

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL – PROPOSED RECORD OF DECISION

DECISION TO BE TAKEN BY:

Sue Chandler, Cabinet Member for Integrated Children’s Services

DECISION NO:

To be allocated by Democratic Services

For publication [Do not include information which is exempt from publication under schedule 12a of the Local Government Act 1972]

Key decision:

Key decision criteria. The decision will:

- a) result in expenditure which is significant having regard to the budget for the service or function (currently defined by the Council as in excess of £1,000,000); or
- b) be significant in terms of its effects on a significant proportion of the community living or working within two or more electoral divisions – which will include those decisions that involve:
 - significant service developments, significant service reductions, or significant changes in the way that services are delivered, whether County-wide or in a particular locality.

Subject Matter / Title of Decision

Specialist Teaching and Learning Service (STLS) - Consultation outcome on service redesign and delivery options from April 2022

Decision:

As Cabinet Member for Integrated Children’s Services, I agree to:

- Extend the existing STLS district Service Level Agreements (SLAs) for five months (April to August 2022, inclusive), and new flexible three-year SLAs for implementation from September 2022.
- Improve strategic governance and monitoring of the SLAs as part of the wider Children and Young People Outcomes Framework knitting together the SEND Strategy, the priorities set out in the Countywide Approach to Inclusive Education (CATIE) and the STLS Key Performance Indicators.
- Implement proposals for a consistent countywide tiered model of access to specialist advice, support and interventions from September 2022, including: drop-in clinics, solution focussed Local Inclusion Forum Team (LIFT) Meetings, Intensive Specialist Support to model specialist interventions and strategies, and allocation of a named Link Teacher to settings and schools, as a single point of contact.
- Implement proposals for STLS to focus on targeted and specialist level training. This work to be linked to the development of the Kent Directory of Resources.
- Offer the opportunity for chargeable bespoke training where a need is identified which cannot be met through the existing Kent training offer
- Improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND by ensuring that all Specialist Teachers have access to an equitable programme of Continuous Professional Development (CPD), and that they have or be willing to work towards accredited qualifications in an area of SEND or membership of relevant national professional bodies.
- Incorporate the voice of parents/carers as equal partners in design, development and monitoring of specialist training for parents/carers of children and young people with SEND, as well as involving them in service design, identification of gaps, evaluation and improvement.

- Ensure greater transparency and accountability as part of annual financial audit to ensure resources are targeted and outcome driven.
- Extend the Physical Disability and Sensory SLAs for 17 months commencing April 2022, with the intention to work through the consultation responses to plan and manage the next steps to create a fully integrated inhouse provision.
- The Kent Association of the Blind Habilitation Service Grant to be extended in line with the Sensory STLS provision, with a review of the service in the interim period.
- To delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education or other Officer, to undertake the necessary actions to implement the decision.

Reason(s) for decision:

Background:

The Specialist Teaching and Learning Service (STLS) resource was devolved in 2012 to 12 Special schools in Kent, and 2 countywide provisions for Sensory impairments and Physical Disabilities, to support the progress of pupils with special educational needs across the following 4 areas of need:

The STLS is one the main vehicles for mainstream early years settings and schools to access the specialist advice, support, training and interventions to gain the specialist skills, confidence and capacity to meet the additional needs of children and young people with SEND. The STLS was devolved from the local authority in 2012 and is managed by 12 Special Schools, one per district. There are also two countywide provisions for Sensory and Physical Disability, both managed by one Special School in Sevenoaks district.

However, there have been growing challenges on the system, with increasing numbers of requests for Education Health Care (EHC) needs assessment made by parents who have indicated a lack of confidence in their child's education provision. Additionally, children have increasingly been placed in specialist provision or special schools; with significant budgetary pressures exacerbated by the rising numbers and costs associated with independent sector placements. Over the last year the local authority has been reviewing the strategic approach to these challenges and the impact of a continuum of support and services to improve inclusivity in mainstream education settings.

Whilst the feedback to the surveys indicate a high level of satisfaction to the current service delivery model, there are some variations and inconsistencies across the county. In addition, with growing number of pupils with more complex needs, settings and schools (particularly at secondary stage) feel they need more targeted and specialist support and training to be able to meet the additional needs of learners. This should lead to a reduction in the number of requests for EHC assessments, where the support needed is universally available.

The above activities resulted in the need to publicly consult on the future proposals for the STLS offer to support mainstream early years settings and schools across the four dimensions of need as set out in the SEND Code of Practice. The Code of Practice is currently being review with expected publishing date in the first quarter of the new calendar year January/March 2022.

The STLS redesign is interdependent on the commissioning activities arising from the CATIE and the proposed High Needs Funding (HNF) review. To accommodate any changes that may be necessitated later, flexibility will be built into the new SLAs to ensure a joined-up approach. These three elements combined provide the opportunity to consider a systemwide approach to allocate resources and support where they can have the greatest impact.

Financial Implications:

The annual budget for the STLS is £8.5m per annum. This budget is funded from the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant.

Legal implications

The Specialist Teaching and Learning Service operates within a framework of national legislation and local strategies and standards.

The Children and Families Act 2014 and SEND Code of Practice 2015 set out the responsibility to improve services, life chances and choices for vulnerable children and to support families. The Act states that “where a pupil continues to make less than expected progress, despite evidence-based support and interventions that are matched to the pupil’s area of need, the school should consider involving specialists.

Schools also have a range of duties under the Equalities Act 2010, including duties relating to disability.

Sensory STLS undertakes a statutory function on behalf of the local authority.

Equalities implications

An Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) screening has been carried out. It identified a low adverse equality impact rating. A full EQIA will be undertaken as part of the new service development.

Other Alternatives Considered and risks if decision isn’t taken.

Discounted options include:

- Open market bids to deliver the service – whilst this option may result in savings, the focus of the STLS redesign has been to introduce greater consistency and equity
- To bring the whole provision back in house. Whilst this is the approach proposed for the countywide Sensory and PD STLS, it was discounted for the district offer.

Cabinet Committee recommendations and other consultation:

The Children’s and Young People Cabinet Committee consider the decision on 1 March 2022

Any alternatives considered and rejected:

As stated above

Any interest declared when the decision was taken and any dispensation granted by the Proper Officer: None

.....
signed

.....
date