NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Consultation on the provision and delivery of Universal Children’s Services and de-designation of Children Centres in Northamptonshire

Appendix 4 - Consultation Analysis Report

March to June 2018

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Contents

1. Introduction ................................................................................................................................ 3
2. Background ...................................................................................................................................... 3
3. Consultation Methodology ........................................................................................................... 5
4. Summary of Feedback .................................................................................................................. 7
   4a. Questionnaire Feedback ........................................................................................................ 7
   4b. Drop-in Library Events Feedback ......................................................................................... 24
   4c. Letters and emails ................................................................................................................ 26
5. Conclusion ..................................................................................................................................... 27
1. Introduction

The changes to the Library and Information Service as a result of the decision taken in February 2018 to decommission 21 libraries gave the Council an opportunity to consult on Children Centre provision and the delivery of Universal Children’s Services.

The council sought the views of stakeholders, including existing and future service users, to consider how best to provide universal children’s services that are accessible to families with children under five and that are based on need. This included seeking views on existing services in libraries that are not proposed to be closed following the Library Services Review to consider whether these universal children’s centre services should be redistributed to other areas of the County.

The feedback from the consultation, along with any other relevant information, will be used to develop the future model of universal children’s services in Northamptonshire.

This report is an analysis of the information and data gathered during the consultation held between March and June 2018.

2. Background

The Local Authority has a statutory duty to deliver Children’s Centre services. This dates from the 2006 Childcare Act and subsequent guidance of 2013. The legislation requires the Local Authority to:

- Improve the well-being of young children in their area and reduce inequalities between them
- Make sure that early childhood services are provided in an integrated manner
- Ensure that partners work together to commission early childhood services
- Make arrangements for sufficient Children’s Centres, so far as reasonably practical to meet local need
- Ensure there is consultation before any significant changes are made to Children’s Centre provision in the area, and
- Consider whether early childhood services should be provided through Children’s Centres in the area

The definition of a Children's Centre in the Childcare Act 2006, as amended by the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009, is a place, or a group of places:
Consultation on the provision and delivery of Universal Children’s Services and de-designation of Children Centres in Northamptonshire Consultation Analysis Report

Consultation & Engagement Team v0.2

a) Which is managed by or on behalf of, or under arrangements made with, an English local authority, with a view to securing that early childhood services in their area are made available in an integrated manner

b) Through which each of the early childhood services is made available, and
c) At which activities for young children are provided, whether by way of early years provision or otherwise

In Northamptonshire, Children’s Centre Services deliver activity at levels 2 and 3 and support Level 4 activity. This began in August/September 2014 followed a tendering exercise earlier that year. An award relating to this tender was not made in Corby and pre-existing arrangements were extended and maintained.

In August/September 2014 Northamptonshire Libraries and Information Service assumed lead responsibility for Level 1 (Universal) activity previously delivered by agencies responsible for Children’s Centres.

Provision of the Universal Children’s Service supports services the Council already commissions for parents and young children, including:

- The provision of 0-19 service delivered by health visitors and school nurses
- Provision of the free entitlement to Early Years settings for delivery of childcare and education for 2, 3 and 4 year olds
- Provision of targeted children centre services in areas of higher need

Children’s Centre Services are for children under five and their families. They are made up of a Universal element which is open to all and easily accessible, and a targeted element for families requiring some support to enjoy the experience of helping their children to grow and develop to reach their best potential.

The Universal Children’s Services offer currently delivered in libraries is as follows:

- Information and Advice Service - Supplying information about a range of services, including childcare and employment support. Supporting families to access appropriate Children’s Centre and other early help services
- Registration Service - Linking registration for Children’s Centre services with general participation events at the library, with library membership
- Volunteer Service - Recruiting volunteers to help deliver universal services increasing the volunteer’s confidence and employability
- Universal services such as Stories Song and Rhyme Service - Building on the existing offer of general participation events in libraries through Bounce and rhyme, Rhymetime, Story Stomp and Play and learn under one and under five events
Consultation on the provision and delivery of Universal Children’s Services and de-designation of Children Centres in Northamptonshire Consultation Analysis Report

There is also a universal health provision for under five year olds that will continue to be delivered so it is accessible to families, including in children’s centre services, libraries and other community venues where the need is identified.

The decision to decommission 21 libraries meant that the Council needed to consider how to deliver universal children’s services in those areas, while at the same time offering the opportunity to review the service more widely across the county, including those services provided in libraries which are remaining open.

The feedback gained from this consultation will be used to inform the future development of universal children’s services in Northamptonshire.

The public consultation was conducted by the Consultation & Engagement Team within Northamptonshire County Council, with support from officers in Public Health, First for Wellbeing (Libraries) and Children First Northamptonshire and was carried out in compliance with NCC’s Consultation and Engagement Policy and Statement of Required Practice.

The consultation did not seek views on universal children’s services in Corby as the provision of these services in Corby libraries is unaffected by the library closure decision, although residents of Corby were welcome to participate.

3. Consultation Methodology

The following outlines the public consultation methodology used to generate the material / data for analysis.

A stakeholder analysis was completed. It identified stakeholders which included: current and prospective parents and carers of children under five, parents and carers who used universal children’s services when their children were under five, professionals or volunteers in this area of work, people who work in other areas of work who might be affected by universal children’s services, people representing particular groups, elected members and interested members of the public.

Due to the breadth of potential stakeholders a base questionnaire was devised. The questionnaire was designed to:

- Inform the audience of the current service and set out why the current provision needs to change
- Gain an understanding of current and prospective service users, including which libraries providing universal children’s services they use, which services they use and what it is they value about the current service
Consultation on the provision and delivery of Universal Children’s Services and de-designation of Children Centres in Northamptonshire Consultation Analysis Report

- Establish an evidence base that sets out the need for universal children’s services across the county
- Gather feedback on where service users would be comfortable accessing services in the future
- Establish which other similar services are accessed locally
- Understand how service users would like to be informed about universal children’s services

A copy of the questionnaire is available at Appendix 5.

A number of qualitative and quantitative questions were asked to gain an understanding of respondents’ views.

The questionnaire was made available on a dedicated web page on NCC’s consultation register, www.northamptonshire.gov.uk/consultationregister, which is where all of the Council’s consultations are published. Paper copies were available upon request. An offer was made to translate the questionnaire into other formats, including easy read, however no requests were made for any translated versions.

In addition, officers from First for Wellbeing (Libraries), Public Health, Children First Northamptonshire and the Consultation & Engagement Team attended drop-in sessions at each of the main libraries in all districts (excluding Corby which is unaffected by this consultation). These were an opportunity to speak directly to service users and to promote the consultation and encourage their participation.

The consultation was also promoted to registered users of universal children’s services via the email addresses they provided when they registered. It was promoted in libraries via posters, by Early Years staff at planned sessions and also on individual library Facebook pages and via their Twitter feeds.

The consultation and questionnaire was promoted to a number of key stakeholders including:

- Users of the service (parents, guardians and carers)
- Members of Northamptonshire County Council’s Consultation Register
- Members of the county’s Residents’ Panel
- Early year providers
- Out of school clubs
- Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCG)
- Healthwatch Northamptonshire
- County Councillors
- NCC staff
Consultation on the provision and delivery of Universal Children’s Services and de-designation of Children Centres in Northamptonshire Consultation Analysis Report

- Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust (including Health Visitors and School Nurses)
- District and borough councils
- Town and parish councils
- Local Members of Parliament

These stakeholders were also asked to help promote the consultation amongst their members and other distribution channels, including on their website and via their social media accounts.

As well as being promoted via our partners’ communication channels, this consultation was posted and publicised via the Council’s Facebook, Twitter and other social media accounts. Respondents were given the opportunity to participate through these social media sites, although no responses were received via this method.

This 12 week consultation began on 23rd March 2018 and ended on 15th June 2018.

4. Summary of Feedback

This is an extensive summary of the feedback received and it is recommended that it is read in conjunction with the verbatim comments (where these contain identifiable information) which can be found in Appendix 5. While this consultation was about the future delivery of universal children’s services, many respondents took the opportunity to express their views about the library closures, a decision which was taken in February 2018.

4a. Questionnaire feedback

A total of 984 questionnaire responses were received generating feedback that included almost 2,000 comments from the different groups of respondents, who were mostly current or prospective parents/carers or guardians of a child or children under five years old or parents/carers who had previously used Universal Children’s Services when their children were aged under five years old.

On 10th April, an error was identified in the questionnaire which incorrectly listed Penrith Drive Designated Targeted Children’s Centre as being in Kettering, when in fact it is in Wellingborough. The questionnaire was amended as soon as this was identified. At the time, 15 respondents had stated that they used Penrith Drive Children’s Centre (out of a total of 171 respondents who stated that they had used one of the Designated Targeted Children’s Centres listed and 467 respondents who had completed the questionnaire at that point). Considering the findings given, and the assumption that users of the Penrith Drive Children’s
Centre would be aware of its true location, this error appears to have made no material difference to the feedback received.

On 21st May, it was identified that libraries that are not designated children’s centres had not been included within the initial list of libraries that could be selected in the questionnaire under “Current Service Experience”, although these libraries were listed within the explanatory information of the questionnaire and were listed for selection under the ‘Future Delivery Options’ questions. This meant that respondents were unable to select Finedon, Irchester, Kingsthorpe, Moulton, St James and Wollaston from the list provided under the current service experience section. However, we can tell from comments received that respondents did indicate that they used some of the libraries not listed and can confirm that any comments to that effect received at that point have been reflected in the findings.

The questionnaire was amended to include the libraries that had not been included in the “Current Service Experience” list (which also included some libraries not scheduled for closure but that are also not designated children’s centres). Library staff in these libraries were encouraged to promote the questionnaire further, and staff from First for Wellbeing (Libraries), Children First Northamptonshire and the Consultation & Engagement Team also visited sessions being delivered in each of the six libraries listed above to help raise awareness of the consultation and facilitate instant completion of the questionnaire using iPads brought along for that purpose.

From the 984 questionnaires received, 429 (45.2%) responses were from current or prospective parents/carers or guardians of a child or children aged under five, 284 (29.9%) were from parents/carers who had used Universal Children’s Services when their children were younger, 45 (4.7%) were from people who work or volunteer in this area of work, 47 (5%) were from people who stated that the work of the Universal Children’s Services impacts on the service in which they work, 17 (1.8%) were from people who have a role which involves representing the view of a particular group of people, 97 (10.2%) were from interested members of the public, 10 (1.1%) were from elected Councillors and 20 (2.1%) were from people who described their interest as something else. Thirty-five respondents skipped this question.
Questionnaire responses

Not all respondents answered every question and so percentages are shown based on the number of respondents to each question. Appendix 5 shows the number of responses to each question.

Respondents were asked how many children they have or currently have caring responsibilities for and their age(s) and were able to select all that applied to them. Excluding those who stated that they did not have children within the specified age brackets, respondents most commonly stated that they had one child between 1 and 5 years old.
Consultation on the provision and delivery of Universal Children’s Services and de-designation of Children Centres in Northamptonshire Consultation Analysis Report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>None</th>
<th>1 child</th>
<th>2 children</th>
<th>3 children or more</th>
<th>Total</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>I am / my partner is currently pregnant</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>662</td>
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<tr>
<td>0 – 6 months old</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>458</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 – 12 months old</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 – 2 years old</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>309</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>552</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 – 5 years old</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>537</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6+ years old</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>514</td>
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<td>My children do not live with me</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>345</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A total of 67 (7%) respondents stated that they have a child with a diagnosed disability (with 795 (83.3%) stating that they did not). The disability that was most frequently selected by those who had answered ‘yes’ to the previous question was a learning disability (34 respondents), followed by mental health issues (20).

Respondents were asked to provide their postcode. This was asked to establish the geographical spread of respondents to help ascertain whether the consultation had reached all areas of the county that would be affected by the need to find alternative venues for universal children’s services. The distribution of responses across the county and in relation to libraries providing universal children’s services shows that responses were mainly clustered around those libraries delivering these services, but were also distributed more widely in the more rural areas. The highest number of responses in the Lower Super Output
Consultation on the provision and delivery of Universal Children’s Services and de-designation of Children Centres in Northamptonshire Consultation Analysis Report

Areas (LSOAs) around libraries due to close were around Rothwell, Desborough and Deanshanger.

Respondents were then asked to tell us about their current service experience with children’s services. They were first asked about which designated targeted children’s centres they have used in the last six months. At present, the changes to universal children’s services will not directly affect the targeted children’s services offer, however there will be opportunity to further align services, where possible, so that families can access co-ordinated services for children and their families in their locality.

The designated targeted children’s centres most frequently selected as having been used by respondents in the last six months were Kingsthorpe (90 respondents/23%), Montagu Street, Kettering (61 respondents/15.6%) and Pen Green Corby (55 respondents/14%).

Respondents were then asked which Designated Children's Centres on a library site which is remaining open they have used within the last 6 months. Those most frequently selected as having been used by respondents in the last six months were Northampton Central (139 respondents/34.2%), Wellingborough (97 respondents/23.8%) and Hunsbury (81 respondents/19.9%).
Consultation on the provision and delivery of Universal Children’s Services and de-designation of Children Centres in Northamptonshire Consultation Analysis Report

Respondents were then asked which Designated Children’s Centres on a library site scheduled to close they have used within the last 6 months. Those most frequently selected as having been used by respondents in the last six months were Desborough (137 respondents/28.3%), Abington (87 respondents/17.9%) and Higham Ferrers (85 respondents/17.5%).

In the amended questionnaire, respondents were then asked in which of libraries remaining open had they accessed universal under 5s sessions in the last 6 months. These are shown in the graph below.
Finally, in the amended questionnaire, respondents were then asked in which of the libraries scheduled to close had they accessed universal under fives sessions in the last 6 months. These are shown in the graph below.

Analysis of the responses indicates that 303 respondents had accessed more than one library for universal under fives sessions in the last 6 months. 216 respondents who had accessed services at a library due to close had also accessed sessions at at least one of the libraries due to remain open during the last 6 months. 283 respondents indicated that in the last 6 months they had only accessed sessions at libraries due to close.

Respondents were then asked which Universal Children Services they have accessed within the last 6 months. The most frequently selected services were Rhymetime (482 respondents/60.6%), books and resources (438 respondents/55%) and Play & Learn Under fives (308 respondents/38.7%).
Some respondents used the free text space in this question to reiterate the services they had indicated they had accessed in the answer choices. Other activities mentioned included baby massage, arts and crafts sessions, holiday activities and accessing support such as reusable nappy kits. A number of respondents stated that they had signposted families to the universal children’s centre services in their capacity as professionals working with families. A number of respondents mentioned activities that do not form part of the universal under 5s offer, including accessing more general library services, using the library for home-schooled children and study clubs for older children and targeted children’s centre services.

Respondents were then asked which of those universal children’s services had helped them the most. The most frequently selected services that respondents had found the most helpful reflected the most frequently accessed services as indicated by the responses to the previous question. These were Rhymetime (395 respondents/51.6%), books and resources (254 respondents/33.2%) and Play & Learn Under Fives (253 respondents/33.1%).
Some respondents used the free text space in this question to state that all the universal services offered were of equal value. Others, while not commenting on specific activities, stated that they considered the general benefits of universal children’s services such as supporting wellbeing, combating social isolation and providing social opportunities for parents, carers and children, were important. Again, some respondents mentioned specific services they had mentioned in the previous question, such as baby massage and holiday activities.

Respondents were also asked if there are any other services which they thought that Universal Children Services can provide.

A range of different responses were provided, and these are listed in full in Appendix 5. Respondents most commonly stated that they wanted more of the same in terms of the current services provided as part of the universal offer. Practical support for new parents, for
example baby first aid, play ideas, home safety and weaning, were also mentioned frequently, along with baby massage and sensory play sessions. Other support mechanisms for parents were also mentioned frequently, from providing social opportunities for parents to meet and wellbeing/mentoring/peer support for new parents, to joining up with other sources of professional support, for example health visitors and the provision of advice on subjects such as dental hygiene and birth control.

When asked how frequently they use universal children’s services, most respondents stated that they accessed services weekly or more often. Some respondents stated that they accessed services more on an ad hoc basis, and others said they planned to access the services more when their next baby was born.

![How often do you use Universal Children Services?](image)

Respondents were then asked how they travel to access these services (ticking all that applied). The most frequent response given was walking (chosen by 491 respondents/63.8%), followed by travelling in own car (406 respondents/52.7%).
Thinking about what they like about the universal children’s services in Northamptonshire, respondents were asked to select which statements they agreed with. The statements most frequently agreed with were:

- My child(ren) can play with others (601 respondents/ 79.5%)
- Provide a safe and comfortable environment (571 respondents/75.5%)
- Helps to improve my child(ren)’s confidence (539 respondents/71.3%)

However, at least 50% of respondents agreed with 10 out of the 12 statements provided, indicating the value placed on universal children’s services. A full list of other comments received is available in Appendix 5.

Some respondents used the free text space in this question to reiterate the statements in this question. A number of respondents also said they valued the services because they are free, while another mentioned the volunteering opportunities that arose from the service.
Consultation on the provision and delivery of Universal Children’s Services and de-designation of Children Centres in Northamptonshire Consultation Analysis Report

Respondents were then asked to think about future delivery options, given that 21 libraries are in the process of being decommissioned and universal children’s services are delivered in 19 of those libraries. Thirteen of those libraries are also designated children’s centres.

Respondents were asked to select from a list which types of venue they would feel comfortable accessing universal children’s services at instead of a library. They were also given the opportunity to suggest other alternative venues. The most frequently chosen from the list of alternative venues were Designated Children’s Centres (592 respondents/84.5%), community centres (511 respondents/72.9%) and village halls (461 respondents/65.8%).

A number of respondents provided comments that repeated their support for one or more of the options that were available as answer options. Many other respondents stated that they felt services should continue in libraries. Some respondents placed more importance on the attributes of the venue rather than expressing a view about a particular type of venue e.g. it should be on a bus route or be local to service users, especially in villages. Some respondents specifically stated that they would not support the use of schools, GPs, hospitals, designated children’s centres or places of worship, mainly because they felt these would be dominated by their primary use and could deter people from using them. Other suggestions made included the Beehive in Kingsthorpe, golf clubs, cricket clubs and other council or government buildings.

Respondents were then asked to think about the buildings in which universal children’s services may be delivered. Respondents were provided with a list of features and asked to
Consultation on the provision and delivery of Universal Children’s Services and de-designation of Children Centres in Northamptonshire Consultation Analysis Report

rank them in order of importance between 1 (most important) and 8 (least important). The below chart lists these features in order of importance, ranked by their average score.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Average score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friendly and knowledgeable staff</td>
<td>6.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcoming environment</td>
<td>6.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close to my home</td>
<td>5.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indoor play area</td>
<td>5.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sufficient buggy/pushchair storage</td>
<td>4.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Available parking</td>
<td>3.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close to public transport</td>
<td>2.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close to other amenities and facilities</td>
<td>2.48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the 753 respondents who answered this question, the majority deemed friendly and knowledgeable staff and a welcoming environment as the most important features, whilst close proximity to other amenities and facilities and public transport were regarded as the least important.

Respondents were also asked to tell us about what might prevent them from accessing universal children’s services. 492 respondents chose to answer this question. Below is a word cloud demonstrating the responses given.

Numerous barriers were listed by respondents however, as can be seen in the above word cloud, the most frequent barrier identified was that of distance, with many respondents wanting access to services that are near to their home, preferably within walking distance, as some respondents cited difficulties with accessing transport, be it lack of their own or public transport, as well as the cost. If people did have to travel they stated that they required venues that were easily accessible and with parking. Respondents stated that they want venues to feel welcoming and not overcrowded and to provide relevant services and activities for their children, at convenient days and times and not just Monday-Friday 9am-5pm. A full list of the barriers listed by respondents is available within Appendix 5.
Respondents were then asked to think about other under fives activities they may access and were asked if they had paid to access any other children’s services or paid to attend an organised children’s activity within the last 6 months. Responses were fairly evenly split, with almost half (360 respondents) stating that they had and 349 respondents (47.9%) stating that they had not.

Respondents who answered “yes” named the activities they had attended which are shown in the word cloud below.

The most frequently selected price band for such activities was £3-£5, followed by more than £5.
Just over 9% of respondents answered “Other”. When asked to specify, most said that they paid between £1 and £5, some said they paid per session dependent on activity, and/or they paid a block amount for a number of sessions or paid a subscription. Respondents also stated that some activities cost more than others; that they had only taken the activity as it was a gift; and that some activities were a voluntary contribution. Comments were also made about activities they considered should be provided for free by the Council due to the council tax contributions that residents make.

Respondents were asked where they would like to access information about universal children’s services. The most frequently selected option was Facebook (563 respondents/77.3%), followed by posters in local libraries (528 respondents/72.5%) and the Council’s website (452 respondents/62.1%). LinkedIn was the least preferred option, chosen by 10 respondents (1.4%).
Other suggestions included targeted magazines such as Toddle About and Time for Tots, direct mail/emails, via medical professionals e.g. direct mentions as opposed to posters in medical settings, and schools and nurseries.

Finally, respondents were asked if they wanted to make any other comments on the provision and future delivery of the Council’s Universal Children’s Services provision or the de-designation of Children’s Centres. A large proportion used this question to express their disagreement with the closure of libraries.

Looking at comments relating to the future provision of universal children’s services, many respondents expressed how valuable they felt the current service is. Respondents frequently stated that services needed to remain local i.e. within walking distance and without the need to drive as this was important for accessibility. Respondents were concerned that services may reduce and a number felt that they should increase (both in the number of children’s centres and services provided). The view was expressed that universal children’s services should remain free, but a number of respondents also stated that they would be prepared to pay/make a voluntary contribution.

When thinking about the future service provision, a number of respondents felt that the needs of children should be prioritised and that the impact of changing the service should be carefully considered. They felt it is important to ensure that provision in libraries remaining open does not become oversubscribed and that the design of the service needs to be future-proofed. Respondents felt that it was important that universal provision remains and that the focus does not move solely onto targeted children’s services.

Some respondents made further comments about alternative venues for universal children’s services, including the view that previously closed Children’s Centres should be reopened. Some respondents felt that the voluntary sector should be encouraged to step in to provide these services. A full list of comments can be found in Appendix 5.

Most respondents were answering the questionnaire as individuals, with only 18 respondents (2.4%) responding on behalf of an organisation or community group.
The highest number of responses came from Kettering borough (167/22.9%) closely followed by Northampton borough (166/22.7%). The lowest number of responses came from Corby borough (19/2.6%) however universal children's centres in Corby borough are unaffected by this consultation, as stated in the consultation information.

All of NCC’s standard equalities monitoring questions were asked of each respondent who completed the questionnaire. Although most individuals answered these questions, not all respondents chose to complete this section of the questionnaire and not everyone answered each question.

From the available completed responses, most respondents stated that they were female (636/88.7% compared with 60/8.37% stating that they were male).
Just under a quarter of respondents stated that they are currently pregnant or have had a baby within the last six months (162/23%).

Most respondents were aged between 30 and 49 years (68.4%).

Other identified equality monitoring information provided demonstrated that 7% stated that they had a disability, with mental health being highlighted as the most frequent disability. Most frequently, respondents stated they had no religious faith (44.6%). The most common religion identified was Christian at 42.5%. Predominantly, respondents identified themselves as White British (84.1%), with 11.4% from Black and Minority Ethnic groups. The majority of respondents identified themselves heterosexual (85.3%).

Full statistics of the responses can be found in Appendix 5.

4b. Drop-in library events feedback

To provide an opportunity to speak to officers directly about the consultation on the delivery of universal children’s services, seven drop-in events were arranged at Daventry, Kettering, Northampton Central, Rushden, Towcester, Wellingborough and Weston Favell libraries, these being the main libraries in each of the districts affected by the consultation. All 36 libraries promoted the consultation during events and 19 of the 21 libraries due to close (where universal children’s services are delivered) were visited by Programme Co-ordinators during events to further promote the consultation and encourage completion of the questionnaire. To help mitigate any impact of the error made of omitting the six libraries that are due to close and are non-designated children’s centres within the ‘Current Service Experience’ section of the questionnaire, additional promotion of the consultation was undertaken in these libraries.

Attendees could either complete the online questionnaire using iPads brought along specifically for that purpose, or go through a shorter series of questions with officers to allow for questions to be asked, feedback to be provided and to have their main points noted. Officers gathered feedback directly from a total of 36 attendees at these events, but discussions with others who attended the events showed that they were already aware of the consultation and had completed the online questionnaire.

Responses from those who went through the shorter series of questions with officers showed that the most frequently accessed service was Rhymetime (15 parents/carers) followed by Play & Learn Under fives (10 parents/carers).

Attendees were also asked why they attended those events. Below is a word cloud demonstrating the most frequent responses given.
Service users were then asked which times of day and days of the week suited them best for under fives events. The most popular response was between 10am and 11am, with after 3pm being the least popular time. The most popular days were Wednesdays, followed by Mondays and then Tuesdays. The full range of responses is shown in the graphs below.
When asked if they had attended other events or activities for under fives not held in the library, attendees who answered this question most commonly stated that they had used commercial/private providers of children’s activities such as soft play centres, followed by sporting activities e.g. swimming or gymnastics, church groups and play groups.

When considering alternative types of venue, the most frequently selected types of venue differed slightly from those given in the online questionnaire responses, with community centres, schools/nurseries and village halls being the preferred options.

When asked if they had any other comments they wished to make, attendees most frequently stated that they valued the universal under fives provision and would like to see it continue. Some made comments about the current service e.g. around length of time, content and capacity, and these have been passed on to the service for consideration. Other comments included the suggestion of a booking system to overcome current capacity issues, alternative venues, a willingness to pay for services, disappointment at the library closures and the view that groups in libraries can be cliquey and unwelcoming.

4c. Letters and emails

We also received correspondence from a local MP, a County Councillor, four local organisations, the Save Brackley Library group and three members of the public.

The local MP expressed concern that there was no guarantee that libraries that are remaining open would continue to operate universal children’s services. She raised concerns about the impact of the loss of universal children’s services in her constituency and acknowledged that these services were valued by those that use them. She suggested that their performance and delivery should be monitored to ensure they are meeting the outcomes required for service users.
The County Councillor suggested alternative venues in her local area which could be considered for the provision of universal children’s services.

The response from South Northamptonshire Council acknowledged the context of this consultation but expressed concern at the double impact of library closures/alternative venues for universal children’s services and the removal of bus subsidies in the area and requested that this be considered when designing the services in future. It suggested that NCC should encourage voluntary sector involvement to ensure the continued delivery of universal children’s services. It recommended that an intergenerational model, looking at addressing social isolation across all ages, could be beneficial.

The response from Healthwatch Northamptonshire stated that universal children’s services are valued and should be maintained. It expressed disappointment with the decision to close 21 libraries and urged continued engagement with communities to develop the future model of universal children’s services. It expressed concerns that service users would need to travel further when libraries close. It undertook some direct engagement with local communities on this subject and stated that this indicated that the current service was valued and that service users would like more services than are currently delivered. It also expressed the view that libraries are not ideal venues to deliver children’s services.

Higham Ferrers Town Council objected to the closure of Higham Ferrers Library and the de-designation of the children’s centre. It stated that the children’s centre is valued locally and that there is a need for services to continue to be delivered in the area. It provided suggestions of alternative venues within the town.

The response from Northamptonshire Police stated that while any potential reduction in services was unfortunate, it is unlikely to have a negative impact on those most at risk because these are universal services rather than targeted services.

Three members of the public expressed their disappointment at the closure of the libraries and the loss of universal children’s services within those venues.

5. Conclusion

A great deal of feedback was received to this consultation from service users, professionals, and interested members of the public, which, when combining questionnaire responses with attendance at events and letters and emails, totalled over 1,000 responses.

While this consultation was about the future delivery of universal children’s services, many respondents took the opportunity to express their views about the library closures, a decision which was taken in February 2018.
Focusing on the responses given in relation to the current service and what it might look like in the future, there is a strong feeling that the current services are valued and that if anything, there is a desire for more services to be provided. Respondents provided views on types of alternative venue and what is important to them when considering alternative venues to access these services, with not having too far to travel being particularly important.