

Cllr Stuart Dark
Acting Chair - Children's Services Committee
County Hall

By email 15 October 2018

Dear Cllr Dark,

In a recent EDP article about the Children's Centre closure consultation, you were quoted as asking, "people to read the consultation document, see what's being proposed and on offer, and actually engage with the process."

Thankfully the City Council's Scrutiny Committee was able to take up that mantle last Thursday and devoted our meeting to consider the City Council's response to your consultation.

A formal response will be submitted shortly, but the committee view was that you should hear our outline conclusions immediately.

Like many of the committee members, I was able to visit the Forum ahead of the meeting and meet with officers of the County Council to gain an understanding into how the proposed changes would impact the citizens of Norwich.

Norwich has higher levels of deprivation than the surrounding rural district councils. The proposals for the closure of children's centres would mean that each district would have one children's centre despite differing levels of deprivation or need.

It is quite unacceptable that given the higher levels of deprivation in the city, residents will be disproportionately affected by the withdrawal of the service.

The consultation fails to provide information on the current usage of centres, there appears to be no equality impact assessment and no financial information or analysis of the social and economic cost of withdrawing the children's services. All of this in the accepted context of the recognised value of investment in early years.

Much of the language used seems to be about transformation, but that is both disingenuous and dishonest. This is about saving money, reducing a budget from £10m to £5m.

Simply transferring the services provided at Children's Centres to GP surgeries and schools sounds like a quick fix on paper but, in reality, these organisations do not have the capacity to step in to pick up the loss.

The public has a right to fully understand what is being proposed, and I urge you to suspend the Early Childhood and Family Service consultation and to rewrite it to provide a more balanced and accurate reflection of the council's proposals.

I look forward to hearing your thoughts on this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Cllr James Wright
Chair - Scrutiny Committee