

Petition: Halt the planned cuts to West Sussex Children and Family Centres

Statement by Petitioners

Between 2010 & 2019 570 Children and Family Centres have closed. A ten-year review of The Marmot Report states a need: to improve availability and quality of early year's services, including Children's Centres, in all regions of England.

A 2020 research paper studying deprived Glasgow families, showed that attending their family centre positively impacted on social inclusion and social support for all parents.

We represent the ten thousand signatories appalled by the decision to close Family Centres and Find It Out Centres. WSCC should halt the planned cuts to its Early Help service and reverse the closures of 32 out of 43 Children's and Family Centres and 12 Find it Out advice centres across the county.

Councillors have responded by saying these aren't cuts and consultation will determine if these closures will actually take place. Yet, we see that the budget (recently agreed in March) makes no scope for running the buildings, nor with the same quantity of staff. Surely this is setting up the consultation to fail?

These closures are not in the best interests of children and families across West Sussex, particularly as we emerge from a global pandemic where social isolation has caused mental health issues within parents and children. They are driven by senseless financial cuts as councils around the country continue to deal with the loss of 60p in every £1 of funding since 2010, inflicted on them by the national Conservative Government. Areas that will entirely lose all their centres include Lancing, Fishersgate, Worthing, Sompting, Midhurst, Petworth, Storrington, Billingshurst, East Grinstead and Burgess Hill.

The Find It Out Centres are the only walk-in confidential youth advice centres offered for 13–25-year-olds in West Sussex.

The core purpose of Children's Centres is to improve outcomes for young children and their families and reduce inequalities between families in greatest need and their peers in:

- child development and school readiness
- parenting aspirations and parenting skills
- child and family health and life chances

Research shows that these centres are essential to the wellbeing of many parents and their children. Specifically:

- Children and family centres significantly impact the physical health of many families and have positive social impacts on communities, especially those living in disadvantage.
- They have positive outcomes for many families identified as experiencing more complex problems.
- They predict better social and behavioural outcomes for children, including better pro-social behaviour.
- They also predict improved mental health outcomes for children and parents using the centres.
- Centres show positive effects on family functioning.

This is clearly a cost cutting measure by a cash strapped council, looking to sell or offload its tax-payers buildings. WSCC's understanding of what children and families need is so poor that Ofsted rated their other children and family services as inadequate.

These cuts will create more community social problems and will end up costing the council more money in the long run, via the NHS, Mental Health Services and Social Services.

Catherine Arnold
Lead Petitioner