

E2593. Re-structuring of the Early Years, Children's Centres and Early Help (0-11) Services 2014-2016 **Cabinet 13 November 2013**

'Do you want your beans on toast or off?' How many of us have asked that question when giving our youngsters their supper? It makes no difference to mum what the answer is, except that children are more likely to 'eat up' if they get their choice. The three options given in the decision- decision- taking via the EYCY panel and the Task and Finish group it set up has a flavour of 'beans on toast'. However, the real question is whether beans on toast, with the high sugar and carbohydrate content, is the right choice in the first place. In the various officers' reports, members were asked whether they wanted horizontal or vertical cuts. Too little consideration was given to whether such deep cuts should be made at all. Here I back Cllr Hardman's argument 100%. Let me draw your attention to para. 3.4 of the report to cabinet where despite the concerns of the Task and Finish Group, it made no difference to the final outcome even though there is no authority in the budget decisions of Council in February 2013 for this £2.3m cut. Eat your beans up or else go hungry. There is nothing else!

It does not seem to me that proper account has been made of the Equalities Impact – and leaving an assessment until after the proposed model is complete, is too late to engage with the issues. (para.4.2) In Radstock apart from the very popular play park provided by the Town Council, and the provisions at our three wonderful primary schools, not to mention 'messy play' occasionally run by the churches, there is very little for children. If these cuts go through their lives, already, statistically shortened by seven years compared with the situation for MSN or Odd Down children, will be further blighted. Breast-feeding rates in my ward are already lower than average – now the support groups will be cut. At 32% of pregnant mothers aged under 30 smoking, how will we secure a healthy environment? Our definitions of 'vulnerable' are too rigid. We need a comprehensive, accessible service if children in the Radstock area (and elsewhere) are not to fall even further behind.

There is no question that co-location and more efficient management could mean more income, as the children's centres are valuable community assets. However, at the end of the day, it is a question of priorities. Stop any person in the street in Radstock (especially someone who has been nearly run over by a bicycle), and they will say that the money should be found from elsewhere. Cycling is a hobby and a luxury, so is spending £5 million painting buildings in Bath.

Finally as I pointed out to Cllr Bellotti at the MSN Budget fair, a 38% cut will make the 'rump' of the service unsustainable. It cannot be allowed to happen. I therefore call upon the cabinet to refer the report back to the Scrutiny panel, accepting Cllr Hardman's recommendations.

Cllr Eleanor Jackson