



Darlington Local Government Branch

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Jenni Cooke
Assistant Director
Children & Families Learning
Darlington Borough Council
Town Hall
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18th December 2012

Dear Jenni

UNISON response to proposal to close Kids & Co Nursery Provision

We are writing in response to the Council's proposal to close Kids & Co Childcare provision.

UNISON are disappointed that the Council are proposing to close the provision and believe there has been a lack of strategic management and commitment in the delivery of the service which has resulted in the current deficit.

The report to the Senior Leadership team in June 2012 outlined nine options for the future of Kids & Co which detailed the perceived strengths and weaknesses of each option. Unfortunately there does not appear to have been any detailed work or analysis undertaken to justify the decision which has led to the proposal to close the provision. The options are listed below with UNISON's comments.

Option 1

Continue with the status quo and request additional corporate funding of £210k

UNISON do not believe this is a viable option.

Option 2

Tender the provision to secure an alternative provider

UNISON believe this option should be explored. Kids & Co is an excellent provision with well trained and highly motivated staff. We believe there will be private organisations interested in the service if it was put out to tender. It is UNISON's view that if this is not pursued the council will have failed the staff and the children of Darlington.

Option 3

Transfer provision to the Schools

We believe the schools will continue to provide the service but without the existing staff and we believe this should be explored in greater detail.

Option 4

Close all provision saving of £210,525

UNISON do not believe closure can be justified when you take into account the cost of redundancies, £168,034, the refurbishment costs of £354,000 in 2009 plus the Council's investment in staff.

Option 5

Review delivery model at both Borough Road and Northwood

UNISON believe this option should be fully explored.

Option 6

Restructure provision at Borough Road to provide integrated provision 52 weeks per year 8am-6pm with single budget and single line management structure through Head Teacher, Asst Head Teacher and Asst Childcare Manager

UNISON believe this option should be fully explored. If the proposed closure goes ahead we believe it would ultimately lead to the closure of Borough Road Nursery as it would be unsustainable. In the year 2011-2012, 85% of the children who attend Borough Road Nursery come directly from Kids & Co.

Option 7

Close Borough Road Nursery School, retaining Kids & Co to deliver full day care including 15 hours free nursery entitlement for 52 weeks per year 8am-6pm

UNISON believe this option should also be fully explored.

Option 8

Rationalise management arrangements and senior posts across all Kids & Co facilities

UNISON believe the service can be viable and request that a fundamental review of the service is undertaken and a business plan developed to include;

1. Structures

- Can flexible working be introduced?
- Will term time only working benefit the service?
- Will allowing staff to buy annual leave generate any income?
- Review management levels.

2. Reduction of service

- does the service need to operate out of two locations,
- is there a demand for the flexi care service?

3. Relocation of service

- Should the service be relocated to Borough Road?

4. Publicity

Review how the service is marketed.

5. Review of pricing structure and consider:

- 3 bands of sessional prices 0-2, 2-3 & 3-4
- Charges for Flexible Sessions for 3-4 only
- 5-11 sessional charges
- Increase fees across the board

6. Funding for 2 Year olds

Take into account the increase in the demand for places for 2 year olds in September.

7. Grant Allocation

Urgent review of the grant allocation to be undertaken (the current split at Borough Road is having a detrimental effect on the income at Kids & Co).

8. Could the service be expanded?

- School pick ups (apply for a grant to fund a mini bus)
- Saturday opening?
- Provision of a small service at George Dent?
- Expansion of after school care due to increase in demand from parents

We would also ask that staff are fully involved in this process as they have a wealth of knowledge relating to the service.

Option 9

Retain Kids & Co Flexi childcare only and absorb the functions and management to support parenting programme delivery

UNISON do not believe this should be considered in isolation.

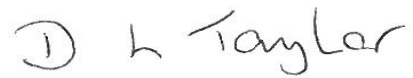
Since the closure was announced there has been an increase in the number of children registered, we believe this demonstrates the excellent provision and commitment of the staff at Kids & Co. A number of staff have left the service and we would ask for a commitment to staff the service during this time.

Although we recognise the provision of childcare is not a statutory requirement we do believe it is of great benefit to the children of Darlington. There is great support from parents and public who believe the provision should be public rather than private. A petition has been circulated which currently has over 1,000 signatures.

The proposal to close Kids & Co was made without a cost analysis and you are asking cabinet members to make a decision without this information being available. UNISON believe the service could be viable if the time was invested to review the service and a business plan drafted. UNISON request that the decision to close the service is deferred until the nine options can be fully considered and a detailed analysis of each option undertaken.

We hope that you will fully consider UNISON's response when making a final recommendation to Cabinet.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dawn Taylor". The first letter 'D' is enclosed in a circle.

Dawn Taylor
Assistant Branch Secretary

Cc: Yvonne Coates
Lindsay Hodkinson, HR
Gill Toward, UNISON
Kids & Co UNISON Members