

CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL

23 FEBRUARY 2023

DEPUTATION REQUESTS

Subject	Deputation
Council Budget	3.1 NHS Lothian/ Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (written submission attached) 3.2 EIS Edinburgh Local Association 3.3 Edinburgh TUC 3.4 UNISON 3.5 Trinity Primary School Parent Council (written submission attached) 3.6 Unite CEC Branch

Edinburgh City Council's Contract for Speech and Language Therapy

NHS Lothian and City of Edinburgh Council have worked in partnership for over 25 years to deliver a needs-led, child-centered Speech and Language Therapy Service. The current revenue saving proposal suggests cutting significant funding for children and young people's SLT within Education in Edinburgh. NHS Lothian receives funding from CEC to deliver a co-produced service, where jointly agreed goals and priorities are regularly reviewed. I do not believe these cuts take into account the long-term implications of reducing this service, particularly for children from less advantaged backgrounds, and have been based on inaccurate information.

This decision

1. will lead to poorer attainment for children.
2. would deepen poverty and inequality in the city.
3. will lead to poorer wellbeing and mental health for children.
4. would undermine the human rights of children with communication needs within education settings.
5. would undo decades of progress and cause untold damage to partnership working.
6. will cost the Council more money in support services and future benefits in the long term.

Level of Need in Edinburgh

19,960 children and young people have predicted speech language and communication needs within Edinburgh City. This is the pre pandemic figure.

This is the wrong service to cut at the wrong time. Since the start of the pandemic, [Teachers](#) are reporting alarming numbers of children coming to school with minimal spoken language. Almost 90% of Early Years Practitioners [report](#) that they have seen an increase in the numbers and complexity of children with communication needs in Scotland. Public Health Scotland [research](#) shows a very significant increase in need as reported from health visitors. 7-10% of children have specific communication needs and upwards of 50% of children from areas of poverty come to school without adequate spoken language skills for learning. SLT support is required across the system.

The communication needs of children and young people is a joint responsibility because spoken language is the foundation of learning, wellbeing, and future life chances for all children.

Below are comments on specific aspects of the proposal as set out in the Revenue Budget Framework 2023/27 (Revenue savings proposals are indicated in italics).

Delivering for the most vulnerable children

“We propose a shift towards more focus on complex needs in the provision of the Speech and Language Therapy additionally funded by the City of Edinburgh Council through a service level agreement with the NHS. The aim of the suggested change to the service delivery is to target the most vulnerable children in our society and ensure that they have every opportunity to improve their communication skills and continue to reduce any inequalities in line with the Local Authority’s Education statutory requirement.”

We would consider this approach to be short-sighted. The definition of who are the most vulnerable children needs some clarity. While children attending special settings are undoubtedly in need of our service, some are less vulnerable in terms of their communication by the very fact that they are in a specialist provision. The environment has already been adapted to suit their needs and the staff have specialist knowledge and training allowing them to support these children appropriately. We would argue that some children with additional support needs within mainstream schools are even more vulnerable. Not supporting these children appropriately jeopardises the goal of inclusion.

“Families most in need will be prioritised for targeted support, shifting the balance of resources to benefit the most vulnerable.”

This decision would mean almost all speech and language therapy would take place within NHS clinics. As previously stated, a very high percentages of families from areas of deprivation do not attend clinic appointments. The last thing we need is for more children with communication difficulties to fall through the cracks because of barriers to access, which is not currently the case when speech and language therapy support is available in schools.

Temporary Pupil Equity Funding

“(We will) Review potential for crossover into PEF funding duplication leading to: double accounting and, potentially, double invoicing for same work”

This is inaccurate and misleading. There is currently only one school using PEF funding to purchase SLT. This equates to 2 days per week in a school in one of Edinburgh’s most deprived areas. The work done under PEF contracts is clearly set out. It is targeted at improving attainment. There is no overlap with either what is provided by Health, or the SLA paid for by Education. The type of work carried out primarily supports literacy and numeracy development. This is done by ensuring that the underpinnings of speech, language, listening and phonology skills are supported within the curriculum. There is no double invoicing. This work supports the education authority’s desire to reduce inequalities and close the attainment gap for many children who will never be specifically referred to speech and language therapy.

It should also be noted that this funding is only available on a short-term basis and does not allow us to recruit and retain staff to carry out the work. The Council cannot withdraw funding from speech and language therapy on the assumption that this gap can be filled by temporary PEF funding streams.

Future cost to the Council

“Current NHS allocation of 15 Speech and Language Therapists in post would reduce which may create waiting list for SLT support - however service delivery will be reviewed on an ongoing basis and there would be potential to increase internal provision to address this issue if required, although this would reduce the level of the saving delivered.”

Cutting speech and language therapy services in the way proposed will cost the Council more in the long run. Having good spoken language is central to children’s literacy, numeracy, and social skills their mental health and academic attainment, as well as their longer-term life outcomes. With a reduced number of SLTs and longer waiting lists, children won’t get the early support they need to succeed. In turn, we will see other services impacted – for instance, at least 60% of young people who come into contact with the justice system and 88% of long-term unemployed young men have speech, language or communication difficulties.

Collaboration and partnership working

Children’s speech and language therapy service delivery is built on years of relationships formed with colleagues in early years and education settings to ensure that children get support in the environment they are most familiar and comfortable with. SLTs will not be able to deliver support in the same way if these cuts are implemented. During the first 6 months of 2022-23 the Speech and Language Therapy Service has already responded to 222 new requests for assistance from Education, supported 797 different children and young people in Edinburgh and provided 6318 hours of support under the current contract.

I hope this statement plus the attached information sheets help inform your thinking when you are considering the budget proposals put in front of you. The factsheet on developmental language disorder (DLD) describes our service for just one client group but serves as a good example. I plan to attend the Council meeting on 23rd February as part of a deputation and will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

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Trinity Primary School Parent Council

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21 February 2023

Deputation regarding the draft budget proposals

We are writing to you to express our concerns about the proposals set out in the City of Edinburgh Council's draft budget, which will result in significant cuts to the Education and Children's Services budget.

The challenges facing society today are well documented. We are living in an era of low economic productivity and extensive global competition, with an ageing population that will require increasing levels of support to sustain and care for it. In the meantime, one in four children lives in poverty, more and more children are presenting with mental health issues and challenging behaviours, and inequality in experience and attainment continues to slow progress. The recruitment and retention of teachers and school staff is at an all-time low. Children have missed considerable time in the classroom over the past three years.

In order to address these issues, we need to be investing in education. Schools are supposed to be the places that support learners and their families, overcome differences in experience, aspiration and opportunity and equip all learners with the knowledge and skills that they need to become productive members of society who, through their endeavours, character and taxes, will support others. We cannot achieve this if the schools are not properly resourced.

Against this background we wholly oppose the proposed cuts to education and children's services outlined in your budget. School budgets are already stretched and inadequate for the services you expect them to deliver and children are not currently getting the support they need, with impacts being felt by everyone in the classroom. To cut budgets further would result in a failure to Get It Right For *Any* Child and have short- and long-term consequences that will end up costing us all more money to put right.

We know that you agree with us that education is important to your constituents, which is why so many of you placed it prominently on your election campaign material.

These proposals have been developed with no meaningful consultation with service users (children and their families) or, to the best of our knowledge, with school teaching staff. Those of you who attend our meetings will be aware of the existing pressures on school budgets. Further cuts will, in our view, render the service unfit for purpose. You will be letting our city - and our children - down.

We ask you to reflect on the proposals, and to:

1. Agree that you will do everything in your powers to ensure that the Council Gets It Right For Every Child. Ideally this will mean increasing funding from current levels to adequately deliver the service that is required, and certainly not imposing further cuts.
2. Consider whether there are other areas of council spending where cuts would have a smaller economic or social impact than in education, and prioritise these. Not all cuts in expenditure are equal in impact and to target a service that is time-limited and delivering a universal human right will do considerable harm.
3. Consider options to raise additional revenue, for example by further increasing Council Tax and/or by representing our concerns to the Scottish Government to ask for more resources.
4. Pause any proposals to allow for proper consultation with parents and, fundamentally, with your own teaching and support staff.

In the light of Point 3 above we have also written to our MSPs and to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills in the Scottish Government. The First Minister asked us to judge you all on education; be assured that that is exactly what we are doing.

We ask all of you to work together to resolve this situation, and to take ideas to address it from all political parties. As a group of parents with different political views and priorities please know that we will consider you all more favourably if you cooperate rather than descend into party politics. We would be delighted to engage in further dialogue if that would be useful.

Thank you for your time and support.

Helen Duncan, Chair

Trinity Primary School Parent Council