

2nd November 2020

Agenda Item: 9

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, COMMISSIONING AND RESOURCES

JOINT COMMISSIONING TO ADDRESS SPEECH, LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION NEEDS

Purpose of the Report

1. To seek approval to jointly commission speech and language interventions for pre-school children with Nottinghamshire Clinical Commissioning Groups from 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022.
2. To seek approval to work with Clinical Commissioning Groups to explore and progress longer term joint commissioning arrangements for Speech and Language Services from 1st April 2022.

Information

Addressing Speech, Language and Communication Needs for children under the age of 5

3. The early years are a critical time for all children to develop strong cognitive, social and emotional foundations. Early language acquisition impacts on all aspects of young children's development. It contributes to their ability to manage emotions and communicate feelings, to establish and maintain relationships, to think symbolically, and to learn to read and write. Speech, language and communication is both an essential building block for a range of cognitive and social and emotional skills, and predictive of a range of later-life issues.
4. Children's vocabulary skills are linked to their economic backgrounds. Children living in areas of socio-economic disadvantage are at much higher risk, with around 50% of children starting school with delayed language or other speech, language and communication needs. By 3 years of age, there is a 30 million-word gap between children from the wealthiest and poorest families. One study shows that the vocabulary gap is evident in toddlers and by 18 months, children in different socio-economic groups display dramatic differences in their vocabularies. By 2 years, the disparity in vocabulary development has grown significantly. Tackling this gap in early language acquisition is complex and requires a system-wide approach¹.

¹ Children's Commissioner (June 2019) 'We Need to Talk - Access to speech and language therapy' <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/cco-we-need-to-talk-june->

5. Most children develop typically, including those who grow up in disadvantage. There is, however, strong evidence to suggest that the achievement gap is underpinned by income-related gaps in children's language and communication skills, which are already detectable during the second year of life. Early intervention has an important role to play in supporting children who are showing early signs of atypical development².
6. Difficulties in early language development can lead to:
 - educational disadvantage resulting in reduced school readiness and poor academic achievement
 - emotional and behavioural difficulties such as increased risk of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and anxiety disorders in adolescence
 - risky behaviours, for example more than 70% of young people in the youth offenders system have a communication disability
 - involvement in offending - 50% of the UK prison population have language difficulties, compared to 17% of the general population
 - economic disadvantage - 12% average lower earnings among those with inadequate literacy skills, who are also twice as likely to be unemployed at age 34
 - emotional disadvantage - a threefold increased risk of mental health problems in adulthood.
7. Home learning is one of the biggest influences on early years outcomes. The home learning environment refers to the physical characteristics of the home, but also the quality of learning support received from parents and carers. The early communication environment in the home provides the strongest influence on language development at 2, even more so than social background. This includes things like the number of books available, being read to by a parent, being engaged in a range of activities and the number of toys. Home learning packages which improve communication and early language are therefore a commissioning priority in Nottinghamshire.
8. Home Talk is a nationally recognised local evidence-based targeted home visiting programme licenced to Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust (NHCFT). The programme works to support children who have moderate to severe expressive language delay at 2-2½ years of age but who have no comprehension or social interaction difficulties. The programme is delivered by trained Home Talk workers who are managed by a Speech and Language Therapist. The programme has been provided in Nottinghamshire for seven years as part of the Children's Centre Service Contract.

Commissioning Speech, Language and Communication Needs work

9. When the Children's Centre Service was brought under the management of the Council on 1st June 2020, the speech and language elements of the service were re-specified and recommissioned rather than brought in-house. A short-term contract was issued to NHCFT for delivery of the Home Talk programme from 1st June 2020 to 31st March 2021. This was granted as a direct award whilst further arrangements were being made to have one lead

2019.pdf

² Local Government Association (2019) 'Healthy Beginnings: Giving our children the best start in life'
<https://www.local.gov.uk/healthy-beginnings-giving-our-children-best-start-life>

service provider for all speech and language interventions, including therapy from 1st April 2021.

10. Workers involved in the Home Talk programme are now part of the Specialist Speech and Language Service within NHCFT under one management structure. The criteria for Home Talk entry complement that of specialist Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) and targeted services such as 'Little Talkers' groups delivered by the Children's Centre Service. The programme is made up of between three and six visits, depending on the need identified on the first few visits. Children identified as in need of Specialist SLT early in the programme are referred on immediately. Most children will receive six visits and then a three-month review. Families are either discharged after the three-month review or referred on to other services such as Specialist SLT if required.
11. The current arrangements have enabled the creation of one single pathway for children and young people with speech, language and communication needs. The pathway is being developed by a multi-agency group including commissioners and providers. The draft section of the pathway which focuses on pre-school children is included in **Appendix 1**.

Current Commissioning Arrangements

12. The commissioning of the Home Talk programme is the responsibility of Early Childhood Services who performance manage the programme with Public Health commissioners. The Council currently commissions the NHCFT Early Intervention Speech and Language Team to deliver the Home Talk programme and early years networks across Nottinghamshire County. The contract is due to expire in March 2021.
13. Providing a short-term contract for the Early Intervention Speech and Language Team allowed time to engage Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) commissioners to work towards commissioning an integrated service that can identify and address speech language and communication needs.
14. The NHCFT Specialist Speech and Language Therapy Service is commissioned by NHS Nottingham and Nottinghamshire CCG, and covers Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire County, excluding Bassetlaw. This team sits within the Community Children and Young People's Service which also incorporates children's community nursing, occupational therapy, physiotherapy and training teams. Public Health commissioners in the Children's Integrated Commissioning Hub work with the CCG to manage the contract and service development.
15. Doncaster and Bassetlaw CCGs commission Specialist Speech and Language Therapy Services from Doncaster and Bassetlaw Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. This service provides specialist speech and language therapy assessments and interventions for children and young people up to the age of 19 living in Bassetlaw.

Proposed Commissioning Arrangements

16. The Council wishes to continue the Home Talk programme service provision beyond 31st March 2021 and needs a mechanism to do this.

17. The Council and CCGs have a desire for closer working on their Speech and Language services. It is therefore proposed for the Council service requirement to be incorporated into the CCG contract from 1st April 2021 for a 12-month pilot (which will coincide with all service requirements for Specialist Speech and Language Therapy (“SLT”) ending at the same time).
18. This proposal is considered compliant from a legal and procurement perspective because:
 - a) the CCGs contract is multi-million (£9m) so to vary this to include a 12-month pilot is not considered to be a “material variation” which would trigger a procurement law risk.
 - b) the CCG confirms that the scope of the CCG’s contract will permit such a variation and the CCG is happy to implement the same and manage this service element.
 - c) a CCG is permitted to perform a local authority responsibility under s76 of the NHS Act 2006 where the LA is “satisfied that the payment the CCG is likely to secure a more effective use of public funds than the equivalent amount if the LA provided the service...”. The Council’s commissioning team considers this criteria is satisfied for this arrangement. The Council and CCG will agree a legal contract which reflects s76 and asks the CCG to “procure and manage” the service the Council have been providing/procuring to 31st March 2021. This will capture the transfer of the Council budget for the services and any management/performance monitoring responsibilities.
 - d) practically the CCG and Council teams work closely together through the Children’s Integrated Commissioning Hub so the Council will still have visibility of the Home Talk service provision.
19. As Bassetlaw CCG commissions their own Specialist Speech and Language Therapy Service, additional work is required to engage the commissioner and provider of the service to help to ensure that children also receive a seamless pathway involving early help and specialist speech and language service provision. The current NHCFT Early Intervention Speech and Language Therapy Service already works alongside the Specialist Speech and Language Therapy Service in Bassetlaw and refers children appropriately; this will continue as part of the integrated service.
20. The Council will ensure that the NHCFT Early Intervention Speech and Language Service continues to provide specified services in Bassetlaw, working closely with the Children’s Centre Service and Healthy Family Teams, whilst continuing referral arrangements with Doncaster and Bassetlaw Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.

Other Options Considered

21. The Council has the option to end the current contract for Home Talk and instead to procure from the open market an evidence-based home learning programme to deliver speech, language and communication needs work. However, following national guidance and local need, commissioners and providers agree that one integrated service will better meet the needs of children and young people.

Reason for Recommendations

22. By establishing one speech and language service, the creation of one single pathway for children aged 2-19 years is achievable. Establishing one single pathway is a key recommendation from Public Health England, the Children’s Commissioner and the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists. Likewise, joint commissioning of SLCN work is also a key recommendation of these national bodies and guidance. The Early Intervention Foundation asks local areas to strive to ensure that “Joint commissioning for early years, including speech language and communication needs, is extensive and routine”, with investment to early childhood intervention³.

Statutory and Policy Implications

23. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Data Protection and Information Governance

24. The Council has an information sharing agreement in place with Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust which allows the sharing of child and family level data. A Data Protection Impact Assessment has also been completed to enable the transfer of appropriate data and records between the NHS and the Council. This will include performance data as well as child level data sharing with the Children’s Centre Service.

Financial Implications

25. The current contract value for the Home Talk programme 2020/21 is £500,000 per annum; the Council will continue to provide £500,000 for the extension of this work as part of the CCG contract until 31st March 2022. £500,000 was realigned from the Children’s Centre Service budget to commission this work which is now reported on separately.
26. Plans for specialist speech and language therapy services, enabling improved value for money by aligning budgets and ultimately establishing an integrated pathway for children with SLCN. This proposal also allows additional time for the Council to work with CCGs to specify the service, consider national and local evidence and guidance, as well an assessment of local needs through consultation, analysis of local data and needs assessments.

Human Resources Implications

27. There are no Human Resources Implications arising from this report.

³ <https://www.eif.org.uk/resource/eif-maturity-matrix-speech-language-communication-early-years>

Safeguarding of Children and Adults at Risk Implications

28. Commissioning one service and one pathway should result in improved services for children, young people and families and the earlier identification of safeguarding risks.

Implications for Service Users

29. Children and families will experience an improved package of support to help identify and address speech, language and communication needs for children from the age of 2. There will be one pathway, one single point of access and seamless transition between early intervention and specialist services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That:

- 1) the proposal to jointly commission speech, language and communication needs interventions for pre-school children with Clinical Commissioning Groups from 1st April 2021 until 31st March 2022 is approved.
- 2) the proposal to explore and progress longer term joint commissioning arrangements for Speech and Language Services with Clinical Commissioning Groups from 1st April 2022 is approved.

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Constitutional Comments (AK 18/09/2020)

30. The report falls within the remit of Children and Young People's Committee by virtue of its terms of reference.

Financial Comments (SS 18/09/2020)

31. The current contract value for the Home Talk programme 2020/21 is £500,000 per annum which is funded from the Children's Centre gross budget of £9.4m (£6.4m net of the Public

Health grant contribution). The Council will continue to provide £500,000 for the extension of this work as part of the CCG contract until 31st March 2022 from the same budget.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

[Children's Centre Service Proposals – report to Children and Young People's Committee on 13th January 2020](#)

Speech, Language and Communication Needs Commissioning Data Protection Impact Assessment 2020

Provision of Interventions to address Speech Language and Communication Needs for preschool children Service Specification 1.6.20 – 31.3.21

Electoral Divisions and Members Affected

All.

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