

Time commenced - 5.04pm
Time finished - 6.44pm

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE COMMISSION TUESDAY 8 FEBRUARY 2011

Present: Councillor Higginbottom (Chair), Councillors Berry, Bolton, Radford, Tuplin, Whitby and F Winter, Alison Brown and Nasreen Iqbal.

In attendance: Councillor Williams, Councillor Hird, Representatives from Voices in Action.

76/10 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Davis and from David Wilkinson.

77/10 Late Items to be introduced by the Chair

There were no late items.

78/10 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Berry declared personal interests as he has a grand-daughter who attends one of Derby's Children's Centres and his daughter is the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People.

Councillor Whitby declared a personal interest as he is a Derby City Council approved foster carer.

79/10 Minutes of the meeting held on 25 January 2011

The minutes of the meeting on 25 January 2011 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

Items for Discussion

80/10 Budget 2011-12

Proposals for savings from the Children and Young People's budget were reviewed line by line, (Revenue Budget Proposals 2011/12 – 2013/14 pages 57-68).

CYP - One Derby One Council (ODOC) staff savings through business efficiency and delivery

Councillor Bolton began by questioning the lack of any identified savings for 2011/12 from the One Derby One Council transformation programme. The Director of Finance and Procurement answered by confirming that all savings for 2011/12 had already been accounted for with no further savings identified for that year. Figures shown for 2012/13 and 2013/14 represented a proportion of total savings for those years across the whole council. Councillor Bolton asked if the £4.2M (million) of savings identified for 2012/13 -2013/14 would affect children's placements. Councillor Williams replied that she did not yet know the details of future savings.

Voluntary Redundancy / Voluntary Early Retirement

Councillor Bolton asked how many jobs would be lost as part of the £258k (thousand) savings identified for 2011/12. The Director of Finance and Procurement answered that the figure was based on an average figure equating to 12 people.

Neighbourhood Nurseries

Councillor Bolton commented that Nottingham City Council had carried out a review in this area and had not identified any potential savings. Councillor Williams answered that the hope was that some of the provision would be taken up by the private and/or voluntary sector. If an alternative provider could not be found the decision to close facilities would need to be returned to Cabinet for further discussion.

Children's Centre Review

Moving on to the proposed closure of six children's centres Councillor Bolton asked when the figures relating to the closures were compiled. The Head of Childcare and Family Learning replied that it was just prior to 11 January 2011, around the 5/6 January. The six children's centres scheduled to close are Pear Tree, Mickleover / Littleover, South Chaddesden, Oakwood, Chellaston and Derwent.

Councillor Bolton observed that all six of the above children's centres are placed in areas of the city where there is an identified need. She asked what families who need them were to do if they were to be closed. She also asked

how many job losses were anticipated. Councillor Williams stated that if the council had the money they would not be closing the children's centres. The core offer of service would still be available via outreach and the remaining children's centres. Savings were planned by combining management teams and the back office into one team. At the same time the council would be investing £300k to ensure that the core offer can be maintained. Councillor Williams continued by stating that the Mickleover children's centre is not in a top priority area. Ideally this centre could be turned into a centre for autistic children that would in turn help to bring down the cost of city placements. With regard to closure of the Pear Tree children's centre, there will be an outreach service offered, bringing a targeted approach to an area of high need. Both the Oakwood and Chellaston children's centres could make use of school facilities. We are also required under new legislation to consider any bids from the schools to take over the running of the centres.

Councillor Higginbottom asked if the centres would subsequently close if any bids were not sufficient. Councillor Williams replied that the centres would not close as the council has a statutory duty to provide cover across the city. Councillor Higginbottom then asked what job losses were anticipated. The Head of Childcare and Family Learning answered that they did not anticipate losses to front line staff but that the council would be looking at management costs.

Returning to the issue of children's centres later in the meeting Councillor Bolton observed that three of the children's centres identified for possible closure are in area 1 of the city, an area of high deprivation. If Chaddesden children's centre were to close then a parent would need to walk to Asterdale where a constituent had recently been turned away. Further, Councillor Bolton had seen a letter from the Secretary of State for Education dated 13 December stating that the money was available to keep the Sure Start centres open. Councillor Williams replied by pointing out that there was not enough money to do everything. She continued to say that she had asked the commission in June 2010 to suggest savings in anticipation of the budget cuts required for 2011/12.

One of the representatives from Voices in Action observed that at the previous day's Voices in Action meeting they had rated maintenance of the Early Intervention Grant as one of their highest priorities. This was supported by the priority they would give to children's centres. Given those priorities could Integrated Services be based in Sure Start centres to save money? The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Councillor Williams said that they would look into the possibility.

The representatives from Voices in Action continued with further questions about the potential closure of the children's centres. They asked what criteria were used in deciding which centres to close, given that two thirds of those identified are in areas of high need. Councillor Williams replied that they had looked at the percentage of children using the centres and wanted to make sure their work was well targeted. She added in reply to further questioning that the Derwent Centre was a matter of removing a back office function

rather than losing a building itself. Voices in Action continued to ask about the possibility of combining back offices rather than closing centres but Councillor Williams said this was not an option.

Councillor Bolton asked the Director of Resources if it was true that the council has £7M in its reserve fund. He replied that we do and that that is the minimum amount he would want to hold. External auditors would expect that level as a minimum.

Recommendation

That £500k is moved from reserves to save the six children's centres from closure.

Proposer: Councillor Bolton Seconder: Councillor Whitby

In favour: 3 Against: 2 Abstain: 2

The recommendation was carried.

Councillor Williams observed that funds would also be required in 2012/13 and 2013/14 to keep the children's centres open.

Children in Care

Councillor Whitby then asked about the proposed savings of £300k in commissioning services for children in care. The Director of Performance and Commissioning answered that Derby was a part of a regional framework of 9 authorities who had come together to negotiate as a whole and hence maximise savings in this area. Savings from this approach were expected to be £225k in 2011/12. The Interim Director of Specialist Services added that vacant posts would not be filled and that foster carers would not get as high a bonus as in previous years. Councillor Whitby asked if there would be an increased capacity of in-house placements. The Interim Director replied that that was certainly an aim. Councillor Williams added that the council would also be investing in specialised foster carers and working with the media to try and seek out further foster carers too.

Councillor Whitby continued his scrutiny of this item by asking about the highlighted budget pressure of £1M due to the cost of an increased number of looked after children in the independent sector. He asked how many additional children this figure referred to. The Interim Director of Specialist Services replied that the costs for some individuals were very high, as much as £300k-£400k in some cases. Councillor Williams added that this was the reason the council was looking to invest in more specialist foster carers. The Interim Director highlighted the fact that the council had employed Independent Reviewing Officers to ensure the best provision and value for money were realised. However she added that it was difficult to work solely on a large scale as it was important to be sensitive to individual children's needs at all times.

Councillor Tuplin commented that he had noticed a reduction in the number of cases brought to the adoption panel and asked whether this was due to budget constraints. He continued to seek assurance that the adoption budget would be protected in future. The Interim Director of Specialist Services confirmed that the budget would be held at the same level as in 2010/11 but that there would be no increase. Councillor Higginbottom asked if that meant there would be a freeze on posts in this area. The Cabinet Member, Councillor Williams, replied that there would be no freeze on critical posts such as social workers.

In relation to foster care Councillor Bolton asked how many of the 195 foster carers in the city are able to provide specialised care. The Interim Director of Specialist Services suggested that there are only four or five specialised cases at present. It was also asked how many of the 457 looked after children in the city were externally placed. The answer was given that there are currently 13 in residential care with a further 84 in independent purchased placements.

One of the representatives from Voices in Action asked whether combining fostering and adoption activities would improve efficiency. The Interim Director replied that this was already the case. Councillor Williams added that the council were now looking to see what else could be done to work together with other authorities.

Nasreen Iqbal asked how long it took to become a foster carer. The Interim Director of Specialist Services answered that it normally took four to six months of intensive training coupled with a lot of references.

Transport

Moving on, Councillor Bolton asked how the proposed efficiency savings in transport for those with Special Educational Needs and social care transportation were to be made. The Director of Performance and Commissioning replied that reduced and/or more efficient utilisation of taxis, paying parents to transport their children rather than using taxis and investing in route planning were all areas that were being looked at.

In answer to a question related to the future of the B-Line service Councillor Williams said that she would ask the relevant cabinet member to provide an answer to Voices in Action.

A representative from Voices in Action asked if buses or escorts could be used to save money. The Director of Performance and Commissioning replied that a lot of areas were being looked at, including independence training. Councillor Williams added that the council had also been talking to special schools about potential transport savings.

Social Development and Exclusion

Councillor Bolton asked how many job losses were anticipated in the area of social development and exclusion. The Director for Learning and Inclusion replied that it could be two as grant funding had been removed. Councillor Bolton proceeded to ask how many job losses were anticipated for term-time only staff and for statutory school attendance. The Director replied that in the former case there were no job losses anticipated but that six staff would be affected and in the latter case two and a half front line posts would be lost. Councillor Bolton asked what impact this would have. The Director replied that it would have some effect. A representative from Voices in Action asked if the A-E service would be affected. The Director for Learning and Inclusion replied that it would depend on the school concerned.

Specialist Teaching & Psychology Service

Councillor Bolton then asked how many job losses the savings represented. Councillor Williams answered that as the saving was not due to be found until 2013/14 a review would be held later. It was not possible to give a definite answer now. Councillor Whitby responded by asking, if that were the case, how the figure of £300k had been arrived at. The Director of Performance and Commissioning answered that the £300k was only an estimate. The timing of the saving was given so as to allow time for further investigation.

One of the representatives of Voices in Action asked if the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) had been included in any savings. It had not.

Learning

Councillor Bolton proceeded to ask about savings in learning, specifically how many potential job losses were involved. The Director for Learning and Inclusion suggested a figure of five.

Excellence Partnership

Councillor Bolton asked if the saving included PEEP's. They do.

Youth Service

Councillor Higginbottom asked for confirmation that the savings in the Youth Service budget did represent a 20% cut in front line services. She said she felt that it was important that members of Voices in Action knew where potential cuts were likely to impact.

The Head of the Youth Service stated that there was no latitude in managing future funding for the Youth Service. They had looked for potential inefficiencies but found that the biggest expense was the buildings themselves, particularly the older ones. They needed to make savings of £600k and although Merlin and Mandela were in areas of high need they were also the highest cost buildings to maintain.

Councillor Higginbottom reiterated that at the last meeting they had been informed that 11 of 55 weekly sessions were likely to be cut. The Head of the Youth Service said that he hoped that the introduction of a mobile facility would help to mitigate the loss of provision.

Councillor Tuplin asked how many young people were likely to be affected by the loss of service. The Head suggested that it was likely to be around 200 young people. Councillor Winter raised a concern that there could be a resulting increase in anti-social behaviour and a negative impact on the local neighbourhoods. Councillor Williams commented that the mobile youth provision in Derbyshire had helped to improve contact. We already have a mobile climbing wall and could have mobile drama and music units.

Councillor Whitby asked if the mobile provision was on top of the remaining 44 sessions per week. The Head of the Youth Service replies that it was not. He pointed out that closing centres would help to protect workers. He suggested that it is workers who change people's lives, not centres. Councillor Whitby then asked if it was correct that there would be a 20% cut in services. He was told it is.

One of the representatives from Voices in Action proceeded to ask for more information about the proposed mobile facility. He was told that it would be minibus-sized with bench seats, a table and a floodlight and could be driven on a normal licence. He was also told that it was likely to be more responsive to need than more traditional youth services. Another member of Voices in Action continued by asking where the reduction in weekly provision was likely to be. The Head of the Youth Service replied that it would be three or four weeks before that was known. The same member of Voices in Action commented that the mobile facility was more likely to be used than the youth centres.

Finally Voices in Action asked which youth centres were likely to be closed. The answer was Mandela, Firs and Youth House. Councillor Bolton asked what would happen to the buildings. The answer was given that we would endeavour to sell those that the council owned, putting the money generated towards the mobile facility. Those that were rented would be returned to their landlords.

One of the members of Voices in Action asked if the cuts might be reduced if the length of all sessions was reduced instead. The Head of the Youth Service felt this was a good idea and would look into it when planning sessions for the coming year. Voices in Action also asked if the cuts would affect the skate park. It would not as funding had already been secured for this.

Finally Councillor Higginbottom asked if the 11 sessions scheduled to be cut would be provided elsewhere. She was told that they would not.

Recommendation:

That funding is found to cover the cost of the 11 weekly sessions scheduled to be cut.

Proposer: Councillor Higginbottom Second: Councillor Whitby

In favour: 3 Against: 3 Abstain: 1

Casting vote of the Chair in favour of the recommendation.

The recommendation was carried.

School Achievement – School Improvement Partners

Earlier in the meeting Councillor Tuplin had asked what effect the withdrawing of School Improvement Partners would have. The Director for Learning and Inclusion said that there would be some change. Councillor Williams added that the role was likely to continue under a different title.

Voluntary Sector Grants

Councillor Bolton proceeded to ask about the impact of cuts to Voluntary Sector Grants and specifically any likely impact on Enthusiasm. The £313k shown for potential savings represented one third of the total budget in this area. The Director of Performance and Commissioning said that some of the grants that had been lost were from the Children's Fund. The relevant staff had been given six months notice.

Representatives from Voices in Action observed that a lot of unemployed young people were likely to miss out on support if services were cut.

Locality Planning and Extended Services

Councillor Bolton asked about cuts to locality planning and extended services in schools and the effect on the most vulnerable children and young people. Councillor Williams stated that money would remain in school budgets.

81/10 Retrospective Scrutiny

There were no items for retrospective scrutiny.

82/10 Forward Plan

The Commission identified the Policy Position on Academies, due to be presented at Cabinet on 15 February, for discussion at a future commission meeting.

83/10 Responses to any reports and enquiries of the Commission

There were no items to respond to.

84/10 Matters referred to the Commission by Council Cabinet

There were no items referred to the Commission by Cabinet.

Councillor Berry ended the meeting by thanking Voices in Action for their helpful contribution to the meeting. Their questions were intelligent and searching.

Minutes End