

Report



meeting	SOCIAL SERVICES STANDING SELECT COMMITTEE	
date	8th June 2004	agenda item number

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 the Best Value Improvement Plan for Disabled Children.
- 1.2 To advise members of the changes in the performance indicator for disabled children.

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 this Select Committee and Cabinet. The most recent report was presented to the Select Committee on 27th January 2004. At this meeting, Members requested a further updated report in June 2004.

2.2 Changes in the Government Performance Indicator for Disabled Children

- 2.2.1 Since the improvement plan was drawn up and implemented in 2001, there have been a number of changes to government policy. This has influenced the delivery of the Improvement plan and has necessitated some fine-tuning to the detail of the plan. At the start of the Quality Protects Programme in 1999, there was a single performance indicator for disabled children, with the requirement for the number of disabled children receiving respite care to increase annually. Over the course of the programme, Councils reported to the Department of Health that they were finding this a 'perverse' indicator in that this indicator did not 'fit' with the requirement to increase funding to improve access to social and community resources for this user group, and for more disabled children to be supported within their own homes.
- 2.2.2 In April 2002, this performance indicator ceased and was replaced. The new indicator sought information on 'The number of disabled children supported in

their families or living independently in the Children in Need Census week, February 2003, per 10,000 children under 18'.

- 2.2.3 In February 2004, this performance indicator was changed to: 'The total number of disabled children receiving services during the census week which support them either in their families or to live independently, as a percentage of the estimated total population of disabled children in the council area'.
- 2.2.4 The total number of disabled children (0-17 years) in the last population census for the county is 6,761. The number of disabled children receiving services during census week was 625. The performance indicator therefore is 9%.
- 2.2.5 The next Children in Need Census week will take place in February 2005.

2.3 Best Value Review Success Criteria

- 2.3.1 The overall aim of the improvement plan is to produce better value outcomes in meeting the social care needs of disabled children, by shifting the balance of investment towards community and family-based services. This is intended to extend the range and reach of services to allow more children and families to access support services in less institutional settings.
- 2.3.2 The original implementation plan was drawn up in 2000. It is now recognised that many of the timescales indicated for specific pieces of work were unrealistic due to the funding for specialist teams to be put into place not being available until 2003-04, and funding for new schemes such as home care services for children not coming on stream until 2004/05. The development of the multi disciplinary service (Fusion 4) has also seen unexpected delay due to recruitment difficulties. In other areas, changes in Government policy have led to some areas of the improvement plan being changed.

A revised improvement plan is attached in Appendix 1.

- 2.3.3 From 1st April 2004, Nottinghamshire is a pilot for the Children's Trust for Disabled Children. A project manager has been appointed and is now in post. The key theme of this pilot is to develop joined up working with our partners in Health, Education and the Voluntary Sector, all of whom have signed up to the Trust. Much of the work described in the improvement plan will be subsumed into the Children's Trust Task Groups, with the emphasis on multi-agency working as opposed to single agency. The work of the Children's Trust reported separately to Cabinet on 26th May 2004.
 - 2.3.3 The success of the improvement plan is based on the following criteria:
- ## 2.4 Increased Proportion of Overall Service Spend on Community and Family based Services

Current Status: Increased Spend

- 2.4.1 During the past year in particular, there has been increased investment in order to develop more community and family-based services. This includes the establishment of a specialist disabled children's team in the north of the county, with the creation of 5 new social worker posts and 2.5 fte social work assistant posts. In addition, 1.5 fte team manager posts were created. With the existing locality Quality Protects funded social workers, the new team has an establishment of 14 workers. The total cost of this new investment in staff is £447,000.

Currently, the 0.5 fte Team Manager post in the north team remains vacant. There is a full-time social work vacancy in the north team and a full-time social work vacancy in the Fusion 4 team.

- 2.4.2 A pilot Direct Payments scheme was implemented in 2003. Take up has been very limited due to the lack of market options. As more options become available through the development of children's services, take up will increase.
- 2.4.3 A community resource budget of £15,000 per year has been identified for the north team to enable them to buy in services to individual families to support disabled children living with their families. Most of this budget is already committed to disabled children who need to continue with individual support packages previously funded from locality Section 17 budgets.
- 2.4.4 A new children's home care service was to be implemented in early 2004 for children in need, with 60% of the overall budget ring-fenced for disabled children. Current home care commitments to children equal £70,000 of the Adult Services Home Care budget. An additional £30,000 has been allocated for 2004/2005 to ensure capacity for new work. Timescales for the implementation of the scheme have slipped due to difficulty in recruiting community care assistants, and the necessity for the scheme to be registered with the National Care Standards Commission. The revised timescale is for the scheme to be operational by June/July 2004.
- 2.4.5 A temporary project manager has been continued to be funded this year to develop and implement Saturday Club provision for disabled children.
- 2.4.6 £50,000 of Choice Protects funding has been ring-fenced to develop a Contract Carers scheme (family-based short breaks service) for disabled children. The target is for two contract carers to be recruited this summer who will care for up to 8 children each on a short break basis.

2.5 Increased numbers of Children and Families Supported

Current status: Upward trend

- 2.5.1 The Children in Need Census figures of February 2003 shows that 625 disabled children were actively supported during that week. Current open

cases to the specialist Disabled Children's teams are around 515, an increase from 291 in September 2002. These figures include open cases to the north team, south team and the Fusion 4 multi-agency team. Transfers from reception and assessment and children's services teams are still taking place. As of 30th April 2004, the total number of disabled children and their families supported by the department is 956.

The figure reported to the Social Services Standing Select Committee in January 2004 indicated that the department was supporting 1,197 disabled children and families. The new figure of 956 should not be read as a decrease as we now have the technology to avoid double counting children and families who are receiving support from more than one service. This method will be used in the future and will give a more accurate picture.

2.6 Increased Numbers of Disabled Children Supported by Family or Community Based Services

Current status: Improving

- 2.6.1 There are currently 15 families being supported by the Direct Payments scheme with more applications coming on stream. Although this figure appears low, comparison with Trent region local authorities indicate that we have the highest figure in the region.
- 2.6.2 The increase in the Carers Grant this year is being used to support the development of a sitting service by Mencap in the Newark area and additional funding provided to the two main voluntary sector organisations within the county supporting disabled children to increase community support.

2.7 Increased Numbers of Disabled Children Supported to Access Leisure and Social Facilities

Current status: Improving

- 2.7.1 District-based family centres provide access to play schemes and local community provision for disabled children under the Breaks in Partnership scheme. They provide the main area of work under this heading. This work is funded from the children's proportion of the Carers Grant. There have been some difficulties with accurate data collection in this area with some Family Centres reporting on the numbers of carers supported and other Family Centres reporting the actual number of disabled children supported. The available figures suggest however, that 200 children were supported in this way during the last financial year, with an approximate increase of 50 from the previous year. Further work has been undertaken to improve the current reporting arrangements. Given that the majority of provision takes place during school holiday periods, figures are not yet available for this financial year.

- 2.7.2 The work on the provision of access to Saturday social and leisure provision continues, provided under a Service Level Agreement with the Play Centre for Disabled Children and their Families. A full report was provided to the Social Services Standing Select Committee on 17th March 2004 with an updated report to be provided in July 2004.

2.8 Improved Levels of User – Satisfaction with Information about Services

Current status: Improving

- 2.8.1 Much work has been carried out on improving access to information for disabled children and their carers. The lead for this has been taken by Fusion 4, the new multi-agency team funded by the Invest To Save project and SHINE, the County Council's children's disability information register and information service. There is now an integrated Fusion 4, SHINE and County Council website which is updated regularly.

Details of the new Disabled Children's Teams and their contact points will be provided in the updated 'Supporting Children and Families' departmental leaflet.

- 2.8.2 From 19th April 2004, the three specialist disability teams (north, south and Fusion 4) have been fully operational in terms of receiving direct referrals and conducting all initial and core assessments for disabled children. It is planned that carers and children will be asked to complete a user satisfaction form at the completion of assessments. The form will also ask their views on access to information and will be used to monitor the quality of services provided from a consumer point of view.

2.9 A Higher Proportion of Disabled Children Assessed as Needing Full Time Care Being Provided by Foster Families

Current Status: Improving

There are now 20 children with permanent and substantial disabilities being cared for by foster carers on a long term basis. There are two other situations where fostering placements have been offered for children currently in residential care that are being considered by the children's social worker.

A delegate decision has been submitted for the establishment of a Contract Carer Scheme for disabled children and a decision is awaited.

2.10 Reduced waiting times for services

Current Status: Improvement Required

- 2.10.1 There continues to be a significant waiting list for services provided by the Short Breaks team. Despite the numbers of resources – particularly befrienders increasing during 2003/04 by 20 – demand outstrips supply. There

is current work being done by Commissioning and Direct Services staff to consider how this situation can be tackled.

2.11 Reduced Assessment Times

2.11.1 The following tables show the number of initial and core assessments of disabled children completed within the assessment framework timescales from September 2003 to March 2004.

Current status: Improvement Required

Percentage of Initial Assessments completed within timescale (Target : 90% of Initial assessments to be completed within 7 days of referral)		
Quarter ending:	Number of assessments	Percentage on time
December 2003	33	61%
March 2004	45	42%

Percentage of core assessments completed within timescale (Target: 90% of core assessments to be completed within 35 working days of referral)		
Quarter ending:	Number of assessments	Percentage on time
December 2003	5	60%
March 2004	1	100%

2.11.2 As reported previously, it is clear there is need for improvement in achieving timescales. Possible reasons for the poor figures include child protection referrals taking precedent in reception and assessment teams, plus the historical difficulties with the recruitment and retention of staff in these teams.

2.11.3 The move to disabled children's teams taking direct referrals from April 2004 should enable improved timescales and this will be carefully monitored.

2.12 Improved assessment quality and less assessments being undertaken that lead to no services being provided

Current status: Improving

2.12.1 The best indicator for this is the quality of reports provided to the Inter-Agency Panel for Short Term Breaks and the outcome of applications to Panel. Over the past year, an increasing number of reports provided have been submitted by specialist disability workers with less submitted by mainstream workers. This seems to have improved the quality and analysis of assessments. There are now very few applications to Panel which have resulted in no short term break service provided. In the very small number of

cases where no service has been provided, the reason has been that the application was inappropriate or community resources have not been accessed first.

2.13 Increase the Number of Children receiving Short Breaks Overnight as part of their Family Support Package

Current Status: Improvement Required

The occupancy figures for the short breaks units for the year April 2003-March 2004 are as follows:-

- The Big House – 90%
- Caudwell House – 93%
- Minster View – 60%

2.13.1 The occupancy figures for Minster View remain an area for concern and work is currently being undertaken via a partnership between the disability teams and Minster View to ensure that all appropriate children are referred and the assessment systems are fast tracked. It is a continuing challenge to ensure Minster View capacity is targeted at the most complex and challenging children. The progress of the current work will be reported in a future report.

2.13.2 This criterion is no longer a performance indicator required by central government as it is accepted that local authorities need to seek new ways of providing support to families in place of children going away overnight. Central Government recognise that support to families to care for their child at home is a better option for the child and family, wherever possible, and that only these children with the highest level of need should be accommodated away from home.

For lower level needs children, new schemes have come on stream such as Direct Payments, Saturday social provision and in July 2004, a dedicated Children's Home Care service will be implemented.

2.14 Children Receiving Short Term Breaks via the Fostering Home From Home Scheme

Current Status: Improvement required

2.14.1 The Short Breaks Team are continuing to offer the following services:-

Numbers of children receiving short term breaks 67
Numbers of children receiving a sitting/befriending service 110

Numbers of carers 65
Numbers of sitters/befrienders 65

2.14.2 The demand for the sitting and befriending service continues to outpace the recruitment of people to offer the service. Despite 20 additional befrienders

being recruited last year, there remains a high number of children waiting. There is currently work being undertaken to look at ways of managing this demand.

2.15 Children Currently in Placements in the Independent Sector

2.15.1 There are 10 children with permanent and substantial disabilities placed in the independent sector. Education and Primary Care Trusts do share funding for these placements.

4. Recommendations

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

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