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Essex Sure Start Children`s Centres – Shaping Future Services from April 2014

Epping Forest District Council has considered the proposals detailed within Essex County Council`s consultation document, “Essex Sure Start Children`s Centres – Shaping Future Services from April 2014 “.

It is regrettable that Essex County Council intends to make savings of £2.5m from the overall children`s centre budget between 2014 and 2016, however, the Council is pleased to note that there will be no change to four of the district`s eight centres;

Brambles Children`s Centre
Epping Library
St John's Road
Epping CM16 5DN

Hazelwood Children`s Centre
Hill House Primary School
Ninefields
Waltham Abbey, EN9 3EL

Sunrise Children`s Centre
Alderton Schools
Alderton Hall Lane
Loughton IG10 3HE

True Stars Children`s Centre
The Limes Centre,
Limes Farm,
Chigwell IG7 5LP

The Council supports the designation of the above centres as “Main Sites” and is pleased to note that each centre will continue to be open for 40 hours per week, with 10 hours telephone service per week.

Essex County Council has proposed that the following three centres are designated “Delivery Sites” which will each be open for 15 hours per week and “provide a number of services for the area”;

Abbeywood Children`s Centre
Waltham Abbey Library
37 Sun Street
Waltham Abbey, EN9 1EL

Little Oaks Children's Centre
Loughton Resource Centre
Torrington Drive
Loughton IG10 3TD

Little Star Children's Centre
Shelley Primary School
Milton Crescent
Shelley
Chipping Ongar CM5 0FF

It is not clear from the consultation document how many hours per week each of the above centres is currently open, therefore, it is difficult for respondents to understand the full extent of this particular proposed change. The Council is, however, aware that services from these sites has historically been delivered primarily in the form of out-reach sessions. The Council recognises the value and importance of providing flexible out-reach programmes within the community and is pleased to note, on page 4 of the document, that this element of the children's centres remit is "not included" as part of the proposed changes.

Most crucially, Essex County Council has proposed that the following site be closed and be merged with the Sunrise Centre:

Little Buddies Children's Centre
Roding House
2 Victoria Road
Buckhurst Hill IG9 5ES

The reasons stated for this proposal are that "it is in an area of lesser deprivation compared to neighbouring Epping children's centres; we are trying to prioritise resources to areas of greater need. The site suffers from accessibility issues as it is on a busy high street with limited parking. Neighbouring centres in Epping Forest are easier and safer to access. Good transport links between Buckhurst Hill and neighbouring centres in Loughton and Debden will also serve to minimise the effects of this closure."

The Council is extremely concerned about the impact of this closure on local children and families. The Council feels that transport links are limited, expensive and not easily accessible, particular when travelling with buggies or for family members with disabilities. In the event that this proposed closure is implemented, the Council would expect that a comprehensive programme of locally delivered out-reach sessions be provided in Buckhurst Hill for families who are unable to travel to the Sunrise Centre.

The Council is disappointed that the consultation document did not provide full and specific details in relation to the rationale behind the proposals put forward; however, we are advised by Essex County Council that a range of information has been used to inform the proposals. We have been advised that this includes statistical data which has highlighted how centres are currently accessed and used, a needs analysis, local workshops and so on. We are also aware that Essex County Council has worked closely with Spurgeon's, the provider currently commissioned to deliver Epping Forest's children's centre service, in the formulation of the proposals.

Whilst the Council is extremely disappointed that the current level of children's centre service cannot continue as it is, it is recognised that the approach taken in developing the proposals is logical and measured under the circumstances and, with the exception of the

proposed closure of the Little Buddies Centre, the model will provide services in the district's key super output areas, whilst retaining a full out-reach programme for local children and families.

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