

Scrutiny and Performance Panel

Update on provision for children and adults with disabilities in response to a petition raising concerns about budget cuts

Ward(s): All

Portfolios: Councillor Barbara Cassidy – Children's Services & Councillor D Coughlan- Adult Social Care

Date: 28 April 2015

1. Executive Summary:

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the panel regarding current provision for children and adults with disabilities in the light of a public petition. The petition calls on the council to:

'not further reduce services in their planned cuts to these vulnerable groups including cuts to respite transport from special schools, year 14 Education in Special Schools, Educational provision, short term breaks/care in Children & Adults services and scrap excessive charging for transport to Day Centres'

This report addresses each of these issues with updates from Children's and Adult's Services.

2. Reason for scrutiny:

- 2.1 The petition refers to services subject to budget cuts in terms of respite transport for children and short breaks but also mentions provision that is not included in the budget cuts. The report clarifies the situation.

It should be noted that Cabinet and CMT was updated on the context and impact of the budget proposal regarding short breaks for children and young people with disabilities on 10.03.15.

3. Recommendations:

- 3.1 **That:**

1. *The panel notes the context to the petition and the rationale for actions taken regarding provision for children and adults with disabilities.*

4. Background papers:

4.1 None

5. Resource and legal considerations:

5.1 We will continue to meet the legislative requirements, of the Children and Families Act 2014 and the Care Act 2014.

6. Citizen impact:

6.1 Effective identification of the needs of children and adults with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities linked will ensure that provision achieves positive outcomes.

7. Environmental impact:

7.1 None

8. Performance management:

8.1 N/A

9. Equality Implications:

9.1 Equality Impact Assessments have been carried out for the budget proposals relating to short breaks for children and young people and transport to respite.

Both EQIAs acknowledge the opposition of parents to the proposals but conclude that the cuts can be made without a negative impact on vulnerable children with actions and mitigation outlined in the main body of the report.

10. Consultation:

10.1 Extensive consultation with all stake holders has taken place with regard to the review of SEN provision for children and young people. With regard to short breaks for children and young people budget consultation took place with a series of face to face meetings with parents and partners. Consultation in relation to adult's short breaks is described in the report.

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Report

Disability Services for Adults

1. Transport

- 1.1 The Assisted Transport Policy for Vulnerable Adults and Older People was implemented on 1st April 2014 following extensive consultation.

All citizens who are in receipt of social care provision will undergo an assessment in relation to their transport needs as part of their support plan. The Transport Policy is predicated upon individuals being supported to access public and community transport already available throughout the borough.

- 1.2 We know there will be exceptional circumstances that will need to be considered whereby evidence can be provided that the transport costs of those citizens are above the average cost incurred as an everyday expense. In these circumstances, if a citizen has critical and substantial eligible needs, they may be able to utilise part of their personal budget to contribute a proportionate amount towards the cost of transport which is over and above the average everyday expense.
- 1.3 The Department of Works and Pensions include in their financial assessment for people with disabilities and opportunity for people to claim various allowances to assist with costs towards their mobility. The benefits that people receive for this purpose are expected to be used to help them access care services which are part of meeting their needs.
- 1.4 The above approach supersedes the old transport charging policy. The current charging assessment is part of the process of an individual's assessment and support plan and is a contribution towards the overall cost of their services based upon their ability to pay. There had been some historical cases where the old transport charge was perceived to be in place due to a delay with individual case reviews. However this has been prioritised and the process based upon the assisted transport policy ensures a consistent transparent and fair approach to the provision and funding of transport for adults with disabilities.

2. Short Breaks

- 2.1 As part of a review of Respite Care for adults with learning disabilities consideration was given to the review and replacement of Fallings Heath Respite Care Unit with a wider range of provision and alternatives subject to consultation. This included a savings target of £260,000 in 2015/16. The Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Inclusion was given Cabinet approval (July 2014) to review Fallings Heath House Residential Respite Service and to consult with service users and carers upon a range of options in order to facilitate the development of improved outcomes for those using the service.

- 2.2 Outcomes were submitted to Cabinet on December 17th 2014. The feedback from carers and users was that Fallings Heath provides essential respite care and that some alternative ways of delivering respite care (such as Shared Lives, and peripatetic support in user and carers' own homes), while more cost effective, are not going to meet the needs of all current users and carers. Carers and users acknowledged the high costs of the service and the need for Walsall Council to reduce its budgets but favoured a model that enabled Fallings Heath to be retained in a cost effective way.
- 2.3 Cabinet made the decision that Fallings Heath Respite Care Unit is developed with increased occupancy rates, and effective measures that reduce costs. This has been achieved with £233,000 of savings and increased occupancy and no cuts in the 8 bed provision. Equality Impact Assessment for Policies, Procedures and Services were completed along with Organisational Change Equality Impact Assessment.

3 Proposals relating to Day Services including Employment Services

- 3.1 There are no proposals for cuts in services in 2015/16. However there are savings proposals for 2016/17 of £517,000 in relation to the review of day services for people with learning disability including the review and redesign of day opportunities that produce cost effective non buildings based options using Goscote as a "hub" for these users and staff.
- 3.2 There is also a savings proposal in 2016/17 of £300,000 in relation to the review of sheltered employment services for people with learning disability (Links to Work) with consideration to replace current service with a redesigned service that supports users to access volunteering, vocational and training opportunities in partnership with colleges and employers.
- 3.3 It should be emphasised that at this stage these are proposals; there will be full engagement and consultation with service users, families and other stakeholders in developing new services for those who are eligible and signposting others and their carers to appropriate support and alternatives.

Children's Services

The 5 points raised in the petition are addressed in turn.

1. Cuts to respite transport from special school.

- 1.1 Transport to respite care from special schools is subject to budget cuts coming into effect from September 2015. This is mitigated with central funds identified to assist families, subject to assessment by the children's social work team. Where families would not be able to access respite without transport assistance the funding will continue. The funding will be in place over the two year period from September 2015.

2 Year 14 Education in Special Schools

- 2.1 This is not an issue relating to the budget proposals. Historically the High Needs Funding stream has been used by Walsall and other local authorities to blanket fund Year 14 placements, that is for young people entering a third year post 16.
- 2.2 The Education Funding Agency has been very clear that this practice must discontinue as effectively it results in funding intended for children's special school placements being allocated to adults.
- 2.3 However, it has been confirmed with the special schools that on a case by case basis where the Education, Health and Care Plan assessment identifies that a young person with complex needs will benefit from a third year post 16 the local authority will support and fund this. This ensures that provision is matched to need.
- 2.4 Alongside this the local offer in terms of education, training and employment opportunities is being developed. Walsall Adult Community College is one example of a local resource for young adults that is extending the range of provision available with new opportunities for training in horticulture, catering and IT skills as well.

3. Short term breaks in Children's Services

- 3.1 On 04.02.15 Cabinet agreed a reduction of £200,000 in the budget for short breaks for the two year period 2015-2017. In the first year the reduction will be £50,000, with £150,000 in 2016-2017. The budget for short breaks is £1.86 million.
- 3.2 There are currently over 200 children/young people receiving short break support. The provision meets a range of needs from Universal Services available for all children who have a diagnosed disability to Specialist Services for children with very complex needs.
- 3.3 The reductions will be achieved through a phased approach to ensure there is no negative impact on children/young people and their families. The two key strands of

this approach are more effective assessment of need and better use of local resources.

- 3.4 Although all the support packages provided to children and their families are subject to assessment and review, the identification of needs has not always been robust and support packages have often 'drifted' without reassessment for long periods. Taking a needs led approach it is proposed to change / reduce support services in line with more robust reassessments.
- 3.5 Effective social work with a focus on the needs of the child/young person rooted in regular visits, robust planning and clear assessment is appropriate and necessary hence this aspect of the proposal essentially requires good practice.
- 3.6 Previously assessments have tended to offer a high level of support without clear identification of how this will achieve positive outcomes or meet needs. An improved assessment tool has been developed to help social workers and families focus on needs and outcomes. It is envisaged that Improved and timely assessments and reassessments will ensure that support packages better reflect needs and outcomes.
- 3.7 More effective use of the Bluebells unit will contribute to the reduction in short break costs. The unit is currently occupied at just over two-thirds of its capacity, a figure that we could readily increase without affecting running costs. Making full use of local resources is appropriate in terms of keeping children/young people within their families and communities so there will be a focus on Bluebells as the first option when new assessments indicate that overnight respite care is required to meet needs.
- 3.8 Walsall provides a range of high quality short breaks provision for children/young people with disabilities. Engagement work with families has confirmed the importance of short break support, and we are committed to ensuring that high quality services continue to be offered and used effectively to meet needs and improve outcomes for children and their families. A high level of engagement work with children, young people and adults will continue. Annual surveys are carried out to consider service user views in relation to the short break groups that are offered during term time and school holidays. Social workers within the Children with Disabilities team (CDT) seek the views of children/young people through home visits.