

# ITEM 6.1

## **Council Cabinet response to the Budget Recommendations of the Children & Young People Commission**

### **Revenue**

#### **Recommendation 1**

That Council Cabinet note that the Commission:

a) would not wish to see the implementation of the 2010/11 proposals to reduce spending on: Family Support (£134k), Reception and Hospital Service (£108k), Aspire Leaving Care (£60k), Reduction of post 16 residential beds (£296k), Assessment and Care Planning (£248k), Independent Reviewing Officer function (£72k),

b) were informed by the Council Cabinet Member and Corporate Director that every effort would be made to find ways to avoid the implementation of the proposals and

c) have resolved to receive a regular progress report from the Cabinet Member and Director on the steps taken to avoid implementation in 2010/11, the first of which should be no later than December 2008.

#### **Reasons**

These services are central to the Council's statutory obligations in respect of child protection and looked after children; from a risk management approach meeting our responsibilities is highly sensitive both intrinsically and because of the level of external inspection and ramifications should anything go wrong.

#### **CABINET RESPONSE**

The third year savings were proposed in the light of the efficiency savings required of the Department and Council and the difficulty in finding alternatives that do not affect frontline services.

Nevertheless, the commission's comments are noted and endorsed, with a view to finding alternative savings options to those identified. The commission's comments are noted and we endorse both b) and c) above with a view to finding alternative savings options to those identified.

## **Recommendation 2**

That Council Cabinet:

a) note that the Commission welcomes the work to reduce the unit costs of independent fostering agency, IFA, placements, either through contracting arrangements and/or collaboration with other local authorities and

b) needs to recognise that the overall number of in-house foster carers are affected by the rate of allowances they receive and that this has an interrelationship with the need to make placements with IFAs.

## **Reasons**

a) The appointment of an officer to secure unit cost improvements through a commissioning and contracting process is a welcome example of invest-to-save. It may be that, subject to any rules on competition, a sub-regional consortium of unitary/councils may be able to secure even more favourable unit costs.

b) The Commission decided not to make a specific recommendation regarding the rate of fostering allowances for 2008/9; however, experience has shown that the number of in-house foster carers is not growing fast enough to enable the rising number of looked after children to be accommodated. As a consequence greater and greater use of made of the much more expensive IFAs. Good child care practice means that once placed there, the child is likely to remain and thus create a long term financial commitment. Making increased budget provision in response (£547k extra from April 2008) in tight financial circumstances squeezes out the scope to increase the allowances to our own foster carers, which would serve as an aid to recruitment and retention and reduce the need for IFA placements. In July 2006 the Commission's own review heard – and agreed – that 'the issue of allowances can't be ignored – it's a competitive market' and that 'we need to strive to reach' the Fostering Network's recommended rates.

## **CABINET RESPONSE**

The Commission's comments are noted and a) is endorsed. With regard to b) our current basic allowance levels and fees for foster carers are the best in the East Midlands. We review the increase each year to determine how best to allocate that increase across the full allowance range. All carers will receive an increase that is equivalent to the rate of inflation or better. Given the current budget requirement and our regional strong position this is assessed as being sufficient to retain our position in 08 – 09. We will continue to review this and our allowance structure in subsequent years

### **Recommendation 3**

That Council Cabinet note that the Commission is concerned that the re-categorisation of the costs of the Education Psychology, so as to fall within the schools budget with consequent charging to individual schools, may have an adverse impact on individual pupils accessing the service, as the 'affordability' will depend on i) the level of charges, ii) the number needing referral and iii) the state of the school's budget.

#### **Reasons**

At its meeting the Commission was not sure about the 'mechanics' of putting this important service into the schools budget. If the change does not produce any adverse impact on pupils needing referral then the proposal can be welcomed as creative accountancy. The concern is that a school with budgetary difficulties or which by chance has an unusually high number of children needing referral in a year, does not refer all those who would be referred under the present system. Early, appropriate intervention can avoid much costlier responses later, for example, successfully dealing with behavioural issues can avoid permanent exclusion, family breakdown and the need for the child to become looked after by the Council.

### **CABINET RESPONSE**

There will be no adverse impact on pupils who need to access this service

### **Capital**

### **Recommendation 4**

That Council Cabinet should consider the feasibility of building a larger residential home for autistic children, perhaps comprising two five beds wings, with the additional places to help adjacent authorities to meet the needs of similar children.

#### **Reasons**

There could be a win/win result of income generation for Derby City Council and reduced costs, compared to expensive out-of area placements for neighbouring councils. Accepting the logic that the nature of the children means that specialist units have to be small to manage well and deliver care, two wings could keep the operational scale but also provide significant management economies when compared to two entirely separate homes. Even with a catchment area based on the BVPI indicator of placing a child not more than 20 miles from the parental home, that would include Nottingham City, the Erewash/Amber 'border' towns plus Burton-on-Trent.

## **CABINET RESPONSE**

The proposal to build a five bedded home which is long stay / permanent for children with severe autism is based upon our current use of agency placements and our forecast of future needs. As the home is a permanent family home for these children, rather than for short breaks as per 'The Lighthouse', the design and regulatory requirements of Ofsted are different.

Therefore the proposal as previously approved by Cabinet needs to proceed. The recommendation is, however, noted in the context that there may be other need categories where the building of a further local home would be cost effective. This matter will be referred to the Disabled Children's Strategic Planning Group

### **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION**

The above response was considered the pre-agenda meeting and at the request of the Chair and Vice Chair this additional comment was provided by Keith Woodthorpe, Assistant Director:

The proposed five bed children's home is for children with severe autism and challenging behaviour. This is not a respite care facility but a long stay family home for those children with these conditions that cannot live with their own families. This will require us to create a home with as near as possible the feel of a normal family environment. Due to the type of needs we are talking about children will require dedicated supervision and support as well as careful matching with their co-residents. A wing style home, which is what would be needed to accommodate increased numbers, would by design be a more institutional building as well as being more difficult to create a homely environment within it. The usual size for long stay children's homes is 4 to 5 beds with some 2 or 3 bedded units in some areas. Our projected need over the next 3 – 5 years indicates that a 5 bedded home will be capable of meeting our need.

A progress report from the project manager will go to the Disabled Children's Planning Group on March 12 and the outcome of the discussion will be reported to the next C&YP Commission.

## **Recommendation 5**

That Cabinet note that as regards the new capital programme 'Primary Strategy for Change' the Commission a) wish to be involved in a timely way so as to have the opportunity to potentially influence the proposals and b) will take a specific interest in the methodology to be used to determine the order that primary schools appear in the programme.

## **Reasons**

The Primary Strategy for Change was described as BSF's 'little brother' because the scale of funding is much smaller. However, the submission to central government has to make projections about primary provision for the following 14 years – making the 15–20 page document much more strategic than most local authority service planning. Working back from the final submission date of 16 June 2008, the timetable needs to factor in engagement with the Commission whilst the proposals are still capable of being shaped and revised. Regarding b) with such limited funds covering such a long period achieving a fair methodology is essential to justify each school's place in the ranking order.

## **CABINET RESPONSE**

Agreed. There will be full consultation with schools and all interested parties, including the Commission, before Cabinet agrees the Strategy. The Strategy will be produced in line with the DCSF guidance, so specific school projects will only be identified for the earlier years of the period. We would envisage the consultation taking place immediately after the April 2008 school holiday, and a special Commission meeting may be needed in early May, notwithstanding the difficulties associated with the Council timetable in that period.