

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

ADULT SOCIAL CARE, CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE

5 OCTOBER 2017

QUESTION 1 in accordance with Standing Order No.36

Leslie McDonald to ask the Chair of the Committee:

Proposal to reduce Information Advice & Support Service

At the 17 July Policy Committee there was a holding reply to my supplemental question about whether Councillors were aware that a significant portion of the current IASS budget is restricted funding from the Council for Disabled children, which will run until 2019. Following the Committee meeting full details were provided to Cllr. Gavin on the issue in email, sent on the same evening of 17 July. This email is reproduced here to illustrate our worries in detail.

Cllr. Gavin did provide assurance in reply that she would look into the issue and get back to me, however despite a follow-up email on 18 August I have still had no word.

"Dear Jan,

By way of enlarging on my supplemental question tonight about the IASS service, I apologise that the point I raised had not come together in my brain until earlier today. However, better late than never. There follows a possible scenario about the envisaged cut to this service which is worrying in terms of the Council acting with financial probity.

As I said, because I am one of the two voluntary sector reps on the IASS Management Group, I knew that there was an underspend on the restricted grant from The Council for Disabled Children which channelled funding from Central Government to support the transfer of children with Statements of SEN to EHC Plans under the C&F Act 2014.

The manager, Lesley Chamberlain, had asked Richard Blackwood, the then head of Service, back in the autumn of last year to sanction the extension of the contracts of employment of the two staff employed under the grant because there had been an underspend. Shortly before Christmas I now recall Lesley saying that this had gone ahead and it would mean that she could extend the service for a while longer because of the underspend. This underspend was in the area of £40,000 which had built up from the grant from 14/15 when it had first been granted. I also understand that Lesley has further just invoiced CDC for the next tranche of the grant for another £10,000.

The CDC grant was an odd one I recall, because we nearly applied for it

ourselves in a Mencap consortium bid, which only paid out as outcomes were met at various stages and demanded a certain amount of crystal ball gazing in the setting of the outcomes at the outset in order to be awarded the staged payments. Work throughput was therefore difficult to gauge.

So apart from this 'two employee' CDC funded service there are only two RBC funded employees, which are the Manager, Lesley Chamberlain, full-time in term-time only and a part-time, term-time only officer who was employed to assist parents with 'School Choice' which employee doesn't cost anywhere near £30K.

I felt that the proposed cut must therefore be aimed at the underspend as the manager would otherwise be the only option for the cut and this would mean that RBC would not be able to meet its statutory obligations to parents under the 1996EA/C&F2014.

At the very least Jan, I feel that you might well feel this bears looking into as it would not be proper to cut funding that does not originate from RBC. On the contrary it is a restricted grant and should be treated as such but also to enable the Service to meet its monitoring requirements to CDC for a proper spend of the grant.

I hope this makes sense to you but in any case I am happy if you wish to ring me for a chat. Or I am sure Lesley Chamberlain herself can better explain the situation and can signpost you to the accountant for the service who assured her that the proposed use of the underspent funding was acceptable. Sadly you cannot ask Richard Blackwood but the renewed contracts of employment for the two staff employed under the CDC funding should be on file.

So to summarise if you cut £30K from the service and loose the equivalent of one RBC funded FTE member of staff and then the CDC grant runs out in 2019 when you lose the remaining two CDC grant funded employees, this would leave the service with one part-time, term-time only person to run the whole service. We would feel that this would be a totally inadequate and tokenistic service for Reading parents.

I hope this is helpful, but if my interpretation of the situation is not correct we would very much wish to have a conversation, as would the Reading Families Forum, about the impact of and cut to the core RBC funded service."

REPLY by the Chair of the Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee

I invite Councillor Gavin, the Lead Councillor for Children's Services & Families to make the response on my behalf.

REPLY by the Councillor Gavin, Lead Councillor for Children's Services & Families:

I have looked into the points you have raised and the breakdown of the budget for IASS. As you point out the Council for Disabled Children Grant of

£20,833 per annum was received by the service from 2014 onwards. It took time to recruit to the fixed term posts to support this function and so only a small amount of the grant was spent in the first year. Taking into account the staff related costs for the 2 staff employed through this grant, the full grant plus a proportion of the balance of the carry forward has been spent in each subsequent year. This will leave some of the Council for Disabled Children grant at the end of the financial year to carry forward into 2018/2019.

The service was also allocated a proportion of the SEND Implementation Grant in 2014 which is a different grant but did not spend it. This should have been returned to the total grant budget and reallocated, although I understand that it was agreed that it could be carried forward in the service budget. A proportion of it may be required to provide capacity in SEND services to ensure that the Children and Families Act is fully implemented by 31 March 2018 as required. There is still likely to be a balance to carry forward into 2018/2019 which would help sustain the grant funded posts for longer and provide more time to move to an alternative delivery model and ensure any proposed changes provide the capacity that is needed by families.

Reading has commissioned a SEND Improvement Adviser who is working with the IASS Service Manager and will work with Reading Families Forum to consider alternative models of delivery for the service with costings that ensure our statutory duties are met and that families receive the independent advice and support that they need. This is being managed from a starting point of how we can improve service delivery and meet demand more effectively and efficiently, and then looking at what savings could be achieved. If this means that some of the proposed savings can't be achieved in this service, we will be looking at how they can be achieved elsewhere.

At the same time we are looking at what advice other services can provide to families in a way that families feel that their concerns are answered and that they feel that they are well supported.

Please be assured that we agree with you that the primary aim for all of us is to ensure that Reading families receive the support and advice that they need.