

## **CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**5 DECEMBER 2017**

### **MEMBER'S ITEM: CLOSURE OF ALL SAINTS NURSERY**

Report from: Ian Sutherland, Director of Children and Adults Services

Author: Ann Domeney, Deputy Director Children and Adults

#### **Summary**

This report sets out the response to an issue, raised by Councillor Maple regarding the impending closure of All Saints Nursery.

#### **1. Budget and Policy Framework**

1.1 Under Medway Constitution Overview and Scrutiny rules (Chapter 4, Part 5, Paragraph 9.2) Councillor Maple has requested that an item on this matter is included on the agenda for this meeting.

#### **2. The Issue**

2.1. Councillor Maple has requested that an item was placed on the agenda regarding the impending closure of All Saints Nursery, in particular that in late November parents at All Saints Nursery were informed their nursery provision would close by Christmas. This item was requested by Councillor Maple as he is extremely concerned that there is a lack of early years provision in the area. He also expressed concern that ward councillors were not informed by officers prior to any announcement of proposals.

#### **3 Director's comments**

3.1 Subsequent to this item being placed on the agenda, officers were able to confirm that an alternative arrangement had been found to keep All Saints nursery, in Magpie Hall Road, open between January and July 2018 for all the children who currently attend.

- 3.2 Discussions are also underway to find a permanent solution to keep the nursery open after the summer break in 2018. Once there is confirmation of future permanent arrangements, Members and parents will be updated.
- 3.3 In a letter to parents dated 7 November, the Director apologised for any upset or anxiety caused to some families. The timing of the original letter to families was prompted by the statutory timescale for notifying staff of the potential risk of closure. In the absence of an agreed solution at the time, the Service wanted to ensure that parents were advised of the risk of closure at the earliest opportunity. It is pleasing that plans have been secured so the nursery will not close in December 2017.
- 3.4 It is regrettable that Ward Members were not notified of the breakdown of the planned arrangements in early November. With hindsight, the Service should have provided a briefing to local Members prior to notifying parents on 7 November. In the event, officers were focused on ensuring that the timeframe for giving notice to parents and staff were adhered to.
- 3.5 The need for good quality early years provision in this part of Chatham has been a driving reason behind the efforts of officers to secure the continued operation of the nursery at All Saints for local children.

#### **4. Related Petition**

- 4.1 A petition, containing 260 signatures, was received by the Council on 21 November 2017. The petition requested the following:

‘We are protesting about the closure of the All Saints Nursery in Magpie Hall Road, Chatham.

The parents of the children at All Saints Nursery were made aware on Tuesday 7 November 2017 that the nursery is closing at the end of the term. We have not been included in any consultation with the Council regarding this matter and we feel strongly that this has been handled unfairly.’

- 4.2 On 22 November 2017, the following response by the Director of Children and Adults Services was sent to the petition organiser:

‘I am very pleased to confirm that we have been able to find an alternative arrangement to keep All Saints Nursery, in Magpie Hall Road, open between January and July 2018 for all the children who currently attend.

We are also in discussions to find a permanent solution to keep the nursery open after the summer break in 2018. As soon as we have confirmation on future permanent arrangements, we will ensure that parents are updated.

I am extremely sorry for any upset or anxiety caused, but at the time we issued the original letter we wanted to ensure that parents were advised of the risk of closure at the earliest opportunity.

I am pleased that we have been able to secure plans so the nursery will not close in December 2017.'

- 4.3 On 23 November 2017, the petition organiser responded that he was not content with the response and confirmed that he wished to exercise the right of referral of the petition to this Committee for discussion.

## 5. Risk Management

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Action to avoid or mitigate risk</b>	<b>Risk rating</b>
Permanent Solution failure	Transfer of nursery to alternative local organisation cannot be agreed.	Negotiations at advanced stage. In principle commitments in place regarding lease of premises, staffing, and funding. Ultimately, a different organisation will be found if the current negotiations fail.	D2
Interim Solution failure	Problems encountered with the planned arrangement for January – July 2018. E.g. due to loss of staff as result of insecurity.	Officer are seeking a swift permanent solution to give security/ confidence to current staff and users.	D2
Communications with Members	Fast moving developments lead to stakeholders not being sufficiently briefed.	Procedure to ensure that all key stakeholders are kept briefed. Local Members to be notified of all key developments in timely manner.	E2

## 5. Implications for Looked After Children

- 5.1 There are no implications for Looked After Children arising from this report.

## 6. Financial and Legal Implications

- 6.1 The transformation of Early Help Services will deliver a range of improved and integrated services for children, young people and families in need of support in Medway. Changes in government funding requires significant savings to be made in central Early Years Services to enable a greater proportion of funding to be passed to nursery education providers. One consequence of these

changes was a need to find an alternative management structure for the Council run nursery at All Saints.

- 6.2 The interim solution involves a short-term arrangement for the continued operation of the nursery, under the leadership of a fixed term post until summer 2018. The cost of this post and the other nursery staff is met from the pupil-led funding of the early years block of the Dedicated Schools Grant.
- 6.3 The permanent solution will involve leasing the nursery building, which is part of the All Saints centre to another local organisation, who will take on the management and leadership of nursery from September 2018. At that point the nursery will be funded on the same basis as all other schools, academies and private nurseries in Medway via pupil-led funding of the early years block of the Dedicated Schools Grant.

## **7. Recommendations**

- 7.1 The Committee is asked to consider the petition referral request.
- 7.2 The Committee is asked to note this report and in particular that officers have confirmed All Saints nursery, in Magpie Hall Road, will remain open until July 2018.
- 7.3 The Committee is asked to note that a permanent solution is being sought to keep the nursery open after the summer break in 2018 and following confirmation on future permanent arrangements, Members and parents will be updated.

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### **Appendices**

None

### **Background Papers**

None