

**Minutes of: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**Date of Meeting:** 19 December 2019

**Present:** Councillor R Caserta (in the Chair)  
Councillors T Cummings, J Harris, B Mortenson, L Smith,  
S Smith, Susan Southworth, R Walker and C Walsh

**Also in attendance:** Councillor T Tariq, Cabinet Member – Children & Families  
Karen Dolton, Executive Director Children and Young People  
Sandra Bruce, Assistant Director Early Help and School  
Readiness

**Public Attendance:** One member of the press was present at the meeting.

**Apologies for Absence:** Councillor N Jones, Councillor K Leach and Councillor  
M Powell

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**OSC.281 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Stella Smith declared a personal interest in any item relating the Mosses Centre as she is a director at the Nursery and Pre- School.

**OSC.282 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no member of the public present to ask questions under this item.

**OSC.283 CALL IN OF CABINET DECISION - CHILDREN'S CENTRES MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENT**

The Scrutiny Committee considered a called-in decision of the Cabinet meeting held on 13 November 2019 in accordance with the Council Constitution.

The Cabinet had made the following decision:

**Delegated decision**

Cabinet agrees to:

1. Approve the use of the Community Asset Transfer arrangements and invite interest from community and voluntary sector organisations to the management and use of Children's Centre buildings.
2. That a report be presented to Cabinet in early 2020 setting out the outcome of the Community Asset Transfer application process, and making recommendations in respect of the future management arrangements for each Children's Centre

**Reason for the decision:**

The proposed arrangements focus on how the Children's Centre buildings can continue to serve their respective communities, whilst exploring alternative

models for the management of those buildings, both to build community capacity and resilience, and to enable the broader delivery of services.

A Call – In Notice had been submitted by Councillor Caserta, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, setting out the reasons for the Call In of the decision. The reasons are set out below:

- To understand the financial implications and social hardship that will be caused by transferring centres to private ownership.

Councillor Caserta invited Councillor Tariq, Cabinet Member – Children and Families, Karen Dolton, Executive Director Children and Young People and Sandra Bruce, Assistant Director Early Help and School Readiness to respond to the reasons highlighted:

Councillor Tariq explained that the Children’s centres as key Council assets can make a greater contribution to communities through more effective arrangements for their management and use, moving away from the delivery of constrained core services to a much broader community driven offer over an extended day.

The proposed arrangements set out within the report focus on how the Children’s Centre buildings can continue to serve their respective communities whilst exploring alternative models for the management of the buildings both to build capacity and resilience and to enable the broader delivery of services to the 0-19 population.

It was reported that the proposed alternative management arrangements would be put in place at the following Children’s Centres:

Bury East Hub (Hazel Wood High School)  
Radcliffe Hub (Coronation Road)  
Radcliffe Spoke (Radcliffe Hall CE/Methodist Primary School)  
Prestwich Spoke (Butterstile Primary School)  
Bury West Hub (Woodbank Primary School)

It was proposed to use the same Community Asset Transfer approach that was used when the management of a number of former library buildings was transferred to community and voluntary sector groups and two schools. It was reported that lessons from that process will be addressed as part of the review arrangements that will be put in place for the Children’s Centre buildings. Two key considerations would be reflected in the revised Community Asset Transfer Toolkit:

- As the majority of Children’s Centres are on school sites, and in many cases located integral to the school site. It is important to ensure that future use of those buildings is complementary to the schools use and does not introduce unmanageable safeguarding risks.
- A clause contained in the original capital funding agreements for the construction of the Children’s Centre buildings specified that those buildings must remain available to deliver an early year’s offer, or be subject to a financial penalty (capital claw-back).

It was explained that a requirement of the Community Asset Transfer is that the buildings must continue to be used to deliver a range of services including: access to midwife and delivery of 'booking-in' clinics; access to health visitor and delivery of child health clinics; Stay and Play sessions; Childminder drop ins; base for Early Years quality networks for settings and schools. Applicants for Community Asset Transfer will be expected to set out in detail how they will meet this requirement, and evaluation of applications will have regard to the level of risk of claw-back in relation to intended use.

It was reported that no social hardship would be expected. The Council would be following the Stockport Family Model in the transferring of the centres and it was anticipated that that provision would be enhanced to provide services and support that was more targeted and relevant to the needs of the local communities. The Council would be working closely with the new management of each of the centres and each centre would have a Management Committee from the local community which would hold the management provider to account.

- Councillor Caserta asked whether the Council were complying with the 2006 Children's Act and whether they were doing enough in relation to this.

Karen Dolton explained that the Council were meeting requirements but wanted to enhance what was already being provided. Councillor Tariq explained that the services would be aligned with the communities.

It was also explained that as some of the centres were located within school sites it was anticipated that the schools may submit an expression of interest.

- Councillor Caserta referred to figures relating to the Bury East hub usage and income from that usage and stated that services will have been provided free of charge. Councillor Caserta asked how this would work with a private Management Company.

Karen reported that the management can apply for charitable funding and can supply services other than what the Council currently offers.

Councillor Southworth referred to maintenance of the buildings and the Council having liability for repairs etc.

Karen Dolton explained that the savings set out within the report related to running costs of the buildings, applications for Asset Transfer would have to show how costs would be met.

- Councillor Walker referred to the asset transfer in relation to the library buildings and asked whether there were good examples to take from this. Councillor Walker stated that it would be more difficult in deprived areas.

Councillor Tariq stated that there were two options; do nothing or, move forward with something that that worked in and with the local communities.

- Councillor Lucy Smith asked what would happen if the organisation that took over failed.

Karen Dolton stated that mitigation would be built into the agreement should a situation arise where it was required. The Early Help work force would be working in and around the centres to ensure a continuation of services and it was stated that if risks arose then action would have to be taken.

Councillor Tariq reported that the legal agreements in relation to the lease would include the power to withdraw the lease if required to do so.

- Councillor Caserta referred to the use of an annual survey and asked what this would be based on.

Karen Dolton explained that the survey would be looking at outcomes and the impact rather than numbers. There was currently some work being carried out with Cheshire West and Chester Councils in relation to this.

- Councillor Walsh asked how outcomes would be evaluated.

Karen reported that the details were in the process of being pulled together and would link with other services. Karen stated that she would report back to scrutiny in relation to the evaluation process.

Sandra Bruce explained that this was an opportunity to provide something more creative and dynamic than was currently on offer. She also explained that the Council would still be involved as they would still have statutory responsibilities.

**Delegated decisions:**

1. That, having considered the points raised in the Notice of Call-in, this Committee does not offer any comments to the Cabinet in respect of Minute CA.05 Children's Centres Management Arrangements.
2. That an update report in relation to the progress made be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at a date to be arranged before the March 2020 meeting of the Cabinet.

**COUNCILLOR R CASERTA**  
**Chair**

**(Note: The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 7.00 pm)**