

Oxford Place Children's Centre

A sub-committee of the Oxford Place Children's Centre met on 6th April 2016 to consider the future of the Oxford Place Children's Centre.

The Mission Statement

The Oxford Place Children's Centre seeks to provide care in a loving and safe environment for children whose parents /carers are occupied in the Leeds Magistrates and Combined Courts, or who are attending court-ordered or other rehabilitation, or who are working voluntarily within the Oxford Place Centre.

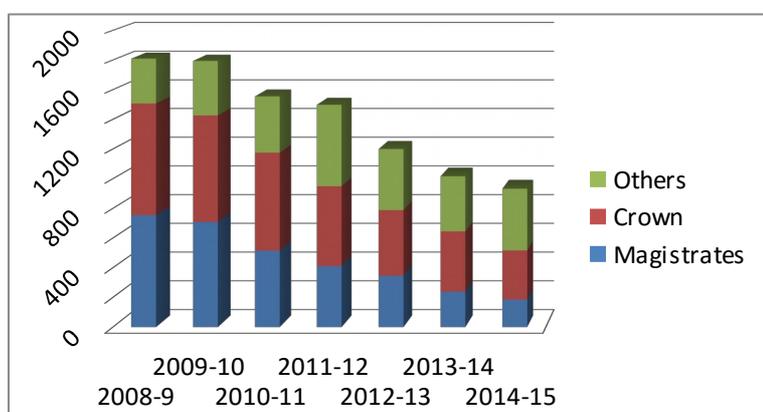
Background

The Oxford Place Children's Centre was opened in May 1983. The Centre came about following the refurbishment of the Oxford Place Centre in 1979 and a vision to serve the city centre community. Having heard of a Courts childcare project run by Birmingham Central Hall, the Women's Fellowship in the District (now MWiB) worked with the Council, Social Services, Probation Services and voluntary agencies, along with Oxford Place to set up the crèche.

After 33 years of running the project, during which many thousands of children have been cared for in a loving, caring environment by professional staff supported by many hundreds of faithful volunteers from churches within the Leeds District, circumstances have changed and the demand for the service has declined. It has also become much harder to find the funding for the Centre and so, after much thought and prayer, we have decided to recommend that the Centre should close next year.

Issues Facing the Children's Centre in 2016

The number of children coming to the Centre has declined significantly over the years (see graph). There are a number of reasons for this decline. The Courts are using more technology and if someone is already in custody a video link is often used rather than bringing the defendant to the Courts. If there is no Court appearance, then there is no need for childcare.

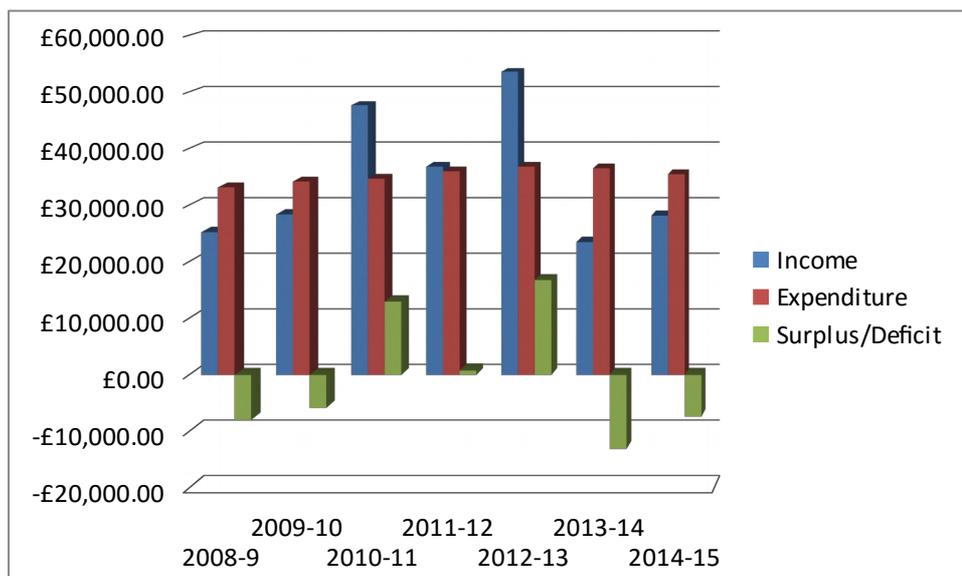


A second major reason for the decline in children attending is changes in legislation that mean that vulnerable children over two years of age are already provided with free childcare, so have no need to use the Oxford Place Children's Centre.

Over the years, the balance between the children whose parents have a direct link with Court procedures and those who may be attending, for example ESOL training before attending asylum applications, or training from an agency within Oxford Place has moved away from those attending Court. In 2014/15 nearly 45% of the children's parent's/carers were not in one of the Courts.

Finding funding for this project has been a constant battle as about 90-95% of its expenditure is on core costs, i.e. staff and accommodation, which are unpopular with grant-givers, who prefer to fund project activity.

MWiB groups and churches have been incredibly generous over the decades, but with numerical decline in membership their contributions have fallen. There have been occasional one-off fundraising efforts, which have extended the project. Leeds City Council have provided a grant for many years, but the amount has remained the same for ten years. The District Advanced Fund has also been generous in its support for this project.



Finding volunteers to support the work of the Children’s Centre has become increasingly problematic. Many of the current volunteers are well over retirement age and covering holiday periods or times of sickness is difficult. Staff are also hesitant to approach volunteers at short notice when someone is unable to meet their commitment, as there is the real possibility that no children will come to the Centre that day.

Proposal to Shut the Centre from Spring 2017

Having considered the financial situation and the numbers of children attending the Centre, the sub-committee felt that it would be wrong to approach the District Advanced Fund for another three year grant (its current stream finished in 2016/17) knowing that Leeds City Council’s grant is uncertain beyond March 2017 and the search for other funding streams has proved fruitless. The Children’s Centre is currently looking at another £5,000 deficit this financial year.

The Children’s Centre currently has enough reserves/grant income to run until August 2017 and pay the staff redundancy (Julie Commons, Manager started 1992, Anne Grimes 2006).

The closure of the Children’s Centre would free up resources for other missional activities.

It is, therefore, proposed that the Oxford Place Children’s Centre closes in the Spring of 2017 with a celebration of its work for all those who have worked or volunteered there.

Risks attached to this proposal

- Vulnerable children having no care whilst their parents are in Court. Meetings will be set up with Court managers to give them notice of this proposal.
- Staff finding new employment in the interim and the Oxford Place Children Centre being unable to meet it contractual agreement with Leeds City Council. A meeting has been arranged with the contract manager to discuss this implication.
- Loss of income for the Oxford Place Centre