

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Cabinet Member for Children and Young People held at
2.00 pm on Tuesday, 28 February 2017

Present:

Cabinet Member: Councillor E Ruane

Other Members: Councillor P Seaman (Deputy Cabinet Member)
Councillor M Lapsa (Shadow Cabinet Member)

Employees (by Directorate):

People J. Brookes, M McGinty, N Patterson

Place M Salmon

Apologies: There were no apologies

Public Business

13. Declarations of Interests

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests made.

14. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 17th January 2017 were agreed and signed as a true record. There were no matters arising.

15. Connecting Communities Phase 2 Proposals - Petitions (Children's Centres and Youth Services)

The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Executive Director of People that responded to petitions relating to the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People's portfolio, that had been presented to the Council as part of a public consultation that took place from 12th September to 12th December 2016 on a set of proposals across Children's Centres, nurseries, youth service and libraries with an associated Phase 2 savings target of £3.8m. The proposals included the development of integrated Family Hubs for 0 – 19 year olds located in areas of highest need (turning 8 Children's Centres into Family Hubs and retaining Council delivery of a targeted and specialist youth offer focused on young people who are hardest to reach and most vulnerable as part of the Family Hub model).

Connecting Communities was an ambitious approach to redesigning services through collaboration with local communities. This was in the context of an estimated 55% grant reduction to Coventry City Council from Central Government between 2010/11 and 2020.

During the consultation, 2 e-petitions and 3 written petitions had been received that related to the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People's portfolio in respect of the 'Family Hubs' proposal. 1 of the written petitions related to 'Youth Services, Children's Centres and Public Libraries' and this petition would also be considered at a meeting of the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills on 6th March 2017.

Final decisions on all of the proposals detailed in the "Connecting Communities Phase 2" report would be made by the Cabinet at their meeting on 7th March 2017.

The petitions considered were as follows:

- i) An e-petition headed 'Save our Children's Centres', received on 13th December 2016 and bearing 6 signatures, that stated:

"We believe that the proposal to close 9 Children's Centres and convert 8 Children Centres into 'family hubs' is wilful neglect of the most important asset this city has for future prosperity and security – Coventry's children. Removing nursery provision from all Children Centres will place children at greater disadvantage and will increase inequality and social immobility. There is no guarantee that private providers will take over nursery provision in Children's Centres. Ofsted has found the provision at these Children's Centres to be outstanding. We are not assured that privatisation of these public services will offer the same quality of nurturing for children and parents. Children Centres provide access to multiple support services for parents and children. The proposal gives little detail over what services the 'family hubs' will deliver, where they will be delivered, who will deliver them and how services delivered by the Council, NHS and the private sector will be integrated. The provision of services for areas of highest need will leave gaps in service provision, contrary to the Council's early intervention strategy.

The petition organiser was unable to attend the meeting.

- ii) An e-petition headed 'Save our Youth Services' received on 13th December 2016 and bearing 11 signatures, that stated:

"We reject the Council's proposal to close youth services at 16 locations. The services provided by 8 new family hubs will only be available to the 'most vulnerable'. Youngsters who are not 'most vulnerable' will not have their needs met, reducing their future opportunities and creating additional demands on services at a later date. Youth club activities will cease. Removing these activities will reduce the opportunities for the children to approach youth workers for help. Will there be enough volunteers to run a reliable and effective alternative. Our children need places to go and things to do. They also need trained staff that can provide a positive role model for the future. We call on Coventry City Council to connect our communities to find the funding for our current services and fight with the people of Coventry for a better deal for public services from central Government."

The petition organiser was unable to attend the meeting.

- iii) A written petition headed 'Save Jardine Youth Services' received on 12th December 2016 and bearing 382 signatures, that stated:

"We, the undersigned protest at the cuts planned by Coventry City Council including closing virtually every library, children and family centre, adult education and community centre, making cuts in transport for the disabled and sacking all lollipop men and women, reducing street cleaning and road maintenance, and axing another 1000 jobs that will then never be available to the young people of our city.

We particularly object to the plan to close Jardine youth centre and Tile Hill Children's Centre (Sure Start) both on Jardine Crescent which are used by young people, children and families in our area. These are both essential safe spaces, open new doors and horizons to the young people, children and families that are central to healthy local communities."

The petition organiser, Sarah Smith, attended the meeting and spoke on behalf of the petitioners. Sara outlined the concerns of families in the Tile Hill Area of the City on the proposed closure of the Children's Centre and Youth Centre in Jardine Crescent, many of whom relied on the facilities. She spoke of her personal experiences at the Tile Hill Centre, which she viewed as a valuable lifeline that had helped her overcome many personal issues. She spoke of similarly assistance provided to others, particularly vulnerable young people and families.

- iv) A written petition headed 'Please stop all cuts to Youth Services' received on 12th December 2016 and bearing 209 signatures, that stated:

"Stop Coventry youth centres from being closed down and turned into family hubs.

The closure of youth centres in and around Coventry City will leave kids without places to go to have fun, make friends and socialise with the community. As a child myself who attends the Xcel leisure centre which is one of the centres rumoured to close I am utterly devastated and I will do everything and anything I can to prevent it. In the Xcel leisure centre I attend Canley youth theatre a group which has inspired hope, laughter and tears. In the centre there lies so many memories and I consider it as a home it is our centre and the Coventry City Council cannot close it down. Coventry City Council should research the great work Canley youth theatre has done and all the other groups which are in the centre to realise what an amazing effect it has on young people like myself. Not only would you be taking down a building you would be taking down a museum of living memories. People need to realise that not all kids are reckless juveniles and our centre proves that. We have kids of all different backgrounds, races, religions and sexualities however we are all one big family and we all enjoy where we are and what we do. We don't want this great sense of unity, friendship, family taking away or the transferable skills we learn every time we attend. It will take away young people's spirit and it will diminish the strong community we share together. Think about the domino effect which could occur if we were to lose such vital provisions."

The petition organiser, Bailey Evatt, attended the meeting and spoke on behalf of the petitioners. Bailey outlined his concerns for the many young people who use youth centres in the City. In particular he spoke of his personal experiences at the Xcel Leisure Centre, which he viewed as a vital provision that had had a huge effect on his life and helped him overcome many personal issues. He spoke of similarly experiences for other who saw the Centre as a home where everyone enjoyed their time and had become a strong community.

- v) A written petition headed 'Stop the Cuts' received on 12th December 2016 and bearing 327 signatures, that stated:

"We the undersigned, protest at the £3.8m cuts planned by Coventry City Council affecting public libraries, youth work and nursery provision, children's and youth centres. We believe those essential services should be provided by properly paid staff, not replaced by volunteers working for free.

We object to the Council's current 'consultation process', supposedly listening to people's views on whether these cuts should go ahead, when at the very same time the Council has set up a fund of over £1/2m to give grants to those who want to take over services under threat.

We believe the Council should use some of the £84m it has in reserves to stop these cuts, and buy time for a serious campaign in the city involving the Council, trade unions, and all those affected by these cuts to demand proper national funding from the Government of essential local services."

This petition will also be considered by the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills on 6th March 2017.

The petition organiser, Dave Nellist, attended the meeting and spoke on behalf of the petitioners. Dave outlined the concerns of the petitioners, particularly focussing on the funding for public libraries, youth work and nursery provision, children's and youth centres. Recognising the importance of the facilities for many people, particularly the vulnerable, and suggested that the City Council's reserves could be used to support a further year of operation of the services, allowing time for the Authority to undertake work lobbying the Government for more funding for these essential provisions.

The Cabinet Member thanked the petition organisers for their attendance and indicated that he was aware that approximately 30 young people were presenting a petition relating to supporting youth services provision, to no. 10 Downing Street in April 2017. He acknowledged that public libraries, youth work and nursery provision, children's and youth centres, were very important services for a lot of young people and families.

The Cabinet Member was informed that the City Council had a statutory duty to ensure sufficient childcare for working parents, as far as was practicable, and sufficient Children's Centres to promote integrated health, early education and childcare. It was for the Council to determine sufficiency levels for Coventry, whilst having regard to the relevant legislation and guidance and the needs of the city.

During the consultation, extensive interest was received from the Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) sector and schools regarding alternative use of Children's Centre space, in addition to a high level of interest from voluntary and community sector in the delivery of future universal youth services. There had also been a willingness from partner organisations including Police and Health to collaborate and share resources to better meet the needs of young people aged 0 – 19 years.

The City Council valued the contribution that Children's Services made to local communities and was working to ensure that the impact on service users and children in the city would be minimised through the willingness from the PVI sector to collaborate in mitigation and by working in partnership.

Subject to the agreement of the Cabinet on 7th March 2017, the Council would continue to develop integrated Family Hubs for 0 – 19 year olds, located in areas of highest need.

There had been a high level of interest from groups and organisations interested in accessing Transition Fund, premises and other support in relation to universal youth services. The Transition Fund would enable work with interested parties in the youth services sector to create community solutions with an ethos that solutions are found collaboratively with the community groups and organisations. A bid to the Big Lottery Youth Investment Fund, if successful, would also contribute to an increase in universal youth support in the city and form part of the mitigation of the Connecting Communities proposals.

RESOLVED that, the Cabinet Member, having heard and considered the petitions submitted as part of the Connecting Communities Consultation on the 'Family Hubs' proposal,:

- 1) Agrees that he will write to the Minister of State for Children and Families to lobby the Government for funding to support the provision of youth services in the City.**
- 2) Recommends that the Cabinet take into account the issues raised through the petitions, when considering the Connecting Communities report at their meeting on 7th March 2017.**

16. Outstanding Issues Report

There were no outstanding issues.

17. Any Other Business

There were no items of other business.

(Meeting closed at 3.15 pm)