

**Cabinet 9 January 2018 – Item 4 – Early Help Review**

**Representations from Mr Sheahan CC on behalf of the Labour Group**

Children's Centres provide highly valued services which benefit vulnerable and potentially vulnerable members of the community. Any loss of these services would impact disproportionately on women and children in deprived communities, with many problems only emerging in later life, perhaps when children go on to become parents themselves. There is a further risk that cuts to these vital support services would widen the achievement gap for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, which increases unfairness.

The report acknowledges that cutting preventive work carries a real risk of creating additional service pressures and costs on mainstream care services, but also on other services such as health and education. A high proportion of services in Children's Centres are provided by partner agencies. This makes it difficult both to quantify future additional costs, and also for the Council to take responsibility for how the loss of service could be mitigated.

The report details the risk of capital clawback of up to £5.8 million if at least 60% of future usage in Children Centre buildings is not reserved for 0-5 year olds. With most of these buildings being leased, the County Council will have no control over what services are provided on the premises once the lease is surrendered.

The report presents a crude assessment of the number of service users that would lose out, proportional to the loss of building space and in turn, the reduction in staff. Of the service users who do lose out, their lack of entitlement would be determined in practice by where they happen to live, not by their need. Some isolated areas lack bus services, which becomes a problem if the nearest functional Children's Centre is three villages away.

Rather than delivering the seamless merger of four separate services, the approach recommended in the report carries a high risk of creating a muddled patchwork of services, burdened with sharp inequalities and laced with hidden costs, both in budgetary terms and by way of the impact upon society.

Sean Sheahan  
On behalf of the Labour Group

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