

Joint Consultation on Overnight Short Breaks for Disabled Children and Young People

Introduction

This paper provides a summary of the recently completed joint Health/Local Authority review of overnight short breaks for disabled children and young people. The review has considered all overnight short break provision provided by or commissioned by NHS Wiltshire and Wiltshire Council. This includes Hillcote residential unit provided by Wiltshire Community Health Services, and Canon's House residential unit and the Family Link fostering service provided by Wiltshire Council. This paper proposes to move from the current position where significant resource is invested in residential short breaks services to a mixed model of residential and family-based provision.

Review methodology

The review worked to the following principles:

- There should be equity of access across Wiltshire to overnight short breaks for families with a disabled child;
- Parents and carers should have choice between different types of overnight short break provision;
- The funding available for overnight short breaks must be used effectively, avoiding tying up resource in any provision that is not well utilised;
- Any recommendations made as a result of the review should be based on a cost neutral approach so that families with disabled children can be assured that they will continue to receive effective support.

The following tasks were undertaken:

- Analysis of the overall resource across Wiltshire for overnight short breaks;
- Analysis of current activity and use of overnight short breaks provision;
- A survey to ascertain the views of parents and carers who currently use overnight short break services;
- Analysis of similar provision in other authorities.

The review has been overseen by a Steering Group consisting of:

- the Joint Head of Commissioning for Children’s Services for NHS Wiltshire and Wiltshire Council;
- the service lead for Canon’s House and the Council’s Children with Disabilities Teams;
- Wiltshire Council’s Lead Commissioner for children with disabilities;
- representatives of Wiltshire Parent Carers Council (a group of approximately 600 parents);
- the Head of Specialist Services with responsibility for Hillcote from Great Western Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust;
- representatives of the Council’s Family Link service.

Current overnight short breaks services

Hillcote is a ten-bedded unit providing residential short breaks services for children and young people aged 4 - 18 with a learning disability and complex needs. The service is provided by Great Western Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and commissioned by NHS Wiltshire. The service is available for overnight and day care throughout the year. The service is run from a Grade II listed house in Salisbury (owned by Salisbury Foundation Trust).

Canon’s House is an eight-bedded registered residential home in Devizes which offers short term breaks for children aged 5 – 18 with a disability and complex needs. The unit offers short breaks of 24 hours or more over weekends and during school holidays. Overnight breaks are provided during midweek in term time. Canon’s House has an Outstanding rating from OFSTED.

Family Link is a family-based short breaks scheme for disabled children. It is designed to give children a regular short break within a family based setting where children are cared for in a family link carer’s own home.

Activity data

Activity for the year 2011-2012 was analysed for all three services. The total number of children using these services was 111.

	Canons House	Hillcote	Family Link
Overnights	2663	756	663
Children receiving overnight breaks	65	21*	19

*As of July 2013 there are now only 8 children and young people using Hillcote and from April 2014 is anticipated that there would be only 5 children and young people using the service.

The number of children using Hillcote has reduced in the past three years and this presents a significant challenge to the provider. The unit now closes when not required.

The proportion of hours of service delivered by the Family Link service is comparatively low. In other authorities the use of family based short breaks is much higher.

Financial analysis

The total expenditure on the three overnight short break services for Wiltshire Council and NHS Wiltshire in 2011/12 was 1.474m. These costs are direct service costs and do not include any corporate overheads or corporate management costs which are additional.

The cost for providing each service is as follows:

	Canons House (£,000)	Hillcote (£,000)	Family Link (£,000)
Total	745	608	123

The following table shows the share of cost and activity for each service:

	Canons House	Hillcote	Family Link
Cost (£)	51%	41%	8%
Activity (Nights)	66%	18%	16%

Family Link can be considered good value compared to the other services in terms of the comparison of spend to activity. (For every 1% of spend it produces 2% of the activity). This is because family based care is less costly to provide than residential provision.

Comparing the two residential units, Hillcote is a lot more expensive than Canons House in terms of unit costs. A key reason for this is that the numbers of children attending Hillcote has reduced; this has the effect of high unit costs given the high fixed cost element of running a residential unit. The continuing reduction in numbers of children and young people using Hillcote means the cost per child of delivering the service is continuing to rise.

Parents' views

Initially all families using the services were invited by letter to attend formal consultation events in 2012. However, interest was so low that together with Wiltshire Parent Carer Council it was decided to undertake an on line survey instead of the consultations. All families using services were invited to complete a short survey to give their views on provision. Each family was personally contacted and offered a range of ways of responding. Just less than 20% of families using the services responded survey and all but one of these used Canons House.

Overall comments were positive about the quality of the services they currently receive. Key points were:

- The most common reason for using the services from the family perspective was a break from caring.
- The most common benefit to the child identified by parent carers was the opportunity for their child to spend time with other young people of a similar age.
- The preferred option for those using overnight short break services was a residential home. The least preferred option was an increase in community based activities to replace overnight short breaks. (In interpreting this feedback it is important to note that all the respondents to the survey currently use residential short break services).
- There was a strong preference to be able to use services at weekends and during school holidays rather than mid week and term time.

Parents identified difficulties with sleep, behaviour, continence and meal times as key issues that lead to the need for overnight short breaks.

The national context

A review of overnight short breaks provision in other areas has found a general trend of reducing bed capacity within residential facilities and a move towards outreach provision. Some examples are outlined below.

- Peterborough reduced from 21 to 8 bed provision places by offering creative and responsive packages of support in the home. Their new outreach team in the community was linked to their residential provision which reassured families.
- Medway reviewed their services with a recommendation to close their NHS overnight short breaks centre.
- Dorset closed an NHS residential unit and now provides overnight short breaks through a mixed model.

- North Somerset put their overnight short breaks provision out to tender with contracts for sitting services, outreach day care services, an overnight carers' service and a residential unit.
- Newport City Council have employed two full time foster carers and made adaptations to their homes so that they can provide overnight breaks for a number of children.

In summary, the national picture shows a move towards greater use of family based support and a marked reduction in residential overnight short break provision.

Options considered

Based on the results of the review, three broad options were considered:

Option 1 - Keep both residential units open

Continue with Canons House offering the bulk of overnight short break activity for Wiltshire, Hillcote offering a smaller amount of activity to families in the South of the County and the Family Link service continuing as is.

Option 2 - Close one residential unit

Use the annual savings from the closure of one unit to invest in alternative services to support children and young people in new ways. This would include an early intervention services that will increase the potential for children to access opportunities with their peers and develop independence skills. Given the geographical locations, activity levels and the unit costs analysis of both services the proposal would be to close Hillcote releasing approximately £608k revenue per annum for investment.

Option 3 - Close both residential units

Use the combined annual savings from the closure of both Hillcote and Devizes to invest in community based provision.

Analysis of options

Option 1 – Keep both residential units open

Benefits

- Continuity for existing service users and staff.
- Consistency with the positive survey feedback from parent carers.

Issues and Risks

- This option does not represent an efficient use of public money because of the low numbers of children and young people using Hillcote and the higher and growing unit costs at Hillcote.
- The decreasing numbers of children using Hillcote means the service is not viable to the provider.
- The low numbers of children using the service at Hillcote means that the main benefit identified for young people in the parent carer's survey - of meeting peers - will no longer be realised.
- Funding will not be released to develop the other desired services required such as early intervention and more services in carers homes to improve outcomes for children.
- This option does not address the equity issues for families living further away from the residential units.

Option 2 – Close one residential unit (Hillcote)

Benefits

- Release funding for investment in new services to deliver improved outcomes for children.
- An opportunity developing the remaining residential unit as centre of excellence. Staff would work in a 'satellite' capacity with families and children by delivering support in areas such as behaviour, sleep and continence issues.
- Release funding to increase family based provision, increasing the geographical spread of services.
- Resolve issues relating to the financial viability of Hillcote.
- Retain ongoing residential overnight care in line with the wishes of parent carers.

Issues and Risks

- A change for families who use the service at Hillcote
- Impact to staff at Hillcote
- Managing a change programme in service provision
- Reduction in choice for residential services

Option 3 – Close both residential units (Canon’s House and Hillcote)

Benefits

- Enable a radical redesign of services
- Maximise revenue and capital available for new services
- Opportunity to provide individualised services for children and young people

Issues and Risks

- This would not be consistent with feedback from parent carers
- A highly complex change programme would be required
- Risk of gap in provision during the transition to new service models
- Lack of continuity for children and young people and their families
- Based on need it would be likely that a replacement residential unit would be required. This would need a substantial capital reinvestment. The logical place for a replacement unit would be in a central location such as Devizes, which raises the question: Why close Canon’s House in the first place?

Proposal

It is proposed that Option 2 above is implemented because it will ensure a range of services required to meet the needs of families and achieve the best outcomes for children. This option will also ensure a more efficient use of public money.

Specifically the proposal is to:

1. Close Hillcote from April 2014.
2. Reinvest savings in more family based overnight provision, allowing a wider geographical spread of services, greater equity of provision and a more cost effective use of public money.
3. Reinvest savings in additional services for families to help with the key difficulties they have identified (e.g. sleep, incontinence, behaviour and meal times) to empower families and enable improved outcomes for children. These services would work in collaboration with family based carers, Canons House and Special Schools.
4. Develop service specifications for the new services with input from families.
5. Develop the new services so they can start as soon as possible.
6. Jointly manage the change through a Steering Group consisting of officers from Health, Wiltshire Council and representatives from Wiltshire Parent Carer Council
7. Work with families who would otherwise be using Hillcote from April 2014 to ensure the needs of their children and families continue to be fully met.
8. Continue to provide overnight short breaks that deliver a break from caring for parents.

This proposal is cost neutral – any saving made will be reinvested in the services described.

Taking part in the consultation

We would appreciate you sharing your views with us on the proposed changes to overnight short breaks for disabled children. To take part in this consultation please use the following web link, on the Wiltshire Parent Carer Council website:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/OvernightSB>

Alternatively you may write to Wiltshire Parent Carer Council with your comments at the following address or contact them by telephone:

Wiltshire Parent Carer Council
Freepost RSXC-YTUB-KTBL
Unit 3 Fordbrook Business Park
Pewsey
SN9 5NU

Tel. 01672 569300

www.wiltshireparentcarercouncil.co.uk

Wiltshire Parent Carer Council will share the consultation feedback they receive with the other agencies for the purpose of this consultation process.

The consultation period

This consultation will run for 3 months from Wednesday 24th July – Wednesday 23rd October.