

## **Wiltshire Council**

### **Cabinet**

**22 March 2011**

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#### **Item 5 – Public Participation**

##### **Statement from Louise Cole, Regional Director South West, The National Deaf Children's Society**

As the Regional Director for the National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) in the South West region, I am writing to request information on your budget proposals for education hearing support services in 2011/12. NDCS is the leading charity dedicated to creating a world without barriers for deaf children and young people.

Education hearing support services play a vital role by advising classroom and subject teachers and schools on the effective teaching and learning of deaf children and how to use hearing technology, as well as providing one-to-one teaching. Most crucially they provide support to parents with deaf babies and young children so that they can start school with essential language skills that enable them to succeed in school. Although expenditure on these services represents a small fraction of local authority spending on children they can have a big impact on a deaf child's life chances and are highly valued by their parents.

I am aware of the severe budgetary pressures facing Authorities, but I urge caution if reductions are being proposed for services that are essential services for deaf children for a number of reasons:

- There are rising numbers of deaf children. The Department for Education school census shows that the number of school aged pupils with hearing impairments requiring support has increased by 8.9% between 2008 and 2010.
- Cutting services is likely to increase cost. Hearing support services are essential in helping deaf children make satisfactory education progress. Without sufficient support specialist placements are often required. These involve higher transport costs and increase the likelihood of out of authority spending. NDCS currently supports 80 parents per year at the SEN tribunal. In all cases they are won by parents, largely because of lack of specialist support in mainstream schools. In all cases the LA's spending increases. With new regulations that enable parents to appeal every year at the child's annual review, any reduction in specialist support will increase the risk of triggering an appeal to Tribunal.
- Deaf children are not achieving their academic potential and deserve a fair chance to do so. Although the government made closing the attainment gap a

national priority, figures show deaf children in the South West region are 44% less likely to do as well in their GCSEs as other children. Deafness is not a learning disability and, given the right support, deaf pupils should be achieving as hearing pupils of similar cognitive ability.

- Deaf children already face unfair access to help. Last month, NDCS published survey results from 144 local authorities which showed that deaf children are being denied fair access to help from specialist Teachers of the Deaf.<sup>[1]</sup> In the North West of England each visiting specialist supports an average of 31 deaf children but in Wiltshire Council they support 56.7 deaf children.

NDCS would like to work with both central and local government to tackle these important issues and ensure funds for these vital services are maintained. I should therefore be most grateful if you would let me know what your Council is proposing for the funding of education hearing support services in 2011/2. NDCS can then inform parents of deaf children so that they have the opportunity to make representations to the Council and consider their options for their child's educational placement next year.

At this point, we understand that it may only be possible to give broad proposals; but when the budget has been finalised I should be grateful for the following information:

1. What budget will be provided to hearing support services for deaf children in 2011/12?
2. If this has changed in real terms since 2010/11, what is the level of this change in percentage terms compared with the overall percentage change in the budget for children's services?
3. What will any changes mean in terms of the provision of hearing access equipment and levels of support for deaf children?
4. What will any changes mean in terms of staffing levels?

We welcome any support you can offer to ensure deaf children, who are among the most vulnerable and educationally disadvantaged children in England today, are not further disadvantaged during these difficult times.