

Dear Colleagues

Council on 16th February made a range of decisions regarding the budget for 2016/17. Included within this were a range of reductions for Children, Education and Families Directorate and, in particular, future arrangements for Children's Social Care. The Council has provided a summary of these decisions. This is available on the intranet <https://intranet.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/news-content/amended-budget-summary>.

There are a range of complex and complicated issues for Children, Education and Families and I and senior managers within the Directorate have been asked to explain the consequences for services.

In February 2015, the County Council took a decision as part of budget setting to reduce the available early help resources of £16m to £10m. This £6m was to be reduced over a three-year period, so that in this year the Directorate was to find £1m, in 2016/17 spending is to be reduced by a further £2m and by 2017/18 a final £3m. I have during the last twelve months chaired an advisory group established by Cabinet to identify from where the £6m in savings can be best made. The Cabinet Advisory Group (CAG) has over the last 12 months worked to identify the detailed implementation of these changes.

In September 2015, Cabinet considered detailed proposals for change, and agreed that these should be consulted upon between October 2015 and January 2016. Due to a reduction in finances from central government the Cabinet in December last year recognised the need for in excess of £50m to be found. These savings were to be made by the Council by 2020.

As part of this process Cabinet agreed that the proposal for a further £2m in budget reductions to Early Help services should be considered. This meant the total savings for the Early Help services amounted to £8m of the available £16m budget.

The Council on 16th February decided not to reduce the Early Help budget by the additional £2m and agreed to make available an additional £1m 'one-off' fund to work with communities in order to provide alternative provision for vulnerable children from these centres.

In order to take forward the changes to the Directorate Cabinet on the 23rd February Cabinet agreed:

- To receive the outcome of the consultation exercise on the future of early help services along with the proposed alternative arrangements for Children's Services as outlined in the Cabinet Advisory Group report of September 2015 along with recommendations from the Director of Children's Services regarding future organisational arrangements for Children's Social Care;
- To approve the proposed arrangements for Safeguarding and Corporate parenting services;
- To approve the proposed arrangements for Education Services; and

- To receive a further detailed report on the implementation of the proposed changes.

The detail of these reports can be found at:

<http://mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=115&MId=4347&Ver=4>

In addition it was agreed that the Director of Children, Education and Families would provide to a future meeting of Cabinet detailed proposals as to how the additional £1m and the retained £2m be best utilised.

As a consequence of these decisions the following next steps will now be put into place.

- We will establish over the summer 8 Children and Family Centres in the following localities:
 - Abingdon
 - Banbury
 - Bicester
 - Didcot
 - Oxford – Barton/Sandhills
 - Oxford – Blackbird Leys
 - Oxford – Rose Hill/Littlemore
 - Witney
- Discussions with staff will take place over the coming months as to how these changes will be implemented.
- In addition, funding will be provided that will allow the following centres, which currently provide childcare, to continue to provide this service until March 2017 and hopefully beyond:
 - East Street Centre, Banbury
 - North Banbury Children's Centre
 - The Sunshine Centre, Banbury
 - Britannia Road Children's Centre, Banbury
 - The Ace Centre, Chipping Norton
 - Slade Children's Centre, Wood Farm
 - East Oxford Children's Centre
 - Grandpont Children's Centre, Oxford
 - Rose Hill and Littlemore Children's Centre, Oxford
 - Elms Road Children's Centre, Botley
 - Stephen Freeman Children's Centre, Didcot

One of the big issues that has been raised with me and my Cabinet colleagues is how Children's Centres can be retained and continue to provide universal support in local communities. We are keen to do this, and during 2016 staff will meet with schools, partners and local communities to develop these initiatives.

We recognise that the implementation of this ambitious programme will be wide reaching and will affect significant numbers of staff and local communities.

Finally, decisions regarding the £2m identified by Council on 16th February will be subject to a further detailed discussion with elected members of all major parties. The outcome of this will be referred to the cabinet for final decision.

These are exceptionally difficult times and inevitably an ongoing concern for many of you. The reduction in services is not what anyone wants but they are unfortunately unavoidable. I would wish to reassure you that I and my Councillor colleagues and senior management within the Directorate will do all that we can to maintain services and keep jobs. I will ensure that you and our trade union colleagues are regularly kept up to date about this.

Kind Regards

Cllr Melinda Tilley

Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Families