

My name is Jane Carter and I am the Branch Secretary for the B&NES Unison Branch.

At our most recent Branch Executive meeting the committee voted unanimously to oppose these cuts to the Children's Centres for a couple of reasons:

The importance of the work that is carried out by the Children's Centres cannot be underestimated. They provide really crucial services which can help highlight and tackle problems as early as possible and we are fearful of the costs that will be built up for the authority in the future if you cut this.

The purpose of Children's Centres is to improve outcomes for young children with a particular focus on the most disadvantaged. If you take away the skilled, qualified and experienced employees from these centres, or if you outsource them outside of council control, how can you be sure that the most disadvantaged are being reached?

We are concerned about the impact of these cuts on the most disadvantaged and we are concerned that a decision could be made when we haven't seen an equalities impact assessment.

As a trade union, we are obviously also worried about the loss of skilled employees from the Children's Centres. There are currently just over 127 Paid posts in Children's Centres, 91 of these are council employees and we therefore anticipate significant job losses although we are unclear of the detail yet.

These paid posts can't be replaced by volunteers. The Councils own policy is very clear, it states that "Volunteers will only be used to provide additional or extended services to the community, to support the work of paid staff and not replace them"<sup>1</sup>

Our Branch certainly recognise that volunteers have a crucial role in the success of Children's Centres and we highly value their work, alongside the paid, skilled, trained and qualified employees. The loss of paid posts has to therefore mean that the services that Children's Centres can offer will be cut dramatically.

The manager of a Children's Centre in the North East is quoted in the 2012 Sure Start Census document as follows:

"The move towards using volunteers to replace paid, qualified and experienced staff would be a dangerous one. Volunteers are a valuable resource but need careful and thoughtful management support"<sup>2</sup>

We urge the cabinet to seriously note the issues highlighted and consider the recommendations of the Minority report.

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<sup>1</sup> Page 3, Bullet Point 2 under **2. Principles** of the Document '*Volunteers at Bath and North East Somerset Guidelines for Managers and Staff*' Feb 2013

<sup>2</sup> Page 26, Sure Start Children's Centres Census 2012