

**Notes from parents and carers consultation meeting at Ash Field with Tracie Rees and Clare Nagle:
07 12 22**

Parent: Some of us did the written consultation early on but we understand that we can now do it again. Could you explain please?

TR: explained the extension of the consultation to 9th January and that a copy of the report is now available so people may wish to read that and then make further comments

Parent asked if school principal (JE) could ensure email / message to parents again so all can follow the links and see report easily

JE agreed to do this

TR then gave background to proposal

Parent: what this will lead to is a higher rate of pregnancies and parents in coroner's court due to self harming. The spend by the council is on silly projects. Mental health is a great concern – this is so important. One of you will end up in coroner's court – either from Millgate's or our parents by closing these.

TR: the decision has not been made for Ash Field

Parent: Peter Salisbury indicated that the decision had been made by his messages

Parent: our children are being failed – decisions have been made – the school has failed them too as there are no staff here

Parent: do you have disabled child?

TR: I don't have a disabled child but I do have a disabled brother but I prefer not to discuss my personal life

Parent: this school works hard; residential works hard. We need this. We need time with our other children too. How can it be said that it is not education - This is all about education.

Parent: it's social too

TR: can I respond?

Parent: why aren't the decision makers here?

TR: said that Peter Salisbury has attended other consultation meetings and she would mention it to him – the staff have raised this too

Parent: school is education and the residential wing is on-flowing from that. I don't understand that it's been funded for all these years as an education provision and now suddenly there's a change. If this was a mainstream school providing something that was outstanding, would you be shutting it then?

TR: we are not funding other schools to have residential

Parent: the children here are not valued then

TR: we do care about them

Parent:

- part of the issue for the high needs block is the health element and that's not going to be resolved quickly
- we have also been trying for some time to get residential within the SEMH section and C&I and C&L section of the EHCP but it's being blocked

Parent: you don't want it in the EHCPs

Parent: if the issue is about overspend on the high needs block – this is discriminatory.

TR: how is it discriminatory

Parent: other budgets are not overspent so they aren't losing services but with this one, the one for those with SEND, the services are being cut

TR: there is a pressure on all elements of the budget – the council is looking at reducing budgets for all different services across the council budget – in February there will be a list of areas targeted to reduce costs

Parent: none of that is good and appreciate that this is about central government funding but this council needs to fight those cuts

Parent: the council need to push back and say we need the extra cash

TR: we do regularly – City Mayor has said this. In our city, we currently have a 9% increase in pupils who have an EHCP

Parent: so don't they need more support not less? These people here do the utmost best – there is nothing for these children out of here – it is so vital. They can't see other children – they can't go to each other's houses

Parent: these are the only people we trust

Parent: because of this proposal there is a lot of distress for the children

Parent: are you just here to go through the motions because the decisions been made?

TR: it hasn't been made

Parent: Peter Salisbury has said the decision has been made

TR: the decision hasn't been made. All the comments from the consultation will be put into a report for the executive – as will the comments made here today. We will distribute these after today so you can see what's been said

Parent: the city mayor needs to listen to the pupils – his responses so far have shown a lack of understanding of education and what is being provided by residential

TR: staff also asked for the city mayor to come and meet with parents, staff and children. I will take this back

Parent: it's not just for the children here now – it's for future children too

Parent: you're killing them off – this is life or death – I'm frightened for our children

TR: if the decision is made, it will not close until September 2024

Parent: what if the academy made the school provide for all different groups?

TR: I can't speak for the academy – that will be up to Jenny and the governors – they can consider options to gain funding

Parent:

- I feel that the education argument is a loop hole to try to stop the funding – this is totally education
- take communication – the communication in resi is a different form - different age groups / different agenda etc
- they can't have this normal social interaction with their peers and younger or older pupils outside school normally – they have so much equipment – transport is really difficult
- we try to help the children socialise outside of here -they need more than just going to school – other children get this
- Resi is plain straight-forward education and learning – people don't always recognise what the provision is really about – they don't always see it's education but it absolutely is – it is just a different type of learning
- SEMH I don't even have to explain – being able to stay and depend on others is a huge amount of learning. For my daughter, sleeping in a room on her own was a huge development – if that's not education, supporting her well-being and setting her up for life, I'm not sure what is – she knows how to do stuff and how to be independent – what happens when I'm dead and gone? This is about society – about her being able to live beyond here.
- I could go through the entire EHCP areas of need and explain how it happens in resi
- Then there's the point that it could happen in the school day – children want to learn in the day other things e.g. academics etc – if this is happening in the day then they won't have the opportunity to learn other things like other children do who don't need to learn all of these extra things because they don't have these needs

Parent- this is their community – they can't access what they have here - there isn't anything else out there

Parent: the understanding of education for our children seems to be really lacking in the report

TR: we do understand it's about functional skills and other things and that these are essential

Parent: it's important that that's been acknowledged but it's now important that it's acknowledged by the decision makers

TR: it will be fed back into the report for the decision makers

Parent: so if not here, where will this learning be done?

TR: in strictest sense of it, in the plans, it doesn't say that it's a must requirement in the EHCPs

Parent: that's because we aren't allowed to put it in

TR: we've looked over a long time and it's not in those

Parent: I've been doing this and I've learnt to be very careful what goes in F because if the school doesn't have it, the school potentially can say they can't meet need and potentially we have then lost a school place

Parent: the council don't want it in

JE (Principal) asked Bev Snow to explain the history regarding the EHCPs and why it's not in them any more and for some years

Bev Snow – head of residential care and education: if you go back much further (during headship of David Bateson's – head teacher before last) it was always put in. Then when school and resi were funded together – which was fought for and agreed, residential was just part of the offer – therefore it wasn't necessary to put it in and we were told by LCC that it was no longer needed in the EHCP – as long as Ash Field was in there. It was just part of the offer and would be provided to the pupils who it would make the biggest impact for

Parent: and those who made that decision aren't in charge now and those who are making decisions now won't be when our children are older and struggling – it's a short term decision

Parent: if one of our pupils goes from being in Resi and then goes to a local college in Leicester, someone will have to fund them there and make up for what's been missed - it will cost more at that point as the children will have become more dependent

Parent – it's a short term saving

TR: I understand what you're saying – my previous role was adult social care. It's important to ensure young people are supported in independence as much as possible. Picking up on the college element and making sure that when children leave here they have something to go onto: we are agreeing with Leicester college around a new curriculum – they have a unit for profound and medical needs which is great but under-utilised – they want to change their curriculum and change who they can support. We've shared with them the data for the next 5-10 years – they understand that they need to change their offer. There will then be an opportunity if the pupils want it.

Parent: but if they came out of here not needing that then surely that's better

Parent: we need to remember that some of our children are life-limited so they may not reach that provision so it's important that they get that here and now

Parent: education is an experience – if you're in a wheelchair, just getting in somewhere – things that are classed as special needs don't work for these children – their needs are really complex – some won't live into adulthood - they need the best life they can now

Parent: so why would we get rid of this?

Parent: All of the expertise that is there – it will be lost

TR: Ash Field is an academy – if the decision is made to withdraw it will be from September 2024 – potentially that gives time to look at other options for funding – ways to provide the facility. We've had a discussion about extending the provision to other children – providing respite support and evening support – including those with similar difficulties

Parent: you just used the term respite – we are education

TR: one option is the possibility of Ash Field moving towards respite short breaks provision

JE clarified about our discussions around respite with the LA explaining:

- Explained what was offered re the respite to us, explaining that it was for us to take a cohort of children with complex autism who also had medical needs. That we felt this wouldn't work with the cohort we have especially in the environment that we have – the mix just wouldn't work so our pupils just couldn't attend.
- Clarified around our (govs) decision not to engage in the respite conversation until a decision is made on the current Resi provision as it stands because this is the service that we believe should stay and by engaging in the respite ideas etc, we feel it's almost accepting the decision on our current provision which we think needs to happen after the decision is officially made. We hope that the funding will remain for it as it is.

Parent: can you give an example of a decision where other cuts have been made?

TR: element 3 to mainstream schools / banding adjustments within special schools / Millgate residential – so we've had to make difficult decisions already

Parent: this is easy to cut because they are vulnerable

Parent: someone has used the idea that this isn't education and are trying to use it as a loop hole – but there isn't a loop hole – it is education

Parent: a long time ago it was raised that this was not education and funding was at risk – this was successfully over turned as it was seen as education

TR: we will look at that – I will check case law relating to it - if there was precedent set before – it would go against the law – we wouldn't want to go against that -sometimes individual cases do set precedent

Parent: the council don't care – you're just talking the talk

Parent: let's get Peter Salisbury here

Parent: it takes longer for our kids to learn in every sense so even if one evening a week and night and morning, it makes a difference – for our kids to achieve they need that extra input – it makes me think it is discrimination – we need to level the playing field for these children. We need them in a provision with expert staff to do those things that other families can do all the time

TR: I do understand that from my brother – that they do need extra time and support

TR: are there any other questions

Parent: when will next meeting be and when will Peter Salisbury be here?

Parent: one of my children is at a mainstream school a street away. They can experience playing in the park, being sociable. My other son came here – he can't access his own community – he can't have friends over as we don't have a hoist etc and he can't go there because of his medical needs - other parents can't take responsibility for that. Then he came here and accessed Resi. He has learnt so many independent skills – showering, personal hygiene etc. He's either with me or at school – this is a safe environment for him to come and learn things – how to shower, how to cook – you can't shower in the middle of a maths lesson – you can't just do those things in the school day. Resi adds a huge value

Parent: the suggestion that we can be given a budget and go and find it – it isn't there – there is not the expert services – the school have the expertise and facility

Parent: you have this provision – built up over so many years – and it's excellent – why would you get rid of it

Parent: surely the 400k is a drop in the ocean

Parent: you're talking to people here today who go through this 24-7. That's why we're so passionate about it

TR: we understand that – of course it matters to you – we just don't have the money

Parent: some people won't be here today because they can't be – not because they don't care

Parent: they're just wasting money on stupid things

JE asked for examples of the things parents felt the council were wasting money on

Parents: bike lanes and a new market were stated

Carer: if 5 children here got to crisis point here – it would cost you 2 million. Health, social care and education are often needed for the same child – as an example, for one child it's costing more than it's costing to run this whole provision. If 5 parents got to crisis point from here, you will be spending far more. The provision would have to be specialist for the pupils here – hospitals cost £9000 for one week – the argument is flawed – it's a very short term saving. That's just a fact. Look at the placements currently being paid for by the council. With no saving for two years but building stress up for parents.

Parent: decision makers now are just leaving the problems for the future

JE asked if other funding options could be considered given the costs that had been stated if families were to go into crisis – could resi be kept as we are for education but taking into account the above – could contributions then be made from the general fund / social care in recognition of the above and the potential costs that could happen without this provision – so it's joint funded between the high needs block and other funding streams but with the model kept

TR: one of the considerations already was that it wouldn't be funded by the general fund. It's looking at an overspend of 30 million. In terms of individual children – council does have a statutory duty where for whatever reasons families can't care for them – do have lots of children in care – we want them to be with foster parents or their own parents instead so they do have to be taken into care.

