

Brighton & Hove City Council

For general release

Meeting: Children, Families and Schools Sub-Committee

Date: Monday 15 March 2004

Report of: Director, Children, Families and Schools

Subject: Petition - Closure of St Gabriels

Ward(s) affected: All

1. Purpose of the report

1.1 To inform members about the context of the Petition that was presented to the Council on 22.1.04 and the process that has led to the closure of some of the services provided by the St Gabriels Family Centre.

2. Recommendations

2.1 That the report be noted.

2.2 That the action taken by the Department in ensuring the continuation of appropriate services be endorsed.

2.3 That it be noted that the continuation of services will be subject to the available financial resources and that this means that services will be reconfigured and reprioritised.

3. Information/background

3.1 St Gabriels, a Children's Society project, has been operating as a family centre since the late 1970s and not surprisingly it has been subject to numerous changes. In the early 80s the contract arrangements were relatively simple with a single contract based on a rough 50/50 arrangement. These arrangements have changed over time with a variety of different contracts being developed to reflect the changes in focus of the Children's Society and Departmental priorities for children and families most in need.

- 3.2 The Local Authority has tried to respond positively to such changes over the past 20 years or so. For instance in the early 80's it seemed likely that the highly valued Portage Project would have to close, however as a result of our negotiation with the local Health Trust, this Social Services Department together with the Education Department we were able to substantially increase the funding. The arrangement arrived at was 25% Health, 25% Social Services, 25% Education, 25% Children's Society. At current rates our combined CFS Department contributes £28400 and South Downs Health contribute £14200. This project will be continuing for the foreseeable future and will continue to be located at St Gabriels.
- 3.3 Consequently it has come as some surprise that the Children's Society's current change of direction has been so radical and with little consideration of the Council's priorities for service provision. The departure of the Children's Society from our key service areas has meant that it has proved impossible to find an agreed way forward in maintaining some of those services. At a Contract meeting on 14.10.03, with Senior Managers from the Children's Society it was mutually agreed that there was no benefit to be gained from renewing the main contracts.
- 3.4 **Current Contractual arrangements.**
- 3.5 At the end of March 2003 the St Gabriels overall budget stood at £447,000. Total income from a number of sources amounted to £213,000 about 48% of the total. The Centre's staffing costs are £323,000 with an additional £124,000 (38%) made up of project, support and premises costs of £74,000 and Management costs of £50,000.
- 3.6 **The main contract is a "Service for families in which children are suffering or likely to suffer significant harm;"** our current annual contribution is £140,000. The Service Specification requires a total of 180 client hours on this work and the staffing figures provided by the Children's Society show approximately 140 staff hours committed to this work.
- 3.7 In previous discussions it has been noted that the Children's Society have costed this element of service in the region of £337,000 suggesting that our contribution is 42%. On the current evidence we would have wanted to challenge these figures and if the contract had been continuing we would have been seeking a detailed review of the arrangements. This contract was due to end on 31.03.04.
- 3.8 **Contract for Therapeutic work with Looked After Children and their Carers.** This was a separate contract funded through CAMHS modernisation monies

and was of fixed term duration running from January 2002 to 31st March 2004. The annual contribution for 2003/4 was £23,000. It is difficult to estimate the actual cost to the Children's Society of providing this Service; their own estimate of staff hours plus 38% would suggest a cost of around £30,000.

3.9 **Contract for work with Young Mothers (Teenage Pregnancy).** The Children's Society were given £5000 from the Local Implementation Fund, for their contribution to this work that was provided jointly by St Gabriels and our own Family Centres. The work was costed and facilitated by Kerry Smith of the Primary Care Trust. The contract was time limited and due to end on 29.02.04.

3.10 **Alternative Service Provision.**

As far as we are able to ascertain the Children's Society is committed to keeping the building operational and this should allow the continuation of its "Open Access" services to the local community. We are also looking at the possibility of some of our Children's Disability services and Family support Services being located at St Gabriels alongside the Portage service.

3.11 **The main contract.** The provision for Risk Assessments of families where children are at risk of significant harm will be absorbed into the Clermont Child Protection Unit. Resources have been consolidated within Clermont to provide a robust service for the Courts and for field social workers on the "front line". The Clermont is highly respected by the Courts and Professionals for the quality of its service provision.

3.12 The work with families and children in need will be a priority for the developing Family Support strategy, Rosalind Turner (Assistant Director) together with Duncan Campbell (Head of Service Family Support) are progressing this work as matter of urgency. We were also fortunate in having two members of staff who were seconded to the St Gabriels Family Centre. These staff are working directly with those families who will continue to need a service with the aim of identifying similar resources within our other family centres and family support provision.

3.13 **Therapeutic work with Looked After Children and their Carers.** This contract was due to end in March 2004 and Sharon Donnelly (Head of Accommodation Services) is overseeing future therapeutic work in partnership with CAMHS. A LAC therapy team has been established at CAMHS with the work supervised by Leslie Ironside (Child Psychotherapist).

- 3.14 **Contract for work with Young Mothers (Teenage Pregnancy).** This was again a time-limited contract. However the service was provided jointly by our own family centres and we are clear that the benefits identified should be sustained and supported by a continuation of the service. To this end Duncan Campbell is negotiating a partnership with NCT.
- 3.15 The decision by the Children's Society to withdraw resources from the Brighton area will inevitably have some impact. However this Department has responded positively and quickly to the potential threats to services and created a number of opportunities that should ameliorate the worst effects and continue to meet the needs of our most vulnerable clients.

4. Further Information

- 4.1 This process has been characterised by actions on part of the Children's Society that has made it difficult to sustain clear communication and a constructive dialogue. Prior to the contract meeting on 14.10 03, staff at St Gabriels had been given redundancy notices. There had been no negotiations with staff as to whether they were in a position to meet the Children's Society's new agenda. At the contract meeting it was agreed that a joint media statement should be drawn up by negotiation between Senior Managers of both agencies. After considerable delay the Children's Society went ahead and issued their own press statement. In doing so they inferred that the responsibility for closure lay with the Local Authority which is a position we strongly reject. Since that time a number of attempts were made to establish a dialogue with Children's Society management without any response on their part.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 Following an approach by the "Friends of St Gabriels" I agreed to meet with them as requested (7.1.04). I asked the relevant Departmental managers to join me in order to ensure the Friends were fully informed of our actions. We had approached the Children's Society to see if they would agree to a joint meeting but did not receive a response. The "Friends" had received a letter from the Chief Executive and Chair of Trustees of the Children's Society again placing the emphasis on this Department for the closure outcome.
- 5.2 As a result of this meeting and the letter referred to above I wrote directly to the Chief Executive Bob Reitemeier on 19.1.04. He replied on 4.2.04 maintaining the same position but stating that there was little to be gained from further rebuttal or disagreement on interpretation of past events. However he also stated that they had not made any long term decisions

about the future of the building and that two projects would be continuing alongside the existing community use.

- 5.3 Throughout this process there has been open communication and briefings with members and also with MP's.
- 5.4 It has become increasingly clear during this process that the Children's Society had some time ago made up its mind to exit from the main contracts referred to above. Their behavior towards their own staff and to this Council made it very unlikely that a suitable compromise could be found.

COMMITTEE REPORT APPENDIX



Meeting/Date	<i>Children Families and Schools sub- committee</i>
Report of	<i>David Hawker. Director CFS</i>
Subject	<i>Closure of St Gabriels - Petition</i>
Wards affected	<i>All</i>

Financial implications

The original budget for the St. Gabriels contract is £143,300, of this £130,000 will be removed and forms part of the CFS directorates savings commitment for 2004/2005. The remaining £13,300 is available to invest in the reprovion of services lost by the closure of St. Gabriels. It is unlikely that any additional costs will be incurred in reprovion of services over and above the current budgeted provision.

David Ellis Finance Officer. 01.03.2004

Legal implications

There are no specific Legal implications arising from this report. Employment implications arising as a result of the closure of St Gabriels are described in the body of this report. In terms of the Human Rights Act (1998) a consultation process has been undertaken as far as has been possible given the reluctance of The Children's Society to fully engage in that process. There is no other specific Human Rights Act implications arising as a result of this report.

Sandra O'Brien, Lawyer, 03.03.2004

<p>Corporate/Citywide implications The Department has responded quickly to the potential of a resource short fall in the light of the above and has put in place a number services that are consistent with our Departmental Strategies for Family Support, Looked After Children and Children at Risk of Harm.</p>	<p>Risk assessment None</p>
<p>Sustainability implications We would hope to continue to use the St Gabriels building for the development of our own Services alongside its Open Access facility to the Community.</p>	<p>Equalities implications Departmental managers have offered to meet with all members of St Gabriels staff in order to facilitate their search for alternative employment within the Council. This has already proved successful in a number of cases.</p>
<p>Implications for the prevention of crime and disorder None</p>	

COMMITTEE REPORT APPENDIX



Background papers

Contact Officer

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