

Seashells Commissioned Family Hub Petition - Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services Position Statement

All decisions related to services commissioned through contracts need to be considered within the context of the agreed fundamental policy priority of the Council – to deliver the financial stability required to protect the sustainability of core operations in line with the Securing Kent's Future Budget Recovery Plan.

The Budget Recovery Plan states that there needs to be:

“a strong focus from elected Members, the Corporate Management Team, Directors, Heads of Service and all our staff to recognise that this spending challenge is now the fundamental policy priority of the council and to respond accordingly.”

The proposal to review whether or not to recommission the Family Hub service contracts when they end in March 2025 is being considered now, in line with the council's published policy position.

Seashells is one of only two independent Family Hubs from where KCC commission some services in the county; the other is the Millmead Centre in Margate. The rest of our Family Hub model is delivered by our in-house Family Hub workforce.

As reported to the CYPE Cabinet Committee in March 2024, the current contracts at Seashells and Millmead were renewed for a period of one year only, ending on 31 March 2025.

It is important to make two points clear:

1. No decision has been taken yet. Later in November 2024, members of the CYPE Cabinet Committee will be considering this proposal, alongside the analysis of the consultation response and Equality Impact Assessment and they will have the chance to make their recommendations to me as Cabinet Member.
2. The proposal not to renew the contracts when they end is in no way a reflection on the quality of service delivered to local communities.

The decision focuses on whether to renew the commissioned Family Hub service contracts and it does not result in the removal of Family Hub services from these communities. The proposal that formed the basis of the public consultation set out alternative suggestions for the provision of Family Hub services. In the case of Seashells, that means using the Sheppey Gateway location, which is 0.2 miles away, situated on the High Street in Sheerness.

In response to the public consultation 672 people submitted comments regarding the proposal to not renew the contract at Seashells. Comments highlighted the importance of both the services and the Seashells Centre itself to the local community. The proposal going to Cabinet Committee for consideration would mean that Family Hub services continue to be delivered to the local community by our in-house Family Hub teams rather than via a commissioned contract.

Other services, including those delivered by partners, available from Seashells, outside of the commissioned Family Hub services, are not in the scope of the CYPE Cabinet Committee decision.

In recognition of the feedback provided in the consultation about the importance of delivering services from Seashells, officers have requested information from the centre to ascertain any associated costs of hiring space. KCC is exploring the option of our in-house teams to provide Family Hub services for local residents from Seashells; these requests remain unanswered.

The debate at Full Council will help inform further considerations at CYPE Cabinet Committee and by myself in reviewing the proposals ahead of making a decision.