

SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL

Children, Young People and Family Support Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee

Meeting held 24 January 2013

PRESENT: Councillors Gill Furniss (Chair), Rob Frost, Keith Hill, Talib Hussain, George Lindars-Hammond, Karen McGowan, Mohammad Maroof, Lynn Rooney, Colin Ross, Andrew Sangar (Deputy Chair), Nikki Sharpe, Clive Skelton and Geoff Smith (Substitute Member)

Non-Council Members in attendance:-

Jules Jones, Education Non-Council Voting Member
Gillian Foster, Education Non Council Voting Member
Joan Stratford, Education Non-Council Voting Member
Alison Warner, Education Non-Council Voting Member

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1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.1 An apology for absence was received from Councillor Stuart Wattam and Councillor Geoff Smith attended the meeting as the duly appointed substitute.

2. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

2.1 No items were identified where resolutions may be moved to exclude the public and press.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3.1 Councillors Talib Hussain, Nikki Sharpe and Clive Skelton declared personal interests in item 6 'Call-In of the Cabinet Decision on the Redesign of the Early Years Service' as members of the Admissions Committee.

3.2 Councillor Karen McGowan and Jules Jones declared personal interests in Item 6 - Call-In of the Cabinet Decision on the Redesign of the Early Years Service - as Governors at schools which had nurseries.

3.3 Gillian Foster declared a personal interest in Item 7 - Call-In of the Cabinet Decision on the Home to School Transport Policy - as a representative of the Diocese of Hallam.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

4.1 The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 22nd November 2012 were approved as a correct record, subject to the addition of Joan Stratford in the list of apologies for absence.

5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

- 5.1 A petition, containing 9929 signatures was submitted, objecting to the closure of 20 nurseries in Sheffield. As this had received more than 5000 signatures, this would be debated at a future meeting of Full Council.
- 5.2 A petition, containing 68 signatures was submitted, objecting to the closure of Darnall Community Nursery. It was agreed that this would be forwarded to Councillor Jackie Drayton, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families.

6. CALL-IN OF THE CABINET DECISION ON THE REDESIGN OF THE EARLY YEARS SERVICE

- 6.1 The lead signatory to the call-in was Councillor Colin Ross and the co-signatories were Councillors Andrew Sangar, Jillian Creasy, Ian Auckland and Trevor Bagshaw.
- 6.2 The Committee scrutinised the decision of the Cabinet from its meeting held on 12th December 2012, setting out in principle the proposals to redesign early years services in Sheffield, and also received a report from the Interim Executive Director, Children, Young People and Families which had been submitted to that meeting:-
- 6.3 "That Cabinet (a) approves in principle:-
- (i) the proposed redesign and streamlining of the organisational structure in early years services in order to maximise access to high quality early learning and health services with the resources available;
 - (ii) the proposed action plan for a quality improvement programme for all early years settings;
 - (iii) the proposed reorganisation of the management and co-ordination of 36 Children's Centres into 17 Children's Centre Areas;
 - (iv) the proposal that existing contracts with providers (due to end in March 2013) are not renewed where services are no longer required or funding is not available, while, at the same time, specifications for procurement of new targeted services will be developed;
 - (v) the proposed cessation of grants to 16 childcare providers in the Private, Voluntary and Independent sector and 4 in the statutory sector; and
 - (vi) the proposed reduction and transfer of the maintained childcare provision; and

(b) notes (i) the proposed further communication and consultation to be carried out on the Early Years' Review and (ii) that a further report will be submitted to Cabinet in February, 2013 on the outcome of the consultation.

6.4 Attending this meeting for this item were Councillors Julie Dore (Leader of the Council), and Jackie Drayton (Cabinet Member, Children, Young People and Families), Jayne Ludlam (Interim Executive Director, Children, Young People and Families) and Dawn Walton (Assistant Director, Prevention and Intervention, Children, Young People and Families).

6.5 Reasons for Call-In

Councillor Colin Ross outlined his reasons for the call-in, indicating that the high level of public interest justified a full scrutiny of the decision. He also wished to clarify a number of issues in the report. Councillor Andrew Sangar supported the view that it was important to let the public have their say. He also did not believe it was clear from the Cabinet discussion which groups had been consulted, and he wanted to seek clarification on some of the detail such as the implication of moving to 17 areas.

6.6 Public Questions

6.6.1 Emma Chadwick informed Members that she was a parent of a child with a learning disability who currently attended Darnall Community Nursery. She commented that staff who worked in the nurseries were committed to the job and enjoyed the work they did. Her child had been diagnosed with autism and she was aware of a number of parents in similar situations who were grateful for the support. She therefore questioned the need for such changes and commented that the children may find it difficult to adapt. She believed that the £3.6m gap could be funded from elsewhere. The Multi-Agency Support Teams (MAST) were still being funded despite what she believed to be declining demand. In conclusion, Ms. Chadwick commented that she believed the proposed changes were putting children at risk and asked for the proposals to be reconsidered.

6.6.2 Chrissie Meleady commented that concerns had been raised throughout in respect of the consultation process which had formed the basis of the report submitted to Cabinet on 12th December 2012. The process had been flawed in respect of equalities where the focus had been on some selected equality characteristics and failed to take into account the Nolan principles, the Equalities Act and existing childcare legislation. Whilst the Council was stating that the proposed cuts in childcare were as a result of Government cuts, it was understood from central Government that funding was available through a range of budgets available to local authorities. Consultation

meetings had also been flawed and parents and staff had often been segregated without their consent.

- 6.6.3 She further commented that she objected to the short period for the consultation process and that the cut-off date of 31st March Ms. Meleady objected to the Council's view that the market would prevail and commented that she did not believe this showed signs of fighting for Sheffield children. Parents and staff who had objected and attended meetings had done so off their own volition and not been commandeered, as had been suggested. She reported that offers had been made to Council officers to assist with bids for funding, but these had not been progressed. In conclusion, she asked that the Council be fair, transparent and put children first and asked that children's services be saved for future generations.
- 6.6.4 Sally Pearse referred to a briefing paper which had been circulated to Members. If no certainty on the future had been received by 31st March 2013, vulnerability notices would have to be issued to staff. The timescales being outlined were very tight and did not allow for proper consultation. Those centres which did not close would have to restructure and under 2's provision would be lost. She believed that parents were entitled to affordable, flexible childcare, and that the proposals would damage that.
- 6.6.5 Gwyn Fields commented that she believed that up to this point, the need had been identified by early years workers and was concerned how the need would be identified in the future. She questioned how the Council would ensure the children who would be moved would receive a place elsewhere when specialist nurseries were full. Her main issue with the Cabinet report was that it referred to equality for providers and not equality for children.
- 6.7 In response, Dawn Walton outlined the following:-
- It was important to hold discussions with parents individually and collectively.
 - Every effort would be made to work with community sector providers to ensure consistency for parents and children.
 - The MAST worked with children from pre-birth to 19 plus and supported a wide range of parents. A redesign of the service had taken place in 2011 and 2012, which had reduced duplication by adopting a whole family approach. Referrals were not reducing as had been suggested.
 - There had been a wide call for views and opinions across the City around the future of early years. Officers were aware that some held the view that this didn't get to the heart of the issues for some sectors.

- The Council wanted as many people as possible to have their say. It was willing to adapt and change if necessary. The strength of feeling across the City was acknowledged and an effective response was important,
- There was a need to utilise universal services to identify early need.
- The current economic situation had resulted in the need to take a different approach in respect of child care across the City.
- In respect of bids to obtain funding, officers had chased up the bid for lottery funding and had just received an outline to express an interest. The voluntary sector providers would be brought together to work on the bid.
- No decisions had yet been taken and there was a need to undertake broad consultation before any final decisions.

6.8 The Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families (Councillor Jackie Drayton) commented that she welcomed the call-in as an opportunity for Scrutiny to discuss the issues and the proposals in the Cabinet paper and saw it as an important part of the consultation process. She understood the importance of early years and that this helped to shape a child's future. She was committed to doing all she could to protect the most vulnerable across the City.

6.9 She commented further that the Early Years and MAST 0-5 review had been underway since 2011 and had consulted and drawn together the views of schools, providers, health colleagues, parents and carers, amongst others, to examine the local and national situation. Since the proposals in principal had been submitted to Cabinet further consultation had taken place and the Council was listening to people's views and would continue to listen. She was keen to highlight she had never stated that the proposals would not make a difference to early years provision, as having £3.5m of funding withdrawn from any service inevitably would have an impact. The Government had cut £6.8m from the Early Intervention Grant and this would impact on the most vulnerable in the City. The proposals to be made, where possible, showed savings in management, premises and administration costs whilst protecting services to children and families. The City Council had a duty to provide value for money for the taxpayers and to be an advocate for children and families.

6.10 Further Public Questions

6.10. A member of the public asked officers to confirm whether parents
1 would be asked open and honest questions.

6.10. Di Chilvers, Independent Early Years Consultant, stated that she had previously been a nursery nurse and an early years lecturer so she was abreast of the key issues. She would be submitting a formal response to the consultation which would cover the following broad points:-

- She was not convinced that Sheffield's view of early intervention was one that fit. Sheffield focused on 0-19 year olds, but she believed the perspective of 0-5 year old children was very different to older children and families.
- The consultation on the Cabinet report had not been clear or transparent which was why there appeared to be such a large discrepancy between what the Council was hearing and saying and what was really being heard amongst the public.
- She was concerned about how the proposals would ensure the quality service provision currently on offer would be retained. It may be wise to research how Sheffield was able to maintain an excellent early years service in the 1980's despite a similar level of cuts.
- The vision around two-year olds was not clear and it was important to provide the best quality provision for them. There was a fear that the Council would look to schools to provide provision for two-year olds and this was too early in a child's development.
- If a 'slash and burn' approach was taken to early years, it would take years to build back up the expertise and quality which was currently out there.

6.11 Mrs Kettleborough, a nursery worker, commented that her question around Special Educational Needs had not yet been answered. She believed some services would not be able to continue if the proposals were agreed. Children's Centres had not been allowed to build up reserves, so no funding would be available to roll over services. The timescale for the consultation was too short. She commented that vulnerable children and families shouldn't be treated as businesses.

6.12 Linda Edwards, Business Manager for Darnall Community Nursery, commented that if the proposals were taken up, support provided by charities would cease. She asked why the MAST were not part of the redesign of services and requested clarification on the cost of the MAST as she had received three different figures. She believed the Council had misused the Allen report and requested that it think again about the proposals being considered.

6.13 Co-Signatories to the Call-In

Councillor Ian Auckland commented that he believed if all

organisations were “pushed together over the financial cliff” as he believed they would be there would be complete disorder across the City. He also raised issues about the lack of consultation and the view amongst many that the proposals did not represent a level playing field across the City.

6.14 Following public questions and representations from the co-signatories to the call-in, Councillors Colin Ross and Andrew Sangar, as the signatories and Committee Members outlined a number of concerns which they had, as follows:-

- The report and answers provided at the meeting still lacked detailed information about the proposals. Lines needed to be drawn to show which centres would be grouped together.
- The most vulnerable children in the City needed to be looked after and there was a danger that the proposals would negatively impact on them.
- It was crucial to provide a ‘soft landing’ for providers as cutting off the funding could prove catastrophic. Transitional arrangements were needed to provide a ‘buffer’ to enable childcare providers to survive in the City.
- There were concerns over the closed nature of some of the questions in the consultation and the vagueness of the Cabinet report.
- Without numbers and lines, there was no clarity and it was inevitable that vulnerability notices would have to be issued to staff.
- The Council should not move towards children’s centres being attached to maintained schools.

6.15 Jayne Ludlam, Interim Executive Director, Children, Young People and Families then responded to the public questions and Member comments as follows:-

- The anxiety which many felt around the future of early years was appreciated by officers.
- No consultation process could ever hope to be perfect, but this must continue and would inform the final Cabinet proposals.
- The Equality Impact Assessment would evolve throughout the process and grow as risks were identified.
- The only way to develop and maintain services was to make them

sustainable for the future.

- Contracts would be reissued to third sector providers.
- It was important to ensure that children with disabilities were properly cared for and that the different funding streams available were utilised.
- The Council wanted to ensure that every child had a childcare place. However, at this stage, it was unclear where this would be and what it would look like.
- Drawing lines at this stage to group centres together would be pre-empting the outcome of the consultation.
- The figures in relation to the MAST would be clarified and provided to the questioner.

6.16 Councillor Drayton added that she hadn't expressed concerns at the whole consultation process, as had been suggested, but just with the quality and availability of the online questionnaire, and this would be addressed.

6.17 Members then asked a number of questions and officers responded as follows:-

- The consultation process had begun following a report produced by an external consultant in 2010. This had led on to a broader consultation and the consultation outlined in the Cabinet report which focused on two different areas.
- The Council was committed to targeted early years intervention and had a range of interventions nationally researched.
- A communications plan was a key part of the proposals and an effective publicity campaign was crucial.
- The expertise which existed throughout the City was recognised and acknowledged by the Council.
- The Council was not expecting the NHS to fill the gap in providing services and was working towards joint commissioning.
- There was a need to separate childcare and children's centres. Children's centre services would continue to be delivered from where they were delivered from.

6.18 Following Member questions, the Leader of the Council, Councillor Julie Dore outlined to the Committee why there was a need to

redesign early years services. The main reason was the cuts which the Government was imposing. The Council was trying to realign services, whilst having the least impact as possible.

6.19 Childcare was essential and needed by parents to maintain employment and respite. It was important to design a service that met the needs of all and that everyone worked together. It was essential to spread the money amongst all and the Council was committed to protecting the most vulnerable in the City.

6.20 **RESOLVED:** That this Committee:-

(a) recommends that the Cabinet:-

(i) considers what transitional arrangements are needed to be put in place to ensure that good quality early years provision is able to be sustained; and

(ii) provides further detail of provision within the 17 areas, and gives assurances that a comprehensive communications plan is developed to inform parents of the locations of support, and the type of support available, in the 17 areas; and

(b) gives further consideration to these proposals when they are developed further and scrutinises the operation of the new system when it is in place.

7. CALL-IN OF THE CABINET DECISION ON THE HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT POLICY

7.1 The lead signatory to the call-in was Councillor Colin Ross and the co-signatories were Councillors Bob McCann, Andrew Sangar, Roger Davison and Ian Auckland.

7.2 The Committee scrutinised the decision of Cabinet from its meeting held on 12th December 2012 to withdraw all current provision for discretionary transport with effect from September 2013, including the withdrawal of passes for pupils who were currently in receipt of them under the current policy, and also received the report of the Interim Executive Director, Children and Young People's Service which had been submitted to the Cabinet meeting.

7.3 Attending the meeting for this item were Councillor Jackie Drayton (Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families), Alena Prentice (Assistant Director, Inclusion and Learning Services, Children, Young People and Families) and John Bigley (Manager: Admissions, Children, Young People and Families).

7.4 Reasons for Call-In

Councillor Colin Ross outlined to the Committee that the reason the decision had been called-in was that he believed that the Cabinet selected the wrong option and did not feel that due consideration had been given to those already attending Catholic schools. Other local authorities who had introduced a similar policy had undertaken it on a more staged basis so as not to disadvantage children.

7.5 Co-Signatories to the Call-In

Councillor Roger Davison commented that Catholic schools provided some of the best schools in comparable localities and took pupils from all areas. The concerns of the signatories were not just about bus passes but the future viability of the schools if the policy was introduced.

7.6 Alena Prentice reported that the reasons for the proposals were that the Council needed to make significant savings. The current policy was not equitable for all children and could leave the Council open to challenge from parents from other faiths. The consultation had taken place between 29th October and 4th December, 2012, and 326 responses had been received.

Public Questions

7.7 John Martin, Headteacher at Notre Dame High School, commented that he objected to how the consultation process had been undertaken and did not believe the proposals were fair in terms of equality. He referred to a historic agreement which had been made with the Council when the last Catholic Secondary Schools had been closed, which stated that the Council would continue to fund transport to school for Catholic children and pointed out that there was no reference to this in the Cabinet report. If the proposals were agreed, the school would no longer be able to receive children from low income households and 95% of those affected would not be eligible for free bus passes.

7.8 Alan Dewhurst, Headteacher at St. Marie's Catholic Primary School, commented that 15-20% of pupils currently travelled to the school by bus and most would be negatively impacted by the proposals. He also questioned whether the principle of a catchment area still existed within the Council.

7.9 Chrissie Meleady questioned why, if the proposals aimed for equality across all faiths, why these proposals were not agreed when the Equality Act was introduced in 2010. No other faith had complained about Catholic children's transport being subsidised. The Equality Impact Process was highly flawed, for example, it stated that there were no issues of race at Notre Dame, despite having gypsy and traveller children as pupils. She also commented that it was believed Councillors had free bus passes and asked where the equality was in

this circumstance.

- 7.10 A parent of a child who attended Notre Dame reported that she would no longer be able to afford to send her child to the school if the proposals were agreed. There would be no guarantee that her child would gain a place at King Egbert School, her local school, as she had been told that the school was full. Her child may then have to relocate to a school over 3 miles away where they would be entitled to a free bus pass which would mean that there would be no cash saving. This was not an isolated case so surely the justification of cash savings would not be realised.
- 7.11 Alena Prentice reported that officers had no record of the historic agreement referred to by some of the questioners, which is why it was not referred to in the Cabinet report. The current arrangements existed within a discretionary transport policy which could be withdrawn. The catchment area was a defined geographical area which formed a priority for admissions.
- 7.12 Councillor Jackie Drayton commented that 80% of the children and families budget was spent on children and families, safeguarding and statutory responsibilities. The current economic situation had resulted in officers presenting savings proposals which would never have been considered in the past, which was why the proposals were not considered in 2010. The proposals were not about discrimination and the Council valued the work of Catholic schools in the City.
- 7.13 Members of the Committee then asked a number of questions and officers responded as follows:-
- If documentary evidence was made available of the historical agreement referred to this would be passed to the Head of Legal Services for consideration.
 - If a Catholic school was giving priority to a catchment area within its admissions policy, this would be giving priority to local children and not necessarily Catholic children.
 - The reason for the timescale for introducing the policy in September 2013 was that it would allow time for those parents who were in the process of applying currently to consider their options in terms of how they would be affected by the introduction of the policy.
 - All schools received a Pupil Premium and the Catholic Schools could use this or other funding to make up the shortfall in funding for transport should they wish to.

RESOLVED: That the Committee recommends that no action be taken in relation to the call-in decision.

(Note. The votes on the decision to take no action were ordered to be recorded and were as follows:-

For the resolution (9) - Councillors Gill Furniss, Clive Skelton, Talib Hussain, Karen McGowan, Nikki Sharpe, George Lindars-Hammond, Mohammad Maroof, Lynne Rooney and Geoff Smith

Against the resolution (6) - Councillors Colin Ross, Andrew Sangar, Rob Frost and Gillian Foster, Jules Jones and Joan Stratford

Abstentions (0) - Nil

8. ANNUAL SAFEGUARDING REPORT

8.1 **RESOLVED:** That consideration of the item be deferred to the next meeting of the Committee.