



CABINET REPORT

Date Written	8 th March 2021
Report Author	Sue Walker
Service Area	Learning
Committee Division	Portfolio
Exempt/Non Exempt	Non Exempt
Committee Date	24 th March 2021

To: Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen

Future Commitment to Delivering Shared Regional Education Advisory Services for Children and Young People with a Sensory Impairment

1.0 SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 This report asks Cabinet to consider a proposal from the Education Directors group across Bridgend, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) to move from separate and autonomous sensory services to a shared sub-regional, Educational Advisory Service for children and young people with a sensory impairment (*Children and young people who have a hearing (deaf), visual (blind) and/or dual sensory impairment (dea/fblind)*), subject to further scoping.
- 1.2 This new sub-regional service would be in partnership with the two other Councils from the Cwm Taf Morgannwg region; for at least three years.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION(S) that

- 2.1 Further scoping undertaken to consider the above proposal, be approved.
- 2.2 By the end of Summer Term, a further paper on specific proposals for delivery be presented to Cabinet.

3.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 3.1 A shared, sub-regional Educational Advisory Service for children and young people with a sensory impairment would provide us with a resilient and future-proofed sensory impairment service to families and schools across the region.

This shared service could respond effectively as the numbers of children and young people with sensory impairments increases, appreciably.

- 3.2 It is set in a context of unequivocal nationally collated evidence of rising challenge, on the current capacity of Councils, to meet this group of young people's Additional Learning Needs.
- 3.3 A shared service could diminish the growing difficulties recruiting and retaining specially skilled staff to provide these statutory services locally, and it could ensure that all partner local authorities are prepared and able to meet the additional challenges inherent in the forthcoming ALN reforms.
- 3.4 Across the Central South Consortium (and Wales as a whole) Councils currently provide and deliver highly specialist sensory impairment/ALN services, to families and schools. This paper acknowledges the growing difficulties delivering a continuous service to families, during a period of unprecedented public sector financial austerity, significant impact of a global pandemic together with an irrefutable increase in the population of these extremely vulnerable children and young people.
- 3.5 In the Autumn of 2020, Directors of Education and the Central South Consortium, commissioned an independent review of the region's sensory impairment/ALN services (see Appendix 1). The purpose of this review was to ascertain if an individual Council's current sensory impairment services were fit for future-purpose, financially sustainable and operationally prepared to meet the prospective workforce changes projected over the next five years.
- 3.6 The Central South Consortium Directors group reviewed the independent report and believe it is in the best interests of families with hearing impaired/deaf, visually impaired/blind and/or deafblind/multi-sensory impaired children to move forward with a pioneering strategy to future-proof these specialist services by developing a sub-regional sensory impairment service in partnership across Bridgend, Merthyr Tydfil and RCT councils.
- 3.7 Each Council has a legal duty, under the current Welsh Code of Practice (ALN), to provide specialist services to families of deaf/hearing impaired, blind/visually impaired and deafblind/multi-sensory impaired children, in Early Years and schools' settings (*currently not in FE provision*). Under impending, new legislation, these duties and responsibilities will change to include liability for those young people attending local post-16 FE establishments.
- 3.8 In addition, Councils are also required to provide specialist teachers who hold a mandatory qualification in hearing, visual or multi-sensory impairment. Without the provision of an appropriately qualified workforce, families would be entitled to seek specialist, out-of-authority placements to secure access to this specialist teaching and learning, thus placing an excessive and avoidable burden on the Council's under-pressure ALN budgets.

4.0 KEY MESSAGES FROM CONSULTANT'S REPORT

- 4.1 The independent consultant's report provides robust and direct evidence that the population of deaf/hearing impaired, blind/visually impaired and deafblind/multi-sensory impaired children is increasing, drastically, across the region and Wales. All three local authorities involved with this proposal reported increases in their respective hearing, visual and multi-sensory impaired populations, over the last five years.
- 4.2 Furthermore, the recruitment and retention of specialist teachers and support staff holding mandatory qualifications in hearing, visual and multi-sensory impairment, has become progressively more challenging over the last five years.
- 4.3 In a number of cases, it has not been possible to recruit *any* qualified staff to current sensory teams and Councils have embarked on the costly exercise of finding and training experienced mainstream teachers, in this area of ALN.
- 4.4 Interest from experienced, mainstream or special schoolteachers willing to undertake re-training and complete a two-year mandatory teacher training course, is unpromisingly low.
- 4.5 Specialist sensory impairment workforces are recognised, nationally, as ageing. The current, small number of academic training providers (*none in Wales*) cannot deliver sufficient numbers of newly qualified teachers, as the contemporary workforce retirees exceeds the demand for new appointments.
- 4.6 Within five years (or less) and without decisive action, the Council's current isolated sensory impairment teams will be faced with operationally **critical** short-falls in qualified staff, to meet growing numbers of newly identified and vulnerable children and young people with sensory impairments.
- 4.7 Moreover, public services are not unflawed and this opportunity will enable us to drive forward and improve the way in which current sensory impairment services operate. Regionalising the resources and expertise across the three councils will enable us to realise efficiencies in travel, equipment, training and direct support to families and schools.
- 4.8 The respective Directors of Education have been proactive, having commissioned an independent review to evaluate the risks and subsequent options facing the region's sensory services. The report identifies areas for development and improvement. If this proposal is approved, it will ensure the partner Council's future-proof these highly regarded ALN services, safeguarding and ensuring financial sustainability.
- 4.9 In a number of the region's local authorities, there has been growing uncertainty apropos the long-term future of their mandatory ALN services.
- 4.10 This report seeks to provide a clear commitment from each of the three respective Councils to the enduring future of these low incidence services, and provide families, schools and local authority staff with assurance, during a period of significant insecurity, for this aspect of the educational sector in Wales.

5.0 THE NEXT STEPS

5.1 If the three Council Cabinets endorse this proposal i.e. the further scoping of the delivery of a regional, shared educational advisory service for sensory impairment, the Directors of Education will subsequently present to their respective Cabinets the following:

- An explicit and clear-cut strategy to ensure that families, across the three Councils, continue to receive high quality, specialist statutory support for their children and young people;
- Projected increases in the numbers of children and young people accessing these services, together with a plan on how Councils will continue to meet their statutory duties i.e. provide mandatory qualified ALN staff to support families and schools, across the region;
- A remodelling of the existing educational sensory services, in particular the operational arrangements and deployment of resources, advised and informed by an Independent Consultant;
- Three-year budget proposals for consideration by the respective Councils;
- Ensure all modified operational arrangements take account of forthcoming legislative changes (2021) and guarantee that these new 0 - 25 services are future-proofed.

6.0 CONSULTATION

6.1 There will be significant engagement with all families across the region, Council's current sensory impairment staff/teams, Headteachers, Governors and members of the area's voluntary and community sector, as part of the transformation of the current, separate sensory impairment services. This will safeguard the respective future delivery of support and interventions to sensory impaired children and young people across Bridgend, Merthyr Tydfil and RCT councils.

7.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

7.1 There are no financial implications from this report. Any implications as a result of changes in service delivery would need to be considered following next report.

8.0 INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

	Positive Impacts	Negative Impacts	Not Applicable
1. Merthyr Tydfil Well-being Objectives	2 of 4	0 of 4	2 of 4
2. Sustainable Development Principles - How have you considered the five ways of working: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Long term	5 of 5	0 of 5	0 of 5

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevention • Integration • Collaboration • Involvement 			
3. Protected Characteristics <i>(including Welsh Language)</i>	2 of 10	0 of 10	8 of 10
4. Biodiversity	0 of 1	0 of 1	1 of 1
<p><u>Summary:</u></p> <p>The main positive impacts are more resilient services for vulnerable learners through a collaborative and regional delivery approach.</p>			

SUE WALKER
CHIEF OFFICER (LEARNING)

COUNCILLOR LISA MYTTON
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL
CABINET MEMBER FOR LEARNING

BACKGROUND PAPERS		
Title of Document(s)	Document(s) Date	Document Location
Does the report contain any issue that may impact the Council's Constitution?		

Consultation has been undertaken with the Corporate Management Team in respect of each proposal(s) and recommendation(s) set out in this report.