

Equality Impact Assessment



Name of project/proposal

Proposed Family Support Service

Contact name

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Department

Childrens Services

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Purpose for project/proposal

The purpose of this decision report is to make recommendations and seek approval from the Executive Lead Member for Children's Services regarding the future of Hampshire County Council's early help services, including the proposed closure of designated children's centres.

Consultation

Has a consultation been carried out?

Yes

A 10 week public consultation on the proposed new Family Support Service model ran from 23 February 2016 to midday on 3 May 2016.

During the consultation period, communication took place in a range of ways to raise awareness of the consultation and provide opportunities for key stakeholders to raise questions. A total of 2,017 online responses were submitted and 107 completed consultation questionnaire responses submitted by post. The majority of responses came from groups most impacted by the proposals.

Statutory considerations

Impact

Age	High
Disability	Low
Sexual orientation	None
Race	None
Religion and belief	None
Gender reassignment	None
Sex	Medium
Marriage and civil partnership	None
Pregnancy and maternity	High

Other policy considerations

Poverty	Medium
Rurality	Medium
Other factors	None
If other please describe	

Geographical impact

Have you identified any medium or high impact?*

All Hampshire

Yes

No

Equality statement

5 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

5.1 The EIA outlines the background to the proposed changes, the current shape of service delivery and the proposals for a new Family Support Service (FSS), as well as the methodology and outcomes of the public and staff consultations that took place.

5.2 The EIA describes how the County Council has considered the impact of the proposed changes on those with protected characteristics and the actions that would be taken by the County Council to minimise this impact. It is divided into two sections. The first is in relation to service users and the second is in relation to staff.

5.2.1 For reference, the EIA will refer to thresholds of need, which are identified in 4 levels as below:

- Level 1 (universal) – all families and children where there are no specific needs;
- Level 2 (early help) – families where there is a need for support, but this can be met within a specific setting e.g. pre-school or school and by one single service or agency, i.e. a speech and language therapist providing advice and help;

- Level 3 (targeted early help for vulnerable families) – families and children with more needs requiring more than one service or agency to be involved; and
- Level 4 (children’s social care) – families and children with a high level of unmet and complex needs and meeting the threshold for children’s social care intervention.

Impact Upon Service Users

AGE - Impact before mitigation - HIGH

Impact after mitigation - MEDIUM

5.3 Specific issues:

Children’s centres currently only serve families with children under 5; with 29,067 children being supported in the last year. Early Help Hubs serve families with children aged 0-19 (up to 25 for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities), although they primarily work with those aged 5 - 14, with 3,042 children currently being helped (with an average age of 10).

5.4 The proposed changes would primarily negatively impact children under 5 and their families who currently are assessed as having level 1 and 2 needs and who get support from children’s centres. This is because the proposed new FSS would move from a universal service to a more targeted service. This means that those families who are classed as having level 1 needs and level 2 non priority needs would have less access to early help services provided by Hampshire County Council

5.5 Mitigating actions:

The proposed changes to early help services would move to targeting (prioritising) the most vulnerable children and families. This proposal is based on feedback from residents in the ‘Shaping Hampshire – Spending Review Consultation’ that took place between 26 May and 6 July 2015.

5.6 Hampshire County Council recognises the importance of having services available for families with level two needs, in order to reduce the risk of problems escalating to level 3 needs. There is a range of universal services (available to all) operating and managed by voluntary and independent providers across the Hampshire. The Family Support Service would offer an online local resource directory to signpost which community services could be accessed by families in their locality. This directory would also publicise the Hampshire County Council offer for level 2 priority families. The early help offer would be a joined up and holistic offer, with services provided by Hampshire County Council forming a part of what would be on offer locally. The universal health visiting service would also be a key early help service.

PREGNANCY AND MATERNITY - Impact before mitigation - HIGH

Impact after mitigation - MEDIUM

5.7 Specific issues:

The data collected by children’s centres shows that 13% of individuals who have used the service in the last financial year were in a stage of either pregnancy or maternity. It is acknowledged that this group could be negatively affected as early help services delivered by Hampshire County Council potentially move from a universal model to a targeted service.

5.8 Mitigating actions:

It is proposed that the FSS would continue to provide support to this group of carers if they are identified as vulnerable i.e. have a level 3 need. However, universal and free support (currently provided by children’s centre staff) would be reduced for carers with level 1 or 2 needs, although some targeted support would be offered to families assessed as having priority level 2 needs. Another existing mitigating factor is that maternity and health visiting services are universally available to all levels of need and these would continue to be available. The maternity and health visiting services may not be delivered from a designated FSS hub/ children’s centre but health

visiting services have expanded significantly since 2012.

5.9 To further mitigate the impact of this proposal, the FSS report includes the creation of an online signposting resource directory for those with level 1 needs. It would be a web based directory of universal services, some of which would be based in the community and provided by the voluntary/independent sector. For those with level 2 needs, there would be limited continued support, such as appointment based triage surgery sessions and targeted group work.

SEX - Impact before mitigation - MEDIUM

Impact after mitigation - MEDIUM

5.10 Specific issues:

56% of the children who have visited children's centres in the past financial year are female, while 44% are male. 60% of the current children being served by Early Help Hubs are male, whereas 40% are female. Taken as a whole, this shows a fairly even split between the sexes. 81% of the carers who have visited children's centres in the past year have been female.

5.11 Mitigating actions:

The proposed FSS would be delivered with local needs in mind, with support taking the form of a combination of group work and one-to-one support and advice, which would result in it being individually tailored to the needs of vulnerable families. Whilst targeted, the service would be open and inclusive, focussing on family needs, and would fundamentally not discriminate based on sex.

5.12 The support given would be co-ordinated amongst different agencies, such as health and other statutory and voluntary/independent services. A family plan would be produced, which would take into account the needs of the child and the broader needs of the family. With evidence-based parenting groups, intensive support and alignment with the STFP, it is proposed that the county's most vulnerable children and their families would be given the opportunity to stay safe, stay healthy, grow and learn.

DISABILITY - Impact before mitigation - LOW

Impact after mitigation - LOW

5.13 Specific issues:

The data shows that 1.15% of children and 1.55% of carers who have visited children centres in the past financial year have been disabled. This is lower than the national average, which shows that around 6% of children and 16% of working adults are disabled⁷. However, 7% of children who are currently using Early Help Hubs have been recorded as disabled, which is slightly above the national average. It is acknowledged that the loss of provision could have an impact on those carers with mental health issues.

5.14 Mitigating actions:

It is proposed that the FSS would target support at families with level 3 needs who have children aged between 0 to 19 years old (up to 25 if they have learning difficulties and/or disabilities). The reduction in service capacity would primarily be taken from the universal aspect of children's centres. This means that the remaining funding would be used to continue to deliver level 3 support, as is currently delivered by Early Help Hubs. Therefore level 3 support to families, which as the data suggests is more likely to be used by those children with a disability, would not be significantly changed. The mental health of carers will be taken into account when deciding the allocation of a client to a specific level. Work will be undertaken with community groups and other services working at Levels 1 and 2 to identify carers who are in need of mental health support from the proposed Family Support Service.

POVERTY - Impact before mitigation - MEDIUM

Impact after mitigation - MEDIUM

5.15 Specific issues:

12.5% of families who have visited children's centres in the last financial year were recorded as being in poverty. This compares to a 15.9% poverty rate amongst the general population in 2013⁸. The proposed changes to the early help services could negatively affect those families in poverty who have level 1 needs.

5.16 Mitigating actions:

It is proposed that the FSS would provide an integrated and focused service, starting with those with a level 3 need. This would mean that those families in poverty who have a level 3 need would continue to be helped by the proposed new service, free of charge. However, it is acknowledged that the removal of universal services could negatively affect those families in poverty who have level 1 or 2 needs. The intention of the proposed FSS model would be to provide a signposting service to free and paid services within the community. Furthermore, the proposed FSS would continue to offer grants to organisations delivering youth support, which could be targeted at those with a level 2 need. Priority families with level 2 needs would be supported, free of charge, by the FSS.

RURALITY - Impact before mitigation - MEDIUM

Impact after mitigation - LOW

5.17 Specific issues:

13.85% of those families who visited a children's centre in the past financial year were categorised as living in a rural environment. This compares to 23% of Hampshire's general population living in conditions of rurality⁹. Whilst there are currently lower than average numbers of rural users, it is acknowledged that closing buildings and making services accessible by appointment only could have an impact on accessibility for vulnerable clients who live some distance from the remaining FSS hubs/designated children's centres. It could be especially difficult for those who have low incomes and rely on public transport, which can be expensive and are also reducing in availability in some areas.

5.18 Mitigating actions:

To mitigate this, outreach services would continue to be delivered in a number of service delivery sites within localities and a mobile service would continue to be operated, which is intended to ensure that the proposed FSS could reach all areas, especially those that are isolated and in greatest need. This approach would mean that the service could be flexible in its delivery and change its focus in accordance with geographic demand.

5.19 For the groups which are categorised under the EIA criteria listed below, there is low or no impact

- Gender Re-assignment
- Sexual Orientation
- Marriage and Civil Partnership
- Religion
- Race

5.20 This is because it is the intention of the proposed FSS to provide an inclusive service, which focuses on the individual needs of the most vulnerable children and their families. This would ensure that the needs of service users in relation to the above criteria would be fully met.

Summary for Service Users

5.21 The impact of the proposed FSS would primarily be on current children's centre service users who access universal services. In relation to demographics, this could negatively affect families with children under the age of 5, or who have a family member in the stages of pregnancy or maternity. It could also affect those who are in poverty and who rely on the universal provision offered by children's centres.

5.22 Considering the budget pressures and in line with consultation feedback from residents, as well as the increase in service demand from vulnerable children, the FSS would focus its resources on targeting the most vulnerable children and families in Hampshire. This would happen by joining up and integrating existing early help services, to provide a holistic and sustainable service. The service would align with a broad spectrum of public and voluntary services, helping to provide effective plans to help those most in need.

5.23 Where possible, the negative impacts of this proposed change would be mitigated through services such as outreach and delivery sites in order to reach those in rural locations, as well as a signposting service to help those who are in poverty and wish to access universal services.

Date to review actions 01 Jul 2016

Final decision date

Final decision date due 01 Jul 2016
Decision to be made by Executive Member