

Due to the impact that the Surrey County Council proposals will have on the Spelthorne Community, the Spelthorne Health & Wellbeing Group would like to express their views on four of the consultations. The Group meet quarterly to discuss issues in Spelthorne and comprise representatives from Spelthorne Borough Council, councillors (county and borough), the third sector, other statutory agencies, North West Surrey CCG, user groups and other community groups.

Due to the extent of concern in reference to these consultations, a special meeting was held on Thursday 06.12.18; please note the following:

The Group would like to express their overall concerns with how the consultation has been conducted. The online surveys are difficult to navigate, the strategies not easy to access and the details of the proposals hidden within the questions. There are a lack of hard copies available locally: we would have expected there to be materials available in key locations such as the Council Offices in Knowle Green and yet had to ask that these be sent to us. Also, the consultation event scheduled in Spelthorne was only advertised a few days before it took place. This all adds up to what we perceive as lack of meaningful engagement that is inconsistent with the level of impact that the proposals will have. We are particularly concerned that the residents most in need are unlikely to contribute to the consultations due to the length and complexity of the issues contained therein, but it is their input that will be invaluable and their voice that needs to be heard. We are also concerned that the consultation doesn't acknowledge the diversity of communities across Surrey. However, the Group hope that this will be considered when an Equality Impact Assessment is carried out.

Some of the consultations are fractured and it is felt that more joint working is needed. The fact that the children centres are being reviewed yet the youth centre consultation is not active yet highlights this. The Group also feel that it has a valuable role to play and we, along with others, should be given the opportunity to contribute to the detailed proposals rather than the broad proposals. We understand our communities and want to ensure Spelthorne is well represented. The borough of Spelthorne has relatively high needs across a range of measures and the Group is concerned that our population will be disproportionately hit by the proposals. Surrey County Council should be focussing on need which means not cutting services severely in Spelthorne.

Concessionary Bus Travel

The group fully understand the need to save money and can appreciate the proposals to bring Surrey in line with other councils that offer the statutory scheme.

We would like to express the benefits of concessionary travel that are well documented and include:

- enabling elderly people, especially those on low incomes, to continue to use public transport and to use it more often, improving their access to a range of basic necessities such as health care and shops and reducing social isolation
- recognising the importance of public transport for older people and the role access to transport has to play tackling social exclusion and maintaining wellbeing
- achieving social inclusion benefits for older and disabled people by allowing them greater freedom to travel, for free, by local bus
- giving older and disabled people greater freedom and independence to visit family and friends and a lifeline to facilities both within and outside their local area
- encouraging modal shift from car to bus

Implications of removing the discretionary element include:

- Giving elderly and disabled people less flexibility about when they want to travel
- Discouraging those who need help with travelling
- Discouraging those who need to travel to work and who may be in low-paid work
- Increased pressure on volunteer driver schemes

These proposals will primarily affect the disabled working population, carers and residents attending hospital appointments. According to the Office of National Statistics, Spelthorne has the highest number of people with limited activity in Surrey (14.9%) so the Group would like to express their concerns that the impact these changes will have on Spelthorne will be greater than in other areas of Surrey.

The Group understand that individuals may be able to access Personal Independent Payment (PIP) to support with payments for carers to travel with them. However, we would like to understand how this will be promoted to individuals to encourage people to access this. Also, we understand that the mobility section of the PIP is currently being reviewed as people with mental health issues currently miss out. We understand that hospital transport can be arranged in some cases and similarly GPs can organise transport for carers.

To summarise, given the levels of saving that must be achieved, the Group generally support the proposals to reduce the additional funding for free concessionary bus travel but would like to express the importance of ensuring that people are made aware of alternative opportunities to access support with their travelling needs.

SEND

The Group support the principles of the strategy but are concerned with the lack of details and practicalities of how this strategy will be achieved.

We welcome the proposals to intervene earlier with this vulnerable group, work more collaboratively, increase capacity, invest in specialist school places and increase support for older children and young people but have misgivings about the lack of transparency in the documentation about the savings that are planned to be made (for example by slashing the transport budget) and failure to commit to funding beyond the next two years. According to SCC Business Plan, SEND savings equate to £9.5m over 3 years so the Group are puzzled as to how the strategy will be achieved.

Surrey County Council acknowledge the current situation where many parents are disappointed with the length of delays but there are concerns that the introduction of new pathways will only add to delays.

Given the location of Spelthorne, it is easier for some residents to travel over the border into neighbouring non-Surrey boroughs for specialist school places. The group would be concerned for the transitional arrangements required for these young people if they were to be transferred to other schools due to these proposals. Due the location of Spelthorne, the availability of transport and travel time must be a consideration. Currently, out of 848 children in special schools, 145 are placed out Surrey. However, due to the location of Spelthorne within Surrey, it is often easier for these children to travel to neighbouring boroughs. For example, Lindon Bennett and Marjory Kinnon Schools are both located in Feltham but are geographically very close to Spelthorne. The Group would like to understand what impact the proposals will have on mainstream schools as the proposals have outlined that money the schools currently receive will be transferred from the mainstream school budget to support these new placements.

The strategy suggests that there will be fewer EHCPs (Education, Health and Care Plans). The concern expressed by the group was that by reducing the number given, it will be harder for young people to get the support they need. Some children and young people will experience issues at home but not at school. For example, children with autism may benefit from the structure of school but experience difficulties in the home environment. We fear that these young people will miss out on vital support that they need.

The strategy suggests that there will be more access to Education Psychologists, speech & language therapists etc. Have all these relevant agencies been part of the discussion and are they able to supply the amount of support identified in the consultation? In the Family Resilience consultation, there is reference to housing advice, CAB etc. being available to give advice within the new centre structures. Housing in Spelthorne has not been consulted and has resource issues.

The suggestion of 350 additional places sounds positive but it will be important to know where these will be located and how they will be resourced. There is a continuing demand for specialist care staff and often resourcing can be challenging as identified by Surrey in previous meetings when discussing the delay or lack of services provided.

The strategy aims to reduce exclusions but there is no detail about how this will happen?

Transforming Libraries

The Group agree with the principles of the strategy but feel that there is insufficient detail on how these principles will work in practice.

We would like to express the wide benefits of libraries including:

- As the social divide widens, libraries are the bridge to culture, creativity and expression that our communities need. Arts Council England's (ACE) <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication/evidencing-libraries-audience-reach-research-findings-and-analysis> study shows that libraries are better at reaching a much more diverse audience.
- Public libraries have the local knowledge and understanding needed to help people within our local communities find content that suits them. There are countless examples of where library staff have changed lives just by knowing the right information or book recommendation to offer the user.
- According to the ACE reports, library usage tends to be triggered more often when users have children, become unemployed, start studying or retire; with lapses occurring when outside of these windows.
- The consequences of underinvestment and under-representation of communities are drastic, especially as we enter a more isolationist, post-Brexit era, where national identity is already coming starkly into question.
- Not only does a misrepresented populous pose dangerous questions about democracy, it may also stunt the country's progress going forward.
- Matt Hancock, Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport said in the publication "Culture is Digital": "The UK's future will be built at the nexus of our artistic and cultural creativity and our technical brilliance" <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/culture-is-digital>
- The argument that it is a false economy to cut funding to libraries, culture and the arts only grows stronger
- Libraries are important to support with loneliness, which is high on the government agenda.
- Furthermore, many families use libraries for children to complete homework

The consultation document does not detail which of the 18 libraries equate to 65% of the usage or those that are less well used. We would also like to understand whether the principles mean that an “underused” library in a deprived area be more likely to stay open. If not, it is difficult to see how that fits with the principle of targeting resources to the “most vulnerable”? The Group would also like to understand how the usage statistics are calculated. Are these based on books borrowed or visits to the libraries? Many people access libraries to access the internet, attend groups e.g. Knit and Natter, Digital Buddies or for advice for agencies such as the Citizens Advice, Catalyst etc. – is this taken into account when looking at usage figures?

Given the aim is to cut spend per head of population by about 30%, some libraries must be under threat and we would ask that there be greater transparency about this. We would expect that there would be further consultation once the libraries identified for closure are known.

Nineteen of Surrey’s libraries are within two miles of each other – the libraries in Spelthorne are near each other geographically but the transport links between the towns are challenging and this needs to be taken into account.

There is a lack of relevant examples in the consultation materials. The Group found it puzzling that there were ideas from Botswana, Chile and Ukraine!

Spelthorne struggles to recruit volunteers for various projects so the Group believe that Spelthorne would find it difficult to move to volunteer-run libraries. This works well in rural community-based areas but much of Spelthorne is more urban so we are not convinced that this model would work here.

The Group support the use of digitalised libraries. The Group also support the shared use of sites and feel that this model has worked well in the libraries in Spelthorne, for example Voluntary Support North Surrey, Catalyst and Spelthorne Museum are all based at Staines Library and Citizens Advice are based at Sunbury Library. We support the need to make libraries more resilient by encouraging use of hot desks and capitalising on business opportunities.

One of the aims of the Government is for libraries to be hubs for social prescribing and it is difficult to understand how this can be achieved if libraries are under threat of closure.

Family Resilience

Taking into account the number of children in low income families and subjected to statutory homelessness, Spelthorne has the highest deprivation score in Surrey and therefore the Group is very concerned about the proposals to cut children’s centres.

Given that Spelthorne is an area of relatively high need and that there are pockets of deprivation within the whole of the Borough, and taking into account that the number of families is likely to increase with Heathrow expansion, the Group believe that there should be a minimum of three centres. When the children’s centres have been ranked by need, Spelthorne had three centres in the top 21.

We acknowledge that this is phase one of the consultation but it is important to consider the whole picture. We are aware that youth centres will be the subject of a separate consultation but believe it would be useful to consider these proposals at the same time because they are closely linked.

The strategy suggests the need to make savings of £19.5 million but is not suggesting where these cuts will come from and when.

The proposals state that children centres will be open to a wider age group, from 0-11 year olds, and we are concerned whether centres will have the capacity to deal with this. Details are needed about what will be provided at the new centres and the Group questioned whether they will be fit for purpose for dealing with children up to 11 years, as the needs of children between 0-11 change considerably. At this present time, the centres cater for 0-5 years old with facilities and staff that are appropriate for that age group. Could youth centres be a suitable location for some of these centres?

Spelthorne was one of the first Boroughs to embrace establishing Early Help Advisory Boards and to pilot Early Help Partnerships, note that largely on the basis of relative need the area selected to pilot was Sunbury Common, so we were particularly concerned to see the proposal for removal of a Centre from the Sunbury Common area. There is conflicting information being given out by Surrey as to the future of the Early Help Advisory Boards.

With the shift from children centres to be accessible to everyone, to a more targeted group who will have to go through an assessment to gain access, the Group is concerned that there is potential for individuals who are in need to miss out on receiving crucial support. This would undermine the County's objective of achieving more effective early intervention. The universal offer currently allows for early prevention and supports families before they are in great need. Centres also currently promote positive role models which is important for confidence building in early life.

Spelthorne has been grouped in a quadrant with Elmbridge and Epsom & Ewell – this is consistent with the Family Support programme but not in line with the CCG area which is likely to have an impact on health provision for the centres.

We understand that there will be one Early Help Hub in Surrey, one Service Manager per quadrant and then Early Hub Coordinators. There is worry that there will be a delay for individuals to be seen as they have to be assessed on various levels. Given the track record of issues when referral processes have been changed in the recent past, we would like assurances that sufficient resource and time will be spent implementing the proposed new referral processes.

The Group would like more detail on what criteria will be used for people to access these centres. What does targeted mean? What is the referral pathway?

In terms of the suggestion about outreach work, the Group are concerned that there would not be sufficient capacity since there is no mention of extra resources

Introducing charges for some activities may be attractive on the face of it but Surrey County Council needs to be careful not to inadvertently stigmatise those who would qualify for free activities, in a similar way to free school meals. A study by the Institute for Social and Economic Research in 2012 showed that more than a quarter of children entitled to free school meals took a packed lunch instead because they feared being stigmatised. Furthermore, targeting families in the most financial need may be to the detriment of those that may not be in financial need but rely on children's centres to help prevent social isolation which in turn could lead to mental health problems and poor parenting. The group also had concerns for low income families who fall just below the threshold of receiving benefits and, therefore, miss out on free activities. We have identified this to be a particular problem with carers.

An Oxford University study evaluated that Children's centres promotes better parenting, and improved health and social skills.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/485346/DFE-RR495_Evaluation_of_children_s_centres_in_England_the_impact_of_children_s_centres.pdf

Some key findings of the Oxford study shows:

- children's centres with the best funding and staffing levels reached families in 'most need' – the poorest households and families with dysfunctional parent-child relationships
- Children's centres support parents and families, helping to mitigate the powerful effects of disadvantage on life chances
- open-access, walk-in activities encouraged vulnerable families to take part because they did not feel there was a stigma attached to using the centres
- Preventative work with families can head off more serious problems that could otherwise put them on the lists of social welfare agencies

The consultation also suggests that other services will be provided in the new centres such as housing advice but does not detail who would provide this. There is also a lack of detail about what role satellite centres will play and indeed what is involved in outreach.

The consultation suggests that services will be available for the whole family but this is not clear and we are concerned about what this will mean. Confusion over the assessment of the eligibility for the service doesn't help the Group to understand how this will work.

Again, the Group is concerned about the suggested reliance on volunteers as Spelthorne struggles to recruit them in comparison to other boroughs/districts and the service shouldn't be reliant on the third sector to provide this essential service.

In conclusion, the Spelthorne Health and Wellbeing Group are very concerned about the 4 proposals. It is acknowledged that financial savings have to be made by Surrey but it is difficult to be reassured that an adequate service will be provided when such little detail is given about the actual effect these cuts will have on particular areas.

Surrey is very diverse in relation to need. Service provision suitable for residents in Waverley is unlikely to be the same as in Spelthorne, a borough which borders London.

Just to reference a few statistics, Spelthorne is the worst in Surrey for:

- Under 75 mortality rate (cardiovascular)
- Diabetes diagnoses (17 and over)
- Smoking Prevalence in adults
- Infant mortality rate
- Deprivation score
- Children in low income families (under 16)
- Statutory Homeless
- Violent Crime

The Spelthorne Health and Wellbeing Group would be very happy to assist Surrey with further opinions once the initial concerns and details contained in this document are addressed.