

Shared Services Joint Committee Wednesday 17th August 2022

Report Title	Sensory Impairment Service (in Education) Disaggregation – Change to Approach
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Executive Member	Cllr Scott Edwards, Executive Member for Children, Families, Education and Skills, NNC Cllr Fiona Baker, Portfolio Holder for Children, Families and Education, WNC

Key Decision	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for call-in by Scrutiny?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there public sector equality duty implications?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information (whether in appendices or not)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Applicable paragraph number/s for exemption from publication under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972	

Contributors/Checkers/Approvers

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List of Appendices

None

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To seek approval for a revised delivery model for the disaggregation of the hosted Sensory Impairment Service, Education (Children’s Services), with work to commence immediately to finalise the legal and financial agreements that will underpin this new approach.

- 1.2 To seek approval to amend the originally planned schedule of disaggregation to reflect this proposal and revise the Inter Authority Agreement accordingly. This is to ensure a safe and resilient service with the least amount of risk to service users.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The Sensory Impairment Service (SIS) is hosted by North Northamptonshire Council and provides services across both North and West Northamptonshire. The hosted arrangement is governed and monitored by the Inter Authority Agreement (IAA) between both councils and is made up of 58 employees.
- 2.2 The Sensory Impairment Service aims to raise the aspirations and improve the outcomes of children and young people (CYP) with hearing/ vision impairment (ages 0-19yrs) by identifying and meeting their needs at an early stage and positively impacting on their progress within educational settings and the home. The service contributes to the multi-agency planning for CYP with Special Educational Needs or Disability (SEND). This specialist service aims to improve self-esteem and to promote independence and ensure broad access to the school curriculum.
- 2.3 The team currently has a caseload of 1,025 Children, Young People (CYP) spread broadly evenly across both NNC and WNC. The students supported by the sensory impairment service are some of the most vulnerable, with a significant high level of need but low incidence, it is vital that this very vulnerable cohort of students does not have their education disrupted. Intervention needs to be at the earliest stages to ensure optimum outcomes and to develop skills leading to maximum independence as they prepare for adulthood.
- 2.4 The Sensory Impairment Service is responsible for delivering statutory services which must be delivered within a legislative framework. In developing options explored, the need to meet these statutory obligations have remained a key driver in assessing and determining risk factors.
- 2.5 Several options have been explored to mitigate some of the core risks identified with proposed disaggregation of the service. This included the recommendation to not disaggregate the service into a traditional North/West model, but instead review alternative ways of delivering the service for both authorities including considering a single service owned by North Northamptonshire offering specialist service provision to both West and North Northamptonshire Council, and potentially other Councils through a traded model.

A comprehensive Impact and Options Assessment was subsequently completed which explored in more detail the various options which would both meet business requirements for each authority but, more importantly, minimise risk to service continuity and delivery for the vulnerable end users.

- 2.6 The recommendations outlined in the Impact and Options Assessment are included and presented to Members for consideration, with a further recommendation to develop a comprehensive Business Case to present to Members for consideration.

3. Recommendations

3.1 That the Shared Services Joint Committee:

- a) Agree that the disaggregation of the Children's Sensory Impairment Service is reprofiled to enable a more detailed Business Case with recommendations for a potential alternative model to be developed.
- b) Agree that the Children's Sensory Impairment Service remains within the current IAA until a further decision is made regarding the future model of delivery.
- c) Note that a Business Case will be presented to both the West Northamptonshire Council's Cabinet and North Northamptonshire Council's Executive by December 2022 to consider alternative service delivery models.
- d) Grant delegated authority to the Monitoring Officers for North and West Northamptonshire Councils to amend or terminate the relevant provisions within the IAA if an alternative delivery model has been approved and commenced, subject to an agreed Exit Plan.

3.2 Reasons for the Recommendation

- a) The proposed option to delay disaggregation until the Councils have had the opportunity to consider alternative service delivery models for the Sensory Impairment Service will ensure continuous effective service delivery within this statutory function. It also considerably reduces the risk of service failures or issues as a result of limited specialist resources and capacity to support the vulnerable end-users, as well as reputational damage.
- b) This arrangement will provide greater flexibility for both authorities to develop potential future service delivery models.

3.3 Alternative Options Considered

3.3.1 Continue with full disaggregation (split between both authorities) but at a later date than the original September 2022. For the main reasons outlined below this option is not recommended:

- a) Statutory responsibilities may not be met as developing an appropriately skilled service with capacity to meet needs for each Council could not be achieved without investment of significant time and resources and may still not be successful. A National shortage of specialist teachers already leads to recruitment difficulties.
- b) Reduced size of individual services would limit resilience due to specialisms of teachers and difficulty in accessing appropriately skilled and qualified contingency cover. Additionally, needing to duplicate specialist roles within teams is likely to incur increased costs for both Councils.

- c) Smaller disaggregated teams are likely to lead to a less responsive service due to reduced capacity and resilience. This would pose a significant risk to the current highly regarded and effective service which is meeting the needs of very vulnerable children.

4. Report Background

- 4.1 The Sensory Impairment Service is made up of a wide range of highly specialist unique roles meeting highly complex specific needs. Traditional disaggregation with the aspiration of creating two equally effective teams would not fulfil the user need without the requirement of significant growth and the duplication of key roles. There is a national shortage of specialist qualified teachers, and so the required recruitment would expose both Councils to significant risk of being unable to meet their statutory requirements, a fall in service standards and failing vulnerable children and young people.
- 4.2 The service aims to raise the aspirations and improve outcomes of children and young people (CYP) with hearing/ vision impairment (ages 0-19yrs) by identifying and meeting their needs at an early stage and impacting on progress within educational settings and the home. The service contributes to the multi-agency planning for CYP with special educational needs or disability (SEND). This specialist statutory service aims to improve self-esteem and to promote independence and ensure access to the school curriculum. Service offered may include:
- To support pupils, educational setting staff and parents/carers to understand sensory impairment and how this may impact on the child or young person's learning;
 - To support and advise educational settings in how to close/narrow the gap between pupils with a sensory impairment and their main cohort of pupils, through specialist knowledge, strategies, IT and resources;
 - To contribute towards improved access to the curriculum and learning in order for pupils to be able to make expected or exceeded progress;
 - To support and advise parents/carers in how to support their child's learning and development, through specialist knowledge, strategies and resources;
 - To directly teach pupils specific skills which will enable them to independently access learning, improve their self-advocacy skills, improve their mobility and improve their self-confidence, social, emotional and well-being;
 - To monitor the progress of pupils over time in terms of the support and interventions SIS provide and to hold educational settings to account where necessary; and
 - To directly teach an Additional Core Curriculum (sign language, auditory processing skills, braille, tactual skills, IT skills, social emotional/well-being, self- advocacy, mobility and independence).

- 4.3 Research from other local authorities (LA) suggests that a centrally based team (in the case of NNC, a remodelled team) ensures most effective and resilient service delivery. Other LA's that have moved to smaller or locality-based teams, report that skills of specialist teachers have become diluted, and standards have dropped.
- 4.4 One option being explored is the potential move to a traded model - this is not an untested model of delivery, as other authorities successfully work in this way, for example Rutland County Council. The former Northamptonshire County Council was previously approached to provide services for another authority through a traded model as specialist teachers could not be recruited due to the national shortage of these skills.
- 4.5 It was agreed as part of the new unitary authorities Blueprint that the Sensory Impairment Service would be disaggregated. Further detailed review has highlighted some significant risks associated with this approach – most of which would have a direct impact on the ability of both Councils to deliver a safe and effective model to service users. Therefore, in looking to put forward a proposal for the future of the service, both authorities have used the opportunity to think more innovatively about service delivery in its totality with children and young people at the heart of service design and delivery.
- 4.6 The timeline for disaggregation of the Sensory Impairment Service is currently set for September 2022. However, this is no longer achievable given the limited timeline and processes required to consider and seek approval from each authority on an alternative service delivery model.

5. Options and Recommendation

- 5.1 The options for delivery of the service set out within the report look to disaggregate the service in line with the blueprint whilst establishing new arrangements that effectively, and with resilience, meet the needs of vulnerable children across West and North Northamptonshire. The proposals are relevant to the entire Sensory Impairment Service, currently operating under a hosted arrangement by North Northamptonshire Council.

- 5.2 The following options are to be considered:

Option 1

Continue with full disaggregation – originally planned for September 2022, but earliest achievable date would likely be by March 2023. Given the potential impact associated with implementing two much smaller and less resilient teams, this option is deemed the highest risk to end users of the service and the least effective/efficient model for each Council.

Option 2

Retain existing arrangement - this would mean that the current Sensory Impairment Service remains under a hosted (or lead) arrangement across both Councils, delivered through North Northamptonshire Council and managed accordingly through existing IAA arrangements.

Option 3 (Preferred and Recommended)

Develop a comprehensive Business Case, which fully explores all alternative options for safe and sustainable future service delivery and provides a suitable recommendation to mitigate risks identified. The intention would be to present this to North Northamptonshire Executive and West Northamptonshire Cabinet in December 2022 for consideration and approval. One of these options will be to explore a commercial model arrangement, as outlined in the Impact and Options Assessment.

5.3 **Option 3** is the recommended option for the following reasons:

5.3.1 It will enable a more detailed assessment of safe and suitable options for the future delivery model of the Sensory Impairment Service. Members from both authorities will be presented with comprehensive information and recommendations to enable robust and informed decision making.

5.4 The recommended option has been developed based on a detailed investigation of possible service delivery models and the need to mitigate high levels of risk identified with the proposed split of the service, as per the original Blueprint.

5.5 The disadvantages / risks of this option are:

5.6 Delayed implementation of the service model as identified in the original Blueprint.

5.7 Imposing any change on a successful and high performing service increases risk of impact on sustained performance.

6. Implications (including financial implications)

6.1 Resources and Financial

6.1.1 There are no direct financial or resource implications as a result of the recommendation. The current arrangement will continue until agreement has been made relating to the future delivery model, as a result of the Business Case. A thorough financial assessment will be undertaken and incorporated into the Business Case against options identified and recommended.

6.2 Legal and Governance

6.2.1 The Shared Services Joint Committee is responsible for “ensuring there are robust plans for any disaggregation of services and that there is a smooth transition to new service delivery arrangements”. They are also responsible for ensuring that statutory arrangements are in place for each Council.

6.2.2 The service is currently operating in accordance with the Inter Authority Agreement that exists between North Northamptonshire Council and West Northamptonshire Council. This would continue until an alternative model has been agreed and safely implemented.

6.3 Relevant Policies and Plans

6.3.1 All relevant policies will need to be reviewed and updated to ensure they remain fit for purpose following implementation and are agreed for the respective authorities as necessary.

6.4 Risk

6.4.1 If the service is disaggregated in accordance with the original plan to split the service equally between each authority, the following risks and issues will arise:

Risk Assessment	Mitigating Action
Availability of highly specialist roles is limited and considerable risk of being unable to consistently fill key roles.	Risk is mitigated by the recommended alternative delivery model. In the event of disaggregation, a skills audit would need to be carried out to equitably split the existing cohort and separate recruitment carried out as necessary to fill vacancies.
Inability to recruit to specialist roles to create safe and legal teams to deliver statutory service requirements within each authority	Salary provisions would need to be reviewed (e.g. market supplements) and third-party providers engaged to delivery aspects of the service.
Effective county wide working relationships with health services, Multi Academy Trusts etc are weakened	Activities would be duplicated under a disaggregated Service delivery arrangement.
Highly regarded and effective service meeting needs of very vulnerable children is broken up risking continuation of delivery	Collaboration working arrangements would be implemented for a time limited period to maintain service levels.

6.5 Consultation

6.5.1 This report does not meet the parameters required for public consultation.

6.6 Consideration by Executive Advisory Panel

6.6.1 No immediate considerations arising from this report. However, if recommendations are agreed, the future Executive Committee report would also likely be taken for consideration by the Executive Advisory Panels (Education, Skills and Employment as well as Service Delivery, Performance and Customers).

6.7 Consideration by Scrutiny

6.7.1 No immediate considerations arising from this report. However, if recommendations are agreed, then a further report will be presented to NNC Executive Committee and WNC Cabinet. Therefore a future report to scrutiny may be required.

6.8 Equality Implications

6.8.1 No considerations arising from this report. An Equality Impact Assessment will be undertaken as part of the Disaggregation process.

6.9 Climate Impact

6.9.1 No negative impacts arising from this report.

6.10 Community Impact

6.10.1 None arising from this report

6.11 Crime and Disorder Impact

6.11.1 None arising from this report

7. Background Papers

7.1 Sensory Impairment Service Impact and Options Review