

SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL

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

Meeting held 27 February 2013

PRESENT: Councillors Gill Furniss (Chair), Rob Frost, Keith Hill, Talib Hussain, George Lindars-Hammond, Karen McGowan, Mohammad Maroof, 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
Joan Stratford, Education Non-Council Voting Member

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1. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

- 1.1 The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director, Children Young People and Families Service, which was due to be submitted to Cabinet later that day, regarding the redesign of Early Years Services.

Officers in attendance included Jayne Ludlam (Executive Director, Children, Young People and Families Service), Dawn Walton (Assistant Director, Prevention and Early Intervention) and Julie Ward (Senior Manager).

In considering this matter, Councillor Gill Furniss (Chair) indicated that it was proposed to receive representations, in the form of petitions or public questions, prior to the Scrutiny Committee deliberations and that before any recommendations were made, points raised by the public would be answered by the aforementioned officers and Councillor Jackie Drayton (Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families) who was also in attendance.

- 1.2 Members of the public asked a number of questions which are summarised below:-

- Why had the Scrutiny Committee not responded to the paper submitted and questions raised at the last Scrutiny meeting?
- Why had the Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet and Council not had due regard to the research and evidence presented as to the importance of early years provision? Exception was taken to Paragraph 1.1.1 of the report which referred to an 'exaggerated perception of the impact of the proposals'.
- Why was the Labour led Council not adhering to Labour principles?
- A recently published report had referred to the exemplary practice of at least 2 settings in Sheffield, namely Broomhall and Tinsley Green – why was the voice of the child not being heard?

- How would the Council continue to work with providers following the withdrawal of funding? How would the Council carry out individual actions plans for all organisations? What was the purpose of these plans and who were they for?
- Could the Cabinet Member explain the comments she made regarding pay and salary levels at a recent trade union meeting?
- How could the proposals save costs and how could improvements be made to outstanding Ofsted provision?
- Parents would lose day to day access to support – where would savings be made?
- What would happen to those children on child protection plans once the nursery closed on 29 March? What reassurances could be given that children would be kept safe?
- The Council had failed to provide sufficient information for people to make an intelligent response, the questionnaire was not easily understood and parents had not being given a true picture of the consultation. How could the decision be made when the consultation was biased and flawed? It was stated that a session attended by 21 parents at Tinsley Community Nursery had led to frustration, in that officers had refused to record verbal feedback and parents were instead referred to the questionnaire.
- Why had there been no response to the issues previously raised and why was there no recognition of the voice of the child in the consultation? The Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) had blatant failures and had not paid due regard to distinct characteristics but instead referred to homogenous groupings. Reference was made to human rights and equalities breaches and that a consultation response included within the report was racist and should not have been repeated. It was also stated that there had been a series of intimidatory actions exemplified by the serving of an invoice to Darnall Nursery for £10k back dated when no invoice had been previously received, which had caused great distress.
- How could sufficiency duties be met when quality nurseries and staff expertise were being lost?
- Areas of deprivation needed subsidy and practical solutions were required to preserve services rather than political posturing.
- Paragraph 4.4.5 of the report referred to the overwhelming parental response from 1 area and stated that 'This was however noted in context of the City as a whole'. What did this mean? Had these parents from this area had their responses treated differently from other parents in the City? The Council should not be keeping their own services to the detriment of charities. Would the Council allow evidence to be examined by an independent group of

statisticians who would be able to look through the confusing evidence presented? What was the 'soft landing' for childcare providers?

- The questioner referred to 13 years experience as a consultant paediatrician and questioned whether the Multi Agency Support Team (MAST) approach outlined would meet the needs of vulnerable children, adding that early intervention was crucial for longer term outcomes. He stated that from his personal experience in another locality, the switch from early years to MAST provision had been a big mistake, adding that it was bureaucratic and a backwards step.
- Redundancy notices were due to be issued on 28 February 2013, what would happen to the 61 children who currently attended the centre? Detailed support and negotiation had not been offered
- Written questions in relation to the promotion and funding of MAST, the impact on communities of removing much needed services and the sense of putting more pressure on existing providers when these services had gone, were passed to the Executive Director for Children, Young People and Families.

1.3 In response, Dawn Walton outlined the following:-

- The responses to questions raised at the previous Scrutiny Committee, held on 24 January 2013, had been incorporated into the minutes for that meeting.
- There was a desire to continue to provide high quality early years provision in its broadest sense, incorporating health, child care and early learning. However, these were difficult financial times and a framework of support and delivery had to be managed within budgetary constraints.
- The Council wanted to work with providers and maintain quality of provision. However, there was inconsistency in provision which was reflected in results at foundation stage and it was important to look at results across the City at the earliest opportunity.
- With regards to action planning, it was recognised that organisations were working to manage the restraints of the budget envelope. It was hoped that following the consultation period there would be dialogue and proactive work with providers to maintain and build on services and manage reductions. This work had already commenced with the 20 centres identified.

In requesting staffing information, it was hoped to provide a fresh perspective and examine other ways of working. The Council had no desire to take over, but given the volume of activity and savings, it was important to work together with all partners to gain efficiencies across the board.

- Any child with a child protection plan would have a detailed plan in place and it would be a cause for alarm if this was not being overseen by a social worker. With regards to concerns over children not under an official care

plan, early identification was critical as was partnership working with partners such as midwives, health visitors, MAST and social care.

- Jayne Ludlam stated that work was ongoing to avoid redundancies but a different way of working was required. Whilst the childcare subsidy would not be there, the Council wanted to work with providers to access other funding streams.
- Consultation had been looked at in a broader sense with 1:1 discussions and a range of meetings held in conjunction with the questionnaire, which staff had been made available to assist and complete. In the instance at Tinsley referred to by the questioner, it was explained that an officer would have attended the session to discuss concerns if they had been made aware of this in advance.
- Consultation analysis had been carried out by another team within the Authority.
- No officer would want to make significant changes to policy without consideration of the potential impact. The EIA attached to the Cabinet report was overarching and had been produced in conjunction with providers. The EIA could not be a document that stood still, but had to be reflective and change as communities and families changed and encompass discussions with providers, families and partners.
- With regards to the invoice sent to Darnall Nursery, it was noted that a letter had been sent out from the Chief Executive to clarify that no action would be taken.
- The requirements of the Council's sufficiency duty would be met. The Council were aware of where the demands were, had reflected on the needs on the community and would ensure that the childcare market responded actively to these demands. The Council would provide information to potential child care providers as to the shape of demand and its' role was not to provide services but to manage the market and provide the right data.
- Jayne Ludlam stated that the Council did not want to lose childcare providers, but wanted to work with them in a way that was financially sustainable in a changing environment. Income streams were available, but as from 1 April 2013, families would access the same services but in a different way. She added that there were transitional arrangements in place.
- Early years provision was valued and was part of a broader intervention and prevention strategy around specific and complex needs. This was an important stage in a child and family's life and early years provision played a significant role in this. However, this could not be a 1 size fits all approach. There was a strong commitment and shared vision across the partners, with a whole family approach and a focus on the identification of risk factors at the earliest opportunity.

- The MAST process involved working with partners and universal services to provide the right support.
- With regards to a 'soft landing' for child care providers, Jayne Ludlam stated that there would be a transitional phase and individual planning for organisations, each of whom had differing circumstances and needs. She was not able to quantify the support at the current time but referred to a 3 month waiver in relation to contracts and the potential room for manoeuvre therein. It was noted that of the 200 providers in the City, 4 were considered to be at high risk, which was a small minority in relation to the City.
- With regards to the reference to consultation responses from 1 area, it was noted that the reference was factual and it had been the intention to acknowledge the strength of feeling in particular areas within the report.

As to whether parents from a particular area had their responses treated differently from other parents in the City, Jayne Ludlam clarified that there had been no prioritisation. The statement in the report had been intended to acknowledge that certain areas had contributed and to thank them for their contribution. All responses were taken into consideration and views reflected.

- Information in relation to MAST funding was provided to the previous Scrutiny Committee meeting and this was much less than that allocated to Early Years.

1.4 The Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families made the following responses:

- She was very aware of how important the early years of a child's life were and she was not disregarding the evidence presented or the importance of the work that had already been carried out to shape the service.
- This was a political choice, in that the Government had changed how childcare would be delivered. Its' flagship policy was free early learning and the City would receive £3.8m through the Dedicated Schools Grant to facilitate this. However, this funding would follow the child and could only be released as the child presented in the system. The Government had cut the Early Intervention Grant by £6.8m which included the cuts in the Early Years' budget. Furthermore, from 2013/14 funding would be incorporated into the main budget and no longer ringfenced.
- To try to protect services to children and families, savings had been made through reducing management administration and reducing premises costs.
- In relation to the question raised as to the prioritisation of Council provided services, it was noted that up to 50 Council job losses were outlined in the report, so it was not true to say that Council services had been protected.
- With regards to the GMB meeting, Councillor Drayton clarified that she had made a general comment in the meeting which was not personal and no names were mentioned. She had referred to the fact that the Council had

reduced and reviewed their management structure in order to protect services as far as possible and asked that organisations looked at their management structures, reducing the number of managers and staff who did not work directly with children, to consider if this was the best possible way to make savings to protect services, the organisation and families.

- Consultation had not been solely through the questionnaire.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Lynne Rooney and Stuart Wattam. Councillor Geoff Smith attended the meeting as the duly appointed substitute for Councillor Wattam.

Apologies for absence were also received from Paulette Kennedy (Parent Governor Representative) and Alison Warner (School Governor Representative).

It was noted that Rt. Hon. Michael Gove, MP (Secretary of State for Education), Elizabeth Truss, MP (Under-Secretary of State for Education and Childcare) and the Rt. Hon. Nick Clegg, MP (Deputy Prime Minister) had been invited to attend the meeting. Apologies had been received from Mr Gove and Ms Truss and Mr Clegg had agreed to meet with campaign representatives at a date to be arranged.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Talib Hussain declared a personal interest as a member of a local Advisory Board.

Jules Jones declared a personal interest as a governor at a school which had a Sure Start Centre attached.

4. OUTCOME OF CONSULTATION ON THE EARLY YEARS' REVIEW

4.1 Members of the Committee asked a number of questions, the officers' responses to which are summarised below:

- The Early Intervention Grant covered a range of activities such as Area Based Grant funding and Sure Start. There had been changes to that funding and the free early learning entitlement had gone to 2 year olds.
- With regards to transitional arrangements, the waivers were in relation to contracts around family support.
- There were 200 child care providers in the City, 20 of which were in receipt of grant and 4 had deemed themselves to be at risk of closure. The Council were currently working with 2 providers to resolve rent issues and it was hoped to work with all providers to produce a good transitional plan, identify alternative providers if required, or if necessary the local authority could step in to provide services.

- The Service had started to put together a comprehensive plan to promote the take up of 2 year old places to ensure that early access was taken up and maximised. Dialogue was important to increase the take up of the 2 year old provision, as many parents were not aware that they could receive up to 15 hours of childcare per week. If this was used, centres could then claim funds which would assist in maintaining sustainability.
- A series of briefing sessions were being arranged and support offered to assist providers to reorganise and utilise their facilities for 2 year olds, this was timely in that the majority of 4 years olds would be moving into school education.
- Capital funding was available to help providers make structural arrangements to adapt to providing for 2 year olds.
- Since the publication of the Cabinet report there had been a lot of interest from child care providers interested in forging new partnerships. It was also noted that child minders had expressed an interest in supporting 2 year olds.
- Discussions were ongoing with various partners in the South West of the City and it was hoped that if the recommendations outlined within the report were agreed by Cabinet, a hub would be identified as soon as possible.
- It was important to recognise that families could suddenly become vulnerable and have immediate needs. A Crisis Fund was in place as a safety net, so that if a family presented in crisis, the local MAST would be contacted and there would be an immediate release of what was required to support the family.
- There was not currently a set amount identified for the Crisis Fund, but it was intended to do so if the proposals were accepted. Work had already begun to look at the financial implications of the aforementioned waivers.
- In relation to the proposed hub and outreach centre at Sharrow and Broomhill, it was noted that extensive data, such as footfall, had been collected in this respect. Sharrow was more spread out with a lot of activity and Broomhill would continue as a satellite.
- Several Members expressed concerns that the report and answers provided at the meeting lacked detailed information as to transitional support and timescales, local authority intervention and the Crisis Fund budget allocation.

It was confirmed that 4 centres had identified themselves at risk of closure. Councillor Jackie Drayton stated that the Cabinet decision had not yet been made and that she did not wish to name the organisations concerned due to commercial sensitivities. She referred to the fact that actions plans belonged to the organisations and they did not have to share them with the Council. The Authority would work on an individual basis with the organisations concerned.

Dawn Walton added that the Authority would do whatever it could to assist in looking at organisational structures, business planning and the identification of other opportunities, but could not enforce this support on the providers.

- It was recognised that there were a number of children with special educational needs across the 20 centres and it was important to ensure that the child had access to provision in the local area, alongside a holistic approach around the family to provide specialist support from a range of professions in an inclusive way.
- Whilst the Local Authority would step in with its' own resources if necessary, dialogue would always be the starting point.
- The advisory boards would transform into local area forums linked to each children's centre area. These would have a have a fuller view of the locality.

4.2 **RESOLVED:** That the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families, Executive Director and appropriate officers be requested to report to a July meeting of this Committee in order to:

- (a) report back on the transitional arrangements offered to various affected organisations; and
- (b) provide an update on the Communication Strategy and its' effectiveness.

(NOTE 1: Prior to the passing of the above resolution, an additional resolution was moved by Councillor Colin Ross, seconded by Councillor Frost, namely that:-

- (c) That the Scrutiny Committee reiterates the need:
 - (i) for substantial transitional support, including time limited financial support, to ensure that all high quality providers are able to survive;
 - (ii) to publicise free early learning for 2 years olds to encourage take up; and
 - (iii) to indentify the amount set aside in the crisis fund

On being put to the vote, the additional resolution was negatived).

(Note 2: The votes on the additional resolution ((c) (i) – (iii)) were ordered to be recorded and were as follows:-

Against the resolution (8) - Councillors Gill Furniss, Clive Skelton, Talib Hussain, Karen McGowan, Nikki Sharpe, George Lindars-Hammond, Mohammad Maroof and Geoff Smith

Meeting of the Children, Young People and Family Support Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee 27.02.2013

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| For the resolution (6) | - Councillors Rob Frost, Keith Hill, Colin Ross, Andrew Sangar, and Jules Jones and Joan Stratford |
| Abstentions (0) | - Nil |

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