

Wiltshire Council

Council

25 February 2014

Item 10 - Questions from Councillors

From Councillor Helen Osborn, Trowbridge Lambrok Division

To Councillor Laura Mayes, Cabinet Member for Children's Services

Question 1

Can I please be informed whether Wiltshire Council lobbied central government and Wiltshire MPs regarding the reinstatement of the Aiming High funding?

The loss of this funding will seriously affect the long term future of such highly valued, volunteer centres for children with learning difficulties and disabilities, as Stepping Stones in Trowbridge, and others across the county.

If we did lobby, what was the response?

Given that the amount involved is relatively paltry, why did the Council make the cut rather than finding the money from elsewhere?

Both the coalition government and this Council has failed these children.

Response

Under the **Aiming High for Disabled Children** programme, **£280m was allocated to Local Authorities in England between 2008-11** to significantly increase the range and number of short breaks they provide to disabled children and their families.

In Wiltshire, a dual approach was taken in distributing this funding. Parents and children were/are given a payment to access their own short breaks, whilst a number of schemes, including the opportunity centres, were funded an additional amount to enhance their provision for disabled children. In the case of the opportunity centres this was over and above their core funding from Wiltshire Council. These local and specific Aiming High grants were always intended to be short term, encouraging local schemes to become self sustaining. This short-term additional money was specifically identified within the service level agreements with each opportunity centre as coming from this grant and the organisations all understood that this additional money was time limited. Wiltshire Council staff have been working closely with these charitable organisations to support them in becoming sustainable.

Since 2011, Local Authorities have not received Aiming High Funding, yet Wiltshire has continued to fund short breaks for disabled children to the tune of £1 million a

year, with over a thousand disabled children benefiting each year. Far from failing children this Council has maintained a significant level of investment.

Since 2011 money has been available to local authorities through the **Early Intervention Grant** (EIG). The EIG covers a wide range of early intervention services for children and young people, including those with disabilities. The EIG is **non-ring-fenced** and has now been absorbed in to the overall revenue grant received by the Council. This grant is reducing year on year.

The funding to opportunity centres has had to be reduced, as planned, to reflect the reduction in Central Government funding. The opportunity centres are still in receipt of core funding from Wiltshire Council, however, the £10,000 that was allocated from the Aiming High grant is no longer available.

Over the last three years the opportunity centres have received £889,320 from Wiltshire Council as core funding and this core funding is continuing.

Wiltshire Council recognises the excellent work carried out by these charities in providing a service to Wiltshire disabled children and this is reflected in the core funding noted above.

To help these charities remain sustainable Wiltshire Council has assisted them in accessing the Free Entitlement funding for 3 and 4 year olds and more recently helping them to ensure they meet the criteria to be able to access childcare funding for disadvantaged two year olds. The funding allocated to the opportunity centres for those children taking up the free entitlement to childcare is set at a higher rate than for other providers to recognise the additional needs of these children. The Council has good relationships with the centres and will continue to work with them. Each centre will receive core funding of £74,100 this year as agreed through the service level agreement.