

**MINUTES OF EXTRAORDINARY COUNCIL MEETING HELD
26 FEBRUARY 2014**

The Mayor – Councillor June Stokes

Present:

Councillors Arculus, Ash, Casey, Cereste, Dalton, Davidson, Day, Elsey, Fitzgerald, Fletcher, Forbes, Fower, JA Fox, JR Fox, Goodwin, Harper, Harrington, Hiller, Holdich, Jamil, Khan, Knowles, Kreling, Lamb, Lane, Maqbool, Martin, Miners, Murphy, Nadeem, Nawaz, North, Over, Peach, Rush, Saltmarsh, Sanders, Sandford, Scott, Seaton, Serluca, Shabbir, Shaheed, Sharp, Shearman, Stokes, Swift, Sylvester, Thacker, Thulbourn and Todd.

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Allen, Johnson, Lee, McKean Simons and Walsh.

2. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Miners declared a pecuniary interest in agenda item 4, in that his partner worked for one of the service providers and would be affected by the new proposed delivery of the service. He would not participate in the debate or vote on the item.

Councillor John Fox and Councillor Judy Fox declared an interest in agenda item 4, in that they sat on the Advisory Board of Werrington Children's Centre, based at Welbourne School.

3. Whipping Declarations

There were no whipping declarations.

4. Call-In Referral From: Creating Opportunities and Tackling Inequalities Scrutiny Committee of 17 February 2014 - Executive Decision - The Future Direction of Children's Centres Delivery FEB14/CAB/09

The Mayor addressed Council, introduced the item and provided a background explanation to the call-in.

It was advised that a procedure note for the meeting had been circulated to Members for comment for which there had been no objections received.

In the first instance, those Members requesting the call-in were permitted to speak should they wish.

Councillor Murphy addressed Council and in summary raised points including:

- Issues relating to the decision making process of the Council, which included the consultation not being suspended following initial call-in of the decision and Scrutiny Committee deliberation being conducted in private session;
- Members of the public not being able to make comments in objection to the proposals;

- The provision of poverty deprivation figures alone was insufficient and health indicators and other factors should have been explored further;
- Issues around the equality impact assessment undertaken;
- The Council was at risk of having acted in an inappropriate manner;
- There had been no consultation undertaken with the service users of the Verandah, the centre which had already been closed; and
- The closure of the centres would in no way improve people's health or in any way go towards protecting people.

Councillor Forbes did not wish to address Council at that point in proceedings and Councillor Johnson had submitted her apologies for the meeting.

Councillor Scott, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, was invited to address Council and to outline the original report and decision and to respond to the call-in. In summary, points raised included:

- Doing nothing was not an option for the Council as there were significant challenges to be faced;
- The consultation exercise had been both constructive and positive, one of the key messages raised had been in relation to the loss of health and midwifery services within the centres and child development sessions under the supervision of professional childcare workers;
- In order to address core concerns raised during the consultation, a reduction of £100k in the proposed savings had been agreed in order to maintain health visiting and maternity clinics, support schools and childcare providers, deliver family support activities. It was proposed that these activities should be delivered from the designated centres;
- Support would be offered to those parents who had expressed an interest in running sessions and centres;
- The Fenland Mind Connecting Mums project would be expanded to identify post-natal depression and to provide support;
- Child care providers would be supported to extend childcare provision and also to provide some universal early years provision;
- Councillor Scott could not comment upon the Constitutional aspects of the call-in;
- Consultation meetings had all taken place prior to Christmas and all additional requests for meetings had been honoured;
- Children's Services had targeted the under-fives, therefore as the children were very young they had not been consulted with directly, but rather through their parents;
- No realistic alternatives had been put forward during the consultation, however the £100k secured would mitigate against part of the impact of the proposed changes;
- The proposals more than met the Council's obligations and almost every Council was reviewing their children's centres provision;
- The government was investing £10m of ring-fenced funding for pre-school provision for all three and four year olds and some two year olds in Peterborough;
- The proposal would provide a children centre service for all families, but with a focus on particularly those families most in need; and
- Part of the £100k would go towards training for childcare professionals, keen to offer their services to the children's centres.

The Mayor sought a motion for debate.

Councillor Fitzgerald moved that *the Council take no further action on the call-in*. This was seconded by Councillor Holdich who reserved his right to speak.

The motion was put to the Council for debate and in summary, the following points were raised:

- Members had been sent a letter which contained a detailed alternative proposal. This included costings which highlighted significant savings. These proposals should be considered by Cabinet;
- The Head of Strategic Finance provided context around the submission and the impact that the proposals contained within would have on the Council's budget. It was also to be noted that not all Members had had sight of the letter;
- There had never been a contribution sought from NHS England in relation to health costs incurred by the Council, with many of the children's centres providing clinics and health visitor services;
- There had been concerns relating to the level of service to be provided at the Stanground Children's Centre, however following further clarification provided by the Cabinet Member for Children's Services these concerns had been allayed;
- The Council faced substantial ongoing financial challenge due to a cut in grant of £40m;
- It was being suggested that a tenant, such as a school or childcare provider, be sought to rent the buildings, in order to protect space for family support services which could be provided by the Council or activities which could be provided and paid for by the parents. This would be a more sustainable way to retain support to families;
- The proposal would have a great impact on communities, particularly in the south of the city, and closing the centres was not in the public interest. The £100k was welcomed, however the one hour a week universal provision at each children's centre was deemed inadequate;
- The extra funding from the government would only go to low-income families and other "ordinary" families would be overlooked;
- Public transport access to the restructured children's centres was prohibitively expensive for parents;
- In an ideal world there would be unlimited money to provide all services. The proposals were entirely due to monetary considerations and the Cabinet Member for Children's Services had done the best job in order to identify how best to support the people of the city;
- A substantial amount of money could be saved if all social workers were directly employed by the Council;
- People across the city felt isolated and the children's centres helped to break that isolation, therefore the consultation should be extended in order to explore alternative solutions;
- The point of the debate was to ascertain whether Cabinet had acted properly in relation to reaching its decision, rather than analysing the merits of the decision itself. The grounds for the call-in were that there had been a breach of consultation and a lack of public debate. The issue had been discussed at numerous public meetings and there had been a consultation exercise undertaken. It was therefore not possible to conclude that there had been no consultation;
- One of the grounds for call-in related to whether Cabinet had considered all options. The submission of the letter detailing further options indicated that they hadn't;
- The question was not whether savings had to be made, but rather that they were being made at the expense of children;
- Not everyone who was socially deprived lived in a geographical deprived area, there being pockets of deprivation all over the city, and therefore the relocation might not necessarily serve all deprived families in Peterborough;
- Health visiting and maternity clinics would continue and families unable to afford to go to a hub would be provided for by outreach services where appropriate;

- None of the savings proposed within the circulated submission would guarantee the £1.2 million that needed to be saved. Social workers should not and would not be removed;
- The Cabinet system depended on a strong Leader and an effective Scrutiny system;
- There had been overwhelming support by the public for the retention of the children's centres in their current state. There had been cross party support at the recent Scrutiny Committee;
- The consultation was flawed as all the facts had not been made available, the equality and impact assessment had only been received after the consultation had finished;
- There had been no explanation as to where the £100k had come from, if it had come from cuts and savings, why could further cuts and savings not be made?
- The children's centres provided a wide range of services and brought communities together;
- The centres made the transition to school easier for children and meant that behavioural issues were dealt with at an early age;
- Ofsted had described the centres as life-changing and parents had described them as transforming their parenting approaches;
- The service should not stigmatise or single out parents or make the service unacceptable to all;
- One hour a week of universal provision was not enough. There would be knock-on effects to other already strained services and this would affect children's development in the long-term, meaning higher costs being incurred in years to come;
- There had been previous times when money had been found in order to rectify issues, the money could be found;
- Other areas of investment in projects detracted resources from the Council and other savings needed to be considered;
- A lot of time and effort had gone in to securing the £100k, and £1.1 million could not be easily found;
- The number of people using the centres was estimated to be between 5,000 to 10,000 in a city of over 190,000 people;
- No realistic alternatives had been put forward at the time of Cabinet making its decision;
- Community involvement and the hard work and commitment of local residents could help the centres become successful, an example of which was the Tunnel Play Centre in Orton Malbourne;
- There had to be longer term planning in order to maintain a balanced budget going forward. These proposed changes would create further pressures;
- Planning for the future was essential and the country was facing one of the most difficult economic situations of the past 100 years. The services needed to be protected as much as possible for those people that needed it;
- Sure Start had been a good idea, however the money ring fenced for Sure Start was now no longer available;
- Why was a better settlement from the government not being sought?; and
- Cabinet had looked at the decision in detail and had considered the consultation;

Councillor Holdich exercised his right to speak and in so doing highlighted that the children's centres were providing a health function and not a Council function, and the £100k due to be put back into the centres would mitigate against the loss of this health function; the government was investing £10m of ring-fenced funding for pre-school provision with this being increased in 2015, with all infants receiving a free school meal; Peterborough was within the top 30 authorities for spend on early year's provision and this would improve long term achievements in education; there would need to be

further cuts made in the years to come and statutory provision would need to be maintained.

Councillor Fitzgerald summed up as mover of the motion and highlighted that there was continued investment into Children's Services, albeit with services being provided in a different manner, as required to adhere to the budget available; in relation to the alternative proposals paper which had been circulated, the Head of Strategic Finance had clarified that the proposals contained within had not been validated and were unattainable and unachievable; and it was therefore recommended that the motion stood and that Council took no further action in relation to the call-in.

A recorded vote was requested and agreed. Members voted as follows:

Councillors For: Arculus, Casey, Cereste, Dalton, Day, Elsey, Fitzgerald, Goodwin, Harper, Hiller, Holdich, Kreling, Lamb, Maqbool, Nadeem, Nawaz, North, Over, Peach, Rush, Scott, Seaton, Serluca, Stokes, Thacker and Todd.

Councillors Against: Ash, Davidson, Fletcher, Forbes, Fower, JR Fox, JA Fox, Harrington, Jamil, Khan, Knowles, Lane, Martin, Murphy, Saltmarsh, Sandford, Shabbir, Shaheed, Sharp, Shearman, Swift, Sylvester and Thulbourn.

Councillors Abstaining: Sanders.

Following the vote (26 For, 23 Against and 1 Abstention) the motion was carried, with no further action to be taken on the call-in.

Mayor
7.00pm – 8.40pm