



11 February 2019

Agenda Item: 10

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, COMMISSIONING & RESOURCES

CHANGES TO DISCRETIONARY FUNDING FOR DISABLED CHILDREN'S ACCESS TO CHILDCARE (DCATCH) DELIVERED AT HOME

Purpose of the Report

1. This report seeks approval of a phased withdrawal of the Disabled Children's Access to Childcare Home Based Packages (DCATCH (HBP)) service.

Information

Background

2. The Council was one of 10 local authorities selected to deliver DCATCH as a pilot project in 2008. This was a specific element of the Aiming High for Disabled Children (AHDC) initiative dedicated to improving childcare provision for this group of children and young people, and their families.
3. The pilot ran until March 2011, and involved funding those selected local authorities to improve the range and quality of childcare for families of disabled children and young people, with the objective of enabling greater numbers of disabled children and young people to access childcare.
4. DCATCH (HBP) in Nottinghamshire was designed to enable working parents of disabled children and young people of school age to access formal childcare to wrap around their child's education.
5. Nottinghamshire County Council has chosen to continue provision of DCATCH (HBP) primarily within the family home, with parents/carers contributing £3.50 per hour, equivalent to the cost of mainstream child care, with the Council covering any excess costs. However, it should be noted that this price point was set upon the commencement of the pilot nearly 10 years ago and has not changed since. Similar services are not available in most other local authority areas.
6. Local authorities are not statutorily obliged to provide DCATCH services, and since March 2011, the Council has been funding DCATCH (HBP) at its own discretion. There are currently 46 families in receipt of a service. The allocated budget attributed to DCATCH (HBP) for the financial year 2018/19 was £176,000.

7. It should also be noted that there are a number of central government benefits which the parents/carers of disabled children can access to assist with the cost of childcare such as:
 - Disability Living Allowance (DLA)/Personal Independence Payment (PIP).
 - Free Early Education & Childcare (3-4 year olds) (Min 15 Hours, Max 30 Hours).
 - Working Tax Credit – Childcare for disabled children & young people element.
8. An impact evaluation of the DCATCH pilot published in 2011 by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), now known as the Department for Education (DFE), found that DCATCH did not have an overall impact on the take-up of formal childcare amongst parents of disabled children, and following this evaluation it was decided that the pilot programme would not be rolled out to local authorities across the country.
9. However, the evaluation report did find that it was important for local authorities to identify families likely to benefit from improvements to their current childcare arrangements, and help to facilitate dialogue between parents and potential childcare providers. It was also recommended that it would be beneficial for local authorities to encourage and support providers to take a flexible approach to childcare arrangements offered to parents of disabled children. More recently the government has introduced the need for local authorities to establish an Inclusion Fund in addition to a Disability Access Fund to support early years settings providing for children with additional needs. There are good examples of highly inclusive early years providers across Nottinghamshire who have the support of specialist teachers from the Local Authority.
10. A consultation has been undertaken with current service users and a wider group of parents of disabled children; the proposals to either withdraw or scale down this service are generally opposed by parents/carers especially from those directly affected. It was acknowledged within the comments from parents/carers that the option of phased service cessation would give more time for parents/carers to make alternative arrangements; full consultation feedback is provided within **Appendices A & B**. Maintaining the service at current levels, while a potential option, was not included within the consultation as it would not realise any of the anticipated savings, furthermore the service would continue to attract new applicants such that costs would continue to rise.
11. Committee is asked to approve a controlled phasing out of DCATCH (HBP) which would save £176,000 by 2020/21. Implementing this option would see the service remain closed to new applicants and withdrawn in its entirety by the end of March 2021, with parents/carers in receipt of DCATCH (HBP) via a direct payment having the service withdrawn from the end of March 2020, while parents/carers in receipt of DCATCH (HBP) from a commissioned provider service would see their contribution rise from £3.50 to £7.50 per hour from 1 April 2020 until the withdrawal of the service at the end of March 2021 (**Appendix C**).

Other Options Considered

12. Immediate withdrawal of DCATCH (HBP); this would see final payments for this service being made by the end of March 2019 with no continuation of the service afterwards. This model of withdrawals is the least favoured by the affected cohort and would not give families adequate time to make alternative arrangements.

13. Immediate increase in DCATCH (HBP) from £3.50 to £7.50 per hour; this would see parents/carers paying an additional £4 per hour for child care with this increase taking effect from 1 April 2019. This option would only realise a portion of the anticipated savings and would see the service opened to new applications causing costs to increase further over time.
14. Maintaining the service at current levels, while a potential option, would not realise any of the anticipated savings, furthermore the service would need to be reopened to new applicants which would mean that costs would continue to rise.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

15. DCATCH (HBP) originated as part of a pilot programme 'Aiming High for Young People' designed by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) now known as the Department for Education (DFE), which ran from 2008 to 2011 in partnership with 10 local authorities, where the Council was selected as one of these local authorities.
16. DCATCH (HBP) was designed as a way of supporting working parents/carers of disabled children and young people to be able to access the workplace by removing the additional cost barriers to formal childcare experienced by disabled children and young people. This service was not designed as an early support service for disabled children/young people and their families to prevent/delay escalation into more formalised services and has not been operated as such.
17. The central government funding for the pilot programme ended in March 2011 without the pilot being rolled out to local authorities across the country, as such this is not a service which has traditionally been offered by local government and since DCATCH (HBP) is a childcare service offered to parents and is not part of an assessed need, there is no specific statutory duty to provide DCATCH (HBP).
18. Additionally, as outlined above, there are alternative sources of funding available to parents/carers to support the cost of child care, with additional benefits for the parents/carers of disabled children/young people to contribute towards the higher cost of living experienced by parents/carers of disabled children/young people.
19. This option would enable the entire 2018/19 budget for this non-statutory service of £176,000 to be saved within the period of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

Statutory and Policy Implications

20. 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

21. The withdrawal of the DCATCH (HBP) service will not require the collection of any further personal information, or the processing of personal data and as such there are no additional data protection and information governance implications.

Financial Implications

22. The phased withdrawal of the DCATCH (HBP) service is anticipated to save £50,000 in 2019/20, £50,000 in 2020/21 and £76,000 in 2021/22. The savings proposed for 2019/20 will be included in the 2019-20 budget setting process and the remainder in the construction of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for future years.

Public Sector Equality Duty Implications

23. In order for the Council to meet the public sector duties as set out within the Equality Act 2010, an Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken in relation to the proposal contained within this paper and is available as a background paper.

Safeguarding of Children and Adults at Risk Implications

24. There are no safeguarding implications arising from this proposal, it should be noted that the Council acknowledges the continuing statutory duties towards the affected cohort under the Children Act 1989 and that the withdrawal of DCATCH (HBP) will not impact upon meeting those statutory duties.

Implications for Service Users

25. Some of those 46 families currently accessing the DCATCH Home Based Packages who, if they choose to continue to access such services after the cessation, would need to fund this themselves.

RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1) That the Committee approves a phased withdrawal of the Disabled Children's Access to Childcare Home Based Packages service, as detailed in paragraph 11.

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Constitutional Comments (SLB 31/01/19)

26. Children and Young People's Committee is the appropriate body to consider the content of this report.

Financial Comments (SAS 25/01/19)

27. The financial implications of the report are contained within paragraph 22 above.

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.

DCATCH Withdrawal Equality Impact Assessment

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

C1203