



Statement to the Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel

Roz Lambert, CEO.

15th November 2016

We are very concerned about the long term outcomes for children and families in Bath West.

We are not assured that the options put forward in the Children's Centre briefing paper outlining the Local Authorities option appraisal process to decide on a model of Children's Centre Service Delivery have been fully or fairly thought through.

We feel that some of the options unfairly disadvantage First Steps and this is a concern as First Steps is a community organisation working in the heart of the most disadvantaged areas.

- 1) It is completely inappropriate for First Steps as the organisation delivering the Children's Centres in Bath West to contribute to or be damaged by measures taken to resolve an overspend by Local Authority officers on the budget for the internally delivered 9 children's centres.
- 2) The presence of an effective and efficient 3rd sector should NOT be put at risk.
- 3) A third sector organisation which is managing resources more effectively and efficiently should be encouraged and supported by the council not destroyed.

About First Steps – what we do.

First steps is a charity and company limited by guarantee, it is a registered social enterprise, operating three Child Care settings and two Children's Centres, one in Moorlands and one in Twerton.

First Steps IS a community organisation, it grew from the community and has kept to the original mission to

“Work in partnership with children, families colleagues and the community”

It has been in operation for almost 25 years; First Steps was the Children's Centre before the term was used by the Government and seeded the Children's Centres in the rest of B&NES.

The most important part of our work is forming relationships, if you have in your past been let down by your family, your community it is very difficult to ask for the help you need to make a difference for your children.

Families trust First Steps because we are consistent; we are part of the normal support systems that families engage with.

Our parent led services help parents to form positive and joyful relationships with their children, address debt, worklessness, lack of training, loneliness.

The result is that over the years the levels of school achievement in the area have been rising and the gap in achievement has been narrowing.

At any one time the family team are supporting 170 families with complex needs. These are families who are vulnerable, who traditionally would NOT engage in support.

First Steps – adding value

Trust; Raising aspiration; Additional funding;

Funding in communities that are needy comes and goes; projects are set up, run for a few months and then disappear. First Steps has been there for a generation, we don't need to spend time and money getting people to know what we are about, they already know. Families come to us because they know that we are safe, welcoming and grounded in their area and crucially, working with them we make a difference for their children.

Our social enterprise model of Childcare delivery builds social capital, funding stays in the community. First Steps has a strategy to employ local people and use a parent led approach to family support. As a result First Steps staff are seen as community champions and accepted. Over 50% of participants on the First Steps Volunteering programme are in further education or employment.

As a local medium sized charity we are eligible to apply for additional funds. Last year we had a resident Early Years music specialist, funded by Youth Music and we have just applied for funding for a resident artist through the Theatre Royal Bath Creative Fund. We apply for smaller grants for example, to pay for summer outings, additional child care for a single mum having cancer treatment and fundraise to ensure that children on low incomes attending First Steps nurseries have a free hot lunch.

For every £1 of children's centre grant First Steps adds an additional 10p, that's a 10% increase in the local authority funding.

Quote from Ofsted Survey 2016

Unknown Children Destined for Disadvantage.

A child's earliest years, from their birth to the time they reach statutory school age, are crucial. All the research¹ shows that this stage of learning and development matters more than any other.

If we get the early years right, we pave the way for a lifetime of achievement. If we get them wrong, we miss a unique opportunity to shape a child's future.

ⁱ 'Students' educational and developmental outcomes at age 16, effective pre-school, primary and secondary education (EPPSE 3–16) project', Department for Education, September 2014; www.gov.uk/government/publications/influences-on-students-development-at-age-16.