



16 Helston Grove
Heald Green
Stockport SK8 3EU
11th December 2018

Councillor Alex Ganotis
Leader, Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council
c/o Town Hall
Edward Street
Stockport
SK1 3XE

Dear Mr Ganotis

Re: proposed 2019/20 budget reductions

Stockport Council is proposing budget reductions in 2019/20, with services provided by Children and Education Services, Adult Social Care and SEN transport in scope. Parents in Partnership Stockport (PIPS), Stockport's official partner in supporting families of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) 0-25 years, wish to express our strong concern at these proposals. Papers presented to Council and relevant Scrutiny Committees since 24 September 2018 show the following services in scope for reductions:

Children and Education Services: A fundamental review of the alignment and focus of Education and Family support, some Housing Support and Children and Young People's Health services;

Adult Social Care: the abolition of Stockport's Local Assistance Scheme (SLAS) and possible reductions in Direct Payments and Disabled Facilities Capital Grant;

Reductions in SEN transport.

The paper of 24 September (para 1.2 p1) also proposes **alarming reductions to contracts:**

Structured reviews of all service performance, delivery models and contract arrangements across the Council will take place over the coming four years. Stronger commercial and analytical skills will work alongside service expertise to better manage public service suppliers. In practice, this new approach will mean:

- *Changes to how services are delivered,*
- *New partnerships and new providers encouraged and developed,*
- *Contracts will be shorter and suppliers will be changed more frequently to ensure value for money,*
- *Quality and outcome standards will need to be reduced in many areas to reduce cost.*

We object to these proposed reductions on the following grounds:

1. They may reduce equality of opportunity for people with protected characteristics, notably children, young people aged 0-25 with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and their families;
2. The Council's proposed changes to contracts, which may include services for children, young people and families with SEND, will reduce quality and outcomes and mean more frequent supplier changes. Many children and young people with SEND react badly to change. They will therefore suffer such reductions far more keenly;



3. The proposals are contrary to the findings of the recent SEND local area inspection report, which noted multiple and serious shortcomings in the services and support provided to families where there is SEND;
4. The proposal to abolish SLAS is already out to consultation. However, that consultation gives no detail on the promised alternative proposal. Residents are therefore being asked to give opinions on insufficient information. Nor does the consultation mention the Council's own research showing that abolition will affect females, single parents and disabled people more than others. We believe the proposal is against the Council's obligation under the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic (including females and disabled people) and people who do not share it.

We recognise that Stockport faces many difficult budget decisions in the years ahead. However, the paper presented to Children & Families Scrutiny Committee on 2 October (para 1.1, p89) stated:

We know that difficult decisions are needed but are confident that with our core organisational values, robust financial management and longer-term view to managing pressures facing the Council that we are well placed to meet the £47m budget gap in the coming four years. The Borough has already managed cuts and budget pressures of over £100m in recent years, while continuing to deliver good services and good value for money.

The SEND inspection findings show the last sentence highly questionable in respect of education, children's services and adult social care. We note that the cuts proposed over the next four years will be on top of cuts of over £100m. Addressing the shortcomings noted in the report will require increased investment, not reductions.

Parents in Partnership Stockport calls on the Council to:

1. commit publicly and immediately to increase investment in services and support for children, young people and families with SEND from 2019/20 onwards;
2. review its recent and future consultations to ensure they meet PSED requirements and re-run consultations that fail to meet this duty;
3. publish on the Local Offer in further detail its proposals for budget changes which may affect children, young people and families with SEND, and consult face to face with families on these proposals.

Yours sincerely

Sherann Hillman

Paul Harper

Sherann Hillman MBE

Paul Harper MBE

PIPS Co-Chairs

www.pipstockport.org