

# CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND FINANCE AND PROCUREMENT JOINT PORTFOLIO DECISION RECORD 22 September 2011

The meeting commenced at 11.00am. in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool

**Present:**

Councillor Cath Hill (Culture, Leisure and Tourism Portfolio Holder) and  
Councillor Robbie Payne, (Finance and Procurement Portfolio Holder).

Officers: Joan Stevens, Scrutiny Manager  
Danielle Swainston, Sure Start, Extended Services and Early Years  
Manager  
Jo Stubbs, Democratic Services Officer

## 2. **Call-in of decision – Local Authority Childcare Settings – Oscars Out of School Service, Bushbabies Daycare and Chatham House Daycare** (*Scrutiny Coordinating Committee*)

**Type of decision**

Non-key

**Purpose of report**

A. To report the outcome of the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> August 2011 at which consideration was given to the Call-In of the following decision taken by the Children's Services and Finance and Procurement Portfolio Holders at a joint meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> August 2011:

Minute No. 1 – Local Authority Childcare Settings – Oscars Out of School Service, Bushbabies Daycare and Chatham House Daycare.

2. That the Bushbabies and Chatham House day-care facilities be closed.

B. To refer the joint decision taken by the Children's Services and Finance and Procurement Portfolio Holders on 9<sup>th</sup> August 2011 back to the Children's Services and Finance and Procurement Portfolio Holders for further consideration.

**Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder**

At the joint Children's Services and Finance and Procurement Portfolio Holder meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> August 2011 the decision was made to close the

Bushbabies and Chatham House day-care facilities. A Call-in Notice was subsequently issued on 18<sup>th</sup> August 2011. Copies of the original report, minutes and Call-in notice were appended to the report.

At a meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> August 2011 the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee accepted that the decision had been taken in contravention of the principles of decision making as outlined in Article 13 of the constitution specifically due consideration and a presumption in favour of openness. They acknowledged that the decision had been made on the basis that there were alternative placements available in other settings in the town and that financial support of the facilities could not continue in light of the Council's current financial situation. However there was great concern that parents had not been consulted, a clear contravention of the principles of decision-making. Members did feel however that councillors had been kept informed as the decision had been included in the Forward Plan and been discussed through the Business Transformation Board. The Portfolio Holders were therefore asked to reconsider their decision on the grounds that it contravened the principles of decision making in relation to openness and transparency and that in reconsidering their decision they recommend that consultation be undertaken with the parents of those children affected by the closure.

The Scrutiny Manager submitted apologies for the Chair of Scrutiny Coordinating Committee who was currently detained in another meeting. The Culture, Leisure and Tourism Portfolio Holder queried whether any consultation had taken place. The Sure Start, Extended Services and Early Years Manager advised that parents had been notified that there were financial difficulties however officers had been careful not to mention possible closure as they felt this might lead to children being removed precipitated actual closure. The Finance and Procurement Portfolio Holder noted that the previous decision made by himself and the current Culture, Leisure and Tourism Portfolio Holder (Children's Services Portfolio Holder at the time of the decision) to close the facilities had not been in line with officer recommendations and that had officers had closure in mind he was sure the consultation would have been more thorough. He asked for an update on current attendance at the facilities and was advised that they were running at 40% occupancy currently as large numbers of parents had moved their children to other facilities following the announcement. Some parents were going to stay until the end of the year and then move in January. The Department for Child and Adult Services had offered support to parents seeking alternative provision in terms of arranging visits although some parents had rejected this help. The Sure Start, Extended Services and Early Years Manager confirmed that there were still outstanding places available at other facilities and advised that in order for Bushbabies and Chatham House to remain open charges would have to increase by as much as £12 per day.

The Portfolio Holders both continued to express regret at the closure of these facilities and the effect this would have in terms of job losses and displacement of children. However they felt that keeping the facilities open

in the current economic climate was indefensible. Grants had been cut by Central Government and to find an additional £200,000 per year when savings of £14 million had to be made over the next 3 years could not be justified. They commended officers for the help they had given to parents and children in finding alternative placements and expressed the hope that staff affected by the closures would find alternative employment elsewhere.

**Decision**

That the decision previously made by the Portfolio Holders for Children's Services and Finance and Procurement be confirmed and that the Bushbabies and Chatham House day-care facilities be closed.

The meeting concluded at 11:10am.

**P J DEVLIN**

**CHIEF SOLICITOR**

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