

# Romsey Mill Trust’s abridged response to the consultation on the future of Children’s Centre Services in Cambridgeshire

## Section 1: Children Centres Future Delivery

### Do you support our Children’s Centres meeting the needs of a wider age range, from expectant parents to young adults?

- Strongly Support
- Support
- Unsure
- Unsupportive
- Very Unsupportive

Additional comments

- No detail at all in consultation about who will be delivering this service, and what capacity they have to do so
- No acknowledgment at all of the vast difference in skills required for family workers to deliver effective support across a wider age range (i.e. with a young mum and baby, and a 17 year old needing specific help)
- Data set provided as part of the consultation does not account for anticipated population growth, particularly for children and young people over 4 years of age
- Insufficient information in consultation about what a Children and Family Centre / Children and Family Zone actually is – and how it would operate
- Romsey Mill Centre has been operating as an effective “family friendly” child and family centre for decades – but the proposals suggest that it has not been considered suitable to continue in this role. Why?

### 2. To what degree do you support the proposal to focus services on those families that need them most?

- Strongly Support
- Support
- Unsure
- Unsupportive
- Highly Unsupportive

Additional Comments:

- No definition of ‘need’ in the consultation or explanation of “other identified support needs”
- The benefits of Children’s Centre services supporting families from a range of situations and circumstances and providing a vitally positive place to grow community resilience amongst families are totally lost in these proposals.

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- Cambridgeshire County Council published a strategy on early intervention and community resilience in 2015/16. The proposals in this consultation run counter to this strategy.
- Consequence will be greater demand for support and services later on – resulting in more acute need for families and greater cost / pressure for public services.

### 3. How important is it to have health services in the same place as your Child and Family services?

- Very Important
- Good To Have
- Unsure
- Not Important

#### Additional comments

- Health services are already being delivered from Children's Centres i.e. in the same place/building as child and family services. This includes antenatal sessions with midwives, child / baby clinics with health visitors, linking with mental health workers, which are already being delivered from Romsey Mill Centre and Cherry Hinton Children's Centre alongside parenting courses, new parent groups, stay & play sessions, pre-school care and adult education etc.
- The consultation document contains no information about the new health services to be delivered from the Child & Family Centres/Zones, so we do not know whether the proposals offer anything different from/additional to what is currently being delivered from Children's Centres and working well for families.
- We are therefore unclear why this question is being asked and unsure about what is being proposed.
- The ethos and culture of a building/centre is very important and some families are put-off accessing certain places when they seem too 'statutory' or are perceived to be places that only support those families with significant problems.
- For this reason, we think Brookfields is an inappropriate location for a Child & Family Zone when compared with a building like Romsey Mill Centre, which has proved to be an effective community child and family centre for decades.
- We also think the library in Cherry Hinton is a less appropriate venue for a Child & Family Zone. There are no details in the proposals regarding costs of establishing a new Child and Family Zone at Cherry Hinton Library against the current expenditure on venue making it impossible to make an informed decision on the suggested proposal for Cherry Hinton.

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### 4. Our Child and Family Offer will include the following:

- Maintaining some of our existing Children's Centres
- Delivering services in shared community spaces
- Providing outreach programmes at a local level
- A greater online offer.

### To what degree do you support this?

- Strongly Support
- Support
- Unsure
- Unsupportive
- Very Unsupportive

### Additional comments:

- The consultation is misleading to the point of being dishonest, giving the impression that services will not be cut under these proposals.
- Currently, Children's Centres, including those at Romsey Mill and Cherry Hinton, deliver services from main centres – and services in community spaces – and outreach – and connection to other family services.
- Consultation suggests in text and diagrams that more will be offered than currently available (even suggesting that 're-designated' centres are a positive, rather than the fact they will cease to deliver existing service provision under the proposals).
- Services will be lost. The £1 million cuts are on top of previous £1.55 million cuts 3 years ago to children and family services.
- No details at all about the 'greater online offer' - the only thing that seems to be new.

### 5. Section 2: Districts

You will now be shown our plans for the 5 districts in Cambridgeshire.

You can respond to any or all of them, or skip through any which are not relevant to you.

Have you read our full proposals in the consultation document?

- Yes
- No

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### 6. To what degree do you support our proposals for Cambridge City?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Unsure
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Additional comments:

- Diagrams are confusing and deceptive. Re-designation of Romsey Mill Children's Centre, and others, actually means closure of existing Children's Centre services at these sites – but are being portrayed as a positive
- Romsey Mill has vast experience of operating as an effective child and family centre, but our comprehensive delivery of services is being closed in favour of a new site at Brookfields – less than a quarter of a mile away.
- The future of Romsey Mill's experienced and highly valued team of family workers is at best uncertain, and seemingly threatened, under these proposals.
- Page 14 of the data briefing confirms that high levels of families experiencing deprivation currently exist within Romsey Mill Children's Centre reach area – with new housing developments underway and planned, this is only likely to increase need.
- Page 14 of the data briefing confirms that high levels of families experiencing deprivation currently exist within Cherry Hinton Children's Centre reach area – with no clarity or indication about the suitability of the library as a location for providing alternative proposed services for families.
- Therefore we think that Romsey Mill Centre should be a second site for the Child & Family Centre in south city. This view is further strengthened when consideration is given to the housing developments planned for the Ridgesons site on Cromwell Road and the old Mill Road Depot.

### 7. To what degree do you support our proposals in South Cambridgeshire?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Unsure
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

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Additional comments:

- Diagrams are confusing and deceptive. Redesignation of Cherry Hinton Children’s Centre, which supports families in South Cambridgeshire, with others, actually means closure of existing Children’s Centre services at these sites – but are being portrayed as a positive.
- Page 14 of the data briefing confirms that high levels of families experiencing deprivation currently exist within Cherry Hinton Children’s Centre reach area – with no clarity or indication about the suitability of the library as an alternative location.
- We strongly disagree with the high number of Children Centres proposed for re-designation (closure of Children Centre services) in South Cambridgeshire. Children’s Centre buildings serve as vital hubs, where families connect, engage and then community resilience is nurtured. Outreach Programme venues will not provide the same effective opportunity for family connection, engagement and growth because they are not settled sites.

### 8. To what degree do you support our proposals for East Cambs?

Strongly disagree

- Because of the lack of sufficient information about level of service, staffing, needs assessment and financial information we strongly disagree with proposals for East Cambs.

### 9. To what degree do you support our proposals for Huntingdonshire?

Strongly disagree

- Because of the lack of sufficient information about level of service, staffing, needs assessment and financial information we strongly disagree with the proposals for Hunts.

### 10. To what degree do you support our proposals for Fenland?

Strongly disagree

- Because of the lack of sufficient information about level of service, staffing, needs assessment and financial information we strongly disagree with the proposals for Fenland.

## 22. Your feedback will help inform and shape our proposals.

Please feel free to add any further thoughts or comments here:

### 1. Romsey Mill does not consider this consultation to be fair.

Under United Kingdom Supreme Court judgement, a fair consultation must:

- take place while the proposals being consulted on are at a “formative stage”;
- give sufficient reasons for any proposal to allow for intelligent consideration and response;
- allow adequate time for consideration and response; and

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- ensure that the “product” of the consultation is “conscientiously taken into account” in finalising the proposals.

We are concerned that some of the proposals being consulted on are already beyond the “formative stage”. For example, it is being proposed that current Children's Centre Services provided from Romsey Mill Centre close and a Child & Family Zone is located at Brookfields (potential shared building with health). Signage that has been erected at the Brookfields site already indicates that this discussion has moved beyond a formative stage. Why haven't Cambridgeshire County Council consulted on alternative options in the consultation document? The level of pre-consultation discussion with existing Children's Centre staff and delivery partners has been wholly inadequate. No one from the County Council has spoken with Romsey Mill to enquire about the impact we think the proposals will have on the families we work with and services we provide.

The lack of any financial facts and figures or details on level of service and staffing being offered through new Child and Family Centres/Zones/Outreach/online, means that there is insufficient information to allow for meaningful consideration and response to proposals.

The timing of the consultation during summer holiday period does not allow adequate time to engage families for consideration and response.

The consultation document is misleading in the way it represents information about the ‘re-designation’ of certain Children's Centres.

### **2. Costs that are unaccounted for in the proposals**

The consultation document doesn't mention the ‘Young Parents Support Contract’ that Romsey Mill has with Cambridgeshire County Council through the Children's Centres in City and South Cambs. These Children's Centres part fund the work with Romsey Mill drawing in over £70k of additional funding to add significant value to the County Council contract. No one from the local authority has spoken with us to discuss the future of this contracted work. We can only assume that there is a risk to the future funding of this work to support vulnerable teenage parents and their children.

It is negligent of the County Council that they have not engaged with Romsey Mill about this service as the non-continuation of this contract would leave many teenage parents unsupported in the immediate/short-term and cost the County Council considerably more money as needs and problems escalate. A sudden end to this contract would result in immediate impact on other public services, and increased costs to the public purse.

Romsey Mill thinks that cutting further funding from Children's Centre preventative and early intervention services for children and families in Cambridgeshire is short sighted and detrimental to the wellbeing of communities. What are the real life costs of these proposals? There is no acknowledgement of these in the consultation document. The costs of likely additional referrals to social care, mental health services, counselling, etc, because of the withdrawal of early intervention support, will quickly become greater than the ‘savings’ made from closing Children's Centre services.