

## COUNCIL MEETING - 24 JANUARY 2017

### AGENDA ITEM 4 - PETITIONS

#### 1. Lead Petitioner - Wendy Thomson: Save Our Children's Centres

"Reading Borough Council has announced a consultation on closing 9 of its 13 children's centres.

In North Reading they propose to close **both** children's centres: North Reading Children's Centre in Emmer Green and Caversham Children's Centre.

Reading Borough Council's proposal to remodel Children's Centres shows that 28% more children attend North Reading children's centres (1335 children age 0-4), than South Reading children's centres (956 children age 0-4), yet they propose for South Reading to keep one of two existing centres and for North Reading to lose both.

It is unreasonable to suggest that 5097 children age 0-4 years old from East and North Reading should attend one children's centre in Cemetery Junction. It is unreasonable to ask families from North Reading to travel across the Thames to East Reading to access a children's centre.

Children's centres are not only vital support for young children they are also a lifeline for their primary caregivers, the majority of whom are women. Some mothers struggle with isolation, depression, anxiety or other conditions and need the help they can access at children's centres.

We are asking the Council to keep Children's Centres open and at least one in North Reading."

**RESPONSE** by Councillor Lovelock, Leader of the Council, on behalf of Gavin Lead Councillor for Children's Services and Families:

Thank you, Ms Thomson, for your petition

Firstly, may I say on behalf of the Labour Administration that we agree that Children's Centres, brought in by the last labour Government, provide a vital and valuable programme for families and we regret that government cuts to funding mean that the council is no longer able to continue to spend the level of money on its Children's Centre programme as we have in the past. This is due directly to cuts in Government funding to the Council. By 2019 the government will have reduced our annual grant by £57million to less than £2million and on top of that there is no allowance made for increased pressures such as more elderly people needing care and more children needing care and school places - to name but two of the additional costs the Council is facing.

The proposals for Children's Centres which is out for consultation is based on the principle that the remaining resource needs to be targeted on meeting the needs of the most vulnerable children and families in the town. The number of children is not the main indication of need and we hope that during the consultation discussions people will be able to question in detail at the different needs analysis which underpin the proposals.

Although it is proposed that there will no longer be a registered Children's Centre in the North of Reading, we are committed to retaining a significant resource with a satellite building housing services on the Amersham Road at the Caversham Nursery School site.

I agree with the petitioner that it would be unreasonable to ask families to travel to Sun Street to access Children Centre services from north Reading. The proposal is that the Caversham Centre will continue to provide a good range of universal Health services, including midwifery and health visiting as well as range of RBC activities for families, some limited universal and a range of targeted services. We are also working with voluntary sector partners to assess how they might be able to provide some elements of universal 'Stay & Play' type sessions, as indeed they already do.

Therefore, it is not the case that Children and families from the North of Reading will have to travel across the Thames for access to services within the proposed remodelled Children's Centre offer.

I hope the petitioner and those who have signed this petition will participate in the consultation now underway and we welcome any dialogue on how to keep services available to the community whilst still needing to meet the savings target outlined in the proposal.