledge institutional racism in the force for which there was a growing body of evidence to support this.
- Since the publication of the Child Q review, all local agencies had committed to anti-racist policies and practice, yet to date there was little tangible evidence of these being applied and this was being followed up by the CHSCP.
- The CHSCP spoke to children in their own environment which was a positive development in helping to reach the authentic voice of children and young people. The CHSCP would be teaming up with other agencies to further develop this approach for this year.

- There is a national programme of 'getting the basics right' in safeguarding, but the view of local practitioners here in Hackney was that this approach was too Eurocentric and would need to be adapted with the project lead (NSPCC) when applied in the borough.
- The reviews that the CHSCP undertake are highlighting a number of new issues for the locality, such as the management of sex offenders within the community. A local case referral had promoted a broader assessment of provision to identify if there were any systems that needed to be strengthened.
- Working Together had been consulted upon by the government to implement a number of developments to local safeguarding arrangements. Whilst some of these were welcomed others were felt to be untested. Of particular concern was the suggested removal of the Independent Chair from local partnerships to be replaced by the Head of Children's Services as this would raise questions about accountability and the ability to provide independent challenge to local safeguarding arrangements. It was suggested that this weakened local safeguarding arrangements, and this was the view of Hackney and many other local safeguarding partnerships who also did not support this move.

Questions from the Commission

4.3 From the safeguarding work across the partnership, what were the key safeguarding risks and challenges to emerge in Hackney for 2022/23? a) Are there any new or emerging risks that the Commission needs to be made aware of? b) Are safeguarding concerns in Hackney any different to other London boroughs, or are there specific risks for Hackney? c) How do these assessments inform local safeguarding priorities for 2023/24?

- (JG) The mental health crisis has been rapidly developing across the country and Hackney was no different in this respect. More recently the crisis in Palestine had substantially increased the risk and incidence of faith based hate crimes and the potential impact that this has on young people particularly in relation to becoming radicalised. This would need to be carefully assessed and monitored locally by all agencies.

4.4 Like many other boroughs across London, Hackney is having to place large numbers of families in temporary accommodation due to the lack of social housing and other housing options within the borough. From a safeguarding perspective, is the CHSCP aware of evidence, here or elsewhere, of heightened safeguarding risks to children placed in TA?

- (JB) Once a child has left care at the age of 18 they will have the support of a personal adviser (PA). The leaving care team works very closely with housing service to develop stronger pathways including within supported living arrangements for those that may need ongoing post 18 support. The borough has a strong record of supporting care leavers, but access to affordable housing is a real challenge across London. Working closely with housing providers helps the corporate parenting team to engage with young people earlier on the issue of future housing which can lead to better planning.

4.5 The Chair followed up from the questioning above, to ask whether there were any associations between the referrals for children's social care being received by the department and if these families were residents in temporary accommodation?

- (JB) Housing was a significant issue for many families that the children's social care service was working with. It was noted that many of the families are placed outside of the borough in temporary accommodation, therefore their safeguarding needs would also be met by the borough in which they reside.

4.6 In terms of the risk of increased radicalisation of children, an Open Democracy report noted that children were being referred to this programme in relation to support for Palestinian cause. Are children in Hackney being referred to anti-radicalisation

programmes in Hackney and if so, how is this reconciled with entitlement to freedom of speech? What are the safeguarding implications of such referrals?

- (JG) When the conflict in Palestine was triggered CHSCP was in immediate contact with the Borough Commander and a gold group was configured. It is the role of CHSCP to ensure that children are properly supported from being radicalised but also able to exercise their free speech. CHSCP has worked with Prevent for the same purpose. It was encouraging that there were new policies being considered by political parties which may support a more beneficial role in the way that children are engaged in respect of risks of radicalisation.

4.7 The cost of living crisis continues to put local children and families under severe pressure which may have wide ranging implications for the safeguarding of children (e.g. possible increase in cases of neglect, exposure to domestic violence, increasing prevalence of anxiety and mental health issues). Has there been any noticeable trends in local child safeguarding risks/cases as a result of the cost of living crisis, and if so, how has the partnership and other services responded? Is City & Hackney Safeguarding Partnership confident that there is an effective multi-agency preventative (early help) offer to help address emerging safeguarding needs arising from cost of living crisis?

- (JB) When parents are crushed by debts and anxiety this can affect their ability to effectively parent their children. In all its work with families, children's social care must view families in context, recognising the financial and other pressures that they are under. Therefore, workers will aim to ensure that families have access to appropriate grants and other resources which may be able to support them. The Mayor of London has extended free school meal provision for primary aged children to the end of July 2025 which will help struggling families and the local authority would be working to maximise this support. In terms of early help, the council operates 21 children's centres, numerous youth clubs and a robust supporting families programme. There were also good relationships with local schools to help reach out to children and families across different settings. Social workers worked together in partnership with all other agencies to maximise the support provided to children and families.
- (JG) The CHSCP held a dedicated meeting on the cost of living impact on local families which was attended by all local stakeholders. Of particular interest to the partnership was the impact that the cost of living crisis was having on staff, and the pressures that this created on them.

As a follow up; Cllr Young asked how families were being supported who were required to go on a waiting list for services? What support was available in the interim?

- (JB) If the referral for children's social care, there is no waiting list. Where there was a waiting list for other statutory services, such as CAMHS, the appointed social worker would continue to support the family in liaison with the in-house clinical service team within children's social care. If families were requiring specialist advice or support they could also be supported by agencies within the early help system. There was WAMHS which was available in all local schools, providing mental health support to children in these settings.
- (JG) It should be noted that all services are managing a decline in central government funding and resources which was placing significant pressures on service delivery, and in some areas this had resulted in cuts to specific services.

4.8 The CHSCP published its Child Q update in June of last year, which suggested that more should be done to ensure that local schools adopt a safeguarding first approach, particularly in relation to behaviour management in schools. a) What has been the response of local schools? b) Has there been any changes in local school safeguarding policies? c) Has there been any 'uptick' in school staff requesting safeguarding / adultification training?

- (JG) On the whole, the report was received well by local schools. The CHSCP has continued its safeguarding audit work with schools. To support this safeguarding work with schools, it has strengthened its central coordination role,

bringing in the head of a local academy to facilitate more internal challenge. A safeguarding first approach was a philosophy not a policy and the CHSCP intended to measure the impact of this in its work with local schools. The update report also indicated that it would independently survey the schools and local young people to assess progress and it was working with education colleagues to undertake this.

- (PS) There has been an audit process and the response of schools has been incredibly positive. Despite the Child Q report did have some difficult messages for schools, most schools have engaged with CHSCP and HE in follow up work stemming from the report. It was important to note that whilst not all schools agreed, there was good engagement across the sector.

4.9 Continuing with Child Q, adultification bias was a central theme in the Safeguarding Practice Review, and a programme of adultification training was commissioned across all partner agencies? a) Can the CHSCP update the Commission on the rollout of the adultification training across Hackney? b) Are all partner agencies, especially the police and education, signing up to this training in sufficient / equal numbers?

- (JG) Adultification training was provided by Hackney Education through to schools and elsewhere. A real priority for the CHSCP was to ensure that this training was cascaded through the community and voluntary sector partnership, so that training was being delivered by local people who know and understand these issues in Hackney. Police attendance at this training offer had improved significantly since the time it was first offered and the new Borough Commander was committed to this training.
- (PS) Concurred that there had been a positive engagement from the Borough Commander and that there was a good engagement between schools and local policing. The Safe Schools Policing model was being reassessed to identify if there were new approaches that could be implemented locally, to create a Hackney specific approach. The Borough Commander had attended both primary and secondary head teacher's meetings to explore new ways of cooperative working between the police and schools.
- (Deputy Mayor Bramble) Noted that it was important to move forward from Child Q, not only to allow Child Q herself time to withdraw from the spotlight and to heal, but also to ensure that local agencies focused on the underlying conditions which gave rise the experience of Child Q and that there was a systemic response.

4.10 'Named organisations' are those organisations which work with children predominantly in informal out of school settings (e.g. sports clubs, dance clubs). a) Is CHSCP confident that all those organisations working with children are 'named' are registered with them? b) Has there been any follow-up to recent audits of safeguarding practices in 'named organisations'? c) Are there any specific areas for which the CHSCP may have concerns?

- (JG) Under the Children's and Social Worker Act, organisations working with children and young people are designated as 'named' organisations. Local safeguarding partnerships will then ensure that these organisations complete a safeguarding self-assessment to determine the level of risks to children, and that there are appropriate safeguarding systems in place to keep children safe. There is however, no statutory duty for these organisations to comply, and change is therefore best affected by influence and best practice rather than through enforcement. Whilst there has been good engagement from local named agencies, there was scope for wider engagement. There was wide variation in local practices in these organisations, with some named agencies illustrating excellent safeguarding practice, whilst others were proving difficult to engage. CHSCP was of the view however, that if there was not greater buy-in to local safeguarding arrangement then more radical steps would need to be taken alongside partners.

4.11 Mobile phones and social media continue to present safeguarding risks for children and young with evidence of increased anxiety and mental health, as well as exacerbating risks. a) Can CHSCP update the Commission on work that has been undertaken locally to address these risks, particularly in relation to: work in Schools; work with parents; and children directly?

- (JG) Social media is not a distinct issue, it has to be treated as fundamentally part of children's lives. Phones are part of children's lives, but there is a difference of opinion as to whether these should be in children's person all the time, such as in school and other educational settings. The focus should be on educating children to use this technology responsibly and at the right time. There were also issues raised in relation to potential criminalisation of young people under the age of 18 and 16 in relation to certain activity on their phones.
- (PS) The safeguarding partnership had a good programme of training and development opportunities on this important area of keeping children safe around mobile technology and social media. This was a fast developing area which schools were having to adapt to on a daily basis.

4.12 The children's service workforce across education, health and social care continue to face acute pressures - not only in respect of the complexity of cases they are required to support - but also in the context of recruitment and retention of staff. At its most recent meeting the Commission heard from Children's Social Care of the acute social worker shortages which had impacted on some areas of service performance during 22/23. The Commission noted that staffing was a safeguarding priority for 2022/23 and this year, can CHSCP update on key ongoing challenges and the local response?

- (JG) Pressures in Hackney are very much the same as other authorities: rising caseloads for staff, increasing complexity of cases, difficulty in retaining high quality and experienced staff and ongoing challenges in recruitment. Every public service working with children was under this same staffing pressure including health, education and social care, so it is imperative that this issue is a priority for the local safeguarding partnership. In the absence of national investment in all aspects of the public sector, the recruitment and retention problems will remain.
- (JB) Hackney was not alone in this challenge, as there were social work recruitment pressures across London. There have been a number of developments to help ease these pressures, including an agreement among London authorities to stop recruiting agency social workers who have recently left a permanent position. Career progression was also recognised as a retention issue, and the children's social care team has changed the structure to allow more internal career progression and development opportunities. It should be noted that some agency workers were very committed to the local authority but for their own personal reasons, they did not want to be permanent members of staff.

4.13 The report notes that the DfE are consulting on plans to remove Independent Commissioners from chairing local safeguarding arrangements, and for these to be chaired by one of the key partners (most likely the Director of Children's Social Care). Can CHSCP set out the risks for this prospective development and provide further details of the consultation (when it closes) and whether a local response from CHSCP - or individual partners have been submitted?

- (JG) The CHSCP provided a response to the Working Together 2023 consultation. It was made clear that CHSCP opposed the specific aspect of the proposals which removed the independence of these arrangements. However, in its response to the consultation, the government has accepted the proposal to remove the independent chair of local safeguarding arrangements and there is 11 months to implement this. It is clear that if this is implemented that there will be an imbalance in the local safeguarding partnership, and there will be an element of partners 'marking their own homework'. There is a need to continue to

challenge the central government on this proposal but it was acknowledged that there was a limited timeframe in which to do this.

Agreed: That the Commission would write to the DfE setting out its concerns around the amended Working Together safeguarding children arrangements in respect of the removal of independent chair and subsequent reduced local accountability.

5 Cabinet Q & A - Cabinet Member for Education, Young People & Children's Social Care (20.05)

5.1 Cabinet members who have responsibility for children and young people's services are invited to the Commission annually to enable members to scrutinise services within their portfolio. The Commission may identify up to three service areas on which to focus questioning which the Cabinet member can provide verbal responses. For this session, Deputy Mayor Bramble and Cabinet Member for Education, Young People and Children's Social Care was invited to respond to questions on 2 policy areas which the Commission had selected:

- Free School Meals (FSM) and Childhood Food Poverty;
- Next steps in school estate strategy.

5.2 Since the time when the policy areas were agreed and questions submitted in November 2023, members noted that there had been a number of key developments which had taken place in relation to these policy areas:

1. The Mayor of London had announced the extension of the free universal FSM provision for all primary school pupils to July 2025.
2. The Cabinet decision to close / merge schools was called-in and discussed by the Scrutiny Panel on the 9th January 2024. The focus of that discussion was on the evidence relating to the decision to close /merge the schools. The focus for this session is on what happens next, those plans to support children, families and their schools agreed for closure / merger and future preparations for likelihood of ongoing falling rolls in both primary and secondary school sectors.

Questions on Free School Meals (FSM) and Childhood Food Poverty:

5.3 Can the Cabinet member update the Commission on the Local Authority's work to address childhood food poverty and support the extension of FSM in schools (as set out in the recommendations of the Tackling Food Poverty in Education report), in particular:

1. The development of a local action plan to support the strategy and how this is being overseen and implemented by the Cost of Living Board;
2. Setting up of School Food Trust to support schools to carry on FSM provision after cessation of Mayor of London's FSM programme (7/24);
3. Plans to establish a local FSM auto-enrolment procedure for local parents and schools;
4. How local voluntary sector organisations are being supported to work with local schools to provide healthy, nutritious and cost effective school meals;
5. Changes to Capital Programme to facilitate maintained schools to update and or extend school kitchen facilities;
6. How the £300k of additional investment announced in August has been used to support the delivery of the above plans;
7. Progress in developing planning restrictions which prevent new fast food outlets within 250 metres of schools and education settings.

5.4 The following is a summary of Deputy Mayor Bramble's response to the questions above:

- Given the introduction of FSM across London by the Mayor of London, there has had to be a change of focus to ensure that there was longer term sustainability of local schemes. In addition, there was a need to ensure that local school meals were cost effective and of high nutritional value to children. The Food Poverty

Task Force had been helpful in assessing local priorities and coordinating a plan of action set out in the council report.

- It was noted that all of the schools had their own kitchens which was positive. Funding arrangements for FSM from the Mayor meant that whilst funds could be spent on staffing arrangements to support delivery, it could not be used for any capital works. The extension of the FSM offer had been relatively straightforward, but had required schools to invest in additional resources (plates, cutlery, staffing) to meet the increased demand for meals.
- Improving School Meals Strategy Group was set up and had a number of different work streams to help support schools (e.g. procurement, healthy and sustainable food options). This also linked to the reducing food poverty work which was going on across the council, so local work in this area is more coordinated.
- The task force was supported by £300k of additional funding to help schools adapt and improve FSM provision. Each school now has a link to experienced voluntary sector organisations working in this sphere to support them in their provision of FSM including Chefs in Schools and Hackney School of Food (Gainsborough) School. The latter grows its own food for children at the school and offers training for other schools and teachers.
- A grant system was set up for local schools to bid for money aligned to the priorities and recommendations of the Task Force report. Applications closed on January 6th 2024. It was important that schools lead and take this work forward in their own school. The working group will reflect on how the grants system was working and make adjustments as needed.

5.5 The Commission asked the following supplementary questions (with responses).

5.5.1 Given that there are other family benefits attached to FSM entitlement, what is the authority / schools doing to make sure that parents continue to apply for FSM now that universal free provision is in place? Is auto-enrolment being considered?

- This issue was being discussed London wide as this impacted all local authorities. The critical issue here was data sharing so that eligible families continued to apply and ensure that schools received Pupil Premium (PP) funding which was attached to FSM entitlement. Hackney Education was working with the local Money Hub to support this. It is important to get the message to parents that they should still apply given the significant levels of school funding attached. The authority was investigating automatic sign-up to ensure that FSM entitlements (and attached PP funding) was maintained.

5.5.2 The Commission notes that as independent schools do not qualify for FSM provision, in Hackney the Household Support Fund (HSF) has been used to support Charedi community organisations to deliver school meals (£852k year to March 2024). Under current government plans the Household Support Fund will cease from March 2024, are there plans for supporting the pupils from the Charedi community beyond this date?

- The authority was speaking to the central government and London Mayor about how the authority can continue to support independent schools within the Charedi community and Charedi community more broadly. The Council through its broader poverty reduction work was committed to ensure that all children and families in need were supported (e.g. families with no recourse to public funds are provided with free school meals). Hackney has a tradition of continuing to fund programmes even after central government has ceased funding and it would of course look into the impact of the discontinuation of the HSF and how work might be continued (where possible). This all sat within the council's overall reducing poverty framework and was not an issue for Hackney Education and local schools alone.

- (PS) The Poverty Reduction Board is working closely with the Schools Food Group, and it was hoped a more bespoke solution could be developed in near future to respond to these areas of unmet need.

5.5.3 To what extent are those children in secondary school whose families who do not have recourse to public funds are entitled to free school meals?

- (Mayor Bramble) Children in secondary school settings need free school meals as much as those children in primary settings. The Task Force was commissioned and set up to look at issues such as this. At this stage it was helping secondary schools work together and to share good practice which was evidently present in local schools. Urswick Secondary school does offer FSM to all its pupils and there is much that can be learnt from this approach. The challenge of providing FSM to secondary school pupils was more nuanced, as children of this age may mask over food poverty.

5.5.4 Southwark Council, which has had universal free school meal provision in place for primary school pupils for a number of years, has been allowed to use Mayoral funding to develop more targeted FSM support to pupils in secondary school settings. Whilst work to extend FSM has focused within primary settings, has there been any similar work to develop FSM in secondary settings in Hackney? What does food poverty look like in secondary school settings?

- The FSM and Food Poverty report set out a number of recommendations in this area and the local task force continued to look at this issue.

Questions on the School Estates Update

5.6 Can the Cabinet member update the Commission on the School Estates Strategy and proposals (agreement) to close / merge 6 primary schools in Hackney in response to falling school rolls? In particular, members would welcome further information on the following:

1. Data on the number of reception school places and vacancies in Hackney from September 2023 entry;
2. Transitional support available for children and families at schools confirmed for closure and / or merger (especially those children with an EHCP or on SEND support);
3. Details of any transitional support available for staff at schools proposed for closure / or merger;
4. Ongoing engagement and involvement of local primary schools that continue to be impacted by falling school rolls and local strategies to address this;
5. Engagement with local secondary schools to assist future planning to prepare them for falling school rolls;
6. Strategic planning for deciding how school sites which may become vacant will continue to be used for educational or community purposes?
7. Upcoming timetable for key decisions to support the future implementation of the School Estates Strategy.

5.7 The following is a summary of Deputy Mayor Bramble's response to the questions above:

- Schools were at the heart of the local community and often attended by multiple generations of families. No officers or elected officials go into office to close schools, but have a duty to maintain quality of education for all children locally. Although there were some very high performing schools locally, the education system as a whole was experiencing a challenge through falling school rolls. Local schools were high performing by design, supported by highly motivated and committed teachers and staff.
- The GLA level of surplus places within local educational systems was recommended to be within 5-10%. In Hackney, surplus places were currently at 21% and projected to rise further without rationalisation of the school estate. This is having a significant impact on school finances as school income is

predominantly through per pupil payments. As a consequence, the total value of school reserves was being depleted, with reserves projected to fall to £2.1m in 2023/24 from £9.9m in 2020/21.

- Falling school rolls was therefore undermining the future sustainability of the educational system and the decision was taken to close two primary schools and to merge a further 4 schools on two sites.
- In terms of transition for children and families, schools were leading in making sure children and families were prepared for respective closures and mergers. Schools will be able to draw in the expertise of other professionals to help support them in this process. Children on an EHCP will have the guidance of a key worker to help and support the school and parents decide where the best school option for their child will be after closure / merger. Additional support will also be given for children on SEND support. An additional 300 Hackney SEND places (in special schools, ARP) will be provided through the SES to ensure that parents have more local options in which to educate their children.
- The HR team led a Q & A with all staff at affected school sites to explore what the impact would likely mean for them. Now that the decision to close the schools has been confirmed, a wide range of support will be made available to staff including support for job applications and the development of soft skills (e.g. interviewing techniques).
- A key timeline of events will be developed for all the schools to ensure that there is an appropriate transition for all children, families and staff to follow the closure decision. WHAMS, the mental health and wellbeing service for schools will continue to operate as normal and support children in affected schools.

5.8 The Commission asked the following supplementary questions (with responses).

5.8.1 How were schools continuing to experience falling school rolls to be supported, particularly in the context that local surplus reception places would continue to be well above the advised level (5-10%) even after the current programme of closures and mergers were implemented. Is there a timeframe to reduce the vacancy rate further to within this advised level?

- (Deputy Mayor Bramble) The School Estates Strategy (SES) continues to look at the whole school system in response to falling school rolls. It was important to note that the previous Mayor and Deputy Mayor had written to the DfE highlighting the need for additional funding for school, and the necessity to bring in new powers for local authorities to support a more system wide assessment of education provision, and not just focus on schools maintained by the council. Whilst funding was increased, it was insufficient to make any substantial impact on the long term position. Non-maintained schools also remain out of scope of falling school roll rationalisation plans. The authority would continue to work with the SES to support sustainable schools. There is preparatory work being undertaken with secondary schools to ensure that they are resilient to likely reduction in school numbers '*coming down the line*', for example, one local secondary school was moving to become coeducational from single-sex school. Given that projections showed continuing falling school rolls to 2029/30, this was a long term project in which officers would continue to work with schools to promote sustainability.
- (PS) The current school closure programme will reduce surplus capacity from 21/22% to 17%, so there is still further to go. A working group had been set up among local primary and secondary heads to help develop long term plans for school places but also assessing what had been learnt from round 1 of closures and to help identify good practice from other local authorities. All maintained and non-maintained schools will be represented in this process. It was also noted that despite these funding pressures, schools were still delivering outstanding results, but this could only be maintained for so long.

5.8.2 Given the experience of this round of school closures, are other local schools aware of the processes that they may need to consider to ensure the future sustainability of their school (such as closure working with neighbouring schools)?

- Every head teacher locally would have had this conversation as falling school rolls are having a London wide impact. Head teachers meet quarterly together to discuss this and other issues of importance. Regular updates on this issue are also provided to all head teachers across the borough. The next step is just to reassure schools going forward of the support available, and to facilitate local cooperation between schools to address underlying issues. The local authority is of course open to all suggestions and dialogue with schools on this important issue. One form entry schools remain a particular focus within this work as these schools are stand alone and maybe have reduced scope to adjust and adapt to changing pupil numbers. Secondary schools on the whole are larger and maybe have greater flexibility to adapt, but it was noted that such schools in Hackney tended to be comparatively smaller in comparison to other boroughs. The Deputy Mayor also assured members and others in attendance that there was no plan to sell-off any of the school sites.

5.9 The Chair thanked Deputy Mayor Bramble for attending and responding to questions from the Commission.

6 Work Programme 2023/24

6.1 Members noted the work programme for the remainder of the municipal year:

February 2024 Agenda:

- Session will be devoted to proposed changes to local Children Centres. The proposals are due to have been published on 12th Jan for consideration at Cabinet on 22nd January.
- These papers will inform scrutiny and will be distributed informally as soon as they are published.
- The Commission will need to plan how to scrutinise the session and consider, aside from officers, who it may wish to invite to attend (e.g. local parent's groups).

March 2024 Agenda

- EBSA item, the Commission is working on an invitation to a specialist independent agency as well as two local heads teachers.

2024/25 work programme

- The Commission needs to consider those items early on in the work programme for 2024/25 given the proximity of meeting dates (June and July)
- June 2024 - Joint meeting with Living in Hackney - Youth Justice and Housing for care leavers.
- July 2024 - Childcare Sufficiency - new free childcare entitlement, wraparound childcare.

7 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

7.1 The minutes of the 30th November 30th 2023 and 18th December 2023 were noted and agreed.

7.2 Actions arising:

30th November

Action: HE to provide data on the proportion of children with an EHCP who move from one mainstream school to another who are a) moving to a Hackney school and b) who are new to the borough.

Monday 15 January 2024

- *These have been requested and will be included in the February agenda.*

Action: Pupil movement has been added to the draft work programme for 2024/25, noting that it will require further scoping (to include more demographic analysis).

- *Noted for next year's work programme development.*

18th December

Action: Scrutiny would present a number of questions to Children's Social Care which it was unable to ask due to time limitations. Responses to these questions would be published in a future scrutiny agenda.

- *These have been requested and will be included in the February agenda.*

Action: That further information on the future funding of OBIS beyond 2023/24 would be provided to the Commission.

- *This has been raised with Director of Children's Social Care and Group Director*

Action: The scrutiny officer will develop the aims and objectives for the review in liaisons with the Commission and, once Cabinet members and officers have been consulted, create a work schedule for delivery.

- *This has commenced and a draft was planned for the February 2024 meeting.*

Agreed: a) **Minutes of the 30th November 2023**
 b) **Minutes of the 18th December 2023.**

8 Any Other Business

8.1 The next meeting of the Commission will be held on 19th February 2024.

8.2 There was no other business and the meeting concluded at 9.10pm.

CYP Scrutiny Commission - 18th December

Additional questions for CFS

The following questions could not be addressed during the Scrutiny Commission meeting on 18th December 2023, due to time restrictions.

The responses below have been provided by the Children and Families Service and will be discussed at the next Scrutiny Commission meeting in February 2024.

Follow up Questions from CYP Scrutiny Commission:

Edge of Care

12. The Edge of Care service is in operation to support children (and families) who are at risk of becoming looked after (and entering care).
- a. How successful has this service been in helping children live within existing family networks rather than being placed in care?

Response from CFS:

To date, 7 children and their families are open to the Edge of Care team. One of these children is looked after, although is living with a family member through a connected care arrangement. The other 6 children remain living at home. Since April 2023, 16 other children have been offered a service. For 7, the team were unable to successfully engage them in the offer. Nine were offered a service, with the following outcomes:

- 6 family relationships were stabilised;
- 1 came into care due to being remanded in custody, however, family relationships were stabilised;
- 2 remain living at home but strains in family relationships persist.

The team have experienced some staffing challenges over time, which has meant periods of reduced capacity, however, a core team which includes social care staff, clinicians and an educational psychologist have been delivering intensive multi-agency support focused on partnership with families in a way that is systemic, trauma-informed and anti-racist.

Youth Justice

13. The Youth Justice service notes that whilst the number of young people who are first time entrants to the youth justice system has decreased over the past few years, that it has become increasingly difficult to support some young people who are facing acute, multiple and complex needs and challenges.
- a. What does the service plan to do differently to support this cohort of young people, who may be at risk of entering the Youth Justice system, who have really acute needs?

Response from CFS:

The key principles of youth justice practice within Hackney, are that it is expected to be systemic, trauma informed, anti-racist and anti oppressive, restorative and congruent with a child first approach. These principles are reflected within the Youth Justice Partnership Plan.

Through academic research and the HMIP Inspection our Prevention and Diversion Team has been recognised for its collaborative assessments and strong delivery of out of court interventions. The findings of the Middlesex University Research have been discussed at a learning event in January 2024 and there is a shared recognition that too many children are still propelled to Court. Our Police partners are committed to reviewing decision making and as a Partnership Board we will continue to press at a London-wide and central MPS level for agreement to allow our local 4 borough project "Postponed Prosecution (Outcome 22)" as an option for 'no comment' interviews. In 2023, we have also been able to enhance our Prevention and Diversion Offer through two new grant funded programmes (Engage and Turnaround) which provides opportunity to engage with young people arrested and brought into Police Custody (Engage), as well as to offer very early support (Turnaround) to young people who have come to the attention of the police for minor misdemeanours without resulting in a statutory outcome.

As partner agencies we are also committed to improving data collection across the partnership to provide an in-depth understanding of children's education attendance, engagement, and attainment. With the support of Health colleagues we have undertaken a health needs assessment for the cohort to ensure their needs are met and to identify opportunities to intervene earlier. We have developed a multidisciplinary health team to address the identified needs of young people within the cohort and to provide support for parents. This has led to the inclusion of Speech and Language Therapists (SaLT) within the Court setting to ensure additional learning needs are understood. SaLT Training has also been provided. An additional education resource for the Virtual School to extend its offer to young people supported through Prevention and diversion has been identified, with recruitment to begin February 2024.

The London Accommodation Pathfinder service (LAP) is a pan-London project, backed by Ministry of Justice/Youth Justice Board funding to commission new pathways that can accommodate 16 and 17-year-old children as an alternative to custody (either those on remand or as an alternative to custodial sentence), and with provision for resettlement. The new facility for North and Central boroughs is located in Barnet and opened in August 2023. It provides community-based accommodation and intensive support to meet the shortfall of provision in London with supportive pathways on exit for a stable transition and resettlement - this includes outreach support for a period of time following the placement. Since opening Hackney has successfully placed two children.

Clinical Service

14. The report suggests that 291 local families were allocated to the Clinical Service in 2022/23 - a 32% increase on previous years. Can officers confirm:
 - a. If there is a waiting list for the clinical service, if so how long?
 - b. Are all these children and families receiving support through the clinical service?
 - c. What pressures this service is currently experiencing, and future plans to support provision?

Response from CFS:

291 children were allocated to the Clinical Service throughout the year - on average we usually work with around 150 children at any one time. The average wait time for allocation to the CFS Clinical Service is currently 15 weeks. Over the past year we have experienced challenges in recruitment and retention, but are now fully staffed. We are embarking upon a review of our Clinical Services as we have shifted from a service designed to support Social Work Practice to a service that is almost entirely focused upon direct work with children and families. In line with our ambition to develop a Practice Academy to support frontline practice (including the embedding of our Systemic, Trauma-Informed and Anti-Racist 'STAR' practice model and improving recruitment and retention through the development of clear career pathways) we will be in dialogue with our CAMHS Alliance partners about any potential impact for our children and families and how their needs can best be addressed.

Children's Rights

15. How effective is the Children's Rights service in engaging and supporting children in care and or care leavers? How is this assessed?

Response from CFS:

Across 2022/23, 513 children were offered support by the service, which is very similar to the previous year. 386 of these young people were referred during that calendar year, with the remaining 127 children already being open to the service prior to 01/04/2022.

In respect of Looked After Children and Care Leavers, 78 children were referred for Advocacy, 6 to be supported to make a complaint and 5 in respect of housing and accommodation needs. Our Children's Rights officers have excellent child focused and creative approaches to engaging children according to their age and abilities and receive consistently positive feedback from the children they are supporting and the wider professional network. Good practice by the Children's Rights services has also been identified through our wider Audit programme.

Care Leavers

16. The Commission notes that a Care Leaver Hub (a previous recommendation of this Commission) has been agreed, and that capital funding (£300k) has been set aside for its development in this month's (December) Cabinet decisions. Can officers update the Commission:

- a. What services are planned for the Care Leaver Hub?
- b. How Care Leavers have been involved to date?
- c. How will it work with existing services?

Response from CFS:

A potential Hackney Council site has been identified for a new Care Leavers Hub by Property Services and, as noted, capital funding agreed. The Property Services team are in the process of carrying out a full specification of the work required, including enlisting the support of architects. The hope is that work will be undertaken across the spring and summer and it will be ready to launch in autumn 2024. Hackney of Tomorrow have been made aware of the plans and will be consulted in the design of the building e.g. colours, choice of kitchen / furniture, garden design, etc, as the project develops.

Once up and running, the plan is to base existing services from the hub, to include Leaving Care staff being there every day and regular attendance from other services including the care leavers leads from Housing Needs and Benefits, the CFS Clinical Service, the Virtual School and the Looked After Health Team. These services would then be available for planned and unplanned sessions with care leavers, who will have an open invite to 'drop in' to the hub during working hours. The space will also be available for group events e.g. summer BBQs or Hackney of Tomorrow meetings.

Additional questions from Care Leavers:

The following questions arose during a focus group with 9 Care Leavers and were not able to be addressed during the Scrutiny meeting on 18th December 2023 due to time constraints:

- 1) Placement/accommodation stability is equally as important for care leavers as it is for looked after children - but do we monitor how many times care leavers may be moving accommodation? Could standards be developed?

Response from CFS:

We are aware of the potentially negative impact of moves for all care experienced children and young people and work hard to minimise these wherever possible. Whilst it is not a statutory requirement to report on stability of accommodation for care leavers, we do track the number of moves each month.

The Young People's Accommodation Pathway, our commissioning framework for supported accommodation, which was launched in 2023 was designed so that support could be flexible, in order to wrap around a care leaver and provide the level of support needed at any given time. This avoids a young person having to move, for example, to access a higher support provision. The primary reasons for a care leaver moving between the ages of 18 to 21 are because they have breached their tenancy; because they are stepping down the level of support; or because they want or need to move to a different area.

We work closely with all our providers to try and avoid our care leavers being evicted, for example, due to non payment of rent or service charges or breaching the rules of the accommodation. However, sadly it is not always possible to avoid this outcome. Where care leavers tenancies have come to an end, we will always work to find them alternative suitable accommodation. Some care leavers continue to need to live in 24 hour staffed homes when they turn 18, due to the complexity of their needs. We are always mindful of our responsibility to prepare them for independent living by the time they turn 21. We therefore meet regularly to

review those in high support accommodation and consider step down plans. We always endeavour to be clear to young people if and when they may need to move before or after they turn 21. These conversations should be reflected in their Pathway Plans. We work hard to source supported accommodation in or around Hackney, so that any necessary moves will have minimal impact on other areas of their lives e.g. access to education and other support services, as well as informal support networks. Some young people request a move to a different location, at times for safety reasons, but at other times for new opportunities e.g. in education, training or employment, or to move closer to Hackney, following a period living elsewhere.

- 2) What assurances can officers provide to the Commission that all of our care leavers, especially those aged 21 years and above and required to seek accommodation in the private rented sector, are allocated quality accommodation suitable to their needs?

Response from CFS:

All the supported accommodation that we commission for care leavers age 18 to 21 is subject to a quality assurance framework, led by our Placement Management Unit. This includes quality assurance visits and gathering feedback from practitioners and young people on their experiences of the provider. We also work closely with commissioning teams in neighbouring East and North London boroughs to share information, particularly where we may have any concerns about a specific provider. The 3 providers who are part of our Young People's Pathway - Outward, One Housing and Irish Causeway - are subject to regular commissioning contract reviews, including regular quality assurance visits. We are planning to enlist the support of our Care Leavers Advisors, Elena and China, in the quality assurance activities going forward.

We have small numbers of care leavers opting to access accommodation in the private rental sector prior to the age of 21, primarily due to affordability. Post 21, the duty to support care leavers to access suitable accommodation passes to our housing colleagues. Housing colleagues may help a care leaver explore options in the private rental sector and have developed partnerships with landlords over time in this regard.

We have a statutory duty to keep in contact with all care leavers who are open to us for support at least every 8 weeks. Wherever possible, we endeavour to meet with them face-to-face, as well as keeping in touch with them by phone, email, etc. Whilst most often care leavers may prefer to meet with us in the community, we also understand it is important to see where they are living, as this can offer important insight into how they are managing. If and when we have any concerns about the suitability of their accommodation, for example, repairs, safety, etc, we will always endeavour to support our care leavers to escalate these concerns and get them resolved.

- 3) Are the roles of the Independent Reviewer and Children's Rights officers sufficiently promoted to young people in care and among care leavers? What is being done to make sure that such young people have access to independent advice and support and guidance to support their care, especially when things might go wrong?

Response from CFS:

All looked after children have an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). Their IROs will see them every 6 months for their Looked After Children Reviews and will always endeavour to speak to them alone as part of the reviewing process. Many of our IROs have long-standing relationships with the children they work with and will maintain contact with them outside of reviews. All children, their parents and their networks are made aware of the role of the IRO to independently oversee plans for them and that they are therefore a potential point of escalation if they are unhappy about any aspect of their plans.

In addition, Children's Rights Officers are able to offer independent advocacy to all Hackney's looked after children and care leavers. We try to ensure that all care experienced children and young people are aware of the support on offer from Children's Rights Officers. As outlined above, 89 accessed this support in 2022/3. However, we are aware that we need to continue to promote this service, to ensure all those that may benefit from it are encouraged to access it as needed.

- 4) Young people were also unsure about their rights in respect of their allocated social worker. Could their SW be changed if the relationship between them was not working or poor? A care leaver noted that due to their previous experience, they only felt safe with female workers and expressed a clear preference to work with female SW or PA, yet had been allocated male practitioners? Is this a system failure? Is this trauma informed?

The social worker relationship is critical for young people to help them build trust and a positive working relationship. What are the rights of young people if they wish to change their social worker?

Response from CFS:

Whilst it does not happen very often, sometimes children and young people make requests for specific characteristics in their practitioners and/or make a request to change their practitioner. We should always do our best to seriously consider any requests made by children and young people about who they feel most comfortable being supported by. Sometimes, it may not be possible to meet a specific request, for example, for a male practitioner, due to the makeup of the team. There may also be occasions where someone may request a change of worker, for example, because they are unhappy with a message they have been given, where we may feel it would be in the child or young person's best interests to try and repair their relationship with their practitioner. As outlined above, if children and young people are unhappy with the response to their requests, or feel their voices are not being heard by their units, they are all entitled to independent advocacy support from the Children's Rights Service, who are very skilled at helping to explore and resolve any differences of opinions.

- 5) Care leavers noted that they had experienced periods of high turnover of social workers that supported them, and aside from having to update and develop new relationships with different social workers, young people noted that the approach of social workers was not

always consistent? What was the overarching approach of social workers - was this practice holistic, trauma informed and anti-racist? Are all social workers trauma informed - are all practitioners being trained in this approach?

Response from CFS:

Locally and nationally children and families consistently feedback that changes in practitioners is something they find most difficult about the Children's Social Care system. We know that strong relationships are key to achieving positive outcomes in our profession. Sadly, there are significant national challenges in recruitment and retention of social care staff. Across the senior leadership team, we are thinking about the structures of training, support and remuneration we need in order to attract and retain high quality staff, at all levels. The development of our Systemic, Trauma-Informed and Anti-Racist (STAR) practice model is a key component of this. As we embed this way of working / being, we hope to attract people to Hackney whose values align to our own. We have plans in 2024/5 to develop a Practice Academy that will support all practitioners to develop their STAR skills in order to achieve greater consistency of approach.

6) What is the average caseload for social workers? Is there an agreed standard that the service has? Does this differ for different aspects of the service - e.g. LAC, care leavers FIZ?

Response from CFS:

Within the Child in Need Service, newly qualified social workers usually begin working with around 6-8 children, rising to 12-14 children by the end of their first year.

Within the Access and Assessment Service, newly qualified social workers usually begin working with around 7-9 children, rising to 16-18 children by the end of their first year.

Most Child in Need and Access and Assessment social workers support around 16-18 children.

Within the Looked After Children Service, newly qualified social workers usually begin by working with around 12 children, rising to 16 or so by the end of their first year. Most looked after children social workers support 17 or 18 children. Practitioners in Leaving Care tend to work with between 20 and 25 young people.

7) What are waiting times like for LAC/ Care leavers for clinical support, CAMHS and SLT? Is there a joined up approach between CAMHS and CSC in ensuring that the needs of care leavers and looked after children are met locally?

Response from CFS:

The average wait time for allocation to the CFS Clinical Service is currently 15 weeks.

The average wait time for allocation to CAMHS Services in Hackney ranges from 15 to 35 weeks depending upon the service required.

Our CFS Clinical Service will link with CAMHS services local to a looked after child or care leavers home to support the identification of local support in respect of mental health and emotional wellbeing as well as providing direct support to children who are within an hours distance from Hackney.

As at December 2023, the average wait time for Speech and Language Therapy was 6.6 weeks. This is the time from referral received to assessment completed across the service from age 0-19 years (and up to 25 years for SEND).