

**MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY, 8 JUNE 2011**

Councillors Councillors Bull (Chair), Browne, Alexander, Diakides, Ejiofor, Engert, Weber and Winskill (Vice-Chair)

Apologies Councillor Christophides and Kania and Y. Denny

Also Present: **Co-optees:** Sandra Young (John Loughborough Secondary School)
Councillors: Allison, Brabazon, Newton, Reece, Reith, Wilson
Officers: Julie Parker (Director of Corporate Resources), Dorothy Simon (Assistant Head of Legal – Social Care), Jan Doust (Deputy Director – Children’s Network), Ian Bailey (Deputy Director - Business Support & Development – Children’s Services), Ros Cooke (Early Years Standards and Inclusion), Debbie Crossan (Policy – Project Manager), Paul Dennison (Liberal Democrat political Assistant), Jan Doust (Deputy Director – Children’s Network), (Neville Murton (Head of Finance – Children & Young People), Natalie Cole (Clerk)
Also attending: William Dean (Headteacher -Highgate Primary School), Dee Copen, Peter Catling, Sue Head (on behalf of Headteachers of Children’s Centres and Children’s Centre Managers), Daisy Heath and Melian Mansfield (on behalf of Chair’s of Governors of Children’s Centres), Brian Simpson (North Bank Children’s Centre Management Group) and approximately 40 members of the public and press

**MINUTE
NO.**

SUBJECT/DECISION

<p>OSCO01.</p>	<p>WEBCASTING</p> <p>NOTED that the meeting was web-cast for live and future broadcasting on the Council’s website.</p>
<p>OSCO02.</p>	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</p> <p>Apologies for absence were received from Helena Kania and Pam Moffat (LINK).</p> <p>Yvonne Denny (Co-opted Church Representative) and Councillor Joanna Christophides also gave apologies as they were not able to take part in the meeting due to the prejudicial interests outlined below.</p>
<p>OSCO03.</p>	<p>URGENT BUSINESS</p> <p>It being a special meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee no urgent business was permitted.</p>
<p>OSCO04.</p>	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</p> <p>i. Yvonne Denny was not in attendance as she had declared personal and prejudicial interests before the meeting as she was the Chair of Governors at the Triangle Children’s Centre.</p>

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	<p>ii. Marcelle Jemide declared personal and prejudicial interests and did not take part in the meeting as she was a Parent Governor of Pembury House Nursery and Children’s Centre, which her son attended. Ms Jemide was advised by the Council’s Deputy Monitoring Officer and the Chair that she should not be present at the meeting but it was Ms Jemide’s decision to attend the meeting as an observer in the public gallery.</p> <p>iii. Cllr Christophides was not in attendance as she had declared personal and prejudicial interests as her children attended a school that was also a children’s centre and her babysitter worked in a children’s centre and had been made redundant.</p> <p>iv. Cllr Reith declared a prejudicial interest as the Cabinet Member who took the decision in a cabinet member signing.</p> <p>v. Cllr Brabazon declared personal and prejudicial interests as a governor of Rowlands Hill Children’s Centre and South Grove Children’s Centres and due to her general involvement in children’s services.</p>
<p>OSCO05.</p>	<p>DEPUTATIONS/PETITIONS/PRESENTATIONS/QUESTIONS</p> <p>The Chair had agreed to the presentations of stakeholders as detailed below.</p>
<p>OSCO06.</p>	<p>CALL-IN</p> <p>RECEIVED the report of the Monitoring Officer (pages 1-4 of the agenda pack) validating the call-in request (pages 5-7) of the decision of the Cabinet Member signing of 18th May 2011 (proposing a new model for Children’s Centres in Haringey) and the report of the Director of Children’s Services (pages 1-15 of the to-follow papers).</p> <p>Committee Members also received various written representations from the interested groups prior to the meeting including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A letter from David Lammy (MP for Tottenham) expressing his concerns that the clusters of children’s centres proposed would challenge the autonomy of the centres and the gains made in this area in recent years. • A letter from the Haringey Children’s Centre Alliance sent to the Cabinet Member for Children’s Services stating reasons why the proposed model was unworkable. <p>6a. <u>Monitoring Officer’s Report</u></p> <p>The Deputy Monitoring Officer, Dorothy Simon, presented the report as laid out.</p> <p>6b. <u>Introduction to the Call-in of Cabinet Member signing of 18th May 2011 proposing a new model for Children’s Centres in Haringey by Councillor Rachel Allison</u></p> <p>NOTED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Call-in had been signed by Cllrs Katherine Reece, Rachel Allison, Monica Whyte, David Schmitz and Richard Wilson in accordance with the Council’s Call-in procedure because the signatories believed that there

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should be provision of children's centres across the borough and because stakeholders such as governors, parents and teachers were unhappy with the proposed model.

- The proposed model presented a gap in provision in the west of the borough, where there were areas of deprivation. Families would have to travel more than 1 hour to get to a children's centre, which they were unlikely to do in cold and wet weather.
- The decision to close children's centres was contrary to the objectives of Haringey's Children's Trust Prevention Strategy and the Council's Children and Young People's Plan.
- Early intervention into child protection was vital and vulnerable children would be placed at risk if the proposals went ahead.
- There would be longer term implications such as an increase in anti-social behaviour of young people, which would cost more financially in the future than if funding was currently provided for children's centres.
- The Council had the discretion on how funding was spent and the Cabinet Member for Children's Services was urged to consider other options so that all children's centres could remain open with the autonomy to manage reduced budgets.
- The Committee was urged to refer the decision to full Council for consideration.

In response to questions from Committee Members Cllr Allison provided the following information:

- Neither Cllr Allison nor the Liberal Democrat Group had received a response from the Council either acknowledging or answering their response to the consultation.
- It was essential to build a support network within the community and the 1 hour journey from the west of the borough to a children's centre in the east would cause further isolation for vulnerable families who relied on play groups and other children's centre services.
- Localism was important including allowing children's centres to decide how to spend budgets according to the need in their areas.

6c. Representations by Interested Groups

i. NOTED the statement of William Dean – Headteacher of Highgate Primary School and Children's Centre, including:

- The proposed model for children's centres was flawed and did not support the needs of vulnerable families in affluent parts of the borough. Being at the heart of the community, schools were the best location for children's centres.
- An alternative model for Highgate Primary School was proposed, which would enable services to continue to be run independently by the school, outside of SureStart. A similar level of service could be provided over three days on a budget reduced by 80% of current funding.

In response to questions from the Committee Mr Dean provided the following:

- A service could be provided based on a budget of £35k with the

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continued provision of health services and by drawing on community support (i.e. using volunteers) and letting the centre out (for after school clubs etc as well as running training courses from the centre).

- The school had responded to the consultation, towards the end of which the Council had proposed to close the Highgate Children's Centre.

ii. NOTED the statements of Dee Coppen (Head of South Grove Children's Centre), Peter Catling (Head of Woodlands Park Children's Centre and Nursery) and Sue Head (Head of Earlsmead Children's Centre) on behalf of Headteachers and Managers of Children's Centres in Haringey, including:

- Accessibility and early intervention were key aspects for safeguarding children. Children's centres minimised risk for families on a daily basis and the closures would cut contact with vulnerable families.
- Families accessing children's centres needed consistency rather than having to re-tell their stories on each visit.
- Schools provided substitute staff for children's centres when required so that they could remain open. Under the proposed structure the role of schools was reduced to hosting the children's centres (in an arms length management position) which would be a loss to the centres which currently benefited from the local knowledge of managers and school staff.
- The new model threatened the successful integrated working and partnerships and strong links between childcare and outreach that had been developed over the years.
- Information sharing was straight forward in the current model of children's centres and there was no evidence to show that the proposed model of separated accountability would be successful.
- It was accepted that financial savings had to be made but investment now would prevent future costs and the Council was urged to provide schools with reduced funding to enable them to continue to run children's centres.

In response to questions put by the committee, the following was noted:

- The proposed model proposed had not been described in the consultation.
- The Head of Woodlands Park Children's Centre and Nursery had received a response to his consultation submission but it did not ease the fears expressed in the submission.
- Schools across the borough would support being allocated reduced funding, which could be managed using a deprivation formula and would work together. Schools would also put their own resources into the children's centres.
- The theme of localism would come into play in terms of budgets, safeguarding and early intervention if children's centres were able to remain open with reduced budgets.

iii. NOTED the statements of Melian Mansfield (Chair of Governors Pembury House Children's Centre and Nursery) and Daisy Heath (Chair of Governors – Woodlands Park Children's Centre) on behalf of Governors of children's centres in Haringey, including:

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- Universal provision was vital as targeted provision was not successful. All children centres in Haringey provided different services to suit their local communities and had built relationships.
- There had been a lack of consultation with Governing Bodies and most schools' responses to the public consultation had been ignored. Whilst schools were keen to work in clusters there was a lack of confidence in the proposed model.
- Headteachers and Governing Bodies were not willing to manage staff that they did not recruit.
- Relationships with and support for the local community would be lost if the proposals went ahead. Parents depended on these services and were incredibly worried about the proposals.
- The Cabinet Member was urged to rethink the proposals and consider giving each children's centre a reduced budget to manage services.

In response to questions from the Committee the following was noted:

- Interested groups confirmed that redundancy and redeployment processes in children's centres had begun. The Deputy Director – Children's Networks, Jan Doust, explained that Governing Bodies had been recommended to start consulting with staff to seek views on which staff could be placed in the redeployment pools in the future. The Deputy Monitoring Officer confirmed that all Council staff had been served with a redundancy notice as the Council was in a general state of redundancy.

iv. NOTED the statement of Brian Simpson (Chair of North Bank Children's Centre Management Group), echoing comments recorded above and including:

- The North bank children's centre would continue to run some activities as part of the church community programme at Muswell Hill Methodist Church but due to lack of resources the centre would be unable to reach vulnerable families that were most in need.

In response to questions from the Committee it was further noted:

- Neighbouring children's centre, Coppetts Wood, in Barnet would not provide outreach services in Haringey.
- It was suggested that a permanent member of staff be placed in each of the children's centres to keep them open and provide some facilities and the important aspect of community outreach be maintained.
- Mr Simpson estimated that North Bank provision could continue with a £40k budget allocation.

v. The Committee received the statement from Councillor Zena Brabazon, including:

- It was generally accepted that cuts were required and there was little opposition to the clustering of children's centres but the Cabinet Member signing report did not fully explain how the proposed structure would

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operate.

- The Committee was urged to listen to the concerns raised by the interested groups who were experienced practitioners particularly concerns about the potential loss of multi-disciplinary and multi-agency working relationships.
- Consistency was essential in safeguarding and the proposals presented the risk that vulnerable children would not be identified.
- Removing the devolved funding and centralising staff created the worry that quality services would not be delivered.
- Alternative models should be considered as a result of headteachers confirming that they could work with reduced budgets.
- The Cabinet Member was urged to review the decision and consider whether it was the best way to utilise the small amount of funds available.

In response to questions by the Committee, it was noted:

- Cllr Brabazon had expressed her views at every opportunity and had taken part in discussions about centralised teams.
- Cllr Brabazon proposed that reviewing funding for Surestart and moving towards devolved services should take place; schools should be allocated reduced budgets to continue to provide children's centre services and ensure that commissioning arrangements were clear with unequivocal service level agreements.

The Committee heard from published author Professor Jane Tunstill who supported the comments made by Cllr Brabazon and stated that the safest and most developmentally rewarding arrangements for children were those with multi-agency working and intimacy, and that centralised services should be avoided.

6d. Cabinet Member for Children's Services Response

NOTED the statement of Cllr Lorna Reith, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, responding to the matters raised, including:

- The position of withdrawing funding and reducing services was not what the Cabinet Member wanted, however it was required in order to achieve a balanced Council budget within a necessary short timescale.
- The proposed model for children's centres differed from the model in the original consultation as it had been changed as a result of consultation.
- The Cabinet Member acknowledged the concerns raised by the interested groups in relation to children's centre provision in Highgate and North Bank and explained that the model had to be based on the levels of need. The model did not mean that levels of deprivation did not exist elsewhere but this was the purpose of proposing to continue to have centralised outreach staff who could work with families in other parts of the borough who were referred by other agencies.
- Discussions with neighbouring boroughs had taken place and Haringey residents could access services (except health services) at Coppetts Wood Children's Centre in Barnet. Health services would continue at North Bank children's centre.
- The viability of further funding to assist setting up the proposals from Highgate School and North Bank could be considered as well as for health services at Rokesly Children's Centre. It was not viable to allocate

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budgets directly to schools as all schools had differing costs, catchment areas and levels of deprivation.

- Vulnerable areas such as the Coldfall Estate could be targeted by family support and outreach workers.
- In response to suggestions that funds be taken from the safeguarding budget the Cabinet Member explained that this budget was for looked after children, the numbers of which were steadily increasing.
- The Cabinet Member expressed that she felt there seemed to be a misunderstanding in relation to the model. She explained that there would not be a centralised team but that children's centre staff, who were not currently on Council contract, would be moved onto employment contracts with the Council (rather than being employed by schools). Due to a smaller workforce staff there was a need for staff to be flexible and all staff being on the same employment contracts meant the Council could better manage the workforce. The Unions had not objected to the proposals.
- The original proposals had included having Lead Children's Centres which had not been well supported during consultation therefore clusters had been proposed where there would be a Cluster Manager. The clusters had also been amended according to centres that already worked closely together. The management of staff would be much the same and staff would still work at the same centres and local knowledge and information sharing in the clusters would ensure vulnerable families were not lost.
- The Cabinet Member agreed that there was a need for clear service level agreements which would fall to the local partnership boards, which would set priorities for the local area and would monitor children's centres.
- The Cabinet Member was due to meet with the Haringey Children's Centre Alliance and the Haringey Governors Association. She would also be engaging further with headteachers and chairs of school governing bodies to discuss their concerns.

Clerk's note: 19:00hrs - The Chair temporarily left the meeting and the Vice-Chair took over as Chair for the duration.

19:03 hrs – The Chair returned and resumed chairing.

The following was noted in response to the Committee's questions to the Cabinet Member:

- The reason for placing children's centre staff on Council contracts was to have a flexible workforce that the Council knew more about and not for financial gain. If the Partnership Board decided that, for example, more work should be conducted in a particular ward the structure allowed for staff to be moved to that area.
- 70 family support workers were employed in the borough that could provide high level support to those vulnerable families. Such families would be identified by health visitors and midwives, GPs, police, schools and some families will already be known to the authority. Targeted services would also help to reach families in need of support.
- In response to comparisons with other boroughs the Cabinet Member agreed to send details of the budgetary cuts required to be made by other local authorities. **Action: Cabinet Member Children's Services/ Deputy**

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Director – Children’s Network

- Local authorities were using different models for children’s centres across the country including outsourcing and having both centres within schools and stand-alone centres.
- The proposals for self-funding children’s centres were not models that would work across the borough, although there were areas where families could pay for services.
- The Cabinet Member welcomed suggestions for other areas where funds could be cut to provide for children’s centres which would not leave the Council open to legal challenge.
- The Cabinet Member agreed to provide the figures for improved health visitor services in the borough. **Action: Cabinet Member Children’s Services/ Deputy Director – Children’s Network**
- The total projected saving through the children’s centres proposal was £6.5 million. There was no scope to move funds from the safeguarding budget as this budget was needed for children who were already in the system.

The Committee noted comments from Cllr Martin Newton relating to the need for a universal service in Fortis Green that was open to everyone and his concerns that vulnerable families would not be identified under the new proposals.

Clerk’s note: 19:40hrs The Cabinet Member for Children’s Services, Cllr Reith, and Cllrs Brabazon and Reece (also in attendance) left the meeting during the Committee’s considerations. Ms Jemide also left the gallery from where she had been observing at this point.

The Committee debated the matter and the following was noted:

- Committee Members expressed the need for engagement, trust and relationship building between the Council and the interested groups.
- The Committee requested categorical assurance that meetings would be held with stakeholders.
- The Committee also expressed concerns about the lack of clear service level agreements in the proposals.
- It was recommended that the decision should be reconsidered by more than one individual.
- In considering this matter the Committee attempted to be constructive and expressed that it would be disappointed if the comments and recommendations, which reflected expert contributions, were not taken into consideration.

The Chair MOVED a motion that the decision taken by the Cabinet Member on Children’s Centres was inside the Council’s policy and budget framework and that further action should be taken. This was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED

- 1a. That the decision taken by the Cabinet Member for Children’s Services on Children’s Centres in Haringey on 18th May was inside the Council’s policy and budget Framework and that further action should be taken.

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The Chair MOVED a motion that the matter be referred back to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services with the added recommendation that the Cabinet Member requests that the Leader convenes a special Cabinet meeting for full consideration of the matter.

A vote was taken (7 members voted for the motion and 1 member abstained) and carried:

RESOLVED

- 2a. That the decision be referred back to the Cabinet Member as the decision taker to reconsider the decision before taking a final decision within 5 working days in light of the views expressed by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.
- 2b. That the terms of the final decision of the Cabinet Member as in recommendation 2a. above be recommended to be a request that a special Cabinet meeting be convened within a further 5 working days.
- 2c. That the Cabinet Member and the Cabinet note the Overview & Scrutiny Committee's reasons for referring the original decision on children's centres back for reconsideration as set out below:
 - i. Proposals made by schools to run children's centres independently with reduced funding had not been fully assessed by the Council and should be reconsidered.
 - ii. The Committee expressed concerns that opportunities to engage with school headteachers, governors and representatives of the Haringey Children's Centre Alliance at an early stage had not been taken. A committed engagement process between the Council and the Alliance should begin at the earliest opportunity.
 - iii. Consultation on the proposals had not been fully effective as the proposed model in the Cabinet Member's signing report of 18th May 2011 differed significantly from the model proposed in February 2011.
 - iv. No reasonable responses had been provided by the Cabinet Member to the objections submitted by interested parties as part of the consultation.
 - v. There was no evidence in the proposals that a proper risk assessment of the consequences for early intervention and child protection had been conducted when assessing the move from the current model of children's centres to the proposed new model.
 - vi. Experts attending the committee had expressed concerns that the proposed structure was unworkable and would present safeguarding concerns.
 - vii. Experts who provided evidence and the Committee had expressed concerns about who would be responsible for the timely and effective identification of vulnerable children and children at risk under the new structure.
 - viii. The key concerns raised by interested groups and experts around the loss of integrated multi-disciplinary working and early intervention following the proposed centralisation of staff should be fully addressed during reconsideration of the decision.

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	<p>ix. Children from the Coldfall Estate in Fortis Green who would normally attend the Northbank site and those who would attend the Highgate, Rokesly and Tower Gardens sites would be placed at greater risk due to the lack of provision in this area as a result of the proposals.</p> <p>The meeting ended at 20:05 hrs</p>
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COUNCILLOR GIDEON BULL

Chair

SIGNED AT MEETING.....DAY

OF.....

CHAIR.....