



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Steve Crocker
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Hampshire County Council
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3 March 2016

Thank you for your e-mail dated 23 February 2016, informing me about the consultation on Hampshire County Council's proposals to develop a Family Support Service.

Let me firstly say that I fully understand Hampshire County Council is under intense financial pressure. Central government cuts are harsh, and I know this means you have to make some extremely tough decisions. For this reason, I recently met with the Secretary of State and Minister for Local Government to raise my concerns about the proposed Local Government Finance Settlement and I was pleased that the proposals were somewhat toned down, with HCC also receiving additional transitional grant funding totalling £9.35 million in 2016/17 and £9.34 million in 2017/18.

I know that things are still tough, but I do not believe that it is right to make cuts to children services.

Back in 2011, I vehemently campaigned against the closure of Surestart centres in my constituency, speaking up to the Prime Minister against proposed cuts. I was pleased that Hampshire County Council committed to protecting these frontline service upon which so many local people rely.

Therefore, I was shocked and saddened to learn that similar proposals are on the table again and my position remains the same. I strongly oppose Hampshire County Council's proposals for a streamlined Family Support Service that would shut down five out of six children's centres in my constituency: The Haven, Haselbridge, Stubblee Hill, Little Waves, The Tree House.

These centres provide front-line services that are utterly invaluable to my constituents. Families and mothers need the critical practical and social support on offer when coping with the challenges of raising young children. This is particularly true in Gosport because significant pockets of deprivation mean that many mums are highly vulnerable and utterly depend on the guidance and advice on offer through children's services. Sadly, many are not lucky enough to have a family they can rely on for such support.

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These centres also help give children a better start in life. Gosport suffers from terrible obesity and diabetes rates, but these centres provide mothers and children with guidance on how to lead a healthy lifestyle.

Gosport's children's services centres are also easily accessible, making things so busy mums and mums without cars can easily access them. A single district hub would preclude access for so many people in need.

I strongly believe that your proposals to reduce the number of these 54 hubs in Hampshire to only 11 Family Support Service centres would leave a gaping hole in the provision of support for families, leaving mothers and their children isolated and vulnerable. In the long-term, this would increase pressure on physical and mental health services whilst engendering unacceptable social costs.

I strongly urge you to reconsider these proposals and I would be happy to meet with you to discuss this issue further.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Caroline Dinenage".

Caroline Dinenage MP