

By: Joanna Wainwright, Director Commissioning Division (Specialist Services), Children, Families and Education

To: Children Families and Education Policy Overview Committee - 15 November 2007

Subject: UNIT REVIEW (INCLUDING DESIGNATED AND SPECIALIST PROVISION AND VERY SEVERE AND COMPLEX NEED SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEED AT MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS)

Classification: Unrestricted

File Ref:

Summary: This report updates Members on the progress of the Unit Review and consultations to date

Introduction

1. (1) In 2003 following the review of special schools across Kent, Members agreed the need to review specialist Units and Designations in mainstream schools. The objectives of the Review are:

- To ensure the pattern, diversity and organisation of provision reflects the changing needs of pupil population.
- To support schools in becoming more inclusive and accessible to all learners
- To reduce the long distances travelled by many children on a daily basis thus limiting stress for them and their families and reducing the expenditure on transport
- To ensure complementary provision to that available in special schools

(2) Since 2003, a number of key initiative and developments in Kent have influenced the review. The development of clusters and the move towards Children's Trust like arrangement provides the structure through which local provision can be commissioned to meet local needs. The Disability Discrimination Act Part 4 means that all schools must work towards developing flexible approaches to ensuring better outcomes for children and young people with learning difficulties and disabilities. The organisation of mainstream resourced provision needs to take account of this. Equally the opportunities presented by Building Schools for the Future and the 10 year Childcare Strategy should be factored in.

Background Information

2. (1) There are 63 Units or designated specialist provisions within mainstream schools in Kent of which 55 have delegated funds and 8 non-delegated. Units and designations provide 938 places countywide. There are currently 757 pupils on roll. In addition 377 pupils have Very Severe and Complex Need (VCSN) funding. These learners attend mainstream schools at their parent's wishes and funding for them is allocated by

a Headteacher Panel on a case by case basis. As Members will know, an increasing number of parents/carers are exercising their rights to secure local mainstream provision for children with severe and complex learning difficulties/disabilities. The following need types are covered by the review: Autism; Hearing Impairment (HI); Physical Disability (PD); Speech and Language; Specific Learning Difficulties; and Visual Impairment. The review encompasses all of the above provision.

(2) To achieve the objectives of the Review, provision will be commissioned from each cluster. The idea of the 'Unit' is being refreshed making it more flexible and responsive to cluster need, through the introduction of the 'Lead School' accountable to and funded through the Cluster board. The Lead School would be responsible for taking a lead in a particular need type and developing special expertise to support learners within a locality either in their own school or in other schools. A locality would consist of a cluster, district or area dependent upon the incidence of need. New funding mechanisms have been proposed to fit with this new structure of provision and will be developed further as necessary.

Development of Cluster provision

3. (1) Consultation and planning in Clusters began in May 2006. Clusters have worked in groups with the support of the Project manager, Local Education Officers, specialist CFE staff and local health professionals to develop proposals for cluster provision for children within each need type. The decision-making process, agreed by Cabinet on proposals for lead school provision is as follows:

- proposals are submitted to the County Unit Review multi-agency steering group for initial consideration
- proposals are presented by area to Cabinet Members seeking their views prior to consultation with a wider group of stakeholders
- consultation is undertaken in each area starting with briefings for Local members and MPs followed by a six week consultation period and public meeting.
- the outcome of the consultation is presented to Cabinet and agreement on proposals is sought.

The proposals being developed by Clusters are diverse and may include; schools which currently have unit provision becoming Lead schools for that need type and the establishment of new Lead schools where there are gaps in current provision.

(2) Clusters are at two different stages of development. In Phase One, there are eight Clusters Ashford 1 & Ashford Rural, Shepway 1 & Shepway Rural, North West Kent Clusters – Dartford East & West, Swanley & District and Gravesham. Proposals for these Clusters formed the basis of a consultation process undertaken during June and July 2007. The majority of responses to the consultation on Phase One proposals, 73% were positive. Stakeholders were particularly supportive of the following elements of the proposals

- the Lead school vision of sharing expertise and resources within a locality
- the concrete proposals for new Lead schools which will reduce travelling distances for children in the future
- the idea of groups of schools working together to make decisions
- the potential within the proposals for influencing the practice of staff in all schools

(3) A detailed report on the outcome of the Phase One consultations are included in the Cabinet Paper 17 September 2007. This includes key themes emerging from the consultation and for each area the list of proposed Lead schools and changes or actions proposed as a result of the consultation.

(4) All remaining Clusters are part of Phase Two. Continued progress has been made on Lead school nominations for these areas and detailed proposals will be the subject of a wider consultation in each area during the Autumn. A timetable is attached at Appendix One.

Funding proposals

4. (1) Proposals for new funding arrangements, which fit with the new structure of provision implicit in the Review strategy, have been developed by a working party established in April. In addition to the relevant CFE officers, the working party included members of the Schools Funding Forums, Headteachers and Teachers in Charge of current units and designations and Local Education Officer representation.

(2) The proposals developed by the group were presented to the Schools Funding Forum on 20 July. In response to consideration by the Funding Forum of issues relating to the Units Review it has been decided to delay consultation on funding for a further year. The proposals agreed for Phase One will proceed as a pilot with some realignment of existing central funding arrangements. Consultation on Phase Two proposals will commence and outcomes will be informed by the evaluation of Phase One. Future funding proposals will also be considered in light of the outcome of Phase One prior to full consultation with schools next year.

Recommendations

5. Members of the Children Families and Education Policy Overview Committee are asked to comment on the progress of the Unit Review.

Nuala Ryder
Project manager – Unit Review
Commissioning Division (Specialist Services) - Children, Families and Education
Tel 01622 696683
nuala.ryder@kent.gov.uk

Background Documents:

Cabinet Reports on the Unit Review 16 October 2006, 12 March 2007, 17 September 2007

Education and Libraries Policy Overview Committee 17th of November 2005

Timetable

Approval on provision (phase one) from KCC Cabinet	17 September 2007
Agreement to consult on provision (phase two) from Cabinet Member	5 November 2007
Wider consultation with stakeholders on area proposals (phase two)	November/December 2007
Consultation on Funding arrangements	November 2007
Progress reports and implementation decisions	2008