

## Statement for Cabinet, 13th November 2013

### Bath and North East Somerset Council:

*Good evening my name is Dougie Brown and I am reading this statement on behalf of Sue Pendle, the Chair of the Board of Trustees at First Steps (Bath);*

First Steps is a charity which under commission from the Council is the external provider, of your Children's Centres at Twerton and Moorlands.

I am very passionate about the work that First Steps and other Children Centres do for our local community and I would just like to briefly explain why I think they are so important. During my normally working day I work for a large national charity which helps disadvantaged and disengaged young people from the ages of 13 -25. I am convinced and have seen lots of evidence that show that high quality Early Years intervention has a hugely positive effect of Young People's lives later on, especially in their teenage years. It is therefore vital it continues.

There are three points I would like to make. They are:

- 1. The proposed 38% budget reduction on Children's Centres is out of line with your priorities and is disproportionate to the overall level of council budget reductions elsewhere and should therefore be reconsidered. Early Years intervention works.**
- 2. The three options in the council's proposed hub and spoke model are not really different options at all as they assume the same level of reduction and same service delivery.**
- 3 That the Twerton community and its specific needs mean that this area should be given particularly careful consideration when reviewing this budget discussion.**

I would now like to try and explain in more detail what I mean by these points.

#### **Point 1**

We completely accept that savings need to be made and that this will mean that the Council will need to make some difficult and drastic cuts however I believe you are targeting the wrong areas for these cuts and **that you should wholly reconsider this proposed 38% budget reduction on Children's Centres.**

This huge reduction hits front line services for some of the most vulnerable people in our community; it is therefore out of line with your priorities. Also the level of reduction you are seeking to implement will mean that young children are much more likely to be at risk of requiring more intensive support from educational, social care and health services.

The proposed model of delivery, with significantly restricted children's centre services at many of existing children's Centres will dilute the availability of Children's Centre services to the extent that their capacity to identify and support families at risk will be seriously impaired.

The Child Psychotherapy Trust recently commissioned a paper looking at promoting infant mental health in which it found, and I quote ‘ a redistribution of resources to support infants, carers and families in their Early Years would save much on what is being spent on behavioural and mental problems of older children, teenagers and adults.’

The Trust also tried to put a figure on the costs of not intervening in infancy. As an illustration they estimated that the cost to a social service department for a child protection plan for one family assuming one child is taken into care is between £15-£20k for 3 months support.

## **Point 2**

The three options are not really options at all – they assume the same level of reduction and the same service delivery shape. Also none of the options proposed seemed to be based on need. We would ask you to give further consideration to these proposals in relation particularly to the following points

i) part time CC provision in areas of high and medium need produces real risks where the levels of engagement with vulnerable children and families are not enough to support them in a safe and appropriate way

ii) the particular arrangements proposed in this model in respect of Bath West are still not clear and we feel that further consultation should take place. From a 1<sup>st</sup> Steps view we would strongly argue on the grounds of need that if you do proceed with this model of service delivery then Twerton should be given ‘hub’ status.

iii) there were many comments at the PD&S Panel meeting on 14th October about the inappropriateness of a single focus on a ‘medical’ model inherent in asking a Health provider, to provide Children’s Centres, under your option 2). We would ask that you consider developing this option further to look at alternative patterns of providers, including perhaps partnership arrangements with ourselves, perhaps in partnership with health.

iv) that you should reconsider the assumption that day care would or can be provided on a self financing basis at all Children’s Centres – Each centre needs to be look at from its own merits and issues.

## **Point 3**

You are being asked to make decisions that confirm a 38% reduction in Children’s Centre funding without any data on need levels or the impact that Children’s Centres are having on the areas where they deliver their support. As an example you should be aware of some of the following statistics from our support in Twerton and Whiteway

### **Need**

1) In some Super out put areas 40% of children under 5 live in workless households

2) Twerton has the highest % of children eligible for free school meals: 31% compared with the LA average of 12.28% and the highest incidents of Domestic Abuse; 16% of families with children being affected compared with the LA average of 6.563%

## **Impact**

- 1) The Child Care Monitory Report clearly shows that 92% of families in the most deprived areas have been seen.
- 2) The gap in achievement on the Early Years Foundation Profile is reducing.

As a charity involved in providing support to children and families in Twerton for 15 years – First Steps know that the universal availability of highly flexible day care and related services is the most effective way to engage with children and families in that community – this model of day care, in the Children’s Centre context, is not possible on a self financing basis.

I would ask that, if there are to be reductions in the CC budget at all, that particular consideration is given to the needs of the community in Whiteway and Twerton