

Staff Response to the Consultation Document on Bright Start Nursery

We intend to show why the consultation report on the closure of Bright Start Nursery is unnecessary. It is clear that it is financially viable and can be retained 'in house' as part of Brighton and Hove City Council.

If the Council had wanted to remove the subsidy, this could have been achieved by simply consulting with staff and parents. No attempts were made to engage with nursery staff before consultation regarding addressing the subsidy and at no time were parents approached to discuss any level of fee increase before disregarding this from the report.

Bright Start Nursery's Annual Subsidy

Point 2.1 of the consultation document states that "*the key reason for proposing the closure of Bright Start is to save the annual revenue subsidy of £87,000.*"

We show below how the nursery subsidy could be removed by enacting a few simple measures.

- Increase the fees by £2.50 per session for existing council staff to the current community level of £20.00 (£40.00 per day)
- Increase the community rate by £2 per session to £22.00 (£44.00 per day)
- Ensure that we are adequately staffed to 51 places rather than 47 and by maintaining the current occupancy rate of 76% we would increase our annual fee income from £342,106.00 to £417,637.00 thus **saving £75,531.00**.
- Increasing this occupancy figure by only one full time child an additional £11,220 would be achieved and the need for subsidy would have been removed altogether.

This figure would have been achieved in this current year by

- Allowing us to advertise for a temporary member of staff to cover the absence of a long term staff member who has been unable to work due to treatment and recovery from breast cancer
- Meeting an ongoing request to appoint a 15 hour per week kitchen assistant- a position that became vacant in June 2009 following the retirement of the previous employee.
- Had the fees been increased by 50p each year since the last fee increase in 2006 there would be no need for a subsidy.

See Appendix 1 for a breakdown of the figures
Appendix 2 – Impact of staffing and fees
Appendix 3 – Other costs of closure

We will now go through the report explaining the errors, miscalculations and misleading information point by point.
Further relevant information and statistics will be provided as appendices along with statements from parents.
The report by parents forms a separate document.

Vulnerable Children

Point 2.2 states that “very few of the children who attend Bright Start have identified needs”

This simply isn't true. Children may not qualify for funding or other schemes which provide this type of statistic. Practitioners who work with the children are only too aware of needs of individuals that are of equal importance. Among the children who have attended this nursery in the last two years we have had children who are adopted and in the process of fostering and adoption, children whose parents have mental health issues but without child protection plans, children whose parent committed suicide, other children who experienced the death of a parent. There is currently one child whose mother is terminally ill and relies on the nursery to provide a constant stable place for him at a time when she is no longer able to care for him. This family has made a choice to attend here. They are unable to prevent him from losing his mother but to also have to deal with finding an alternative nursery setting while guiding him through this impending bereavement and remove this support from this family is unthinkable.
None of these children would register on official statistics as having an identified need.

See Appendix 4 - Letter from parent Deborah Booth.

Bright Start practitioners are keen to use their extensive experience and talent, caring for more children with “identified needs”

Looking at information of the four local schools that surround Bright Start, all within half a mile of us it is apparent that there is a need to provide places that all children can access. Information from the Ofsted inspection reports for Middle Street, Carlton Hill, St Paul's and St Bartholomew's all state that the proportion of children receiving free school meals is above the national average. In addition to this each school has an above average number of children who have special educational needs. This suggests that there is an unidentified need currently not catered for.

With the “significant increase over the last two years in the number of children under 5 with child protection plans” (point 2.1 in the report), the 18 month waiting list at Tarnerland Nursery School, and the report of low uptake of nursery entitlements by low income families (Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents from 2008 to 2009), we believe that there is plenty of scope for using the existing staff team and premises to help fill these gaps in provision.

Council's Childcare Strategy

Point 2.6 states that “there is sufficient childcare across the city”, implying that the children who lose their place at Bright Start will be able to find alternatives. This is not borne out by the information we have from the Council’s “Family Information Service”(see Appendix 5 and parents testimonies)

Point 2.10 states that “a central element of the Council’s childcare strategy is to ensure that children most in need benefit from high quality childcare”, and goes on to refer to the provision of “more places for two year olds”.

This demonstrates that there is a need for more childcare places, yet the extension built at Roundabout Nursery to create 12 more such places is then negated by the closure of Bright Start Nursery.

The report also suggests that we have resorted to giving away free places to some under twos. This is completely misleading. The places in question are part of a pilot scheme for free funded places for two year olds. The aims are to offer high quality childcare to disadvantaged families in line with Children’s Centres.

The two year funded places have been very successful and we hope to build on this with the Government’s intended expansion of the scheme to 15 hours per week

Help for parents

- Parents were urged (Point 2.12) to contact the Family Information Service so that enquiries could be tailored to their needs, unfortunately parents who have contacted them have found that there are very few nursery places available that fit with the sessions that they require.
- One parent was offered only one nursery that could offer the sessions that they required, giving them no choice of alternatives. You cannot select childcare this way.
- Parents often start looking for childcare before their child is born to ensure that they are placing them where they feel comfortable and do not wish to have to make this choice again when it is not their decision to do so.
- The report also notes that there is little childcare in the town centre, particularly for under 2s. Childcare is usually arranged prior to a parent returning to work following maternity leave. When applications are made often the sessions required are a result of negotiation between themselves and employers regarding hours of employment and availability of nursery sessions. This work/ childcare balance is often finely tuned to enable parents to juggle work commitments, travel from home to nursery then on to place of work; and also ensure their child has the best balance of home and time in childcare to suit their needs.
- Any disruption to this careful structure of life balance renders it unworkable. An additional journey each end of the day can make it impossible to continue to meet the working hours and timing of nursery sessions.

- We note with concern that no Environmental Impact Assessment has been carried out with reference to these points.
- **The report suggests that it is simply a case of swapping childcare provision but no account is taken of the complexity that this involves.**

Please refer Appendix 6 and the parental response submitted independently for individual cases.

Bright Start Building

Point 2.14 questions the “long term viability of the building,” claims it is “not in a good condition”, and that it would cost £230,000 to bring the building “up to a good standard”.

This is not true.

- “The building itself is in a fair condition” (according to the Council’s Informal Cabinet Paper 12 May 2010). The £230,000 cost quoted for refurbishment was a capital growth bid for government money intended to upgrade nurseries whose building required the most improvement. Then money went to other nurseries in greater need. The proposals contained within the refurbishment plans were for significant alterations to the building and *not* as the report suggests essential maintenance.
- It is misleading to compare the standard of the Bright Start building to the Children’s Centre nurseries which were purpose built and recently constructed.
- The £5000 worth of spending on flooring, heating and lighting was already budgeted for in the current revenue budget 2010-2011. It was planned maintenance and has already been completed
- The “*small rooms*” and “*low ceilings*” criticised in the consultation are seen as an asset by practitioners, particularly those working with children with special needs and speech and language difficulty. Sheila Graves of the Autistic Spectrum Condition Support Service stated on a recent training lecture that “*the rooms at Bright Start Nursery are a positive attribute and provide an atmosphere of calm and security that supports children with behavioural difficulties. These rooms also help provide an environment that is conducive for learning and nurture.*”

What Other Options Have Been Considered

At the informal Council Cabinet meeting on 12 May 2010, another option was considered. This was to change the status from workplace nursery to a community nursery giving priority to disadvantaged and local children, with existing children (including Council parents) continuing to use the nursery. £230,000 of Sure Start capital funding was available for a complete nursery refurbishment. This option was not taken up by the Administration.

This has been omitted from the final consultation document, and been replaced with the spurious claim that “over the last three years a range of measures has been taken to improve the sustainability of the nursery” (Point 2.17).

This is not true

- The staffing in the nursery has not been “reduced to match the number of children in the nursery” (point 2.18). In fact it was the other way round. Had more staff been taken on, and vacant posts filled, more children could have been taken on, cutting the subsidy further. (see page one, point 3 and appendix 1).
- Point 2.19 suggests that offering community places is a recent decision, whereas in fact the nursery has been open to the community since 1989.
- The funded part time places for two year olds referred to in point 2.20 were part of a pilot scheme to help disadvantaged children, not to “increase the occupancy in less popular sessions”. This pilot has now been extended and Bright Start expects to continue to take part alongside other local nurseries.
- Point 2.22 notes a concern that “a large rise in fees” would “reduce occupancy levels”. Our fees have remained the same for four years. (hardly a “measure....to improve the sustainability of the nursery”!) Our survey suggests that a reasonable fee increase may be acceptable.
- We are cheaper than most nurseries. The table comparing Citywide nursery fees with ours (point 2.24) is from 2008-2009. Services since, according to the Daycare Trust annual childcare costs survey (reported Nursery World, 18/2/2010), fees are rising at 5% a year. This makes Bright Start’s prices considerably cheaper for under 0-2s, and average for 3-5s. Unfortunately, the next “Childcare Sufficiency Assessment”, with current fee information, won’t be available until March 2011.
- Furthermore, these figures do not take into account extra charges for pre-8.30am starts or post 5.30pm finishes, which can add an additional £7 per day to equal an 8am – 6pm day which Bright Start currently offers. This takes a daily charge of these nurseries to over £50.
- Other nurseries operate fines for lateness, and deposits. Bright Start does not implement any of these charges.
- Point 2.26 states that allowing Bright Start to stay open to the end of August would substantially reduce savings. This pays no attention to the severe disruption that the closure would have on the 26 school leavers who will find it virtually impossible to secure other nursery provision. Every child matters. It also states that by staying open until August would make “it more difficult to redeploy staff to other nurseries,” surely if we are already identified at risk that suitable jobs would have to be held.

Summary: Maximising Occupancy to Increase Income

We have looked at ways to maximise income and increase child occupancy. The key points are

1. The key to this is to increase the staffing and number of children that could attend back to 51 or 55 places to maximise our income.
2. This includes a review of the distribution of ages and numbers of children within the nursery to optimise occupancy and income.
3. This will enable us to increase our 2 year old places, an area of growth, to enable children to utilise the free 15 hour funding.
4. Increase the 3 -4 year old places and offer a limited number of stand alone 15 hour funded places.
5. Reduce the under 2s places to optimise staffing.
6. Increase registration to 59 places, to allow flexibility to raise numbers on our most requested days so that we do not lose prospective parents as we are fully booked for key sessions.

There are a number of simple steps that could be taken to increase community awareness of the nursery (see Appendix 8). In fact the Save Bright Start Campaign has already done much of this. We should also realise that our location is our asset. This is more important than the fact that it is an old building.

We are confident that we can continue to review ourselves in order to build and improve as a nursery

Conclusion

We have demonstrated that much of the key information in the report is out of date, misleading, or fails to consider the alternative options to closure in a meaningful way.

We have also demonstrated simple steps that could be taken to reduce and remove the subsidy and we have looked at ways to maximise our income and increase child occupancy.

Our response shows how some simple alterations to fees and occupancy could result in the removal of the subsidy. When taken in context of CYPT's total savings of £7.1 million the Bright Start saving of £87,000 represents less than 1.2%. The impact of the closure would directly affect over 100 children and staff and therefore seems disproportionate to the size of saving.

We have unprecedented public support with over 5,000 signatures on our petition. We have dedicated and supportive parents and staff. We have a nursery full of fantastic children.

The July 2010 Options Report reported on the "danger that many parents will move their children as soon as possible".

In fact, *no parents have left the nursery* since this whole process started two months ago. Furthermore two more children started at Bright Start the week closure plans were announced.

Bright Start nursery is an asset to Brighton and Hove City Council and the City as a whole. It must continue to provide high quality childcare to the children of this City.

Appendix 1

Current charges and occupancy based on 47 places

	Sessional rate	Sessions per week	Total per week	Percentage occupancy	Total yearly income
Council places	£17.50	186	£3255.00	39.57%	£166,005.00
Community places	£20.00	160	£3200.00	34.04%	£163,200.00
2 year funded places	£24.25	14	£339.50	2.98%	£12901.00 (38 weeks)
		360	£6794.50	76.60%	£342106.00

Example 1

	Sessional rate	Sessions per week	Total per week	Percentage occupancy	Total yearly income
Council places	£20.00	186	£3720.00	39.57%	£189,720.00
Community places	£22.00	160	£3520.00	34.04%	£179,520.00
2 year funded places	£24.25	14	£339.50	2.98%	£12901.00
		360	£7579.50	76.60%	£382141.00

Projection if the occupancy remains the same as above (47 places) but fees are increased according to figures indicated as acceptable by parents returning questionnaire (as opposed to nursery closure)

A saving of £40,035.00 would be achieved.

Example 2

	Sessional rate	Sessions per week	Total per week	Percentage occupancy	Total yearly income
Council places	£17.50	201	£3517.50	39.41%	£179,382.50
Community places	£20.00	178	£3540.00	34.90%	£180,540.00
2 year funded places	£24.25	14	£339.50	2.75%	£112901.00
		393	£7397.00	77.06%	£372823.50

Projection if fee remain at original rates but the occupancy is increased to 51 places at the approx same occupancy rate.

A saving of £30,727.50 would be achieved.

Example 3

	Sessional rate	Sessions per week	Total per week	Percentage occupancy	Total yearly income
Council places	£20.00	201	£4020.00	39.41%	£205,020.00
Community places	£22.00	178	£3916.00	34.90%	£199,716.00
2 year funded places	£24.25	14	£339.50	2.75%	£12901.00
		393	£8275.50	77.06%	£417637.00

Projection if fees increase and the occupancy increases to 77.06% of 51 places and increasing fees.

£75,531.00 saving would be achieved by increasing fees by £2 and £2.50 and increasing occupancy to 51 places and maintaining a similar occupancy of places. Further saving could be achieved by increasing the occupancy further. We are currently registered with Ofsted for 55 children. It should be noted that the EYFE funding currently does not equal the cost of the projected increased sessional fees, however, this would be met by the addition of the equivalent of one full time nursery place.

Appendix 2

Impact of staffing and fees

- Occupancy is now 76% rather than 70% as quoted in Agenda Item 34.
- The 6% increase has removed the projected overspend (stated as £12,000).
- Bright Start is on target to meet the revenue budget with no reported overspend.
- This demonstrates how allowing Bright Start to decrease from 55 to 51 to 47 places by reducing the staff numbers has had a negative effect on income.

The table below shows the effect of one practitioner and the income that is gained or lost. This is based on the salary of one full time practitioner on top of Scale 4 (£19,126.00)

Ratio of children per practitioner based on age ratio	Annual salary of one practitioner	Yearly fee per child based on £20 per session	Income generated by one practitioner according to ratio
1:3 (under 2 years)	£19,126	£10,200 x 3	£30,600
1:4 (2 years)	£19,126	£10,200 x 4	£40,600
1:8 (3- 4 years)	£19,126	£10,200 x 8	£81,600

Therefore it can be seen that by not employing one full time member of staff, there is a net loss of between £11,474 and £62,474.

- Bright Start has been functioning without a kitchen assistant for the past 18 months following retirement of the previous employee.
- Rather than employ a kitchen assistant (Scale 1-2 for 15 hours per week) nursery practitioners had to cover the post pending clearance to advertise.
- This meant that a qualified practitioner was taken out of the room and therefore out of the room ratio everyday for the last 18 months.
- A kitchen assistant employed for 15 hours per week has an annual salary of £6257.
- The loss of three children's places per morning meant that Bright Start lost an income of £15300.
- **Employing a replacement kitchen assistant would have increased income by £7566 based on the lowest ratio of child to staff.**

Maximising Occupancy

- One area of nursery sessions that we are less likely to fill to capacity is the afternoon sessions. A lot of working parents work part time and tend to require morning or all day sessions leaving us with a spare capacity in the afternoon.

- One way of using these sessions may be to introduce some term time only stand alone sessions for children who qualify for either 2 year old free funding or 3 and 4 year old free funding for 15 hours per week.
- Currently children who receive 3 and 4 year funding receive this for 38 weeks of the year (term time only) and have to pay and attend for the remaining 13 weeks.
- By introducing a limited number of term time only places for afternoon sessions we will increase our occupancy evenly across the days and enable children from the local area to attend Bright Start who currently cannot afford any additional charges.

Appendix 3

Other costs of closure

Point 2.3 raises the issue of £6,000 a year “management and finance support” and other “indirect costs” such as “payroll, IT and support from human resources”.

There is no explanation of how these figures were arrived at, or how this money would be saved if Bright Start was closed.

Neither is there any mention of the “redundancy costs of some £60,000 plus any pension entitlements” (as projected in the informal cabinet paper, 12/5/2010, agenda item 7).

Any mention of additional costs needs to take this into account too.

Further costs to the taxpayer not included in the report

- The cost of losing council staff who will no longer be able to work for the council, both in human terms and recruitment costs.
- The loss of staff taxes, itself greater than the subsidy.
- Bright Start Options Paper, (16th July 2010) also reports that “at present the nursery pays rent of £14,200 a year for the use of the building. This would be lost unless another tenant was found”.
- The cost of Jobseekers Allowance for the 19 jobs lost in the City as a result of closure, a figure also greater than the subsidy
- The cost of Housing Benefit paid to some of the jobseekers.

Appendix 4

Letter from parent Deborah Booth

Dear Vanessa,

I have been passed your email address by our nursery and hope you can help. I was absolutely devastated to hear that Bright Start Nursery is under threat of closure. Our three year old has been attending part time for the past two years, and in September started full-time.

I have recently been diagnosed with terminal cancer (prognosis likely only months) and a linked condition which has rendered me disabled and unable to care for my son. My husband is now my full-time carer and without family in the uk we rely hugely on our wonderful nursery, who provide our little boy with the care and stability he so badly needs at this time. Things are incredibly stressful at home and I don't know what we would do without the staff at Bright Start, who have been so supportive and understanding and make sure that at least from the hours of 8-6 every day my son has some normality, in a happy, stimulating environment, close to our home.

I desperately hope he will not be forced to leave his nursery and all his friends in the coming months in addition to likely losing his mother, or have to be at home watching my health deteriorate. It will be very difficult for my husband and I to arrange alternative help locally, especially in the middle of an academic year when childcare places are especially sparse.

Bright Start nursery has an had an excellent reputation as one of the best in Brighton for many years, we initially applied there after many recommendations from other parents. We would rather even deal with possible price increases than see it close.

Yours sincerely,

Deborah M Booth & Davy Simon

Appendix 5

Please note that "radius" is as the crow flies and some of the distances are over 2 miles, through city centre traffic

Name of nursery	Post code	Radius from Brightstart	Full time vacancies Monday to Friday all day	Part time
Pepperpot Nursery	BN2 3PF	0.5 miles	No full time places	A few part time
Orchard Day Nursery	BN2 0GL	0.5 miles	4 places for 18 months to 3 years	Several places for all ages
Happy Days Nursery	BN2 9SQ	0.5 miles	No full time places	Part time places for all ages mainly aft
Tarnerland Nursery School	BN2 0GR	0.5 miles	Full in all groups waiting list in operation	
Young Sussex (Brighton)	BN3 1TL	1 mile	A few full time places for children 3 years	Part time places for all ages
Elm Grove Pepperpot Baby Unit	BN2 3ES	1 mile	No full time places	A few part time
Joyland Nursery	BN1 6EE	1 mile	No full time places	A few afternoon vacancies
Phoenix Nursery	BN2 9WN	1 mile	No full time places	A few part time
Playcare Nursery	BN1 3AG	1 mile	4 full time places for ages 1 and over	part time places for all ages
Strawberry Hill Nursery	BN1 6EE	1 mile	No full time places	No part time places
Sunshine Day Nursery	BN2 0AG	1 mile	3 full time places for children from 3 months to 5 years	Part time places in all age ranges
Sussex House Nursery (workplace nursery NHS)	BN2 1ES	1 mile	No full time places	Some part time places for 3-4 year olds under 2's
Blueberry Nursery Early Learning Organisation	BN3 1QB	1 mile	No full time places	No part time places
St George's Neighbourhood Nursery	BN2 1ED	1 mile	No full time places	Some very part time places
Little Oaks Nursery	BN2 9SJ	1 mile	No full time places	Some vacancies on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday depending on child
The Children's House	BN2 9ZF	1 mile	No vacancies	No part time places
Hopscotch	BN3 1PL	1 mile	No full time places	No part time places
Early Years	BN3 6QA	2 miles	No full time places	Places on Monday and Friday afternoon
Hillbury House	BN3 3TH	2 miles	A few full time places for all ages	A few part time places for all ages
Early Years	BN1 6RF	2 miles	No full time places	A few part time places for all ages
Hilltop	BN2 3EW	2 miles	No full time places	A few part time places for 2 year olds
Hopscotch	BN1 6RD	2 miles	2 full time places	A variety of part time places for all ages
One World	BN2 4GA	2 miles	3 full time places for children from 3 to 5 years	Part time places for 2 year olds on Monday, Thursday and Friday

Sunflower	BN2 4DA	2 miles	Have not responded	
The Playstation	BN1 6JL	2 miles	10 full time places for children from 2 to 5 years	A variety of part time places 2 to 5 years
Wonder Years	BN1 6WF	2 miles	2 full time places for children under 2 years	Part time places for all ages
Cbabiesafe	BN3 3GF	2 miles	No full time places	Afternoon places Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday and all day Thursday and Friday
Poets Corner	BN3 3WJ	2 miles	3 full time places for 3 to 5 years	Part time places for all ages
Cherry Tree	BN1 7DY	2 miles	No full time places	A few part time places
Footsteps	BN3 3ER	2 miles	15 full time places for all ages	Part time places available in all age groups
Angmering Day Nursery	BN3 3WB	2 miles	No full time places	6 afternoon places for all ages
Little People By The Sea	BN3 2RP	2 miles	Full time places available in all age groups	Part time places for all ages
Little Earthworms	BN1 6NF	2 miles	Full time places available for children over 2	Part time places for all ages
Little Oaks	BN1 6FE	2 miles	10 full time places for children from 3 months to 5 years	Part time places for all ages
Supersaurus	BN3 3ER	2 miles	Full time places available in all age groups	Part time places available in all age groups
Growing Up Green	BN1 6HQ	2 miles	2 full time places for children from 14 months to 5 years	Various part time vacancies
Growing Up Green	BN1 6RA	2 miles	Full time places as follows:- 6 for babies, 14 for 12 months to 24 months, 17 for 2 to 3 year olds and 18 for 3 to 4 year olds	Various part time vacancies
Chestnut Tree	BN3 3RT	2 miles	Full time places available in all age groups	Part time places available in all age groups
Roundabout	BN2 5FL	2 miles	No full time places	A few part time places for babies
Pumpkin Patch	BN1 6LA	2 miles	5 full time places for ages 3 months to 5 years	Part time places for all ages
Paces for Brighton	BN2 5HE	2 miles	Have not responded	

Appendix 6

There is a need for child care in the city centre

Bright Start was established 21 years ago when there was a real need for childcare in the city. The availability of childcare has grown in Brighton and Hove over this period of time but we are as necessary today as when we were first opened. A recent study revealed that 1 in 5 nursery places have been lost in the past 4 years. In the South East region this equates to 14,000 fewer places. It makes no sense to consider closing a valuable local resource.

- There are very few nurseries in the city centre yet the local area has grown with the development of the Jubilee library site and New England quarter offering more residential and office space.
- Locally to us there is a huge development for expansion to the Amex UK Headquarters where a number of their employees have used us for childcare, these numbers could be expanded.
- It has been identified that new nurseries are opening in Hove yet these places cannot easily be accessed by parents living or working in the centre of Brighton.
- A town centre nursery closed recently, a number of these children have joined us only to find their childcare at risk again.
- There is a need for good quality childcare in the town centre where people work, and can be accessed by the local buses and trains.
- The increase in use by community parents demonstrates a demand for places.
- The nearest two Sure Start nurseries are currently full with a waiting list. We provide good childcare for all sectors. Although our subsidy comes from a different source to the Children's Centres we do not cost more.
- It should be noted that all Sure Start nurseries receive funding which is reported to be between £100,000 and £200,000 per nursery. The difference being that this subsidy comes directly from Central Government funding.
- Bright Start is directly funded by Brighton and Hove City Council. At current levels Bright Start is more financially viable than the Sure Start Centres – and with basic changes our subsidy could be removed.
- The report states that the Council is committed to working with the private and voluntary sector to provide a sufficient level of high quality childcare across the city yet it is not willing to support Bright Start.

Appendix 7

Response from parent questionnaire about fees

Parents were sent a questionnaire asking them how much they felt an acceptable fee increase would be. We recognise that the 30% increase suggested in the consultation is unrealistic but an increase would increase our revenue and therefore help to reduce the subsidy. The last fee increase was in 2006.

We had 26 responses from parents. 11 of these were community parents who currently pay £20.00. 15 are council employees who pay £17.50 per session.

	none	5%	10%	£1	£2	£2.50	£3	£3.50	£5	£7.50
£17.50	2	1	1			7		1	2	1
£20.00	2			1	4	2	1			

The majority of parents were happy to agree to a fee increase to keep Bright Start open.

Most Council employees agreed to a rise of £2.50 which would increase their fees from £17.50 to £20.00 (the current community rate).

More than half of the community parents who responded felt an acceptable increase for them was between £2 and £3.

A total of 4 parents could not afford an increase at all, one saying they would have to reduce sessions. Another saying they would find it 'tricky' but not that they would leave. One is currently on maternity leave and would to have find fees for 2 children. The other parent has a full time child at Bright Start who will be leaving to start school in September.

Parents were asked whether they would be happy to pay the same fee as community parents or did they feel that a lower rate should remain.

	Council responses	Community responses
Should remain lower	5	
Smaller difference	2	
Same as community	6	1

Other comments

- It is reasonable to expect a year on year increase.
- Fees should be charged provisionally according to earnings whether private or public sector.
- If the nursery closes, parents should be compensated for either loss of earnings (for childcare cover) or given a transitional fee to find other childcare.
- Lower rate should apply, council staff haven't had pay rises – we always get hit at all angles.
- Profile against other nurseries to ensure it remains viable for future parents.
- Felt that community parents were put off by 'priority given to council employees' and nearly didn't enquire.
- Felt rate should be the same for both council and community.
- A slightly lower fee for grade M8 and below would be preferable.

3 months notice is required to increase fees.

Appendix 8

Engaging with the community

- We feel the occupancy rate of around 76% of places is the most realistic and achievable as the occupancy at Bright Start has averaged at this figure for both 51 and 47 places in recent years.
- These figures have maintained despite large numbers of council staff now being based in Hove as the number of community places have increased.
- We have continued to thrive and built a strong community based largely on personal recommendation.
- What has become apparent through the consultation procedure is that many local families are unaware that they can access the nursery thinking that it is only available to council staff.
- By engaging with our local community awareness could be increased. The North Laines Community Association has a bi monthly newsletter delivered to every household and shop in the North Laines area. They also have a local parent support group.
- Distributing leaflets to the council's buildings including the Jubilee Library which is situated in the same complex as us would make us more visible. They hold a number of preschool sessions including Baby Boogie there every week and attract many family groups.
- Improving the visual recognition of the building is necessary. For example, as we are situated in what is effectively a car park we have no high street presence and do not even show up on most Sat Nav searches. We frequently have phone calls from the public who are coming to the nursery for the first time but cannot find us.
- Internet presence is another option that could be explored. Even by entering the nursery's postcode on an internet search for nearby nurseries Bright Start does not show up.

Private groups threaten to pull out

Fears over free nursery places

NURSERIES are threatening to scrap free childcare in a row about funding.

Parents in Sussex are already struggling to find nursery spaces and unless Government funding increases the situation will become more desperate.

This is the view of Hove-based Early Years Childcare managing director Kate Peach, who is calling on the Government to change the way it funds free childcare.

Currently all three and four-year-olds are eligible for 15 hours of free childcare per week. But while it costs private nurseries £4.52 per hour to provide the service, they only receive £3.68.

Ms Peach said: "There is a very real danger nurseries could

by **JAMES WALLIN**

pull out of the programme all together. That's not a situation anyone wants but if the alternative is nurseries going out of business what can we do?

"We all want this to work because we want every child to get the same opportunities but the situation we are being forced to work with is not sustainable. They cannot expect private nurseries to subsidise their scheme.

"It is already hard enough for parents to find nursery spaces, particularly in Brighton, and we don't want that to get any worse."

Ms Peach is urging people to sign her petition calling on the

Government to change the way it allocates funding for free childcare, at www.freechildcare.org.uk.

Mother-of-two Kate Gowar was left in limbo last year when Nursery Time at Fiveways closed abruptly. She spent two months searching for a new nursery for daughters Florence, four, and Martha, two.

The 43-year-old said: "It was terrible. Florence was very upset because she had made friends there and bonded with staff and now had to move somewhere else.

"Then there was the problem of juggling work and childcare and trying to find a nursery. It's a nightmare trying to find a nursery in Brighton.

"If this funding situation is forcing nurseries out of business it's going to have a huge effect on parents."

The Department for Education was unavailable for comment when The Argus went to press.

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● NURSERY children and parents from Bright Start nursery, which is facing closure, will protest outside Kings House, in Hove, on December 16. Brighton and Hove City Council is currently consulting on plans to close the nursery in Barrack Yard, Brighton, in April. Campaigners have already collected about 4,300 signatures opposing the closure.

"I do think this is the worse thing the council has ever done.

They're trying to close the council crèche which is the best thing Brighton council has ever done. They're supposed to be encouraging women back into work"

*Peter Stone, Post Room Assistant
Nursery Parent, 1990 - 1994*

The Argus

Childish vision

4:43pm Friday 22nd October 2010

So Tory-controlled Brighton and Hove City Council is consulting on scrapping the Bright Start nursery – a retrograde step that demands a big campaign to keep it (The Argus, October 11; Letters, October 16).

All three of my children went to the nursery. I was council leader when it was set up and am immensely proud of what it has done for the city.

Roughly a thousand children have been through its doors. Meet any of those who have been there today and you will come across young people who are confident, articulate and have rounded social skills.

Why? Because from an early age they had the opportunity to mix with other children from a broad social mix. The wonderful thing about Bright Start is that it isn't a nursery with kids drawn from a narrow range of backgrounds. When I took our children there they mixed with the children of lawyers, care workers, street cleaners, refuse workers, teachers, ground maintenance staff, cooks, cleaners, musicians and even the odd director of a service.

The sliding scale of charges made the nursery accessible to all grades within the council and the policy of providing private sector places widened the social mix even further.

The truth is the Tories never liked the nursery. Year after year they threatened to take its budget away and close it down. At the time Labour set it up in 1988 we were facing cuts, but we argued that if we wanted to encourage women to return to work for the council after maternity leave a nursery would help – and help it did. It gave the council the edge in recruiting top-class staff at every level.

Perhaps the Tories don't care. They probably think that the age of austerity justifies any cut or closure. But this is a service we should be providing. This is a vindictive piece of short-sighted short termism.

**Lord Bassam
Church Place, Brighton**

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