Staffordshire
County Council

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Appendix B: Best Start Consultation 2014

Analysis of Results

DOCUMENT DETAILS

Title	Best Start Consultation 2014 Analysis of Results
Description	The purpose of this document is to provide details of feedback from the Best Start Consultation.
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Best Start consultation took place between 4th October 2014 and 3rd December 2014. A total of 1,605 structured responses were received to the consultation: 1,204 were received via the consultation survey. Another 401 responses were received via a third-party market-research company commissioned to determine the views of parents who have not used Children's Centres. These consultation responses were sought via street and door to door interviews and through local baby clinics and parent and toddler forums. Their views were sought to ensure the consultation included representation of parents who had not used Children's Centres. Feedback was also received via letter, email and organised events.

Staffordshire's Vision for Early Years

Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the five essential things that every child needs to have the best start in life. Between 96% and 100% of respondents agreed. Respondents stated that *"they seem like common sense"*. The need to signpost parents to services was highlighted and some stated that the 'five essential things' were difficult to disagree with.

Respondents were also asked to what extent they agreed with the five objectives set out as part of the vision, and how they thought these objectives can be achieved. A key theme was by making the services accessible: "*by being able to access the support necessary to achieve"*.

Staffordshire's Early Years Offer

Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the five priorities on which the early years offer is based. Between 94% and 97% of respondents agreed. Respondents stated that they *"all seem like common sense".* Respondents were asked how they would prefer to access information and advice on children and family services, with 853, or 53% stating that they would prefer to access information via the Staffordshire County Council website.

When asked what types of information respondents would need as a parent of a child under 5 and when they would need it, comments reflected the importance of specific information at key milestones. In the early days of parenthood, information advice and guidance on raising a baby and how to cope was important, over time information on child health was also viewed as important. As children continue to grow advice on how children could be best supported to learn and develop was important, followed by information on preparing for and choosing a school.
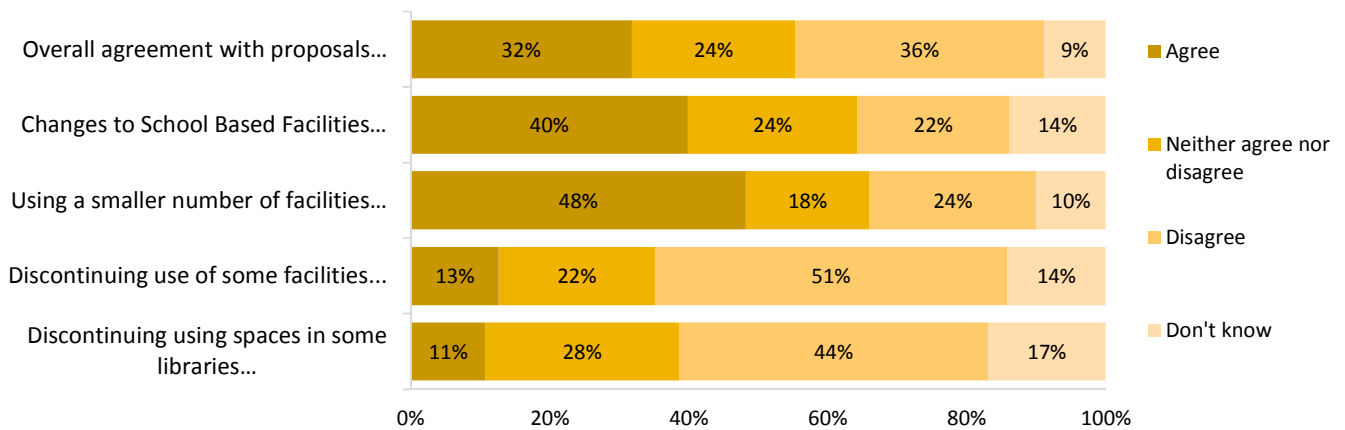
Respondents took a range of considerations into account when choosing a childcare provider including quality, safety, friendliness and environment. Experience and qualifications were also important, as was the location of the provision. Respondents felt families would need regular support and advice on an ongoing basis, as well as financial support and/or access to affordable childcare and/or activities. Advice on finance and housing and access to positive parenting classes would also be of benefit.

Overall Views on the Proposals

32% of respondents agreed that the proposals would help to ensure that all children get the best start in life, while 36% disagreed. Respondents who had not used Children's Centres were more likely to agree with the proposals than respondents who used them.

The proposal to continue to use a smaller number of facilities where the model was considered to be working well received the most agreement from respondents. There was most disagreement for the proposal to not continue to use facilities that are not working well/and or are not in the best locations to deliver the County Council vision for children's early years.

Figure a: Proportion of respondents who agreed/disagreed with the proposals overall, and by individual proposal

Proposal	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Don't know
Overall agreement with proposals…	32%	24%	36%	9%
Changes to School Based Facilities…	40%	24%	22%	14%
Using a smaller number of facilities…	48%	18%	24%	10%
Discontinuing use of some facilities…	13%	22%	51%	14%
Discontinuing using spaces in some libraries…	11%	28%	44%	17%

Respondents generally agreed that *"all children deserve the best start in life"*. Many believed that the provision of services should be universal and *"regardless of background"* whereas other said that it was important to *"focus on those that need it".* Many respondents considered the proposals to be at odds to the 'vision' and the 'best start in life': *"closing [children's] centres is not helping the children have the best start"*.

Comments in Agreement

Respondents agreed with the proposals *"because they [children's centres] are not working"* and *"If [they are] not attended, why waste resource where it is not needed"*. Money and funds were also a common theme: *"if they are not working we should use the funds elsewhere"*.

Respondents also stated that they considered schools to be the right environment in which to begin a child's education: *"It's a good use of existing resources"* and that it would be *"good for children"*. Others stated that they did not believe libraries were suitable: *"A library is not an ideal place anyway"* and *"I'm not sure libraries are the right location for this type of provision"*.

A key theme was around continuing providing the existing services where there is a need: *"If attendance is high it must be popular and working"*, *"don't change something which is working well"* and that *"facilities with good attendance should stay open"*.

Comments in Disagreement

Many respondents were concerned about the potential closure of children's centres: *"children's centres are needed and should not be closed".* Many respondents also believed the current services are working well and expressed concern about the ability of schools to cater for Early Years: *"schools have enough with managing their schools"*.

Others stated that the provision was not the problem and that under-usage was the consequence of services *"not being promoted well enough, use social media"* and that the council *"need to make more families aware and encourage use"*. Comments included: *"advertise better and seek out families that would benefit from use"* and *"they are not used because people don't know much about them"*. Promotion of services was proposed as an alternative to closing centres: *"If attendance isn't high then more promotion is needed"* and stressed the *"need to encourage parents to use facilities not shut them"*.

Accessibility was a key concern for many who disagreed with the proposals, particularly in relation to residents of rural areas: *"This proposal is not meeting your aims for rural communities"* and *"the bus services in the rural area are terrible"*.

Regarding accessibility of services, some suggested that the proposal ran *"the risk of alienating parents who cannot travel to other venues"* . It was pointed out that *"isolation is a major problem for families without transport"* and *"surely every child matters"*. Respondents also believed the removal of services from some locations would create more problems and that *"low income families always suffer"*, *"people need face-to-face and group support. Technology is not the answer to someone who is struggling"*.

The accessibility of libraries as venues was a key theme: *"libraries are central locations everyone can access"* and *"a library is a great place for families"*. Respondents highlighted the opportunities presented by shared use of libraries and the importance of libraries as an educational resource. Respondents stated that *"libraries are places of learning"* and provide *"the foundations of learning"*.

Concerns were also raised about the long term financial and social cost of potential closures: *"you are setting us up for much more social problems in the future"*. Respondents also raised concerns about child development: *"the best start in life mixes children and parents of all backgrounds together".* The perception that the proposals amounted to a cost-cutting exercise was also a common theme, as was the issue of universalism. It was suggested that services should be available for all, regardless of background.

Respondents were asked if they had any ideas how these locations could be used to benefit their local community?

There was a wide range of alternative uses proposed including: *"as community hubs, to base a variety of services/activities"*, *"[they should be] available for hire by the local community"*, or as *"holiday clubs and play schemes for 0-5 year olds"*. Further suggestions included *"after school clubs and breakfast clubs"*, *"any local organisation who needs them should be able to use them"*.

Impact of the proposals

Many respondents stated that the proposals would have a negative or detrimental impact on either themselves and/or their children: "the proposals will have *"a massive impact on my daughter"* and *"I would lose a massive support network of other parents".* The lack of social interaction was also a key theme: *"It can be a lonely place when you are a first time mum, meeting other mum's is essential"* .

Many respondents stated that they will not be affected by the proposals, as they currently earn too much to qualify for services. Comments were also received from organisations and or professionals working in the early years field: *"As an organisation we could lose contact with families and it would make partnership working more difficult".*

Perhaps unsurprisingly, non-service users were much more likely to say that the proposals would have *"no impact personally"* or that they *"don't know"* what impact they will have. Some respondents not eligible for free services were concerned that alternatives services would *"cost more"* and some felt that they would not be able to *"afford"* to use *"alternative services"*.

Some stakeholders and providers expressed a keen interest in working with the County Council to discuss how they could be involved in the future. *"Targeted approaches"* for the most vulnerable were widely supported and *"localised service delivery"* was considered important.

CONTENTS

1. SETTING THE SCENE

Introduction

Our vision is that all children in Staffordshire should have the opportunity to get the best start in life and be safe, healthy and ready for school. The first five years of a child's life are vital for their future, so it's really important that parents and carers feel able to take care of them.
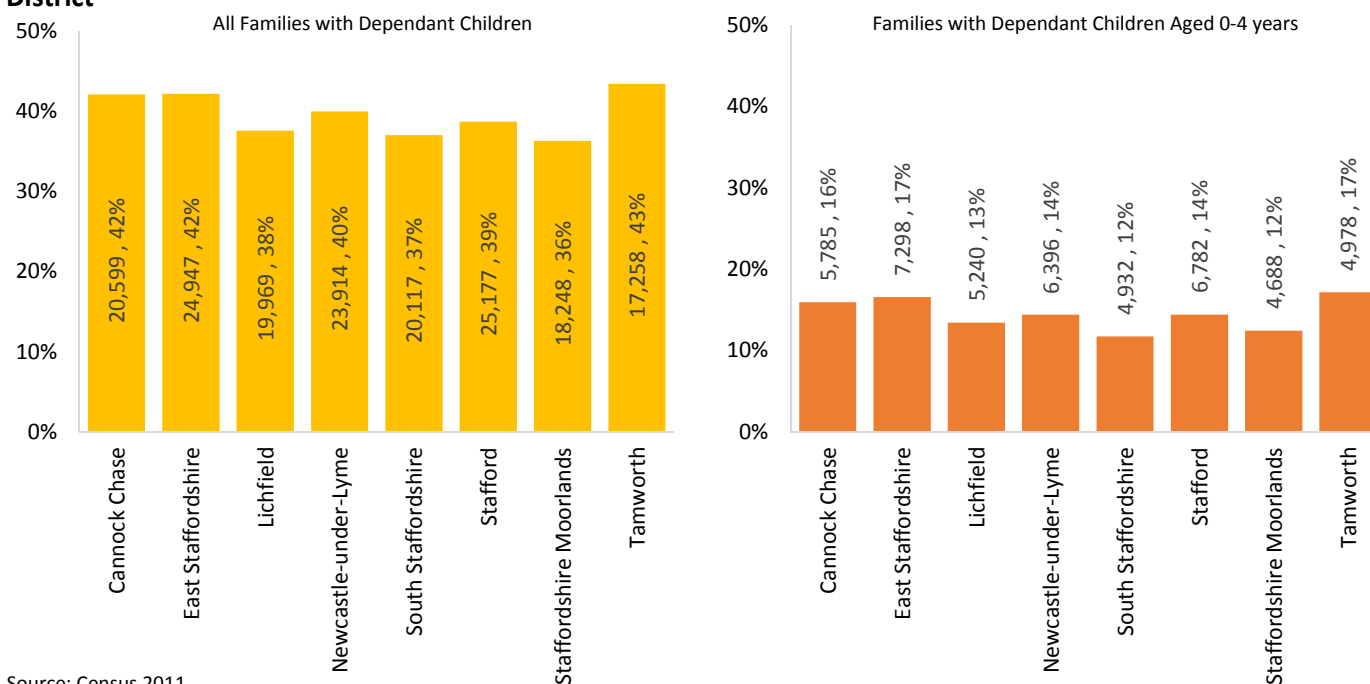
We believe we need to change how we work with parents and our partners and focus more effort on connecting parents to what they need, where they need it and when they need it, rather than on buildings that are not well used.

Our proposals aim to improve outcomes for young children in Staffordshire, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The County Council has consulted widely on their proposals and this report provides a summary of consultation findings.

Families in Staffordshire with 0 to 4 year olds

According to the 2011 Census, there are approximately 254,000 families in Staffordshire. Of these families 40% (100,400) have dependent children and 14% (36,600) of total families have dependent children aged 0 to 4 years.

Figure 1: The proportion of Families Who Have Dependent Children in Staffordshire & Number of Children by District

Source: Census 2011

Methodology

The Best Start consultation took part between 4th October and the 3rd December 2014. A total of 1,605 structured responses were received to the consultation: 1,204 were received via the consultation survey. Another 401 responses were received via a third-party market-research company commissioned to determine the views of parents who have not used Children's Centres. These consultation responses were sought via street and door to door interviews and through local baby clinics and parent and toddler forums. Their views were sought to ensure the consultation included representation of parents who had not used Children's Centres. Feedback was also received via letter, email and organised events.

The local knowledge of District Commissioning Leads was also sought. They provided contact details of local baby clinics and parent and toddler forums where known parents who had not used Children's Centres would be. 90% of respondents to the questionnaire indicated that they were current users of Children's Centres. 99% of respondents to the market-research company survey indicated that they did not use Children's Centres.

58 meetings were held during the consultation period and over 400 people were reached through these. Multiple letters and emails were also received. A wide range of people representing 0 to 4 year olds were encouraged to engage in the consultation through meetings. Some were set up specifically to discuss the consultation, others were pre-existing meetings and slots were secured on agendas to publicise the consultation and encourage participation and feedback. Meetings were also sought with a wide range of key groups from across all districts in Staffordshire. Key groups included parents and grandparents who were responsible for children between the ages of 0 to 4, councillors, providers, stakeholders, health professionals and staff from Families First.

Profile of Respondents

90% of total respondents were female, the largest proportion (44%) were from the 25-34 years age group. Almost two thirds of respondents (61%) were working full time, while an addition 23% looked after the home or family. 96% were of White British ethnicity, which is broadly representative of the Staffordshire population.
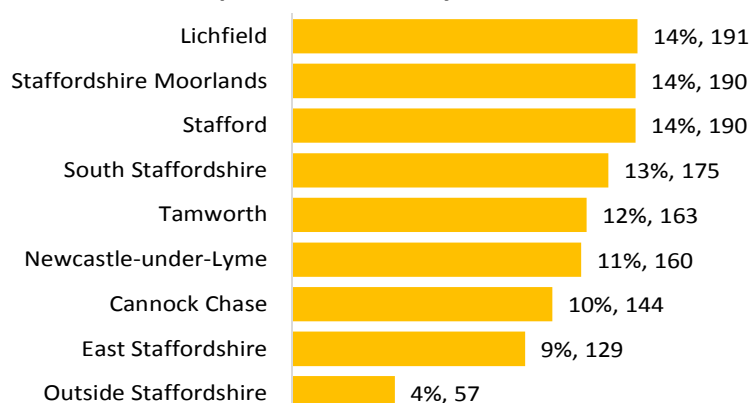
114 respondents (7.9%) indicated that their child had a disability. The largest proportion of which were classified as 'social/communications impairment' (53 respondents) or 'Learning difficulty' (43 respondents) disabilities. Various other disabilities were cited by parents, including impaired development and genetic conditions. Full details of these are in the Appendix. 6.3% of parents also had a disability. Mental health conditions were most common (2.7%) followed by physical impairments or mobility issues (1.5%).

Analysis shows the rate of response to the consultation is statistically significant, with a confidence level of 99% and a confidence interval of plus or minus 3.3%. For example had 50% of survey respondents strongly agreed with a question, 99% of the time between 46.7% and 53.3% of the Staffordshire population would have given the same answer. The response rate at a district level is not as statistically robust with a confidence interval of approximately +/- 9.2%.

Responses by District

Respondents were prompted for their post code. A total of 1,399 valid post codes were received throughout the consultation which allows the respondents' district of residence to be identified. The highest number of responses was from Lichfield District with 191 responses, whilst the lowest was from East Staffordshire with 129 responses.

Figure 2: Consultation Responses, Number by District, Valid Post Codes Only
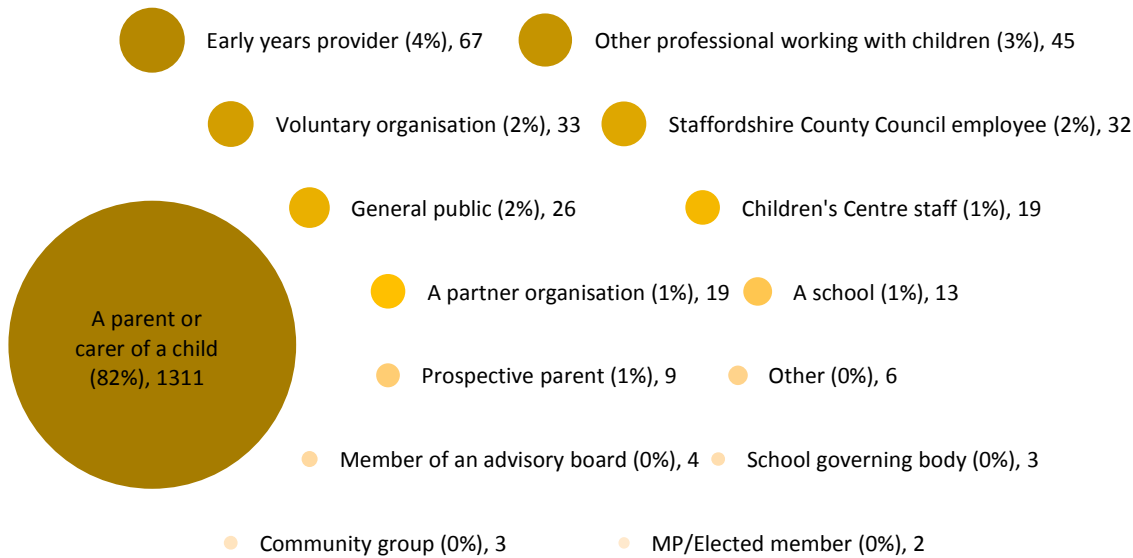
2. SURVEY RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS

Respondent Characteristics

Not all respondents provided details of their characteristics. Respondents were asked to select the option(s) that best suited them, as illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Are you responding to this consultation as...?

Early years provider (4%), 67
Other professional working with children (3%), 45
Voluntary organisation (2%), 33
Staffordshire County Council employee (2%), 32
General public (2%), 26
Children's Centre staff (1%), 19
A partner organisation (1%), 19
A school (1%), 13
A parent or carer of a child (82%), 1311
Prospective parent (1%), 9
Other (0%), 6
Member of an advisory board (0%), 4
School governing body (0%), 3
Community group (0%), 3
MP/Elected member (0%), 2

The majority of respondents (1,311 respondents) were the parent of, or a carer of a child. Of those who responded, 6.5%, or 94 respondents were expecting a child. The next highest volume of responses came from early year providers or other professionals who work with children.

Do you use any of the following 'designated' Children's Centres? Respondents were asked to select all that applied to them:

72% (1,328) of total respondents indicated that they currently use children's centres. The most frequently used children's centres were in Newcastle-under-Lyme (118, 6%), Glascote (90, 5%), Charnwood (85, 5%), Tamworth Early Years (84, 5%) and Cannock Chase (78, 4%).

Fewer than 15 respondents used children's centres in Audley Library (24, 1%), Castlechurch (22, 1%), Perton Library (19, 1%), Stapenhill (10, 1%) and Tynsel Parkes (7, 0.4%). For a detailed breakdown of respondents by centre, please see the appendix data tables.

Do you use any of the following locations (linked sites) to access early years services? Respondents were asked to select all that applied:

The greatest number of respondents indicated that they use the following locations (linked sites) to access early years services; Exley (57, 3%), Boney Hay (55, 3%), Clayton Library (52, 3%), Hempstalls (52, 3%) and Amington Heath (40, 2%).

Fewer than 5 respondents used sites in Barton-under-Needwood (5, 0.3%), Brewood Library (5, 0.3%), Glenthorne Primary, Cheslyn Hay (5, 0.3%), Grove Primary, Stafford (4, 0.2%), Greysbrooke, Lichfield (1, 0.1%), Hugo Meynell, Newcastle (0, 0%). For a detailed breakdown of respondents by centre, please see the appendix data tables.

How often do you use Children's Centre services? Respondents were asked to select one response only:

Of the respondents who used children's centres services, 77% (704 respondents) used them 'at least once a week' or more often, 86 of whom stated that they use them 'daily'. 23% (206 respondents) stated that they used them less than once a month or less frequently.

Which of the following activities and services, if any, do you use most often? Respondents were asked to select their top three:

The most frequently used activities and services accessed by respondents were Breastfeeding Support (206, 8%), Baby Yoga/Massage (208, 8%), Postnatal Groups/Baby Clinics (227, 9%), Private Nursery (263, 10%), Stay and Play (or similar activity) (637, 24%).

The least frequently used services or activities were adult learning (60, 2%), healthy eating courses/ services (60, 2%), family learning (70, 3%), Family Information Service (71, 3%) and support groups (76, 3%). For a detailed breakdown of activities and services used, please see the appendix data tables.

Are there any other Early Years activities or services that you access? If 'Yes', respondents were asked to state what these were;

There were a broad range of additional early years activities that users accessed, including church play groups, dad's groups, health visitors, play and exercise groups and various other leisure activities. Many of these were location specific.

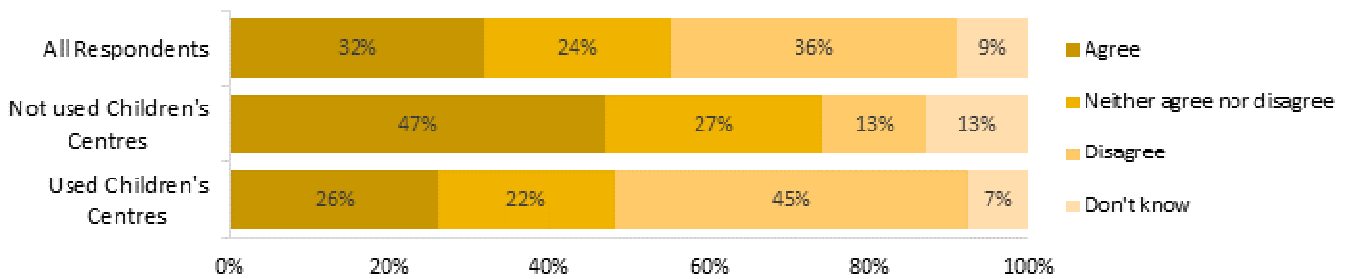# 3. STAFFORDSHIRE'S EARLY YEARS PROPOSALS OVERALL

Respondents were introduced to the proposals with the following statement:

"The county council believes that all children aged under 5 should have the opportunity to get the best start in life and be safe, healthy and ready for school. The aim of our proposals is to make a difference to the lives of many more young children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds."

They were then asked for their views on the overall proposals. Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed that the proposals would help to ensure that all children get the best start in life.

32% of respondents agreed that the proposals would help to ensure that all children get the best start in life, while 36% disagreed.

Figure 4: Proportion of Respondents who agreed/disagreed the proposals would help to ensure that all children get the best start in life, by respondent type

Respondents who had not used Children's Centres were more likely to agree with the proposals than respondents who had used them. 47% of those who had not used them agreed with the proposals overall compared to 26% of those who had used Children's Centres.

Comments in Agreement

There were approximately 320 comments received from respondents who agreed that the proposals would help to ensure that all children get the best start in life. More than half of these were from parents who had never used Children's Centre's.

There were many comments reiterating the need for 'the best start in life': "*all children deserve the best start in life*", "*everyone deserves help if they need it*", that "*investing in early intervention is backed up by evidence*" and that "*the proposals should make childcare accessible to more families with children under 3 years*".

Comments also included "*if access to facilities and more importantly, information is improved, this can only be seen as an improvement*", "*I hope that the proposals will encourage more families to use early years units and support provided*" and "*I feel it will lead to more families accessing appropriate support early on*".

Many respondents who agreed also agreed on the basis that provision should be universal: "*I agree with the above statement as long as this includes ALL children and not just vulnerable families*", "*all children need the same opportunities early on in life*", the proposals "*give children the same opportunities, even from disadvantaged backgrounds*" and that provision should be "*regardless of background*".

However others continued that it was important to *"focus on those that need it"* and *"what is important"*. It was stated that the proposals *"should make it easier for families who need extra support to get it and improve early identification of the most vulnerable"* and it would be a *"good thing"*, *"as long as vulnerable families are being supported appropriately"*.

Some respondents acknowledged the need for change: *"dwindling funding means that change has to happen"* and *"it is clear changes are required to find better and more efficient ways to improve services."* It was stated that *"any help is better than none"* and that *"any help can only benefit parents and children."*

Other respondents, whilst agreeing that the proposals would help to ensure that all children get the best start in life, made cautionary comments: *"I agree with the support you want to offer but disagree with the closures"* and that *"this doesn't mean that services need to be cut, savings could be made just from using and running less centres"*. Others suggested that *"taking away some services in the places above would be detrimental"*.

Others mentioned the allocation of funding and that the proposals would only be a success if *"the access to information and services was implemented effectively"*.

Comments in Disagreement

There were approximately 450 comments from respondents who disagreed with the proposals. Relatively few comments (51) were received from those who had never used Children's Centres.

Many commentators stated that they considered the proposals to be at odds to the 'vision' and that they could not see how the proposals would lead to a 'best start in life'. Comments included: *"this can do nothing but harm our children's start in life"*, *"I can't understand the decision to close them (children's centres)"* and that *"children won't get the best start because there will be no where for families to get support"*.

Respondents continued: *"I cannot understand how closing centres local to people will help"*, *"I cannot see how closing centres down will help vulnerable children"*, *"closing centres is not a positive change"*, *"closing centres is not helping the children have the best start"* and that *"getting rid of services for children is never good"*.

Further comments included: *"providing less community access does not improve what we have to offer to families. It actually makes it more difficult"*, *"cutting services, no matter how it is dressed up, cannot be to the benefit of anyone"* and that they *"can't see any benefits, just cutting provisions and breath of choice"*.

There was also a recurring theme around the perception of the proposals being a cost-cutting exercise: *"I feel that Staffordshire County Council are trying to save money and are not considering the needs of the community"*, *"it appears that the proposal is cutting services not developing them"*. Respondents continued *"[the proposals] appears to be a cost saving exercise... no options are in place to offer alternatives"*, *"closing children centres is purely based on financial reasons/cost cutting"* and *"they [the proposals] are just a cost-saving exercise that will reduce the facilities available to parents and young children"*.

Concerns were also raised about the long term financial and social cost of potential closures: *"shutting children's centres to save money is also so short sighted"*, *"you are setting us up for many more social problems in the future that will cost a lot more money"*. Commentators added *"it seems your only interest is cost saving with little consideration for children and no interest in parents/families until they are at crisis point"*. *"Crisis management will not save you money in the long run"*.

Respondents also highlighted a perceived inequality in the proposals and the need to provide services for all: *"I feel that you should assist all families and not just those identified as on low incomes", "if you take the services away there will be a lot of families who are isolated"* and the proposals will *"result in a lot of families being unable to access groups".*

Respondents also thought that the proposals were *"discriminating against certain areas"* and that they were *"cutting people off".* The proposals should *"make support inclusive not exclusive."* The proposals were considered to be *"discriminating against families who are not currently vulnerable".* It was regarded that the Council are *"limiting the opportunities of all children by focussing on a minority group".*

Access was also specifically mentioned throughout the comments, particularly in relation to residents of rural areas: *"some people can only go close to home because of transport", "families will have to travel further to access services, the most vulnerable are unlikely to be willing or to have the means to do this".*

Respondents continued *"some [people] would not be able to afford to travel to centres. They will be too far away"* and that *"this proposal is NOT meeting your aims for rural communities", "the bus services in the rural area are terrible. A lot of families will be left vulnerable and their situation may escalate whereas at the moment issues can be picked up early on".*

In addition, respondents raised concerns about child development: *"the best start in life mixes children and parents of all backgrounds together to support each other", "my child will not be able to mix with other children at the group"* and that *"children will not be able to get social skills, or mix with other children".* It was highlighted that *"children need to play and have contact with other children"* and that *"there are no proposals for alternatives"* and this could impact negatively on children's development.

4. STAFFORDSHIRE'S VISION FOR EARLY YEARS

Respondents were introduced to Staffordshire's vision for Early Years with the following statement:

"Our vision is to give all under 5's in Staffordshire the opportunity to get the best start in life. What determines a best start in life will differ for every family in the county, but based upon feedback already received and national research, we believe there are some common themes and we would like your opinion."

The survey stated: "We believe that there are five essential things that every child needs to have the best start in life".

Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with these statements. There was almost universal agreement, as illustrated in figure 5.

Figure 5: Agreement with the five essential things that every child needs to have the best start in life

	Agreement
Safe and secure home with space to grow and learn the skills they need to develop	100%
Children having positive relationships with their parents and carers	100%
Good parental mental and physical health	96%
Healthy child development to aid their physical and mental development e.g. good nutrition and immunisation	99%
Positive early childhood learning experiences e.g. play	100%

Respondents were asked to give reasons for their answers and more than 1,000 responses were received.

The vast majority of respondents re-affirmed their support for the 'five essential things'. Statements of support included: *"they seem like common sense"*, *"its simple really if a child has all of these options then that's the best start in life for them"* and *"all of these are vital to ensure your child has the best possible start in life and has every opportunity to reach/achieve their full potential."*

Many respondents also acknowledged that all children deserve and need the 'five essential things' but not all will have them provided in the home environment.

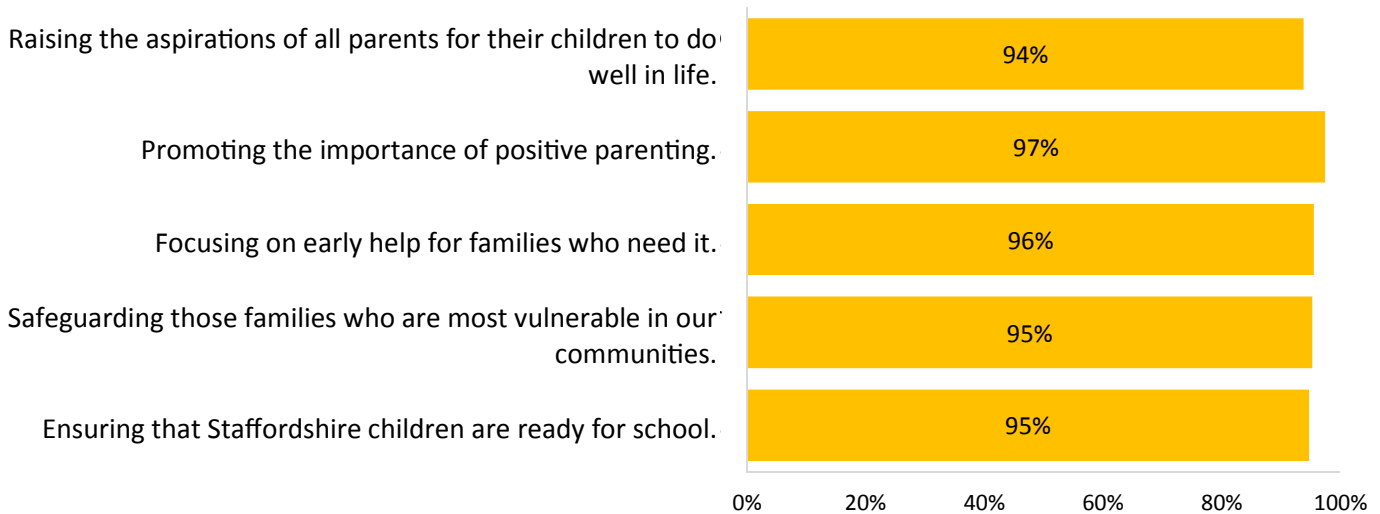Respondents also cited the need to signpost parents to services: *"children should be given the best start in life, this can happen by parents been signposted to services that will add value to their family unit."*

Some respondents stated that the 'five essential things' were difficult to disagree with: *"I can't see how anyone would disagree [with these]"* and that the *"answers are obvious".*

The survey stated "As part of our vision we want to focus on the following areas." Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the objectives set out.

The majority of respondents agreed with the objectives, as illustrated in figure 6.

Figure 6: To what extent do you agree with the following objectives?

Respondents were asked how they thought these objectives could be achieved and more that 1,200 responses were received.

Many respondents affirmed their agreement with the objectives with a large volume of statements such as *"by applying all the above" and "as a provider we believe in all of the above for our families and children"* etc.

A recurring theme was accessibility and suggestions included *"by being able to access the support necessary to achieve"*, *"access to facilities for all regardless of social background"*, *"By offering more courses and making them widely available"*, *"by providing Children's Centres throughout the County, especially in rural villages, where no other support systems are available"* and *"by continuing with the invaluable services provided at Sure Start centres."*

Some respondents also suggested that *"activities [should be] accessible to everyone"*, *"from what you say above it's clear you want to focus your attention only on deprived families. Do you not think middle class families have problems too?"* Other respondents suggested that focussing on those who need the most help should be a priority. The County Council should be *"giving support to those parents most needing it."*

Respondents also used this space to voice opposition to the overall proposals with comments such as *"by keeping open/not closing children's centres"*, and *"ensuring these vital centres remain open."*

Respondents also identified the importance of partnership working *"by having all relevant partners working together for the sole benefit of the child"* and the potential for volunteering *"by training mothers in the community to help other mums, a bit like a buddy system."*

Again, many stated that the objectives simply represented common sense: *"surely people don't disagree with these either?"*
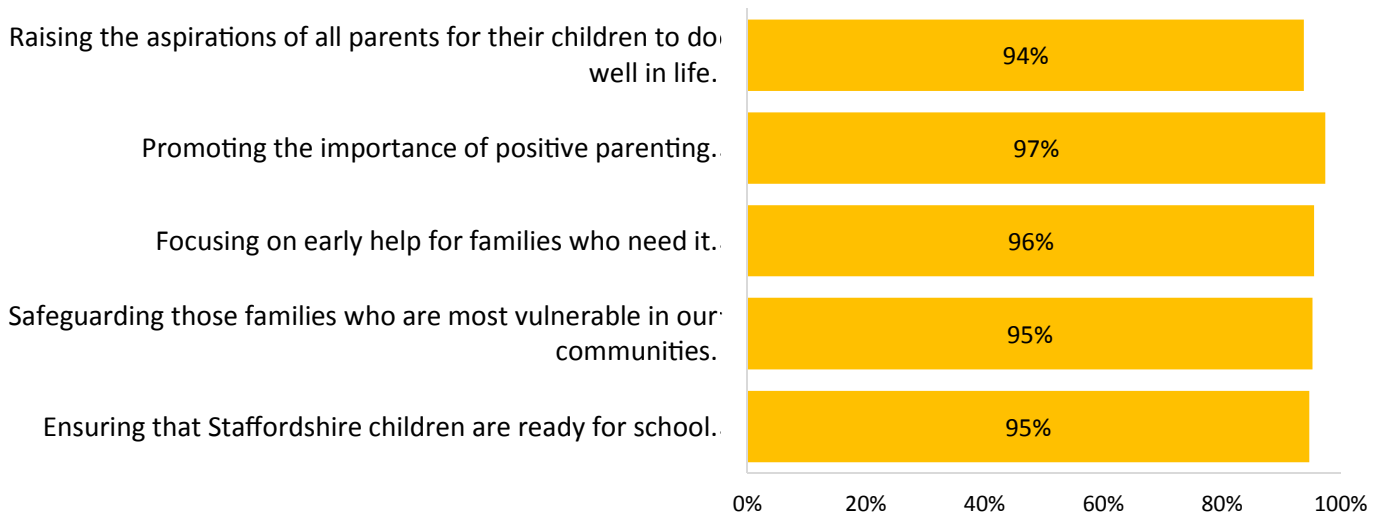
5. STAFFORDSHIRE'S EARLY YEARS OFFER

Respondents were introduced to Staffordshire's Early Years offer with the following statement:

"We aim to deliver a quality Early Years Offer for all and extra support for those who need it most. We want to base this offer on the priorities below."

Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the following priorities, with the majority agreeing, as illustrated in figure 7.

Figure 7: To what extent do you agree with the following priorities?

Priority	Agreement
Raising the aspirations of all parents for their children to do well in life.	94%
Promoting the importance of positive parenting.	97%
Focusing on early help for families who need it.	96%
Safeguarding those families who are most vulnerable in our communities.	95%
Ensuring that Staffordshire children are ready for school.	95%

Overall agreement with the priorities was evident. Over half of participants commented on the priorities (56%). Many stated that *"all these are sensible priorities"* and agreed in order *"to give every child the best possible start"*, that *"all [the above] are important"* and that they *"all seem like common sense to me."* Many also stated *"again, who could disagree with any of these?"*
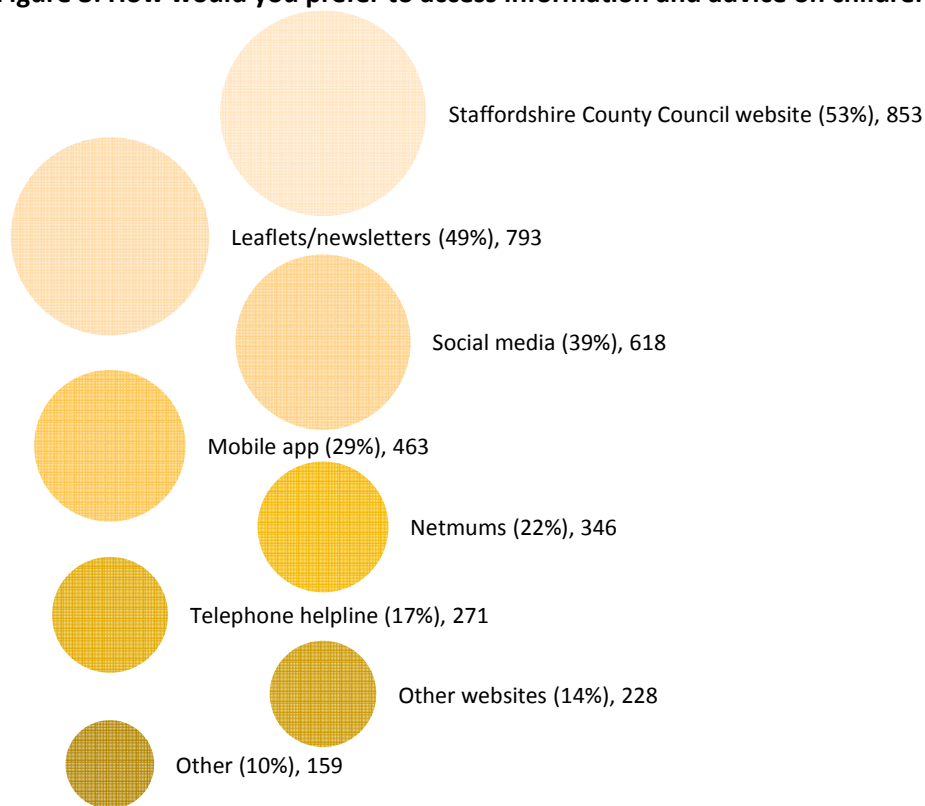
Additional comments were diverse in their nature. Respondents questioned how vulnerability would be defined and how families that need 'early help' would be identified: *"vulnerable families need early identification and support so that their situation can improve long-term."*

Comments were mixed on whether support should be given to those vulnerable people who need it the most or to all families. Regarding vulnerable people, some respondents agreed that some families do need *"more support than others".* Comments from families who did not think they would be eligible were most common. These included that there are *"many working parents who wouldn't qualify for support but struggle to pay for childcare"* and that *"these questions should be for all families with small children vulnerable and non vulnerable."*

How would you prefer to access information and advice on children and family services?

Respondents were asked how they would prefer to access information and advice on children and family services. They were asked to select their top three preferences with the highest number stating that they would prefer to access information via the Staffordshire County Council website.

Figure 8: How would you prefer to access information and advice on children and family services?

Staffordshire County Council website (53%), 853

Leaflets/newsletters (49%), 793

Social media (39%), 618

Mobile app (29%), 463

Netmums (22%), 346

Telephone helpline (17%), 271

Other websites (14%), 228

Other (10%), 159

The most frequently cited 'other' means of accessing information was via personal contact: Respondents stated preferences for face-to-face information via health visitors, in person at an office or a building that could be visited by the respondent, at children's centres or at 'community hubs'. Email, text and social media were also mentioned as accessible sources of information.

What types of information do you need as a parent of a child under 5 and when would you need it?

Approximately 70% of respondents explained what information they needed as a parent of a child between the ages of 0 and 5 years.

Parent's responses reflected the importance of specific information at key milestones, and a general need for information on what's 'going on' for children at all ages. In the early days of parenthood, information advice and guidance on *"raising a baby"* and how to *"cope"* was considered important. Then over time information needs developed to include information on *"health"* and signposting on *"how to meet other mums"*.

As children continued to grow and develop, information and advice on how children could be best supported to help them *"learn and develop"* was considered important. Key to this was being aware of *"activities"* and *"groups".* Then, pre-school, information on *"preparing for school"* and *"choosing a school"* was considered important.

Some parents needed their peers support. This was considered particularly important for parents with specific needs. They needed information and advice to enable them to link up with *"others in similar circumstances"*. There was a preference for *"online information"* and *"face book"* was highlighted as one way in which information could be shared. Some parents however did prefer traditional means of communication, for example *"leaflets"* and *"newsletters".* Therefore a variety of methods would be preferable to ensure effective information is available to all parents.

What is most important to you in choosing a childcare provider for your child/children?

Respondents took a range of considerations into account when choosing a childcare provider, with approximately 71% of respondents commenting.

These most commonly included needing assurances that the childcare provider delivered a *"quality service"* in a *"safe"*, *"caring"*, *"friendly"* and *"trusting environment"*. Some respondents wanted to assess the provider to ensure it met their requirements for example via *"Ofsted reviews"*, documented *"experience"* and *"qualifications of staff"* or via *"word of mouth"* recommendations. The *"location"* of the childcare provider was also a key consideration for some.

Who do you think is crucial in helping identify families who need early support?

Almost a quarter of respondents (74%) shared their views on who would be crucial in identifying families who needed support. It was common for respondents to feel that there were a whole variety of people who could support with identification. These frequently included *"health care workers/visitors"*, *"midwives"*, *"GP's"* and *"social workers or key workers"*.

Some felt that families themselves were capable of identifying that they needed support and they just needed to know *"where they could go to access support"*. Others felt that additional people including *"providers"*, *"Children's Centre staff"*, *"nursery staff"*, *"school staff"* and *"friends"* could play a role in helping to identify those families in need of support.

What do you think these families need?

Some respondents did not feel they could give an informed opinion on what families would need and therefore declined to comment, other than to say they *"did not know"*. The majority of respondents (71%) did however have a clear idea of a wide range of support they felt families could need and these suggestions for support are outlined below.

Having *"someone to talk to"*, who was able to provide *"regular support and advice on an ongoing basis"* was of fundamental importance. Families were more likely to be receptive to support where it was *"friendly"*, not *"bureaucratic"* and where it was *"non-judgemental"*. Support from *"other parents"* was suggested as one means of meeting this need.

Financial support and/or access to affordable childcare and/or activities was something some respondents felt would be of benefit to families in need. It could free up parents time to enable them to work, to deal with other important issues or to enable them to cope. It is however important to recognise that not all parents want hand outs and being mindful of individual family need was also highlighted as important.

Respondents also suggested that advice on finance and housing should be offered, whilst others felt that some parents needed guidance e.g. access to positive parenting classes to enable them to develop the skills they needed.

It was considered that the need for support would vary depending on individual family circumstances. Therefore support packages should be tailored to meet individual family needs.

6. OUR FACILITIES

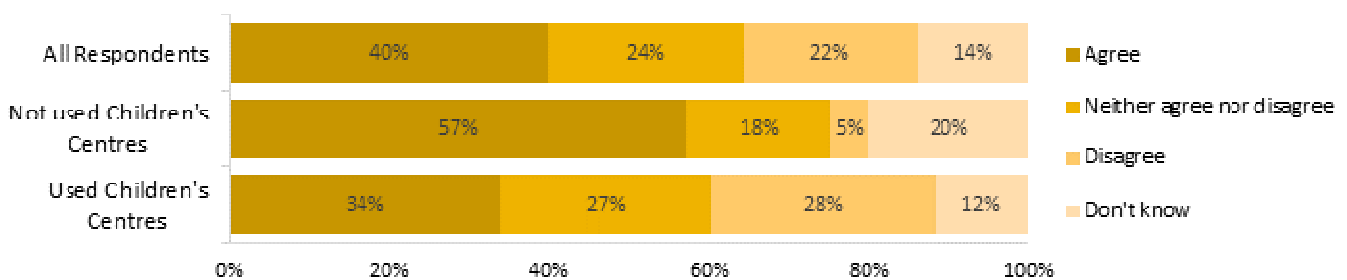Respondents were introduced to this section with the following statement:

"Our initial review showed that not enough families, including those who are most vulnerable, are accessing the facilities we are currently using to provide early years services from. This includes those that are 'designated' Children Centres and those that are not. Our proposals include plans to deliver what is required in a different way using technology and outreach support in the community for those who need it most."

Respondents were presented with a series of proposals and were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with each proposal in turn, and asked to explain the reason(s) why.

Proposal 1

"We propose to change how we use our school based facilities. We plan to talk to schools about how we can give them more flexibility to determine how early education fits into the Early Years Offer."

Figure 9: Proportion of Respondents who agreed/disagreed with the proposal to change how we use our school based facilities, by respondent type

40% of all respondents agreed with the proposal, however respondents who had not used Children's Centres were more likely to agree with the proposals than respondents who had used them. 57% of those who had not used Children's Centres agreed with the proposal compared to 34% of those that had used them.

Comments in Agreement

There were approximately 400 comments from respondents who agreed with the proposals. They did so on a variety of grounds. The views from those who had and had not used Children's Centres were similar.

Respondents stated that they considered schools to be the right environment in which to begin a child's education, *"because parents already have a relationship with the schools and staff and have the resources available"*, *"schools are already centres of the community"*, *"everyone knows where the schools are"*, *"it's a good use of existing resources"* and *"they're the ones who will know best"*.

Respondents also stated that using schools best prepares children for the transition into school providing a *"good foundation"*. *"It is important that each stage in a child's life flows and makes transitions seamless"*. The proposal *"can only help/prepare children for school"* and *"it's a good idea to get schools involved in earlier years care, so children are ready when they go to school"*.

Respondents felt that it would be *"good for children"* and that it *"should have a positive effect on the children's learning"*. Respondents also agreed that *"if they're not being used then it would be important to look at other ways to use the facilities"*, and that *"working together will be beneficial for families"*.

Whilst agreeing, some respondents also expressed caution. For example, *"I agree to the changes but I don't agree with closure"* and *"less groups mean more crowded sessions".* Others were in agreement *"so long as the centres remain open"* and *"providing standards are set and monitored to provide consistency".*

Comments in Disagreement

There were approximately 270 comments from respondents who disagreed with the proposals, and they did so on a variety of grounds.

Many respondents were concerned about the potential closure of children's centres: *"children's centres are needed and should not be closed"*, *"taking away the facility is not the answer"*, *"children's centres work, people do not want to go to community/church groups"* and *"why build children's centres and then remove them"*.

A perceived reduction in service was also a concern: *"I believe this will lead to less groups and services"* and *"I disagree if this involves cutting the services offered."*

Accessibility was also a key theme: *"all families should have access to facilities"*, *"families need to be able to access services/there is no school in Wombourne"* and *"I believe that this would isolate families further"*. Face-to-face contact was also seen as a key aspect of accessibility: *"families need face to face contact"*, *"children's centres are a vital way to meet other mums and make friends"*, *"children centres are more friendly to visit and welcoming"*. *"More help should be given to families to access those"* and *"people need face-to-face and group support"*. *"Technology is not the answer to someone who is struggling."*

Respondents also expressed concern about the ability of schools to cater for Early Years: *"I do not believe school will give sufficient priority to the Early Years offer"*, *"because the schools already have a lot to deal with"* and *"schools have enough with managing their schools".*
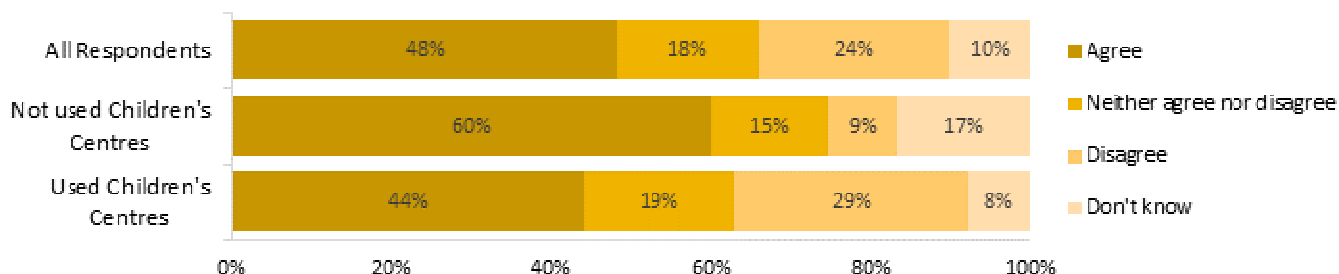
Further concerns were raised around the different approach required for Early Years compared to schools: *"flexibility is good but the centres will simply become extra classrooms"* with concerns that Early Years would *"get swallowed up by the schools".* One respondent commented *"I don't believe the schools will honour the commitment to nurture early years".* *"I think the schools are more focussed on children of school age"* and *"I would prefer early years to be about social [skills] and communication rather than meeting schools tick boxes".*

Others stated that the provision was not the problem and that under-usage was the consequence of services *"not being promoted well enough"* and that *"more needs to be done to bring families together".* The council *"need to make more families aware and encourage use".*

Proposal 2

"We propose to continue to use a smaller number of facilities within communities where the model is working well, attendance is high and this approach is required." Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with this proposal, and why?

Figure 10: Proportion of Respondents who agreed/disagreed the proposal use a smaller number of facilities within communities, by respondent type

48% of all respondents agreed with the proposal, however respondents who had not used Children's Centres were more likely to agree with the proposals than respondents who had. 60% of those who had not used Children's Centres agreed with the proposal compared to 44% of those who had used them.

Comments in Agreement

There were approximately 490 comments from respondents who agreed with the proposal. The views of those who had and had not used Children's Centres were similar.

The overriding theme was around continuing providing the existing services where there is clearly a need: *"If attendance is high it must be popular and working"* and *"if it is working well then it makes sense to continue"*.

Respondents continued: *"if it's working well keep it there. Don't stop or change it"* and that it makes sense *"not to waste resources at locations not accessed".*

Many respondents urged *"don't fix what isn't broken, if they work well and are popular then there's no need to remove them"* and *"don't change something which is working well"* pointing out that *"facilities with good attendance should stay open."*

There was also concern expressed from respondents who agreed with the proposals *"as long as they don`t shut all the groups down"*, stating that *"families would lose a great benefit if these were closed"*, *"good attendance suggests success/meeting needs"* and that it *"helps community, people look forward to coming in."*

Respondents also expressed concern about stretching resources and commented *"that some centres are at capacity and a reduction in other areas could create difficulties and limit the ability to be able to deliver a good service". "It would be counter productive to remove services if they are being used well"*.

Comments in Disagreement

There were approximately 270 comments from respondents who disagreed with the proposals. Very few comments were received from those who had not used Children's Centres.

Accessibility was a key concern for many who disagreed with the proposal: *"It excludes our children and we wouldn't be able to reach these centres"*. *"The geographical area of the proposed children centre is too far away"*, *"they are not all accessible"* and *"by cutting less attended facilities you are isolating some parents and children"*.

Many respondents were concerned about their ability to travel: *"families may not be able to travel there"*, *"I couldn't get to any of these centres"*, *"I do not drive"*, *"I would find it difficult to get to Biddulph from Keele"* and *"it can be difficult for families to travel. It puts a barrier in the way of accessing services"*.

Social isolation was also raised as a related concern: *"So many people walk to children's centres, if it's not local they won't go, leading to more isolation"*. *"This will isolate lots of families that need support."*

Respondents also stressed the need for services for all: *"all centres are important"* and that *"children's centres should remain open everywhere"*.
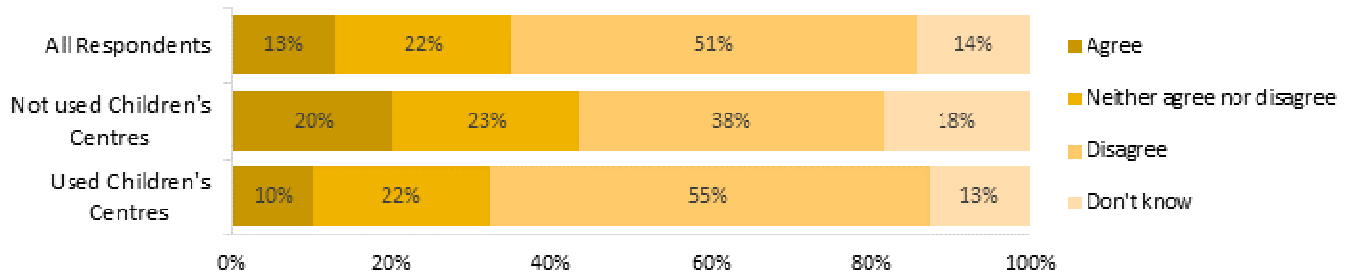
Many respondents also stated that *"support should go in places where it does not work"* and questioned *"why are the other areas not working?"*. Promotion of services was proposed as an alternative to closing centres: *"if attendance isn't high then more promotion is needed"*. *"If the present model is not working well it needs reviewing rather than dismissing"*, *"keep them all and improve your advertising"* with one respondent stating that *"if this was a business, you would never go about making these kind of decisions."*

Respondents stressed the *"need to encourage parents to use facilities not shut them"*, that *"they should be kept everywhere and [models of success] used as a template for other centres"* and that *"they should concentrate on getting attendance up not closing them down"*.

Proposal 3

"There are some locations where we feel that the current facilities are not working well and/or are not the best locations to deliver our vision for children's early years. We propose that we do not continue to use these facilities to deliver early years services in the future as they are not working well."

Figure 11: Proportion of Respondents who agreed/disagreed with the proposal not to continue to use facilities to deliver early years services in the future as they are not working well, by respondent type

Just 13% of all respondents agreed with the proposal, however respondents who had not used Children's Centres previously were twice as likely to agree with the proposals than respondents who had. 20% of those who had not used Children's Centres agreed with the proposal compared to 10% of those that had used them.

Comments in Agreement

There were approximately 120 comments from respondents who agreed with the proposal. The most common theme focussed upon alternative courses of action if the current system 'is not working'.

When asked why they agreed with the proposal, respondents stated: *"because they are not working", "if it doesn't work then it makes sense to change it", "if it's not working, do something different"* and *"if not attended why waste resource where it is not needed"*.

Money and funds were also a common theme, with respondents stating *"if they are not working we should use the funds elsewhere", "it's not cost effective to keep something running if it's not being used"* and *"apply this money and resources to improve other locations"*. Further comments included *"we have limited resources and have to be practical"* and that the services are *"not advertised well enough"*.

Comments in Disagreement

More than half of respondents disagreed with this proposal, the highest proportion of all the proposals, and there were approximately 600 comments provided by respondents. Approximately 150 of these were from those who had not used Children's Centres.

A common theme was that respondents thought the current facilities were not advertised well enough: *"advertise better and seek out families that would benefit from use", "services that are on offer need to be communicated to the target audience", "the Local Authority should be more creative in marketing"* and *"early years is not advertised enough"*.

Respondents also stated that if this was achieved, the services would be used more: *"they are not used because people don't know much about them"* and *"I know there are families who don't even know about the facilities available"*.

Many respondents suggested that removing services was the *"easy option." "Find out the reasons why they are not being used before closing them"*, *"look into why they aren't working and change them. "Closing them is the easy option"*.

Access was also a key issue for respondents, as was the sentiment that services should be provided universally regardless of social background: *"all centres are needed for help and support"* and *"just because these are affluent areas doesn't mean families aren't in need"*.

It was suggested that the proposal ran *"the risk of alienating parents who cannot travel to other venues"* and that *"the few who are using them will no longer have access"*. Comments included *"I would have to travel too far"*, *"local facilities are a must, especially for those who do not drive or cannot afford bus/taxi fares"* and *"I don't drive - I will rely/relied on out reach centres"*.

Respondents expanded on this theme by stating that they believed the removal of services from some locations would create more problems: *"I think there will be a lot more 'vulnerable' people if you don't have these children's centres"*, and that *"low income families always suffer"*. *"Taking facilities away completely will only lead to needy families being more isolated and in need of support".* It was also commented that the proposal could *"significantly disadvantage the people you claim you want to help."*

Respondents also suggested that the removal of services would lead to more isolation. For example, *"isolation is a major problem for families without transport."*

Many respondents also challenged *"why do you feel the facilities are not working well?"*, *"I would like to understand the evidence on what you have based your decision"* and *"what has your research told you about why they are not working well?"*.

These statements were reinforced by frequent statements such as *"the facilities are being extremely well used"*, *"Tamworth Early Years is a busy hub which is very well used by service users and professionals"*, *"the services at Madeley are first class and are very well used and appreciated"* and *"Western Springs children's centre is very well used"*. Others added *"Exley is always busy!"* and *"I attend two [groups] in Rugeley and they are always busy"*.

Respondents were asked if they had ideas as to how these locations could be used to benefit their local community?

There were approximately 750 responses to this question, with many respondents repeating their statements from the previous question, particularly around the need to advertise the facilities that are available more effectively: *"use more advertising , make more people in the community aware"* and *"advertise the services offered better"*, *"encourage midwives, doctors and antenatal classes to promote the centres and services"* and make *"better use of websites and social media."*

Many respondents thought these facilities should be kept as they are: *"keep them as children's centres".*

There were a wide range of alternative uses proposed including: use the centres *"as community hubs and as a base for a variety of services/activities"*. *"[They should be] available for hire by the local community"*, or as *"holiday clubs and play schemes for 0-5 year olds"*.

Other respondents suggested that the Local Authority should *"encourage private use." "People expect to and will pay"*, to use facilities such as *"community hubs - child friendly meeting places"* and as a location for *"health visitors, creative play etc."* Many simply stated the desire for *"more groups available to attend rather then decreasing the amount of places to go". "More quality providers"* and *"more going on"* would be beneficial.

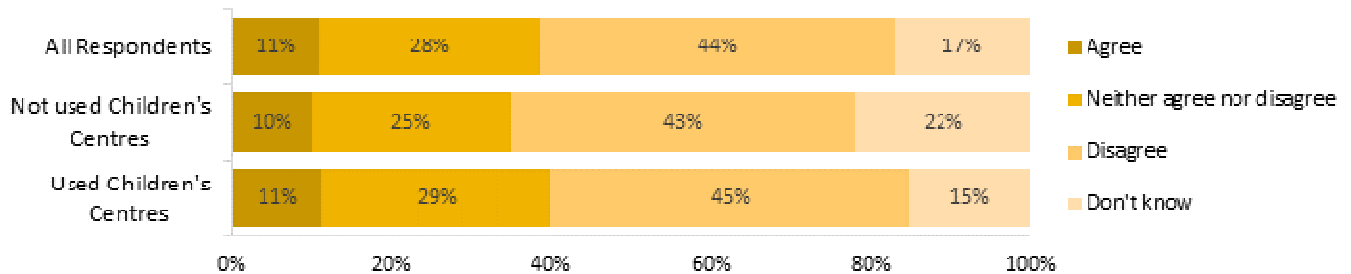Further suggestions included *"after school clubs and breakfast clubs"*, *"any local organisation who needs them should be able to use them"*, *"get Brownies/Guides, sports events, charity events"*, *"sports facilities or out of school activities"* and *"a youth centre for older children too"*.

Those who had not used Children's Centres were far more likely to say that *"they don't know"* or have *"no opinion"*.

Proposal 4

"We propose that we do not continue to use some space in libraries to deliver early years services in the future."

Figure 12: Proportion of Respondents who agreed/disagreed with the proposal to not use some space in libraries to deliver early years services in the future, by respondent type

Just 11% of all respondents agreed with the proposal, and respondents who had not used Children's Centres were slightly *less* likely to agree with the proposals than respondents who had. 10% of those who had not used Children's Centres agreed with the proposal compared to 11% of those who had used them.

Comments in Agreement

There were fewer than 90 comments received in response to this question from respondents who agreed.

The most common theme focussed on the suitability of libraries as a venue: *"A library is not an ideal place anyway", "I'm not sure libraries are the right location for this type of provision", "the spaces are not suitable for families", "some of the libraries used do not have appropriate facilities (messy play area, floor-space, open outside library hours, parking etc.)"* and *"libraries are not the best option because I feel I have to be quiet".*

Other comments included *"libraries are not always the best way of reaching out to people"* and *"people do not consider these locations as children's centres".*

Comments in Disagreement

44% of respondents disagreed with this proposal and there were approximately 500 comments provided by these respondents. Approximately 170 of these were from those who had not used Children's Centres.

The overriding theme was around the libraries perceived suitability as a central location, and a resource that is accessible for all, particularly families. Respondents stated that *"a library is a great place for families", "all children should be encouraged to use libraries making them ideal locations for interventions"* and that *"children must have the opportunity to engage in their local library."*

Respondents frequently highlighted the opportunities presented by shared use of libraries: *"I think it's a way of encouraging children to use libraries", "library space is important as it promotes borrowing books and the services of the library".* Many stated that, for them, *"libraries are a big part of a community"* and *"libraries are a good venue"* and that *"it's the first place I go to find information".*

Respondents also highlighted the importance of libraries as an educational resource and said that *"children should be encouraged to visit libraries from a young age".* Many respondents stated that they *"think it's important for children to have access to libraries",* and that we should *"never close educational establishments".*

Respondents stated that *"reading and books are proved to be very important even from birth"* and that *"libraries are places of learning"* and provide *"the foundations for learning"*. Comments included *"a library is an educational place for all"* and that *"if this is the only accommodation available then this is necessary for the local area."*

The accessibility of libraries as venues was also cited as a reason to disagree with the proposal, and that implementation *"would reduce access for vulnerable families"* because *"libraries are central locations everyone can access"*. *"Closing these services is a step backward"*.

Comments included that libraries are *"the only place for parents to go that's free and safe"* in some localities, and libraries in *"rural locations are ideal for those who don't drive"*. The potential for *"children and parents to be excluded and isolated"* was also cited as was the risk of *"isolating people who cannot travel to other centres"* . The proposal was considered *"a bad thing as people may not have transport to go elsewhere"*.

There were many other statements in support of libraries and the facilities they offer, including *"mothers may lack confidence to go to children's centres but may already use the library"*, *"we run successful breastfeeding groups—the support women receive here is invaluable"*, *"encouraging people to libraries can only be a good thing"* and *"I can't believe I'm being asked this question - it's a place children should be encouraged to go"*.

Other comments saw the proposal as a cut to the level of service provision: *"this looks like a cut in services provided - what options will become available to these service users?"* with questions asked about *"what will replace this in their area? This leaves a huge gap."*

7. How will these proposals affect you?

Respondents were introduced to this section with the following statement:

"The County Council believes that all children aged under 5 should have the opportunity to get the best start in life and be safe, healthy and ready for school. The aim of our proposals is to make a difference to the lives of many more young children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds."

Please explain what impact the proposals may have on you, your family or your organisation.

There were approximately 840 comments from those who had used Children's Centres. These covered a variety of themes which are outlined below.

Generic Impact

When discussing the impact of the proposals, many respondents made general comments regarding societal impacts and the need for all children to be offered the best start: *"all children deserve the best start so it will impact positively on our future generations"* and *"I believe children's centres are a valuable asset generally promoting intergenerational contact and cohesion"*.

Negative impact

Many respondents stated that the proposals would have a negative or detrimental impact on either themselves, their children, or both: Common reoccurring themes included that the proposals will have *"a huge impact"*. Examples of this included *"I have post natal depression and these groups help me get out the house talk to other mums/grandparents and carers"*. It would have *"a massive impact on my daughter as she uses children's centres three times a week"*, *"I really don't know what I'd do without it and would worry about the impact on my mental health"*. *"I would lose a massive support network of other parents which would be detrimental to my health."*

Other comments included: *"I don't currently use them as I work full time, but I feel it's an essential service for some"*, *"It can be a lonely place when you are a first time mum and meeting other mums is essential"*, *"I will have nowhere to go, no support, no groups for my child. I am not disadvantaged or vulnerable, but we are still important"*, and *"I will feel very isolated if the centre closes, as I have no means of transport to reach services further a field."*

The lack of social interaction was also a key theme: For example *"less socialising for me and my child so less development for my child"*. *"My child wont be able to socialise, develop and learn. I currently get support and expert advice"*. *"Social skills will be decreased and opportunities for learning from a young age would decline"*. Furthermore *"the centres give some families the confidence to get out and socialise with other families"*.

 Other respondents continued *"I do not fall into the category of a disadvantaged background as our household earnings are too high. I rely on the groups and the support. I had no friends with mums before and I've made them through Sure Start"*.

Various comments were also received from organisations and or professionals working in the early years field: *"As an organisation we could lose contact with families and it would make partnership working more difficult"*, *"[as an organisation] we will be concerned about the potential loss of contracts and staff redundancies"*, *"I may have to close down my organisation, if my work is no longer required"* and *"I may lose my job, my organisation may be replaced and the bond would be lost with the families we already work with."*

Other respondents expressed concern for staff: *"I do feel that the push to encourage children into school at an earlier age may effect the business of day nurseries"* while others were concerned about the impact on the children and families they work with: *"I work at Charwood site at our nursery so it would affect my working life and the children's settled, happy routine greatly"*.

Little Impact

Few respondents stated that the proposals would have little impact on them. Comments included: *"little impact in reality as I do not use the above services"*, *"little or none other than ensuring children are brought up and educated to lead a decent life"*, *"no impact really apart from if my baby time classes stop. Perhaps this will benefit me in the long run once I fully understand the changes"*, *" I know I'm not disadvantaged so perhaps its not relevant to me"* and *"none as my daughter is now at school"*.

Many respondents stated that they will not be affected by the proposals, as they currently earn too much to qualify for services. Comments included: *"As an individual, none. We do not qualify for free child care for example, but I am currently paying over £600 a month for a private nursery which is excellent but very expensive"*, *"because my husband and I earn more than the average we seem to be always excluded from proposals such as this"*.

Comments from those who have not used Children's Centres

There were approximately 290 comments received from respondents who have not used Children's Centres. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this group were much more likely to say that the proposals would have *"no impact personally"* or that they *"don't know"* what impact they will have.

However comments included that *"access to information would improve my life"*. There was agreement that the *"best start will make children ready for school"*, that the proposals would *"help me financially, educate my child in things that I am not good at such as English and Maths"*. Implementation of the proposals *"would enable me to cope more as I feel there would be more support"*. Even though *"I'm not disadvantaged, it makes me think it's important for those who are"*.

Further comments included: *"It won't have any impact on our family, but will effect a lot of others in the Cannock area who rely on this service"*. *"My daughter would be socialising more, getting used to different situations and people"*. *"I know friends who it would effect and need help"* and *"where would I go to find out what is being offered?"*.

8. OTHER SOURCES OF FEEDBACK AND INFORMATION

Others sources of feedback included meetings, letters and emails. 58 meetings were held during the consultation period and over 400 people were reached through these. 32 letters and emails were also received.

Meeting Responses

A wide range of people representing 0 to 4 year olds were encouraged to engage in the Best Start consultation through meetings. Some meetings were set up specifically to discuss the consultation. Others were pre-existing and slots were secured on agendas to publicise the consultation and encourage participation and feedback.

Meetings were sought with a wide range of key groups from across all districts in Staffordshire. Key groups included parents and grandparents who were responsible for children between the ages of 0 to 4, councillors, providers, stakeholders, health professionals and staff from Families First. An overall summary of the responses received is outlined below.

Overall Comments

Views on the current provision were discussed and common concerns about the possible implications for change were raised. These included *"accessibility"* and *"affordability"* of facilities in the future for middle income families who will *"lose out"* as they *"will not be able to afford to pay for them and will not be eligible for free services".* Some praised the services currently available and voiced their concerns about losing individual localised facilities. However some stakeholders recognised the need to change in times of financial austerity.

Current Provision

Parents and providers were keen to understand more about the implications for their localised provision and wanted a clear understanding of whether their own centres would be viable in the future. They felt that *"families need local support"*, *"there is a need for one centre in each local area"* and *"one centre is not enough for the district."*

Whilst stakeholders voiced concerns about losing facilities in local areas, some did acknowledge that Children's Centres can be *"expensive to run"* and *"are not always well used".*

Comments on the Vision and Proposals

Some participants commented directly on the vision agreeing that it was *"essential for the best start in life".* Respondents also supported helping *"vulnerable children".* Some did however feel that they needed *"further information"* to enable them to make *"a considered response".*

Whilst parents mainly agreed with the vision, some were anxious about the impact that the proposed changes would have on them. Those not eligible for free services were concerned that alternatives services would *"cost more"* and some felt that they would not be able to *"afford"* to use *"alternatives services".*

Some expressed a concern about delivering facilities in schools. For example, *"schools would not deliver services for families with young babies and children".*

Others were concerned about the impact the proposals would have upon existing providers. For example *"what would happen to existing providers?"* One provider commented that the changes would have a detrimental impact on their business principally because they would have to *"increase prices in line with room rental at alternative venues".*

Some respondents were disappointed with the proposals and felt that implementing them could actually *"increase the numbers needing support in the long term".* Some did not express disagreement, were not overly concerned about the proposals and understood that children's centres can be expensive to run.

Future Provision

Those that recognised the need for change provided suggestions and considerations for the future provision. Some stakeholders and providers expressed a keen interest in working with the County Council to discuss how they could be involved in *"the development of an integrated early year's offer which could provide both value for money and meet local need". "Targeted approaches"* for the most vulnerable were widely supported and *"localised service delivery"* was considered important.

Finding ways to ensure vulnerable groups were aware of and could access services was considered key, particularly as some stakeholders and providers warned that they had already been trying to do this for a number of years but had found *"the people they needed to access were incredibly hard to engage with".*

Maintaining some universal services was supported because they could provide a valuable opportunity to enable *"early identification"* and because those not deemed as vulnerable would also benefit greatly from them. Health visitors were also viewed as an important mechanism for enabling early identification.

Additional Considerations

- Consider building the future approach on a longer term view of usage rather than the here and now.
- Please remove barriers to access - consider basing it on individual need, not on areas of deprivation.
- Think about providing training on the needs of families who have children with special needs and disabilities.
- Please provide timescales and communicate the impact that the decisions will have to the staff who will be affected.

Views of MP's, Councillors and Partner Organisations

A number of responses were received from MPs and a District Councillor, as well as various District and Parish Councils and organisations such as Homestart, Age UK, Health Visitors, Children's Centres and a wide range of other partner organisations. For a full breakdown please see the tables in the appendix.

Responses were received in the form of completed consultation surveys. Personal feedback as well as feedback on behalf of residents, constituents and clients was provided. The views expressed in the feedback reflect those expressed in the wider consultation and highlight similar themes to those included throughout this report.

At the time of writing, no petitions had been received in relation to the consultation.

Letters/emails

32 emails and letters were received to the consultation. These were from Councillors, parents, providers, community representatives and leaders. The vast majority of emails / letters expressed disagreement with the proposals. Views shared were reflective of those shared in the overall consultation results.

Children's Centres were highly valued for example: *"Children's Centres are a life line"*, *"please do not close them"* and we are *"unable to afford alternative provision."*

If centres were closed, there were *"affordability"* concerns for alternative provision from those parents who were on a low income. *"Accessibility"* to alternative provision and *"social isolation"* were also common concerns for those without transport.

Media Coverage

A total of 30 media hits were recorded throughout the period of the consultation. 19 hits were from local Key Media Targets (The Burton Mail, The Sentinel, The Express and Star, The Lichfield Mercury, and The Staffordshire Newsletter Online) and a further ten were from Important Weeklies (The Leek Post & Times, The Cheadle Post & Times, The Wolverhampton Chronicle and The Biddulph Chronicle). Coverage was also recorded on the Connect Cannock Website.

The overall tone of the coverage (where –1, is negative, 0 is neutral and +1 is positive) was calculated at +0.1.

9. DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

Gender	Respondents
Male	144
Female	1378
Not Stated	5
Total	1527

Ethnicity	Respondents
White (British, Irish, Other)	1439
Mixed / Multiple Ethnic Group	15
Asian / Asian British	25
Black / African / Caribbean / Black British	4
Other ethnic group	10
Prefer not to say	10
Total	1503

Age Range	Respondents
Under 18	9
18-24	150
25-34	664
35-44	476
45-54	135
55-64	72
65+	20
Total	1526

Disability	Respondents
Yes	95
No	1416
Not Stated	3
Total	1514

Disability	Respondents
Social/communications impairment, such as Asperger's or autism	4
Deaf or hearing impairment	8
Blind or serious visual impairment	7
Long-standing illness or health condition, e.g. leukaemia or epilepsy	21
Mental health condition, e.g. depression, anxiety or schizophrenia	44
Learning difficulty, such as dyslexia	20
Physical impairment or mobility issue	24
Other	6
Total	134

Employment Status	Respondents
Working (either full or part time)	923
Looking after home or family	350
Self employed	90
Unemployed and available for work	37
Retired	33
Other	31
Long term sick/disabled and unable to work	19
Full time education at school, college or university	17
Not Stated	2
Total	1502

10. APPENDIX: DATA TABLES

Are you responding to this consultation as...?	Number of Respondents
A parent or carer of a child	910
Early years provider	67
Other professional working with children	43
Voluntary organisation	33
Staffordshire County Council employee	31
General public	22
Children's Centre staff	19
A partner organisation (please specify below)	19
A school	10
Prospective parent	9
Other (please specify below)	5
Member of an Advisory Board	4
School Governing Body	3
Community Group	3
MP/Elected Member	2

If you indicated MP/Elected member, Partner or Other, please state your name/organisation...	Number of Respondents
District Council	4
Homestart	4
Age UK	2
Grandparent	2
Health Visitor	2
MP	2
Childrens Centre	2
College	1
Community Centre	1
Councillor	1
Families First	1
First Steps	1
NHS	1
Police	1
School	1
SSOTP	1
Stafford & Rural Homes	1
Staffordshire Wildlife Trust	1
Volunteer	1
Ward Councillor	1
Total	31

Age of Child	Number of Respondents
0-11 months	383
1 year old	278
2 years old	361
3 years old	284
4 years old	193
5 years old or more	431
Total	1930

Are you expecting a child?	Number of Respondents
Yes	94
No	1362
Not Stated	5
Total	1461

Do you have a child who has an illness or a disability?	Number of Respondents
Yes	114
No	1329
Not Stated	7
Total	1450

Disability	Number of Respondents
Child(ren) do not have any disabilities	407
Social/communications impairment	53
Learning difficulty	43
Other	24
Long-standing illness or health condition	20
Physical impairment or mobility issue	16
Deaf or hearing impairment	11
Blind or serious visual impairment	7
Mental health condition	7
Total	588

Do you use any of the following 'designated' Children's Centres?	Number of Respondents
I do not use Children's Centres	529
Newcastle under Lyme	118
Glascote	90
Charnwood	85
Tamworth Early Years	84
Cannock Chase	78
Springhill	74
Leyfields	68
Silkmore	64
Wombourne Library	64
Leek and Rural (Beresford)	63
Stafford	63
Cheadle	59
East Staffordshire	54
Crackley Bank	46
Maryhill	42
Staffordshire Moorlands (Biddulph)	37
Western Springs	35
Wilnecote (Heathfields Infants School)	33
Manor Hill	32
Landywood	30
Hednesford	27
Audley Library	24
Castlechurch	22
Perton Library	19
Stapenhill	10
Tynsel Parkes	7

Do you use any of the following locations (linked sites) to access early years services?	Number of Respondents
Exley	57
Boney Hay	55
Clayton Library	52
Hempstalls	52
Amington Heath	40
Huntington	32
Kinver	23
Clough Hall, Kidsgrove	20
Bridgtown	19
Lane Green First, Bilbrook	17
Coton Green Primary, Tamworth	16
Leek All Saints	15
Chadsmead	14
Churchfield Primary, Rugeley	14
Blythe Bridge Library	13
Featherstone	13
Gnosall St Lawrence	12
Chesterton Primary, Newcastle	10
Ellison Primary, Newcastle	10
Flash Ley, Stafford	9
Bishop Rawle Primary, Cheadle	8
Highfields Primary, Burntwood	8
Hixon	6
Barton-under-Needwood	5
Brewood Library	5
Glenthorne Primary, Cheslyn Hay	5
Grove Primary, Stafford	4
Greysbrooke, Lichfield	1
Hugo Meynell, Newcastle	0

Which of the following activities and services, if any, do you use most often?	Number of Respondents
Adult learning	60
Healthy eating courses/services	60
Family learning	70
Family Information Service	71
Support groups	76
Childminders	77
Parenting Programmes (e.g. PEEP)	104
Antenatal Classes	106
Physical activity sessions/groups	135
Family Support	146
School Nursery	160
Breastfeeding Support	206
Baby Yoga/Massage	208
Postnatal Groups/Baby Clinics	227
Private Nursery	263
Stay and Play (or similar activity)	637