



## Outline Business Case

<b>Document Type</b>	Outline Business Case
<b>Project Name</b>	<b>Sensory Impairment Service – Alternative Delivery Model</b>
<b>Audience for this document</b>	
North Northants Council (NNC) Children’s Senior Leadership Team; NNC Corporate Leadership Team; West Northants Council (WNC) Executive Leadership Team; NNC Executive and WNC Cabinet	
<b>Purpose of this document</b>	
This document is used to present options available relating to the future model of delivery for the Children’s Sensory Impairment Service and to provide rationale for a preferred option – this is to be used to obtain commitment and approval to proceed to the next stages of planning/implementation of the preferred and recommended option. The ongoing viability of the project will be monitored against the Business Case, and it is therefore intended to be ‘living document’ which will remain live until the project enters the closure stages.	

<b>Version History</b>			
<b>Date</b>	<b>Ver</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Brief Comments on Changes</b>
28.09.22	0.1	Helen Baines, Project Manager	Initial draft
04.10.22	0.2	Helen Baines, Project Manager	Second draft, amended format and structure
14.11.22	0.3	Jacqui Joseph / Helen Baines / Neil Goddard	Service additions
17.11.22	1.0	Helen Baines	Minor amendments following service review
07.12.22	1.1	Helen Baines	Minor amendments following Pathfinder Legal review



<b>Distribution (For Information, Review or Approval)</b>	
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(1) Responsibility: R=Review, A=Approval, I=Information

## **1. Description of Business Challenge/Opportunity**

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 NNC and WNC – this is a relatively stable cohort in terms of changes with minimal increase/decreases from year to year. However, the students supported by the SIS are some of the most vulnerable, with a significant high level of need but low incidence, and it is vital that these students do not have their education disrupted.

The SIS is currently hosted by North Northamptonshire Council (NNC) and provides services across both North and West Northamptonshire Council (WNC). The hosted arrangement is governed and monitored by the Inter Authority Agreement (IAA) between both councils and is made up of 55 employees. The service is made up of a wide range of highly specialist unique roles meeting highly complex specific needs. 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.



It was originally agreed as part of the new unitary authorities Blueprint that the Sensory Impairment 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.

Several options have been explored to mitigate some of the core risks identified with proposed disaggregation of the service. This included the recommendation to not disaggregate the service into a traditional North/West model, but instead review alternative ways of delivering the service for both authorities – this would include considering a single service owned by NNC offering specialist service provision to both West and North Northamptonshire Councils, and potentially other Councils through a commissioning model.

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.

## 2. Options Overview

A comprehensive Impact and Options Assessment has been completed which explored the core options available. These are outlined below.

### 2.1 Option 1 – Service Disaggregation in line with the agreed 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 is not recommended for the following reasons:

- Statutory responsibilities may not be met as developing an appropriately skilled service with capacity to meet needs for each Council could not be achieved without investment of significant time and resources and may still not be successful. A National shortage of specialist teachers already leads to recruitment difficulties.
- Reduced size of individual services would limit resilience due to specialisms of teachers and difficulty in accessing appropriately skilled and qualified contingency cover. Additionally, needing to duplicate specialist roles within teams is likely to incur increased costs for both Councils.
- Smaller disaggregated teams are likely to lead to a less responsive service due to reduced capacity and resilience. This would pose a significant risk to the current highly regarded and effective service which is meeting the needs of very



vulnerable children and young people (CYP), resulting in a direct impact on positive outcomes for these CYP.

## **2.2 Option 2 – Retain existing arrangement**

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.

This option has been discounted due to the ongoing drive towards complete split of shared services between NNC and WNC.

## **2.3 Option 3 – Delay disaggregation and seek to deliver an alternative delivery model**

This would mean the existing service would disaggregate to an alternative delivery model than the straight split between the two Councils, and would likely retain the service as a whole to mitigate the significant risks identified. Pending further development of an Outline Business Case, this could be the setting up of a commissioning arrangement between NNC and WNC, with NNC being the service provider. If approved, this would mean the service would be remodelled with a commissioned 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.

It is this third option which was recommended and endorsed by both Councils at the Shared Services Joint Committee in August 2022, and which forms the basis of the preferred way forward outlined within Section 3. Decisions made at this meeting were as follows:

*a) Agreed that the disaggregation of the Children's Sensory Impairment Service is reprofiled to enable a more detailed Business Case with recommendations for a potential alternative model to be developed.*

*b) Agreed that the Children's Sensory Impairment Service remains within the current IAA until a further decision is made regarding the future model of delivery.*

*c) Noted that a Business Case will be presented to both the West Northamptonshire Council's Cabinet and North Northamptonshire Council's Executive by December 2022 to consider alternative service delivery models.*

*d) Granted delegated authority to the Monitoring Officers for North and West Northamptonshire Councils to amend or terminate the relevant provisions within the IAA if an alternative delivery model has been approved and commenced, subject to an agreed Exit Plan.*



### 3. Preferred way forward and option

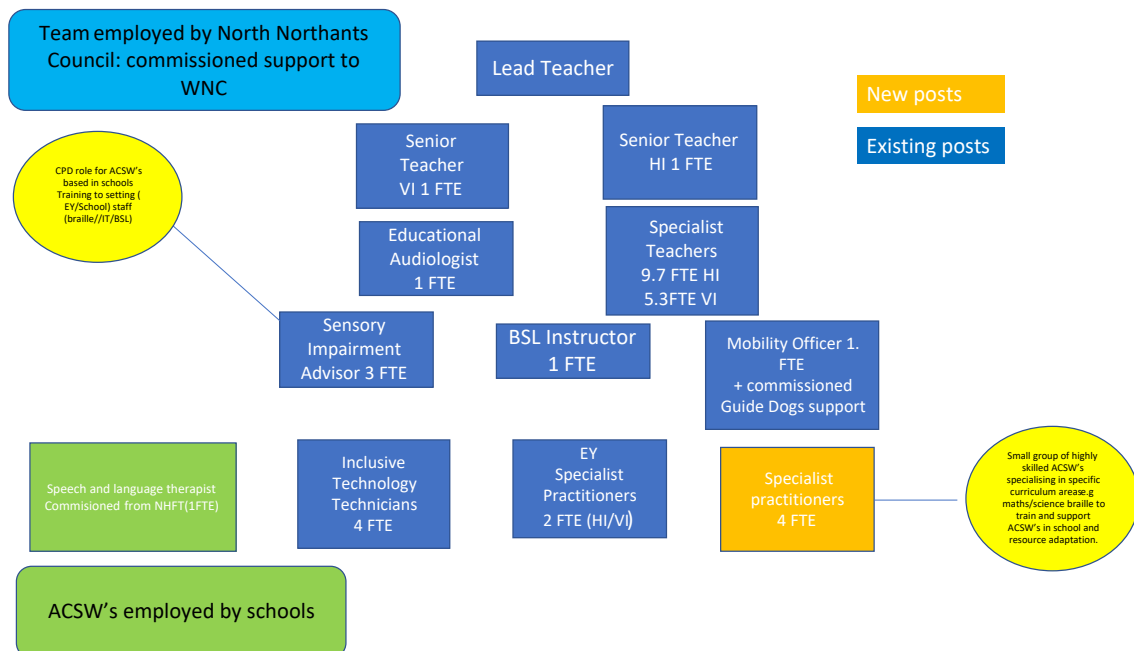
#### 3.1 Overview

The preferred approach is to develop a single model of delivery for the Sensory Impairment Service (SIS) within education across Northamptonshire, located within North Northamptonshire Council.

This option would mean the majority of existing SIS staff would remain within their current employment arrangements, but the existing IAA schedule would be dissolved, and a commissioned supplier/provider contractual arrangement would be put in place for the new model between North and West Northamptonshire Councils – please refer to picture 1 below for proposed new service model set-up.

The service would be remodelled with a commissioned 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. Within this model, it is proposed that a group of specialist staff who currently work primarily directly within schools transfer directly across to relevant schools, to enable more effective and efficient service delivery.

**Picture 1 – Proposed SIS Service Model**



#### 3.2 Core Rationale

This option has been developed based on 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. Based on this, 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.

### **3.3 Staff Changes**

Access and Communication Support Workers (ACSWs) work directly in schools throughout the day and support highly vulnerable students with either British Sign Language or Braille. The ACSWs are currently deployed to schools by the service to meet the needs of individual pupils. Of the 20 schools across Northamptonshire who have this requirement, 12 currently seek support direct ACSW through the SIS and the other 8 employ their own.

A new model would see all the SIS ACSW's employed by schools with a small number of new 'Specialist Practitioner' posts created within the team to provide specialist advice, guidance and training to schools to ensure continued professional development of ACSW's in schools – funding for these roles is currently provided to the Local Authorities via the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), and this funding would therefore subsequently transfer to the schools to manage once the roles move across. These new posts would also provide resource adaptations for braille and large print as required, enabling continuous access to education for highly vulnerable students. The role of the existing Resource Technicians would be absorbed into the new specialist roles. Two early years specialist practitioners would be centrally based to ensure continuation of essential early intervention in early years settings. The remaining specialist advisory team would remain the same to enable continuous excellent support to highly vulnerable CYP.

### **3.4 Outline Approach**

In order to ensure a successful transition to the proposed new model, a phased delivery approach is recommended. This would allow for a review of the delivery of ACSW resources after the formal decision is made, with a move to the fully commissioned model to be effective ideally in line with the end of the academic year, to align with the School's Forum decision making processes. This would be subject to Business Case approval in principle by both North Northamptonshire Executive and West Northamptonshire Cabinet, and subsequent approval of a detailed proposal by the Shared Services Joint Committee.

Commissioned support from both specialist Speech and Language Therapists and Guide Dogs would continue as required to enable development of communication skills and independent living skills (including the direct teaching of cane skills)



### **3.5 WNC Commitment**

NNC and WNC have worked collaboratively at all stages of the review and development work into suitable options for the future service delivery model of the SIS, and are supportive of the future recommended proposal at Senior and Executive level. Both Councils agree that there is a significant and untenable level of risk to vulnerable service users associated with splitting existing resource and that it should remain as a single service. Given the team are currently already employed within NNC, both parties are supportive of this remaining in place to minimise disruption to both staff and service users.

It has been agreed that there needs to be a commissioning agreement in place (jointly drafted and agreed) prior to removing the IAA schedule and effectively dissolving the current lead authority model – this would effectively reflect the whole cost of service delivery within the West, including addressing support requirements such as accommodation needs for staff and storage space for necessary equipment.

Have more flexibility

To mitigate risk to either party, there would be a minimum 18-month break clause written into this agreement.

## **4. Financial Implications**

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 LGR, 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.

The majority of costs relate to staffing and the provision of specialist equipment to support accessibility to the curriculum in schools for students with sensory impairment. Service staffing is made up of strategic and advisory peripatetic specialist professionals and, Access and Communication Support Workers (ACSWs) who work directly in schools throughout the day and support highly vulnerable students with either British Sign Language or Braille. The ACSWs are deployed to schools by the service to meet the needs of individual pupils. Schools are recharged for these services, but currently not for overheads or the management time involved in the delivery of this service. The budgeted income for the team for the services for FY2022/23 is £0.17m.

Recently, more schools have chosen to employ ACSWs directly as this gives them greater flexibility to deploy the resources effectively across the school to meet the needs of vulnerable children. This approach has been proven to work, and continues to successfully meet the needs of children. This is supported by a comprehensive training offer delivered by the SIS specialist advisory team. This training is provided as part of the strategic offer and ensures consistent high standards are maintained and excellent outcomes achieved for vulnerable students.



The proposed model would retain and strengthen the Strategic and Advisory Team whilst moving to a consistent model of ACSW delivery where all these staff are employed directly by schools. This will deliver greater resilience for the SIS team, 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.

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 is £0.31m – summarised in Table 1 below.

**Table 1. SIS cost comparison between current model and proposed new model**

	Annual Budgets	
	Current Model	Proposed New Model
<b>Total Staffing Costs</b>	£2,172,564	£1,692,071
<b>Total Non-Staffing Costs</b>	£108,372	£108,372
<b>Income</b>	£170,000	£0*
<b>TOTAL BUDGET</b>	<b>£2,110,936</b>	<b>£1,800,443</b>

*\*£170k income lost from schools' contribution towards ACSW staff*

Currently, the cost of the service is shared between WNC and NNC through the Inter-Authority Agreement established as part of the LGR process. All staff 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.

Under the new arrangements, further income generating opportunities could be pursued through providing services to other organisations, such as Local Authorities or schools. Historically, enquiries have been made of the existing service regarding potential commissioning of specialist services. This is based on the excellent reputation of the service and the nationally recognised shortage of qualified specialist teachers. As a result of this, it is envisaged there will be continued high demand for these services.



## 5. Core Benefits

The key benefits of implementing the proposed new SIS model are as follows:

- There is an opportunity to embed ACSW staff within the school culture and environment. The remodelled team will seamlessly continue to be high performing and will effectively meet need and deliver statutory services to vulnerable children across North and West Councils.
- The remodelled service would have greater resilience and provides efficiencies in access to and deployment of limited specialist resources.
- The service retains, and can build on, excellent working relationships with schools, health and other partners.
- The service could expand trading outside of County to create greater resilience through increased capacity.
- Deployment of ACSWs managed at school level freeing up leadership capacity and focus within the service.
- 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 children they serve.
- Innovative business model supports recruitment and retention of highly qualified specialist team.
- Clarity and transparency of funding models that can be adapted to meet changing need.
- Savings realised as set out above (for transfer of ACSWs into schools).

## 6. Core Risks and impacts

<b>Risks / Impacts</b>	<b>Risks mitigated / Impacts managed</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As lead of the service provision, 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> </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 focus enabling the service to adapt to meet the changing needs of both Councils and the children they serve</li> </ul>



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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Imposing any change on a successful and high performing service increases risk of impact on sustained performance.</li> <li>• As a new organisation NNC has limited experience of designing and delivering commercial activities relating to Children’s Services.</li> <li>• Reliance on income from WNC to fund service delivery</li> <li>• Limited capacity and resource within the Children’s Transformation team to support and manage the delivery of the proposal</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Innovative business 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> <li>• Resource allocation and capacity will be managed by the Children’s Transformation Programme Manager, once priorities have been further scoped and recruitment completed</li> </ul> |
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## 7. Estimated Project Delivery Costs

There are no direct or additional costs associated with the setting up or implementation of the project. All delivery resources will be allocated from within the available transformation team dedicated with Children’s Services (NNC) and enable resources allocated upon agreement at core points within the project.

## 8. Links and dependencies

None identified

## 9. How will the project be delivered?

Once approved, the project should be delivered with support from the Children’s Transformation team resource, with a dedicated Project Manager assigned to manage all stages of the project lifecycle. This would be done in accordance to agreed NNC and service specific governance arrangements and project methodology processes. However, there is currently limited capacity in the team due to vacancies and other core project commitments – further scoping into delivery of the project will help determine support resource requirements and enable allocation and management of resources available.

Subject to approval of the recommended option by Executive, a more detailed plan will be produced to identify more specific actions and timelines, core decision points and any further specific resource requirements. The anticipated key milestones to deliver the recommended option are as follows:



<b>Key Milestone</b>	<b>Date</b>
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

## **10. Who will deliver the project?**

The project will be delivered as part of the agreed NNC and WNC corporate Transformation Programmes and led by transformation resources based within the NCC Children’s Directorate. There is an assumption that resources will be available to support and manage overall delivery, although there is a risk that this may not be the case (dependent on other priority allocation within the Children’s Transformation Plan and potential limited capacity). Resources would include:

- Lead Project Manager (NNC)
- Supporting Project Manager (WNC)
- Change and Engagement Manager (NNC)
- Children’s Transformation Programme Manager (governance and oversight)
- Business Analyst (if deemed necessary) (NNC)
- Senior Responsible Officer (SRO, NNC)
- Service Lead (NNC)
- Enable resources to support as necessary at identified periods of the project delivery plan – including Finance Business Partner, HR Business Partner and IT resources.



**North  
Northamptonshire  
Council**

## **11. Appendices**

None

## **12. Other Supporting Documents**

SIS Disaggregation Impact & Options Assessment