

20.01.2017

PaCC Position Statement: Brighton and Hove City Council's proposed budget 2017/18

PaCC understands the ongoing pressures on the Local Authority budget, and we support the concept that improved efficiency and review of service delivery can have positive outcomes for children and young people with disabilities and their families. However, the proposed budget goes beyond efficiency savings. The cuts, combined with insufficient transition arrangements, will have a serious and immediate effect on this community.

Public Sector Equality Duty

The Public Sector Equality Duty states that local authorities must have due regard to the need to **advance** equality of opportunity for disabled children. ie there must be a continual drive to improve equality of opportunity. We believe for this most vulnerable group the budget proposals go contrary to this duty.

PaCC highlights below two proposed cuts to the SEND budget. These two cuts should not be seen as an exhaustive list and we remind the Council officers and Councillors, who have legal responsibility to improve Equality, that many other cuts already have a cumulative negative impact on Equality.

A. Residential, fostering, boarding school and respite placements: £510K (p. 124 of budget papers)

It is proposed these savings will be made by reducing the number of out of city agency placements, with greater provision for full time residential places created at Drove Road.

PaCC is supportive of improved provision in the city to enable more children and young people to live near home. However, these cuts will have knock on effects for overnight respite provision in the city and we ask for reassurance that this budget proposal will not in any way reduce the numbers of bed spaces available for overnight respite care. PaCC identifies the following concerns:

- Currently Drove Road provides short-term overnight respite for families in need. This will reduce as a result of more full time places. There is already a waiting list for families, who can wait for up to 2 years for a place. Any reduction in places there will necessitate more places being provided at the only other provider, Tudor House, but this would require £48k p.a. investment in staffing to increase its occupancy sufficiently.
- “Plans are in place to offer an extension of other short break options” (EIA2). These plans are not yet in place, and PaCC has not been given any details. Any reduction in overnight respite spaces will have an immediate impact on families. Our community has already lost valued respite provision, e.g. BHIP, Adventure Unlimited, Compass Card Activities. Many CYP in this group have little or no opportunity to access these types of specific inclusive social/ play/ adventure opportunities now these services have gone. Any reduction in respite care will further impact on these families.

- Despite the Council's strategic intention to encourage more families to take up Direct Payments in place of other more costly short break options, there is no proposed increase in the direct payments budget, even though the proposal states "impact will be mitigated by a rebalancing of budgets and to increase funding for Direct Payments", In the last twelve months 42 families have indicated they need some or more direct payments [reference Compass Data 2017]. We also know that many families are not able to cope with the added demands of managing their own personal budget or finding and employing a Personal Assistant for their child so investment will be needed to ensure this option is available to all.
- The SEND Review of special educational provision is ongoing. During this transition phase, there is a high risk of an increase in the need for agency placements for children unable to find an appropriate placement in the city. This makes the proposed £510k saving very vulnerable.

PaCC believes any savings in this SEND budget line must be reinvested in SEND services in order for the local authority to fulfil their public sector equality and statutory duties.

B. Residential, respite and short breaks: £86K (p.123 of budget papers)

Proposals to reduce funding on contracts offering short breaks, Information Advice and Support, and DLA support via the Community and Voluntary Sector are very alarming for the parent carer community, for whom these services are often a lifeline.

Amaze currently delivers the cost effective and highly successful DLA Project who support ~20 volunteers to support families in their own homes to apply for the right disability benefits. This is a time consuming specialist support service and we cannot imagine it could be delivered more effectively by the Council as the proposal suggests.

We ask that this saving proposal is removed. Waiting lists show demand for respite, short breaks and direct payments outstrips supply. Any reduction in provision will push more families to breaking point, directly impacting on children with disabilities and their siblings.

Finally you may remember we wrote to you to protect investment in short breaks last year too and all the things we said then still hold true so please also refer back to our 2016 Pacc Position Statement on the Budget Proposals.

<http://paccbrighton.org.uk/what-we-do/pacc-connect-events/>

We would be very happy to come and talk to your group in more detail about this and any other issues to do with the local community of families with children and young people with additional needs. For this or any more information please contact fiona@paccbrighton.org.uk