

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>p.6</p>	<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>p.5</p>	<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>p.6</p>	<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>p.6</p>	<p>EY engagement</p>	<p>FOI on costs of EY, and staff who worked on the engagement</p>
<p>p.6</p>	<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>p.7</p>	<p>EY worked with the children centres managers, school leaders, and stakeholders representing children in need and those with SEND</p>	<p>There was not meaningful engagement with parents</p>

		<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 CIN 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>The infographic features a yellow background with the text 'The lowest cost of childcare amounts to' in blue, a large '25%' in yellow, and 'of a person's median income.' in blue below it.</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	Stuff 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

•

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.”

•

- 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

