

Resource Scrutiny Committee 28.02.2011.

Proposals in Children's Services Budget Summary

Play Services

The proposed saving on the play budget is £375,000 - £175,000 in 11/12 and £200,000 the following year. The report to the Executive indicated that this would come from voluntary sector grant aid, currently £780,000 - a cut of 48%. The £780,000 goes to holiday playschemes (£290,000), adventure playgrounds (£272,000) and community associations (£218,000). All play services in Manchester are delivered by the voluntary sector.

We are not disputing the level of the saving proposed and recognise that this is a direct consequence of the government's actions in reducing the City Council's funding. However, the proposals which officers make in the budget summary report are uninformed and misleading. The actions they propose will result in even greater damage to services for children and young people in Manchester. What we propose is a way of achieving the savings while minimising the damage to services and at the same time enabling voluntary and community groups to take full responsibility for play services in the city.

What is the real level of play cuts being proposed?

The Children's Services Budget Summary report contains proposals which could result in even higher cuts than those above. It proposes to 'exit quickly from contract arrangements with limited play outcomes' (£218,000 funding to community associations) and to 'withdraw funding from adventure playgrounds' (£272,000) - which would make an **overall cut of £490,000 or 63%**.

The cost of adventure playground closure

Current council funding does not cover the full cost of running adventure playgrounds and they now generate 20% (£68,000) of this themselves. In the past five years they have also brought into Manchester over £1M in capital funding to develop buildings and play facilities. The funding which the council provides supports the delivery of a wide range of services - more than play alone - and enables them to engage some of the most vulnerable children and young people in Manchester. Centres offer Aiming High provision to disabled children, behaviour management training for parents, targeted work for young people at risk of gang involvement and alternative education for disengaged pupils.

They operate in some of the most disadvantaged wards in Manchester - Ardwick, Moss Side, Sharston and Hulme - and currently work with over 40% of 5-14 year olds living there (2010 registration figures). The withdrawal of funding completely would result in the loss of all these services.

Why close successful provision in order to develop new?

Does anybody seriously believe that parks and leisure services could deliver the range of provision above, let alone draw in the external funding which adventure playgrounds attract? This is what officers propose in the report however. Cut funding to successful voluntary providers and lose their facilities so that council facilities can develop their own services? Manchester's adventure playgrounds are recognised as some of the best in the country, their play facilities are of a far higher standard and have a higher level of use than those in parks.

Where to find the savings in the play budget?

If the required savings are those originally proposed - £375,000 - then they can be made in an alternative manner which would reduce the impact on children in the city. MYL has already proposed a reduction of 16% across the whole grant budget, which would achieve the figure required for 2011/12. This would mean reductions in adventure play services but would avoid any closures. It would also provide all providers with time to develop income generation further.

In addition to the grant budget the Children's Services play budget includes approximately £280,000 for its role in 'funding and quality assuring play provision'. The report doesn't quantify the savings to be made here but the Manchester Play Network - a consortium of voluntary sector providers - has put forward proposals to deliver enhanced development and support services at considerably less cost.

We hope that a meeting with the Executive member for finance and appropriate ward councillors will produce more specific, realistic and far less damaging proposals than those contained in the officers report.

27 February 2011