


FORM S & PP 3

 Walsall Council	REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE	DATE: 11 August 2020 REF.NO:
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TITLE OF THE MATTER CALLED-IN: Future of Stanleys Nursery

DATE CONSIDERED BY CABINET: 15 July 2020

CABINET PORTFOLIO HOLDER: Councillor T. Wilson

DATE OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MEETING: 3 August 2020

Grounds under which the matter was called in for scrutiny:

'We note with concern the decision to close Stanley Nursery, Birchills. Our concern centres on the disproportionate impact this closure will have in a deprived area of Walsall.

Whilst we are aware savings will be made, there are concerns that any savings made by the closure of the last remaining centre run by the council will create a long term legacy that further embeds deprivation in the Birchills area and ultimately would cost the authority and its partners significantly more.

The nursery provides much needed care and support to a cohort of vulnerable children, not just now but into the future. The long term impact of the closure has been recognised by One Walsall and the Dorothy Patterson Hospital who will find it more challenging be able to operate valuable services in the Birchills area.

In calling in this decision we note:

- The historic time-line from as far back as February 2015 through February 2017, and in particular the decision in February 2020 to consult on options for the future of the nursery provision at Stanley's Nursery.
- That all decisions up to and including the February 2020 decision to consult were taken pre-COVID-19 Pandemic
- That the decision to close was taken without the benefit of lessons learned from COVID-19 Pandemic

We further note:

That Council's across England, through the Local Government Association (LGA), are calling for a review of the early years system and are supportive of the Children's Commissioner for England's call through her Report "Best Beginnings" for the Government to make early years provision central to the COVID-19 Fightback. Early Years provision is known to assist in reducing educational and health inequalities.

In light of the above we urge the Cabinet to reconsider the closure of this setting and identify alternative funding that will sustain the centre and thus support local people improve their lives.'

Record here the Overview and Scrutiny Committee conclusions and proposals:

As part of their considerations, the Call-in Members, informed the Committee about the reasons for the 'call in' and heard representations from the Portfolio Holders for Children's Services and Education and Skills.

The call-in members elaborated on their reasons for the call in. They urged to keep the nursery open due to the nursery been located in a deprived ward and the negative impact this would have on its service users. The majority of which had protected characteristics. The argument was put forward that early years education was vital to preventing long-term disadvantage. This situation was exacerbated by the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. The Children's Commissioner has identified early years provision as a key sector in addressing the effects of the pandemic. Investing in this nursery now could save the council and its partners money in the long term.

The Portfolio Holders explained it was an unfortunate situation but the budget pressures on the nursery meant it had not been possible to balance the budget for a number of years. The importance of early years education was acknowledged and it was noted that there were sufficient nursery places in the area to accommodate the displaced children who would all be assisted to find alternative places.

Following a debate, the Committee resolved to recommend to Cabinet that: *'In light of the impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic, the recommendations made in the Children's Commissioners report 'Best beginnings' and the support made to these recommendations by the LGA. Plus the commitment made in the Conservative Party Manifesto for the 2019 General Election to champion Family Hubs we urge the Cabinet to reconsider the closure of this setting and identify alternative funding that will sustain the centre and thus support local people to improve their lives.'*

Record here the specific recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

In light of the impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic, the recommendations made in the Children’s Commissioners report ‘Best beginnings’ and the support made to these recommendations by the LGA. Plus the commitment made in the Conservative Party Manifesto for the 2019 General Election to champion Family Hubs we urge the Cabinet to reconsider the closure of this setting and identify alternative funding that will sustain the centre and thus support local people to improve their lives.

Explain here how the proposals/recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee differ from those of Cabinet:

The Committee are recommending that Cabinet keep the nursery open rather than close it.

This form provides an accurate record of the meeting of the above named Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Chair of Scrutiny Overview Committee

John Murray

Signature:**Date:** ...11 August 2020.....