

**We Want To Get It Right This Time,
Don't We?**



**Barnet UNISON'S Response to the Full Business Case
on Children, Young People and Family Hubs 0-19
Programme presented at Children Education and
Safeguarding Committee 6 June 2018**

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Recommendations

1. Extend formal staff consultation by at least 1 month
2. Request for an update of progress and developments following the consultation to come to this Committee prior to it going to General Purpose Committee (formerly GFC) and bring to this Committee hard data regarding the changes proposed here.
3. Ensure the trade unions and staff are fully engaged with all aspects of the restructure including any changes to role profiles and that the trade unions are formally involved in the job evaluation process.
4. Engage staff fully in the development and design of the new services **before** the consultation of the restructure takes place. Amongst other concerns there are significant Health and Safety considerations for staff and the public regarding the changing usage of some of the premises mentioned in this report.

Summary

The changes proposed in the Full Business Case are extensive and promising and yet the paper is peculiarly vague in data regarding the scope of these changes. There is no data with respect to numbers of staff affected. There is little accompanying data with respect to numbers of residents currently making use of these services which include Children's Centres, Youth Services and Family Resilience Support. There is no mention as to how the changes proposed affect the current delivery of services and whether the families portrayed as benefiting are the same families currently able to access and use these existing services. Therefore it is difficult to comment on the extent of and proportionate benefit, if any, to Barnet residents.

Equally unclear is how the new proposed service will affect the working arrangements and the way in which staff with their current skills are equipped to deal with these new arrangements. In other words does a 0-19 service mean the staff retain their specialisms (those trained to work with under 5's and those trained to work with young people) or is the expectation that staff become generic workers? We feel it would be wrong to give up staff trained to have a focus on a particular age group of children. We believe this could present risks to those children, their families and the workers themselves.

There are already issues mentioned in the report relating to the changing usage of the premises and yet there is little mentioned in the way of engagement with staff and service users as to how to deal properly and safely with those issues.

We are also concerned about the knock-on effect of saving the full £154,574 from a break-even proposal for traded services. There is a risk to these services of collapsing altogether giving public services a bigger cost at a later date precisely because these interventions could no longer be provided to the current standard. We are not clear where the £451,316 stated in the reduction in the Children's Centre Budget is reflected in this report. If it is not clear, how do we know it will be achieved? Does it matter?

If Councillors agree to this report with its recommendations, **without scrutinising** the detail, is there no concern this is yet another case of voting through "over-optimistic reporting" as the Children's Commissioner's, Frankie Sulke put it in her report January 2018. If Councillors agree to this report with no changes and no further request for this

to be returned to this Committee then we believe this echoes what Frankie Sulke noted from previous reports and developments which failed to make their way back to the then CELS Committee and which contributed directly to the inadequate Ofsted rating.

At 4.20 (p.14) of her report she states “concerns grew to the extent that a decision was made to commission Essex to provide a diagnostic in **January 2016, nothing was reported to the Committee.**”

And at 4.21 of the same report:

“Following the serious issues raised in the Essex report in **March 2016**, bilateral discussions were had between the DCS and individual members. The Leader and Lead member (Chair of CELS) were well briefed by the DCS on concerns raised, and the restructuring took place to give the DCS full responsibility and accountability for the service, as outlined in paragraph 2.6. **However, the CELS Committee did not receive any reports** relating to concerns highlighted in the Essex work.”

Background

Staff Engagement and Scrutiny

June 7th 2017 Ofsted rated Family Services as inadequate. The proposals outlined in this Business Case are as much a part of Family Services improving on this rating as have been the vast changes in front line social work – notably the shedding of around 60-70% of front line staff employed prior to the inspection report. As such it is important to reflect on some of the commentary and findings from Ofsted and the Children’s Commissioner, Frankie Sulke.

One of the findings of the inspection report (7/7/18) at paragraph 85 (p.28) was:

“The local authority recognises that a restructure of children’s services in 2014 was wholly unsuccessful in achieving a positive social work service for children. The increased demand for services and **a significant number of staff leaving, following the restructure, resulted in widespread instability throughout children’s services, contributing to deteriorating practice standards.**”

Members of this Committee should know that the restructure involved 100’s of staff who are already involved in long and intense working hours and much of the information regarding the restructure was not forthcoming until the restructure was well underway. UNISON and NUT approached the General Functions Committee at the time and argued for the consultation time with staff to be extended in order that meaningful consultation could take place and we specifically warned of the risk of rushing through a statutory consultation with only the statutory timeframe expressing a fear that the service would end up seeing staff leave as a consequence because they had not been engaged fully in the restructuring exercise. Unfortunately we were right and Councillors who voted to go ahead with the restructure with no extra time given were shown to have been wrong. As a consequence children were exposed to even greater risk of harm as experienced staff did indeed leave the service.

We believe the Councillors of this Committee are committed to the residents of Barnet they are here to safeguard. **Getting it right is the paramount concern.**

Since the end of 2017 UNISON has been involved in a series of meetings with the Head of Service regarding the move to develop a new way of delivering front line services to families and their children needing extra support or early intervention. Assurances were given that as the shift was going to be significant then there would be full staff engagement and the process would be taken over a long period of time to maximise this engagement. There was talk of the new structure needing to be in place by April 2019 or thereabouts.

“... any staff consultation process would begin after CELS in the summer. This could begin immediately after CELS or from September as it is recognised there will be a lot of staff absence for holidays in the summer. Staff will be asked on what their preferred start date will be. **Any changes would not commence until early 2019.**” (Minutes from the UNISON/ management meeting 22nd Jan 2018.)

From the extract above it must be noted that very early on it was identified by both sides the significance of the summer break in carrying out a consultation exercise. UNISON was assured staff engagement was taking place and, not hearing the contrary, took this at face value. This appeared to be an area of Family Services which was keen to take its staff with it on a journey of transforming the service in order to deliver on necessary improvements needed and identified by Ofsted. Panels have been set up and the aspiration is to be working in a multi-disciplinary way. Whilst colleagues have questions about the “how”, no one has ever, to date, seriously questioned the direction the service wanted to go in. **Colleagues want to make it work to the optimum for the service users but in so doing they do not want to feel they are being made to carry greater risk with less support.**

However, it now transpires that actually significant sections of affected service areas are only now and only vaguely aware of broad sweeping changes afoot. Staff have not been involved in discussions about how their service area would need to adapt or change to develop the partnerships and the multi-disciplinary working outlined in the report. They are apparently less than 1 month away from being consulted about changes to their service with no clue as to whether this means, or is even desirable, that the specialism they have, such as working with young children or young people will continue. They have no clue as to whether this means, and what this means by, and the feasibility of, accommodating a 0-19 age range in their premises. During the consultation period they are being expected to prepare for interviews rather than focus on what the different service could and should look like. The worst is that the consultation period takes place **entirely** during the summer holidays! Some colleagues in Children’s Centres work term-time only, so their opportunity for consultation will be only the 3 weeks starting in July! Many other colleagues take around 2 weeks of breaks during the summer, including very many managers which will mean getting information circulated properly will be very haphazard.

Unfortunately this is a spectacular case of what Frankie Sulke described as staff being “receivers” of change rather than “agents” of change. The poor engagement she described is about to be continued. Barnet UNISON is perplexed as to why this change which originally did not have to begin to be implemented until early 2019, now has to be

up and running from the start of 2019. The project has been pulled forward by some 3 months and risks alienating staff from the process as a consequence and risks repeating the mistakes seen in 2014.

If staff are not adequately supported in their role, then they will inevitably fail to support these children and families adequately.

In addition for such a broad sweeping change there is no proposal to provide this Committee with a formal updating report on progress and so the fall out will be heard by a different Committee which did not hear or scrutinize the initial proposal.

Numbers and Detail

The report which went to CELS in January 2018 at p.59 estimated the number of post reductions could be around 11.

<http://barnet.moderngov.co.uk/documents/b30555/Addendum%2016th-Jan-2018%2019.00%20Children%20Education%20Safeguarding%20Committee.pdf?T=9>

In the current Full Business Case on p.13 this figure appears to have increased to “less than 20” and overleaf at p.14 this is again revised to state:

“Some job losses will be necessary. These will mainly be at management level preserving front line delivery as much as practicably possible.”

So up to 20 management posts and then some more? What exactly will the front line delivery be in any case? What does the decrease in management posts mean for the span of control and supervisory responsibilities for the staff left in post? What would the bottom line be?

How many staff will be connected to each Hub? – 1 month away from the start of formal staff consultation, this level of detail must be available as must the current staffing numbers including agency levels, those on fixed term contracts and those who do sessional work.

None of these figures, even as ball-park figures have been presented in this report. Therefore how do the savings stack up – particularly the saving quoted as being generated by the Children’s Centre Budget reduction?

This has left staff now feeling that many of them will be made redundant (otherwise why the need to interview for a job they are already doing?). It has left them wondering if they will have to leave the job if the hours they work radically change.

Are the numbers of service users colleagues will be dealing with more or less the same as now?

Health and Safety and Premises

Already in the report members of the public have raised concerns about the broad age ranges expected to use the premises which once accommodated specific age groups. It should be noted that due to the cuts in Youth Services, it would be fair to say that our services are engaging with the most vulnerable and often most alienated young people who present with highly risky behaviour to themselves and unfortunately to others, including acquiring a criminal record. Generally it is not recommended for this group of young people to be sharing space with much younger children. One of the report’s responses to this point is p.18:

“There will be explicit requirements for staff to provide close supervision of children using the same waiting and communal spaces”

What does this mean? One to one supervision? How realistic is this?

We note the aspiration (p.17) is also that the majority of services offered to young children will be predictably at different times to older children. The key word here is “majority” – so not all then? The plan to deal with this is...?

At another point the report hears feedback from focus group participants that some activities in Children’s Centres are already running at capacity and some are oversubscribed – does this not indicate a potential to run extra sessions then for groups which are already well catered for by a particular premises?

Barnet UNISON supports greater use of the Council’s buildings but it must be safe for the public. We think it is important Councillors have assured themselves of the safety of the services and not simply left it to the “over optimistic” reporting of Council officers assuring them everything is all right.

Currently the panels are operating from the hubs but the staff which support that work are by and large still not co-located at those premises. This is frustrating for numbers of staff and so we need to understand the obstacles to making this outcome happen.

Supporting the most vulnerable

At p.2 of the report under “Purpose” we have the over-riding objective of what these proposals are trying to achieve:

“The vision of the Family Service is to ensure that all children and young people in Barnet achieve the best possible outcomes and to enable them to become successful adults, especially our most vulnerable children. They should be supported by high quality, integrated and inclusive services that identify additional support needs early, are accessible, responsive and affordable for the individual child and their family.”

We are concerned that the proposal for traded services to break even may have exactly the opposite effect. The saving envisaged is not huge and there seems to be an indication that some of this has already been achieved through an agreement and changes to the CAMHS service. However, some costs are to be passed onto schools, in particular the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme and the Alternative Education Service. Yet this is in an environment when schools are making swingeing cuts resulting in job losses often for the school support staff who support vulnerable children in staying in school and so it is difficult to envisage how schools will be able to pick up the cost of these services. We are concerned that effectively the writing is on the wall for these services and so the vision presented at the start of the paper will not be achieved.

Risks

1. The greatest risk by far is pressing on with these proposals in the timeframe set out in this document. The aim for full implementation should be set as 1st April 2019 and no earlier than mid-February 2019. This risks a repeat of the restructure in 2014 and that children are potentially not adequately safeguarded.
2. The purpose of slowing down implementation is to enable a full and proper engagement with the trade unions and staff and for this Committee to have proper feedback on developments so that Councillors here take ownership of this project. The risk of not doing this is to repeat the mistake of the restructure in 2014 and that children are potentially not adequately safeguarded.

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3. There is a risk the savings will not be achieved as outlined in the report if detail is not forthcoming.
 4. There is a risk the most vulnerable children will not receive adequate support with their education and other measures will be financially out of reach for socially disadvantaged children.
 5. There is a risk this Committee will sign off a proposal in which the Councillors do not have adequate involvement or sufficient knowledge to make a properly informed decision.
 6. There is a risk of further reputational damage by incurring no improvements to the Ofsted rating if these proposals are passed unamended and the trade unions are shown to be right once again.

Conclusion

Barnet UNISON has written to the Senior Management Team requesting responses to the following questions:

1. UNISON is concerned that the numbers of those potentially at risk has risen from 11 in January to less than 20 on p.13 as affecting management level but on p.14 there is the statement "Some job losses will be necessary. These will mainly be at management level preserving front line delivery as much as practicably possible." This seems to indicate a higher figure therefore than the "less than 20". Is the figure then possibly over 20?
2. Given the mention of redundancies UNISON is concerned that a full business case does not state how many currently work in the areas affected (head count, FTE and how many agency staff/ fixed term contract and where these posts are) nor list the areas/ teams in family services which would be directly affected. Can you therefore confirm this information to us in writing asap? You intend to start consultation already in one month's time so I imagine you already have all of this data.
3. What is the rationale and urgency for bringing forward the consultation by ¼ of a year?
4. Targeted Youth services uses sessional staff. How do the proposals affect these colleagues?
5. Is the rumour true that all staff will be expected to work with all age groups (of children) and there will be no specialisms – in terms of age groups?
6. Is it true that the 3 hubs will employ 18 members of staff each? If so the numbers of redundancies will be much higher than the 20 or so listed in the report. Please confirm this or explain where the other colleagues will be working.
7. There are a variety of working patterns operating across Children's Centres, Youth Services, Family Resilience and CAF. Will all colleagues be expected to work across these diverse hours and including weekend working?
8. Will Barnet employed Youth Service workers continue to provide the "positive activities" or is "Youth Zone" being approached to do these? What will be the effect on Barnet employed staff if this is the case?
9. How will the saving of £451,316 identified through the reduction in the Children's Centre Budget be achieved?

We have been given a response that the Business Case would not require this level of detail and yet this was not the question put as we are less than 1 month away from formal consultation and so some answers to these questions must already be known. It is extremely worrying that the Senior Management Team are unable or unwilling to share this information at this crucial moment.

Other questions this report raises, which we are now highlighting, are:

10. Are the numbers of service users colleagues will be dealing with more or less the same as now?
11. What does the decrease in management posts mean for the span of control and supervisory responsibilities for the staff left in post? What is the ratio looked for in this report and what is it now?
12. What is meant by the “close supervision of children using the same waiting and communal spaces”? How realistic is this?
13. What measures will be taken when young children and older children/ young people use the services offered at the same times?
14. Does it matter if the budget saving on the Children’s Centre Budget is not achieved?
15. How much does each individual traded service listed in this report cost? How much of the savings are already accounted for e.g. CAMHS appears to have taken on some of the cost?

Barnet UNISON is looking for urgent answers to these questions and we believe we are being very reasonable.

We believe this Committee should be provided with more detail in order to make an informed decision and should certainly accompany the progress and development of these proposals as they are quite substantial affecting significant numbers of residents, partner agencies and staff.

What this restructure is trying to achieve in terms of breaking down silos, encouraging more collaborative working and sharing of information, strengthening partnerships is something most staff and Barnet UNISON would like to achieve also. There is a risk that unless staff are properly engaged that this will not be achieved and the restructure fails.