

COMMITTEE REFERRAL TO BUDGET CABINET

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 26 JANUARY 2012

MINUTE 50 - REFERRAL FROM COUNCIL - EARLY INTERVENTION GRANT

The Committee considered a referral from Council, which on 12 December, 2011, had considered the following objection to the Cabinet minute 216 (8 December, 2011) – Budget Projections 2012-15,

‘(1) That the decision to cut £1m from the Early Intervention Grant be referred to the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee.’

The Acting Director of Children’s Services informed the Committee that he, along with his other Chief Officer colleagues, was reminded on a daily basis that he had a statutory duty to balance the budget. Good progress was being made on this year’s budget to bring the projected overspend down. He assured the Committee that the services provided under the Early Intervention Grant budget of £17.9m could be provided for £16.9m and going forward into 2012/13 the same services could be provided for this amount.

The Chair suggested that the £1m could be used to increase the staffing in the Children’s Centres and that to cut it was depriving the Centres of the opportunity to grow. By restoring the £1m and investing it in services for young people would help in tackling child poverty.

Other Members referred to the position of the Council, which along with every other Council in the country had seen its grant cut by central government. There was a need to be responsible to the residents of Wirral and realistic in the budget setting process.

Responding to the Committee, the Acting Director stated that vacancies were filled across Children’s Centres as they arose and there were no restrictions on the filling of these vacancies nor were there for Children’s Social Workers and family workers. There were no proposals to alter service delivery as the same service could be provided with these resources.

It was moved by Councillor Hayes and seconded by Councillor Mrs P M Williams, that –

“This Committee endorses the widely held view that early intervention works and praises the work of our Sure Start Children's Centres and the many other projects which are funded by the Early Intervention Grant and do so much for Wirral's families and young people.

Therefore this committee records its concern at the proposal to remove £1 million from the Early Intervention Grant. We are unconvinced that the removal of £1 million from this grant will not have a detrimental impact on those families who are reliant on

the services which this grant funds and on the life chances of the children who benefit from these services. We ask Cabinet to think again.”

It was moved as an amendment by Councillor Dodd and seconded by Councillor W Smith, that –

“This Committee endorses the widely held view that early intervention works and praises the work of our Sure Start Children's Centres and the many other projects which are funded by the Early Intervention Grant and do so much for Wirral's families and young people.

Therefore Committee notes and appreciates the Acting Director of Children's Services assurances and assures him that he will be held to account over the coming year.”

The amendment was put and not carried (5:5).

The motion was put and carried (6:5) (on the Chair's casting vote).

Resolved (6:5) (on the Chair's casting vote) –

This Committee endorses the widely held view that early intervention works and praises the work of our Sure Start Children's Centres and the many other projects which are funded by the Early Intervention Grant and do so much for Wirral's families and young people.

Therefore, this Committee records its concern at the proposal to remove £1 million from the Early Intervention Grant. We are unconvinced that the removal of £1 million from this grant will not have a detrimental impact on those families who are reliant on the services which this grant funds and on the life chances of the children who benefit from these services. We ask Cabinet to think again.

It was further moved by Councillor Hayes and seconded by Councillor Povall and –

Resolved – That this Committee continues to scrutinise the Acting Director of Children's Services over the coming year.