

Bexley Children's Centre reconfiguration 2021

Frequently asked questions

Q. Is it true that there will only be five children's centres in Bexley?

It is proposed that we would have five children's centres remaining in Bexley and that a Children's Centre Operational Lead will co-ordinate the provision and support of services at a range of additional community venues across the borough, we refer to this as 'outreach'

Q. What community venues will be used, and will these be as good as my local children's centre?

Children's centres already use some community venues such as libraries, village halls and other community spaces. Staff check that such venues are suitable and safe for the activity being provided and this would continue to be a task for Children's Centre Team. Families have indicated in recent consultations that they want to be able to easily access services and value the story time sessions run from our libraries.

Q. Will the new service offer the same range of activities and support currently available in children's centres?

The new service will provide access to the same activities already being delivered and that we know families value but may be delivered in a different way. We are proposing that the Children's Centres work alongside community groups and universal services, such as health visitors, midwives and childcare settings so that families can access the activities they want but from a range of providers, not just a children's centre.

This means we can provide new additional services to families who may need extra help beyond that offered in local community groups particularly for expectant mothers and families with children up to the age of 2. It also allows us to support those children who are not taking up a free childcare place to take part in activities that mean they are ready for school.

Q. How will the proposed service reach parents and families who need support?

Now families receiving targeted support do so as a result of a referral, with their consent, from their Health Visitor, Midwife, local school etc. This will still continue but we know in Bexley where children experience more disadvantage, and we would want the new service to focus on those areas in addition to the range of universal services that offer support to every family.

Q. Will I have to pay for activities that I currently access at my local children's centre?

Activities and group sessions provided by Children's Centres and targeted at families who need extra help will continue to be free. Some universal provision delivered by the private, voluntary sector and faith groups may charge fees as is currently the case for some of the universal play activities offered in our centres.

Q. Will I have to go online to get information and advice – what happens if I want to speak to a real person or have no internet access?

Whilst we want to ensure there is a better online and digital offer for families through joining up some of the existing ways to access information and advice, we recognise that families still want to speak to people. Children's Centre staff will be available to signpost and support access to services in person through a variety of outreach sessions and at our centres.

Q. Will I have to travel to one of the proposed 5 children's centres to access support and services?

No – the aim is to bring the services out to you and your family, making use of local spaces that you can easily access as well as supporting you at home where this is helpful or necessary. We are not suggesting families will have to travel to the main centre to get the support they need. Families living close to the centre would be able to access some of the support they need onsite, alongside the outreach support.

Q. What are universal services and what does that mean?

Universal services means services that are open to everyone. In children's centres this means all children have access to a range of 'universal' services depending on how old they are, their stage of development and their individual needs.

Universal services are provided by several different agencies, including health and education. So, Health Visitors, Midwives, Nurses GP's etc.

The children's centres offer a range of universal services such as stay and plays, parent and toddler groups etc these are all examples of services that everyone can attend.

Q. Will the change in status of 4 children's centres mean there will be less opportunities for families to attend services?

We are proposing to deliver services from other sites such as libraries, leisure centres, church halls etc and we believe this provides more opportunity for families to access services across the whole borough and that they may be nearer to their home. These services will be in addition to the variety of services offered to under 5's across the borough provided by the private, voluntary and community sector.

Q. Will the dedicated Children's Centre Team just signpost to services, what will difference will we see?

The proposed new team will be providing services in addition to the universal services currently offered across the borough by various partners and providers. We will work closely with them to support and promote their services.

The new team will operate across the whole borough from all of the venues available to them including Children's Centres, libraries, leisure centres etc. They will be able to provide 1:1 support for families who need a little extra help, in their home if they need it.

They will be the familiar face and will deliver some of the proposed new services aimed at expectant parents and children up to the age of 2 years old. We believe there will be more opportunities' and a variety of new activities for families to access.

Q. What exactly will the dedicated inhouse Children's Centre Team do, will they just be signposting to services?

The inhouse team will consist of a skilled group of Practitioners who will be able to deliver sessions in a variety of venues across the Borough including, Children's Centres, Libraries, leisure centres etc. They will also be that familiar face you see when you attend services and will be there to support you with practical parenting advice and guidance and if needed put in place with you a support plan to help you when you need them most.

Q. You are retaining only 5 Children's Centres and redesignating 4 of them, how will you deliver services from just 5 sites to everyone who wants to attend a service?

We are proposing that 5 Children's Centres will remain the same, Danson, North Cray, Northumberland Heath, West Street and Normandy.

Of the 4 sites we are proposing to re-designate 2 of them, North End and Hillsgrove never have delivered the full Children's Centre offer but provide early education and childcare for families in the Borough, they should not therefore be called a children's centre. The other 2, St Augustines and

North End we are in discussion with partners as to what services could be delivered from those sites to support the Children's Centre offer.

We are also proposing to deliver initially from a further 9 sites across the borough including Libraries, Church Halls and then expanding into Leisure Centres, this will give greater access to families and will hopefully put some services nearer to their homes which was requested in the previous consultation. Whilst our focus will be on 0-2's as most of our 3- & 4-year-olds are in nursery provision there will be some activities for those children who are not taking up their place.

There are also lots of activities across the Borough delivered by private, voluntary sector partners, faith groups and community groups giving a much greater choice of services for families to attend with their children.

Q. Will lots of activities be lost in the south of the Borough as a result of the proposed new model?

We believe the proposed new model will variety of activities for children and families to access across the whole Borough. With a decrease in funding, it is true that we will no longer commission universal play activities but will sign post families to these sessions that are already being delivered by private, voluntary sector groups, faith groups and community groups. The universal offer provided by our Health Visitors and Midwives will remain the same – no change. As we will be focussing on the first 1001 days of life there will actually be more services available to support antenatally to 2-year-olds, with more appropriate mother and baby sessions, age appropriate.

Q. Will sign posting be effective with such limited services and with so many babies born in Bexley?

Sign posting will be effective as it will ensure families are aware of the vast array of services delivered across the Borough not just by the Council.

Not all families choose to take up sessions at the same time for example some families only want to attend health visiting and midwifery appointments and there will be no change to those services in the new model.

Q. Will Danson Youth & Community Trust activities be affected by the proposed changes?

We would anticipate no change to the variety of activities provided by The Danson Youth and Community Trust. They will still be offering activities for the over fives and can continue to provide under five universal activities as do other private and voluntary sector groups across the Borough to which we can signpost families. The Local Authority will continue to deliver children's centre services from Danson Children Centre which is a separate building and will continue to provide the statutory activities and services through the in-house team. This will include Health Visiting; Midwifery; targeted activities for 0-5's with a focus on pre-birth – 2 yrs.

