

Item 6. Councillor Tidball: Addresses on Neighbourhood Issues

Good afternoon, my thanks to the CEB and Officers for allowing me to raise this important issue today. As you will all be aware there has been an energetic campaign across this county to Save Oxfordshire's Children's Centres. I am delighted that the electorate gave me a very clear endorsement to fight to save our Children's Centre at Grandpont and its essential services in electing me as ward Councillor for Hinksey Park.

As a governor of Grandpont Nursery School and Children's Centre, I am also grateful to the hard work and dedication of Children Centre staff, our head teacher and other governors in working so hard to put together a fully costed and achievable proposal to keep our Children's Centre open after March 2017. I bring this proposal before you today for further action by the City Council's Community's team.

The loss of the Children's Centre and its services at Grandpont would be a terrible blow to our Nursery school and to the community of South Oxford where 13% of children are in poverty and 18% are in social rented housing (Oxford City Council, 2011). From the universal breastfeeding advice sessions for new mums to our specialist work with traveller families and Healthy relationship workshops for dads this is an essential local resource for our community. As Councillors will know, the [government commissioned Oxford University research](#) demonstrated 'that children's centres make a difference to the lives of disadvantaged families across England'. 'The most disadvantaged families were also the least likely to use other services outside children's centres'. This is in part because they were designed to be within 'pram pushing distance' from the parents' home and because their universal services ensured parents felt welcomed, not stigmatised. Children in school-led centres like Grandpont, did better with social and cognitive skills and learning complex vocabulary.

Our costed 'core' model is designed to maintain Grandpont as a Specialist Outreach Service closely affiliated with the Rose Hill Early Intervention Hub. Under our model we would retain two Grandpont located Outreach Workers and the use of our family room for universal services. The Outreach team would include an Outreach leader, to be based for a minimum of four days per week at the centre to allow effective engagement and better understanding of the local families' issues and the community as a whole. This work with families would include: improving parenting skills; supporting mental wellbeing in parents (eg post-natal depression).

The outreach worker would support the Outreach Leader in these objectives and also provide the specialism of Grandpont's current Fathers Practitioner. The outreach service will be aimed primarily at supporting: families of the local traveller community; identifying, engaging with and placing 'two year old entitlement' children into appropriate early years settings; encouraging healthy relationships between fathers and their families (see below); engage with BME families and support with ESOL classes to enable better integration and improvement in employment opportunities.

The retained core universal services would include using our family room for a health, Midwife clinics and Baby Café.

The model we propose would cost £81,000/per annum and would enable our Nursery setting to continue our important outreach work from Grandpont, for our most deprived families, in the context of a reduced service whilst retaining some specific universal services. We propose that Oxfordshire County Council provides £50,000 per annum for the next three years from County Council's £2million CEF 12 Early Intervention/Children's Centres budget line from 2017/18 budget of and the £1 million one-off funding which has been set aside to assist communities to develop proposals for children's centres that will not receive longer term funding from the Council. Grandpont will then seek matched funding for the remaining £30,000 from a combination of funding sources, including: Oxford City Council's Communities Team, charitable fundraising through a 'Friends of Grandpont' programme, charging for the use of Health Visitor and Midwife Sessions on site and asking service users to make discretionary payments for universal services.

On 14th April Councillors Price, Tanner and myself along with fellow governors met with Lucy Butler and Maria Godfrey and put forward this proposal to secure £50,000 of funding from the County. Whilst we were delighted that this week Grandpont was named as one of the eight outreach centres, in the Director of Children's Services Report to the County Council, this report does not provide any additional funding allocated to Grandpont beyond the £12,500 announced for us as a childcare venue back in February. The county's current plans appear to allocate only 5% of the £2m CEF 12 to keeping children's centres open. This means only £100,000 has been allocated across all 8 outreach centres; potentially, only leaving Grandpont with the original £12,500 for childcare. This money is actually unrelated to running the children's centre outreach function and instead is in place to sustain the County's obligation to provide state daycare. This appears to mean that the outreach service will not receive any funding.

Again, we are pleased that this week's report supports the continuing delivery of early intervention services through outreach activities to children and families at Grandpont. However, the County's proposed community coordinator posts will not be based at outreach centres like Grandpont and other staffing remains unclear. Conversely, our proposal will enable a high quality locally embedded outreach service on a modest budget. The research is unequivocal: Children's centres with the best funding and staffing levels make the greatest improvements to the lives of families in 'most need'.

Prevention over the long term is much cheaper than intervention. More importantly, early intervention gives mothers in our city the support they need when they face the darkness of post-natal depression. It enables fathers on care orders to learn good parenting skills in an environment where there is no stigmatisation. It gives children from every corner of our society a safe place to play and to make friends with other children across their community. A drift to crisis-based children's services provision and away from the government's own prevention paradigm is counter-productive. Our model retains a vibrant and effective outreach service which best supports the needs of our community on a reduced budget.

I would like to ask CEB to request that officers take our proposal forward in their discussion with the County Council to make the case for an increased budget commitment for our Outreach service.