

Date: 9 October 2013

Your Ref:

**Children, Education & Families
County Hall
New Road
Oxford OX1 1ND**

**Jim Leivers
Children, Education & Families**

Dear colleague

Budget pressures in Children Education & Families

I am writing to bring you up to date with the budget pressures faced by Children Education & Families over the next few years and the steps we are taking to address them.

You will be aware from local media coverage and elsewhere that the Council as a whole, in parallel with Councils across England, is facing the need to make considerable cuts. In the case of Oxfordshire, the County Council is going to have to find £90m between now and 2017/18. This is in addition to £127m already achieved since 2010/11 and £43m planned for 2013/14.

What this means for Children Education & Families is that we shall have to find some £22.5m by the end of the 2015/16 financial year. This equates, very roughly, to a reduction of 20% over that period. The consequences of such reductions will, inevitably, be significant.

As I write this we are embarking on a series of briefings for all CEF staff, explaining to them, in broad terms how we intend to find those savings and I should like to take this opportunity to share with you the substance of those briefings. I do need to emphasise, however, that what follows is based on our current intentions and are therefore *proposals* and not decisions. The next few months will see a process of refinement, consultation and discussion, concluding with decisions made by County Councillors in February 2014.

Our proposals are underpinned by the following principles:

- To support but no longer be a provider of universal services
- To ensure services are targeted to those in greatest need
- To only do what we are required to do by legislation, regulation or policy
- To seek to protect the reputation of the Council

We are also clear that:

- Reductions of this scale cannot be achieved without a wholesale change to current priorities and structural arrangements
- The previous practice of shaving little bits of budgets here and there ('salami slicing') will no longer suffice
- We shall have to reprioritise our ambitions, activity and emphasis
- There will be differential reductions in service (i.e. not a simple 20% cut across the directorate, given the need to target such resources as we have on greatest need etc.)

- Reductions and re-structuring on this scale will require a lead in time of 12-24 months.

Our key areas of activity can be broken down, broadly, into the following: Early Intervention (including Children's Centres); Children's Social Care (including, Referral and Assessment, Corporate parenting and disability); Education Services (including home to school transport, attendance, school improvement and special educational needs); Early Years Foundation Stage; Administration; and Commissioning and Support Services.

This is going to be our approach in relation to those areas.

Early Intervention (including Children's Centres)

We are going to: ensure services are targeted at those in greatest need and protect the most vulnerable; focus on what we are required to do by legislation, regulation or policy; ensure that early help is integrated with the care system to support the child's journey; ensure proposals are part of whole systems redesign and integrated into the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) proposals; and ensure services are aligned with partners in the statutory and voluntary sector.

This will mean that there will be: reduced capacity to deliver early intervention and children's centre services; a need to realign provision to target those children in greatest need; a need to move from a focus on prevention to one on higher level engagement. This will, inevitably, result in significant reductions in provision. There will, however, be improved linkages and engagement with Children's Social Care; development of 3rd sector engagement and more mobile working, particularly in rural areas

Children's Social Care

We propose to recast the service to create a different approach to the current Children's Social Care arrangements which would build upon changes to early intervention and other related services. The development of this new model will require: changes to the current structural arrangements; new ways of working; changes to organisational and practice culture; and will require different expectations of our partner organisations.

This will be achieved by the development of the MASH; co-location of specialist services in schools and with Health (70% of referrals to the Directorate come from Schools currently, and another nearly 20% from Health). The success of the Troubled Families approach will be used to develop intervention/support systems for children, young people and their families. The previously agreed placement strategy will be implemented. Changing the way the service works will require a change in culture of those responsible for decision making.

Education Services

The 'direction of travel' is for local authorities to become commissioners rather than providers of services. The local authority will however retain full responsibility for overseeing the performance and financial arrangements of its maintained schools. In terms of standards in academies (and holding sponsors to account for this), the lead responsibility sits with the Department for Education and the schools themselves. We shall retain a legal responsibility for performance in the area as a whole, under the 1996 Education Act.

Commissioning and Support Services

We are proposing to reduce a number of services delivered through this arm of the Directorate including: Engagement, Commissioning, Strategy and Business Planning.

We shall, however, seek to protect those parts of the service which manage complaints, contract management and performance.

Finally, we shall reduce administrative support to reflect reductions in the other areas of the services. This will be achieved principally by 'default' as other services which currently receive administrative support are cut. Further savings will be found from the remaining administration as necessary.

We shall of course keep you in touch with developments.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jim Leivers', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jim Leivers
Director for Children, Education & Families

Direct line: 01865 815122

Email: jim.leivers@oxfordshire.gov.uk

www.oxfordshire.gov.uk