



Aiming High Budget Consultation 2014 Executive Summary

For Bracknell Forest Council

July 2014



RESEARCH

1. Executive summary

Background

Bracknell Forest Council is in the difficult position of having to make savings from the Aiming High Short Breaks budget over the coming years. Currently, the service supports users with a £370,000 budget, reducing to £250,000 by April 2015. Of the 2015 budget, £130,000 goes directly to funding core services; leaving £120,000 per year to design and deliver Aiming High services.

Method

There were many aspects to the consultation, ensuring that full transparency was provided for parents/carers, their families and the stakeholders involved with Aiming High.

First, a pre-consultation phase took place, with parents/carers invited to an event. Their views were used to help Bracknell Forest Council formulate three options to be used as the basis for the full consultation. Options A and B took into account parent/carer comments, while Option C was devised by Bracknell Forest Council and was the only option to achieve the required savings.

The full consultation included:

- online/self-completion survey for parents/carers
- online/self-completion survey for stakeholders
- family focus groups with parents/carers and their children/young people
- consultation event for stakeholders to attend

Findings

- There was a widespread understanding and acceptance from parents and stakeholders about the need for cuts to the Aiming High services budget. Participants recognised that proposed budget cuts came in the context of cuts to a range of services at Bracknell Forest Council and cuts to similar short breaks services across other local authorities. **Over two thirds** of parents were willing to rank the options in order of preference (**73%**), with just a third not knowing or not having an opinion.
- The Aiming High services are hugely valued by those who use them, with **57%** of respondents indicating the services made a **huge impact** on their quality of life and a further **23%** indicating that the services made a **good improvement** to their life. Parents and carers noted that by using the services they have increased free time, increased time with other children and that they facilitate a 'normal' lifestyle within a good environment.
- The proposal that core and protected services should be protected and retain their funding was met with little disagreement. The holiday

play schemes were particularly well used and valued with **almost half noting they use or had used Konnections (49%)** and **a third using or had used Kids (35%)**.

- Discussion groups with parents and stakeholders considered the acceptability of increased price rises for holiday and Saturday services such as those provided by Kids and Konnections. While some felt that price increases may be difficult for some families, most who commented on this topic could see the fairness of increased charges in line with mainstream provision.
- There were indications that a couple of the services in line for their Aiming High funding to be cut – Oakwood and Transition – should in fact be partially protected. Both services affect older children, whose parents were not well represented at the pre-consultation phase and therefore did not contribute to the parent-developed options.
- Oakwood was one of the most used of all the individual services (after Kids, Konnections and Carer's Grant) with **around a third** of respondents indicating they use or had used it **(31%)**. It was highly valued as a place where children could enjoy the outdoor, adventurous activities.
- When considering what might be the impact of the reduced or removed funding on services, there was some awareness that equivalent services may be available elsewhere. These equivalent services could include:
 - those from existing Aiming High providers who may still continue to provide their service
 - services from third sector providers
 - mainstream services, particularly with the use of the Inclusion Support service to help children transition into mainstream services
- In order for families to access such equivalent services, many stakeholders and parents highlighted that good information sharing and signposting would be key. Several groups or agencies were nominated to take on this role:
 - Family Information Service
 - family liaison workers in schools
 - local support groups
 - Bracknell Forest Voluntary Action
- The idea of parent-led groups did not meet with much support from parents or stakeholders. Relatively few parents indicated that they had experience of parent-led groups. Stakeholders were doubtful about the enthusiasm of parents for the parent-led groups. However, **42% of parental respondents** said they may potentially be interested in forming or joining such a group.

- Stakeholders suggested that an organisation like Bracknell Forest Voluntary Action may be able to support parents with legalities and applying for charitable status or that local voluntary organisations could work with Kids to develop the parent participation work already under way in Kids. Volunteering did not appear to offer a reliable enough resource for providers to depend on.
- Option A was almost universally preferred as the option of choice, described as “*the least bad option*” and “*a good compromise*” with **86%** of parents/carers choosing this as their preferred option. Based on findings from parents and stakeholders, there may be widespread support for a slightly adapted Option A. Under such an adaptation, Oakwood could retain partial funding, alongside John Nike. Partial funding for Transition could also be considered, unless a similar support scheme can be identified elsewhere.