

Feedback on

Sefton Children's Centre Consultation

1st August 2011 – 31st October 2011

Children, Schools and Families

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Children, Schools and Families

This report summarises what the public, Children's Centre staff, school staff, Governors, partners, Commissioned Services and Voluntary organisations told the Council during its consultation on proposed changes to Sefton Children's Centres and Children's Centres services.

Executive Summary

The consultation on changes to Children's Centres took place between 1st August to 31st October 2011 and this report provides an overview of the feedback from service users, general public, partners and other stakeholders. The key messages are that service users:

- value their children's centres,
- do not wish them to close and;
- whilst they have concerns about specific mergers are supportive of mergers as opposed to closure.

The report provides detail on each of the questions and also provides comments received from stakeholders under themes such as proposed merger model, service offer, general comments and alternative proposals.

Detailed documents will be available at the Children's Centre Review Board Meeting on 16th November 2011.

Background

There were a number of challenges faced by the Local Authority December 2010 when Sefton received their annual financial settlement from Central Government. In order to implement savings of £44m Sefton have had to make very challenging decisions over reductions of services across the Borough of Sefton.

On the 3rd March 2011 the Council passed the following resolution:

The Terms of Reference and timescale for a strategic review of Sefton Children's Centres was approved by cabinet on the 17th February. In order to inform this review it is felt appropriate to identify a savings target for the review group to achieve. A savings target of £900,000 should be the objective of achieving this in 2011/12. Therefore any savings opportunities identified throughout the review should be implemented in stages rather than wait until the final report stage. In 2011/12 it is recommended that this saving target be underwritten by one-off resources.

The Local Authority has a Statutory Duty for the provision of Children's Centres: Under section 5D of the Childcare Act 2006 and any "significant" changes have to be consulted upon.

A Children's Centre Review Board was established to:

- Realise a saving target of £900,000

- Maintain a network of children centres and bases¹ to deliver universal and targeted early years intervention and prevention services
- Direct resources to both individual and community needs

The Children's Centre Review Board has the following membership:

Cabinet Member Children's Services (Chair) - Councillor Ian Moncur
 Lead Spokesperson for Children's Services - Councillor Hadyn Preece
 Lead Spokesperson for Children's Services - Councillor Sean Dorgan
 Strategic Director of People - Peter Morgan
 Head of Service for Early Intervention and Prevention - Olive Carey
 NHS Sefton Representative – Margaret Jones
 Sefton Council Voluntary Services representative – Simone Hill
 Parent's representatives: Sam Nellist; Zulma Brady and Pauline Hill
 Head Teachers representative – Pat Speed

Three Reference Groups have been in place to inform the Review Board:

- Parents Reference Group
- Centre Leads/Head Teachers and Managers' Reference Group
- Staff Reference Group

In looking at the options, the Board considered a range of children's centre data and principles such as:

- Purposes of children's centres
- Data & Quality of performance
- Future purpose of children's centres
- Partnership working
- Different levels of need across areas
- Number of families currently accessing services

Proposals

The Review Board decided that by reducing 2012/13 centre budgets and merging children centres Sefton will realise the £900,000 savings target. These proposals formed the basis of meeting the savings target and it was agreed to present the percentage cuts; to consult on proposed mergers and to gain insight into valued services to inform future models.

The proposals in the consultation document were:

1. To apply an overall percentage funding reduction across all children's centre bases proportionate to the levels of deprivation they serve:
 - 10% for Phase 1 centres
 - 25% for Phase 2 centres
 - 30% for Phase 3 centres
2. To maintain a network of children centres across the borough, without closing bases

¹ The term base is used to indicate a building

3. There will be a number of mergers across the borough, with no more than 2 or 3 centres in any one merger, under a single management structure to maintain an appropriate service delivery model to the communities they serve.
4. To reduce overall management and running costs

As background to the proposal it was stated that Sefton are confident that there will be adequate resources to staff centres and continue to deliver quality services. Careful planning of services and a review of opening hours will ensure key services are retained and duplication is reduced.

The following mergers were proposed:

(It was proposed that all bases remained open although a review of opening times and services will take place)

North

Name	Reach²
Linaker Bishop David Sheppard	2,296
Kings Meadow Freshfield Farnborough	2,261
Parenting 2000	987
Total	5,545

Mid

Name	Reach
Hudson Holy Rosary	1,460
Netherton Grange	1,220
Waterloo Valewood Thornton	1,818
Total	4,498

South

Name	Reach
Cambridge	800
Seaforth All Saints *	1,298
Springwell	733
Litherland Moss Hatton Hill	1,126
Total	3,957

***Seaforth & All Saints have a large reach in a high level of deprivation that reflects a successful partnership arrangement.**

² The area covered by each Children's Centre is set according to the number of children aged 0-5 in an area and also the levels of deprivation in the area. This is known as the "reach"

Consultation

A Consultation Plan and a Communication Plan were drafted and agreed by the Review Board and a Consultation Document was agreed. Consultation on the proposals took place from the 1st August 2011 to 31st October 2011.

Consultation forms were available both online and also in hard copy form. These were supplied to Children's Centres together with posters, banners and information sheets to promote the consultation. Postcards were sent to all parents/carers who had attended a Children's Centre advising them of the consultation and letting them know how to get involved and the centre staff held a variety of events to encourage parents to have their say. These included group sessions to discuss the document, one to one for parents who may have needed support to complete the document and a number of events to promote the consultation including talking walls for comments to be added, face book pages, a quiz and other individual events at each centre itself.

Appended to the report (Appendix 1) is a list of activities that took place at each centre.

Apart from the people who use the centre a number of other stakeholders were informed of the consultation. These letters requested stakeholders to use their networks to inform others and ask that they get involved. Health Centres were asked to promote the consultation and provided with a number of forms and posters.

Visits took place to a variety of groups to promote the consultation including School Governors, South Sefton Area Partnership, staff meetings, Sefton Area Parent Forums. Various networks and focus groups such as Parenting Group and the ECM Forum had workshops to look at the options and provide comments as well as to promote the consultation to their own networks.

Local press was utilised to inform the general public of the consultation and all Sefton's libraries and Leisure Centres displayed posters and held forms for completion either in hard copy form or online. Throughout the consultation the consultation methods were reviewed and in order to reach more people a playbus was manned at several community venues as well as Children's Centres to alert the general public and allow them to fill the forms in online (the playbus is equipped with laptops). In addition, there were a number of information sessions to inform people of the consultation and these took place at Leisure Centres, in some cases over the summer holidays, to target families. Information was included in a number of newsletters including staff newsletters and the Sefton CVS bulletins.

The consultation plan shows the methods and target audiences and can be summarised as:

- Letters to partners
- Postcards to parents
- Web and paper response forms in place
- Use of local media and publications to publicise consultation
- Local consultation groups to inform and gather views

- Consultation will include the following groups:
 - o Local families who use the centre
 - o Children's Centre staff and their trade unions
 - o Advisory board members
 - o The wider community
 - o Local service providers located in and linked to Children's Centres
 - o Schools, particularly those that share their site with a Children's Centre
 - o Elected members

The number of consultation forms completed either on-line or in hard copy form was 1507 of which 1350 were users of Children's Centres which is a response rate of 12.64% of registered users (10684). In addition we received information from talking walls, facebook pages, letters, etc. and these have been considered and grouped together in themes.

The consultation document. – what we asked

Some of the questions in the consultation document were a simple yes/no or don't know relating to things such as "do you agree with the proposals?" but others allowed respondents to respond in more detail around things like "are there any services not currently on offer which you would welcome", and "do you have any comments on the proposals".

All respondents were asked where they lived (postcode only) and if they used a Children's Centre or not. If they did not use a Children's Centre they were asked to comment on the proposals. Users of the centre were asked to identify information about their particular centre such as what centres they currently use and which they could travel to. Users were also asked to state how many children they have and their ages; these were to allow us to ascertain if we had a valid sample of the current users of the centres.

Service users were provided with a list of services and asked to rank them in terms of whether they thought they were essential, desirable or not important to them and also to identify any other services not on offer which they would welcome.

We also asked if users would be prepared to pay for any non-essential services, provided families on benefits or low income would not have to pay, and if so, what services would they be prepared to pay for. They were also asked if there were other activities they would be willing to pay for. Respondents were assured that health services will be retained by partners and they are not at risk of reduction.

Further questions to users were around their own centre and whether there could be ways in which services could be more flexible and accessible and also whether they were involved in the running of the centre and if so why.

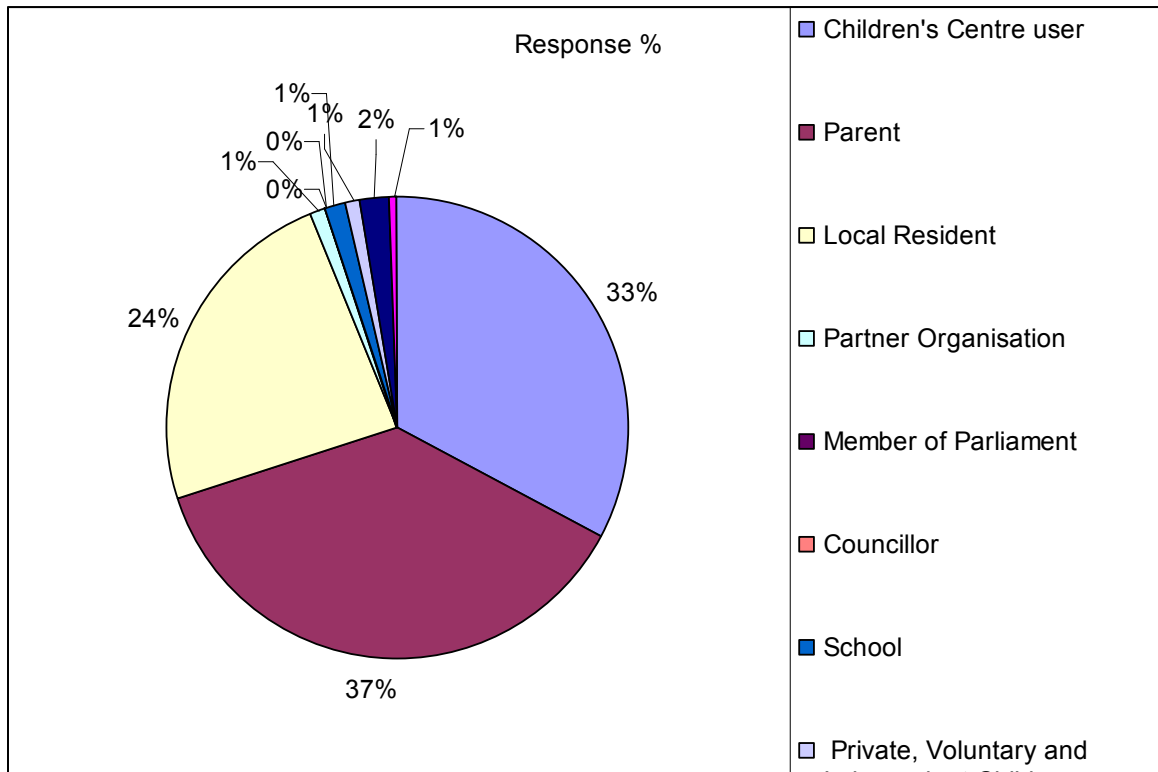
From this point non users of the centres were asked to comment also.

All respondents were asked if they agreed with the Review Board's recommendations that we should keep Children's Centres in all areas across Sefton and then if they agreed on the proposed mergers. Comments on each of

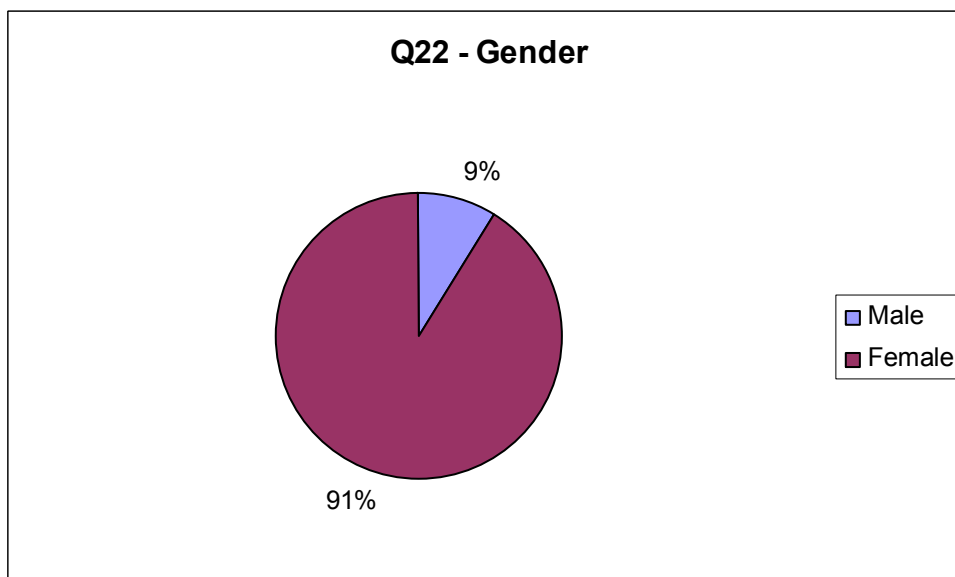
the three areas were requested together with any other comments or suggestions they would wish the Review Board to consider.

The form concluded with monitoring information.

Monitoring Information



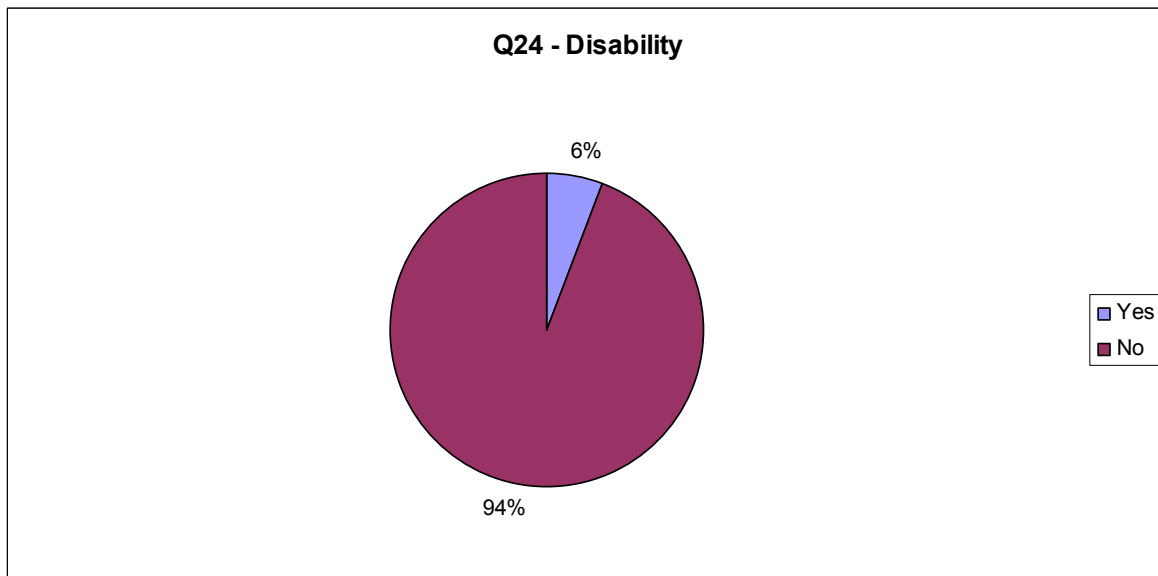
We asked respondents to tell us how they classified themselves.



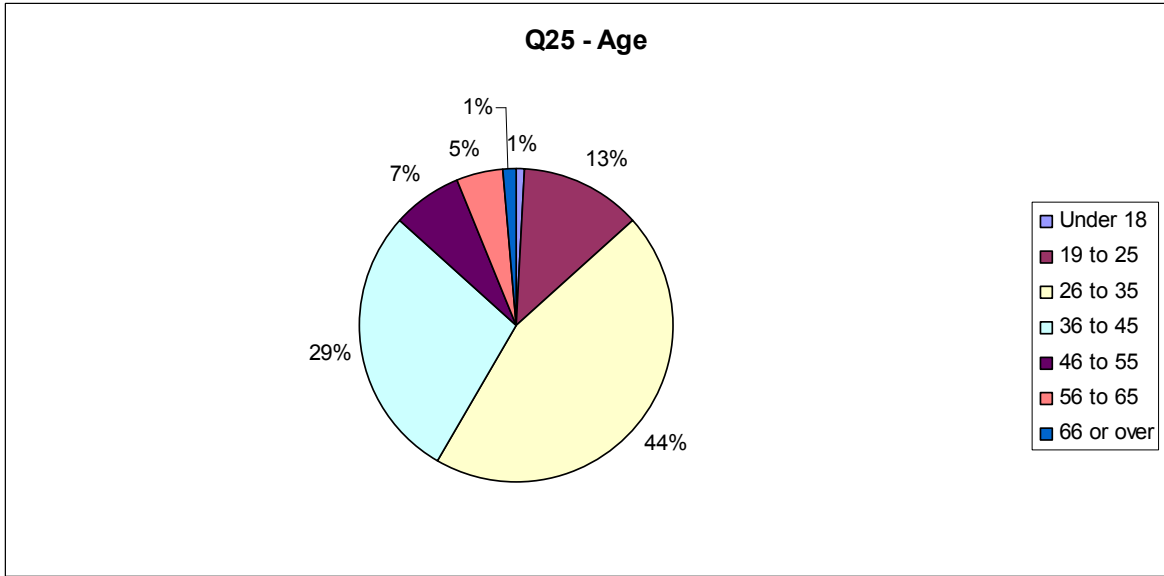
Children, Schools and Families

Question : How would you describe your ethnic origin?

Answer Option	%
White - British	93.69
White - Irish	0.8
White - Irish Traveller	0
White - Gypsy/Roma	0
White - Other	3.19
Black/Black British - Caribbean	0.15
Black/Black British - African	0.15
Black/Black British - Other	0
Mixed - White & Black Caribbean	0.65
Mixed - White & Black African	0.07
Mixed - White & Asian	0.07
Mixed - Other	0.29
Asian/Asian British - Indian	0.15
Asian/Asian British - Pakistani	0.07
Asian/Asian British - Bangladeshi	0.29
Asian/Asian British - Other	0.07
Chinese	0.36



We asked respondents to tell us if they



What respondents told us

The number of responses was 1507 of which 1350 were from current users of the centres (12.64%). We then asked each user to let us know which centre they currently use.

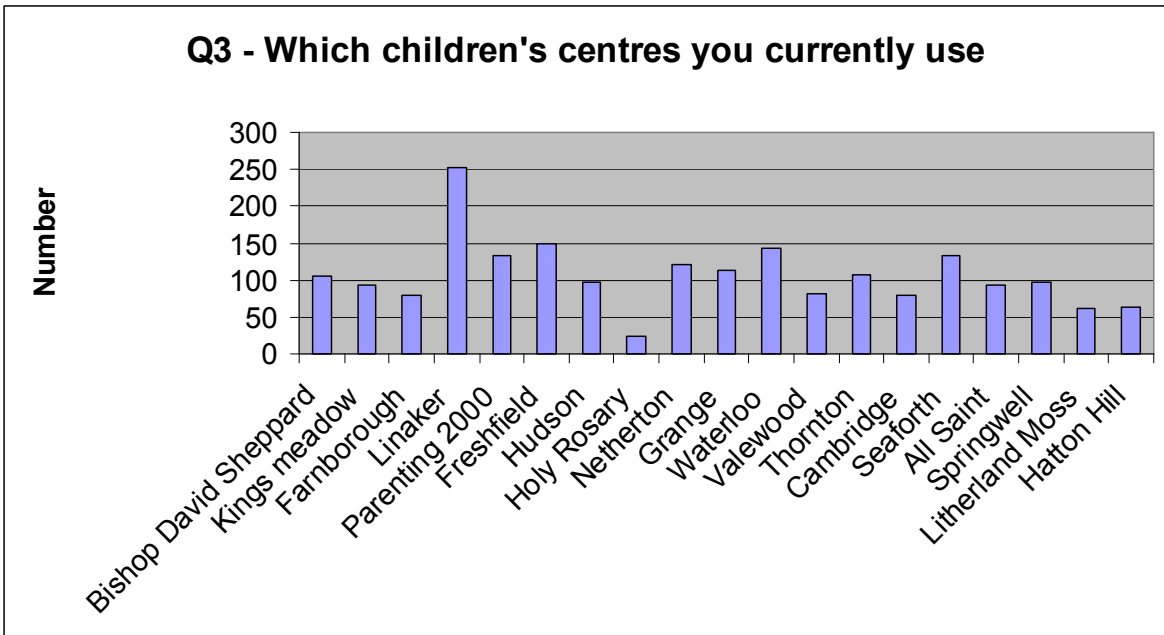


Figure 1 shows the service users who responded and the centre they currently use.

All correspondence, consultation meeting notes and questionnaires have been considered and responses have been grouped together under themes. These can be found in annexes. In addition all responses to questions in the consultation document have been analysed. The Council has reviewed alternative proposals put forward by Head teachers, Governors, Centre Heads and Partners.

This analysis is a summary of all consultation responses, which have been grouped together under the following headings:

- Proposed model (as set out in the consultation paper)
- Service offer
- General comments
- Alternative proposals

Proposed model

The Council asked for views on the proposed model as set out in the consultation paper:

Respondents were asked if they agreed with keeping centres in all areas and 93% agreed with this question.

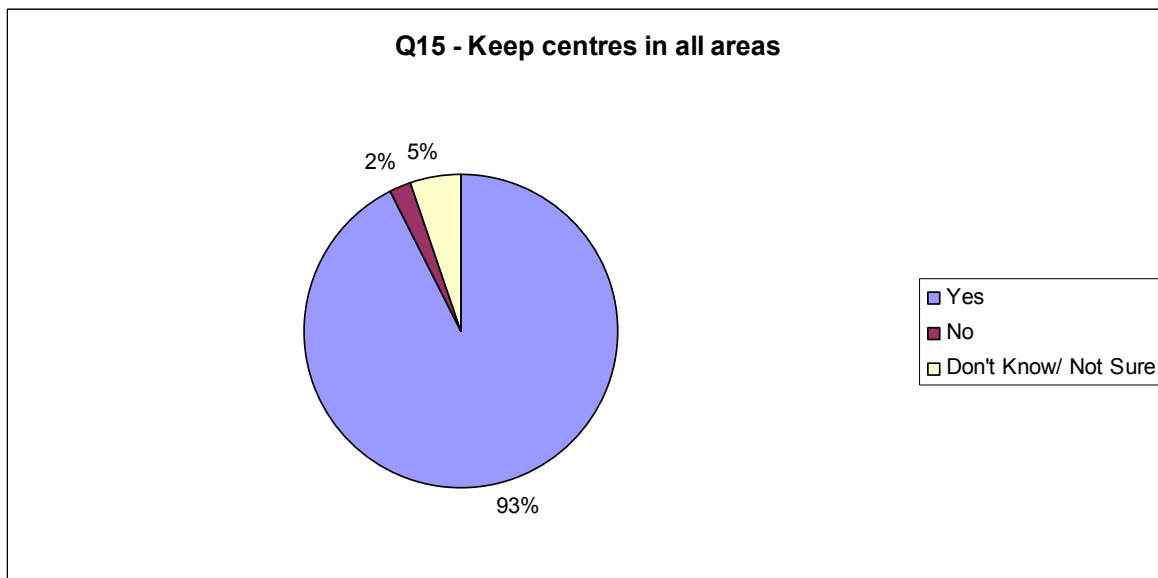


Figure 2 shows the response to keeping centres in all areas

Respondents were then asked if they agreed with the proposed mergers.

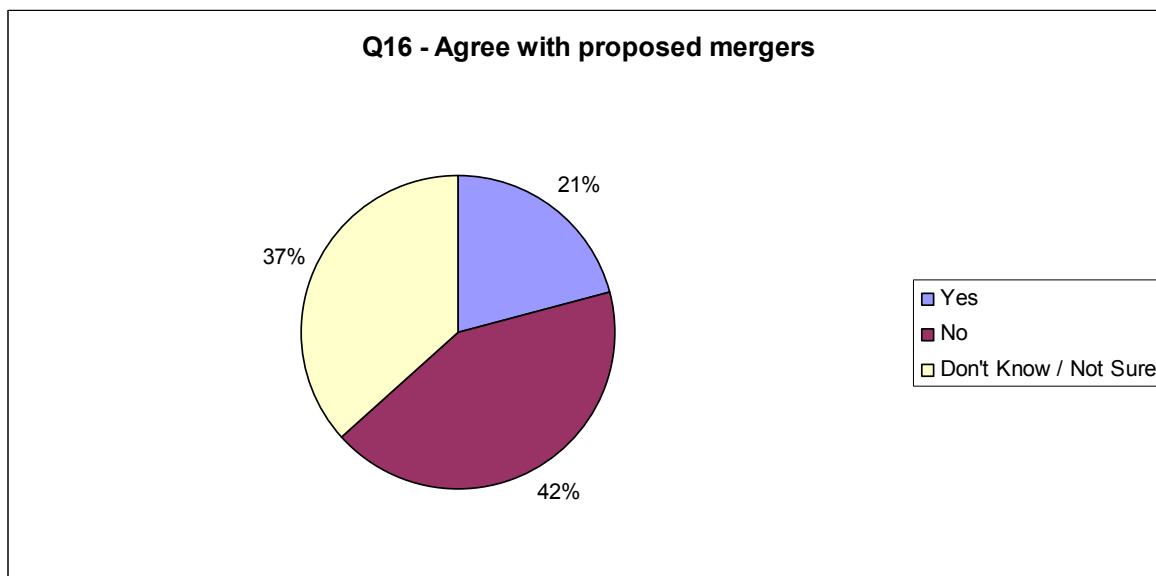


Figure 3 shows the percentage of respondents who stated whether they agreed on the proposed mergers

- 21% of all 1507 respondents were in support of the overall proposal mergers and 37% did not know or were unsure. 42% disagreed with the overall proposal shown in the consultation paper, however, most of the comments for those who answered no or unsure stated that they did not want their centre to close. The proposal was to merge centres and keep all bases open this may have led to some misunderstanding and confusion over the proposal.
- The majority of respondents agreed that Children’s Centres services should be targeted at the most vulnerable. This was supported by respondents who raised this under ‘Do you have any further comments’.

Service offer

The consultation proposal set out the Children’s Centre services. The Council asked for views on the services most important to users of the centres and they responded with: There were slight differences between centres and these are listed separately as an annex.

The chart below shows the services which are important to users and there is a breakdown available for each centre.

Please tell us whether each service is essential	%	%	%
	Essential	Desirable	Not Important
One to one support	48.11	31.12	20.77
Family Support Groups	50.8	31.61	17.59
Parenting Programmes	51.3	33.87	14.83
Home Safety Visits & Advice	44.1	38.61	17.28
Family Cookery/ Cooking on a Budget/ Healthy Eating	41.26	46.32	12.42
Physical Activity Groups e.g Tumble Tots/ Toddler Soccer	64.21	29.02	6.78
Baby Massage	43.9	38.91	17.19
Baby Health Clubs	59.89	26.86	13.25
Antenatal & postnatal classes	60.22	21.43	18.35
Weaning & Finger Food	49.86	33.93	16.2

Smoking cessation	23.14	26.3	50.56
Weight Management	26.91	36.82	36.27
Breastfeeding support	50.05	22.04	27.92
Home Visiting	38.23	35.78	25.99
Parents involved in children's learning groups e.g. read & rhyme	68.76	26.35	4.89
Home Play & Learning Support	46.01	39.75	14.25
Stay & Play Groups	78.98	17.82	3.2
Speech & Language Support	55.88	28.66	15.45
Specialist advice & support for target groups e.g. children with additional need	2.92	1.71	3.94
Music	3.56	2.91	1.23
Crèche	54.28	32.22	13.5
Outdoor play	68.72	26.48	4.8
Supporting transition into Nursery/ Primary school	59.98	27.51	12.51
Toy Library	46.96	40.52	12.52
Children's Centre Teachers	49.08	33.52	17.4
Volunteering support	32.19	44.93	22.88
Parent Forum Support	36.67	44.26	19.07
Advisory Board Support	31.73	44	24.27
Adult Education	41.44	36.34	22.22
Childcare	51.23	30.88	17.89
Specialist support i.e. Citizens Advice Bureau	2.81	2.62	2.62
Fruit & Vegetables Co-operative	35.93	45.19	18.87
Capacity building local groups associated with Children's Centres i.e. Gardening groups	2.42	3.12	2.72
Community Engagement Events/trips	44.16	42.5	13.34
Supporting community groups to develop social enterprises	35.99	44.61	19.4
Support to increase employability skills and move into employment	41.38	35.76	22.86

The Council asked for views on any services not currently on offer which they would welcome and suggestions (by more than one respondent) included

- Activities for older children
- Improved publicity
- Bi-lingual multi-lingual groups
- Respite crèche
- Early Years Foundation Stage support for childminder groups

Increase in:

- Support for fathers
- Activities for children with disabilities
- Adult education and training
- Breastfeeding support
- Foster Group support
- Physical activities

Parents and carers were asked if it was reasonable to introduce some charging for non-essential services and activities, provided families on benefits or low income do not have to pay.

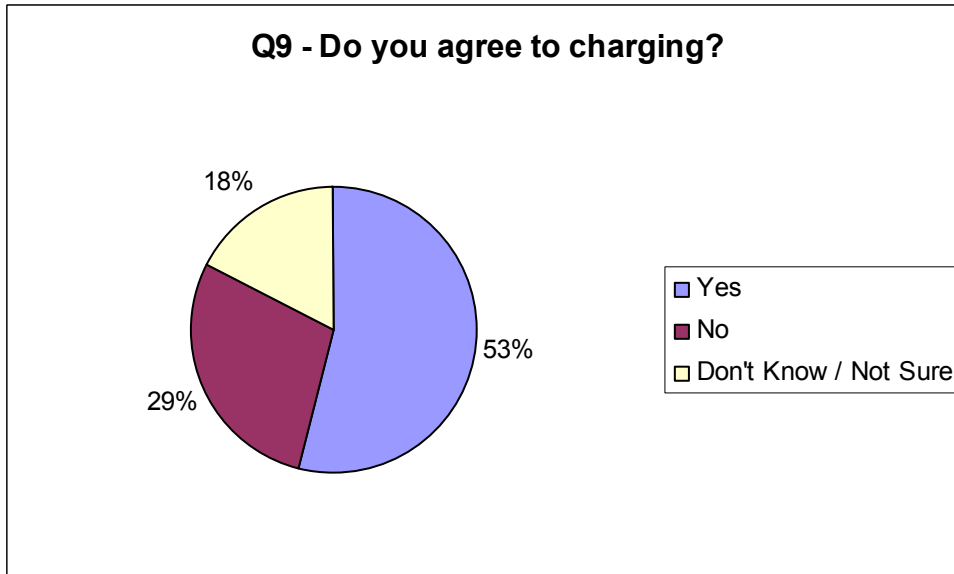


Figure 5 shows the percentage of respondents who would be prepared to pay for some services and those that would not.

53% of respondents agreed with some charging, with 18% unsure and the rest stating they did not.

Parents and carers were asked what type of services they would be willing to pay for from the current services offered. Responses included stay and play sessions, crèche, physical activities for toddlers, and music, singing & dancing groups, figure 6 lists the services and the numbers who may be willing to pay. (A full breakdown is available). In consultation meetings, and some questionnaire comments, respondents suggested that the costs of these services would be the deciding factor as to whether they would use the centre in the future or not. Some suggested that no services should be charged for, whilst other have suggested flexible fees as an alternative option.

Parents and carers were asked if there were any other additional activities they would be willing to pay for and most of the suggestions were around baby clubs and activity sessions and play sessions. Other suggestions were:

- If a Specialist/professional ran the session.
- A donation could be made.
- Charging may lead to some service users being unable to use the services.
- Would pay for events, trips, fetes, fun days/coaching (football/games)
- All should pay including people on benefits or low income.

A full list of suggestions is available.

General comments

Through all consultation methods the Council asked stakeholders and service users for their general comments on the proposed changes. The following is a summary of the feedback received. For a full breakdown see appendix 3.

- The majority of all respondents made comments that the Council should not make cuts or changes to Children’s Centres.
- The majority of all respondents commented that Children’s Centres provide valuable support.
- A substantial number of all respondents commented that Children’s Centres should offer universal services and maintain the social mix of service users.

Stakeholders and parents and carers through the consultation suggested that the following areas be considered if the mergers go ahead.

- Travelling distance
- Investment for the future
- Capacity to deliver
- Retention of good staff
- Community profile and ownership
- Local offer balanced against duplication

In the North

- Review the North reach and address gaps in provisions across wards
- Close bases one day a week and provide services on a rota basis
- Individual centres are valued by the communities they serve

In the Mid

- Distance to centres
- Public transport
- Retaining quality services and staff
- Physical capacity across bases
- Individual centres are valued by the communities they serve

In the South

- All these areas serve extremely deprived communities – more money not less should be sent here.
- Opening times reflective of community needs
- Quality versus quantity
- Individual centres are valued by the communities they serve

Health partners

In addition to the public consultation, a number of interviews were conducted with health professionals who are either based within Children’s Centres or work closely with the centres across Sefton to obtain their views on the proposed changes. Partners in Health, collective, have expressed their desire to work in partnership with the Council to keep Children’s Centres open across the Borough. Nevertheless they do acknowledge that services for the most vulnerable is a priority, however universal services are key to ensuring that this group is identified as early as possible.

The health professionals felt that the proposed merger of Children's Centres in Sefton would not affect the core health related services they currently provide. The main impact would be the potential reduction and accessibility of additional services provided at the centres and the provision of available rooms to deliver group sessions. A copy of the summary of the feedback from health professionals is attached as an appendix.

Alternative proposals

Respondents were asked if they had any comments or suggestions they would wish to be considered.

- The Core Group for Freshfield Children's Centre submitted 'The Response to the Consultation from the Core Group for Freshfield Children's Centre'. "To stand alone and offer an alternative model to the merger" which includes developing a financially self sustaining centre on a reduced budget.
- Bases to close one day a week and provide services on a rota basis
- A small minority (6%) suggested they would wish to pay rather than lose services

Recommendations of the Children's Centres' Review Board

- To continue to implement a funding reduction in line with the Council resolution of March 3rd 2011
- To maintain a network of children centres across the borough, without closing bases
- To agree to merge centres across the borough, in order to maintain an appropriate service delivery model to the communities they serve