

**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
31 JANUARY 2013**

**DRAFT MINUTE EXTRACT FROM
CABINET
8TH JANUARY, 2013**

C104. KEY DECISIONS - (1) Kids & Co - The Cabinet Member with the Children and Young People Portfolio introduced the report of the Director of People (previously circulated) advising Members of the outcome of the consultation on the proposal to close the Kids & Co Nurseries at Borough Road and Northwood and the Flexi Childcare Service.

The Cabinet Member with the Children and Young People Portfolio stated that a petition had been received containing 530 signatures requesting that the Council reconsider their proposal to close both Borough Road and Northwood Kids & Co nurseries and work with parents, staff and the community to look at keeping them open.

A number of parents of children currently attending the nurseries addressed Cabinet in respect of the proposed closures and requested that consideration be given to the proposal put forward by the parents, which they believed, would move the nurseries to a situation whereby they did not require a subsidy from the Council. References were made to the current deficit of the service; the options available for the nurseries; staffing costs; grant funding; the risks to parents and their children should the nurseries close; other childcare providers; and the dedication of the staff at the nurseries.

The Manager of the Borough Road Kids & Co Nursery and representatives of Unison addressed Cabinet in respect of the staffing costs associated with the nursery; issues that had been highlighted when it had merged with Borough Road Nursery; the strategic management of the service; the refurbishment costs incurred when Kids & Co moved to Borough Road in 2009; redundancy costs should the nurseries close; grant funding; the audit of nursery places that had been undertaken; and what could be done to retain the service.

The Cabinet Member with the Children and Young People Portfolio and the Director of People responded to those issues thereon.

RESOLVED - (a) That the Flexi Childcare Service be closed, following the required period of notice for staff.

(b) That the childcare provision for children aged under three years of age, at both Borough Road and Northwood facilities, be closed from the end of the spring term.

(c) That the childcare provision be retained until August 2013 for the 95 children across both settings, who will be due to start school in September of that year, thus minimising disruption for those children and their families.

REASONS - (a) All three Kids & Co services are running at a total deficit of £212,000 per annum at a time when the Council is having to prioritise services in accordance with its statutory obligations and its available budget.

(b) In spite of extensive detailed work, no model of running the provision has been identified which removes the need for a Council subsidy.

(c) No alternative models have been proposed formally by any other parties which would remove the Council subsidy.

(e) Neither school (as hosts of the nurseries) is currently prepared to consider a partnership arrangement with another provider.

(f) Other childcare vacancies exist across Darlington amongst childminders and private day nurseries.

(g) There is no longer any demand for the Flexi Childcare Service, partly due to other service reductions within the Local Authority and there were no consultation responses received which would lead Members to review the original proposal for closure.

(h) Closure of the provision at the end of the Spring term for children aged under 3 gives parents a reasonable period of notice with which to find alternative settings or to make other arrangements.

(i) Closure of the provision at the end of August 2013 for children transferring to school in September 2013 removes any disruption for those families and removes the need for them to seek alternative arrangements for only one term.