Wrap Around Care Service in Cuiken Primary School

Report by Donald MacKay, Director Education and Children's Services

1 Purpose of Report
The purpose of the report is to refer back to elected members the decision taken as part of the efficiency savings in February 2010 to close the Wrap Around Care service in Cuiken Primary School. Council is requested to give guidance on the future of this service, in light of the business case providing a case for retention of the service, prepared by a group of parents. The parents’ business case ‘Cuiken Nursery School: Wrap around Service, The Case for Retention’ forms appendix 1.

In order to give further consideration to this it will be necessary for the Council to agree to suspend its Standing Orders in respect of the original decision taken on 23 February 2010.

2 Background

2.1 On 23 February 2010 Council decided to close the Wrap Around Care Service at Cuiken Primary School on 1 July 2010. This decision was taken as part of the service reduction savings as this service was operating at a deficit. The part year savings anticipated in the current year are £27,000 rising to £40,000 thereafter.

2.2 At a public meeting requested by parents on 24 March 2010, the Director, Education and Children's Services explained that the service could no longer be subsidised, as it had been over a number of years. It was also explained that there was sufficient provision of pre-school education and childcare places in the Penicuik area.

2.3 The parents indicated that they thought the service could be made financially viable through more marketing and undertook to put forward a business case evidencing this. The parents were of the opinion that increased uptake could be ensured through improving advertising. Consequently they undertook a ‘Save our Wrap around Care’ campaign.

2.4 Main issues raised in the parents’ business case.

2.4.1 Advertising
Information was provided to parents that regular advertising of the Wrap Around Care service has been provided through the Midlothian News (delivered to every household), the Hunter and Lass programmes, leaflets provided to all parents of children applying for pre-school education, the Under 5s Directory which is provided to parents of all new children by health visitors, the local post office, health centres, leisure centres and libraries. Information has also been provided each year at Vogrie Festival and in specific events at local supermarkets throughout Midlothian. The national childcare
information service website and Midlothian Council website provides online information.

2.4.2 Local Provision
Two local nurseries (one private and one voluntary sector) have closed in the last year. Both provided a small number of places and there remains within the Penicuik area sufficient pre-school education sessions and childcare.

2.4.3 Cost Comparison with Private Sector Nurseries
The quoted costs for the private nurseries are inaccurate and do not take account of the £8.40 daily reduction as a result of funded pre-school education sessions, or the total hours in full day provision. The comparison should be

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nursery</th>
<th>Hours</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pinocchio’s Nursery</td>
<td>(7.30 – 6.00)</td>
<td>£28.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milton Bridge Nursery</td>
<td>(7.15 – 5.45)</td>
<td>£19.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuiken Wrap Around Care</td>
<td>(7.15 – 5.45)</td>
<td>£27.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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From this it can be seen that private sector provision is at a similar price to that of Council provision.

3 Report Implications

3.1 Resource
The parents’ business case (appendix 1) presents the best case scenario is for the Council provided service of a net cost of £221 per annum. Any adverse variations in the business case projections would increase the cost of the service to the Council.

The parents’ business case is based on an optimistic forecast of an increase in uptake for the service, assuming a weekly income of £1,126 before the price increase and funded sessions. The equivalent weekly income for Cuiken currently is £615 of which £296 is for funded sessions.

If the estimated increased uptake does not materialise then the service would continue to operate at a deficit which could reach the current level of £40,000 for which there is no budget provision.

The parents’ business case assumes an expansion of service to include Friday afternoons. As the charges for the service are insufficient to cover costs, this too would serve to increase the cost of providing the service.

Following the Council decision in February to close the service, the redeployment policy has been implemented for current staff with permanent contracts. If the decision is taken to reverse the decision and continue the service, staff will have the choice whether to be redeployed to alternative permanent posts. Therefore there may be replacement staff recruitment and advertising costs for which there is no budget provision.
If a social enterprise were to apply to provide a Wrap Around Care service at Cuiken Primary School this would be a lease request to Community Learning and Development (who under the Harmonisation of Charges policy endorsed by Midlothian Council would take over management of the Wrap Around Care room). In line with existing support for social enterprises the Council would meet building cleaning costs –approx £1,700 per annum.

3.2 Risk
Some of these have already been outlined by the parents’ business case in appendix 1.

3.2.1 Projected Service Usage
The parents’ business case identifies the risk of a reduced uptake. This would be supported by the experience within the service which has shown that a significant number of parents who express an initial interest in the service do not take up places. The parents’ business case suggests an increase in prices be levied. This too may have an impact on the number of users who take up places and would also represent a variation of charges between Council facilities.

3.2.2 Staffing
There is a significant risk that if Midlothian Council decide to continue the service, and current staff decline to take up places offered under the redevelopment policy, that it will be very difficult to recruit replacement staff to work the wrap around care split hours (7.15 – 9.15, 11.30-1.30, 2.15-5.45 and Friday afternoon and occasional days) over the summer holiday period to start on 17 August 2010. The risk of a delay in continuing the service would have a severe impact on securing uptake, financial income and the sustainability of the service.

3.3 Policy

Strategy
The subject of this report relates to the Childcare Strategy, 1999, to support parents return to work, education and training. The closure does not adversely affect the strategy. As stated earlier there is sufficient provision of pre-school education and childcare places in the Penicuik area.

Consultation
Consultation has been through parents requested public meeting with the Director, Education and Children’s Services, three meetings with the parents representatives group, numerous e-mail contact providing information and figures, two meetings with elected members and community council representatives and phone calls with parent representatives.

Equalities
This report is not proposing new services, policies, strategies or plans.
Sustainability
The report has outlined above, in 2.4.2, that there are no sustainability issues as there is sufficient pre-school education and childcare places in the Penicuik area to support parents in work, education or training.

4 Summary
Parents have requested that the Wrap around Care service is retained. They have put forward a best case scenario which indicates that with a significantly increased uptake and advertising that the service could potentially function with a net cost of approx £221.

There is a material risk that there may not be the estimated uptake, so the cost to the Council providing the service would remain at the existing level of £40,000. There is an additional risk that replacement staff may not be recruited in the required timescale in order to continue the service.

The service might be able to operate if a social enterprise were to provide the service. There would be a cost to the Council for cleaning of approx £1700 per year which could be met from existing budgets. The parents’ business case has indicated that Penicuik YMCA may bring forward a proposal for a replacement service. This would meet the parents’ request for continuity of the service.

5 Recommendations
Council is asked to consider the following options

1. Having received the report, confirm the decision taken by Council on 23 February 2010 to close the Wrap Around Care Service at Cuiken Primary School.

2. Reconsider the decision taken by Council on 23 February 2010 to close the Wrap Around Care Service at Cuiken Primary School, acknowledging that the additional cost to the Council as described in the parents’ business case would be at least £221 and may exceed £40,000

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Background Papers: