

Town Hall
Lord Street
Southport
PR8 1DA

To: Members of the Cabinet

Date: 7 December 2011

Our Ref:

Your Ref:

Please contact: Steve Pearce

Contact Number: 0151 934 2046

Fax No: 0151 934 2034

e-mail:

steve.pearce@sefton.gov.uk

Dear Councillor

CABINET - THURSDAY 8TH DECEMBER, 2011

I refer to the agenda for the above meeting and now enclose the following documents which were unavailable when the agenda was printed.

Agenda No.	Item
6.	Children's Centre Review (Pages 81 - 110) Copy of complaint letter and response of the Strategic Director – People

Yours sincerely,

M. CARNEY

Chief Executive

This page is intentionally left blank

Date: 7th December 2011
Our Ref: OC/JB
Your Ref:

Please contact: Olive Carey
Contact Number: 0151 934 3421
Fax No: 0151 934 3520
Email: olive.carey@sefton.gov.uk

Dear Mrs Sumner,

Re: The Children's Centre Review and ahead of the Cabinet meeting on Thursday 8th December 2011

Thank you for your letter received on the 6th December 2011; for ease of reference I have copied the text of your letter below and added my comments in blue.

Points by Mrs Sumner

The statutory guidance on children's centres stipulates that all children should have access to a children's centre unless reasonably practicable and that the local authority has to demonstrate that families can access them.

"Section 5A of the Childcare Act now requires that as part of meeting their duties under section 3, local authorities must, so far as is reasonably practicable, include arrangements for sufficient provision of children's centres to meet local need. This means local authorities are now under a duty to secure sufficient children's centres provision for their area."

"Local authorities should be able to demonstrate through their performance management arrangements and review processes that all children and families can be reached effectively."

Response by Local Authority

We are confident as a local authority that we have met our duties under Section 5A of the Childcare Act. Between 2006 and 2010 the local authority was monitored on a quarterly basis on their performance management of Children's Centre development and designation by the Department for Children Schools & Families. The data, reach, funding and core offer was based on national guidance at that time. Sefton Local Authority was banded a high performing authority and the children centre network was approved.

Agenda Item 6



Points by Mrs Sumner

The statutory guidance also says:

“...local authorities should be guided by demographic factors and demonstrate an understanding of the different communities – both geographically and socio-economically – children’s centres will serve. Local authorities should also take into account views of local families and communities in deciding what is sufficient children’s centre provision.”

Response by Local Authority

In 2009 Together for Children, commissioned by the then DSCF, as the national body on Children’s Centre design and delivery requested that all local authorities review their portfolio within appropriate guidelines, to ensure that there was a sufficient number of Children’s Centres across the borough.

By December 2009 Sefton’s network of Children’s Centres were reviewed and 15 Centres were formally designated, in line with OFSTED guidance, with a further 4 Centres given satellite status. The reconfiguration included the following information:

- Data on where the families live
- Data on Current reach figures for each centre
- Data on history of attendance at centres
- Demographic split 20/30% and 70% Super Output Areas

I am confident that the new merger proposal will continue to provide sufficient children centre provision across the borough in line with the Children centre Review Board principles (Reference 1.2, 1.3 Cabinet Report) A review of reach across the north of the borough will address any gaps and ensure services meet the needs of both individuals and our communities and any special circumstances.

Deprivation and inadequate provision in Southport.

Points by Mrs Sumner

As I’m sure you are aware the IMD2010 statistics were published in March 2011. They show that deprivation in some parts of Southport (Dukes and Cambridge wards) is in the top 20% nationally. Deprivation in LSOAs in duke’s ward and in High Park is top 10% and is worsening (High Park E01007055 is -541 between 2004-2010, dukes E01006968 is -221). What is particularly worrying is that deprivation in dukes ward improved between 2004 and 2007 but has worsened to below 2004 levels in the 2010IMD.

Deprivation in neighbouring LSOA E01006948 is the next most deprived quintile and shows that it is worsening, a fall of 1660 between 2004 and 2010 (a 17.4% reduction in rank). Crossens, the rest of Marshside and some of Churchtown is middling to relatively well off but currently has no provision of children’s centres at all.

Response by Local Authority

Whilst this information is factually accurate it needs to be considered in the fuller context. There are 8 Super Output Areas (SOA) which make up Dukes ward, only 2 of which are in the most 20% deprived. This equates to 25% of the Ward. 1 of the 8 SOAs in Dukes falls into the 10% most deprived (12.5% of the Ward). Whilst the ranking of the 1 SOA which falls in the 10% most deprived has worsened (E01006968), overall there are fewer SOAs



in Dukes ward falling into the bottom 50% (in 2010 there were 5 SOAs, in 2007 this figure was 6)

There are also 8 SOAs which make up Cambridge ward and just 1 of those is in the 20% most deprived (12.5% of the Ward)

The Children's Centre Review Board as a result of consultation, are reviewing the services delivered in the North of the borough and have recognised a delivery gap in the Marshside Area (See Appendix 1 of Cabinet report). Future Service Level Agreements across the proposed merger with Linaker and Bishop David Sheppard will include outreach to serve the Crossens, Marshside and Churchtown parents.

However, improved data intelligence evidences the footfall of parents from the Marshside, Crossens and Churchtown are accessing the current network of children's centres across the north of the borough and our commissioned Voluntary Community and Faith Sector outreach services.

I note your concerns about these areas of the borough and a review of reach across the north will address this including any recent decline across our communities.

Failure to take account of the geographical and socio-economic factors in North Sefton:

Risks to centres in more deprived town areas.

Points by Mrs Sumner

The council's merger proposal "to reduce overall management and running costs" I believe has not taken into consideration the special circumstances in Southport where the current provision is inadequate and poorly situated and there are 4 LSOAs in the most deprived quintile. I note particularly that Linaker children's centre, which is the only phase 1 children's centre north of Netherton, is situated in a LSOA which is not most deprived and is also in a place that requires that any families visiting the centre from the most deprived quintile LSOAs must cross the train tracks from either direction.

I don't believe it is reasonable to expect that Linaker truly serves the most deprived LSOAs. Especially when considering that it is poorly served by public transport, across a natural geographic boundary (the train tracks) and what public transport there is, is difficult to use and prohibitively expensive.

Response by Local Authority

When the location for Linaker children's centre was proposed its accessibility by public transport was carefully considered. The main bus routes through Southport pass within "pram pushing" distance from the centre. For the majority of families living in the town centre area Linaker Children's Centre is within fifteen minutes walking distance.

Points by Mrs Sumner

The other children's centres which better serve those deprived communities (BISHOP DAVID SHEPPARD and Parenting 2000) are phase 2s and therefore will be taking a bigger reduction in their budgets; disproportionately affecting those living in an equivalent

Agenda Item 6



(to the south of the borough) level of deprivation in Southport. I believe this has not been considered by the review.

Response by Local Authority

I note your concerns regarding the Southport area; however a reduction in management should not impact on the front line service delivery.

The funding for Phase 1, 2 & 3 centres was nationally rolled out based on a Full Core Offer including daycare for Phase 1 centres, and a reduced funding model for phase 2s to address additional community need. I would not consider the funding for the North of the borough to be disproportionate to the South of the borough; given the scale of deprivation and the number of children aged 0-5 yrs.

I note from your letter that you consider Linaker Children's Centre to be an inadequate resource for the needs of the community it serves. However, I am informed that Linaker Children's Centre has performed well against its current Reach figures and was graded as an Outstanding Children's Centre, partly due to its excellent engagement and impact on key target groups and vulnerable children.

Local Authority Performance management data evidences the excellent commissioned, partnership work and outreach services that enable the centre to work with families who do not engage within the traditional centre setting. Targeted services, rather than universal services ensure that priority is given to the families and children most in need.

Parenting 2000 Children's Centre will not be merged and there are no plans to close any Children's Centres (see Cabinet report page 35 of appendix 1). However, a review of the current attendances and reach area is under way to address any anomalies. A designated Phase 1 Centre is required to have Childcare on site and Phase 2 centres are not registered with the Department for education to run Ofsted daycare. Lease restrictions meant we were unable to develop Parenting 2000 as a Phase 1 centre.

Additional funding has been invested into Parenting 2000 to develop local services e.g. Portakabin for crèche and refurbishment for reception area.

Particular risks to centres in less deprived village locations.

Points by Mrs Sumner

The fact that centres in Freshfield, Ainsdale and Birkdale, although serving less deprived communities, are in entirely separate geographical areas (the villages of Freshfield, Ainsdale and Birkdale) and therefore if merged and services reduced to avoid "duplication", will be disproportionately affected - putting them at a disadvantage and risking interfering with their effectiveness (risking closure). I do not believe this has been considered by the review either.

Response by Local Authority

One of the recommendations of the Children Centre Review Board is to consider a proposal from the Freshfield Core Group to allow the Freshfield Children's Centre to remain a stand alone centre on a reduced budget. The Board will meet to consider the request once they have further information.





The proposed mergers will prevent closures and both Kings Meadow and Farnborough Children's Centres' are willing to work in partnership to secure a sustainable delivery model. (See Cabinet report recommendation (IV) page 25)

Problems with the calculation of reach in Southport.

Points by Mrs Sumner

Furthermore, I notice the reach for Linaker has been recently recalculated to include areas which previously belonged to parenting 2000.

Response by Local Authority

The information you have quoted is inaccurate, this is not a recent reconfiguration but followed the Together for Children National Body for Children's Centres' recommendations and Ofsted guidance in December 2009.

Points by Mrs Sumner

Significantly, this brings a large proportion of the most deprived LSOA into Linaker's reach but it means that if you live in Gordon street (PR9 0BG), as I do, your nearest centre is Parenting 2000 at ½ a mile away - but Linaker gets the money for me attending there.

If I were to walk to Linaker I would have to walk more than twice the distance, cross the railway line and pass the bottom of the road Parenting is on. If you live in Knowsley Road (PR9 0HN), as I used to, which is also most deprived quintile LSOA (or any other road around the promenade) you are also now allocated to Linaker's reach and have to walk up to 2miles, pass Parenting 2000 and cross the railway line. You are not served by a bus. This cannot be argued to be reasonable and I believe it is an attempt to manipulate the statistics and budgets.

Response by Local Authority

Whilst your personal frustration is noted the local authority has been mindful of all patterns of attendance and reach has been determined by the following

- Data on where the families live
- Data on Current reach figures for each centre
- Data on history of attendance at centres

Points by Mrs Sumner

I have never been to Linaker as I feel it is inaccessible, it makes no sense to travel there rather than Parenting and I certainly used to be counted in Parenting 2000's reach – the railway line forms a natural barrier to accessing Linaker children's centre and the reach should be calculated realistically, taking this into account.

Response by Local Authority

There is open access to Children's Centres regardless of a family's postcode. Your right to parental choice also highlights parents are able to access a centre of their choice from a number of Southport bases.



Agenda Item 6



Points by Mrs Sumner

I also notice from the data on 30% reach for each children's centre that no children's centre is currently given a 30% reach for the whole of the Fylde road estate in Marshside (from Marshside Road to Crossens). This effectively leaves this area without any provision at all, since children's centres will not get funding for outreach work done here. This is an area where a large number of families with young children live and is also therefore where a number of primary schools are situated in Southport.

Response by Local Authority

The Children Centre Review Board as a result of consultation, are reviewing the services delivered in the North of the borough and have recognised a delivery gap in the Marshside Area. Future Service Level Agreements across the proposed merger with Linaker and Bishop David Shepard will include outreach services to serve the Crossens, Marshside and Churchtown parents. In partnership with Children's Centres commissioned outreach and health services. Which include:

- Home Start
- SWACA
- Families First
- Breastfeeding Peer Support
- May Logan Healthy Living Centre
- Health visitors and Midwives

Based on our performance management data evidence many families from Marshside area, and further a field, from Tarleton and Banks, access Bishop David Sheppard.

Evidence of a consequential lack of engagement with Southport.

Points by Mrs Sumner

I attend the parent forum steering group and feel this is a significant factor in the poor attendance from the north because we cannot engage with people in Southport through Children's Centres. I also attend the Maternity Services Liaison Committee and the recent health equity audit was having difficulty getting responses from Southport too, this is significant given the PCT has a duty to provide services through children's centres and would likely try to target families with under fives to fill in a maternity services questionnaire.

It is not reasonable to suggest that the families living in Marshside are able to access the existing centres, which are a number of miles away and poorly served by expensive public transport (£2.40 one way on the bus from Marshside to town and no bus to BISHOP DAVID SHEPPARD).

Response by Local Authority

The consultation exercise received completed questionnaires from 1507 Sefton respondents; of which 1350 were current service users. The largest number of respondents cited Linaker as the children centre they currently use. 59.6% of respondents were from the North of the borough and represented all the children's centres based across the north of the Borough.





Press releases were sent to the media (August 9 and October 10). Both releases were sent to the Liverpool Echo, Daily Post, Southport Visitor, Crosby Herald, Formby Times, Bootle Times, Maghull and Aintree Star and the Champion Series (covering the whole of the borough).

In addition a session was held at each of the Leisure Centres across the Borough to raise awareness of the consultation. All libraries also had posters, postcards, consultation forms and the support of staff to complete forms online.

Each Children's Centre identified local partners and they were written to informing them of the consultation and asked to publicise it to their members. As consultation continued, and in order to improve response rates, a Playbus supplied by Parenting 2000 and funded by the local authority was available at a number of venues, including Southport, to highlight the consultation during the last couple of weeks in October 2011.

Specific problems with the merger between BISHOP DAVID SHEPPARD and Linaker.

Points by Mrs Sumner

The statutory guidance also stipulates that in more deprived areas the reach should be around 800 families, rising to 1200 in less deprived areas. The proposed merger of Linaker (with its current reach taking in large portions of the most deprived Southport LSOAs) and BISHOP DAVID SHEPPARD with its current reach which covers the most deprived LSOA in Southport (Wavell, Victory Ave etc) will have a combined reach of 2,296 families which is unacceptably high.

This merger also concerns me because there is a good possibility that BISHOP DAVID SHEPPARD will lose its manager, leaving it with one permanent member of staff.

Response by Local Authority

It should be noted that the guidance states that these numbers are guidelines only and local authorities are free to determine the best arrangements locally taking account of local communities' needs.

This information is inaccurate Bishop David Sheppard currently have 1.5 members of staff and the manager – the merger would result in one manager over two sites, with staff working across both sites. Managers from both sites have expressed concerns at your comments which do not reflect the work they are developing.

Points by Mrs Sumner

The Council's own document reads "It was proposed that all bases remain open although a review of opening times and services will take place". After the merger it is reasonable to assume that not only will BISHOP DAVID SHEPPARD have suffered a larger cut to its budget than Linaker, but that it will lose its manager rather than Linaker (with it being a phase 2 centre) and that its opening hours and services will be reduced due to lack of staff and management from another centre.



Agenda Item 6

Response by Local Authority

The proposal is to merge Bishop David Sheppard and Linaker centres under a single management structure and to maintain an appropriate service delivery model to the communities they serve.

Points by Mrs Sumner

It is also likely that Linaker will have to charge BISHOP DAVID SHEPPARD money for sending staff over to keep it open thereby filtering money away from the most deprived area with worse facilities and into a less deprived area with the best facilities north of Netherton (over 14 ½ miles away).

Response by Local Authority

This is your opinion and inaccurate. There will be a budget for staffing across the two centres. Provision may actually be enhanced as staff with different skills and experience can work across both sites

Points by Mrs Sumner

This cannot have, as the council has assessed in its impact assessment, a “positive impact”. It will have a negative impact, specifically in the places which are most in need and the places which currently have the least adequate provision in the North of Sefton.

Response by Local Authority

I note your concerns and wish to reassure you the local authority is committed to Children’s Centres. The delivery models will be developed and approved after the merger proposals have been to cabinet. Parents across all bases will be consulted on a merger by merger basis.

Concerns with the quality of the Council’s review:

Lack of awareness of the parent participation meetings.

Points by Mrs Sumner

The council’s review was conducted very poorly and I have raised my concerns with several people along the way.

Concerns I have raised include that the council has a database of the names and addresses of service users that it should have utilised when inviting parents to take part in the review process. The council had the funds to prepare colourful cards which were sent to all households inviting them to take part in the consultation part after the parent participation part had ended, and it should have sent a list of dates, places and times of the parent participation part of the review.

When I raised this point the response I received was inadequate; the council blamed CVS saying they were conducting the review and CVS blamed the centre managers saying it was their job to raise awareness. I object to that argument because it is the council not CVS which has control over the database containing names and addresses and the council who are ultimately responsible for the quality of the review even if they outsource the process.

Response by Local Authority

Sefton CVS have been a member of the Children Centre Review Board and it was agreed that they would lead on parental consultation to ensure there was a level of independence and that parents who do not currently use centres could 'have their say'.

At no time have Sefton CVS been criticised for this work, on the contrary they have been applauded. A parent may have been referred to them for clarification and three Parent Representatives for the North, Mid and South Sefton Areas have been the conduit for communication. The Parent Representatives who were elected by the Parent Fora have shown commitment to the Children's Centre Review and have done their utmost to ensure as many parents engaged as possible.

Reliance on centre managers to raise awareness.

Points by Mrs Sumner

The council employs the children's centre staff. I think it is unreasonable to expect that in a climate where the centre managers are unsure about the future for their staff and themselves, and have been reportedly told not to speak about the review with service users by council staff (although this is denied by the council), that they will be able to take initiative and advertise the review meetings. There is also a funding issue (does advertising come out of each center's budget?) and an issue about patchy advertising (affecting the proportionality of the involvement) if it is left to centre managers to do – areas with less provision and community involvement will encourage fewer participants as will areas with frightened managers and centres with no budget for advertising.

When I asked Olive Carey if the centre managers had been told that they were expected to advertise the meetings and given support and peace of mind that this would not result in their centre being penalised she said they had not. I don't see, therefore, how it is reasonable to expect that the centre managers would do this.

Response by Local Authority

A meeting took place with Olive Carey and Kat Sumner on the 5th July at Parenting 2000. Olive Carey was challenged that a message was given to parents that they should not petition or protest. Olive Carey refuted this and said on the contrary and that a previous petition had been presented to the Review Board for consideration.

The consultation process involved centres promoting the consultation and banners were distributed outside centres. Awareness raising sessions were held at leisure centres, libraries displayed posters and had forms available to complete including support for on line completion if required. In addition we used the Parenting 2000 Playbus across centres and in community settings advertised the consultation. Over 1,500 residents did respond.

Individual postcards were sent to each registered user's home to encourage participation and the website for on-line consultation was quoted on the postcard. Over 15,000 postcards were delivered to past and present registered users.

Centres were asked to provide a list of organisations and groups they worked with and these were written to asking them to publicise the consultation and also response with

Agenda Item 6

their comments. Awareness raising sessions were held with Governors, Every Child Matters Forum and South Sefton Area Partnership.

Exclusion from the review process and avoidable poor representation.

Points by Mrs Sumner

The main issue with only advertising the parent participation meetings in the Children's Centres is that it excluded those in Marshside who are not included in any children's centre reach and can be assumed not to, on the whole, engage with a centre. It also excluded anyone else who doesn't regularly attend the centre for any reason; disability e.t.c.

Response by Local Authority

Families from many areas went to Bishop David Sheppard and completed consultation forms. Information was also added to Bishop David Sheppard activity timetable about the consultation, and put on the website, and circulated to many other agencies

Points by Mrs Sumner

The meeting I attended (the final one) was poorly attended from the north. Most likely because it was held in Thornton children's centre which is only accessible by a long and expensive bus journey. This further excluded anybody with a disability or difficulty traveling. At this meeting, run by Sarah Austin, there was an opportunity to see minutes from previous meetings and the review board meetings, many of which, I noted, still went ahead despite the apologies vastly outnumbering the attendance, and with very poor proportional representation.

Response by Local Authority

Press releases and press articles were placed in local newspapers. The Parent Fora work with CVS ensured that non-users could be involved as well as current users.

Press releases were sent to the media (August 9 and October 10). Both releases were sent to the Liverpool Echo, Daily Post, Southport Visitor, Crosby Herald, Formby Times, Bootle Times, Maghull and Aintree Star and the Champion Series (covering the whole of the borough)..

Poor contextualisation and bias.

Points by Mrs Sumner

At the meeting I attended we were asked to choose which services we thought were most important. I asked for clarification on what this was going to be used for but it was not given, we were told to answer just what we thought were the most important. I explained that it is important to know the context of the question when providing an answer. I also objected to the lack of explanation of the statutory guidance and the council's responsibilities, which I felt would allay the fears of closure being vocalised by the parents in attendance.

The fact the parents felt if they didn't agree a proposal the council would close the centres is a significant potential bias, and I raised this point in the meeting, with Olive Carey individually, Peter Dowd e.t.c.

Response by Local Authority

The consultation document requested alternative proposals. Parents stated they would prefer mergers and opposed closures.

Points by Mrs Sumner

Also, the services listed were not all provided by all children's centres and the representation from the north was poor. Some services such as women's aid are vital, but used and valued by a minority. This question was asked in the consultation but again the context was not given.

Response by Local Authority

All services listed in the consultation document are provided across all children's centres. Sefton Women's and Children's Aid is a commissioned service that is funded from children centre central funds.

What will this data be used for?

Points by Mrs Sumner

I suspect this unrepresentative data will influence the reduction in services the council is planning. Asking parents to decide what services were important showed a lack of understanding about how children's centres work. They attract people with nice activities, facilities and highly trained staff and then they co-ordinate support and early intervention. Many people will not realise or value that these important support services are necessary if they have not used them and the groups thought of as unnecessary and nice are the way the centres reach families in need of support (which is most families at some time). If a children's centre is effective these things should be unnoticed. The context of this question should have been better explained.

Response by Local Authority

The question regarding services will enable centres to assess their current delivery and will inform future delivery models. However, this is a snapshot and further consultation with parents across mergers will support any redesign of services.

What should "accessible" be?

Points by Mrs Sumner

Another objection I have is that during the parent participation part parents were asked to decide what "accessible" should be. Having already excluded people in various ways, including those who have mobility problems and those for whom the current arrangements are not accessible, this cannot be representative. The total size of the group was not more than 30 parents, all without mobility problems and who had traveled to a difficult to reach place. The most important people to ask about accessibility are the people who currently do not access a children's centre. Will this data be used to determine need?

The general consultation.

When the council moved on to the general consultation I was disappointed with the quality of the questionnaire. The questions were vague, they did not specify what type of merger the council was proposing or give information about the context and when I asked for

Agenda Item 6

clarification of this I was told that the council were not sure what kind of merger was being proposed. I stated that it is not possible to answer the question without knowing what is being proposed. This potentially accounts for the high number of people who answered “not sure”.

The question about the merger was worded “do you agree...” which is a leading question. You must overcome a psychological barrier to answer “no” and this renders the consultation ineffective and biased. I raised these concerns with the council in my consultation document and to Gill Cowley, Peter Dowd and others

Response by Local Authority

The questionnaire asked for comments on the ‘principle’ of mergers. Parents were encouraged to highlight areas of concern and consideration that the Council should be mindful of.

Stakeholders, parents and carers throughout the consultation suggested that the following areas be considered if the mergers were to proceed:

- Traveling distance
- Investment for the future
- Capacity to deliver
- Retention of good staff
- Community profile and ownership
- A good local offer balanced against the duplication of services

We will consider all of the above when planning services.

Potential bias in communications during the review.

Points by Mrs Sumner

I also raised an objection to the council not having a back up plan to the plan to save money from the Children’s Centres budget as this would potentially bias the outcome of the review. The way the press reported (such as here <http://www.southportvisiter.co.uk/southport-news/southport-southport-news/2011/08/11/sefton-council-launches-consultation-on-children-s-centres-101022-29213385/>) the council’s proposals and the way people conducting the review spoke, implied the threat of closure, despite this not being a legal possibility. This was vocalised by parents and I raised it as an issue more than once. Olive Carey said she would issue a press statement stating the centres were not threatened with closure no matter the outcome of the review because they are protected by statutory guidance but this was not done, to my knowledge.

Response by Local Authority

Whilst the guidance states there is a presumption against closure this does not mean that a children’s centre should never close. However, as a consequence of the report going to cabinet on the 8th December, no children’s centre will close.

Failure to register objections and complaints or conduct a proper review.

Points by Mrs Sumner

The consultation, in any case, received more responses than a similar review in Hampshire and returned a result which was against the council's proposal to merge centres. Given the council's duty to "take account" of the views of parents it seems inadequate to pass the proposed merger - this, combined with the fact the council had no back up plan, indicate the consultation was irrelevant from the start.

My final complaint is that having raised numerous complaints with CVS, my centre, Sarah Austin, Olive Carey, Gill Cowley, Hayden Preece and Peter Dowd, as well as having documented my complaints on my consultation document, my complaints were not documented in any way in the overview and scrutiny committee meeting on 22nd November 2011 which I find to be absolutely unacceptable.

Response by Local Authority

[Comments regarding Marshside and the need to review the reach in the North of the borough were raised at the Overview & Scrutiny. An area report will be presented at the next Overview & Scrutiny meeting on the 24th January 2012.](#)

In conclusion.

Points by Mrs Sumner

If the council pass this proposal in cabinet on Thursday I intend to seek a judicial review of the decision post haste with the aim of getting the decision overturned. The poor quality of this review potentially disadvantages the most disadvantaged people in Southport and the council has failed in its duty to take account of the geographical boundary of the train line to getting to Linaker centre, the high cost and poor provision of public transport and the lack of adequate children's centre provision in North Sefton

Response by Local Authority

[Your letter has highlighted transport issues for parents attending the Linaker Centre – data currently shows that approximately 60% of the families accessing Linaker are from the deprived areas.](#)

Points by Mrs Sumner

(Particularly Marshside, High Park and Southport) which is different to the south of the borough.

Response by Local Authority

[Bishop David Sheppard has many families engaging from Marshside and High Park areas.](#)

Points by Mrs Sumner

The council additionally needs to adequately justify why it has not been "reasonably practicable" to provide a centre, or some kind of provision, in Marshside and why it located the phase 1 centre in an area of comparatively low deprivation on the "wrong" side of the train tracks making it difficult to access to those in the most deprived LSOAs. Also, why BISHOP DAVID SHEPPARD and Parenting 2000 centres were designated phase 2

Agenda Item 6



despite being in LSOAs with high levels of deprivation equivalent to the South of the Borough.

Response by Local Authority

Sefton Children's Centres were rolled out in three phases with revenue and capital monies. Data from Central Government dictated one children's centre in the north with childcare as a Phase I. Sefton CVS were the accountable body for Sure Start Local programme at that time and explored a number of sites within the town centre including Parenting 2000.

In conclusion the Recommendations of the Children's Centre Review Board to Cabinet on the 8th December are:

- To continue to implement a funding reduction in line with the Council Resolution of March 3rd 2011;
- To maintain a network of children centres across the borough, without closing bases;
- To agree to merge centres across the borough, in order to maintain an appropriate service delivery model to the communities they serve; and
- To request the Children Centre review Board to evaluate an alternative proposal presented by the Core Group for Freshfield Children's Centre, subject to additional information being provided.
- To agree use of £600,000 one-off Council reserves to underwrite shortfall against 2011/12 Children Centre saving target.

Yours sincerely

Peter Morgan
Strategic Director – People



Agenda Item 6

Mrs Katherine M Sumner

Southport
Merseyside

Tuesday 6th December 2011

Dear Sir or Madam,

Re: The Children's Centre Review and ahead of the Cabinet meeting on Thursday 8th December 2011.

The statutory guidance on children's centres stipulates that all children should have access to a children's centre unless reasonably practicable and that the local authority has to demonstrate that families can access them.

"Section 5A of the Childcare Act now requires that as part of meeting their duties under section 3, local authorities must, so far as is reasonably practicable, include arrangements for sufficient provision of children's centres to meet local need. This means local authorities are now under a duty to secure sufficient children's centres provision for their area."

"Local authorities should be able to demonstrate through their performance management arrangements and review processes that all children and families can be reached effectively."

The statutory guidance also says:

Agenda Item 6

“...local authorities should be guided by demographic factors and demonstrate an understanding of the different communities – both geographically and socio-economically – children's centres will serve. Local authorities should also take into account views of local families and communities in deciding what is sufficient children's centre provision.”

Deprivation and inadequate provision in Southport.

As I'm sure you are aware the IMD2010 statistics were published in March 2011. They show that deprivation in some parts of Southport (Dukes and Cambridge wards) is in the top 20% nationally. Deprivation in LSOAs in dukes ward and in High Park is top 10% and is worsening (High Park E01007055 is -541 between 2004-2010, dukes E01006968 is -221). What is particularly worrying is that deprivation in dukes ward improved between 2004 and 2007 but has worsened to below 2004 levels in the 2010IMD.

Deprivation in neighbouring LSOA E01006948 is the next most deprived quintile and shows that it is worsening, a fall of 1660 between 2004 and 2010 (a 17.4% reduction in rank). Crossens, the rest of Marshside and some of Churchtown is middling to relatively well off but currently has no provision of children's centres at all.

Failure to take account of the geographical and socio-economic factors in North Sefton:

Risks to centres in more deprived town areas.

The council's merger proposal "to reduce overall management and running costs" I believe has not taken into consideration the special circumstances in Southport where the current provision is inadequate and poorly situated and there are 4 LSOAs in the most deprived quintile. I note particularly that Linaker children's centre, which is the only phase 1 children's centre north of Netherton, is situated in a LSOA which is not most deprived and is also in a place that requires that any families visiting the centre from the most deprived quintile LSOAs must cross the train tracks from either direction.

I don't believe it is reasonable to expect that Linaker truly serves the most deprived LSOAs. Especially when considering that it is poorly served by public transport, across a natural geographic boundary (the train tracks) and what public transport there is, is difficult to use and prohibitively expensive. The other children's centres which better serve those deprived communities (BDS and Parenting 2000) are phase 2s and therefore will be taking a bigger reduction in their budgets; disproportionately affecting those living in an equivalent (to the south of the borough) level of deprivation in Southport. I believe this has not been considered by the review.

Particular risks to centres in less deprived village locations.

Agenda Item 6

The fact that centres in Freshfield, Ainsdale and Birkdale, although serving less deprived communities, are in entirely separate geographical areas (the villages of Freshfield, Ainsdale and Birkdale) and therefore if merged and services reduced to avoid “duplication”, will be disproportionately affected - putting them at a disadvantage and risking interfering with their effectiveness (risking closure). I do not believe this has been considered by the review either.

Problems with the calculation of reach in Southport.

Furthermore, I notice the reach for Linaker has been recently recalculated to include areas which previously belonged to parenting 2000. Significantly, this brings a large proportion of the most deprived LSOA into Linaker’s reach but it means that if you live in Gordon street (PR9 0BG), as I do, your nearest centre is Parenting 2000 at ½ a mile away - but Linaker gets the money for me attending there.

If I were to walk to Linaker I would have to walk more than twice the distance, cross the railway line and pass the bottom of the road Parenting is on. If you live in Knowsley Road (PR9 0HN), as I used to, which is also most deprived quintile LSOA (or any other road around the promenade) you are also now allocated to Linaker’s reach and have to walk up to 2miles, pass Parenting 2000 and cross the railway line. You are not served by a bus. This cannot be argued to be reasonable and I believe it is an attempt to manipulate the statistics and budgets.

I have never been to Linaker as I feel it is inaccessible, it makes no sense to travel there rather than Parenting and I certainly used to be counted in Parenting 2000's reach – the railway line forms a natural barrier to accessing Linaker children's centre and the reach should be calculated realistically, taking this into account.

I also notice from the data on 30% reach for each children's centre that no children's centre is currently given a 30% reach for the whole of the Fylde road estate in Marshside (from Marshside Road to Crossens). This effectively leaves this area without any provision at all, since children's centres will not get funding for outreach work done here. This is an area where a large number of families with young children live and is also therefore where a number of primary schools are situated in Southport.

Evidence of a consequential lack of engagement with Southport.

I attend the parent forum steering group and feel this is a significant factor in the poor attendance from the north because we cannot engage with people in Southport through Children's Centres. I also attend the Maternity Services Liason Committee and the recent health equity audit was having difficulty getting responses from Southport too, this is significant given the PCT has a duty

Agenda Item 6

to provide services through children's centres and would likely try to target families with under fives to fill in a maternity services questionnaire. It is not reasonable to suggest that the families living in Marshside are able to access the existing centres, which are a number of miles away and poorly served by expensive public transport (£2.40 one way on the bus from Marshside to town and no bus to BDS).

Specific problems with the merger between BDS and Linaker.

The statutory guidance also stipulates that in more deprived areas the reach should be around 800 families, rising to 1200 in less deprived areas. The proposed merger of Linaker (with its current reach taking in large portions of the most deprived southport LSOAs) and BDS with its current reach which covers the most deprived LSOA in Southport (Wavell, Victory Ave etc) will have a combined reach of 2,296 families which is unacceptably high.

This merger also concerns me because there is a good possibility that BDS will lose its manager, leaving it with one permanent member of staff. The Council's own document reads "It was proposed that all bases remain open although a review of opening times and services will take place". After the merger it is reasonable to assume that not only will BDS have suffered a larger cut to its budget than Linaker, but that it will lose its manager rather than Linaker (with it being a phase 2 centre) and that its opening hours and services will be reduced due to lack of staff and management from another centre.

It is also likely that Linaker will have to charge BDS money for sending staff over to keep it open thereby filtering money away from the most deprived area with worse facilities and into a less deprived area with the best facilities north of Netherton (over 14 ½ miles away).

This cannot have, as the council has assessed in its impact assessment, a “positive impact”. It will have a negative impact, specifically in the places which are most in need and the places which currently have the least adequate provision in the North of Sefton.

Concerns with the quality of the Council’s review:

Lack of awareness of the parent participation meetings.

The council’s review was conducted very poorly and I have raised my concerns with several people along the way.

Concerns I have raised include that the council has a database of the names and addresses of service users that it should have utilised when inviting parents to take part in the review process. The council had the funds to prepare colourful cards which were sent to all households inviting them to take part in the consultation part after the parent participation part had ended, and it should have sent a list of dates, places and times of the parent participation part of the review.

Agenda Item 6

When I raised this point the response I received was inadequate; the council blamed CVS saying they were conducting the review and CVS blamed the centre managers saying it was their job to raise awareness. I object to that argument because it is the council not CVS which has control over the database containing names and addresses and the council who are ultimately responsible for the quality of the review even if they outsource the process.

Reliance on centre managers to raise awareness.

The council employ the children's centre staff. I think it is unreasonable to expect that in a climate where the centre managers are unsure about the future for their staff and themselves, and have been reportedly told not to speak about the review with service users by council staff (although this is denied by the council), that they will be able to take initiative and advertise the review meetings. There is also a funding issue (does advertising come out of each centre's budget?) and an issue about patchy advertising (affecting the proportionality of the involvement) if it is left to centre managers to do – areas with less provision and community involvement will encourage fewer participants as will areas with frightened managers and centres with no budget for advertising.

When I asked Olive Carey if the centre managers had been told that they were expected to advertise the meetings and given support and peace of mind that this would not result in their centre being penalised she said they had

not. I don't see, therefore, how it is reasonable to expect that the centre managers would do this.

Exclusion from the review process and avoidable poor representation.

The main issue with only advertising the parent participation meetings in the Children's Centres is that it excluded those in Marshside who are not included in any children's centre reach and can be assumed not to, on the whole, engage with a centre. It also excluded anyone else who doesn't regularly attend the centre for any reason; disability e.t.c.

The meeting I attended (the final one) was poorly attended from the north. Most likely because it was held in Thornton children's centre which is only accessible by a long and expensive bus journey. This further excluded anybody with a disability or difficulty travelling. At this meeting, run by Sarah Austin, there was an opportunity to see minutes from previous meetings and the review board meetings, many of which, I noted, still went ahead despite the apologies vastly outnumbering the attendance, and with very poor proportional representation.

Poor contextualisation and bias.

At the meeting I attended we were asked to choose which services we thought were most important. I asked for clarification on what this was going to be used for but it was not given, we were told to answer just what we thought were the most important. I explained that it is

Agenda Item 6

important to know the context of the question when providing an answer. I also objected to the lack of explanation of the statutory guidance and the council's responsibilities, which I felt would allay the fears of closure being vocalised by the parents in attendance.

The fact the parents felt if they didn't agree a proposal the council would close the centres is a significant potential bias, and I raised this point in the meeting, with Olive Carey individually, Peter Dowd e.t.c.

Also, the services listed were not all provided by all children's centres and the representation from the north was poor. Some services such as women's aid are vital, but used and valued by a minority. This question was asked in the consultation but again the context was not given.

What will this data be used for?

I suspect this unrepresentative data will influence the reduction in services the council is planning. Asking parents to decide what services were important showed a lack of understanding about how children's centres work. They attract people with nice activities, facilities and highly trained staff and then they co-ordinate support and early intervention. Many people will not realise or value that these important support services are necessary if they have not used them and the groups thought of as unnecessary and nice are the way the centres reach families in need of support (which is most families at some time). If a children's centre is effective these things

should be unnoticed. The context of this question should have been better explained.

What should “accessible” be?

Another objection I have is that during the parent participation part parents were asked to decide what “accessible” should be. Having already excluded people in various ways, including those who have mobility problems and those for whom the current arrangements are not accessible, this cannot be representative. The total size of the group was not more than 30 parents, all without mobility problems and who had travelled to a difficult to reach place. The most important people to ask about accessibility are the people who currently do not access a children’s centre. Will this data be used to determine need?

The general consultation.

When the council moved on to the general consultation I was disappointed with the quality of the questionnaire. The questions were vague, they did not specify what type of merger the council was proposing or give information about the context and when I asked for clarification of this I was told that the council were not sure what kind of merger was being proposed. I stated that it is not possible to answer the question without knowing what is being proposed. This potentially accounts for the high number of people who answered “not sure”.

Agenda Item 6

The question about the merger was worded “do you agree...” which is a leading question. You must overcome a psychological barrier to answer “no” and this renders the consultation ineffective and biased. I raised these concerns with the council in my consultation document and to Gill Cowley, Peter Dowd and others.

Potential bias in communications during the review.

I also raised an objection to the council not having a back up plan to the plan to save money from the Children’s Centres budget as this would potentially bias the outcome of the review. The way the press reported (such as here <http://www.southportvisiter.co.uk/southport-news/southport-southport-news/2011/08/11/sefton-council-launches-consultation-on-children-s-centres-101022-29213385/>) the council’s proposals and the way people conducting the review spoke, implied the threat of closure, despite this not being a legal possibility. This was vocalised by parents and I raised it as an issue more than once. Olive Carey said she would issue a press statement stating the centres were not threatened with closure no matter the outcome of the review because they are protected by statutory guidance but this was not done, to my knowledge.

Failure to register objections and complaints or conduct a proper review.

The consultation, in any case, received more responses than a similar review in Hampshire and returned a result which was against the council's proposal to merge centres. Given the council's duty to "take account" of the views of parents it seems inadequate to pass the proposed merger - this, combined with the fact the council had no back up plan, indicate the consultation was irrelevant from the start.

My final complaint is that having raised numerous complaints with CVS, my centre, Sarah Austin, Olive Carey, Gill Cowley, Hayden Preece and Peter Dowd, as well as having documented my complaints on my consultation document, my complaints were not documented in any way in the overview and scrutiny committee meeting on 22nd November 2011 which I find to be absolutely unacceptable.

In conclusion.

If the council pass this proposal in cabinet on Thursday I intend to seek a judicial review of the decision post haste with the aim of getting the decision overturned. The poor quality of this review potentially disadvantages the most disadvantaged people in Southport and the council has failed in its duty to take account of the geographical boundary of the train line to getting to Linaker centre, the high cost and poor provision of public transport and the lack of adequate children's centre provision in North Sefton (particularly Marshside, High Park and Southport) which is different to the south of the borough.

Agenda Item 6

The council additionally needs to adequately justify why it has not been “reasonably practicable” to provide a centre, or some kind of provision, in Marshside and why it located the phase 1 centre in an area of comparatively low deprivation on the “wrong” side of the train tracks making it difficult to access to those in the most deprived LSOAs. Also, why BDS and Parenting 2000 centres were designated phase 2 despite being in LSOAs with high levels of deprivation equivalent to the South of the Borough.

I look forward to hearing how we can work together to avoid this.

Many Thanks,

Kat Sumner

Sources:

<https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/SSCC%20statutory%20guidance-2010.pdf>

<http://undertheraedar.blogspot.com/2011/06/imd-2004-2007-2010-change-over-time.html>

Agenda Item 6

[http://www.seftonpct.nhs.uk/your-health/public-health-information/Deprivation Mersey Cluster.asp](http://www.seftonpct.nhs.uk/your-health/public-health-information/Deprivation_Mersey_Cluster.asp)

<http://batchgeo.com/map/b20b0d7d6d52441aec529555d830ea89>

This page is intentionally left blank