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

### **Briefing Note**

- 1** People will have the chance to give their views on proposed changes to a service supporting vulnerable children and families. The Cabinet on 23 February 2021 approved a consultation looking at options to redesign West Sussex County Council's Early Help Service. A 10-week public consultation will start on 8 March 2021 and people will be able to take part in virtual engagement sessions, with dates to be announced shortly.
- 2** Early Help staff support children and families who are facing any number of challenging circumstances, working to ensure every child has a safe environment in which to thrive. The proposals put forward aim to meet a growing demand on these services by focusing support where it is needed most, including closer working with schools.
- 3** If agreed following consultation, Early Help Services would remain in 11 Children & Family Centres across West Sussex, a reduction from the current 43 centres. Some of the centres Early Help could withdraw from are located in buildings such as libraries, schools, village halls and churches which will remain open and will continue to be used by community groups.
- 4** Under the proposals we would cease group work and relocate the Find It Out offer to the remaining 11 Children & Family Centres. This would ensure a full-time drop-in service for young people remains available in each district and borough. This will complement the range of youth services the council run, which includes Youth Emotional Support (YES), mental health in schools and support for children affected by domestic abuse.
- 5** Jacquie Russell, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, said: "Our commitment to putting children and families first is at the heart of these proposals, which are to improve our Early Help Service and enhance the support we can give to those who need it most."

"We know that our Children & Family Centres are not widely used by the families that need Early Help. Since the first lockdown all children and family centres have been closed but requests for help have been at a record high, indicating that despite the lack of access to buildings we are still able to reach the families that need us. Discussions are ongoing with partners and other organisations that normally operate from the centres we are looking at to explore how families will continue to access these services."

"We understand the concerns people have about the potential changes to centres and I would encourage everyone to share their views about these proposals when the consultation opens."

- 6** The proposed changes will deliver savings already identified in the Council's financial plan. A [report on the proposals](#), was discussed at the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee on 7 January 2021.
- 7** More information on the proposals, including video explanations and details of how people can take part in the consultation when it opens, can be found on the [Early Help Redesign project webpage](#).

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**Lucy Butler**

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