

BEXLEY LABOUR GROUP PRESS RELEASE



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Reconfiguration of Bexley's Children Centres

Bexley Labour councillors have accused the borough's ruling Conservative group of making devastating cuts to critical children's services, with the potential to damage young lives.

The cash-strapped Tory council last night agreed a reconfiguration of Bexley's children centres which will result in nearly £400,000 being taken out of their budget. Labour believes the changes will inevitably impact on the delivery of early years services.

The council's own report admits that: "Almost all stakeholders and partners indicated that they were concerned that 6 FTE (full time equivalent) members of staff would be insufficient to support families across the borough' (p19 & p71).

Cllr Wendy Perfect, Labour opposition spokesperson for children services, said: "We agree with the council's stakeholders and partners, particularly as there is no evidence in the report that suggests that this new model will be successful in reaching more vulnerable families, just a lot of information that we already knew about the demographics of deprivation in Bexley.

"The report says that a continuous review of the service will be carried out by a partnership board and a parents' forum. These bodies have failed to carry out this work in Bexley in the past and there is nothing in the report to suggest that they will succeed in the future.

"We also note that Danson Youth Trust, the most popular children centre in Bexley - as highlighted by the fact that 82% of the responses to the second consultation had used this centre in the last two years - put forward four alternative models for consideration, which were rejected. That will be a big disappointment to those residents who use this well-liked children centre.

"Tory MP's Angela Leadsom's work, 'The best part of life: a vision for the 1,001 critical days', is the latest piece of research to confirm that the first two years of a child's life is the most important in terms of children's development and achieving better physical and emotional health outcomes. This cut is devastating for everyone involved and passionate about early years in Bexley, particularly as it comes at a time when the Coronavirus has had such a negative impact on the youngest in our society.

'If Bexley's early years partners and stakeholders are right and this new model doesn't achieve the suggested outcomes in the report with 6 FTE members of staff, then the cabinet member who supports this proposal should take responsibility in the future.

"That won't be much consolation for parents now but, as the waste collection strike demonstrated, our residents are fed up with this administration not taking responsibility for the poor decisions it makes."

-ENDS-

Notes to editors

For further information, please contact Councillor Stef Borella
Stefano.borella@bexley.gov.uk