

## EXECUTIVE

### 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2022

<b>Report Title</b>	<b>Disaggregation of the Joint Sensory Impairment Service to North Northamptonshire Council and establishment of a new operating model</b>
<b>Report Author</b>	AnnMarie Dodds, Executive Director of Children's Services
<b>Lead Member</b>	Councillor Scott Edwards, Executive Member for Children, Families, Education and Skills

<b>Key Decision</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<b>Is the decision eligible for call-in by Scrutiny?</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<b>Are there public sector equality duty implications?</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<b>Does the report contain confidential or exempt information (whether in appendices or not)?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
<b>Applicable paragraph number/s for exemption from publication under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972</b>	

#### **List of Appendices**

**Appendix A** – Sensory Impairment Service Revised Model Business Case

**Appendix B** – Schools and Young People service feedback

#### **1. Purpose of Report**

---

- 1.1. The purpose of the report is to provide an overview to the Executive of the Sensory Impairment Service revised model Outline Business Case, and to seek approval to implement the proposed recommendation as set out within the report.
- 1.2. Further detail relating to the recommendation, including how the new model will be organised, is provided within the Appendices.

#### **2. Executive Summary**

---

- 2.1. This report outlines the current position regarding delivery of the Children's Sensory Impairment Service (in Education) across North and West

Northamptonshire Councils, the core options relating to future disaggregation of the service, and the rationale to proceed with the recommended alternative option of creating a commissioned service model arrangement between the two Councils.

- 2.2. Subject to consultation with affected staff, agreement with affected schools and legal input, the recommended option would also see the potential transfer of some specialist peripatetic staff who already work within schools, directly under school employment (as is already the case for the majority of schools within the county requiring specialist support for students). This would realise a potential saving of £0.31m from the current budget, which will be provided through the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).

### **3. Recommendations**

---

- 3.1. It is recommended that the Executive:

- a) Approve the creation of a single model of delivery for the Sensory Impairment Service within education across Northamptonshire, located within North Northamptonshire Council, which could be commissioned by others.
- b) Approve the proposal to seek transfer of Access and Communication Support Workers (ACSWs) employment from the Sensory Impairment Service directly into schools (as outlined in the recommended new delivery model and explained within Sections 5.7 to 5.10), subject to full staff consultation and HR processes.
- c) Grant delegated authority to the Executive Member for Children, Families, Education and Skills, in consultation with Monitoring Officers and Section 151 Officers for North and West Northamptonshire, to take any further decisions and actions necessary and complete any legal agreements required to effect the decision.
- d) Note that a report will be considered by the Joint Shared Services Committee in relation to the removal of the service from the Inter Authority Agreement between North Northamptonshire Council and West Northamptonshire Council
- e) To note financial implications as set out within Section 7.1 of the report and the impact on the allocation of Dedicated Schools Grant funding.

- 3.2 Reason for the recommendations:

This option has been recommended following a detailed investigation of possible service delivery models and completion of a comprehensive Impact and Options Assessment, which demonstrated that a traditional disaggregation approach created significant risk that could not be fully mitigated. Implementing a single commissioning based model utilising the existing service framework with North Northamptonshire Council would ensure that both Councils are able

to fulfil the obligations set out by the original Local Government Reform 'Future Northants' blueprint through the delivery of an alternative remodelled service. This also safeguards services delivered to vulnerable children and their families and provides a sustainable and resilient model for the future.

### 3.3 Alternative options considered:

- Do nothing – retain the current lead authority arrangement governed under the Inter-Authority Agreement (IAA) between North Northamptonshire Council and West Northamptonshire Councils
- Disaggregate the service equally between the two Councils in line with original Blueprint

The alternative options shown above have been discounted as they would not provide an effective and sustainable delivery model for either Council whilst working towards full disaggregation of shared services. Splitting the service equally would pose significant risk to vulnerable service users and cause untenable strain on already very limited specialist resources.

## 4. Report Background

---

- 4.1. Every Local Authority must make adequate provision for the range of needs within its education service. It is a requirement, detailed in the current Code of Practice for SEND children that Local Authorities (LAs) provide specialist support services to children with a hearing or vision impairment in mainstream and in special schools.
- 4.2. The complexity of the task of supporting these children is recognised by the DfE in insisting that teachers who teach and support pupils with a hearing/ vision impairment should hold a mandatory qualification.
- 4.3. Schools have a statutory duty to provide the highly specialist support identified in Education Health and Care Plans for students with a sensory impairment. This includes support from specialist teachers, IT specialists, Mobility officers, BSL instructor and specialist resource adaptors. These roles currently work across the county to ensure that specialist support can be provided quickly at point of need.
- 4.4. The Sensory Impairment Service (SIS) aims to raise the aspirations and improve the outcomes of children and young people (CYP) with hearing/ vision impairment (ages 0-19yrs) by identifying and meeting their needs at an early stage and positively impacting on their progress within educational settings and the home. The team currently has a caseload of 1,025 Children, Young People (CYP) spread broadly evenly across both North Northamptonshire Council (NNC) and West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) geographies
- 4.5. The service is made up of a wide range of highly specialist unique roles meeting highly complex specific needs.

- 4.6. The SIS is currently hosted by NNC and provides services across both North and West Northamptonshire Councils. The hosted arrangement is governed and monitored by the Inter Authority Agreement (IAA) between both councils and is made up of 55 employees.
- 4.7. It was originally agreed as part of the new unitary authorities Blueprint that the service would be disaggregated, with an original target date of 1<sup>st</sup> September 2022. However, subsequent detailed review and completion of an Impact and Options review highlighted some significant risks associated with this approach – most of which would have a direct impact on the ability of both Councils to deliver a safe and effective model to service users.
- 4.8. Traditional disaggregation with the aspiration of creating two equally effective teams would not fulfil the user need without the requirement of significant growth and the duplication of key roles. There is a national shortage of specialist qualified teachers, and so the required recruitment would expose both Councils to significant risk of being unable to meet their statutory requirements, a fall in service standards and failing vulnerable children and young people.
- 4.9. At the Shared Service Joint Committee meeting held on 17<sup>th</sup> August 2022, it was agreed that disaggregation of the Sensory Impairment Service would be delayed, pending completion of a Business Case to further explore and recommend an alternative delivery model which would best meet the needs of both Councils with minimal associated risks. It was agreed at this meeting that the Business Case would be brought back to both North Northamptonshire Executive and West Northamptonshire Cabinet in December 2022 for further consideration and agreement of next steps.

## 5. Issues and Choices

---

- 5.1. Upon completion of the detailed Impact Assessment and Business Case, there are three main core options for the future delivery model of the Sensory Impairment Service. These are now examined in detail.
- 5.2. **Do nothing** – This would mean that the current Sensory Impairment Service would remain under a hosted (or lead) arrangement across both Councils, delivered through NNC and managed accordingly through existing IAA arrangements.
- 5.3. **Disaggregate the service equally between the two Councils in line with original Blueprint** – This would mean that the current Sensory Impairment Service would be split, and two smaller teams established within both WNC and NNC, thus dissolving the existing IAA arrangements. This option is of too significant a risk of negative impact on effective and sustainable service delivery, and likely to significantly increase the level of risk to the extremely vulnerable service users.
- 5.4. **Developing an alternative commissioned delivery model** – This would mean the existing service would move to an alternative delivery model which

would see a commissioned service arrangement set up between North Northamptonshire Council and West Northamptonshire Council, with North Northamptonshire being the service provider. The service would be remodelled with a traded service (outsourced arrangement in place) to West Northamptonshire Council with other elements of the service aligned with delivery with schools. This option also enables further opportunities to explore working with other local authorities in the future.

- 5.5. The **recommended option** is that set out in **section 5.4** above, to delay disaggregation and seek to instead build and implement a single, commissionable service delivery model within North Northamptonshire Council. This would mean the majority of existing SIS staff would remain within their current employment arrangements, but the existing IAA schedule would be removed, and a supplier/provider contractual arrangement would be put in place for the new model between North and West Northamptonshire Councils
- 5.6. Moving towards a single commissionable service model utilising the existing service framework with NNC would ensure that both Councils are able to fulfil the obligations set out by the original blueprint through the delivery of an alternative remodelled service. This also safeguards services to vulnerable children and their families and provides a sustainable and resilient model for the future.
- 5.7. As well as providing a resilient, safe and sustainable service to end users, the proposed new delivery model would also realise an immediate saving from the Dedicated Schools Grant funding of £0.31m against existing budgets due to the potential transfer of Access and Communication Support Workers (ACSWs) into schools. This saving will fall within the existing Dedicated Schools Grant funding which is allocated to deliver the service.
- 5.8. ACSWs currently work directly in schools throughout the day and support highly vulnerable students with either British Sign Language or Braille. The new model would see all the SIS ACSW's employed directly by schools with a small number of new 'Specialist Practitioner' posts created within the team to provide specialist advice, guidance and training to ensure continued professional development of ACSW's in schools. Moving these roles would provide the opportunity to further embed ACSW staff within the school culture and environment with which they already work closely with, whilst continuing to receive specialist support through the retained central Sensory Impairment Service as appropriate.
- 5.9. Deployment of ACSWs managed at school level would also significantly free up leadership capacity and focus within the core Sensory Impairment Service.
- 5.10. The proposed business model would create capacity and commercial focus to enable the service to adapt to meet the changing needs of both Councils and the vulnerable children they serve.

## 6. Next Steps

---

- 6.1. Following review by Executive, the proposal is also due to be discussed by West Northamptonshire Cabinet at their meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> January 2023. Subject to approval by both North Northamptonshire Council Executive and West Northamptonshire Cabinet, these are the key milestones to further develop and deliver the revised Sensory Impairment Service business model:

Key Milestone	Date
Business Case approved by NNC Executive	22 <sup>nd</sup> December 2022
Business Case approved by WNC	17 <sup>th</sup> January 2023
Detailed Delivery Plan developed and agreed	End March 2023
Trading Contract between WNC and NNC drafted and agreed in principle	April – July 2023
Staff and core stakeholder consultation	April – July 2023
Staff transfer plans / implementation process	July – August 2023
Formal trading contract between WNC and NNC live	1 <sup>st</sup> September 2023
ASCWs transfer to school employment	1 <sup>st</sup> September 2023
Full commercial model in place	1 <sup>st</sup> September 2023

## 7. Implications (including financial implications)

---

### 7.1. Resources, Financial and Transformation

7.1.1. The current total cost of the service is £2.04m, which is funded through contributions from West Northants Council and North Northants Council via their Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). In line with the agreement made at Local Government Reform changes, service costs are split 56% WNC and 44% NNC which broadly reflects the distribution of service activity across the areas. For FY2022/23 the contributions from each authority are £1.07m for WNC and £0.97m for NNC.

7.1.2. Staff within the service are employed by NNC and income is received from WNC to offset a proportion of the costs. In the new model, this will become a trading arrangement, where NNC continues to employ staff but are commissioned to deliver services by WNC. This arrangement being subject to an 18-month break clause on either party to provide certainty of delivery and financial stability.

- 7.1.3. As set out in sections 5.7 and 5.8, part of the new model proposal is to transfer the specialist ACSW peripatetic staff directly into applicable schools, leaving the core Strategic and Advisory team within the Sensory Impairment Service. This will deliver greater resilience, free up leadership capacity within the service and give schools greater opportunity to deploy staff efficiently and embed ACSW staff within the school culture and environment.
- 7.1.4. The current full cost of the staffing structure, including ACSWs, is £2.173m. The staffing structure required to deliver the proposed model is costed at £1.692m, with an expected saving of £0.48m. Set against this, no recharges will be made to schools, as they will employ staff directly, and so the net saving would be £0.31m from within the DSG.

## **7.2. Legal and Governance**

- 7.2.1. The Shared Services Joint Committee is responsible for “ensuring there are robust plans for any disaggregation of services and that there is a smooth transition to new service delivery arrangements”. They are also responsible for ensuring that statutory arrangements are in place for each Council.
- 7.2.2. The service is currently operating in accordance with the Inter-Authority Agreement (IAA) that exists between North Northamptonshire Council and West Northamptonshire Council, under Schedule 2B1 relevant to the lead delivery arrangement for the Sensory Impairment Service. This would continue until the alternative model has been agreed and safely implemented. Should the recommendation be approved, a Deed of Variation will need to be completed to remove Schedule 2B1 from the IAA.
- 7.2.3. Upon agreement of proposed direction for the service by both North Northamptonshire Council and West Northamptonshire Cabinet, it is expected that a further follow-up paper will be taken to the Shared Services Joint Committee to consider any further operational details relating to the proposal and agree an outline implementation plan.
- 7.2.4. Should the recommended option be approved, legal involvement will be required from both Councils in the setting up and ongoing monitoring of contractual arrangements relating to the outsourced service provision.

## **7.3. Relevant Policies and Plans**

- 7.3.1. This proposal will specifically help meet the corporate priorities of supporting active, fulfilled lives, and building better, brighter futures. It will meet the corporate objective of ensuring every child has equal access to a high standard of education.
- 7.3.2. All relevant policies will need to be reviewed and updated to ensure they remain fit for purpose following implementation and are agreed for the respective authorities as necessary.

## 7.4. Risk

7.4.1. The core risks identified with the proposal are set out in the table below:

<b>Risks / Impacts</b>	<b>Risks mitigated / Impacts managed</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• As lead of the commercial contract NNC will bear the risk of the service and financial sustainability</li><li>• WNC are committing to outsource the delivery of this service which means they have reduced control and influence over quality assurance</li><li>• Imposing any change on a successful and high performing service increases risk of impact on sustained performance.</li><li>• Reliance on income from WNC to fund service delivery</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Risks carried will be reflected in the cost of service arrangement with WNC</li><li>• Increased capacity and commercial focus enabling the service to adapt to meet the changing needs of both Councils and the children they serve</li><li>• Commissioning model which supports recruitment and retention of highly qualified specialist team</li><li>• Ensuring clarity and transparency of funding models that can be adapted to meet changing needs</li><li>• Monitoring of quality assurance processes to ensure consistency of excellent provision. Transparency of processes with WNC</li><li>• Agreed minimum 18-month break clause to mitigate risk</li></ul>

## 7.5. Consultation

7.5.1. Consultation will be expected with affected member of staff and schools potentially impacted by the proposal.

7.5.2. Any staff directly impacted by the implementation of the proposal will be consulted with completely in accordance with required HR policy and processes.

## 7.6. Consideration by Executive Advisory Panel

7.6.1. No immediate considerations arising from this report.

## 7.7. Consideration by Scrutiny

7.7.1. No immediate considerations arising from this report.



## **7.8. Equality Implications**

7.8.1. No considerations arising from this report. An Equality Impact Assessment will be undertaken as part of the implementation planning process.

## **7.9. Climate and Environment Impact**

7.9.1. No negative impacts arising from this report.

## **7.10. Community Impact**

7.10.1. None arising from this report.

## **7.11. Crime and Disorder Impact**

7.11.1. None arising from this report.

## **8. Background Papers**

---

8.1. Outline Business Case – Sensory Impairment Service, alternative delivery model.

8.2. Change Request (to Shared Services Joint Committee) – Sensory Impairment Service (in Education) Disaggregation – Change to Approach (Agenda Item 5) ([Public Pack](#))[Agenda Document for Shared Services Joint Committee, 17/08/2022 14:00 \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)