

SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL

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

Meeting held 4 July 2013

PRESENT: Councillors Gill Furniss (Chair), Talib Hussain, Karen McGowan, Mohammad Maroof, Lynn Rooney, Colin Ross, Andrew Sangar (Deputy Chair), Nikki Sharpe, Geoff Smith (Substitute Member), Diana Stimely, Stuart Wattam and Cliff Woodcraft

Non-Council Members in attendance:-

Jules Jones, Education Non-Council Voting Member
Gillian Foster, Education Non Council Voting Member

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1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Helen Mirfin-Boukouris and Councillor Geoff Smith attended the meeting as the duly appointed substitute, and Councillor Ian Saunders and Alison Warner and Joan Strafford (Education Non-Council Voting Members).

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 Councillor Karen McGowan and Jules Jones declared personal interests in Item 6 – The Redesign of Early Years – Communication and Transition Plans – as Governors at schools which had nurseries.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

4.1 24th January 2013

4.1.1 The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 24th January 2013, were approved as a correct record.

4.2 27th February 2013

4.2.1 The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 27th February 2013, were approved as a correct record, subject to:-

- (a) the addition of Alison Warner (Education Non-Council Voting Member) to the list of apologies for absence; and

- (b) the amendment of Item 3 – Declarations of Interest - by the substitution of the following words “Councillor Karen McGowan declared a personal interest in Item 4 – Outcome of Consultation on the Early Years’ Review – as a Governor at a school which had a nursery”.

4.2.2 The Chair reported that Chrissy Meleady had submitted substantial amendments to the minutes, relating specifically to the representations she had made at the meeting. The Committee received and noted the suggested amendments.

4.3 15th May 2013

4.3.1 The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 15th May 2013, were approved as a correct record.

5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

5.1 As all the members of the public in attendance indicated that they wished to raise questions on Item 6 – The Redesign of Early Years – Communication and Transition Plans – the Chair agreed to take their questions as part of that item.

6. THE REDESIGN OF EARLY YEARS - COMMUNICATION AND TRANSITION PLANS

6.1 Further to the decision of the Committee at its meeting held on 27th February 2013, Julie Ward gave a presentation on the communication and transition plans in respect of the proposed redesign of Early Years’ Services.

6.2 In attendance for this item were Jayne Ludlam, Interim Executive Director, Dawn Walton, Assistant Director, Prevention and Early Intervention and Julie Ward, Senior Manager – Early Years’ Service, Children, Young People and Families.

6.3 The presentation included details of the transition plans for those organisations no longer in receipt of grants, the impact of the redesign of Early Years’ Services and the actions taken by the City Council in response to the impact of the redesign. Such work had involved supporting the organisations in receipt of grants and communicating on the planned changes with families, providers and stakeholders.

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

- When precisely had the Early Years’ Review been completed as there had been a number of references to different dates quoted in various documents?
- Could the City Council please work with the local community and providers in the Fir Vale area, and not against the community, as

was their belief?

- What communication had there been with parents prior to the closure of The Meadows? Why had Watercliffe Meadows Primary School not taken the nursery on from The Meadows like Meynell Primary School, which was intending to take on the nursery at Early Days?
- The alternative nurseries suggested for parents who had children at The Meadows were not suitable in that they were too far away, resulting in travel problems for parents, particularly those without transport. What action does the Council intend to take on this issue?
- How was St Leonard's Private Nursery open, when it was in such a poor condition, whereas The Meadows was closing?
- Why was it that The Meadows, Tinsley and Early Days Nurseries were closing when they all offered excellent facilities, and would result in the loss of a number of excellent, well qualified staff? It was considered that there was a disproportionate number of nurseries closing in areas of disadvantage.
- How can the Scrutiny Committee make a decision on this issue when it had not been provided with all the relevant information?
- The situation at Sheffield Children's Centre had been seriously adversely affected by the withdrawal of funding from the City Council, which included the loss of a number of baby/toddler places and 25 full-time two to five-year old places and problems with the water and heating system. Why had the City Council not identified the realities of what was to come and then "covered up" when they had discovered the realities?
- Why had the Equality Impact Assessment not been provided? This should be a necessity, particularly when the City Council was making such important decisions, which were having an effect on so many people.

6.5 The Committee also received submissions from (a) Sally Pearse, on behalf of a cross section of organisations and (b) Sheffield Children's Centre, regarding the adverse impact of the redesign of Early Years Services.

6.6 The following responses were provided:-

- The City Council had forecast an increase in the numbers of young children in the Fir Vale area, and had therefore made proposals to incorporate Early Years' Services provision at the new Fir Vale School. This was required at the time of build.

Officers clarified that if this was not necessary, then it would not be used.

- In terms of the closure of The Meadows, Action for Children had held a number of meetings with parents to explain the decision made by the Cabinet on 27th February 2013, and had worked very closely with those providers who had expressed a wish to provide a service in the area. Officers considered it very unfortunate that provision at The Meadows could not continue, but had arranged for parents to access alternative provision, where possible. Officers would continue to monitor the position, and had been in touch with colleagues in the Inclusion Team in connection with looking for alternative provision for vulnerable families or families of children with Special Educational Needs. Although the nursery would close, the Children's Centre at The Meadows would continue to operate.
- The offer of assistance in terms of funding from Shirecliffe Community Forum was welcomed, but there would be a need to consider the legal implications connected to this, including the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 (TUPE).
- It was appreciated that provision for the Under 2's was very limited, and there had been considerable discussion regarding such provision due to the cost of such provision. The City Council was aware that several parents and staff were interested in child-minding, and was looking at ways to support this.
- The City Council does meet its requirements in terms of childcare sufficiency, and would continue to plan effectively in respect of this. Officers were in the process of drafting the Council's Annual Report on Childcare Sufficiency.
- The Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) was ongoing and used to inform the Council how to identify impact. Officers would attempt to respond to specific issues regarding the impact of the withdrawal of funding on vulnerable individuals/groups. The EIA had been attached to the Cabinet report of 27th February 2013, therefore had been taken into consideration by the Cabinet when making this difficult decision.
- Officers were not aware of the issues raised with regard to the Sheffield Children's Centre, but would contact colleagues in the Assets Team, and Kier, to find out what the problems were.

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

- In terms of the date of the review of the Early Years' Service, an

invitation had been received from Julie Ward, Early Years' Service, on 4th January 2011, to a meeting to discuss childcare in 2011/12. As a result of the Comprehensive Spending Review, there had been changes in terms of how funding for childcare would be provided to the Authority, and such funding was now to be included as part of an Early Intervention Grant, and the £2 million received to subsidise childcare was stopped with effect from 31st March 2011. The Authority requested that funding should continue under the same arrangements until 31st March 2013. There was then a change of control in the Authority and the Labour Group reinstated childcare subsidies until the Early Years Review was completed. They also made a public statement to the effect that such subsidises were not sustainable. Consultation commenced on the future of the Early Years' Service on 26th June 2011.

- The Council recognised the value of childcare, and was facing very tough decisions in the light of the Government budget cuts. The Council had looked at all the evidence and views, which had included assessing the EIA, prior to the Cabinet decision on 27th February 2013. The Council understood the problems being faced by the most vulnerable families in the City, but had been forced to make a number of very difficult decisions following the cuts in funding for childcare, and had chosen to prioritise funding for early intervention and activities for young people at risk of offending.
- Councillor Drayton referred to the wording in one of the documents submitted to this meeting, which related to a "threat" being made by her. She wanted to place on record the fact that she had, and would, never make threats to people.

6.8 Members of the Committee raised questions and the following responses were provided:-

- The position regarding Capital Grants in respect of two-year olds was different to the financial position regarding the City Council. The City Council had brought the grant forward in respect of two-year olds, to give providers more time to make any necessary alterations to their buildings and expand places.
- There was no evidence to back-up the anecdotal information relating to allegations of there only being childcare places available for those families who could afford the top-up charges. Regardless of this, private providers were not allowed to take this course of action and officers would make necessary investigations if there were reports of this practice taking place.
- The Early Days Nursery was approximately 2.4 miles from The Meadows. Whilst this would obviously create problems for some

families, particularly those without transport, it was believed that a number of families who used the nursery did not live within the immediate vicinity and travelled to the nursery by car and, therefore, the travelling distance may be less of an issue for such families.

- There were currently two tenders out, one relating to early engagement and the other relating to family intervention/support, which would offer an opportunity for some groups/organisations to tender for additional work over and above their normal childcare duties.
- The cost of the contract regarding the transitional agreements reached with organisations to continue providing family support, early engagement and prevention and intervention services to 31st August 2013 was believed to be around £600,000.
- The new tender, advertised in May 2013, was open to both existing and new providers.
- In terms of the possibility of The Meadows being set up as a social enterprise, some staff had expressed an interest and had received advice on this course of action. This was viewed as a way forward, and could be seen as more flexible in some cases in that the organisers would be able to set their own terms, conditions and salary levels, as well as having the ability to raise additional funds. Other benefits would include more parental involvement and the ability to apply for other external grants and sources of funding.
- In terms of future realistic actions, the main role of the City Council would be to stimulate the market, and encourage more families to apply for Working Tax Credit. The Council would also talk to providers in specific areas, to see if they were willing to come together and deliver services in that area.
- Officers had benchmarked Sheffield with other areas. A common theme appeared to be the support provided to through schools. This was an activity the Council would like to look at in Sheffield. Officers had visited a number of other Authorities to help with this work.
- The work in connection with the redesign of Early Years' Services would continue indefinitely, particularly with regard to the increase in Free Early Learning (FEL), as well as the fact that there was Big Lottery Funding and other similar grants coming on stream. The City Council was aware that birth rates were increasing and, in the light of the constant shift in Government funding, it was difficult to predict what was going to happen in the future.

- In terms of the impact of the changes on BME families and other hard to reach groups, the information gathered from the EIA had helped officers look at ways of meeting the needs of such groups. The contracts had been drawn up in such a way which enabled officers to target particular services in certain areas, such as BME and other hard to reach groups.
- No one person or group was to blame in connection with the closure of The Meadows Nursery. Watercliffe Meadows School had looked at the possibility of providing services, but had not been able to do so at this time. It was also known that Action for Children were going to continue until July 2013. The Council would ensure that places were found for parents affected by the closure.
- There were a number of different delivery models, including private, voluntary and community.

6.9 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) notes (i) the information reported as part of the presentation, (ii) the responses provided to the questions raised by members of the public and representatives of Sheffield Children's Centre, (iii) the submissions made by members of the public and representatives of Sheffield Children's Centre and (iv) responses to questions raised by Members;
- (b) requests the Interim Executive Director, Children, Young People and Families to:-
 - (i) review the submissions made by members of the public and representatives of Sheffield Children's Centre, and respond to them accordingly, providing copies of the responses to the Committee for information;
 - (ii) speak to the members of public at the end of the meeting, to respond to their questions in more detail;
 - (iii) investigate, as a matter of urgency, the statements made regarding the problems at the Sheffield Children's Centre;
 - (iii) look into the offers of assistance now made in respect of the Manor Community Children's Centre; and
 - (iv) provide written briefing notes on the positions regarding The Meadows and Fir Vale School.

NOTE: Prior to the passing of the above resolution, an additional resolution was moved by Councillor Colin Ross, seconded by

Councillor Andrew Sangar, as follows:-

- (c) That the Committee reiterates the need for substantial transitional support to all providers to be continued, including, if necessary, time limited financial support, to ensure that high quality provision is maintained.

On being put to the vote, the additional resolution was negated.

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

For the Resolution (5) - Councillors Colin Ross, Andrew Sangar, Diana Stimely and Cliff Woodcraft and Jules Jones

Against the Resolution (8) - Councillors Gill Furniss, Talib Hussain, Mohammad Maroof, Karen McGowan, Lynn Rooney, Nikki Sharpe, Geoff Smith and Stuart Wattam

Abstentions (0) - Nil

7. WORK PLANNING 2013/14

7.1 The Policy and Improvement Officer submitted a report containing details of a proposed approach to work planning for the Committee during 2013/14.

7.2 Matthew Borland indicated that there was a need for Members to look at how the Committee could have an increasingly bigger impact, in terms of the work it undertook.

7.3 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) notes the contents of the report now submitted, together with comments now made; and
- (b) agrees to the establishment of a Task and Finish Group, comprising the Chair (Councillor Gill Furniss) and Councillors Nikki Sharpe and Diana Stimely and Jules Jones, with the aim of undertaking the tasks set out in Section 2 of the report now submitted.

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

8.1 It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on Thursday, 5th September 2013, at 2.00 pm, in the Town Hall.