

Proposed Budget Cuts to the Early Support Service, Life Stages Service

The closure of the Early Support Service will have a devastating impact on the lives and future development of young children in Darlington who have the most complex medical needs/disabilities and their families who need support. We must do all we can to prevent this.

I would like to comment on this proposal and put forward some suggestions on how the important and valued work that the Early Support Service carries out could be continued in the future, as an integral part of the Core Offer for Children's Services.

Core Offer Budget for Early Help Model- reference CYP4

In my view the work of the Early Support Service is well placed to support and contribute to the Council's proposed Early Help Model, both of which target the most vulnerable children and their families.

The model is targeted at early preventative work with those children who are most vulnerable and have a high level of additional needs, where parental factors influence family life. This work is exactly what the Early Support Service already provides, working closely with Children's Centres early years provision and the Family Intervention Team.

Children's Service Budget Rationale

"Giving every child the best start in life"

The Early Support Team are committed to Darlington's Children and Young People's Plan [CHYP] 2014-2017. The aim of the plan is to ensure that effective early intervention and preventative services are in place to work with children and their families to reduce the incidence of abuse and neglect, family breakdown, social exclusion and poor outcomes. The Early Support Service provides targeted flexible support at children and their families in greatest need. This evidence determined the continuation of the Early Support Service within the CYP Plan 2014-2017 in promoting high quality early childhood experiences.

Core Offer Budget For Disabled Children- reference CYP3

The proposal for the Core Offer For Disabled Children states that on the termination of the Early Support Service, ongoing support will continue to be provided by the remaining staff within the 0-25 team. The impact of the withdrawal of the Early Support Service could have increased cost implications for the continuing 0-25 team.

Reduction of Staffing Levels in Early Support Team

In my view, rather than removing the whole service, consideration could be given to reducing the current staffing level of 3 FTE by 1 FTE.

This would require a tightening of the criteria for service support, only working with children with the most significant and severe complex medical disabilities, which would become the focus of the service.

In this option, although the service would reduce, there would still be support for those children and their families with the most complex and social care needs, who are often the most vulnerable in our community.

Explore Joint Funding with other bodies eg. Health/Education

The Early Support Service staff work with Health professionals in supporting children with additional and complex health needs.

An option could be to look into to seek funding from Health budgets to pay for the early preventative work, carried out by the Early Support Service as referred to by Bill Dixon at the Public Meeting [March 16th] on the Council Budget.

Education- The Early Support Service staff link in with educational services in supporting inclusion for children with additional needs in accessing early years settings.

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