

Petition to Hammersmith & Fulham Council "The Petition, dated 9 Feb 11"

Re: Consultation about Children's Centres

The parents and carers of the children who attend Wendell Park Children's Centre are opposed to the proposed cuts outlined by the council. We are concerned about the future of this important community service.

The proposed new budgets of just £19,000 for 'Spoke' centres does not even cover the heating, lighting or repair costs for these buildings. There would be no money for play equipment and supplies.

Most importantly, £19,000 leaves no funding for Staff salaries. Regular staffing is crucial for maintaining contact with families and offering support. If support only comes via Hubs, this will not facilitate vulnerable families asking for help.

Why not let the Managers of each centre provide you with proposals for a percentage cut, eg 12%, to their services. This would be equitable, auditable and achievable.

The Children's centres need to provide ongoing planning to meet the needs of the children & families who are referred to, and use, the centre. Children's Centres are important meeting places between staff, families, carers and children in the local area. They have in themselves become part of the community in which they serve.

The regular weekly play sessions designed to involve parents/carers and children in play and other activities are vitally important as parents have contact with other parents/carers of all ages. This chance to socialise with other families brings a unique sense of community which would otherwise be missing. And these are truly multicultural activities, at times bringing individuals together from across cultures, engaging *within* the community, for the first time.

They also provide a unique experience of English for children (and parents/carers) for whom this is a second language, in a safe environment.

All Children's Centres offer training of the Positive Parenting Programme (Triple P), giving behavioural guidance and best practice to parents of pre-school children. At 'spoke' centres they are easily accessed by local families who might otherwise struggle with behaviours in the children until school age. What effect on the community of this loss?

And Wendell Park in particular offers Outreach Work & Childminder Auditing and Advice. The Outreach Worker takes referrals from Health Visitors, Social Workers & Family Services, providing a central contact for all these services. The OW becomes involved on a close basis with the referred family be they of high, or lower, need. If this service is moved to the 'Hub', the caseload would by nature become impersonal and community rapport would be lost. And they would have neither the time, nor the forum, to detect any early issues within the community.

The Childminder Co-ordinator registers all the local childminders, co-ordinates their training, and provides confidential support. She is also responsible for the local Childminder Accreditation Scheme, which provides a benchmark, and confidence in service, for parents and Childminders alike. All Childminders have local access to the services within the Children's Centre, again involving them in the wider community.

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We do not believe that other public facilities are suitable as replacement, or even part replacement, of our ‘Spoke’ Children’s Centres. The Children’s Centre staff ARE the Children’s Centre – they provide a safe, welcoming, encouraging environment for children and adults alike. They are trusted, and this trust has been earned, and built over time. Without the Children Centre staff, the Centres would be empty. Volunteers cannot possibly fill this gap.

And what would be the child safety issues of the Council’s proposals?

The monies allocated for the Early Intervention Scheme need to continue to be ring-fenced for Our ‘Spoke’ Children’s Centres. These Children’s Centres are a good, and vital, model of community support and provision should not fail because funds have been used in other ways.

Our ‘Spoke’ Childrens’ Centres are a true example of what the Government calls The Big Society working for the benefit of the community, in the community. They are used by parents, carers, grandparents, nannies, child minders and, of course, our children.

The children *are* our future. We must provide for their developmental needs and provide easily accessible support for the adults caring for them.