

### Consultation Analysis

A full and detailed consultation has been carried out with all service users who would be directly impacted by the proposals, particularly the closure of The Children's Nursery. The purpose of this consultation was to inform service users and to gauge impact on individuals. A consultation session was held inviting service users to hear the reasons for the proposed closure and to give the opportunity to ask any questions they may have. We had a total of 17 attendees to this meeting, including 2 members of staff from The Children's Nursery.

We have received responses from 11 service users as part of the consultation, all of which attend The Children's Nursery. This equates to 14% of all those families who are accessing the provision. There have been no responses from those service users of Bright Start Nursery.

#### Swindon Borough Council staff members who use the service

All staff members of Swindon Borough Council have been made aware of the consultation taking place in the form of Newsround Communication twice; 27<sup>th</sup> January and 10<sup>th</sup> February 2016. To date we have had no feedback from the wider SBC workforce who are not themselves using the provision at The Children's Nursery.

Individual meetings between Council staff members who access the provision, Human Resources and Early Years Officer were offered to discuss individual circumstances and discuss options.

To date:

- 4 staff members have rejected the invite as alternative arrangements have already been made
- 7 staff members have taken up the offer to meet and we have taken into account their feedback
- 5 staff members are yet to respond to the invite

Throughout the consultation it has been highlighted that 10 members of staff access fees direct.

- This equates to 0.0041% of the Council workforce.
- Childcare vouchers are the favoured option, being accessed by 18% of the Council workforce, however only 0.013% of those utilising childcare vouchers are accessing them at The Children's Nursery.
- A total of 0.007% of the Council workforce use The Children's Nursery, from September this is due to decrease to 0.005%.

Human Resources have stated that although it is acknowledged that The Children's Nursery is viewed by members of staff as a staff benefit in means of a workplace nursery, it is not a term and condition of employment and therefore SBC are not legally obliged to consult on a staff benefit or normally wouldn't consult on the removal of a staff benefit.

However, although the impact on the whole workforce is minimal, the impact on those individuals affected is significant. The main issues highlighted from service users who are both staff and from the local community have been highlighted below;

#### Transition for children/Loss of Keyworker relationships.

Parents feel strongly that by moving children to a new setting it will negatively impact on their development and cause distress as they are settled in their current provision and have built relationships with their children's keyworker. Parents will be offered support to make appropriate choices for alternative high quality provision. *It will be the responsibility of the nursery Manager to ensure that each child's Key Person plans an effective and smooth transition according to the individual needs of each child and prepares each child for the move. This process should involve the parents and carers and will be closely monitored by the Local Authority Early Years Advisors* Financial implications

The Children's Nursery currently charges £43 per day which is cheaper than many other private providers. Parents who access fees direct are able to access an additional tax saving which makes the childcare fees much more affordable. All private providers accept childcare vouchers, so parents would still be able to take advantage of a tax saving elsewhere. Officers are working to negotiate a discount for Council staff members at the nearest alternative day nursery; Trinity Day Nursery, in the hope that fees will be comparable to what they are paying now.

Officers are also exploring options to offer fees direct elsewhere, by definition any provision operating from Council owned building or land can offer fees direct and a desktop study of all our providers has highlighted 75% fit this criteria. Providers must approach the Council directly to offer this however work is being done, particularly with maintained providers, to explore this option.

#### Practical issues around seeking alternative provision

Some parents are concerned about the amount of time they will need off work to visit alternative settings and the impact this may have on their current roles and colleagues.

HR have offered to liaise with managers if there are individual difficulties with this and staff are reminded they are on a flexible contract whereby time needed to visit settings shouldn't be a problem.

### Loss of valuable SBC resources

Some parents have highlighted that the staff at The Children's Nursery are experienced and of high quality. If the nursery were to close the Council could lose these staff members which are a valuable asset.

There are many private providers in Swindon seeking high quality staff members so it is hoped staff would be supported to seek new employment either internally or in Swindon's childcare sector where they would continue to be a huge asset to early years in Swindon.

### Timing of proposed closure

Some parents have stated that the proposed timescale doesn't allow sufficient time to find alternative provision. Unfortunately nursery providers have closed with as little as a days' notice. In all circumstances whereby a nursery closes Council Officers have been able to fully support parents to seek new provision. There are 255 providers in Swindon who accept early years funding so there is a great deal of choice for parents. Officers are confident there are sufficient places in Swindon for childcare, however appreciate demand for some settings does outnumber spaces available.

### Provision for local families from ethnic minorities

Parents have highlighted that the provision is accessed by a number of children from ethnic minorities. This is common across a number of Swindon's providers, 45% of all under 5's in the town centre are of Black and Minority Ethnicity (BME) and therefore many of our provisions meet this need and are unable to refuse entry based on BME.

### Communication throughout the consultation

It has been highlighted by parents that they feel as though communication could have been improved throughout this process. The original letter that was first disseminated to parents went without a signature due to an administrative error which has been apologised for.

Parents were concerned that the staff from the Children's Nursery were only told on the morning they were expected to hand out letters to parents. The staff were briefed prior to the soft market testing and were involved and given the opportunity to contribute to the questions included. Staff were then all briefed by Officers a week prior to the report was published and have been offered support throughout the process. It was been highlighted multiple times that staff have remained professional throughout the process and are thanked for this.