

## HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

### Decision Report

<b>Decision Maker:</b>	Executive Lead Member for Children's Services
<b>Date of Decision:</b>	27 May 2011
<b>Decision Title:</b>	A New Pattern of Children's Centre Provision for Hampshire Part A: Report on the consultation for a new pattern of children's centres provision in Hampshire
<b>Decision Reference:</b>	2635
<b>Report From:</b>	Director of Children's Services

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#### 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. On 28 January 2011 the Executive Lead Member for Children's Services authorised a public consultation regarding the future of the children's centres service. This decision took place in the context of the need to review the pattern of future service delivery following the establishment of children's centres across Hampshire and the likely reduction in the budget available following significant changes to Government funding. The report summarises the outcome of the consultation.
- 1.2. It is recommended that the Executive Lead Member for Children's Services takes note of the consultation responses and considers the implications when determining the future provision of children's centres in Hampshire

#### 2. Contextual information

- 2.1. There are 81 children's centres (also known as Sure Start Children's Centres) in Hampshire, which were established over the past decade through a phased approach as part of the previous government's initiative. Children's centres provide and coordinate a range of pre-school family support services which are generally universally accessible but are particularly intended for those more vulnerable children whose outcomes might otherwise be prejudiced.
- 2.2. Children's centres have been funded through Sure Start Early Years Childcare Grant (SSEYCG), totalling £16.9m in 2010/11. This funding is now included alongside funding for many other forms of grant funded activities within the local government's Early Intervention Grant. The identified funds for children's centres have been significantly reduced (by 8.1% on the 2011/12 baseline allocation) but this reduction has been further compounded by pressures on other areas of the Children's Services budget. Therefore, efficiency savings within the children's centre budget are required.

- 2.3. A model was proposed for public consultation whereby expenditure reductions could be achieved through a combination of:
- Identifying £3m of the savings through reduced central management costs including by unifying early years and children's centre senior roles, substantially reducing senior management functions which are a legacy of the former prescriptive approach and avoiding more intensive support costs related to local authority management;
  - Merging the management of a number of individual centres with others at a local level to reduce local management costs. This would reduce the number of separate entities from the existing 81 to 53 but with no closures to any of the main locations;
  - Bringing together the individual centres in clusters across the county to support the reduction of senior management and some administrative costs;
  - Offering all of the centres out to tender for provision by the independent sector in their new clusters;
  - Making some reductions in support service staffing such as administration and caretaking;
  - Retaining the full complement of approximately 120 Family Support officers across the county to ensure targeted services for the most vulnerable children would be protected.
- 2.4. This approach was based upon a set of principles and criteria set out in the consultation document and would produce 53 children's centre catchment areas whilst retaining use of existing venues where possible including the 81 main sites and offering services across 100% of the county.

### **3. Consultation**

- 3.1. On 31 January 2011, Hampshire County Council's Children's Services Department launched a seven week consultation regarding the future delivery of children's centres. It was aimed at parents, practitioners and community members and sought to find out what they thought about proposed changes to the way the children's centre service was delivered. The paper asked respondents three main questions; if they agreed with the principles for the proposed changes to children's centres, if they agreed with the criteria used to review the delivery of children's centre services and if they agreed with proposals.
- 3.2. The consultation was promoted through a number of publications including newspapers and newsletters. A consultation document was produced which was made available electronically and between January and May 2011 the document was viewed 18,012 times by 13,276 people. There were also over 1,000 paper copies of the consultation document distributed, versions in large print and other formats were available on request. The document set out the context for the proposals and provided a response sheet for respondents to return their comments (paper and electronic submissions were possible). A dedicated website was established with a glossary (see appendix 1) and a frequently asked questions section which was updated regularly. There were a series of meetings listed in appendix 6 with centre leaders, managers, partners and stakeholders to explain the proposals. Parents, children's centre staff, councillors, local and district councils were invited to attend 14 drop-in sessions to provide clarification about the proposals and explore community views.

- 3.3. As a result of feedback, the consultation period was extended and the consultation paper was enhanced to make it more accessible. Further meetings were held to explain the changes. As part of the extension, 12 supplementary questions were added to provide supporting information about views in relation to the original proposals. The extended consultation was released on 18 March 2011 and the consultation period was extended until 15 April 2011.
- 3.4. The initial consultation document can be found at : [http://www3.hants.gov.uk/full\\_proposal\\_document\\_-\\_without\\_response\\_form.doc](http://www3.hants.gov.uk/full_proposal_document_-_without_response_form.doc), and the extended consultation can be found at: [http://www3.hants.gov.uk/supporting\\_consultation\\_document\\_-\\_without\\_response\\_form.doc](http://www3.hants.gov.uk/supporting_consultation_document_-_without_response_form.doc)
- 3.5. A complete list of the consultation questions is included in appendix 2. This is numbered with the original questions listed at the end. Copies of all consultation responses will be made available in the Members' Room for seven days before the decision day meeting.

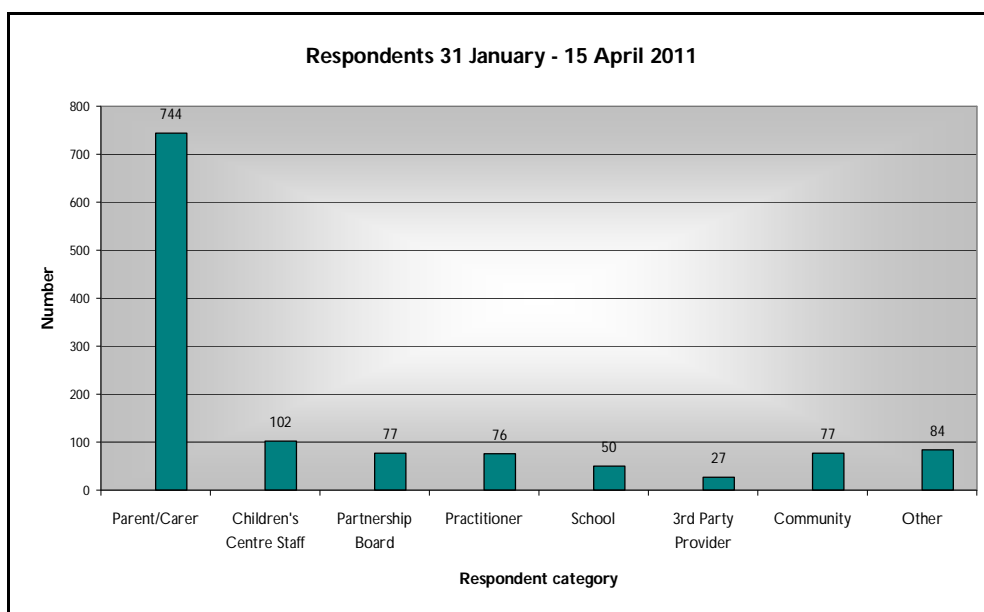
#### 4. Responses to the consultation: respondents

4.1. In total there were 1,286 responses to the consultation using the consultation response form. 30% (386) of the total responses were received during the extended consultation period

4.2. There were eight pre-defined identity categories available for respondents to select from:

- Parent/Carer;
- Children's Centre Staff;
- Children's Centre Partnership Board Member;
- Practitioner;
- School Representative;
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Party Providers;
- Community; or
- Other.

4.3. Chart 1: respondents data



4.4. The majority of responses were received from parents and carers, this accounted for 57% of the responses. The total number of 'Parent/Carer' respondents is 1.5% of the 48,196 families that are registered with a Hampshire children's centre.

## 5. Key findings – responses to the original consultation questions

5.1. Overall, when considering responses to the three original questions regarding support for the principles (listed as question 12 in appendix 2), criteria (listed as question 13 in appendix 2) and proposals (listed as question 14 in appendix 2), the model for the rationalisation of children's centres was not supported (See appendix 3). There was a positive shift in 'yes' answers in the latter part of the consultation.

## 6. Key findings – supplementary questions from the extended consultation document

### Universal and targeted provision

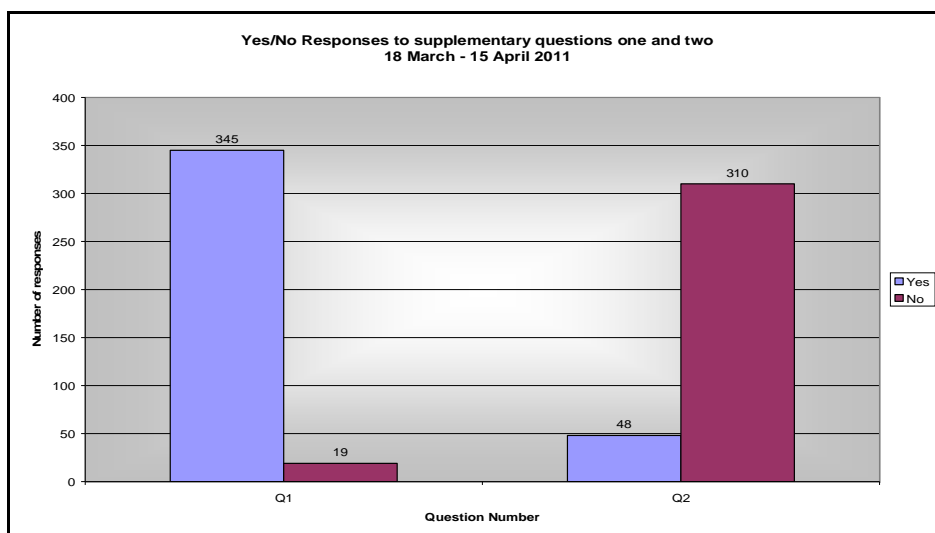
6.1. The first two supplementary questions within the extended consultation were intended to identify priorities for Hampshire's children's centres:

- Q1) Do you agree that we should keep children's centres in areas across the whole of Hampshire?
- Q2) Do you think we should put all our money into areas of greatest need?

6.2. Chart 2 indicates that the majority of respondents (95%) agree that the County Council should retain children's centres across the whole county. In response to question 2, the chart shows that a large proportion (87%) of the respondents do not think that the County Council should put all funding into the areas of greatest need.

6.3. The majority of comments provided in response to question 2 supported the notion of children's centres as a universal service.

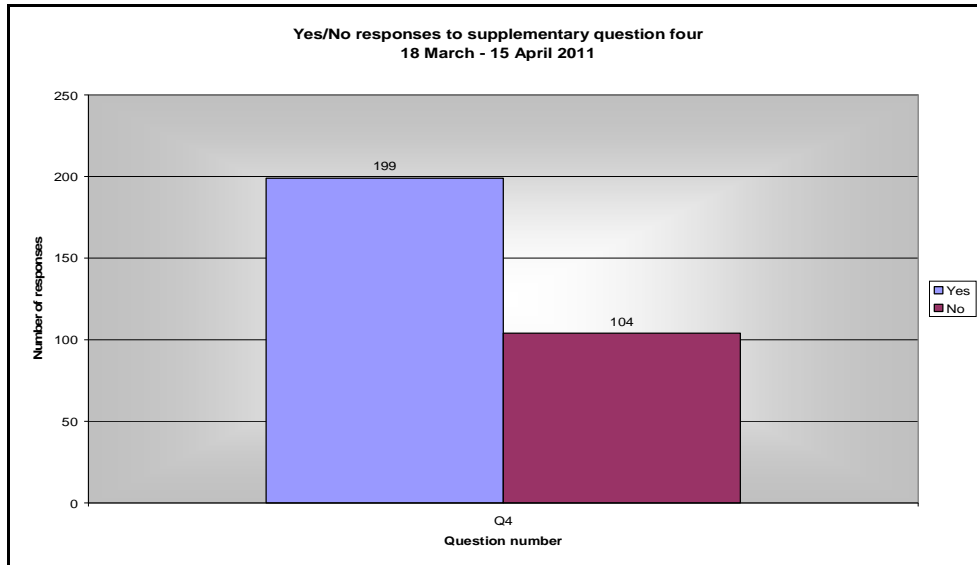
### 6.4. Chart 2: Total number of 'Yes/No' responses - questions 1 and 2.



## Services

- 6.5. Questions 3 and 4 aimed to seek views on services:
- Q3) *Which activities that your centre runs do you think are the most important to protect and keep free of charge?*
  - Q4) *Are there particular points you want to make about your own centre, including ways in which you think it could be made more flexible and accessible?*
- 6.6. Question 3 did not require a 'Yes/No' response. The responses ranged from 'all services provided by Hampshire's children's centres' through to 'all services should be free' or 'free for all new parents and families with children under two'.
- 6.7. Respondents named many services that they considered to be the most important to protect and retain free of charge. The services that were mentioned most frequently were:
- Health support, including baby clinics, breast feeding support, development checks;
  - Groups for children with disabilities and special needs;
  - Parenting courses, including Triple P and PEEP;
  - Stay and play and messy play sessions;
  - Support for vulnerable parent groups such as victims of domestic violence, young parents;
  - New parents groups such as 'Bumps to Babes'; and
  - Healthy lifestyles such as 'Cook and Eat'.
- 6.8. Question 4 required a 'Yes/No' response and asked for suggestions about particular centres. 66% of the respondents indicated that there were particular points they wanted to make about their own centre. Common themes that were contained within the comments included:
- **No change** – Children's centres should remain as they were;
  - **Availability** – Services do not need to be offered all day, everyday;
  - **Quality of Service** - The centres deliver excellent service despite staff vacancies;
  - **Accessibility** - Parents should be able to access any centre, not just their "catchment" centre;
  - **Choice** – The need for more activities to suit working parents, i.e. weekend activities;
  - **Flexibility** - Buildings should be used by other age groups when not being used for under 5s.

6.9. **Chart 3: Total 'Yes/No' responses to question 4**



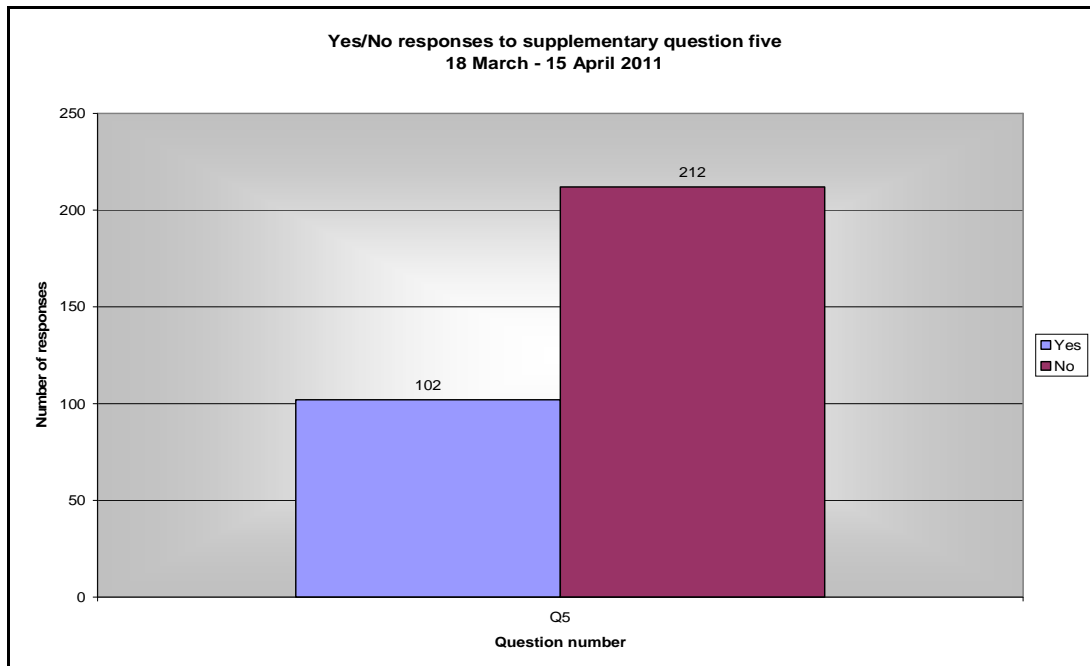
**Other organisations managing centres**

6.10. Question 5 was designed to obtain views regarding the suggestion of tendering the management of children's centres to other organisations to provide cost savings centrally:

- Q5) *Do you agree that we should cut as much as possible from central costs by managing centres through other organisations?*

6.11. Chart 4 indicates that 32% of the respondents agreed that the County Council should cut central costs by managing centres through other organisations.

6.12. **Chart 4: Total number of 'Yes/No' responses to question 5**



- 6.13. The comments in response to question 5 varied and in some cases reflected stated concerns that that all existing centre leaders, administrative and finance staff would be dismissed. Others were concerned that, should the County Council hand over the management of centres to third parties, then there would be no local staff remaining in the centres. Concerns expressed also related to fears that third party provider management of children’s centres would lead to a loss of quality and control of services and that third parties would be running centres for a profit.
- 6.14. The comments that were provided with the ‘Yes’ responses commonly stated support for cutting as much as possible from central costs by managing centres through other organisations, as long as the front line staffing and services remain.

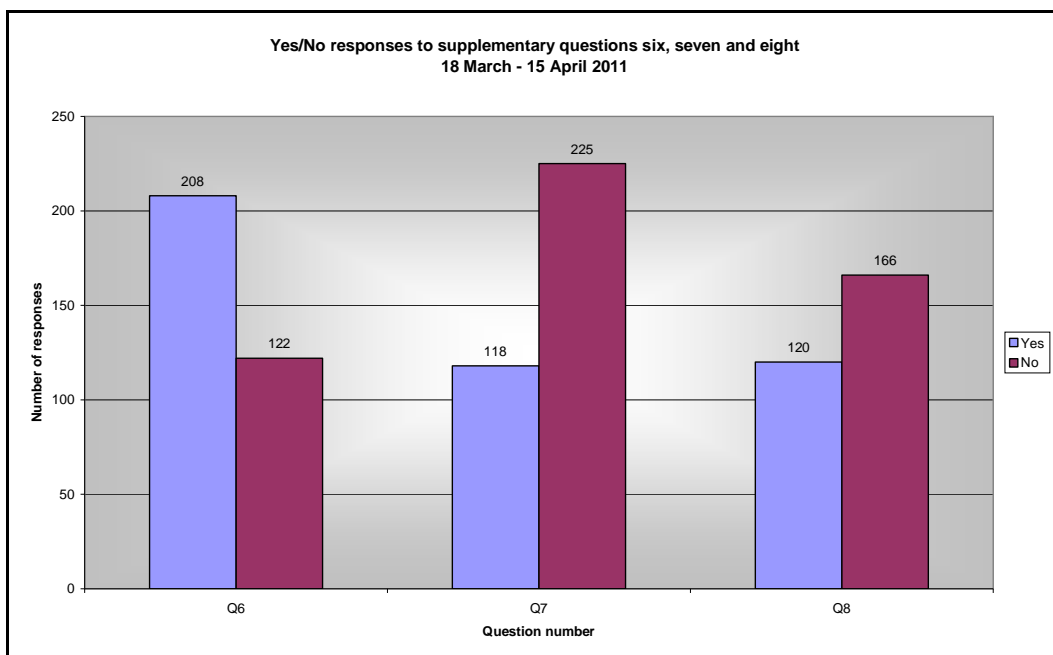
**Combining (merging) some centres**

- 6.15. Responses to question 6, 7 and 8 are grouped together since they focused on the possible proposal of combining/merging certain Hampshire children’s centres to form 53 catchment areas. The questions specifically asked:

- Q6) *Do you agree that we should protect staff who deliver services to families by cutting management and running costs?*
- Q7) *Do you agree to the proposals to combine (merge) centres in this way? If not, please give your reasons and if possible your suggestions for alternative ways to save the money.*
- Q8) *Some people have already told us that the mergers could be done differently. Do you have any views on which centres it would be better to combine?*

- 6.16. Chart 5 demonstrates that the majority of respondents to question 6 (63%) agree that frontline staff and services should be protected by reducing management and running costs. A frequently occurring response reflected the agreement that finance and administration staff could be deployed across more than one centre and this approach would be a good efficiency measure. Comments received in association with the ‘no’ responses stated that children’s centres needed to be managed and therefore managers should be kept as well as front line staff.

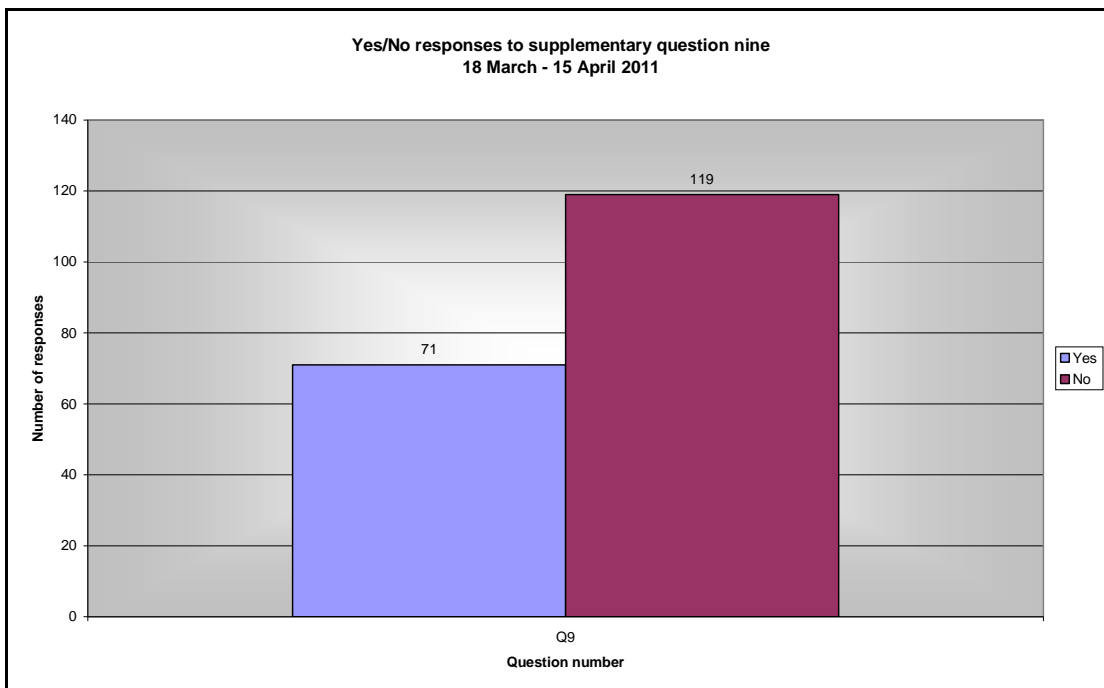
- 6.17. **Chart 5: Total number of ‘Yes/No’ responses to questions 6, 7 and 8**



- 6.18. 34% of the responses to question 7 agreed with the merger of centres as proposed. Of the 66% who submitted a negative response, there were few comments regarding the basis for disagreement. Common proposals for alternative measures to save costs included:
- Suggestions that the heating be turned down in all the centres to save money;
  - Reducing opening hours of centres to save on building and staffing costs; and
  - Offering pay cuts and reduced working hours to existing staff.
- 6.19. The majority of responses to question 8 (58%) did not express views on which centres to combine. However, there was an emphasis within the comments upon the importance of keeping services local and retaining local knowledge.
- 6.20. Overall, 11.5% of the respondents to the consultation made suggestions regarding alternative ways to merge the centres. Alternative suggestions regarding centre mergers and the number of respondents suggesting these are detailed in Appendix 4.

### Managing centres in groups (clusters)

- 6.21. Question 9 consults on the proposal to cluster centre. The proposal presented within the consultation was to have eight clusters, aligning with the new Children's Services area structure. The question specifically asks:
- *“Some people have already told us that the groups (clusters) are too large. Bearing in mind that smaller clusters probably mean more money spent on management and less on front line services, do you agree with the size of the proposed groups? If not, what size would you suggest?”.*
- 6.22. 63% of the respondents answered ‘no’ to this question. The alternative suggestions on how to cluster the centres are detailed in appendix 5.
- 6.23. **Chart 6: Total number of ‘Yes/No’ responses to question 9**



## Introducing charging for some services

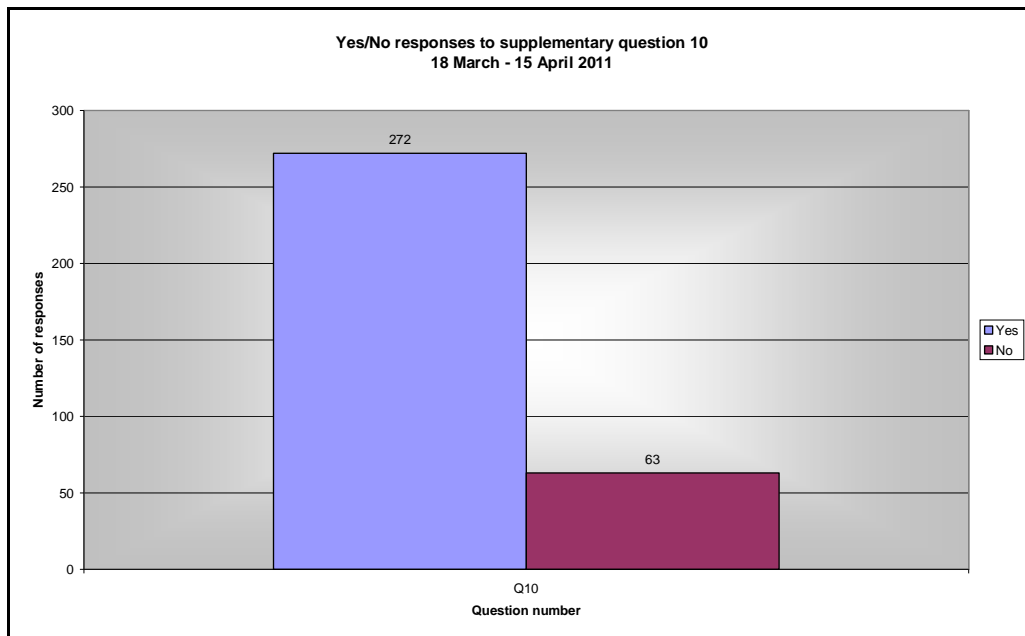
6.24. Question 10 asks

- *“Do you agree that it would be reasonable to introduce some charging for non-essential services and activities, provided families in need did not have to pay?”.*

6.25. 81% of the respondents agreed that it would be reasonable to charge for some services. Comments included:

- **Means testing** - All families who have an income of over £x should pay for all services.
- **Universal charging** - Everyone should pay a little towards services so that families value the service and should not expect everything to be free of charge.
- **High charges** – There was concern regarding how high the charges might be and that charges might stretch middle income families too far especially if they have more than one child under five.
- **Target families** - Families in receipt of benefits should not have to pay.
- **Charging policy** – There was support for robust policies to be in place to ensure charges did not discourage families from attending sessions.
- **Sensitivity** – There was a concern that those who cannot afford to pay should not be stigmatised by receiving free services.

6.26. **Chart 7: Total number of ‘Yes/No’ responses to question 10**

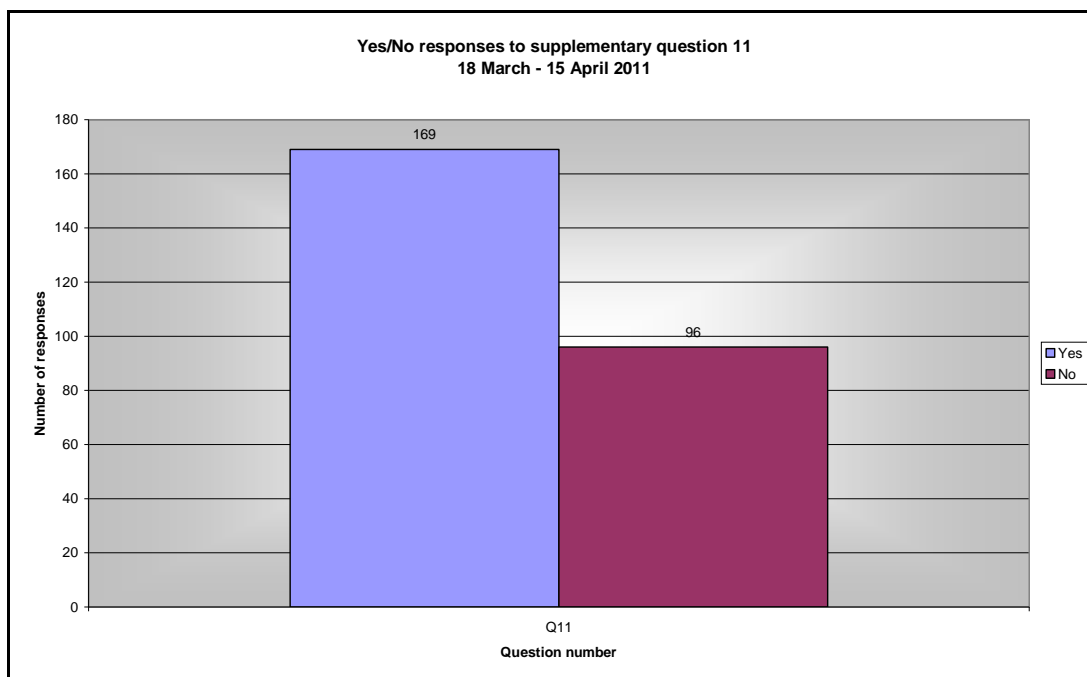


## Alternative proposals

6.27. Question 11 asks

- *“Are there any other ways you think that money could be saved in the work that children’s centres do and in the way they are organised?”*

6.28. **Chart 8: Total number of responses to question 11.**



6.29. 64% of the respondents said 'yes' there were other ways. Most of the comments came from children's centres staff and common suggestions were:

- **Resources** - Centres should be able to buy resources direct from suppliers other than using corporate processes.
- **Training** - Staff could be trained to deliver training in house instead of using external training providers.
- **Extended use of centre** – Centres should be available to other organisations in the evening and weekends and charges should be made for room hire.
- **Partners** - Health and Jobcentre Plus should be charged for the use of centres.
- **Administrative/Management duties** – There should be a reduction in attendance at meetings, paperwork, data and reporting which would enable centre leaders to spend time with families instead of completing paperwork.
- **External funding** - Utilise other sources of funding.

## 7. Responses to consultation: Additional information

7.1. Additional views regarding the consultation proposals were gathered through the drop-in sessions, meetings, letters and scrap books. A summary of the drop in session feedback is contained within appendix 6.

7.2. Save Our Children's Centre (SOCC) submitted a petition to the Executive Lead Member for Children's Services containing over 17,561 verified signatures. The petition requested that children's centres in Hampshire should continue to run as they are at present with no changes to the services that are delivered. The petition opposed the cluster and merger proposals and requested that services remain available for anyone in need and continue to be run by local management teams.

- 7.3. Bushy Leaze Children and Families Centre submitted a group response consisting of case studies, photographs, and a petition signed by 175 people. The petition requested that Bushy Leaze be retained separately from the clustering approach. The community stated that a larger catchment area would be acceptable as long as there was sufficient funding.
- 7.4. The Phoenix Children's Centre submitted two scrap books containing parents' thoughts and stories reflecting their experience at the children's centre. An alternative consultation was submitted within the scrapbook containing 25 responses opposing the proposals for changes to the catchment area clustering and management of the centre.
- 7.5. Haven Children's Centre submitted a set of case studies, examples of parent feedback on the centre, and also a petition, signed by 182 people requesting that Haven Children's Centre be retained as a separate centre and not be included within a cluster or be managed by a third party.
- 7.6. During meetings and through comments with headteachers, some respondents suggested that school managed centres should remain as single centres, as the direct link between the children's centres and a single school has helped to improve outcomes for children who then enter the linked school. Respondents suggested that children's centres provided a mechanism for schools to support families at an early stage. Some schools have indicated that they would not wish to manage a cluster of centres covering a community of children beyond their own catchment area. Other schools welcomed the proposals and have indicated that through their governing bodies, they would seek to establish a legal body to bid for the management of a cluster.
- 7.7. 187 letters and emails were received. The majority of letters and emails submitted asked questions or requested clarification about the consultation document. Other correspondence contained general support for a local centre and did not comment on the consultation.
- 7.8. The Hampshire voluntary alliance sector has welcomed the proposals. Some smaller voluntary organisations have raised concerns that they do not feel able or wish to manage large clusters.
- 7.9. Through meetings, partner agencies have expressed a view that the proposals are acceptable and in particular support has been given regarding the cluster approach.
- 7.10. Finally, there were suggestions within the consultation response relating generally to the geographical boundaries within the proposals. Alternative suggestions included cluster boundaries being co-terminus with health boundaries or local children's partnerships, others were concerned that the proposed mergers would affect communities as the notional catchment areas have been changed.

## **8. Conclusion**

- 8.1. This report summarises the consultation responses to the proposals regarding the future of children's centres. Overall, the data suggests disagreement with the initial proposals. Petitions and comments reflect a general view that there should be no change to the children's centres and a belief that children's centres will close as a result of efficiency measures. However, the extended consultations supplementary questions revealed more detail about respondents' views with a significant proportion of respondents agreeing that:

- Children's centres should be kept across the whole of Hampshire
- Money should not only be dedicated to areas of greatest need
- Staff who deliver services should be protected by cutting management and running costs
- Charges for non essential services (other than families in need) would be acceptable.

There was disagreement with the configuration of mergers and clusters proposed and alternative merger and cluster arrangements were suggested:

- 8.2. Finally, partner agencies and some schools and voluntary organisations have expressed support for the proposals with a recognition that efficiencies need to be made. There has been an overall consensus of agreement regarding the value of children's centres in supporting children and families in Hampshire.

## **9. Recommendation:**

- 9.1. That the Executive Lead Member for Children's Services takes note of the consultation responses and considers the implications when determining the future provision of children's centres in Hampshire

**10. CORPORATE OR LEGAL INFORMATION:**

**Links to the Corporate Strategy**

<b>Hampshire safer and more secure for all:</b>	yes
Corporate Business plan link number (if appropriate):	
<b>Maximising well-being:</b>	yes
Corporate Business plan link number (if appropriate):	
<b>Enhancing our quality of place:</b>	yes
Corporate Business plan link number (if appropriate):	

**Other Significant Links**

<b>Links to previous Member decisions:</b>		
<u>Title</u>	<u>Reference</u>	<u>Date</u>
Children's Service Services Department Revenue Budget 2011 / 12	2503	28 January 2011

**Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents**

**The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)**

Document: 1,286 consultation responses                      Location: members chambers

## **IMPACT ASSESSMENTS:**

### **10. Equalities Impact Assessment:**

- 10.1. Equalities were considered when developing the proposal under consultation and no adverse impact was identified. The impact assessment concluded that the proposals were likely to sustain services for all target groups, as the proposals suggested that reach areas remained smaller where levels of deprivation were higher and that service should be proportionate to need and contribute towards closing the outcomes gap.

### **11. Impact on Crime and Disorder:**

- 11.1. Children's centres are part of an Early Intervention Programme which may prevent crime and disorder in the longer term.

### **12. Climate Change:**

- 12.1. How does what is being proposed impact on our carbon footprint / energy consumption?

Under the consultation proposals it is possible that some additional travelling incurred as a result of changes to the notional catchment areas, however, it is believed that the impact is likely to be minimal.

- 12.2. How does what is being proposed consider the need to adapt to climate change, and be resilient to its longer-term impacts?

No specific measures have been identified.