

**TO: EXECUTIVE
23 SEPTEMBER 2014**

**PROVISION OF SHORT BREAKS (AIMING HIGH)
Director of Children, Young People & Learning**

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to assist the Executive in taking decisions about how best to achieve savings from the Aiming High budget, after taking account of comments received through public consultation which was undertaken by Bracknell Forest Council's Children, Young People & Learning (CYPL) Specialist Support Service in collaboration with QA Research.
- 1.2 The Council's medium term financial plans anticipate a saving of £120,000 to be effective from April 2015.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **To recommend progressing Option A as detailed in Appendix 4.**
- 2.2 **That the 2015-16 Commitment Budget is updated to include savings against the Aiming High budget of £106,000.**

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The results of the consultation have indicated Option A is the preferred option and this is broadly in line with the budget saving. This option is further endorsed by officers who have refined Option A (at Item 4.16) to meet their commissioning needs.

4. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 4.1 Following the Executive decision to consult on the reductions to the Aiming High budget, officers reviewed the commissioning priorities and developed a number of options for consultation. Over the past 6 months there has been a detailed consultation with parents/carers and young people who use the Aiming High services and providers/professionals.
- 4.2 The consultation has been a major piece of work which has been carefully considered and sensitively planned.
- 4.3 Three main options were identified and a four stage consultation process followed.
- 4.4 The electronic annexes give the detail of the consultation and the findings. A full Equalities Impact Assessment (Appendix 1) is included with the report to inform the Executive when making their decision, together with a summary of the Consultation Report (Appendix 3).

Summary of the Consultation

- 4.5 The consultation conclusions can be summarised as follows:
Following detailed discussions, there was widespread understanding - and albeit reluctant acceptance - from parents and stakeholders about the need for savings to the Aiming High Short Breaks budget, but services provided are nevertheless hugely

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valued and 80% said that services provided a large or huge improvement to the quality of life of their family.

- 4.6 The targeted holiday play schemes are particularly well used and valued.
- 4.7 Whilst the proposed increase to the cost in Saturday and holiday play schemes at Kids and Konnections may be difficult for some families. Most who commented on the topic could see the fairness of an increased charge in line with mainstream provision and felt this was fair, if additional reductions to provision could be avoided.
- 4.8 There were indications that Oakwood should be partially protected as it offers a provision for older children, which local authority officers agree with. There were similar views expressed regarding funding for educational transition arrangements at Kennel Lane School. However, could the Executive please note that funding of this provision does not fall within the remit of Short Breaks.
- 4.9 Proposed cuts in other areas were considered to be 'nice to have' but not essential, and there was some awareness that equivalent services may be available elsewhere.
- 4.10 **Option A** was almost universally preferred as the option of choice, described as the 'least bad option' and a 'good compromise'. 86% parents who felt able to choose an option suggested this one, and 55% of provider/professionals supported this view (40% of provider/professionals had no opinion). However, what was clear was there might be scope for adapting Option A.
- 4.11 Although Option A increases costs per session to parents, it is within the range they identified as being manageable. Research into the costs of comparable local mainstream clubs suggests £20 per day is within the norm (Kidz R Us is £23 per day, Bullbrook school club £20 per day, Energy Kidz £22.50).
- 4.12 Evidence suggests that Options B & C are not supported by parents/carers. In addition:
- 4.13 **Option B** would reduce the provision for children with moderate learning difficulties who are 'too able' for a targeted service and are unable to access a mainstream setting, with or without support. Whilst the feedback for John Nike and Oakwood was limited in the pre-consultation event, a greater need was evidenced in the full consultation. Oakwood's attendance figures indicate a sustained need for this provision. This option would save £118,000.
- 4.14 **Option C** does not provide for children with moderate learning difficulties who are 'too able' for a targeted service and are unable to access a mainstream setting, with or without support. Whilst the feedback for John Nike and Oakwood was limited in the pre-consultation event, a greater need was evidenced in the full consultation. Oakwood's attendance figures indicate a sustained need for this provision
- 4.15 The general feeling was that parents felt they could not afford a 50% increase in the daily charge for holiday and Saturday short breaks. This option would save £120,000.

Recommended Option

Option A

- 4.16 Option A is detailed in Appendix 4 and would save £106K. This is the recommended choice. It was the preferred option from the consultation and would result in the least impact to families. However, following the consultation, officers revised the preferred

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Option A to better meet their commissioning priorities. The following two changes have therefore been incorporated:

- 4.16.1 Based on the number of children at John Nike and Oakwood in previous years - and in particular this summer - we cannot recommend that John Nike continues whilst Oakwood is no longer offered. Therefore, we propose substituting the provision at John Nike with one at Oakwood which will enable children with moderate learning difficulties to continue to attend this universal setting during the school holidays.
- 4.16.2 If the carer grant is no longer offered, a large number of families will lose their access to a short break. The consultation has evidenced that approximately 50 families do not access anything other than the carer grant for the purpose of a short break. We suggest continuing a 'Short Break Grant' for a further year, with eligibility criteria such that parents who do not make use of any other service can continue to have a break. This will enable us to determine the reason(s) why existing provisions might not be used and will support signposting. Funding for this will come from a more realistic cost of the targeted provision. Indicative costs had been calculated on 12 children attending each session at either Kids or Konnections with a cost per session of £1,200.
- 4.17 The calculations are based on the actual cost of £1,091 (Kids) and £1,021 (Konnections), with 11 children attending rather than 12. The proposed budget plan is detailed in Appendix 4.
- 4.18 The current contracts are due to expire March 2015, and a six month notice of termination is required i.e. we would need to notify providers of our intentions no later than 1st October 2014. Providers have been spoken to and have provisionally agreed to a variation of their existing contracts should the Executive approve these recommendations.
- 4.19 As part of the ongoing commitment to disabled children and their families, officers will continue to monitor and evaluate take-up and provision, seek user feedback and consultation, and adapt the short break provision to meet the changing needs of the market within the budget allocation.

5 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 5.1 When the consultation commenced a wide range of options were considered. These gradually were refined into three, Options A, B and C (see Appendix 2).

6 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Background / Introduction

- 6.1 Parents told parliamentary hearings in 2006 that "the lack of short breaks was the biggest single cause of unhappiness with service provision". Since 2008 there has been a huge amount of investment in short breaks, and this continued with Government ring fenced funding via Aiming High for Disabled Children (AHDC) until 2010/11. In April 2011 ring fencing was removed and each Local Authority subsequently had the flexibility to make decisions about funding based on local need. At that time, Bracknell Forest's Aiming High annual budget was substantially reduced by £146,000, which represented a 30% cut. This was at a time when neighbouring authorities (West Berkshire, Wokingham and Slough) were increasing their total budget for short breaks. Since then, Bracknell Forest Council has continued it's

commitment to disabled children and their families with no further reductions until now.

6.2 To underpin their commitment, the Government also introduced a 'Short Break Duty' on Local Authorities (LAs). In April 2011, the 'Breaks for Carers of Disabled Children Regulations' came into force. Under the duty required of this legislation, LAs are legally bound to provide a range of short break services including:

- Day-time care in the homes of disabled children or elsewhere
- Overnight care in the homes of disabled children or elsewhere
- Educational or leisure activities for disabled children outside of their homes
- Services available to assist carers in the evenings, at weekends and during the school holidays.

6.3 Current details are documented in the 'Short Breaks Services Statement'. Moving this detail forward will form a major part of the Local Offer so that information and signposting is available to all families and professionals.

6.4 At the Care Portfolio Review Group (PRG) on 22 October 2013, the Council budget paper proposing a range of savings across Council Services was presented. The savings proposed for the Aiming High for Disabled Children services were scrutinised at this time, and on 19 November 2013 a further report was requested by the PRG regarding the anticipated impact of the savings, along with any alternatives to the proposals.

6.5 At the November meeting, a proposal was made for a report to be presented to the Executive that requested a delay in the savings to the Aiming High budget until September 2014. This revised timescale was to allow detailed work to be undertaken regarding the whole Aiming High budget, and also to take account of the implementation of Personal Budgets from September 2014.

6.6 The Chair of the PRG and the Executive Member for Children, Young People and Learning have met with the Aiming High Steering Group and taken part in the discussion process and feedback to Aiming High parents/carers.

The Four Stages of the Consultation

6.7 Bracknell Forest Council has been working with The Consultation Institute to quality assure this consultation process in line with their good practice model. The first three of four stages of this quality assurance process have been signed off to date as being 'good practice'. CYPL are pleased with this outcome and are working to also get Stage 4 kite marked as 'good practice'.

Stage 1 – Planning

6.8 The Aiming High team spent some time scoping the issues, identifying stakeholders, and planning the consultation. During this period, Qa Research, an independent market research company, were commissioned to work with the local authority to ensure independence on this matter. Alongside this, it was agreed to commission the services of The Consultation Institute, who have quality assured the consultation against best practice.

Stage 2 – Pre-Consultation

6.9 A pre-consultation event was facilitated by Qa Research in April 2014 in order to consult with parents/ carers who access Aiming High services regarding their priorities for future service delivery. This event was opened by Councillor Barnard, Executive Member for Children, Young People & Learning and Councillor Gill Birch, Chair of the Care PRG and CYPL Overview and Scrutiny. Members gave assurance to participants that their views were important to the Council in planning services for

children with disabilities for the next three years. 24 parents/carers attended, and the event supported the development of a range of options that identified savings, whilst also taking into account what services are most valued by service users. This was to ensure the minimal adverse impact of any financial reductions.

- 6.10 The CYPL Specialist Support Service developed two options for consideration at the event in order to give parents a 'starting point'. These options were then developed further by taking into account any information from previous consultations, attendance levels at current activities, and the proposed savings target of £120,000.
- 6.11 However, these suggestions were not well supported by the pre-consultation group as the proposed impact was primarily to reduce the targeted schemes (commissioned services). The group particularly noted that these proposals had an impact upon the services they most valued - holiday and Saturday clubs (currently being delivered by Kids and Konnections). During this session, parents were presented with two Options and went on to develop alternative Options. Using this feedback from parents, three options were developed which encompassed views expressed during the event - see Appendix 2 - and these then formed the basis of the consultation questionnaire.

Stage 3 – The Consultation

- 6.12 In regards to the full consultation:
- 72 people completed the questionnaire, which is 36% of total who use the services at risk;
 - 7 attended the focus groups, which is 3% of the total who use services
- Combined, this represents significant views - 39% of total who use services. The outcome of the consultation was a majority of consultees in favour of the parent developed Option A by 60%. There was less support for and more concerns about adverse impact regarding options B and C.
- 6.13 Within the consultation document responses, the children had a range of disabilities including complex health needs and physical disabilities. 72% of parents who responded stated that their children were on the autistic spectrum.
- 6.14 Families (including children and young people) were also invited to give their views at an event hosted by Qa research, and 7 families attended with children and young people. Their participation has been incorporated into the findings.
- 6.15 Children and young people have also given their views with the support of a family worker during visits to a number of holiday scheme settings this summer. In addition, the last consultation carried out by Kids at the end of 2012 has been used and a recent report undertaken by Kids in readiness for our Local Offer which asks specifically what children and young people would like to do in their spare time.
- 6.16 Stakeholders - comprising of professionals and providers - were also consulted. Invitations to complete the questionnaire and attend a focus group were sent to 379 individuals and organisations. Over a 3-week period, 20 replies were received back, and 18 people attended the group meeting.

Stage 4 – Analysis evaluation and feedback

- 6.17 The consultation closed on 9th July 2014, and the Council is undertaking its commitment to a two-stage feedback process to stakeholders and those who were consulted. Qa Research have completed an output report with recommendations, and this and the proposals are published and circulated to allow any further feedback/comment. Once the Executive decision has been made on which option to

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adopt, the CYPL Specialist Support Service will ensure this is also fed back to all stakeholders.

- 6.18 A full copy of the Qa consultation findings is available on request if required. A summary is included as Appendix 3.
- 6.19 Three options were included in the consultation. All options make similar cuts to several services, but maintain the same number of targeted holiday sessions. In summary, the major difference between the options is the reduction in Saturday sessions and the amount paid per day by parents for the targeted provision:
- 6.20 **Option A** – reduces the number of Saturday sessions from 38 at each provider to 20 at both Kids and Konnections, with an increased cost to parents/carers to £20 per session. This option also reduces John Nike provision by half. Option A is considered the most effective way to make the proposed saving whilst still maintaining a highly valued service. Please note the two amendments at paragraph 3.16 to Option A.
- 6.21 **Option B** – reduces the number of Saturday sessions from 38 at each provider to 15 at both Kids and Konnections, with an increased cost to parents/carers to £20 per session. This option also reduces John Nike provision all together.
- 6.22 **Option C** – reduces the number of Saturday sessions from 38 at each provider to 17 at both Kids and Konnections, with an increased cost to parents/carers to £25 per session. This option also reduces John Nike provision all together.
- 6.23 The recommended changes to Option A, detailed in paragraph 3.16, are included in the final proposed budget plan for 2015/16 in Appendix 4.

Disability Living Allowance

- 6.24 Members asked about effective use and families' use of Disability Living Allowance (DLA), in particular in assisting with the proposed increase in the daily rate of the targeted schemes. It is widely evidenced - Joseph Rowntree/Contact a Family - that the cost of raising a child with a disability is three times more than that for raising a child with no additional needs. Many of these costs are 'hidden' in the price of specialist toys/diet/equipment etc. Therefore, it is difficult for parents to 'itemise' exactly what DLA is spent on and why. This also does not take into account that parents are often unable to continue in employment due to the need to be available at all times. In short, despite the fact a large number of parents are in receipt of DLA for their child/ren, this may be insufficient for them to afford the suggested price increase. The majority of parent/carers consulted spoken to said an increase to £25 (from £12) would not be manageable. However, there was agreement that between £15 / £20 per session would be manageable for most.

Parent Led Groups

- 6.25 The consultation also broached the issue of parent-led groups, and volunteering to support services where cuts had been proposed:
- 6.25.1 Parent-led groups did not meet with much support from parents or stakeholders, with stakeholders saying that they had mixed results in the past with parental involvement/participation, and that they were doubtful about the level of enthusiasm. However, 42% of parental respondents said that they might be interested in forming or joining such a group.
- 6.25.2 Volunteering was valued by a few parents as an opportunity to use their skills and develop confidence, while others felt too 'time-poor' to contemplate it.

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Meanwhile, stakeholders agreed that volunteering did not appear to offer a reliable enough resource for providers to be able to depend on it when delivering services.

- 6.25.2 In consideration of the above, the CYP&L Specialist Support team, Aiming High, Kids, and parents have worked together during this period to apply for a 'Contact a Family' grant for parental participation, and it is anticipated that this group will look at future opportunities for increasing community provision.

Changes in other LA to Aiming High

- 6.26 There is some evidence that cuts are taking place to similar services in the neighbouring local authorities of Hampshire and Buckinghamshire. Within Berkshire, it is understood that Slough Borough Council are consulting on short break services, but have made no statement about savings. Wokingham Borough Council have committed further financial investment in theirs to enable more focus on prevention and earlier intervention.

7 ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS

Borough Solicitor

- 7.1 The consultation process has been extensive, and appears to authentically follow and even exceed the requirements set down in Gunning for a fair and accurate consultation. The process that has been used is very comprehensive and transparent. It has considered the protective characteristics of those impacted upon by the implications of the consultation and ways of mitigating any impact.

However, in an exercise like this it is very difficult because of the nature of the decisions not to have some impact. The Council has sought to keep the impact to the lowest level possible. It has to be recognised that however thorough the consultation, it is never possible to sign off a consultation as 100% compliant and completely protected from judicial scrutiny.

Borough Treasurer

- 7.2 The financial implications arising from this report are set out in the supporting information and agreeing this report will achieve on-going savings of £106,000 against a target of £120,000.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 7.3 See **Appendix 1** for full EIA.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 7.4 This consultation is of a sensitive nature and has required careful and ongoing management. The local authority has invested significant time and resources to ensure the consultation was carefully planned, carried out and evaluated to minimise the impact of the savings upon vulnerable children and their families.

- 7.5 In the evaluation stage of the consultation, officers were concerned about the low participation of young people given there are a group we identified as having high interest. Therefore, an officer visited a number of short break settings to seek additional views directly from children.

- 7.6 A full equality impact assessment has been carried out, and at the time of writing three of the four stages have been approved and signed off by The Consultation Institute as 'good practice'. The fourth stage is still active.

- 7.7 Officers Involved in the Consultation Work

- Sonia Johnson - Head of Specialist Support, Children's Social Care

- Abby Thomas – Head of Community Engagement and Equalities
- Jo Lillywhite – Development Manager, Aiming High
- Lorraine Knowles – Specialist Support Family Worker
- Paul Clark – Head of Departmental Finance -CYPL
- Simon Bull – Assistant Borough Solicitor

8 CONSULTATION

Principal Groups Consulted

- 8.1 During the planning stage a stakeholder analysis was undertaken to enable officers to identify all interested parties, and those with high interest. Opportunity to participate was extended to all those identified including:
- Parents
 - Carers
 - Young people
 - Providers
 - Professionals e.g. Social Workers, Kennel Lane School, Transition workers, Health.
- 8.2 As previously mentioned, the involvement of Qa Research and The Consultation Institute have been pivotal in ensuring those who wish to participate have had the opportunity to do so.
- 8.3 The consultation has been extensive, and professionals were consulted as part of the stakeholder consultation.

Method of Consultation

- 8.4 The consultation aims were achieved through the use of a range of methods with different audiences and stakeholders. In brief, the project included :
- **Pre-consultation**
 - Event with parents and carers, opened by members
 - **Full consultation**
 - Online / paper self-completion survey with parents and carers
 - Family focus groups / paired depth interviews with parents and carers and their children and young people with additional needs and disabilities
 - Online / paper self-completion survey with stakeholders
 - Stakeholder event / focus groups.
- 8.5 Please note that all tools, questionnaires and scripts used within the research can be found in the appendices of Qa's output report, together with the pre-consultation feedback report. They are available electronically on request (please note it is a 147 page document). The summary is included as Appendix 3.

Background Papers

- Appendix 1 – Full EIA
- Appendix 2 – Alternative Options discussed through the consultation
- Appendix 3 – Consultation Report - Executive Summary
- Appendix 4 – Proposed budget plan for Option A

Contact for further information

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