

Cabinet Member for Communities, Leisure and Arts

7 September 2023

Response to Kent County Council's 'Kent Family Hub Services' Consultation

Timetable	
Meeting	Date
Communities, Leisure, and Arts Policy Advisory Committee	5 September 2023
Cabinet Member for Communities, Leisure, and Arts	7 September 2023

Will this be a Key Decision?	No
Urgency	N/A The deadline to submit a consultation response is 13 September 2023.
Final Decision-Maker	Cabinet Member for Communities, Leisure, and Arts
Lead Head of Service	Angela Woodhouse, Director of Strategy, Insight and Governance
Lead Officer and Report Author	Anna Collier, Insight Communities and Governance Manager Orla Sweeney, Senior Policy, and Communities Officer
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All

Executive Summary

Kent County Council (KCC) are consulting on proposals which will affect the way in which Community Services are delivered across districts in Kent.

The proposals state that the introduction of the Family hubs will mean changes to some of the existing services provided for families and young people.

There will be changes to the way in which services are accessed. These are currently provided by Children's Centres, Youth Hubs and Community Youth provision, Health Visiting Services and Community-based midwifery care.

The consultation also proposes stopping provision of some Youth Services across Kent. For Maidstone these are predominantly in Shepway and Park Wood.

Proposals have been reviewed and an assessment of impact and risks to residents has been undertaken. This report presents a draft response from the Council to the consultation.

In summary it has been determined that the impact on Maidstone has not been properly evaluated and the proposals risk deepening existing inequalities in Maidstone and denying Maidstone residents access they need to vital community support services.

The main areas that the consultation response seeks to respond to and highlight are:

- The detrimental impact of the closure of youth support services in Shepway and Parkwood on families in an area of high need and the wider impact on the community, other public sector services and the voluntary and community sector.
- Concerns regarding Digital exclusion and the support needed in areas of high need to support the delivery of online services as part of the Family Hub model.
- Insufficient detail on the Family Hub model in terms of possible locations for services which hinders the ability of services users and organisation to make a meaningful response.
- Insufficient evidence on district level data in terms of need to be able to inform a robust Equalities Impact Assessment.

Purpose of Report

To consider the Council's draft response to Kent County Council's Kent Family Hub Services Consultation and recommend to the Cabinet Member for Communities, Leisure and Arts its formal submission by the deadline of 13 September 2023.

This report makes the following recommendation to the Cabinet Member for Communities, Leisure and Arts:

1. That the Council's draft response to Kent County Council's Kent Family Hub Services Consultation at Appendix A, be approved.

Response to Kent County Council's 'Kent Family Hub Services Consultation'

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	We do not expect the recommendations will by themselves materially affect achievement of corporate priorities. However, submitting a response to influence the provision of KCC services in Maidstone will support the Council's overall achievement of its aims in the delivery its strategic plan objectives.	Insight, Communities and Governance Manager
Cross Cutting Objectives	We do not expect the recommendations will by themselves materially affect achievement of corporate priorities. However, submitting a response to influence the provision of KCC services in Maidstone will support the Council's overall achievement of its aims in the delivery its strategic plan objectives.	Insight, Communities and Governance Manager
Risk Management	Please refer to paragraph 5.1 of the report.	Insight, Communities and Governance Manager
Financial	There is no direct budgetary impact from the Kent County Council proposals described in this report. However, by reducing support for vulnerable families, they are likely to increase budgetary pressure on District Council services including homelessness.	Head of Finance
Staffing	We will deliver the recommendations with our current staffing.	Insight, Communities and Governance Manager
Legal	A failure to respond to the consultation which impacts on Maidstone residents could create reputational issues for the Council and could potentially limit any further steps the Council might wish to take.	Mid Kent Legal Services Interim Team Leader (Contentious and Corporate Governance)

Information Governance	The recommendations do not impact personal information (as defined in UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018) the Council processes.	Information Governance Officer
Equalities	Whilst the decision isn't the Council's responding to this consultation would be acting in accordance with the Council's Equalities Objectives, in ensuring that the needs of our communities are considered.	Insight, Communities and Governance Manager
Public Health	By submitting a response to influence the provision of KCC services in Maidstone we will have an opportunity to positively impact population health or that of individuals.	Housing & Inclusion Team Leader
Crime and Disorder	KCC proposals risk having a negative impact on crime and disorder namely the removal of youth services, submitting a response to influence the provision of KCC services in Maidstone will support improved crime and disorder in Maidstone.	Insight, Communities and Governance Manager
Procurement	No impact identified	Director of Strategy, Insight and Governance
Biodiversity and Climate Change	There are no implications on biodiversity and climate change.	Biodiversity and Climate Change Officer

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

2.1 Earlier this year Kent County Council (KCC) ran the Community Services consultation www.kent.gov.uk/communityservicesconsultation. Proposals included a reduction in the number of buildings currently being used to deliver services for children, young people, and families. This could mean that some services will be delivered in alternative ways, including outreach or digital solutions. A decision was due to be made in July.

2.2 KCC state that early feedback has told them that there are concerns about:

- Accessibility: How easily can children, families, or young people get to a building?
- Belonging: How can children, young people and families feel they have their own space and identities in co-located buildings?
- Resources: How can access and storage of specialised resources be managed, and how might this affect what can be offered and from where?

- Special Educational Needs and Disability: How can factors such as location or group size be managed to ensure services are welcoming to all?

2.3 Feedback also included concerns around accessing services and the realities of 'outreach' provision. This consultation is on the Family Hub service offer. KCC are encouraging respondents to consider "the Council's proposals for buildings, in light of the information in this consultation about "what" we are proposing the Family Hub service offer will be." KCC will then review responses from the Family Hubs consultation before decisions are made to close buildings.

2.4 A decision on what services will be provided where is now planned to take place in winter 2023. A diagram of how both consultations work together from the KCC consultation document is shown below.

The diagram below explains how the two consultations will work together.

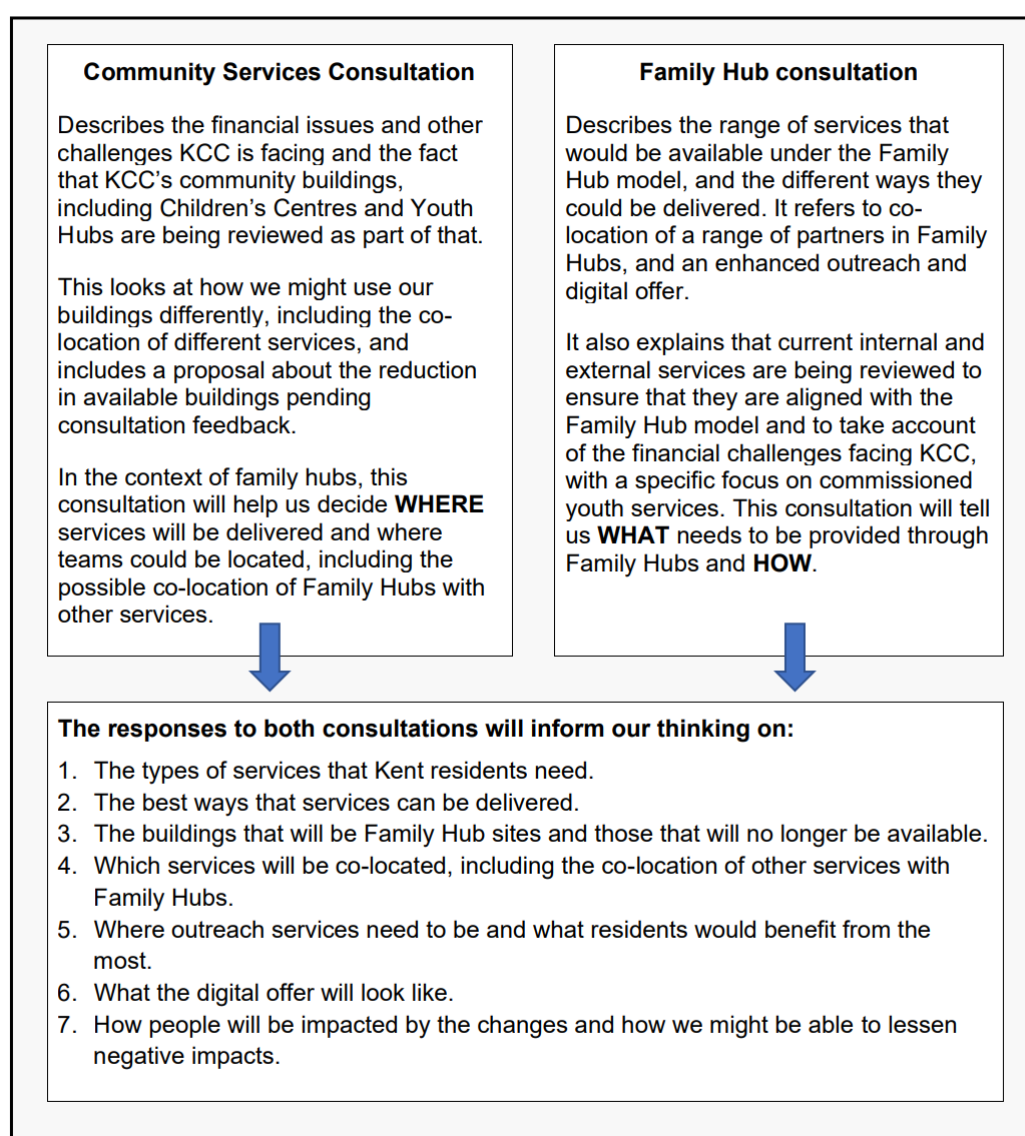


Diagram 2: How the Kent Community Services Consultation and Family Hub Consultation work together

- 2.5 The Kent Family Hub Services Consultation was launched on the 19 July by KCC. It asks service users and organisations to consider possible delivery models for Family Hub Services. It also proposes a reduction in youth services across all districts.
- 2.6 Family Hubs are a national programme and propose bringing together a range of different services to provide the support needed to families and young people.
- 2.7 The Government has set out which services as a minimum must be delivered through Family Hubs. These are:
- parent-infant relationships and mental health support for new parents
 - infant feeding support
 - parenting support
 - support with early language development and the home learning environment
 - support for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)
 - safeguarding
- 2.8 Additionally, KCC have included in this consultation, proposals to stop funding youth provision run by non-KCC organisations due to financial pressures. The affected activities in Maidstone are shown below.

Maidstone district - activity provider: Salus

- Sutton Valence - Village Hall - Junior youth club (Mon)
 - Shepway – Youth and Community Centre - Junior club and Senior Youth club (Tues) Junior club and Senior club - (Fri) Olympia Boxing (Fri) one to one and small group work sessions
 - Parkwood - Youth Centre - Junior club and Senior club (Thurs)
 - Signs of Safety - District wide annual activity to focus on transition from Primary to Secondary education
- 2.9 To reduce the impact on vulnerable young people, KCC are proposing that any future commissioning would be aligned to education services that support children with SEND, reducing the overall saving being made.
- 2.10 KCC have also stated they will continue with youth provision run by KCC, which would remain a mix of activity at KCC centres and outreach locations. They also intend to develop community-based youth work by supporting existing or new local volunteer-led groups. They will develop services specifically for families of young people, targeting where there is greatest need. However, no further information is provided on what this may look like.

Consultation document

- 2.11 The Consultation asks for comment on the following areas of the proposals.
- Co-location of services
 - Outreach

- The Family Hub model
- Accessing Service online

2.12 The consultation documents do not provide details on how the proposals will be developed, nor provide a timeline. Little context has been provided on what the direct impact would be for Maidstone (or other districts), such as location of family hubs and services available as stated above this decision KCC state is planned for Winter 2023.

2.13 The draft consultation response at Appendix A states that the Council cannot adequately respond to the proposals, that will have such a significant impact on residents in Maidstone, as significant information is missing.

2.14 An assessment of the consultation process has also been included (in the draft response) as the engagement events being held for Maidstone are both at Sessions House which isn't in line with the offer for other districts.

Recommendation - The Council's Response

2.15 The impact of the proposals on Maidstone has not been properly evaluated and a response should be made to ensure that Maidstone residents have the access they need to vital community support services. 2.16 The main areas that the consultation response seeks to respond to and highlight are:

- The detrimental impact of the closure of youth support services in Shepway and Parkwood on families in an area of high need and the wider impact on the community, other public sector services and the voluntary and community sector.
- Concerns regarding Digital exclusion and the support needed in areas of high need to support the delivery of online services as part of the Family Hub model.
- Insufficient detail on the Family Hub model in terms of possible locations for services which hinders the ability of services users and organisation to make a meaningful response.
- Insufficient evidence on district level data in terms of need to be able to inform a robust Equalities Impact Assessment
- The risks of lack of services due to reliance on volunteering and the knock-on impact this may have to the VCS.

2.17 Without further information the current proposals risks deepening existing inequalities in Maidstone and denying Maidstone residents access they need to vital community support services.

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

3.1 That the consultation be responded to and that the draft response at Appendix A is submitted by the consultation deadline of 13 September 2023.

3.2 That no response is submitted to the consultation.

- 3.3 To make an alternative recommendation which may include the addition of further points to include in the consultation response.
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4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 The preferred option is outlined at 3.1 of this report, to respond to the consultation and highlight the significant and detrimental impact of the proposal on Maidstone residents and vulnerable groups in Maidstone. This is recommended based upon the findings of the assessment of the proposals and the insights provided by Census and Health Inequality data.
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5. RISK

- 5.1 The Council has an opportunity to respond to Kent County Council's Community Services Consultation. The proposals will have a significant, detrimental impact on Maidstone residents and are likely to affect vulnerable groups in Maidstone's most deprived wards. Not taking this opportunity to respond to this could increase access to services provided by the Council or cause reputational damage.
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6. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

- 6.1 Link to the previous consultation response is provided in the background documents.
- 6.2 The response was considered by the Communities, Leisure and Arts Policy Advisory Committee on 5 September 2023, with the Committee in support of the proposed response at Appendix A to the report.
- 6.3 Additional comments made by the Communities, Leisure and Arts Policy Advisory Committee have been incorporated into the response. Councillors articulated that residents felt unheard and forgotten as a result of the consultation proposals. The response has been amended to include the sentiments expressed by local residents.
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7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 7.1 The approved response will be submitted to KCC via email, as the deadline for consultation is 13 September 2023. At the meeting, the Committee will be informed of the proposed decision date and the process to be followed to meet the consultation deadline.
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8. REPORT APPENDICES

- Appendix A: Draft Response to Consultation

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Response to Kent County Council's Community Services Consultation

https://maidstone.gov.uk/home/primary-services/council-and-democracy/primary-areas/your-councillors?sq_content_src=%2BdXJsPWh0dHBzJTNBJTJGJTJGbWVldGluZ3MubWFpZHN0b25lLmdvdj51ayUyRmRvY3VtZW50cyUyRnM4NjgyMyUyRktDOyUyMENvbW11bml0eSUyMFNlcjZpY2VzJTlwQ29uc3VsdGF0aW9uJTlwcmVzcG9uc2UucGRmJmFsbD0x

KCC Consultation and background documents

<https://letstalk.kent.gov.uk/family-hubs-and-start-for-life-offer>