

Cabinet – 20 June 2012

Review of Safeguarding Services for Disabled Children Working Group Report.

Report of the Children's and Young People Scrutiny and Performance Panel

Portfolio: Councillor Rachel Andrew

Report detail

A working group led by Councillor Barbara Cassidy undertook a review of services provided for disabled children and their families on behalf of the Children's and Young People Scrutiny and Performance Panel. The working group's activity included meeting with parents whose children access disability services. Members of the working group also undertook visits to the Eldon and Redruth residential homes, while also receiving guidance on the New Eldon respite facility.

The working group report was presented by Councillor Cassidy to the Children's and Young People Panel at its meeting on 8 Mach 2012.

The Panel voted unanimously to endorse the report and to recommend to Cabinet the proposals as set-out in the report annexed, specifically:

That:

1. officers commissioning or delivering services ensure that appropriate consultation with disabled children and their parents informs decisions;
2. officers continue to support groups for parents with disabled children;
3. the outcome of the working group's work is shared with parents;
4. children's Services and other council services, including adult social care, work effectively to effect smooth transitions when children reach the age of eighteen;
5. further attention be paid to the training of helpers and volunteers working with children with a disability to create a more consistent workforce.

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Signed:



Councillor Barbara Cassidy
Chair, Children's & Young People Scrutiny
and Performance Panel

Chair's Foreword

The working group was established to consider how the Council is discharging its duties in relation to disabled children.

I would like to thank all those who have assisted with the working group over the last few months particularly the parents who made the time to meet with us, the other members of the working group and officers from within Children's Services.



*Councillor Barbara Cassidy
Lead Member, safeguarding working group
Chair, Children's & Young People and Inclusion Scrutiny
and Performance Panel*



*Councillor
Eddie Hughes*



*Councillor
Rose
Martin*



*Councillor
Alan Paul*

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Introduction

In June 2011 the Children's & Young People Scrutiny and Performance Panel decided that they would like to explore the services provided for disabled children and their families. This was because members were aware that the Council was facing increased economic pressures. Councillors are very aware that disabled children are particularly vulnerable in terms of safeguarding and so keen to ensure that the level of service is maintained.

Terms of Reference

The working group held an initial meeting to consider its terms of reference.

The agreed terms of reference were:

1. To understand the legislative duties placed in Councils to deliver services for disabled children and their families
2. To explore the processes whereby children are allocated 'short breaks'
3. To look at the plans for the 'New Eldon'
4. To explore the views of parents of disabled children

Membership

Councillor Barbara Cassidy
Councillor Eddie Hughes
Councillor Doreen Shires
Councillor Rose Martin
Councillor Alan Paul

The working group's investigation was assisted by a number of witnesses:

Michelle Whiting	Assistant Director for Children's Services
Carol Boughton	Head of Service for Early Years & Disabilities Services - Serco
Sam McDonald	Head of Service for Placement & Resources
David Bovell	Operations Manager for Placements & Resources
Alison Glover	
8 parents of children with a disability	

Methodology

In order to complete their work the working group held a number of meetings during the 2011/12 municipal year.

In addition, Councillor Cassidy visited Eldon House and Redruth. Councillor Martin separately visited Eldon House and Redruth and met with the children and staff there.

Report Format

The report is a summary of the evidence the working group received along with comments and suggestions for future action.

Children's Disability Services

The working group were given a brief on the legislative framework within which the Council's duties sit. (See Appendix 1 (slides overview of service) and Appendix 2 – details of legislation).

There are approximately 4,500 children in Walsall with a disability. However, numbers are expected to rise over time as a result of medical and technical progress.

Short Break

The working group heard that a short break is a service which provides a parent or carer with a break from caring for their disabled child. It is recognised that coping with a child or young person who has additional needs due to a physical or learning disability can be very demanding on parents, carers and family members.

A short break is therefore a service which provides parents and carers with a break in their caring responsibilities. This may include:

- access to all mainstream childcare, childminders, children's centres, after school activities, youth and leisure activities, known as universal services;
- access to specialist after school activities, holiday and weekend activities without assessment for those who meet the medium or higher level of need as outlined in the Entitlement Criteria (Appendix 3);
- Services in the family home directly commissioned by the local authority;
- Overnight stays away from the family home;
- Services that a parent chooses to directly commission via a direct payment facility

Short Break & Complex Care Panel

The Short Break & Complex Care Panel determines the amount and type of short breaks from which parents and young people are able to choose, based on needs assessed by council officers.

The Panel heard that the challenge of assessing a disabled child's needs means that sometimes the council has to advise parents that their child's needs are not as acute as they may think. Care has to be taken by the Council in distinguishing between "a want" and "a need". (See Appendix 3 for the criteria).

The Panel includes representatives from different services who provide specialist services for children and young people with a disability and meet on a monthly basis. The Panel looks at ways of meeting the assessed needs of those children who have the highest level of need. The Panel uses its specialist knowledge of services available and can also ask the Children's Commissioner to look for services to meet the specific needs of children and young people, based on the information provided about the children's individual needs.

Importance of provision

The working group heard that it is vitally important that the council provide the opportunity for families to go on short breaks to minimise the risk of children coming into care, because of their disability. It was explained that a significant amount of work had been undertaken with children and their carers to assess the type of provision they would find helpful and enjoy. This work was undertaken prior to the commissioning of services from a number of voluntary organisations.

The Panel also consider and make a decision on applications by parents wishing to operate a Direct Payments system. This system enables parents to purchase their own services.

Active engagement

The working group heard that the service continues to actively engage with carers and children to help the Council “get it right” for them. Members looked at the seven case studies provided. (See Appendix 4).

Importance of training

Ofsted have stated that children who are severely disabled are more vulnerable to abuse therefore it is important that the work force is well trained.

Complex care

There are a small number of children who require extremely complex care packages, for example, an end of life package for one child can cost up to £50,000 per month. In this instance, health, education, and social care work to a protocol which determines whether it is single, dual or tripartite funding and the percentage each agency commits to. Staff need to be trained effectively to ensure that these complex needs are addressed and that appropriate funding provided by each agency/partner.

However, given the costs members were advised that a couple of unexpected complex packages can challenge the budget. The budgets for children with a disability have not been cut but this puts an additional pressure on other Children’s Services budgets as the directorate has to make an overall saving in line with Council’s reduced income.

New Eldon

The working group considered the investment in New Eldon - a respite facility for severely disabled children. Eldon House provides short term breaks for children with physical and or learning disabilities. The accommodation is based on one level. The new Eldon has, in addition, a separate day respite area to deliver day provision.

Members noted that the old building was past ‘it’s sell by date’ and no longer met current standards. For example:-

- the open layout is not conducive for children on the Autistic Spectrum
- The bathrooms are all highly adapted which does not suit children with less specialist physical needs.
- The close proximity of the bathrooms to the lounge did not afford proper privacy.

The new building has a range of en-suite or Jack and Jill bathrooms with shower arrangements that can flexibly meet the needs of both physically and non-physically disabled children. Members acknowledged the concerns of parents that the new building has less bedroom accommodation – six rather than eight. Members were reassured by Officers who advised that there had been analysis of the amount of overnight respite needed and that six bedrooms was sufficient.

Officers advised that resources within New Eldon would be maximised and that children would continue to be grouped according to age and ability, as in old Eldon, to enable them to form friendship groups and have a richer experience.

Member visits to Eldon & Redruth

Councillor Rose Martin who has visited both the current Eldon and Redruth, a long-stay residential home for disabled children, as part of her Corporate Parenting duties, fed back her findings. She confirmed that the old Eldon building was tired and past its sell by date. However, the staff really cared about the children and their work led to Eldon achieving a good rating by Ofsted. In comparison Redruth is well equipped and decorated, with children being “well loved and looked after”. Councillor Martin observed that physically Eldon is the poor relation to Redruth and it really needs updating so she was pleased that the new build was in progress.

Councillor Cassidy had also visited both of the homes and confirmed Councillor Martin’s finding. She had no concerns about the levels of care when she visited - the children were involved in appropriate activities, the staff were warm and welcoming and the children appeared happy. However there was a significant difference in the physical environment with Eldon being more clinical in its set up compared to Redruth, which is very homely. Staff reported that the physical layout at Eldon presents challenges and that the new build was very welcomed.

The working group agreed that the New Eldon building would enable Walsall to improve its respite service for severely disabled children.

The working group recognised the importance of offering support to parents of disabled children to support them to care for their children at home.

The working group recognised that commissioning sufficient facilities in a demand-led service is challenging and that staff have to be careful to distinguish ‘need’ from ‘want’.

Meeting with parents

Members of the working group met with a group of eight parents whose children access disability services. This was supported by officers Carol Boughton, Alison Glover and Michelle Whiting.

The parents were very open and welcoming to the Members and willing to share their views. The working group heard that some parents have a choice of which short breaks they can access but it depends on the needs of the child (children with more needs have a lesser choice). There are also other considerations such as transport requirements and the needs of other siblings which can make the difference between being able to access a service or not.

One parent shared her view that there is a lack of mainstream activities for disabled teenagers. She used direct payments which enabled her to employ carers and access Eldon House for respite care.

Levels of care

A few parents shared their views that whilst the levels of support for them and their children were appropriate, they were concerned that the levels of support for new parents were reduced. Officers explained that new families had a broader range of options including direct payments and that each package was unique to that family's need.

All parents agreed on the importance of respite care. There were several moving statements about the importance of respite to enable parents to care, maintain other family relationships including their other children, and get some rest. Many parents of severely disabled children have to meet the child's needs several times in the night and this prolonged lack of a full night's sleep becomes very tiring.

Another parent voiced her frustration that she could not get a statement for her autistic child because of his academic ability, even though he had a high level of social/emotional needs. This parent was advised that the Parents Partnership can support her in appealing this. Another parent was not happy that her package of a carer at home for a period of time was reduced when her son was placed at residential school and she is appealing this decision.

The parents all said that they found groups where they got support from other parents with disabled children very helpful.

Play & holiday groups

There was a lengthy discussion about play groups and holiday groups. The parents welcomed the training of staff and buddy schemes to enable disabled children to access a wider range of provision. However there are some parts of the workforce which needed further training on working with disabled children, particularly the buddies where the level of skills were not consistent. (Buddies provide additional support to assist service users in accessing services).

Parents pointed out that if the summer schemes and their application processes were better co-ordinated amongst the providers, they would have more choice.

Parents said that their children enjoyed and got a lot out of the holiday schemes. Several parents expressed concern about the transition of their children into adult services once they reached 18. Officers assured parents that Children's Services will continue to develop transition working.

One parent said although they had been very frank and shared their views she was very pleased with the quality of service that she had received.

The working group were very grateful for the parents taking the time to share their experiences. The group were moved by the commitment they had to their children. It was the view of the group that:-

- **Further attention needed to be paid to the training of helpers and volunteers working with children with a disability to create a more consistent workforce;**
- **Officers should continue to work closely with parents and children to develop support packages that best met their needs.**
- **Children and adult services should work co-operatively to support children and their parents through transition.**

Conclusion

The working group agreed that getting services right for disabled children and their families was very important for the borough. They noted that the most successful and helpful projects had a high degree of consultation and involvement from disabled children and their families. The working group are keen that consultation and involvement are factored into future commissioning arrangements and that Children's Services and adult social care services work closely to facilitate smooth transitions. The group were pleased to note the high number of projects delivered by the voluntary sector.

Recommendations

That;

1. **Officers commissioning or delivering services ensure that appropriate consultation with disabled children and their parents informs decisions;**
2. **Officers continue to support groups for parents with disabled children;**
3. **The outcome of the working group's work is shared with parents;**

- 4. Children's Services and other council services, including adult social care, work effectively to effect smooth transitions when children reach the age of eighteen;**
- 5. Children's and Young People Scrutiny and Performance Panel receive a progress update during the next municipal year.**
- 6. Further attention be paid to the training of helpers and volunteers working with children with a disability to create a more consistent workforce**

Work Group Name:	Safeguarding Working Group
Panel:	
Municipal Year:	2011/2012
Lead Member:	Councillor Cassidy
Lead Officer:	Michelle Whiting
Membership:	<i>Councillor Barbara Cassidy Lead Member, safeguarding working group Councillor Eddie Hughes Councillor Doreen Shires Councillor Rose Martin Councillor Alan Paul</i>
1.	Context
	<p>The council are responsible for safeguarding and delivering a range of services to this vulnerable group of children.</p> <p>A significant part of the service is delivered by SERCO and that part of the contract is under discussion.</p> <p>The service was overspent last year and there are challenges in encouraging families to take up a variety of short break options other than residential.</p> <p>The council is making a significant investment building a new 'Eldon' for short breaks and day provision which is due to open in September. Maximising the use of this building is a tool to manage the budget.</p>
2.	Objectives
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To understand the legislative duties placed in Councils to deliver services for disabled children and their families 2. To explore the processes whereby children are allocated 'short breaks' 3. To look at the plans for the 'New Eldon' 4. To explore the views of parents of disabled children
3.	Scope
	Children's Services, Serco, Disabled children and their parents, care trust , councillors need to be included.
4.	Timescales & Reporting Schedule
	To report to Panel within 2010/2011 municipal year.