

# **CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**9 MAY 2011**

**Extract from the minutes** of the Cabinet meeting held on Tuesday 19 April 2011.

## **CHILDREN YOUNG PEOPLE & FAMILIES SERVICE REDESIGN**

Cabinet considered a report that set out a proposed new direction for the provision of services for children, young people and families in Oxfordshire, including the creation of a new, single integrated Early Intervention Service and changes to the provision of Education Services and Children's Social Care Services. The report sought Cabinet approval to proceed with the implementation of service redesign taking account of the outcomes of extensive consultation, an assessment of equality and inclusion and a financial appraisal.

Councillor Janet Godden, Shadow Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Families noted that consultation on the current proposals had been very thorough but commented that there had been two other restructures in recent years, the latest in 2008. She referred to the low number of schools responding and was concerned that schools and Governing Bodies were not ready and that attainment would suffer. She commented on the early intervention proposals and would have liked to have seen more in the proposals about health and well being, highlighting the concerns in the consultation about the loss and dilution of skills. She felt that there was not sufficient information about the budget and to the financial outcome and reputational risks to the Council of the proposals.

The Cabinet Member for Schools Improvement commented that the previous changes had not been as far reaching as the current proposals.

Councillor Zoe Patrick, speaking as a local member referred to the potential closure of facilities in Grove and Wantage. She was working together with Councillor Hannaby to see what could be done. An application under the Big Society Fund had been submitted but there were many calls on this funding. She referred to the work of the Sweatbox and Beatbox and the high levels of local use. Beatbox provided a valuable service for people with learning difficulties. She asked that the Cabinet rethink how the service redesign would impact on those areas without a hub and what could be revised to help.

Councillor Liz Brighthouse, speaking as a local member, expressed frustration around contradictions she found in the paper between statutory responsibilities, the concept of universal provision and targeted services. She highlighted the position of Wood Farm Youth Club which was run by volunteers and noted that it was in one of the most deprived wards. She believed that the report did not look at the specific impact of the proposals on the families in deprivation and poverty. The proposals would lead to a lack of the universal services they required and she asked that Cabinet look again at how areas in deprivation could be best served to provide the best outcomes for young people. She commented that young people wanted somewhere to go and

without the Youth Club were more likely to be perceived as likely to offend. The aim should be to help young people stay out of the higher end of social care provision. Some facilities had been given an extra year and she asked that Wood farm Youth Club be given the same so that a solution could be found.

Cat Hobbs, Save Our Services, speaking against the proposals for youth services commented that that it looked like a 100% cut in services with 21 centres closing to be replaced by 7 hubs, with satellites and some open access youth work and no funded youth worker posts. She highlighted the difference between targeted support and open access. Young people chose to access the youth centres as a safe space to learn, have fun and to be supported. She did not believe that the Big Society could cover what was needed and that this was not the same as professional support. She recognised that the Council had to make serious cuts but believed that the proposals would cost more in the longer term due to the danger that more young people would be at risk of becoming involved in antisocial behaviour, crime and drugs use. The most vulnerable would be hardest hit.

Charlie Riley, a service user of Oxford City Detached Youth Team spoke in support of the current youth service provision. She referred to her experience of youth services and stressed that it was her choice to go and that this was important. She referred to the positive benefits as a result of the support she had received. Youth services had a huge impact on a lot of people and although there was a need for cuts young people had done nothing wrong.

Councillor Louise Chapman disputed the figures contained in Ms Hobbs addresses and reiterated that the proposal was not to make a 100% cut in youth work and said that it would be helpful to receive the information that was being used.

The Director for Children, Education and Families in introducing the report referred to the need to make savings of £19m over the next four years and that the service redesign would contribute approximately £5m towards those savings. She indicated that she had included information on the structure proposals and that the consultation feedback was currently being considered and there were likely to be changes to the final structure as a result of the feedback from staff and unions. She indicated that with colleagues from legal services, the directorate had reviewed its statutory responsibilities and the service proposals would ensure the Council continued to meet its statutory duties to children, young people and families. She confirmed that the Service and Community Impact Assessment had been reviewed in the light of consultation responses. The director outlined that over 290 children and young people took part in the service consultation and over 50 parents and carers responded. Partners were working with the Council to consider how multi-agency resources could best be used in supporting children and their families. The director indicated that the proposals would support the provision of good universal services, meet early needs and provide holistic support to those most in need or with complex needs, protect children and where necessary remove them from harmful situations. The proposals were evidence based and did require a significantly redesigned structure with staff working differently. They would be working in an integrated way but there would still be professional distinctions and youth workers would be part of this way of working.

The Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Families responded to the comments made agreeing that there had been a very full consultation. The balance between early intervention and universal services had been raised quite rightly but the localities approach would address some of these concerns. She gave an assurance about the continued importance of public health and provision of mental health social care. The use of multi trained workers would make access easier for families who would have one contact person. The proposals focussed on the front line. She accepted that there were risks but explained the context of the changes in relation to reduction in central government funding. The proposals were radical but based on outcomes. It was impossible to fund everything and she stressed the importance of local members acting as champions. She would work with local members. Referring to the position in Oxford she highlighted that there were 2 hubs plus satellite facilities in the City. The Big Society and Chill Out Funds were available to Wood Farm Youth Club. Universal services had always been provided by many groups over many years and this would continue. She disputed absolutely the figure of a 100% cut referred to by Ms Hobbs stating that the reduction was amongst the lowest in the country being around 30%. Referring to alleged comments from a member of staff she was clear that the officer concerned was a hard working and dedicated officer and Councillor Chapman was certain that she would not have suggested that there would be no youth workers. She welcomed the contribution from Charlie Riley and gave an assurance that the City would continue to have some detached youth work. She recognised the skills of the youth workers and that young people did value speaking with them; she hoped to retain as many as possible

Referring to the contents of the report Councillor Chapman emphasised that the Directorate had had to make savings but that there were no cuts in direct social care staff for young people. The proposals ensured that all statutory duties were met. She explained the nature of the hub model stressing that they were not merely big youth clubs. They were places where all sorts of people would come for all sorts of reasons. There would be out reach from there and there would be satellites. The hubs were not magnets and they would work also through the existing 45 children's centres. She referred also to the Big Society Fund which had already had 40 expressions of interest some in areas that had never had any youth facilities. Some facilities affected were on school sites and she was confident that some would continue. With regard to the rest local members should be acting as champions for their local areas and she would work with any local member in this regard. She stressed that the Council was listening to staff and young people.

The Cabinet Member for Schools Improvement referring to comments from Councillor Godden stated that the proposals reflected the current position whereby primary responsibility for attainment lay with schools and the funding streams went into schools to support this. The risk would lie in not acting on this. Hubs would take ownership of families and see them through difficulties. Sure Start would go back to its core purpose, meeting the needs of the most deprived. Discussions with schools and governors were ongoing. The Directorate structure was aimed at building capacity to meet new expectations. Schools were rising to the challenge but would still need help and challenge. There would still be a role for intervention in low attaining schools.

During discussion Cabinet Members supported the proposals, with one member referring to the opportunity to provide a less structured approach making use of and developing the voluntary sector provision. He did not like the use of the term deprivation preferring to stress the future rather than the past. His area used the term 'Brighter Futures' to express hope in the future. A Cabinet Member whilst recognising the opportunities in the new approach vocalised the concerns of her local communities in and around Faringdon who felt that there were a lack of local facilities. She was working with them to access other funding such as the Big Society Fund but it was very complex. For remote areas transport costs were an issue. A Cabinet Member highlighted that Carterton whilst being the seventh largest town was not to get a hub. There was a young population associated with the MoD facility many of whom had had a disrupted school and social life. He was confident that a building could be found but stressed that they would need access to a youth worker. He believed all such facilities would need such access and asked that consideration be given to the redistribution of resources.

Councillor Chapman responded that she liked the term Brighter Futures and that it was perhaps something that could be considered by scrutiny. She agreed that it was important not to forget rural isolation but hoped that the proposals also addressed that. With reference to individual facilities she stressed that the proposals were based on need.

**RESOLVED:** to approve the proposed service redesign and implementation of services for children, young people and families as detailed in this report