

Motion to Full Council, 18/7/18

Proposed: Cllr Kevin Frea

Seconded by: Cllrs Robert Redfearn, David Whitaker and Nathan Burns

- 1) Lancaster City Council acknowledges the fantastic work carried out by children's centres in the Lancaster district by dedicated local people and the importance of this service. Examples include midwife sessions, parenting programmes, language development and safeguarding. A recent Oxford University study found that by supporting parents and families, children's centres help to mitigate the effects of disadvantage on life chances – and that by offering open-access, walk-in activities they encourage vulnerable families to take part because they do not feel there is a stigma attached to using the centres. The research, based upon interviews with parents and staff, found that preventative work with families could head off more serious problems that could otherwise lead to them needing support from social services, the NHS and other agencies.
- 2) Lancaster City Council expresses its concern at the proposals by Lancashire County Council to close the Appletree Children's Centre in Lancaster and Halton Children's Centre in Halton as part of plans to save £1.2m as a result of Conservative Government cuts. The council believes there is a clear risk support for and therefore also outcomes for local families will suffer if these closures go ahead. Comments by a county council director in the local press suggest support will be delivered in other community locations and in the home. However, this council expresses scepticism that the same level of support can be provided, notes the lack of signposting to more detailed information about this as part of the online consultation and fears these proposals appear to be underpinned more by the need to save money than the best interests of families.
- 3) Lancaster City Council asks our chief executive to write to Lancashire County Council as part of the ongoing consultation, which runs until Friday 3 August, to make clear this council's opposition to closure of children's centres in the Lancaster district for the reasons set out in 1) and 2) and to urge the county council to reconsider these proposals.
- 4) Lancaster City Council acknowledges that damaging cuts like those proposed to children's centres are not only a result of local party political decisions, but also impossible choices being forced upon local councils of all political persuasions by the Conservative Government. The council notes concerns raised by the Local Government Association that council children's services departments will face a £2bn funding shortfall by 2020, putting more children and families at risk of reaching crisis point as early intervention services like children's centres are cut. Children's centres were set up by a Labour Government and in 2009, there were around 3,600 centres across the country. Since then, and coinciding with the arrival of a Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition Government in 2010, an estimated 1,000 children's centres have closed. Accordingly, Lancaster City Council asks our chief executive to write the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, highlighting this council's concern about the proposed children's centre closures in the Lancaster district and urging him to urgently address the shortfall in children's services funding.

#### **OFFICER COMMENTS**

This motion relates to services which are provided by Lancashire County Council within the district not the City Council. There would be no direct financial impact on the city council should the motion be carried.

#### **MONITORING OFFICER COMMENTS**

This legal obligations relating to this service provision rests with the County Council. The views of the City Council may be considered as a relevant consideration for the County Council in making any decision.

**DEPUTY SECTION 151 OFFICER COMMENTS**

The Section 151 Officer has been consulted and has no further comments.