

On Tuesday 7th June 2016, Stroud Against the Cuts sent the following letter to all County Councillors in Gloucestershire, registering our opposition to changes to provision of children's centres in the county - many of which are having funding withdrawn with volunteers expected to cover. Links to previous coverage and further information are available below the letter.

Dear County Councillor,

We are writing to you to register our objection to the changes to provision of children's centres in the county, and to remind you of the compelling rationale for strong universal provision as a gateway of entry to additional support. Volunteers have always been highly valued in children's services, but it's unreasonable to rely on them and hold them to account for ensuring an adequate level of provision.

We feel there is still time to oppose these changes being approved by Cabinet, and we would ask that you use all means available to you as elected representative to retain universal provision. We would also like information on how the council intend to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the new model, should it be adopted. We would welcome any opportunity to discuss these issues and the below information.

In the [recent news release](#), Cllr Paul McCain acknowledges this re-organisation is a choice between closure of children's centres or a stronger focus on the most vulnerable children which suggests that this re-design of services is as a result of austerity measures and Conservative Party policies rather than a progressive decision intended to improve services. This should be of concern to the families in Gloucestershire and the staff tasked with its implementation for 2 reasons; first the way in which the consultation is using their views and opinions as a mandate for change without also pointing out the consequences of reducing universal services; second the compelling research evidence supporting the policy mandate for early intervention supported by 3 government administrations since its adoption in 2003 following the SureStart trailblazer sites. This leaves unanswered the question which these policies set out to address which is how do we know who our vulnerable children are so that we can reliably identify, protect and improve their outcomes?

The Every Child Matters (ECM) Green Paper 2003 stated services provided through children's centres were for all children not the most vulnerable and laid out 5 key outcomes which the centres were designed to achieve in order to address this very question following the tragic death of Victoria Climbié who suffered and died from the most appalling abuse whilst known to key children's services. Based on robust research this policy was based on the premise that strong universal provision available to all families was the basis for knowing and being able to

identify those families and the gateway to targeted provision for those who needed more support. More recently The Frank Field Independent Report on Child Poverty 2010; The Ticknell Report, Statutory Framework for Early Years Foundation Stage (2011); Early Intervention: The Next Steps (2011): An independent review and The Munro Review of Child Protection: Final Report – A child-centred system (2011) following the death of Baby P have endorsed this approach as an essential building block for improved outcomes for all children.

Parents and staff are entitled to know exactly what the risks to children are of re-designing universal provision which does not take account of the need to make the gateway to targeted services just as strong, robust and as easily accessible to all the children in Gloucestershire not just the ones we think might be vulnerable – because an over reliance on targeted services which this proposal is leading us towards has been shown to repeatedly fail and confront us time and time again with the same questions about resources service configuration and the ways in which staff intended to provide the protection all our children are entitled to are held to account for failing them.

Yours Sincerely,

Barbara Potter, Health Visitor experienced in working with Children's Centre partnership, and the Stroud Against The Cuts committee - James Beecher, Christine Stockwell, Helen Prynne and Hannah Basson.

For background:

Read our [contribution to the consultation](#)

Watch a video of [Neil Carmichael MP being questioned at Parliament Children's Centre](#) .

Coverage of the changes:

" [Funding for children’s centres in Stroud set for radical changes](#) as county council pushes ahead with overhaul plans" (Stroud News and Journal, 2nd June 2016)

"[Worried mums fear for Stroud children's centre services](#) " (Stroud Life, 18th March 2016)

Letter: "[Please support the campaign to save vital children's centres](#)" (published in Stroud News and Journal, 3rd March 2016)

Letter: "Children's centres are a lifeline for families" (published in Stroud Life, 19th February 2016)