

# Public Consultation

## Sensory Impairment Service Review

### 1. Summary

The SEN Code of Practice 2014 requires that all local authorities should regularly monitor their structures and arrangements to ensure that they continue to be effective and deliver positive outcomes. This is especially necessary at times when there is increasing pressure on resources. Whenever any changes are proposed it is best practice to undergo a process of consultation with all stakeholders including staff, service users and their families and other local organisations.

### 2. Background/Current Situation

The NCC Sensory Impairment Service delivers Northamptonshire's responsibilities for children and young people with a sensory impairment. The Service currently employs 79 staff (63.48 full time equivalent), and has an overall service budget of £2.5 million, which is funded by the Designated Schools Grant (DSG).

Among the staff are specialist teachers who assess children's needs, undertake direct teaching with children and offer advice and training to schools. Access and Communication Workers (ACSWs) provide day to day support to children in schools. Resource Supervisors adapt curriculum resources and IT Technicians supply and maintain specialist technical and IT equipment. There is also provision for specialist Braille, British Sign Language (BSL) and mobility teaching and support. The service has a business and office manager, who manages the budget, databases and admin systems. The senior management is made up of a Head of Service and two deputies, one of whom is an Educational Audiologist and one of whom is the Early Years lead.

All of these are centrally employed although ACSWs, for example, are normally deployed in schools working alongside specific children on a day to day basis.

### 3. Review Outcomes

The review has identified that the majority of what the Service currently does should be maintained or improved and developed. Core activities from the Service would include:

- Responding to notifications from Health, schools and other involved professionals where a child is under investigation or has a confirmed diagnosis of sensory impairment
- New born screening and Early Years intervention for early years settings
- Specialist teacher support for children who use tactile literacy mediums of Braille and for those who sign.
- Provision of specialist aids and equipment for children and young people at band 1 to 3 of the NatSIP framework including children who are Braille and BSL users
- Local Offer in place with SEN descriptors for children with a sensory impairment
- Quality Assurance for schools in partnership with other LA colleagues
- Training for schools on deaf/HI/VI awareness

- Educational audiology and associated technician input
- Mobility, orientation and independent living skills training
- The provision of resources in alternative formats including Braille and modified enlarged print and resource production training to schools.
- Support to schools for the recruitment and initial training of new staff

A range of options have been considered to formulate this proposal, based on ideas borne out of national and local research, including a scrutiny of the statutory duties of LAs, desk top exercises and early engagement meetings with staff, parents, and voluntary organisations. A formal staff consultation has also been undertaken.

There are 2 main issues on which your views are being sought.

### **1. ACSW Support Staff**

The proposed new staffing structure would not include all of the current Access and Communication Support Worker (ACSW) posts. All staff in these roles have been placed at risk of redundancy as part of this consultation. As part of this proposal, NCC will look to support staff at risk in terms of alternative employment in schools and will work closely with the leadership of schools involved to facilitate this, wherever possible.

The exception to this is that there would be 4 FTE posts retained centrally which would have a focus on Early Years support and cover visual impairment and hearing impairment.

The aspiration is that children in schools would continue to receive the high quality specialist support that they require and schools would be provided with additional designated funding to help pay for this.

If specialist support assistants were to be employed directly by schools, NCC could save around £835,000 p.a., however by schools taking on this responsibility for employing their own support staff directly there would need to be an increase of high needs funding of up to £14,000 per pupil. The net result of this proposal is that there would be saving to DSG of approximately £180,000 per annum, which has been identified by a reduction in managerial and administrative costs.

### **2. Where the Service sits within NCC organisation**

The Service will remain a specialist teaching, advisory and training service. The question is where this best sits within the NCC organisation. Based upon existing practice in other areas and feedback from staff consultation, it seems that there are 2 potential options:

a) A central service based at NCC premises and line managed through the Assistant Director for Vulnerable Learners within the County Council, or

b) Managed through an NCC maintained school – A school enters into an agreement whereby the Sensory Impairment Service becomes part of its structure; benefitting from the teacher standards, its data capture, reporting and evaluation procedures, continuous professional development (CPD) and governance structure. The team would have a common base and somewhere to house its equipment. This may be on a site local to the school.

## 4. Further Recommendations

A number of further recommendations have also been made and we would welcome any comments that you have on these.

- That there remains a focus on the early years and building the independence and resilience of children and young people, i.e. through the continued development of specialist IT software and hardware where possible and through the mobility officer post.
- That the funding for sensory support for children and young people becomes consistent with other SEN support to schools, reflects the additional cost of specialist support staff and with its own Early Years support system, directly via the High Needs funding process.
- That the Service develop an income generating model where schools can choose to purchase services, which would be additional to the core services outlined previously. It is expected that these core services would continue to be provided without charge for pupils assessed at band 1 to 3 of the NatSIP criteria.
- That the Service improve and extend their training and advice offer to schools, to include support for recruitment of specialist support assistants.
- That the Service improve and extend the Quality Assurance and monitoring of schools, working in partnership with the NCC School Improvement colleagues.
- That the senior leader and all teachers in the Service build links with identified 'best practice beacon' schools in order to keep up to date with pedagogy and practices, including systems for recording and analysing performance information and impact measurement.

These recommendations would

- enable the LA to carry out its statutory duties
- be consistent with other areas nationally
- take account of the NatSIP guidance

## 5. Risks

With the changes as outlined above risks may be

- that schools may not see the sensory impairment of children as a high need, within their school population and may not direct sufficient funding towards the support for these pupils
- that schools do not take note of the advice or training that they will require for this cohort of pupils

Without the changes proposed above the risks may be

- Children may not always receive the level of support required due to staff shortages and a lack of flexibility within the current system.
- Staff do not have the opportunity to benefit from the training and development available in schools.
- that inconsistencies will continue across the county in terms of funding for SEN and disabilities

- that inconsistencies of the current funding model will continue within the service itself
- that professional development of teachers will not be aligned to the most up to date pedagogy and practices with regards to outcomes for children and impact measurement
- that schools will not exercise the requirements of the SEN Code of Practice and therefore their responsibilities for the management of SEN, its funding and therefore the recruitment of their own support staff
- that the required reduction in the overall budget for the SEN High Needs block will not be made.

## 6. Timeline

- 19<sup>th</sup> January – 24<sup>th</sup> March 2017: Staff consultation
- 4<sup>th</sup> April – 1<sup>st</sup> May 2017: Public consultation
- 1<sup>st</sup> September 2017: implementation date for new structure