

Portfolio Holder Decision

Permission to Consult: WCC SEND and Inclusion Services

Portfolio Holder	Councillor Kaur
Date of decision	25 November 2022
	Signed

1. Decision taken

That the Portfolio Holder for Education and Learning agrees to commence public consultation on proposals for changes to the service offer of WCC SEND and Inclusion Services, as provided for in the Appendices to this report.

2. Reasons for decisions

2.1 The SEND & Inclusion Change Programme included a project titled 'Service Reviews' to review each County Council SEND & Inclusion team to ensure the local offer was value for money and supporting the objectives already of the change programme. External reviews of services identified statutory responsibilities and where improvements could be made to the service offer.

2.2 The Council has also taken external advice on whether any changes to the Service Offer require public consultation. The Council is also mindful that in the SEND Local Area Inspection in 2021, one of the areas for improvement was to improve '*the fractured relationships with parents and carers and lack of clear communication and co-production at a strategic level*'. It is therefore considered that as best practice, a public consultation on the Service Offer is advisable.

2.3 To be clear, the Council must consult if elements of the current Service Offer are being withdrawn but no activities are proposed for withdrawal. Therefore a public consultation is not mandatory.

2.4 In providing clarity on the local SEND & Inclusion Service Offer, the Council will achieve the following objectives:

- Have a service offer consistent with putting the child and family at the centre of our services (Children and Families Strategy)

- Provide a contribution to the 'graduated response' from schools and settings to deliver early intervention for children without EHC plans to build capacity
- Ensure the best outcomes are achieved from allocated resources
- Ensure services operate across all ages 0-25

2.5 In addition, it considered that transparency from this process will contribute to building confidence with parents and carers of children with SEND.

3. Background information

3.1 The proposals are set out in Appendix A (Draft Public Consultation Document). The proposal to the Portfolio Holder is that the Council goes out to public consultation on the Service Offer for SEND & Inclusion. This Service Offer is made up of:

- The statutory offer (not up for consultation)
- The core offer (new and existing activities proposed for comment through public consultation)
- The traded offer (existing activities proposed for comment through public consultation)

3.2 No activities currently offered by the Council are to be withdrawn.

3.3 The consultation would propose new activity in a core offer including the following areas:

- An allocation of paid-for Educational Psychologist time for schools (currently fully traded to schools)
- The introduction of annual conversations and SEND audits to improve planning and evaluation of SEND in Warwickshire schools
- An annual paid-for training offer to schools
- Increasing the offer of support services up to the age of 25

3.4 In providing this support, paid-for by the Council, it is considered that schools would be able to identify and support SEND at an earlier stage as part of a graduated response.

3.5 These proposals would be resourced through appointing to current vacancies that have been carried for a number of years and future restructure to services.

3.6 The percentage of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) continues to increase. The percentage of children identified with SEND at SEN Support (non-statutory level) has increased from 11.4% in 2017 to 12.9% in 2022 at school age. The percentage with EHC plans (statutory support) has risen from 3.1% to 3.8% over the same period. This reflects national trends.

3.7 In response to this increased demand for support, Council officers consider it is appropriate that the Council reviews its own Service Offer and refines it as appropriate.

- 3.8 Based on those reviews, the service managers reflected on what the offer of SEND & Inclusion Services should be and how this should be delivered. A common theme from the reviews, consistent with the Impower report previously, was the importance of a non-statutory offer to ensure that children with special educational needs are identified and supported early. Ofsted also highlighted in the SEND Local Area Inspection the need for schools to be more inclusive, and the pilot inspection from Ofsted highlighted that children at SEN Support (non-statutory support) was an area for improvement.
- 3.9 The reviews also commented on how services worked together (or not) and how they understood their own offer of services.
- 3.10 A period of engagement with staff and stakeholders then took place over the summer term on clarifying the what the SEND & Inclusion Service Offer is. This is made up of the statutory offer, the core (non-statutory) offer and the traded offer. The service also engaged on how it could deliver such a Service Offer more efficiently. Engagement has taken place with staff, school leaders, parent carer forum, young people's forum and hard to reach groups.
- 3.11 In clarifying and developing a 'core offer' (separate to the statutory and traded offer) the service has then tested the affordability of all proposed activities.
- 3.12 The service is now ready to propose a new Service Offer.
- 3.13 Appendix A sets out the Public Consultation Document on the SEND & Inclusion Service Offer. Appendix B sets out the questions to be asked in the consultation.
- 3.14 The consultation is proposed to run 3rd December 2022 to 26th February 2023 and would run separately, but concurrently with, the consultation on SEN transport.
- 3.15 The consultation will engage with the public and key stakeholders in a number of ways:
- a. Information and an online questionnaire will be publicly available on Warwickshire County Council's consultation and engagement hub
 - b. Drop-in sessions will be held in educational settings
 - c. Meetings will be held with key stakeholders
- 3.16 It is proposed that final proposals will be presented to Cabinet for decision on 26th April 2023 with implementation by 1st September 2023.

4. Financial implications

5. Environmental implications

N/A

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Urgent matter?	
Confidential or exempt?	
Is the decision contrary to the budget and policy framework?	

List of background papers
Appendix 1 Appendix 2

Members and officers consulted and informed
Portfolio Holder – Councillor
Corporate Board –
Legal –
Finance –
Equality –
Democratic Services –
Councillors –
Local Member(s):