

Changes to Children's Centre services in Bexley

Consultation document 2021



www.bexley.gov.uk/consultations

Foreword

In July 2020, as part of a wider savings consultation, we asked for your views on changes to our Children's Centres. We received responses from over 3,700 residents, which provided a wealth of feedback for consideration into the future development of our Children Centre's.

Given the financial challenges the Council is facing difficult decisions are having to be made on how we can best spend the money we have.

Our current spend on Children's Centres is £691,000 and most of that is spent on commissioned services and the administration and running of our buildings. Our new proposed model of delivery will reduce our spend on buildings, administration and commissioned providers and enable us to re-invest some of the money we previously spent on this to focus our limited resources on providing services most needed and supporting our families in highest need. We think this is a better use of our money and will provide a better service, that will be flexible and adaptable to meet residents changing needs in the future. We anticipate the change will save £377,500.

Further information on the Council budget, spending and the Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy is available on our website.

In addition to the feedback you gave us we undertook and considered:

- ▶ Detailed analysis of the needs of families with under-fives in the Borough
- ▶ A survey of all our Children's Centre Buildings
- ▶ Discussions with partners and current providers of children's centre services
- ▶ A mapping exercise of all services for under 5's available across the Borough currently being provided by the private, voluntary sector and some faith groups
- ▶ Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)
- ▶ The likely ongoing impact of the coronavirus pandemic on local families

We then developed options, making sure we prioritised the following:

1. Ensuring the Families who need help receive the right support when they need it
2. Ensuring that the Council delivers its statutory duties
3. Ensuring we continue to provide families with the services they need while making the best use of Council money

Having considered all the feedback presented in the previous consultation and taking into consideration the relevant data about our communities, families and children, as well as the financial pressures on the council we are starting a second stage of consultation with you on a proposed new model.

Our preferred option is to deliver our Children's Centres services through a small dedicated in-house team. This will enable us to expand the current offer of services from a greater number of venues across the borough and to provide outreach and targeted support to families in greatest need near to where they live.

We want to make sure families receive the right support at the right time whilst also making best use of limited public money.

This proposed new model that we are now consulting on will provide families with a wider choice of services across the Borough. These services will be delivered from a variety of local venues including our main Children's Centre buildings, community centres, leisure centres and libraries. We will continue to work with our partners so that we ensure that families and children in Bexley have access to the best possible services.

We think this means we can:

- ✓ Provide a wider geographical spread of services across the Borough ensuring better access for families in greater need
- ✓ Expand our collaboration with established, accessible and valued local community venues such as libraries, community centres, leisure centres to provide local activities.
- ✓ Increase and strengthen our partnership work with the NHS particularly our Health Visitors and Midwives, focusing on reducing health inequalities, and continue to meet the duties the council have for delivering children's centre services.
- ✓ Work alongside the Family Wellbeing Service who provide early help to support families with timely co-ordinated support intervening early to prevent their problems from escalating in the future.
- ✓ Potentially increase our income by renting out space in existing Children's Centre buildings to local childcare providers.
- ✓ Adapt more quickly to any future change in need across the Borough by providing an in-house service with skilled Children's Centre Practitioners.

Please help us by letting us have your feedback and comments by midnight on 11th July 2021.

You can also pick up a copy of the questionnaire from:

- ▶ Danson Children's Centre - DA7 4EZ
- ▶ The Civic Offices - DA6 7AT
- ▶ Normandy Children's Centre - DA7 6QP
- ▶ West Street Children's Centre - DA8 1LW

We look forward to hearing from you as it is important to us that we hear your views so we can be sure that the proposed Children's Centre offer will meet the needs of our communities both now and into the future.

Stephen Kitchman

Director of Children's Services

What we are proposing

Introduction

Children's Centres aim to improve outcomes for young children, ensuring they are happy, healthy and ready to begin school. Centres also provide help and support to families around parenting, health and well-being and employability. They offer support to children and young families whenever they need it, as well as helping to prevent problems from developing in the future. The services they provide are designed especially for parents and carers who may be expecting a new baby or have a child under the age of 5.

There are currently 9 Children's Centres in Bexley (see page 12 and 13) offering a range of services including:

- ▶ Pre-school education and access to early education and childcare (on some sites)
- ▶ Access to health services including health visiting and midwifery care
- ▶ Adult learning opportunities to help parents/carers progress into training or employment
- ▶ Access to play opportunities that are available to everyone such as Stay and Play
- ▶ Access to services delivered by private providers that are available to everyone with small fees attached

Why do we need to change things?

1. We consulted with you in July 2020 on the potential Children's Centre savings that needed to be achieved as part of the Councils' Medium-Term Financial strategy. Feedback was received from over 3,700 respondents which was used to help us devise the new proposed model for our Children's Centres.

You asked us to consider:

- ▶ Children's Centres were needed and valued
- ▶ The location of a single children's centre hosted in the centre of the Borough would be insufficient to meet the needs of the whole Borough
- ▶ Families need easier access to services closer to home
- ▶ You valued having a range of health and well-being activities delivered from Children's Centres
- ▶ You wanted to ensure the needs of more disadvantaged families were met.

In the recent library consultation, you told us that you valued story time activities with your under 5's.

We looked at how we currently provide services and found that we were heavily reliant upon commissioned services, that means services that the Council 'buys in'. These activities were predominately universal meaning they were available to everyone regardless of their need and that the same families were attending each week, which means we were not reaching those families most in need.

2. The running cost of our buildings is expensive and services can be delivered anywhere. By exploring the possibilities of changing and maximising the way we use our Children Centre buildings, we found there were opportunities to offer some of our space to existing childcare providers and partners to expand their offer, this would create more childcare places and offer parents more choice it would also complement the new proposed model. The income generated from this would allow us to deliver more targeted services from a wider range of locations. This could include libraries, community centres, leisure centres and other sites, providing local services within the communities where the need is greatest. It will also allow us to change and flex the services provided more easily in response to changing needs.
3. Our communities have changed over the past few years and continue to do so. This means that some of our centres are not now in the right place for the families that need them. There are also new homes being built across the Borough which means more families with young children will need access to children's centre services now and in the future. While most of the new build homes are expected in the north and central localities of the Borough where need is greatest, we do understand that there are also families in need in the south of the Borough.
4. The recent Covid-19 pandemic means that it is increasingly likely that more families will require targeted support around health, well-being and employability as a result of the health, education and economic impact of the pandemic.
5. Our needs analysis shows us that we are already successfully supporting 94% of our 3 & 4 year olds to take up their nursery places. This means we are confident those children have access to good quality provision and that they are school ready. It also means there are support mechanisms in place to identify families with emerging needs and pathways to access support for them. Taking this into account the analysis shows us that we need to provide more groups to support expectant mothers and families with babies up to the age of 2 years old whilst continuing to support those children aged 3-5 years old who are not taking up a childcare place to help support them to get ready for school and make sure that they are not left behind.
6. We considered various options prior to arriving at the preferred proposal that we are consulting on. The other options were ruled out for the following reasons:

Option 1 - No change - Continue with 9 Children's Centres delivering predominantly universal services

- ▶ The Borough's changing demographics has meant that the current model is not reaching our most vulnerable families.
- ▶ The Needs analysis indicated that only 74% of all under 5's in Bexley are registered with a Children's Centre and of that only 43% accessed a children's centre service on more than one occasion. The data also indicated that the same families were accessing centres numerous times and that families who were in areas of greatest need were not accessing services at all and in some cases are not even known to a Children's Centre.
- ▶ This model did not deliver any financial savings.

This is not a viable option

Option 2 – One Children's Centre Hub serving the whole of the Borough

- ▶ This option formed part of the savings consultation in October and you told us it would be insufficient to meet the needs of the whole Borough geography and you wanted to make sure that the service met the needs of more disadvantaged families.
- ▶ Whilst this model would deliver financial savings, it did not provide sufficient access to services across the borough, nor did it ensure that families in greatest need would receive support when they needed it.
- ▶ Achieved the identified savings but did not provide the services that the consultation told us you wanted us to deliver.

This is not a viable option

We are therefore consulting on a preferred model of delivery and the proposal outlined below takes account of the data available about the current use of Children's Centres and the needs of our community. The needs analysis that has informed the proposed model can be viewed online at www.bexley.gov.uk/consultations if you need a paper copy of the analysis please contact email childrenscentreconsultation@bexley.gov.uk or pick one up from your local library, Bexley Town Hall or food bank.

It should be noted that in addition to the changes to the service outlined in this consultation, savings and efficiencies will be achieved through a restructure of the Children's Centre Management and support teams and ongoing scrutiny and management of all expenditure to ensure value for money is being achieved now and into the future.

These back-office changes are not considered within this public consultation document as all staff will be consulted separately on any proposed revised staffing structure.

Proposed changes to the way we deliver services:

We are proposing that we have a dedicated in-house Children's Centre team with 6 Children's Centre Practitioners who will provide targeted outreach support to children and their families and facilitate sessions in the Children Centres and other venues across the Borough. This in-house provision will be in addition to the existing services already provided by Health Visitors and Midwives. The Children's Centre team will sit beside our Family Wellbeing Service and will be qualified to support children and families ensuring they get the right support at the right time.

We are proposing to deliver more services from Children's Centre buildings as well as from a variety of venues across the Borough, including, libraries, leisure centres and community buildings. This means that families will have more choice and be able to access services nearer to their homes. This is an increase in the number of venues offering Children's Centre services across the borough from 20 to 29, and possibly more in the future.

Table 1 – summary of existing services and additional services we are proposing to offer from the remaining children's centres and additional venues across the borough

Services currently offered	Changes	New services
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health Visiting Services • Midwifery appointments • Domestic Abuse support groups • Breastfeeding support groups 	All of these will continue	
Commissioned Stay & Play sessions, baby massage groups etc.	These will no longer be commissioned but we will signpost to the vast number of sessions already being delivered across the borough by private, voluntary and faith groups	
Parenting Groups	We will offer more parenting groups across the borough	More parenting groups
Access to Employment	We will work with the college to provide even more services to support parents/carers back into the work place	<p>More opportunities to access courses to gain employment e.g. Childcare courses</p> <p>Family Learning courses to help you support your child to get ready for school</p> <p>More ESOL classes</p>
Other		<p>Ages and Stages developmental sessions to prepare children for nursery and ensure smoother transitions e.g. Messy Play, age appropriate developmental play sessions</p> <p>Physical sessions such as Buggy Walks,</p> <p>Planned targeted support in the home delivered by experienced practitioners</p> <p>Sessions to promote your child's communication skills in partnership with the Speech & Language Team (SALT) including Sign and Rhyme</p>

In addition to the services already provided by Health Visitors and Midwives and those we deliver to ensure children are school ready, we will have a greater focus on providing groups to support expectant parents and children up to the age of 2. The following new services are examples of what we may offer subject to need:

- ▶ Ages and Stages Developmental Sessions
- ▶ Non-Walker groups
- ▶ Baby sign and Rhyme Sessions
- ▶ Messy play
- ▶ Groups to support mothers with low mood
- ▶ Buggy Walks

Universal play opportunities and parent and toddler groups are already available from a variety of venues across the Borough delivered by a mixture of faith groups, private and voluntary sector groups and some charities. We will help promote those sessions and signpost families to their nearest sessions via our website including charges where applicable.

We will continue to support children of pre-school age who are not accessing any childcare provision ensuring that they reach their developmental stages and have access to good quality play opportunities ensuring they are ready for school and do not fall behind their peers. We will do this by working with our partners in health (health visitors, GP's) and families who come to the attention of our Family Wellbeing and Social Care services. Experienced staff will be able to identify any emerging needs and support families to get any help they need by following the relevant referral pathways.

We will further develop support offered to parents/carers to access adult learning opportunities including, Family Learning, Employability courses and English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes.

Where there are families needing additional help, we will work with them to provide a package of support in their homes and through Children Centre activities across the Borough to stop problems escalating and improve their health and well-being where needed.

Table 2 - Summary of proposal for delivery of Children's Centre services

What there will be more of?	More local venues across the Borough Targeted and one to one work with parents Focus on families with greatest need Variety of services to families	Childcare provision created More connection with Family Wellbeing Service Greater Partnership working
What will change?	We will redirect some of our funding from commissioned services to invest in funding a designated in-house Children's Centre team 4 buildings will be converted to offer child-care There may be a small charge for some of the universal activities	
What will stay the same?	Health Visiting and Midwifery services Targeted services provided for free, but these will be based on need 5 buildings operating as Children's Centres across the Borough	

Changes to Children's Centre Buildings

Having fully reviewed the use and suitability of our existing Children's Centre buildings and the fact that services can be delivered from any venue, the proposed model makes the recommendations in support of the future model. The following table shows each current Children Centre's status and the recommended changes to the status and services provided there.

The last column gives the examples of what we will continue to deliver in the Centres and other venues, where we are changing the status of a Children Centre, where those services will be moved to locally.

Table 3 - Proposed changes to Children's Centre buildings and services delivered from them. We have colour coded them to match the content of Maps below by locality.

Children's Centre	Current Status	Proposed Status	Examples of Children's Centre Services to be delivered
West Street (North)	Children's Centre	Children's Centre Core Children's Centre Team to be based here	Continue to deliver children's centre services for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Midwifery appointments • Outreach services • Health Visiting clinics • Targeted support groups • Information and Guidance Potential income generation by sessional renting of rooms
Green mead (North)	Children's Centre	Early Years Provision	This site would continue to offer early years and childcare provision Children's centre provision will be delivered from other venues in the community which could include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Church of the Cross • Emmanuel Church • Thamesmead Library • A variety of universal services for under 5's across the Borough delivered by private, voluntary sector and faith groups (fees may apply)
North End (North)	Children's Centre	Early Years Provision	Create additional places for free funded childcare - offering early years and childcare provision Children's centre provision will be delivered from other venues in the community which could include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Erith Leisure Centre • Slade Green and Northumberland Heath Libraries • A variety of universal services for under 5's across the Borough delivered by private, voluntary sector and faith groups (fees may apply)

Children's Centre	Current Status	Proposed Status	Examples of Children's Centre Services to be delivered
St Augustine's (North)	Children's Centre	Early Years Provision	<p>Potentially create additional places for free funded childcare or school utilise to create additional space for school age children</p> <p>Children's centre provision will be delivered from other venues in the community which could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belvedere Community Centre • Upper Belvedere Community Library • A variety of universal services for under 5's across the Borough delivered by private, voluntary sector and faith groups (fees may apply)
Northumberland Heath (Central)	Children's Centre	Children's Centre	<p>Continue to deliver children's centre services for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Midwifery appointments • Outreach services • Health Visiting clinics • Targeted support groups • Information and Guidance <p>Potential income generation by sessional renting of rooms</p>
Normandy (Central)	Normandy Children's Centre & Special Education Needs & Disability (SEND) Hub	Children's Centre & Special Education Needs & Disability (SEND) Hub for the whole Borough	<p>This would remain as a Children's Centre and Special Education Needs & Disability (SEND) Hub for the whole Borough ensuring the needs of children with disabilities and complex needs are met and supported.</p>
Hills Grove (Central)	Children's Centre	Early Years Provision	<p>This site would continue to offer early years and childcare provision</p> <p>Children's centre provision will be delivered from other venues in the community which could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crook Log Leisure Centre • Welling Library • A variety of universal services for under 5's across the Borough delivered by private, voluntary sector and faith groups (fees may apply)

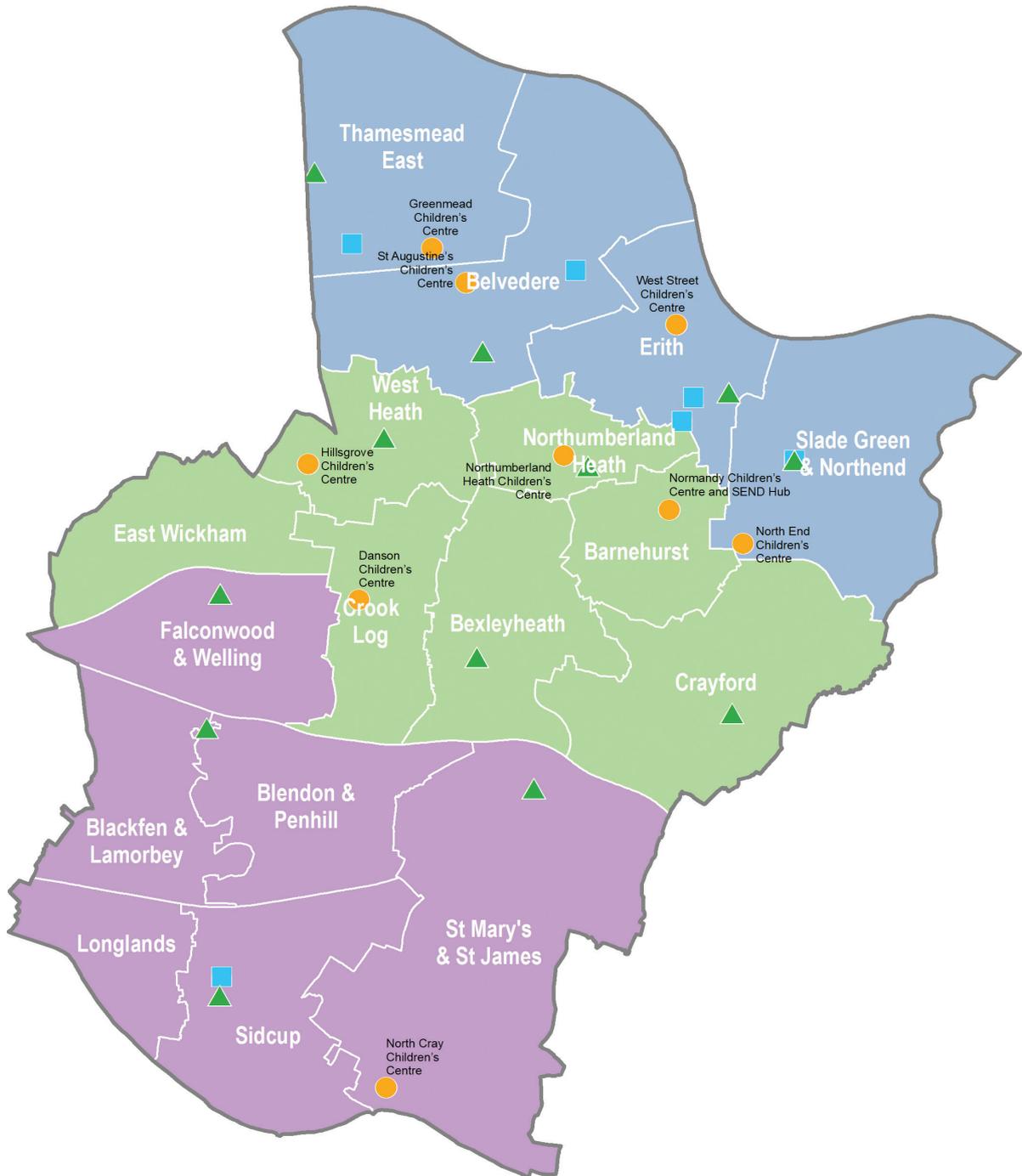
Children's Centre	Current Status	Proposed Status	Examples of Children's Centre Services to be delivered
Danson (South)	Children's Centre	Children's Centre	<p>Continue to deliver children's centre services for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Midwifery appointments • Outreach services • Health Visiting clinics • Targeted support groups • Information and Guidance <p>Potential income generation by sessional renting of rooms</p>
North Cray (South)	Children's Centre	Satellite to Danson	<p>This would provide a small satellite venue in the South of the Borough where there is little access to alternative venues</p> <p>Children's Centre services to include</p> <p>Midwifery appointments</p> <p>Potential income generation by sessional renting of rooms</p>

Current map of Children's Centres and alternative site delivery

Total number of venues delivering children's centre activities: 20

Please note whilst all libraries are listed activities are not being delivered from all of them at any one time.

LBB Wards & Community Facilities (Current Model)



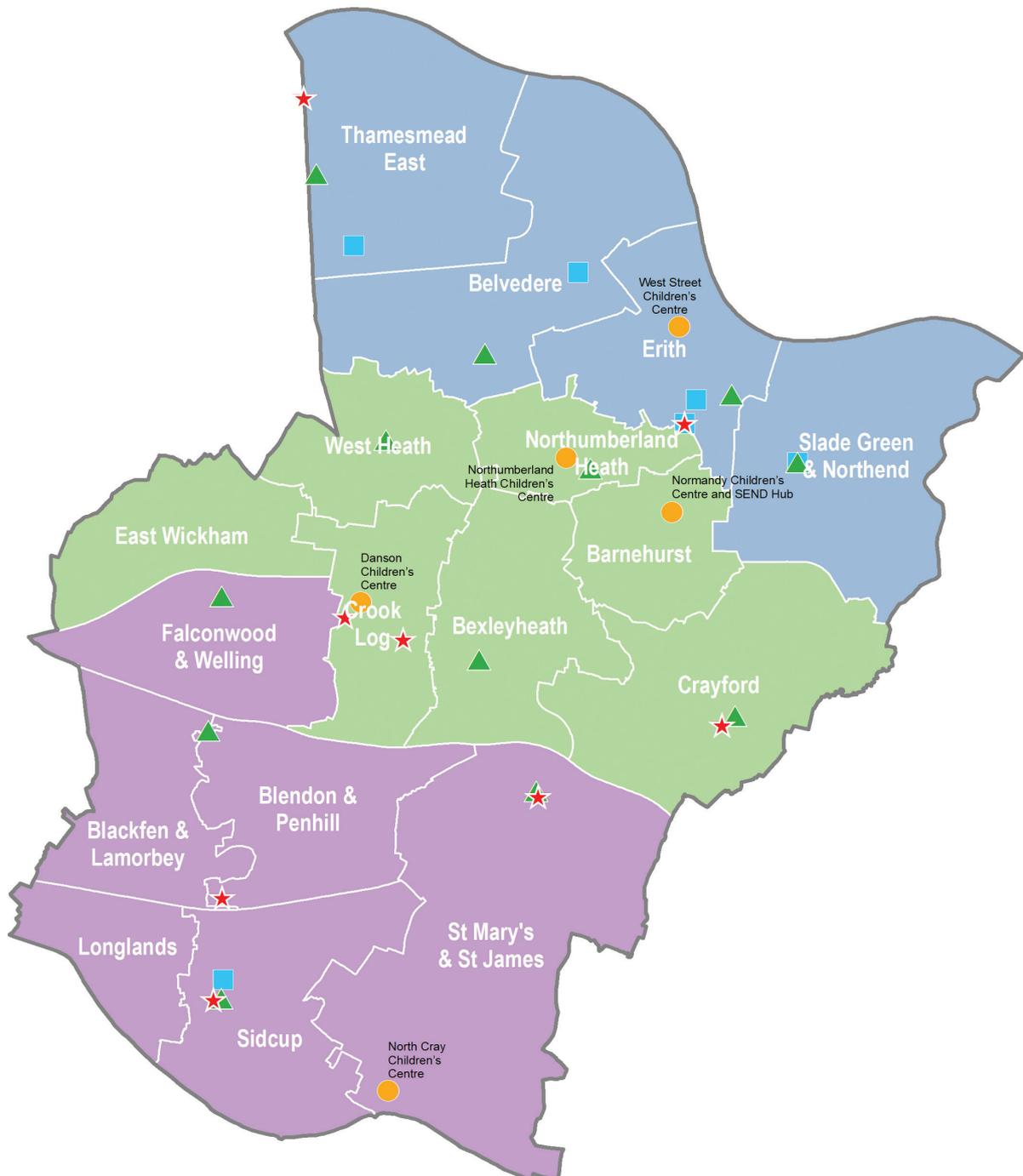
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Map of proposed new model of delivery with additional sites for delivery

Total number of venues with potential for delivering children’s centre activities: 29

Please note this list is not exhaustive there are potentially even more venues available to deliver from which we are currently exploring

LBB Wards & Community Facilities (Proposed Model)



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Other ideas

We would welcome suggestions for any additional ideas on how the Council can deliver our Children's Centre services differently, maximise value for money from services or generate additional income and better utilisation from our Children's Centre assets to reduce costs and focus spend on targeted activities that meet the needs of our families .

How to respond to this consultation

Please ensure you respond by 11th July 2021, you can respond by:

- ▶ Filling out the survey online at www.bexley.gov.uk/consultations
- ▶ Filling out a survey form – you can obtain this in a hard copy obtainable from libraries, civic centre or we can mail one out to you
- ▶ Email us at: Childrenscentreconsultation@bexley.gov.uk
- ▶ There will be a variety of opportunities to contribute to the consultation by Zoom or MS TEAMS and some appointments for telephone response for those who require additional support to complete the forms – these will be published and advertised on the Borough website

How will this consultation be used to inform decision making?

Your feedback will be used to help the Council make decisions on the future of Children's Centre provision in Bexley. Any decisions on the implementation of this model any alternatives arising from this consultation will be taken by the Council's Cabinet, fully taking into account the responses to this consultation.

Timescales

Please see below for indicative timescales

Consultation begins	10 May 2021
Consultation ends (survey closes)	11 July 2021
Consultation outcome reported to Public Cabinet meeting and decisions taken	July 2021 (awaiting publication of dates)
Implementation of changes to Children's Centre Service	November 2021

If you would like the information in this document in a different format, please call 020 8303 7777 and ask for Communications/Graphics. The reference to quote is: 607819