

**MINUTES OF RESILIENT COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING - THURSDAY,
30 JULY 2015**

Present:

Councillor Benson (in the Chair)

Councillors

Critchley	Mrs Henderson MBE	O'Hara	Singleton
Galley	Humphreys	Scott	L Taylor

In Attendance:

Councillor T Williams, Call-in Initiator

Councillor Jones, Cabinet Member for School Improvement and Children's Safeguarding

Councillor Cain, Cabinet Secretary Resilient Communities

Councillor Derek Robertson BEM

Mrs D Curtis, Director of People

Mr M Towers, Director of Governance and Regulatory Services

Mr S Thompson, Director of Resources

Ms S McCartan, Children's Centre Partnership Manager

Mrs J Bollington, Media Manager

Mrs S Davis, Scrutiny Manager

Mr C Kelly, Senior Democratic Governance Adviser (Scrutiny)

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

2 CALL-IN REQUEST

The Committee considered the Call-In of Executive decision PH41/2015 'Local Authority Nursery Review' that had been called-in by Councillor Williams on 23rd July 2015 as per the agreed procedure.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Councillor Williams outlined his reasons for the Call-In. He advised that the two Children's Centres, in which the nurseries that were being consulted upon to be closed were situated, were considered centres of excellence. He added that the nurseries offered excellent childcare and allowed residents to drop off their children and then attend the many courses offered by the centres.

Councillor Williams highlighted that many of the users of the nurseries and Children's Centres were vulnerable, unable to travel, had high or special needs and were from deprived areas. He felt the nurseries proposed for closure could offer one on one care for children that other private nurseries could not. Furthermore, he stated that after carrying out some research, he did not feel that there were enough places available at other

**MINUTES OF RESILIENT COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING - THURSDAY,
30 JULY 2015**

nurseries within an acceptable travelling distance.

In conclusion, Councillor Williams advised that the high level of public feeling demonstrated how valued the nurseries were to the communities. He added that he was concerned that the final decision regarding the closure of the nurseries had been delegated to the Director of People following the consultation rather than it being determined by the Cabinet Member.

The Chairman invited the Cabinet Member for School Improvement and Children's Safeguarding to respond to the Call-In request. Councillor Jones advised that the decision to consult with residents to close the nurseries, which currently were not financially viable, had been taken as one of many measures to meet the £88 million Government cuts. He stated that a final decision had not yet been taken and the consultation period had been extended by two weeks to ensure all interested parties had chance to respond.

In response to Councillor Williams, Councillor Jones advised that private nurseries had the same level of staffing as the two nurseries in question and would therefore be able to offer the same level of one on one care required by children with special needs.

Councillor Jones advised that there was no proposal to close the Children's Centres and that these would remain open to provide support to parents and children.

The Chairman invited questions from the Committee.

A Member of the Committee commented that the nurseries were at the heart of the Children's Centres and that closing them could negatively impact upon the ability of parents and children to use the services provided by the Children's Centres. In response, Councillor Jones advised that a large number of Children's Centre registrations were not linked to the nurseries and it was expected that the proposed nursery closures would not negatively impact upon the centres. In response to a further question, Councillor Jones assured the Committee that there were no plans to close the Children's Centres. He added that additional services would be provided through the Children's Centres delivered by initiatives including Better Start and Head Start.

In response to a request for further information regarding the consultation process, Councillor Jones advised that a consultation with staff had started in January 2015. The consultation had now been opened to the public so that any final decision could be taken in time for the new term which commenced in September 2015. Open days had been held and letters sent to stakeholders. He added that the consultation had been extended by two weeks to allow for extended feedback from residents and to identify the support required by parents. In response to a further question, Councillor Jones stated that any viable, sustainable options for the nurseries that became apparent during the consultation exercise would be considered.

Members expressed concern regarding the transition process from one nursery to another of children with special needs and sought reassurance that, should the nurseries close, parents and children would be supported through the transition. Councillor Jones

**MINUTES OF RESILIENT COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING - THURSDAY,
30 JULY 2015**

advised that support would be provided to parents, children and new providers if the nurseries were to close. He added that if a child was eligible for Pupil Premium, this premium would also transfer to the new provider to provide additional support.

The Committee noted that savings had to be made in the current financial climate, however queried whether closing the two nurseries whilst leaving the centres open would be a good business decision. In response Councillor Jones advised that the nurseries were not sustainable, but that the Children's Centres were considered to be both essential to the community and sustainable.

The Committee queried if there would be provision to assist parents with transport to and from other providers should the two nurseries be closed. It was noted that ten providers had transport and that once parents had identified which nursery they wished to use, transport provision and financial support would be considered on a case by case basis.

In response to a question, Ms Sara McCartan, Children's Centre Partnership Manager advised that support was being provided to parents, children and staff at the centres. She added that over 1,000 families accessed the Children's Centres, significantly more than the number accessing the nurseries and that the centres worked with children from birth, before they reached nursery age.

Members discussed the decision to delegate the final decision regarding the closures to the Director of People and Councillor Jones advised that the Director of People would take the decision following consultation with him.

The Committee agreed to take no further action, thereby allowing the decision PH41/2015 'Local Authority Nursery Review' to be implemented immediately.

Background Papers: None

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 7.05 pm)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:

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