



20 April 2018

Ms Sharon Kemp  
Chief Executive  
Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council  
Riverside House  
Main Street  
Rotherham  
S60 1AE

Our Ref: AG/GUES01001/01180237

Your Ref:

Dear Sharon

I am writing to you regarding the implementation of Phase 2 and Phase 3 of RMBC's Early Help Strategy, which has recently entered public consultation. I would be grateful if this letter could be taken as my submission to the consultation.

I am extremely concerned that the proposals would see the deregistration of two children's centres within my constituency (Broom Valley Children's Centre and Park View Children's Centre), in effect closing the centres, as well as the closure of Herringthorpe Youth Centre.

I am concerned that further closures of children's centres in Rotherham would represent a step back in provision and in the council's ability to pursue early intervention and to appropriately support families, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. These closures would follow previous reductions in the number of both children's centres and youth centres as a result of ongoing reductions in council spending.

As you may be aware, the proposals are under consideration within a context of growing national concern at the loss of children's centres since 2010. Since that time, according to official figures more than 500 centres have closed. Figures collated by the Sutton Trust have suggested the number may be as high as 1,000 centres lost since 2010. Research by Barnardo's has found that funding for children's centres has halved from £1.2bn in 2010, to £0.6bn. This huge loss of both capacity and funding to early help has been widely discussed both in Parliament and in the national media.

**Sarah Champion**

**Member of Parliament for Rotherham**

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It is therefore extremely disappointing that Rotherham is to pursue further closures.

In addition to providing valuable support to children and families in Rotherham, children's centres represent a crucial gateway to other council services, as well as direct, regular contact between families and staff who are both known to them and trusted by them. This allows staff to spot any changes that may indicate a problem early and to deliver appropriate support, which plays an important role in both safeguarding and child development.

The council's approach to early help focuses on a reduction of 'bricks and mortar' facilities and instead aims to deliver a more centralised service. I am concerned that this approach will inevitably erode the strong relationships between staff and families and that the trust that is so important to the delivery of services will be irretrievably lost. Furthermore, by removing a visible, permanent presence located within communities, the link between those communities and council services will be severed. Given the wider loss of bricks and mortar facilities, such as community centres, I am concerned that communities may become increasingly distant from local authority services.

Children's centres as originally conceived were of course intended to provide every child with the proper start in life, whatever their background. As such, considerations of deprivation are hugely important in deciding on future provision. I am therefore troubled by the council's rationale in pursuing the closure of both Park View and Broom Valley Children's Centres. While neither site is amongst the most deprived areas of the Borough, both contain significant areas of deprivation. However, both also contain more affluent areas. I am concerned that the disparity between these areas may skew statistical analysis and lead to the real level of deprivation being underestimated.

In the case of Park View Children's Centre in particular, the proposals would leave a significant geographic gap in provision. Should the centre indeed be closed, there would be no centre in Keppel or Wingfield wards, with the remaining Central Children's Centre located to the east of Rotherham West Ward. This would in effect leave the western half of the Borough with no facility at all.

The proposals have been presented as an effort to improve efficiency and therefore to improve the service offered to families in the Borough. However, for the reasons outlined above, I do not accept that they will do so. As such, I am forced to conclude that the proposals as they stand are driven by the need





to reduce budgets. Whilst I do of course recognise the huge financial pressures placed on RMBC by central government spending decisions, I believe that seeking to reduce spending in this manner will ultimately be self-defeating. I am concerned that any reduction of the service currently provided will result in increased reliance upon statutory services, with cost increases potentially significantly higher than proposed savings.

In summary, I believe that the proposals as outlined will lead to a reduction in service and the severing of a crucial link between RMBC and local communities. I would therefore urge the council to reconsider its approach.

I would be grateful if my views could be considered as part of the consultation.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Champion MP  
Member of Parliament for Rotherham