

Development of the Disabled Children's Service

Report of the Chief Officer Children's Services

Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Cabinet (and confirmation under the provisions of the Council's Constitution) before taking effect.

1. Background/Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to examine plans to re-focus the Disabled Children's Service (DCS) towards building independence, choice and control that will better support services users and their families into adulthood.

Nationally and locally it is recognised that we need to alter the ways in which the needs of disabled children are met - to do so via services that are part of, or closer to, the communities in which the children live. Such services need to be accessible to families and offer increased choice and self-determination, and need to be safe and fit for purpose.

Our focus is to:

- Rebalance residential short breaks and community short breaks, in line with the SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) strategy which has been co-designed with parent carers with contributions from children and young people and which increases the focus both on aspirations for children and raised carer support
- Review the impact of Personal Budgets
- Review eligibility criteria to ensure the right response to the right families at the right time
- Emphasise inclusion in mainstream, rather than over-relying on separate specialist provision

The Lenehan Review (2017) challenges decision makers at both national and local levels to consider how children's needs can be met in more inclusive and enabling ways which lead to better outcomes for children, who in turn achieve more independence in fulfilling adult lives (the review focussed particularly on those children with learning disabilities and autism or mental health difficulties).

The Independent full service review of Children's Services carried out in May 2017 noted the need to re-design services and review practice and procedures within DCS. The review found significant areas of strength within the DCS on the whole, and also identified some areas for improvement. Both the recommendations from this review and the strategic direction set out in the SEND Strategy have informed the programme of work in DCS.

This programme also delivers against joint work with Adults Services and Health in the delivery of an integrated offer for children, focusing on Early Help and Preparation for Adulthood. Collaboration with other project leads is ensuring that this project does not duplicate effort already being made in other projects and plans, but rather draws on that expertise.

2. Choice and Control

Through the delivery of our SEND Strategy we have been focusing on how to achieve flexibility in service delivery. We have been working together with the CCG on the implementation of Integrated Personal Budgets (IPB) and we have been expanding Direct Payments and making use of joint funding arrangements alongside Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). We have offered personal budgets to purchase services to meet children's broader care and education needs. This is being set up with a pilot group of families. A Personal Budget is a ring-fenced amount of resource allocated to a family but can be commissioned on their behalf. However, it gives families greater choice and control over how their children's needs are met. This is planned to encompass a range of service options and will be reviewed to gain an understanding of the impact for children in terms of measurable outcomes, but also an insight into satisfaction levels for children and families.

Devon has a history of offering support to disabled children through specialist provision such as designated clubs and play-schemes. One of our aims is to encourage mainstream providers to broaden their accessibility so that disabled children can safely access and gain from the same resources as their neighbours. We are utilising information gathered from families to identify gaps in provision by type and by locality so that we can target deficits.

3. Demand and meeting need

DCS has seen a year on year increase in children and families accessing the service, both in terms of numbers and complexity of children's needs. The service works with families where there are needs at Child in Need, Child Protection and Child in Care levels, through four locality social work teams and one county wide Advice and Support Team.

DCS works with more than 1,300 disabled children who live across the wider Devon area. Children in receipt of services are mostly over 7 years old, although some disabled children who have a very high level of need, access services from birth or in infancy/early childhood. A direct payment is made to 1058 families and allows them to purchase tailored support for their children, through organisations, services and family members or other individuals.

Some of our short breaks offer to families has resources committed in long term contracts for residential short break provision, which affords families very little choice or control. Families and children are choosing residential short breaks less and less and looking for choice in more flexible community based packages. We reviewed our commissioning intentions in 2016 and have been making changes to contracts in line with need. This programme sets out the next steps in that plan. We are ensuring that continuity of care is prioritised where appropriate and that there are a range of services that can meet the different needs of children.

To begin to facilitate change, all DCS Community Care Workers have undertaken 'different conversations' training to enable more creative and far reaching conversations with families about support for children.

The service has been managing back a significant projected 17/18 overspend of £1.14M at month 8, mainly attributed to the provision of Short Breaks and Direct Payments. Financial pressures have now stabilised and management actions to recover the overspend have begun, resulting in a recovery of more than £300K in month 9.

We are working with partners through joint funding agreements to consider the children accessing services and to ensure that we maximise the use of our shared resources where shared funding is appropriate.

4. Eligibility

We intend to review our eligibility criteria to ensure that the right response is given to families at the point of initially requiring an assessment and service, but also to increase the continuity of service delivery to achieve successful transition to adult services. At present there are differences in access to services for children, and subsequent access as an adult, which can result in dramatic changes in provision for young people once they leave full time education. Making the changes involves working with colleagues in Adult Services and others to draw up proposals to address the current inconsistency of eligibility criteria – examples could include changes to short break provision or where children have been receiving a service from CAMHS but are not eligible for mental health services as young adults. A timeline for consulting with families and relevant stakeholders is being devised. We are also taking learning from good and outstanding local authorities with respect to setting and application of eligibility criteria. This will assist us in benchmarking our practice to ensure that the right services are being arranged for the right children, in the right way and at the right time.

A purposeful systems approach is being used to effect change in ‘transition to adulthood’, which involves developing a system to work in a completely novel way with small numbers of young people and then incrementally increasing the cohort as learning embeds. The aim is to smooth the transition between children and adult services and ensure the needs of the young person are well met.

5. Development Plan

We are ambitious to develop our service, to be fully fit for purpose, enabling all children to achieve the greatest level of independence possible for them whilst offering opportunities for choice for families in how they meet their children’s needs. We are also mindful of offering value for money through ensuring access to reliable services that are provided in ways which both engage children and meet statutory obligations.

The Development Plan for DCS has 5 current work packages, with key objectives outlined below. However, the scope of the plan will remain flexible and adaptable to change as needs and priorities dictate. This will ensure that work remains strategically aligned with other key stakeholder groups such as the Children and Families Partnership and SEND Improvement Board.

The work streams are comprehensive to include multi-agency aspirations and will need to achieve partner buy in to be successful; the initial priority has been DCC internal improvements such as management action with respect to the budget, but are part of a wider programme to cover

- **Assessment & Planning** – to ensure that we identify needs, assess risks and develop plans that will ensure best outcomes for disabled children and young people as they develop independence into adulthood.
- **Remodelling Short Breaks** – In partnership with CCG’s reduce underused contracts for residential short breaks and therefore refocus resources to create more options for community based short breaks.
- **Ensure that families have access to a sufficient range of services locally that they can buy themselves through Direct Payments and increase choice and control through Personal Budgets.** . We are seeking to rebalance residential short breaks (which have been the traditional method of delivering support to families) with community based options that support and encourage richer family life.

- **Locality Working** – to integrate the DSC social work teams into locality settings (including strengthening links with partners including early help colleagues) so that the needs of disabled children and young people are assessed and met through local provision which promotes meaningful community involvement.
- **Disabled Children's Partnerships and Governance** - to develop governance arrangements and communication plans ensure that key messages across the whole of disabled children's services are consistent and coherent with overall partnership strategies and ensure that families have access to good information about partnership arrangements and how these will support their children.
- **Integrated Finance** – to optimise use of all available resources to meet the needs of disabled children through a more cohesive multiagency approach, including exploration of the potential for pooled budgets.

The main focus of our work to date has been to taking management action to investigate and stabilise the budget overspend, work to improve transition to adult services and developing personal budgets.

A Preparing for Adulthood (PfA) Team has been set up, with a recently appointed manager and currently four PfA co-ordinators working across the county with young people in transition. Information is passed to the team from education colleagues, flagging up those young people who are reaching the age to transfer to adult services. Additional resource and support from the PfA team can then be offered to the young people and their families to co-ordinate best practice in promoting independence skills for the young person and smooth transfer or service.

By Spring 2018 we will complete an Equalities Impact Assessment to ensure that we take into account the implications of every aspect of the work. In tandem with this the reviewed Eligibility Criteria will be circulated for agreed consultation, and once signed off will be published.

6. Involvement of children, families and partner agencies

Consultation with children and families is planned across the respective work streams as relevant and in appropriate formats which disabled children can access. The 'different conversations' training for DCS staff is to facilitate more open conversations with families about possible options to meet their children's needs, and this includes greater transparency regarding use of resources and respective costs of services to enable more informed choice.

We plan to target the consultation and utilise wherever possible engage with established groups and communication routes to access families (for example through schools, support groups and networks).

Careful coordination and robust communication across all identified partner agencies will be put in place to ensure priorities and aims are aligned and that messages to families are consistent. This will be achieved through well-structured and effective governance arrangements.

Electoral Divisions: All

Cabinet Member for Children, Schools and Skills: Councillor James McInnes
Chief Officer for Children's Services: Jo Olsson

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972: LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

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