

DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: SOCIAL WORK COMMITTEE - 15 DECEMBER 2003

REPORT ON: WITHDRAWAL OF SERVICE AT HAPPYHILLOCK CHILD CARE CENTRE

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK

REPORT NO: 809-2003

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 This report proposes the withdrawal of services from Happyhillock Childcare Centre from the end of June 2004, following a review of the service at Happyhillock Childcare Centre, which focussed upon cost efficiency and service priorities for Dundee's Child and Family Centres.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Social Work Committee:-

- 2.1 agrees to the withdrawal of childcare services at Happyhillock Childcare Centre from 30 June 2003 and to the reinvestment within Dundee's Child and Family Centres of the revenue savings achieved
- 2.2 instructs the Director of Social Work to formally apply to the Scottish Commission on the Regulation of Care for the cancellation of registration for Happyhillock Childcare Centre from 30 June 2003
- 2.3 instructs the Director of Social Work and Assistant Chief Executive (Management) to continue to consult employees at Happyhillock Childcare Centre and their Trade Unions regarding redeployment opportunities within the Social Work Department and, if appropriate, within other Council departments.
- 2.4 instruct the Director of Social Work to bring forward proposals for the future use of the building at Happyhillock Childcare Centre.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The withdrawal of childcare services at Happyhillock Childcare Centre and the redeployment of all relevant staff will result in revenue savings of £34,000 in 2003/04. It is intended to reinvest these funds to meet service priorities within Dundee's Child and Family Centre services.

4.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

The proposed retargeting of the resources from Happyhillock Childcare Centre to meet service priorities in Dundee's Child and Family Centres will strengthen the provision of family support services across Dundee and will promote social inclusion for many of the city's most vulnerable and in need children and families.

5.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

There are a range of accessible, good quality, alternative childcare services available to working and student families in a variety of locations in Dundee. The reinvestment of the resources currently used at Happyhillock Childcare Centre in the Child and Family Centre services across Dundee will ensure that priority is given in the targeting of available resources to the city's most vulnerable children and families.

6.0 BACKGROUND

6.1 The Social Work Department provides family support services to children in need aged 0-12 years and their families from nine Child and family Centres situated in various local communities across Dundee. A wide range of individual, family and group work services are provided with the main priority being to support those children in greatest need of care and protection.

6.2.1 Alongside other day-care providers, including the private sector, the Social Work Department also currently delivers a childcare service for working and student parents on low incomes at Happyhillock Childcare Centre. This service is costly to provide and has to take lower priority in the use of resources by the Social Work Department. A range of good quality alternatives are available from other providers for parents who require childcare to allow them to work or undertake training.

7.0 REVIEW OF SERVICE

7.1 Service priorities

7.1.1 The budgeted annual cost of the provision at Happyhillock Childcare Centre is £374,000 but this cost is only partially offset by fee income. In 2002/03, the year the service commenced, fee income recovery was well short of the target required and it is anticipated that this will also be the case in 2003/04. The experience of offering childcare services at Happyhillock Childcare Centre has shown that it is very difficult to achieve full occupancy rates because of the part time and short-term nature of many of the employment opportunities currently available in Dundee, particularly for women. It should be noted that the fee income target was revised downwards in 2003/04 due to the lower than anticipated initial uptake of places at Happyhillock Centre.

7.1.2 In addition it had been originally projected that a total of 40 places could be provided at Happyhillock Childcare Centre. However, the new National Care Standards issued by the Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care, who now inspect day-care provision in Scotland, have since changed the staff to child ratios from the previous requirement of 1:6 to 1:5 for 2-3 year olds. This has meant that the number of childcare places being offered at Happyhillock Childcare Centre has had to be reduced to 33.5, resulting in a further increased income shortfall.

- 7.1.3 The staff at Happyhillock Childcare Centre are, like all the other staff in Child and Family Centres, qualified as nursery nurses and this allows a high quality service to be offered in the Centre. However, the Happyhillock staff were also in receipt of the pay award recently agreed for Social Work Department employed nursery nurses. The staffing costs at Happyhillock Childcare Centre are therefore considerably higher than those incurred by private sector providers.
- 7.1.4 The difficulties in maintaining full occupancy, the reduction in the total number of places on offer and the rising cost of providing day-care services at Happyhillock Childcare Centre, has effectively resulted in a situation where the Social Work Department is now directing more resources at a lower priority area of service at the expense of those children in greatest need in Dundee.

7.2 Building Issues

- 7.2.1 The Childcare services at Happyhillock Childcare Centre are provided in a building which is now old and in need of substantial upgrading. The requirement for all day-care services to be inspected by the new Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care means that there is also now a need to ensure that the premises comply fully with the standards laid down for buildings. Despite some refurbishment work carried out in 2003, the building at Happyhillock Childcare Centre still falls far short of the required standards. Significant financial investment amounting to £186,000 would be necessary in order to continue providing childcare services in these premises.

8.0 PROPOSED WITHDRAWAL OF SERVICE AND RETARGETING OF RESOURCES

- 8.1 At present 70% of the cost of the childcare service being provided at Happyhillock Childcare Centre is met by the Council. Given the position described above in respect of occupancy levels, financial issues, national standards and the required building works and service priorities, it is proposed that the resources at Happyhillock Childcare Centre are used to support higher priorities in Child and Family Centre services.
- 8.2 It is proposed to retarget the resources currently allocated to Happyhillock Childcare Centre as shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1	£'000
Net Budget Available	247
Pay Award for Family Support Workers (Nursery Nurses)	127
Redeployment of Centre Manager	33
Redeployment of Centre Worker	30
Remaining Property Costs	23
Funds Available for Reinvestment in Service Priorities	34

- 8.3 This proposal will help to ensure that resources are targeted more effectively at children and families in greatest need and also that other service priorities, including Sure Start funded activities, continue to be met.

9.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR FAMILIES USING HAPPYHILLOCK CHILDCARE SERVICES

- 9.1 At present there are 41 children receiving a service at Happyhillock Childcare Centre, of whom 23 children attend on a part-time basis and 18 children attend full-time. Part-time provision can involve a number of placement options, ranging from 1 or 2 half-day sessions per week up to every morning or afternoon in a week.
- 9.2 Within the total group of children there are 15 who by April will have reached the age of 3, ie the age of eligibility for nursery school provision. Children who come into this category can therefore naturally move on to nursery school. This leaves 26 children for whom alternative under 3's day-care provision will be required.
- 9.3 The Social Work Department is currently in discussion with the Education Department to clarify what individual placement options will be available to children within Council run nurseries from January 2004. The staff at Happyhillock Childcare centre are also linking with the Childcare Information Service run by the Early Years and Childcare Team to obtain full and up-to-date information regarding the options available to parents for under 3's day-care provision within Dundee's private sector day nurseries.
- 9.4 Parents have now been given information about the childcare services available to them in each of their own areas. Every assistance is being made available to them to access appropriate alternative places for their children from one of the range of other suitable pre-school education and childcare resources which exist across the city.
- 9.5 Parents have been informed of the intention to withdraw childcare services at Happyhillock Childcare Centre on 30 June 2004. It is proposed that no new places will be offered at Happyhillock Childcare Centre from December 2003. It is not anticipated that accessing alternative childcare provision will present significant difficulties for parents and their children, given the notice period that is planned and the increasing level of private sector daycare provision within Dundee.

10.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR STAFF EMPLOYED AT HAPPYHILLOCK

Careful and sensitive consideration will be given to the effect of this proposal on employees at Happyhillock. The Director of Social Work and the Assistant Chief Executive (Management) will continue to consult employees and their Trade Unions regarding redeployment opportunities.

11.0 PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

The withdrawal of childcare services at Happyhillock Childcare Centre will require consideration to be given to options for the future use of the building. Although the total cost of upgrading the premises to the required standard for continued use as a childcare centre would be £186,000, the same level of work and financial investment may not be required for the property to be serviceable for other purposes.

12.0 CONSULTATION

This report has been the subject of consultation with the Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executives (Support Services and Finance) and the Assistant Chief Executive (Management). Initial consultation has also taken place with the Trade Unions involved, the staff group at Happyhillock Childcare Centre and other staff within Child and Family Centres.

13.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 13.1 No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential information), were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above report.

14.0 SIGNATURE

Alan G Baird
Director of Social Work

Date: 5 December 2003