



Public Consultation

Children's Centres 2025

Foreword – Councillor Josh Blacker,

cabinet member for a fairer start

Our ambition for the borough is that every single one of our children and young people receives the best start in life, regardless of their background. To do that, we need to make the best use of the council's resources and the strengths of the communities across our 7 towns to support families – because it takes a town to raise a child.



That's what our council plan is all about: making real and lasting change that will give children and young people in Ealing a fairer start. Together, we want to create a safe environment for our children and young people to develop and reach their full potential.

Early help is an important step towards this goal, preventing problems and tackling challenges before they get worse while children are in their most crucial developmental years, under 5. Every day, we see how effective early intervention is across the borough, helping families to build on their strengths and become more resilient which has a direct impact on their children's development and wellbeing too.

But sadly, there are many families out there who still need our support and are not getting it in the way it's currently being provided. This needs to change. Every child who doesn't get supported at an early stage is a child who may need more intensive support later – prevention is better than cure.

Although change can feel challenging, if we work together as a community to redesign early help services for families, we have a real opportunity to make a significant impact on the lives of

thousands of children in our borough. That means being brave and creative and reconsidering some of the ways we currently do things. By reviewing the way our current children's centres are organised, we can return key centres into vibrant hubs delivering a comprehensive service and spend more time in the community, meeting more families closer to home. We want to increase support for the most vulnerable families and make sure that no matter where you live or what your background, when you become a parent in our borough, you have access to the support you need at the earliest opportunity.

We want to encourage everyone to take part in this consultation, whether you have used a children's centre or early help services before or not, and crucially if you haven't, we want to know why and how we can better support your family. For many of us, time is a luxury, so we have tried to create a consultation process that has lots of ways you can get involved and share your views, either by attending an event near you, popping into your local children's centre or library to fill in a survey, or the quickest way is to complete our online survey from anywhere on your phone.

The current situation

At present, there are 25 children's centres across the borough, offering support services for parents and their children aged under 5. Two of these 25 centres only provide a nursery and do not include the wide range of support services the other centres do.

The children's centres offer can differ from centre to centre. It can include:

- health visiting and school nursing 0-19 service (early start)
- midwifery
- perinatal mental health
- English for speakers of other languages
- early education teams
- 'stay and play' sessions



- parenting and family support
- acting as a base for community and voluntary services to offer advice on issues like housing and benefits

The best results occur when a child is seen at the earliest opportunity and before families get to a crisis point.

At the moment, services are not spread fairly across the borough, which can create a gap in the support available. In some areas, there are much-loved and thriving services for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Sadly this isn't the same everywhere and there is a need for more local and personalised support.

Did you know Ealing has the third largest population among London boroughs, behind only Barnet and Croydon? However, while Ealing currently provides 25 children centres, Barnet and Croydon both have just 11 children's centres each. And, while Ealing is only the 11th largest London borough by geographical size, the largest boroughs are Bromley with 6 children's centres, Redbridge with 7 and Hillingdon with 12. Hillingdon is over twice the size of Ealing. So, there are far more centres in our borough, than in neighbouring boroughs.

We know families use children's centres for a number of different reasons, with 61% of children attending children centres to access targeted support, including:

- Early Help Assessments and Plans (EHAPs)
- Early Start
- Supportive Action for Families in Ealing (SAFE)
- childcare for children in need

Meanwhile, only 24% of children supported by children in need, child protection and looked after child plans were reported to be accessing children's centres. Many vulnerable families access support in the

community with agencies like Home-Start and smaller grassroots community organisations, close to where they live. The council believes more could be done to join up services across each of our 7 towns and reach more families in our communities.

Options to consider

There are two options to consider for how the council could provide early help services in the future:

1. Make changes to Early Help services so that they can be provided from fewer children's centres and additional community venues across the borough's 7 towns. The remaining children centres may be repurposed for other uses.
2. Do nothing and continue to run services as they are at present. However, this option is not recommended. The available data shows that the children, young people and families who would most benefit from the services are not currently accessing children's centres. Research tells us that council-run services from council venues can be a barrier to accessing services. For others, the benefit of services is not well communicated from these venues. This option will also not provide any financial efficiencies.

Why is there a consultation?

Local children's centres provide an important range of services and have a very real and positive impact on young children. However, we can improve the offer to reach more families and potentially make more efficient use of the buildings.

Developing a stronger and improved service that offers support to families at the earliest opportunity can help produce better outcomes for children and their families and prevent their need to use other services further down the line.

Although it's not the main reason for this review, generating additional income from council-owned buildings is also one of the many ideas every local authority is having to explore, to make sure local services have long-term financial security.

Finally, while there is a legal duty to consult with families about any changes to its services under the Childcare Act 2006, the council believes it's more important to hear from residents directly,

to ensure the future provision of services is sustainable and effective. In particular, we want to understand how more families could receive support together, or from the same centre.

Guiding principles

Here are some of the key principles guiding the new proposals:

- helping children and their families to have the best start in life, and throughout their life
- offering children, young people and families the right support at the right time
- making sure services for children, young people and families are accessible to the people who would benefit from them most
- taking the least intrusive approach of support
- reducing the need for higher level statutory interventions
- improving children's long-term outcomes
- increasing educational attainment
- supporting good mental health
- making every contact count with families
- working in partnership with parents and carers, and the wider Early Help system, to create and promote services to support children's growth and development
- tackling inequality by ensuring every child has access to early education, health and welfare opportunities.

Therefore, the council's proposed strategy looks at:

1. keeping centres open that serve the largest number of children and families; particularly those supporting families on very-low incomes living in identified areas of disadvantage
2. maintaining health services for early years, such as midwifery and the health visiting service
3. continuing to ensure that vulnerable children and those who have the greatest needs are well supported
4. Increasing childcare available in centres that are being re-organised
5. making services run more efficiently

6. ensuring effective, preventative support and early intervention through closer working with professionals from different services and agencies.

What changes are being proposed?

As stated previously, Ealing is the third largest London borough in terms of population; but only the 11th largest London borough by geographical size. Barnet and Croydon have larger populations but only have 11 children's centres; while the largest geographical London boroughs also have fewer centres. Hillingdon is more than twice the size of Ealing, but has 12 centres compared to our borough's 25.

The council's recommendations have been based on identifying the areas of highest deprivation in the borough. The aim would be to improve the service offered to families by concentrating the early help support across fewer children's centres but increasing the opening hours of these centres – and also by offering support in other community spaces.

Essentially, the intention is to provide more and improved services, from fewer centres – while ensuring all of the borough's 7 towns are covered.

The proposal is to keep 12 key children's centres, each continuing with the full current range of support, such as midwifery and health services. These centres would have extended opening hours, to make it easier for people to access them.

Outreach services would be strengthened and provided at community venues such as libraries, places of worship, schools and hostels.

Additionally, the proposal is to improve the range of digital services the council provides to support families, such as the online parenting workshops on managing conflict and promote access to resources available via the Family Information Service.

How were the proposals developed?

The proposals were developed using a variety of information, which included considering the areas of most need and where current centres are most used. This included looking at:

- data on where in the borough children aged 0-5 and their families lived, particularly those who are most disadvantaged
- data on how young children and their families currently use the children's centres; and travel distances to different centres
- the location of children's centres to enable access to families from across the borough
- the size and suitability of some buildings and premises which makes them better able to provide services and to the greatest number of children and their families
- how buildings that the council may no longer fund can continue to provide spaces for services that children and families can benefit from (even if they are not part of the children's centres).

Where would the 12 centres be located?

Subject to the outcome of consultation, the 12 children's centre sites would be as follows

- Acton: South Acton, John Perryn and Acton Park
- Ealing: West Twyford and Grange
- Greenford: Horsenden
- Hanwell: Hanwell
- Northolt: Limetrees and Islip Manor
- Perivale: Perivale
- Southall: Havelock and Southall Park

As part of the Early Help Strategy 2025-28, based on an understanding of need and the current uptake, a summary of the proposed changes are:

Service: Children's Centre's	
Current Service Offer	
7 main children's centres:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Islip Manor• South Acton• Hanwell• Grove House• Perivale• Log Cabin• Academy Gardens locality*
18 children's centre linked sites:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Grange• Greenfields• Hathaway• John Perryn• Limetrees• Maples• Petts Hill• Southall Park• Jubilee• Acton Park• Copley close*• Dormers Wells• Havelock• Horsenden• Northolt Park• Windmill• Windmill Park• West Twyford

Service: Children's Centre's

Proposed Service Offer

Town	Centres
Northolt	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Limetrees• Islip Manor
Southall	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Havelock• Southall Park
Acton	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• South Acton• John Perryn• Acton Park
Hanwell	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hanwell
Greenford	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Horsenden
Ealing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• West Twyford• Grange
Perivale	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Perivale
Potential Community sites for future service delivery to include:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Young Adult Centre• Hanwell Community Centre• Westside Young People's Centre• Bollo Brook Youth Centre

How to take part in this consultation

The consultation will take place for 12 weeks, from the beginning of February. We would like to hear from you, especially if you have a child under the age of 5 in your household, or if you are expecting a baby.

The council wants to hear from you however regularly you make use of children's centres. Even if you have never been to a centre, your views could be crucial because the council would like to know why you don't use children's centres and what would encourage you to use them.

You can take part in the consultation through coming to a meeting at your local children's centre from February to April 2025 (dates and times will be advertised on your children's centre noticeboard). You can also take part by completing an online survey or a printed survey and return this to your local children's centre or Ealing's Family Information Service.

The online survey can be found at: www.ealing.gov.uk/consultations

You can request a printed copy of the survey by emailing children@ealing.gov.uk or calling **020 8825 5588**.





Early Help review

– FAQs

Early Help review – FAQs

Why are you reviewing the number of children's centres in the borough?

The Council Plan has a goal of continuing to increase the percentage of families registered with children's centres. It also refers to enhancing the community outreach services provided to support more families who are experiencing difficulties or barriers in accessing support.

Ealing Council's Early Help services aim to provide early support to children, young people and families.

By focusing resources on a smaller number of children's centres and widening the range of services available in one place, the council is aiming to increase the number of residents using our services and making them an even stronger community asset.

At the same time, early help would be offered as outreach services at more community spaces.

Given the pressure on council budgets – is this just a cost-cutting exercise?

No, the main aim is to improve access to early help services to encourage more people to use them. Through consulting with communities on the future delivery of the early help service, the hope is to increase accessibility and take up of early help, universal and targeted support to families that have been previously underserved.

Outreach is expensive – where are the savings come from?

As stated above, the main aim is to improve access to early help services driving more people to children centres to make use of services. However, by making better use of council buildings, the hope is to also increase rental income, making core services more sustainable going forward. This income would contribute to paying for the services.

Will there be negative consequences in years to come for children's outcomes?

As mentioned above, the purpose of the proposals is to increase the use of early help services, helping more children prepare for attending school across the 7 towns in Ealing. A renewed focus on outreach and delivering services in the community rather than only in the council's own buildings, would also help us reach more families. The council believes the proposals would help it to see families sooner, so they're less likely to need support later down the line.

Will I have to travel further to attend a children's centre?

There will potentially be increased travel from one children's centre to another, however with a proposed increase to outreach services, residents will be able to visit community spaces closer to home to receive support.

The average walking distance between centres will be approximately 30 minutes. The longest distance will be 1 hour walk or 36 minutes by bus between Grange children's centre and West Twyford children's centre. However we are looking to increase the use of community spaces to reduce travel time.

Where will midwifery and post-natal sessions run if children's centres are closed?

Midwifery and post-natal sessions will continue to be delivered out of children's centres where there will continue to be co-delivery.

Why don't you promote children's centres better?

Work is under way to review and improve computer and online systems to better promote the range of services and reach communities that have previously been underserved. This forms part of the consultation proposals to increase the ways in which services can be accessed.

Has this approach been tried elsewhere?

Other local authorities continue to review the delivery of early help services to make sure they are meeting local and presenting needs. Ealing has the third largest population among London

boroughs, behind only Barnet and Croydon. However, while Ealing currently provides 25 children centres, Barnet and Croydon both have just 11 children's centres each. And, while Ealing is only the 11th largest London borough by geographical size, the largest boroughs are Bromley with 6 children's centres, Redbridge with 7 and Hillingdon with 12. Hillingdon is over twice the size of Ealing. So, there are far more centres in our borough, than in neighbouring boroughs.

What other options have you considered to reach underserved communities?

The council completed a range of engagement activities as part of an earlier 'Family Hubs Discovery and Consensus' phase to understand what communities needed from its services and how to build on the best.

Increased digital support is planned to help families to search for and find services, but the council recognises the challenges for some communities in accessing online information and resources.

Therefore, we will work with voluntary and community groups to jointly create services, and communication materials with them.

The council is also looking at other ways to target services to those who are eligible but who may not know about their entitlement or who may not proactively look for support. For example: the holiday activities and food (HAF) programme during school summer holidays, benefit entitlements and Healthy Start vouchers.

Can you not increase outreach without closing some centres?

Some families are not accessing services delivered from children's centres. A children's centre, as a building, can act as a barrier to services for some families. The proposal is to improve efficiency of the use of the space. This could mean having the proposed children's centres open for longer – being more accessible Monday to Friday – as opposed to the current arrangement of having some of the children centres closed for the majority of the week.

How can I have my say in the consultation?

There will be a range of activity taking place across the 7 towns between February and April 2025. It will include focus group discussions, forums, face-to-face meetings and meetings held online, as well as speaking to service users and partner agencies.

When will a final decision be made?

A report will be prepared for Ealing Council's cabinet in May 2025, with a summary of consultation responses and recommendations. The cabinet will then make a decision on how to proceed.

If approved, the plans would then start to be put in place from June 2025.

How would a reduction of children's centres increase the current number of families using them?

By increasing the services available via community outreach and maximising sessions in existing centres, including extending their opening hours.

How does limited staffing capacity relate to increased outreach work?

Through reviewing the current early help offer and further strengthening our relationship with community groups and partner organisations, the aim is to maximise on the services being offered. Developing this model would allow the outreach service into communities to grow.

What details are provided on how consultations will be run?

In this document, there are details of how, why and when the consultation will take place and how to find out more. Additional details will be provided during the course of the consultation.

What was the decision process for the proposed centres that would remain?

Data was reviewed to identify the reach and volume of centres.

Will everyone be able to take part in the formal consultation?

Yes, it will be promoted that all engage in the consultation, including parents / carers, and partner agencies such as those in education and health, and in the voluntary and community sector.

Which of the 12 centres would focus on SEND (special educational needs and disabilities)?

SEND is a core part of Early Start services across all centres. Early Start Ealing is an integrated service for families – pregnant mothers, expectant fathers, parents, babies, and children and young people up to the age of 19, although the focus is mostly under 5s. The service is delivered at 3 sites across the borough and works out of 5 children's centre hubs. The focus is on prevention, promotion and early intervention.

Early Start Ealing integrated teams include: health visitors and assistants; community nursery nurses; community school nursing; family support and family outreach workers; specialist workers, including nurses from the Family Nurse Partnership (who offer support to young mothers having their first baby), speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and social workers. Early Start Ealing teams then work with GPs, midwives, schools, and family support services. There are also Early Start SEND Inclusion workers based within Early Start, who offer targeted or specialist support to families of children with additional needs, including children with social and communication differences. This can be at home, at the child's early years setting or both. There is an integrated outcomes framework for early years that all practitioners work towards.

Windmill Children's Centre offers specialist provision for children with SEND in association with Ealing Anchor Foundation.

How will the proposal ensure we are reaching the most deprived communities?

The aim is to take early help services into community spaces to reach families that have previously been underserved.

What will happen to the remaining children's centres?

For the children centres to be repurposed, potential options could include:

- increasing local nursery provision
- additional local SEND provision, with dedicated centres
- youth services
- mental health services
- handing over running of the buildings to the community to provide other local services
- providing a base for wider children's services and other council departments within the community such as for social care or housing support.

How will language barriers be addressed in the consultation?

Language barriers will be considered as part of the consultation. The consultation document has been designed using plain English so questions can be translated across multiple languages. Staff will be available to assist parents / carers to complete the consultation document where needed and the online system will include the option to translate to multiple languages, we will also be working with our partners to support diverse communities taking part in the consultation.

What is the timeline for implementing changes after the proposal?

We aim for them to begin in June 2025, subject to receiving appropriate approvals. The changes will take a planned approach to ensure that we are engaging with parents / carers and partners through established forums and governance structures.

Will staff need to upskill or change roles under the new structure?

The outcome of the consultation will highlight the need for any changes to support the new delivery of services. Staff will be encouraged to continue with their professional development and training.

Is there a minimum response rate required for the consultation?

No. But a high level of interest is in the consultation is expected, and the council will endeavour to engage as many people in the process as possible.