

**Meeting of the Decision Session –  
Cabinet Member for Education,  
Children and Young People**

**10 July 2013**

Report of the Interim Director of Adults, Children and Education

**Alternative services to those currently provided by the Toy  
Bus**

**Summary**

1. The Toy Bus service was originally offered as a saving for the 2014/15 round of budget savings. With the need to also find in-year savings officers explored the possibility of ceasing the provision of this service within this financial year.

**Background**

2. The Toy Bus has been run by City of York Children's Centres since 2007 and prior to that by the Sure Start local programme (SSLP). Initial funding came from the SSLP budget (which was ring fenced), Street Support and the Early Years Toy Library Grant.
3. The government believes that children's centres should have a clear core purpose, focused on improving the outcomes for young children and their families, with a particular focus on the most disadvantaged families and in order to reduce inequalities in child development and school readiness. This focus is supported by improving parenting aspirations, self esteem and parenting skills with the aims of improving health and life chances for children and their families.
4. After the Early Years, Children's Centres and Extended Services restructure in 2010, the Toy Bus service was reduced from 25 hours per week face-to-face delivery to seven hours per week face-to-face delivery.

## Use of the Toy Bus

5. Children's Centres must focus on outcomes for children especially the most vulnerable. Over the past three years there has been a reduction in families registered with the children's centre using the toy lending service offered by the Toy Bus. There is little evidence that the service is reaching vulnerable families in any meaningful way.
  - The percentage of families using the Toy Bus service who were registered with the Children's Centres has dropped from 24.4% in 2010 to 7.7% in 2012.
  - Of the 66% of 0–4 year olds in the most disadvantaged areas that are registered at the Children's Centres only 7.5% of these used the Toy Bus.

## Running costs and financial implications

6. The Toy Bus employs two full time staff. This is a reduction of 2.5fte following the restructure in 2010.
7. The bus was originally stocked with approximately 929 toys at a cost of £22,000.
8. The budget in recent years has been:

<b>Year</b>	<b>Expenditure</b>
2009-10	£82,078
2010-11	£108,742
2011-12	£90,478
2012-13	£96,179

9. The Toy Bus is now seven years old and will need replacing in the near future. The cost of a replacement vehicle would be about £70,000-£80,000. Repair costs are increasing due to the age of the vehicle.

## Comparisons

10. In seeking to compare the service that we deliver with that of other local authorities, we have found the following variations but none providing just a mobile toy lending service funded by the LA:

- toy lending/library services offered from Children’s Centres (Surbiton, Harrow, Medlock Vale)
- mobile Children’s Centres (Swansea)
- sensory Playbus (Dorset)
- toy lending service offered through the mobile library (Haringey, Bulkington, North Lanarkshire)
- outsourced private toy bus provider (Oxfordshire).

### Consultation

11. City of York Children’s Centres believe in good quality and meaningful consultation ensuring that those involved have the chance to express their views.
12. The consultation exercise ran from 6 May 2013 until 31 May 2013; this was widely advertised in the centres, the Toy Bus and the website. The consultation asked for responses on two options with additional space for comments.

### Options

13. **Option 1:** Explore option that toys to be added to the Mobile Library which visits all areas of the city and is open to all families. Other services provided by the mobile library would also be available of course.
14. **Option 2:** Explore option that toys to be used to support parenting and play with the more vulnerable children in York by services who work in York including Children’s Centres.

### Public consultation – summary

15. A total of 351 people participated in the consultation.

Option 1 234 (66%)	Option 2 112 (31%)	Both options 5 (1%)
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16. Common themes raised in the additional comments were:
  - keep the Toy Bus and change times/amount charged (32)
  - toys should go to the Children’s Centres (20)
  - give toys to community groups/childminders (13)

- put toys in normal libraries (12)

17. The preferred option and recommendation is Option 1.

Option 1: City of York mobile library includes toys in their lending library	
Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• all families will be able to access the service as this is a mobile service</li> <li>• families will be able to access other services offered by the mobile library</li> <li>• Children's Centres will gift the remaining Toy Bus toys</li> <li>• no further expenditure would be required on a new vehicle</li> <li>• Toy Bus staff could be redeployed to vacancies in the Children's Centres to improve capacity there and support the process of reaching vulnerable families</li> <li>• this option is supported by the consultation process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• additional staff (voluntary) would be needed by the mobile library to ensure the washing of toys, checking toy bags contain the correct toys and that they are not broken, sourcing and buying replacement toys, logging toys in and out</li> <li>• funding to replenish the stocks still required</li> <li>• administration of membership and toy lending service still needed</li> </ul>

Option 2: The toys are divided between services that deliver services for the most vulnerable families	
Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• effective use of resource to support the delivery of services to the most vulnerable families</li> <li>• reduce expenditure for the council to equip the Contact Centre</li> <li>• support voluntary organisations to deliver services within the city</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• loss of toy lending library facility to universal services</li> <li>• no additional funding from the council to replace stock</li> <li>• not supported by the consultation process</li> </ul>

## **Council Plan**

18. Contributes to the two Council Plan priorities of Building Strong Communities and Protecting Vulnerable People.

## **Implications**

### **Financial**

19. Allows the proposed savings identified in the 2014-2015 budget to be met earlier so that in-year savings for 2013-2014 can be achieved.

### **HR**

20. This allows the redeployment of two FTE staff currently employed on the Toy Bus to fill vacancies at the centres. Capacity is currently compromised at the Children's Centres whilst the vacancies stay unfilled. No compulsory redundancies would be required.

### **Equalities**

21. The toy lending service would be available to a larger group of residents as the mobile library stops in more locations. Other services ie lending of books would be available to families therefore widening access.

### **Information Technology**

22. There would be no requirement to invest in a barcode logging system.

### **Property**

23. The use of the depot will no longer be required for the parking of the Toy Bus.

### **Other implications**

24. There are no specific Legal or Crime and Disorder implications arising at this time. The service will still be provided to the current users albeit in a different vehicle.

## **Risk Management**

25. Service risks can be mitigated by providing an alternative service and ensuring communication is robust with all stakeholders. The Children's Centre works successfully in partnership with many agencies already and is confident that the handover of the "lending of toys" part of its service, can be successfully managed to limit disruption to users.

## **Recommendations**

26. The Cabinet Member is asked to approve Option 1: City of York mobile library includes the Children's Centres toys in their lending library.

### *Reason:*

- *all families will be able to access the service through the mobile library which will also offer the services of a experienced colleagues (eg in story-telling)as well as opening up opportunities for families to access other services from the mobile library*
  - *Children's Centres will gift the remaining Toy Bus toys to the Library Service*
  - *no further expenditure would be required on a new vehicle*
  - *Toy Bus staff could be redeployed to existing vacancies in the Children's Centres to improve capacity there and support the process of reaching vulnerable families.*
27. This option is supported by the consultation process and allows the service to make the necessary budget savings in this financial year.
28. If approved by the Cabinet Member the Toy Bus would cease at the end of the summer term as it is not in use in the summer holidays anyway.

## Contact details

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