

Swindon Borough Council Diversity Impact Future of Swindon Borough Council operated nurseries

What is it about?

The Council has a responsibility to ensure that there are sufficient early education places available.

Across the Borough early years' education and childcare is delivered by a total of 255 different providers such as large nursery chains, small private businesses, child-minders and maintained primary schools. At present, the Council directly operates the Children's Nursery and Bright Start Nursery as private provision, which deliver early year's education and childcare.

Cabinet is invited to make a decision regarding the future of these two nurseries given the significant financial challenges the Council will face over the next few years. That there is no longer an imperative for the Council to provide early years provision itself as there is sufficient provision within the private and maintained sector; that one of the facilities is not really fit for purpose and that the senior management capacity required to assist in the delivery of these services successfully and directly is no longer available within the Council.

A full and detailed consultation has been carried out with service users of the provisions to better understand the impact on individual circumstances, in particular as a result of the proposed closure of The Children's Nursery.

Who is it for?

There is no statutory process set out for changes to Early Years Provision and the Department for Education (DfE) does not identify who should be consulted, but the Local Authority proposed that individuals and groups directly affected by the proposal should be consulted. This was also widened out to ensure that all members of staff within the Council were aware of the proposals through Newsround Communication on two occasions; 27th January and 10th February 2016.

In this respect the Council considered it has a duty to notify staff and users of the details of the proposals and enable them to understand the reasons behind the options and the opportunity to raise any questions or concerns.

An 8 week consultation with staff and parents who use the facility has been carried out, with a dedicated email address being created for comments and questions.

A consultation session with service users was also arranged, which saw 15 service users and 2 members of staff attend to hear the reasons behind the proposed closure of The Children's Nursery and to voice their concerns.

Individual meetings between Human Resources, an Early Years Officer and SBC staff members who access the provision for their own childcare requirements were also arranged. To date, 8 members of staff have taken up this offer.

A total of 0.007% of SBC's workforce access The Children's Nursery and this is due to reduce to 0.005% in September should the nursery remain open.

It was raised during the consultation that the proposal had not been considered by all staff focus groups within SBC, including the BME and equalities groups. The intention was to consult directly with the users and staff at The Children's Nursery due to the low numbers of staff currently using the facility. However, following the concerns raised at the consultation meeting the target audience

was widened and the proposal was published on the SBC newsround, intranet and consultation pages of the SBC website.

Impact

As above one setting is proposed to continue operating with a change of provider, but the proposed closure of a setting will have a more significant impact.

The proposal to close The Children's Nursery has no impact on sufficiency of provision in the local area; alternative provision is available which offers identical opening times. Negotiations are taking place to encourage a private provider to offer a discount to SBC employees for their childcare fees should they opt to access the provision.

0.0041% of SBC staff are accessing fee's direct at The Children's Nursery. This offers staff members a tax saving on their childcare costs. Childcare vouchers are offered as an alternative, 18% of the SBC workforce access these however only 0.013% of those using the vouchers use these at The Children's Nursery.

Human Resources acknowledge that the proposed closure of The Children's Nursery would be the loss of a staff benefit in means of what is considered by staff a workplace nursery. This staff benefit is not a part of terms and conditions of employment and therefore the Council are not legally obliged to consult on its removal.

Staff at The Children's Nursery would be at risk of redundancy should the decision be made to close the provision. Support will be provided to seek alternative employment, either internally or in the private childcare sector where there is a shortage of high quality staff.

If the decision is made to close The Children's Nursery and children are required to move to an alternative provider this could cause a period of unsettlement to individual children however support would be offered throughout the transition period in line with the EYFS.

There may be a period of unsettlement whilst a new provider is sought for Bright Starts Nursery, however Officers will ensure that the chosen provider is of high quality and can continue to offer flexible early education and childcare for local families. All staff employed at Bright Starts Nursery will be protected under TUPE terms and conditions.

The proposed closure date for The Children's Nursery is end of August 2016. This is to minimise the impact on individual children as many will make the transition to school so won't be affected.

There is no potential adverse impact on the basis of age, sex and gender, religion, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, marital/civil partnership status or pregnancy/maternity. These assumptions have been tested at consultation whereby no issues have been highlighted.

So what?

The proposal is to close The Children's Nursery at the end of August 2016 and put Bright Starts Nursery out to tender for a new provider to take over the provision from September 2016.

Support will be provided to assist parents to make alternative childcare arrangements if required as a result of the proposed closure of The Children's Nursery and support will be offered to staff members to seek new employment opportunities.