

23 January 2023

Sebright Children's Centre

Dear Parents and Carers,

We are writing to make you aware that on **31 January** the Council will begin a 12 week consultation period on proposed changes to the way the children's centres funded by the Council deliver early education and childcare in the future.

This includes proposed changes to **Sebright Children's Centre**:

- We propose to invite alternative providers to take over the management of Sebright Children's Centre. If a suitable alternative provider cannot be sourced by Autumn 2024, we propose to close Sebright Children's Centre by August 2025.

The proposed changes aim to improve the sustainability of the centres, allowing the early years service to be more efficient and financially viable, while continuing to fulfil the Council's statutory duty to meet the needs of young children and parents living in the area, particularly those in greatest need of support.

The proposals follow the findings of an independent review of the nursery provision delivered by the 11 children's centres currently funded by the Council, which was conducted by Ernst and Young (EY) in 2023.

The intention of the review was to:

- identify solutions to achieve sustainability, taking into account the £1.07m budget deficit from a reduction in nursery fees in the last few years, and increased operational cost,
- identify opportunities to meet the £4m savings required factored into the Council's mid-term financial plans; and
- provide an opportunity to examine the potential impact of the national early years reform to expand the 15 and 30 hours free early years entitlement to working parents.

The independent review found that the current model of provision is not financially sustainable based on the current fees and spend. Even if the centres were at 100% occupancy, and fully occupied by families on the highest fee band (Band 5, families with an income of at least £100k), they would still not be financially self-sustaining.

The other children's centres included in the proposals are:

- **Hillside Children's Centre:**
 - We propose to change Hillside Children's Centre into an early years Additional Resource Provision (ARP), a specialist nursery delivering term-time early

education and care for children aged 2 to 5 years with special educational needs or a disability (SEND).

- **Oldhill Children's Centre:**
 - We propose to change Oldhill Children's Centre to provide nursery places for children 6 months to 3 years old, phasing out places for 4 year olds.
- **Fernbank Children's Centre:**
 - We propose to invite alternative providers to take over the management of Fernbank Children's Centre. If a suitable alternative provider cannot be sourced by Autumn 2024, we propose to close Fernbank Children's Centre by August 2025.

We know that any proposals to change the current provision of childcare in the borough would impact staff, children and families, and we are committed to supporting all those affected through the process as much as possible. However, with rising costs, reduced occupancy rates and current spending far above other local authorities in London, if we do not make changes, the current deficit of £1.07m across the children's centres is likely to continue to increase, which could lead to more far reaching proposals later. The measures included in the proposed consultation are intended to reset the way early education and childcare is delivered in order to achieve greater efficiency, and maximise opportunities to increase occupancy to maintain viability.

The consultation will be open between **31 January and 24 April 2024**. Those interested will be able to find out more, obtain background information and share their views by visiting [the Council's consultation page](#) when it opens on 31 January. Printed surveys and consultation proposals will also be available at children's centres.

Kind regards,

Paul Senior, Interim Director of Education and Inclusion
Donna Thomas, Assistant Director, Early Years, Early Help & Well-being
