

Report



meeting

SOCIAL SERVICES STANDING SELECT
COMMITTEE

agenda item number

date

17th March 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. At the meeting of the Select Committee on January 27th 2004, Members requested a further report on the progress in providing Saturday activities to disabled children.

2.2. Saturday Activities for Disabled Children

In April 2002, funding from the Quality Protects Grant was agreed to provide District-based Saturday provision for disabled children to access social and leisure activities in their local community. There was a delay in the implementation of this project due to there being no available lead to take this project forward. In September 2002, the service manager for disabled children came into post and a feasibility study was commissioned from the Play Centre for Disabled Children and their families to research options for models of provision, identify the costs, accessible venues and carry out consultation with disabled children and their carers. The initial target group of children are those who are waiting for a service from the county short breaks team for a sitting and befriending service and family-based short term breaks. Currently 104 children are waiting for these services.

- 2.2.1 In March 2003, the feasibility study was completed and from May 2003, a county-wide multi-agency group has met on a monthly basis to implement the recommendations. It became clear that a temporary project development

worker was required to co-ordinate and implement the scheme given the complexity and range of the project. The post was advertised during summer 2003 and the post holder commenced his duties in September 2003. The post holder 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 target is for Saturday provision to be launched in the Bassetlaw area by April 2004. 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 recent Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) inspection of Services to Children and Families in Nottinghamshire.
- 2.2.3 A series of 'Fun Days' are being planned to take 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 so far from parents and disabled children invited to attend has been encouraging. Parents are also indicating an interest in becoming involved on a local basis.
- 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 Some children will also have health/medical needs and where this is the case, there will be a necessity for trained workers to provide their physical care during the Saturday sessions. This has implications for the human resources required to operate this project county-wide.
- 2.2.6 A consistent and dedicated team of helpers need to be recruited, training provided and funding identified to ensure the continuation of the project. For the Fun Days, staffing will be provided by the Play Centre. For the Saturday provision, a staff ratio of 1:3 will be required, with a maximum of 15 children in each group. Recruitment is currently underway to recruit a core staff group to operate the Saturday provision, with interviews having taken place in February.
- 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. For the

Fun Days, the Play Centre's registration will suffice. However, it is likely that there will be a delay in rolling out the actual Saturday provision for the under 8's pending the registration of venues.

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. Bassetlaw will be the first to operate from April/early May. Newark/Mansfield in June, Ashfield in August, Hucknall/Broxtowe in November and Gedling/Rushcliffe in January 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.

2.4 Staff induction and training

2.4.1 The Play Centre will carry out the induction and training of new staff. This training will also cover health and medication 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 for a further year. 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 will form part of a service agreement 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, OFSTED fees and management costs.

For 2004-05, 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 Carers Grant.

- 2.7.2 For 2005-06, assuming that the project is successful and has been rolled out in each District; the costs will rise to £120,000.
- 2.7.3 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.

STUART BROOK
Director of Social Services

comm/select/SDC (VS)
ange milne