

## Call in Speech

I would like to explain why we have called in the decision E 3038, regarding closure of the remaining two Council run nurseries,( with the transfer of children's places to other providers and to consider options for the two buildings.)

The reasons we have been given for closing these 2 nurseries, appear logical. The nurseries in question are below numbers and run at a loss.However, if we examine this decision in more detail,it emerges that there are many more factors to consider.

It is no surprise that these 2 Council run nurseries are found in 2 of the most deprived areas of B&NES, Radstock and Foxhill, both showing features of persistent relative deprivation which are extreme when seen against the wealth of much of B&NES.These nurseries are the ones which cater for working families, open from early morning to late evening.

This therefore is the main reason for the Call In. The proposed decision has not taken into account the impact on families and children in crisis, families with challenging children and children with disabilities, protected under the 2010 Equalities Act.Families in need are referred to these nurseries from the local Children's Centres.These two nurseries offer wrap around support and take children for a full day from 8am-6pm, unlike many other local nurseries.With these nurseries closing,it will have an impact on our ability to provide services for vulnerable children and families. The staff in these nurseries are experienced in dealing with families with difficulties and are able to provide appropriate help and intervention.Supporting families at an early stage prevents the problems from getting worse.This is so true when we look at the increasing number of our children being taken into Care.

Secondly,under the Children Act,2006,the Council is required to assess the local childcare market and to secure sufficient childcare for working parents. Sections 6,8-11 and 13 says childcare will only be deemed to be sufficient if it meets the needs of the community and in particular,those families on lower income and those with disabled children. The Local Authority takes a strategic lead in the local childcare market, planning, supporting and commissioning childcare.In Radstock, the sufficiency figure is only 0.73%,meaning that there are already fewer places than required. For those of you familiar with Radstock, you will be aware that there has been a massive amount of building in Radstock, with even more planned, so even more places will be needed. The figures for Radstock show that if the proposed closure goes ahead by July 2018, there will be 30 children in need of a nursery place. I understand that every effort will be made to place these children, but with the sufficiency number being low, there won't be enough places. We will therefore be failing in our duty to provide sufficient childcare.

We have not been told how long these nurseries have been running at a loss, or how long they have been below numbers.Most nurseries advertise themselves.Do we know what advertising and promotion these nurseries have undertaken? Apparently parents were notified about 6 months ago that the nurseries "may close".This would certainly have had an impact on numbers. In fact, the nearby Midford Road Nursery which does open from 8am-6pm, is full and will remain full for the next 18 months.Reason why? When parents got wind of St Martin's Garden Nursery closing, some of them moved their children to Midford Road.In Radstock, the Westfield Nursery does havespaces,but it is only open during school hours and it only takes children from 2-4 years, unlike Radstock Nursery which takes babies.

These Council run nurseries are organised to cater for working parents. Many parents have been upset by the threat of closure. One parent, Amy Keen contacted the Bath Chronicle, saying she will have to change her working hours, as she has not been able to find a nursery to fit around her working hours the way St Martin's Garden Nursery does. Other parents in Radstock have been told the nearest Nursery to them is full and are extremely worried and upset by the situation. My colleague Cllr Jackson will say more about this in her speech.

To conclude, these 2 Council run nurseries provide a very special service to families in their area. There has always been a close working relationship between them and the Children's Centres. Struggling and at risk families are more likely to access these nurseries as part of our family intervention and support service.

If these 2 nurseries close, we must ensure that these disadvantaged and vulnerable families do not fall through the net. Our Early Years Service as all of us know in this room, delivers the statutory minimum. These 2 Council run nurseries have the expertise to help support our more disadvantaged and vulnerable families. We must ensure we do not pay the price further down the line in terms of lack of school readiness. This will not help to improve the outcomes of our disadvantaged children which are low at every key stage. We are a Council providing a service, not a business with just a profit motive in mind.

For all of these reasons, I would like the Panel to recommend this decision is referred back to the Cabinet member to be reconsidered.