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Response to the BCC Budget consultation 2013-14

The Con-Dem Government's failed policies of austerity are leading to a triple dip recession and are now causing profound and enduring damage to the lives of our children, their families and communities in Birmingham. At a time of increasing child poverty the proposed budget cuts to Council services for children and young people will intensify the hardships and stress experienced by many vulnerable children and families at a time of their greatest need.

West Midlands Social Work Action Network is opposed to the totality of the proposed cuts to the Council's budget for 2013-14 but we want to draw attention to just two of the proposed options in the Children and Young Person's budget and to raise fundamental questions about the Budget consultation process.

The Leader of the Council Sir Albert Bore has claimed that the most vulnerable in our community will be protected from further cuts to Council services in 2013-14. This is patently not the case in Children and Young People's services where the axe has fallen disproportionately and painfully on the CYP budget.

1. CYPF15 Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

a. Attacking the most vulnerable

The CAMHS service is to be cut by two thirds over two years, leading to a total budget cut of £2.86m over two years, and making highly trained and qualified staff redundant.

Young people currently referred to CAMHS have significant mental health difficulties often as the result of traumatic life experiences including family violence and child abuse. We have attached the access criteria for the specialist CAMHS as a reminder of the 'vulnerability' and needs of the young people who currently receive this service.

Commenting on these proposed cuts to CAMHS, the Clinical director of the Birmingham Children's Hospital's Matthew Jenkins has said: ***"The mark of a civilised society is that it does protect and support the most vulnerable members of that society."***

"I think that if we make these cuts in full, then we're going to be failing to do that and we're going to be failing the families and children who need those services so badly."

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-birmingham-20826569>

West Midlands SWAN concurs with these comments.

b. Duty to inform

The CAMHS budget option, CYPF15, is summed up in 126 words and is one of the least detailed proposals contained within the Children and Young Peoples factsheet.

The budget option only states there will be reductions in service without setting out in any way the likely implications for young people in need of a service

The information suggests there will be no policy decisions required as a result of this budget proposal but clearly there are major policy issues at stake in regard to the future waiting times for a service, more restrictive eligibility criteria, and the reduction in the range and type of interventions to be offered by the service in future.

c. An unfair consultation

The information included in the Children and Young Peoples factsheet regarding the budget options for the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service fails to include sufficient reasons for the proposal, particularly having regard to the scale of the cuts and vulnerability and needs of the children who receive this service.

These reasons could have included the following points addressed by these questions:

- What are the grounds for selecting CAMHS as a service for these cuts, and for the magnitude of the cuts to this service in relation to other service areas?
- How will the Council meet its statutory responsibilities to children and young people with mental health needs in the future with such a greatly diminished service?
- What are the likely implications for waiting times and eligibility criteria to receive a service?
- What will be the consequences in regard to the future outcomes of young people to be denied a service and the long term implications for their mental health and for accessing mental health services in the future?
- Why is there is no explanation of any changes to specific funding relating to CAMHS?
- With other cuts to lower tier interventions/services to promote emotional health what are the likely implications for young people denied early intervention for their mental health and hence demand for CAMHs?
- What are the consequences for existing local policy commitments by the Council including the Birmingham Children and Young People's Plan 2011-14? This includes the outcome of seeking 'Improvements in the positive mental health and psychological wellbeing of children and young people in Birmingham'.
- What are the likely impacts of the cuts in provision in regard the mental health needs of BME young people?

We, as are other members of the public, are severely disadvantaged in our ability to respond to this consultation due to the paucity of the information provided by the Local Authority. Without sufficient reasons we are unable give intelligent consideration and make intelligent response to this and other budget proposals. The consultation for the cuts to the CAMHS service does not meet the principles of fair consultation required of a public body.

2. CYPF1 Voluntary Sector Funding

The proposal here is to withdraw all funding to the Community and Voluntary sector providing a range of children's services over a two year period, a total of £8.7m.

a. Consultation

The further point needs to be raised as to how the Council has informed and consulted with the Community and Voluntary sector and their service users over this budget consultation period and whether their efforts to inform and consult were proportionate to the scale and in regard to the likely consequences of the cuts proposed.

The above point, that insufficient reasons have been provided to give intelligent consideration and make intelligent response also apply to this proposed budget option. Consequently we are confined to making some very general points.

b. Every Child Matters

'Our aim is to ensure that every child has the chance to fulfil their potential by reducing levels of educational failure, ill health, substance misuse, teenage pregnancy, abuse and neglect, crime and anti-social behaviour among children and young people.' (Summary of the Green Paper, Every Child Matters)

This vision and commitment to develop children's services of the last Labour Government is now being dismantled locally by Birmingham's City Council. The conception of the development of an integrated range of children's services with an emphasis on early intervention and prevention was to meet children's differing and changing needs and to avoid the need for Tier 4 intervention.

The CVS sector has had an important role in providing certain Children's services due to its relationship to local communities in which they are rooted and to the greater trust that exists between families and local non-statutory organisations. For some of these reasons CVS organisations have a better track record of engaging with hard to reach families. This will now be lost.

The proposed remodelled preventative and targeted services, itself to be cut by £11m, is not a comparable or sufficient alternative provision.

At least this Budget options proposal is honest in that it makes it clear that over 5,500 children and young people will lose a service. This is a heinous cut.

c. The long term consequences for the CVS sector

These cuts will have a long term impact beyond the immediate loss of services provided. This proposal has very severe consequences for the future viability of non-statutory organisations with

close ties to the different communities which they serve. We would recommend that Cabinet members read the New Economic Foundation report 'Cutting it in Birmingham - why the grass roots aren't growing anymore'. The report describes the perfect storm currently experienced by many small local organisations that are being overwhelmed by a combination of increasing demand for their services and decreasing funding. To borrow Sir Albert's phrase, these cuts will herald the end of the local voluntary sector as we know it in the city.

3. Conclusion

These and many of the other cuts the CYP budget and to the Play and Youth Services are a permanent loss of capacity and resources for Birmingham's children and young people. They are neither smart nor lean or represent an investment to save.

Historically high levels of child poverty in the city have intensified under the last two years of the Con-Dem Government. The impact of the Governments 'welfare' reforms have yet to take full effect on families but will cause further significant financial hardship and stress when they do.

According to the NSPCC ***'research shows that children who grow up in poverty can be more vulnerable to some forms of maltreatment, particularly neglect and physical abuse. They also have an increased risk of adverse experiences and negative outcomes, both in the short and long term.'*** (p1 http://www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/research/briefings/povertypdf_wdf56896.pdf)

The number of young people is set to grow in total and as a proportion of the population of Birmingham. These year on year cuts occur at the point of growing need as a result of demographic changes and increasing stress on poor families which contributes to a growing demand for services.

Permanent and growing investment in developing and strengthening all tiers of children's services is what is needed at this present time to promote the well-being of all Birmingham's children but particularly to prevent young people reaching the thresholds for safeguarding or becoming 'looked after'.

The de-commissioning, dis-integration and retrenchment of children's services to protect the safeguarding services is the ultimate false economy and profound strategic failure. Cllr Brigid Jones reminds us of King Canute commanding the tide to stop!

We would expect Labour Councillors to be fighting for Birmingham's children and young people and their futures and to protect this important range of services.

Yours sincerely

West Midlands Social Work Action Network

PS The Social Work Action Network is a network of social work practitioners, academics, students and social welfare service users united in their concern that social work activity is being undermined by managerialism and marketisation, by the stigmatisation of service users and by welfare cuts and restrictions. SWAN promotes a model of social work and social care practice which is rooted in the value of social justice.

Unlike the current political administration in Birmingham we do not believe that there is no alternative to austerity and we refer you to a wide range of alternative that we generally support as laid out in a number of reports see: <http://falseeconomy.org.uk/cure/further-reading>

Appendix

ACCESS CRITERIA FOR SPECIALIST CAMHS

http://83.138.172.49/pdf/Access_criteria_for_CAMHS_V2.pdf

GUIDELINES FOR REFERRERS

Listed below are the range of mental health presentations that should be referred to Birmingham Specialist CAMHS. We prioritise children / young people where mental health / psychological presentations have a significant impact on a child or young person's life.

TYPES OF DIFFICULTIES

Emergency/urgent referrals requiring quick assessment:

- Psychosis (e.g. Visual/auditory hallucinations, delusions, thought disorder).
- Risk of Suicide or Severe Self Harm - overdoses or other significant self harm should initially be sent to their nearest acute hospitals A&E department – we will pick up the referrals from the hospital.
- Severe Depressive episode – significant difficulties beyond age appropriate mood variation and having significant impact on daily living.
- Severe Eating Disorders – sudden and severe weight loss, extreme dieting, self induced vomiting, secrecy around food intake, food avoidance, fear of choking or vomiting etc

Routine referrals requiring a standard assessment

Moderate presentations (based on severity, complexity, duration and impact of difficulties):

- Depression.
- Anxiety / Phobia / Panic Disorders.
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.
- Eating Disorder.
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder.

Severe and or complex presentations where packages of intervention have proved unsuccessful

- Severe or complex forms of behaviour such as sleep, feeding, anger, relationship or attachment difficulties

that have a significant impact on outcome and mental wellbeing.

- Developmental Disorders including ADHD and ASD – ONLY where there are significant other mental health concerns.
- School refusal or severe behaviour problems – ONLY where there are significant co-morbid mental health concerns.
- Behaviour which is difficult to manage or understand within the context of a moderate to severe learning disability.
- Children with a learning disability who display extreme reactions to expected/unexpected life events.

Severe emotional difficulties relating to and complicating physical conditions such as:

- Diabetes, Epilepsy, Cystic Fibrosis where compliance and adjustment are impacting on long term outcomes.
- Neurological and other health conditions which significantly impact on psychological health.
- Unexplained significant pain / somatising disorders where there may be a suspected psychological cause
- Bedwetting / soiling – where paediatric specialist interventions have been tried.