

Bedford Children's Centre Consultation Report

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Peopletoo
it works better with you

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1. Background

- Peopletoo were commissioned by Bedford Borough Council to carry out a consultation exercise regarding the proposed changes to the children centres offer within the Borough. This consultation took place over 10 weeks from January to March 2021.
- The Consultation offered the opportunity for the population of Bedford to take part by completing a survey, this was made available online with the offer of paper versions in community languages if preferred.
- A total of 484 people took part in the survey, all using the online portal.
- As well as the consultation survey there was an offer made to early years providers, elected members, health professionals and parent forums to take part in planned focus groups. The offer was taken up by early years providers and health professionals.
- The planned changes to the Bedford Borough children centres up for consultation focussed around:
 - The importance of children centres
 - The online delivery of services
 - The location of services
 - Payment for services

2. Findings from the Survey

- Of the 484 people who took part in the survey only 75% had previously used Children's Centre services.

2.a The importance of children centres services

- Of the total answering the survey just over 50% of the respondents said they did not want to see changes to the Children's Centre offer in Bedford. Of those that said they did want to see changes the main request was for increased support for parents through the delivery of group sessions and parenting/ family support.
- People were asked to rank from the most important to the least important 5 children centre services. All the services were the most important to some people. The services being seen of the greatest importance being parenting support.
 - Parenting support 27.3%
 - Chat and Play (Including Speech and Language support) 24.7%
 - Wiggles and Jiggles (Music and story time) 18.4%
 - Messy play (Arts and Crafts) 18.1%
 - Buggy walks led by a practitioner 11.5%
- When asked to rank in order of importance the services provided by partner agencies the split was very close with only a 4.4% difference across the range of services
 - New birth checks 22.2%

○ Ante-natal support (Midwife drop in)	20.8%
○ Breastfeeding support	20.7%
○ Baby weighing sessions	18.4%
○ Children's general health clinic	17.8%

2.b. Online children centre services

- There was strong support for the delivery of online services with 65.3% of the respondents saying they would like to access children centre services online
 - Despite there being strong support for online services nearly 10% of the respondents did not have readily available access to the technology to support online services.
 - The device most people would choose to use to access online services is a smartphone. With just over 20% who would like training to support access to online services
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|--------------|-------|
| ○ Smartphone | 47.8% |
| ○ Computer | 24.9% |
| ○ Tablet | 22.7% |
| ○ None | 4.6% |

2.c. Location of children centres

- Most respondents, although having accessed children centre services, when asked did not specify which children centre's they had used.

2.d. Paying for children centre services

- A large proportion of the people undertaking the survey said they would be prepared to pay for some children centre services. The services people are most likely to pay for being:

○ Forest school	28%
○ Music sessions	25.1%
○ Baby massage	23.5%
○ Specialist parenting	14.1%
○ Other	9.3%
- 79.2% were prepared to pay for block sessions at a reduced rate.
- Most people who completed the survey, although being prepared to pay for services, did not specify how much they would be prepared to pay.

3. Focus Groups

Three focus groups were conducted, two with early years professionals and one with health professionals.

3.a. Key Findings from the focus groups

- The consensus from all focus groups is that children centre services are important for the people of Bedford. They do make a difference and should be maintained in some form across the Borough.
- All groups were happy with the concept of core centres in the planned locations and were keen to support the notion of children centres delivering services from other venues to ensure a broader spread of services, particularly incorporating the new communities in the Borough of Bedford.
- There was strong support for the targeting of services to support people who experience the highest level of disadvantage, those with the greatest needs.
- The health professionals were keen to maintain and further develop opportunities for joint working out of children centres and in new venues when established.
- All professionals understood the value of online services as a supplement, not as a replacement to, direct face to face work with families.