

Report from Cllr Stiles - Red Kite Children's Centre

At the OCC Cabinet meeting on 26th January, members voted unanimously to recommend their budget to the Full Council on 16th February. The budget includes closing all Children's Centres as well as drastic cuts to many other services e.g. day centres for elderly people and bus subsidies.

I addressed the Cabinet and I hope to speak at Full Council too. I have also supported all demonstrations and rallies in support of our Children's Centres and I plan to join the march in Oxford on 13th February – Love Oxfordshire.

At Red Kite, members of the Advisory Group met with our County Councillor, Nick Carter to look at ways we could still keep Red Kite open, if the worst case scenario materialises on 16th February, and we have also written to John Howell.

The contract with Action for Children runs until September, which means, if faced with closure, we will then have a few months to find a way forward without OCC from the autumn onwards. The morale of the manager and staff is remarkably high under the circumstances and they continue to provide a very professional and supportive service for families with young children during these very difficult times. Below is a copy of my address to Cabinet (which includes a section on bus subsidies too).

Address to OCC Cabinet 26.01.16 re Children's Centres and bus Subsidies

Chair, members of the cabinet – good afternoon. Thank you for allowing me to address you today. My name is Mary Stiles; I live in Thame and I am here to speak about Children's Centres and bus subsidies – NOT because I think that the other services facing cuts are less important than Children's centres and bus services, but because they are the 2 services I know most about in my capacity as Chair of the Advisory Group of the Red Kite Children's Centre in Thame and Chinnor and Thame Town Council's Parish Transport Representative.

The closure of all 44 Children's Centres and the cutting of all bus subsidies are both very short-sighted proposals and, in addition to the catastrophic effect on the users of both services, will lead to a greater cost to the public purse in the future.

You will know from the consultations the arguments made by many individuals and organisations in favour of keeping our Children's Centres open and our subsidised bus services running. In 3 minutes I have time to make only a few points –

Children's Centres

- prevention is always better than cure and more cost effective in the long run
- families need local services, not a centre 20+ miles away (the distance from Thame to Didcot)
- outreach from over 20 miles away is costly in both time and money

- providing a service only for referred families is stigmatising and makes those families harder to reach

- in Thame and Chinnor Health Visitor clinics, physiotherapy and speech and language therapy sessions all take place in the Red Kite Children's Centre. Other premises would have to be rented for these services if Red Kite closes

Subsidised bus routes

-at present there is a bus service in the Thame area which is used by people living in villages or the edge of town to go into town. Many have contacted me to say what a lifeline this is and I know from talking to other Parish Transport Representatives, people all over Oxfordshire are saying the same

- if people become isolated, because they cannot go out regularly, all the research shows that particularly elderly and disabled people and parents of young children can suffer from poor mental health, leading to problems which could have been prevented and costs which could have been avoided

- the local residents who have contacted me have said they don't need a bus every day – 2 or 3 times a week would suffice. They are not asking for much

Please think again. Don't cut completely. Find a way to save our Children's Centres and subsidised bus services.

It may be a cliché, but true none the less – where there's a will there's a way.