

Have your say on the delivery of children's centre services in the Streatham Better Start Area

Background

In the period December 2018 – February 2019, Lambeth Council carried out extensive consultation on proposals to make changes to its children's centre offer. These proposals were made in response to national government changes to the early years element of the Dedicated Schools Grant which meant the council had significantly less money to spend on children's centres.

In that consultation, the Council proposed that in the Streatham area there would be one 'core' children's centre offering a full programme of services Monday – Friday, and two 'link' children's centres offering services on a sessional basis – either every morning or every afternoon, or over a reduced number of days. The children's centres proposed were:

- Hitherfield Children's Centre: Core centre
- Streatham Hub Children's Centre: Link centre
- Woodmansterne Children's Centre: Link centre

Under these proposals, children's centre service delivery at Sunnyhill Children's Centre would cease.

During that consultation, there were changes to the position at Woodmansterne School and Children's Centre. These changes related to the significant capital expansion work which the Council has undertaken to increase its school provision to make Woodmansterne School a four form entry primary school and to provide a new five form entry secondary school on the same site, providing local children and families with an all-through community school from nursery to year 11.

This much needed expansion of Woodmansterne School has placed additional demands on the school site and local infrastructure. While Woodmansterne School retains a strong commitment to the continued delivery of outstanding early years provision, it will not be viable to deliver children's centre services on the school site as individual year groups grow.

The consultation also highlighted concern over proposals to cease delivery at Sunnyhill Children's Centre.

The borough wide consultation informed recommendations made to Lambeth Council's Cabinet in April 2019 as part of the Council's decision-making process. These included a recommendation that further consultation was carried out in Streatham to gather views on which should be the one core and two link centres in the area.

Further consultation was carried out in summer 2019 which focused on these proposals. It became clear that while many of those responding welcomed proposals to maintain Sunnyhill Children's Centre as a delivery site for children's centre services, there remained concern about access to services for families living in the Streatham Vale area and the travelling distance to Hitherfield as the nearest core centre.

Purpose of consultation document

In light of this concern, this consultation document outlines revised proposals and provides you with the opportunity to tell us your views. The primary aim of these revised proposals is to allow for the best possible geographical spread of available services and resources across the available children's centre buildings to ensure that children and families living in Streatham, and particularly those in greatest need of support, can continue to use children's centre services.

The revised proposals for the Streatham area are to:

- Retain Hitherfield Children's Centre as a core centre with services delivered at both the children's centre building on the site of Hitherfield Primary School, and the stay and play one o'clock club in Hillside Gardens.
- Retain Sunnyhill Children's Centre as a link centre but increase the volume and range of services offered by relocating some services from Hitherfield to Sunnyhill. This would mean an increased level of service at Sunnyhill than was proposed in the previous consultation, reflecting the feedback and the desire to provide more accessibility to families in the south of the borough. The combined service offer across Hitherfield and Sunnyhill children's centre would be equivalent to that delivered by one core and one link centre. This means that there would be approximately 15 children's centre services delivered across the two centres each week.
- Retain Streatham Hub Children's Centre as a link centre with services delivered on two days per week.
- An offer of one additional Stay and Play session each week at Streatham Vale One o'clock Club. Under these proposals, this session would be delivered by Streatham Youth and Community Trust, who are responsible for One o'clock club, but they would work in close partnership with the Streatham area Better Start team, who would attend the session on a regular basis to provide additional information and support for families.

Why does the council think these revised proposals will better meet the needs of children and families in the Streatham Better Start Area?

The council cannot continue to deliver children's centre services from Woodmansterne Children's Centre in the longer term. Through consultation, parents living locally to Woodmansterne School have told us that they are concerned about the travelling distance to Hitherfield Primary School and Children's Centre. By providing a greater offer at Sunnyhill Children's Centre, which is more central to Streatham, the Council hopes to address some of these travel difficulties.

In revising proposals, the Council considered whether increasing the range of services at Streatham Hub Children's Centre instead of at Sunnyhill would be effective. However, families have told us that they value Sunnyhill Children's Centre as a purpose-built children's centre with good, safe outdoor play space. This outdoor space is not, and cannot be, available at Streatham Hub and this restricts the activities that can be offered. The Council also owns the children's centre building at Sunnyhill but has a rental agreement for use of space at Streatham Hub, making it costlier to make greater use of Streatham Hub.

Lambeth families living in the area local to Woodmansterne School will also be able to go to an additional Stay and Play session which will be run at Streatham Vale One O'clock club. The session will be run by Streatham Youth and Community Trust, with support from the wider Streatham Better Start team. This will mean that families who need additional support from a Better Start worker will be able to get that easily and in their local area. Families will also be able to get additional support through an online referral process, by talking to their health visitor or by contacting the staff team in person or by phone at Streatham Hub, Sunnyhill or Hitherfield Children's Centres.