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meeting	SOCIAL SERVICES STANDING SELECT COMMITTEE	agenda item number
date	20 th July 2004	

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES

SERVICES FOR DISABLED CHILDREN

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To update Members of the Social Services Standing Select Committee on the progress of providing Saturday activities to disabled children across the county.

2. Information and Advice

- 2.1 The Best Value Review of Services to Disabled Children and their Families took place in 2000-2001. An Improvement Plan was drawn up, and regular updates have been provided to Members through the Children's Forum (Commissioning and Direct Services), as well as Select Committee and Cabinet. This Improvement Plan included the development of Saturday provision for those disabled children awaiting family-based short breaks and/or a sitting and befriending service from the Short Breaks for Disabled Children Team. At the meeting of the Select Committee on 17th March 2004, a specific report was presented in relation to the proposed Saturday activities for disabled children. Members requested a further report on progress in this area for the meeting in July 2004.

2.2 Saturday activities for disabled children

The project was originally funded from the Quality Protects grant. The Quality Protects programme and grant ended in March 2004. For 2004 – 05, funding has been identified from the mainstream children's services budget along with a proportion of the Carer's grant to ensure this project continues.

The service is provided under a Service Agreement with the Play Centre for disabled children and their families; a local voluntary organisation.

There are currently 107 children on the waiting list for a service from the Short Breaks Team for Disabled Children. The target is to achieve Saturday provision in each district area by March 2005.

- 2.2.1 Part of the funding is used to employ a temporary project worker to co-ordinate and implement the project. The post holder commenced his duties in September 2003 and is based at and managed by the Play Centre.
- 2.2.2 The project worker has been instrumental in bringing together key agencies to assist with the roll out of this project. The first district targeted for this provision is Bassetlaw and this was launched on 19th June 2004, and will be held on a monthly basis thereafter. It had been hoped that this launch would have been earlier, but difficulties with securing a suitable venue has led to some delay. Bassetlaw has been chosen as the pilot area as historically this district has the least resources for disabled children, a factor referred to in the 2003 Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) inspection of Services to Children and Families in Nottinghamshire.
- 2.2.3 A series of 'Fun Days' have taken place in each district area during and after February half-term this year, as a means of providing a taster for disabled children with their parents/carers, and the opportunity for further consultation on a local basis. The response from parents and disabled children invited to attend was encouraging. Parents indicated they were willing to provide transport to and from the venues as well as pay a nominal sum of £5 for each session. Some parents expressed concern as to whether the health/medical needs of their children would be met competently whilst at the activity days. Reassurance has been given and home visits are planned by the project worker to explain the project in fuller detail and to reassure parents that the workers will be fully trained in health and medical matters. Parents also indicated that they would be willing to participate in local steering groups to monitor progress and plan the sessions.

A summary of the consultation is attached in Appendix 1.
- 2.2.4 This project is a complex one, involving children with a range of special needs, some of whom would have great difficulty in integrating into a group environment. For some children therefore, individual planning will be required and provision provided on a 1-1 basis. The project is also aimed at a wide age group from 2 years up to 16 plus. This means that there will be need to provide a number of different groups in each district to cater for a range of needs and different ages. The proposal is to have separate groups for the under 5's (looking at where these children can access inclusive mainstream provision), a group for 5-7 years, 8-11 years, 12-15 years and 16 plus. For the 16 plus age group, the Play Centre will provide support from their advocacy workers to enable these young people to build up confidence to access specialist and mainstream activities at a local level.
- 2.2.5 A consistent and dedicated team of helpers have been recruited, and training has commenced. For the Saturday provision, a staff ratio of 1:3 will be

required, with a maximum of 15 children in each group. Currently, a core staff group of 15 workers have been recruited.

- 2.2.7 OFSTED regulations require that for the under 8's, 50% of the staff employed to run this group are required to have an NVQ 3 qualification in childcare. In addition, the venues used are required to be inspected and registered before they can be used. The registration period can take up to 24 weeks. Some difficulties are being experienced in that OFSTED regulations dictate that each venue represents a 'distinct' project and each district venue would have to go through a separate registration process. However, the local OFSTED inspector is aware of this and is being supportive in looking at ways of registering all district venues under one umbrella. Until registration has been completed, parents with children under 8 will have to remain with them on site. This will only affect two children in Bassetlaw.

2.3 Timescales for implementation of activities in each district

- 2.3.1 All groups will run for one Saturday per month in each district. It is planned that the scheme in Newark, Ashfield and Mansfield will be rolled out by December 2004. The southern districts will roll out in early 2005.
- 2.3.2 Achieving these timescales is dependent upon the successful recruitment of a core group of appropriately skilled/trained staff who will operate the scheme in each district with additional sessional workers/volunteers to assist locally with each group. For the under 8's, registration by OFSTED also needs to have been completed.
- 2.3.3 A further series of Fun Days will also be organised in each district area over the school summer holiday period. This will make a significant difference to the families that are waiting for a service and which will also provide further opportunities for consultation with children and their carers.

2.4 Staff induction and training

- 2.4.1 The Play Centre will carry out the induction and training of new staff. This training is part of a rolling programme of training offered by the Play Centre which covers various aspects of childcare, play, health and safety and medication. In addition, specific training may need to be offered in order to include children with specific medical or personal care needs.

2.5 Role of the Project Development Worker

- 2.5.1 This post has been reviewed recently and funding has now been secured to retain this post until March 2005. The post holder will develop and co-ordinate the establishment of local steering groups within each district, which will oversee the development of the individual schemes. It is intended that these local groups will have parent and child representation. The county-wide steering group will continue to meet and the development worker will report to this group.

- 2.5.2 The development worker will have the lead responsibility for the establishment of the district groups as well as the ongoing evaluation and monitoring of the project, planning of the activities with the core staff group, and continuing individual and group consultation with parents and children.
- 2.5.3 Once the district groups are up and running, the development worker will begin to explore, with the staff group, possible links for the children/young people to meet outside of the Saturday activities, accessing the local disabled youth clubs, the department's Breaks in Partnership schemes and other local activities which promote inclusion. This will help to foster a sense of independence, identity and local friendship for our children and young people on a par with their peer group.

2.6 Parental participation

- 2.6.1 Whilst the success of the project is dependant upon the successful recruitment of staff and the development of local steering groups to drive it, parental support and participation is also essential. This is a key theme in research reports, notably those conducted by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, into access to sports and leisure activities for disabled children. Whilst parents want more resources for their disabled children, it can be difficult for them to feel comfortable about letting them join in with activities where they cannot be with them. The children and young people themselves wish to be able to do things independently of their parents, so there can be potential conflict. Care needs to be taken to ensure that parents feel part of the process and are encouraged to trust and have confidence in the staff group delivering the project.
- 2.6.2 Parents will also be encouraged to take some responsibility for ownership of the project by being asked to transport the children to and from the venues and to provide packed lunches. This will help to keep costs down and foster a sense of 'normality' in that parents would normally provide this 'service' for their non-disabled children. Where parents do not have their own transport, this will be provided. Parents will also be asked to contribute a nominal sum towards the sessions. These contributions will go toward the costs of future activities.

2.7 Financial implications

- 2.7.1 The project is part of a service agreement for 2004-05 between the department and the Play Centre. The costs for the first year of the project, 2004-05, will be £88,036. This includes the cost of the development worker, staff group, venues, transport, activities, publicity, training and OFSTED fees.
- 2.7.2 For 2004-05, it has been agreed that this cost will be met by mainstream children's services funding (previously Quality Protects ring fenced grant) and a contribution from the children's proportion of the Carer's grant.
- 2.7.3 For 2005-06, assuming that the project is successful and has been rolled out in each district, the costs will rise to £120,000. The service agreement with

the Play Centre will be reviewed in early 2005. This will include a review of the project and the development worker post.

- 2.7.4 Negotiations will take place with the Culture and Community Services department to try and secure additional sources of funding/resources. In addition, the Play Centre will continue to bid to charities, such as Comic Relief, for contributions.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 It is recommended that Members note and comment on this report.

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