



Registered Address:

Unit 107i, North East BIC, Wearfield, Sunderland Enterprise Park, Sunderland SR5 2TA

Email: info@activefamiliesne.co.uk • www.activefamiliesne.co.uk

Registered Company Number: 11025681

An open letter to Councillor Michael Butler and Councillor Kelly Chequer

Dear Councillor Butler and Councillor Chequer,

We are writing to you publicly, as representatives of the Southwick community you were elected to serve, because our repeated attempts to reach you privately have been met with complete silence.

As you will be aware, Active Families North East successfully completed a fair and open tendering process for the lease of Southwick Community Centre. Following that process, we were formally notified that our bid had been successful. On the basis of that decision, we secured over £500,000 of external investment to transform a building that has sat empty for more than a year into a Wellbeing Hub, community café, soft play facility, and affordable health and wellbeing services, all co-designed through consultation directly with Southwick residents.

That process has since been paused. For months, no explanation was given and no communication was offered. It was only through a Freedom of Information request that we, and the public, learned the truth: that it was Southwick councillors who intervened to

pause the lease, citing policy concerns and requesting the 'official line' to deliver back to us.

The FOI revealed that a Southwick-only stipulation had been put forward by Councillors as grounds to retender the process entirely. We must address this directly, because it does not stand up to scrutiny.

The tender process already accounted for local connections. Organisations based in central Southwick were awarded additional points as part of the scoring criteria, a weighting that was built into the process from the outset. Active Families North East won that process fairly, despite that weighting being applied.

Furthermore, Active Families North East operates from a Southwick postcode. We are a Southwick organisation. The fact that our classes, programmes, and hub activities are delivered across the wider Sunderland area is not a disqualification, it is a demonstration of our reach, our capacity, and our commitment to the communities we serve. Penalising an organisation for doing more, not less, for the people of this city would be difficult to justify to anyone.

To seek to retender on these grounds, after a process that was fairly run, transparently scored, and formally concluded, raises serious questions about the integrity of the decision-making process and the motivations behind it. Questions that, to date, neither of you has been willing to answer.

We have attended Sunderland City Council meetings and raised this matter publicly. On each occasion, neither of you chose to speak to this issue, advocate for your constituents, or offer any clarity to the residents from Southwick and beyond who are watching and waiting for answers. That silence, in a public forum, on a matter of

significant community concern on a building in which you previously sat on the management committee, is, in our view, a failure of the responsibilities you hold.

That silence has extended further still. Over 2,000 people have signed our public petition. Our campaign has been covered across local media. Residents have come forward in their droves to share their stories and their support. This is not a quiet or private concern, it is a very public, very visible cry from a community and our supporters from the wider region that feel let down. And yet, throughout all of it, neither of you has seen fit to acknowledge it, engage with it, or speak up. Not once.

The people of Southwick told us what they need during our extensive consultation process. They need somewhere for their children to play. They need mental health and wellbeing support. They need activities for elderly residents, for isolated individuals. They need a warm and affordable space where residents can come together. That building could be all of those things, and it is currently none of them.

We are calling on you both, publicly and on the record, to:

1. Respond to this letter - publicly and within seven days.
2. Explain your intervention to pause the lease process and your basis for seeking a retender.
3. Acknowledge that the tender process already included a local weighting and that Active Families North East is a Southwick-based organisation.
4. Acknowledge the 2,000+ residents who have signed this petition and the community voices that have gone unanswered.
5. Commit to advocating openly for Southwick Community Centre to be reopened without further delay.

6. Use your position to demand that Sunderland City Council honour the original tender outcome.


The community is watching, and we will not stop until Southwick gets the community space it was promised.

Yours sincerely,



Amy Swan & Kelly Brougham
Co-Founder & Directors Active Families North East CIC

On behalf of the Stand with Southwick campaign and over 2,000 petition signatories

 www.change.org/p/sign-share-stand-with-southwick

This letter is published openly and in full. The information regarding the pausing of the lease process was obtained via a Freedom of Information request. We welcome a public response from Councillor Butler and Councillor Chequer and will share any reply received, or any absence of reply, with the Southwick community.