

Information Services Review

Purpose of Report

1. To provide an update on the implementation and impact of the changes made to information services for families in Wiltshire from July 2012.

Background

2. On 11 May 2012 the proposed changes to information services were considered by a Rapid Scrutiny Exercise established by the Children's Services Select Committee. The recommendation was to make better use of resources and funding and remove duplication by reducing the specification of the Family Information Service (FIS) provided by a local voluntary and community sector organisation ('ask').
3. From 1 July 2012 the following changes took effect:
 - FIS focused on information and signposting for general services via a helpline and website. (Cost £120,000 per annum)
 - The Early Years Team within Wiltshire Council launched the Childcare Information Service (CIS) and became the single point of contact in relation to childcare. (Cost £40,000 per annum)
 - Wiltshire Parent Carer Council (WPCC) became the single hub of information on services relating to Disabled Children. The Special Educational Needs / Disability Information Service (SENDIS) costs £35,000 per annum.
 - The Revenue and Benefits Team within Wiltshire Council became the single point of call for queries relating to family finances. The additional work has been absorbed without additional cost.

Implementation

4. FIS: A revised specification was developed and agreed with ask. ask went through a process of restructuring their organisation as a result of the reduction in income. The process was challenging for managers and staff at ask, however ask has now successfully restructured.
5. CIS: The Early Years Team had support in relation to TUPE from HR, Legal Services and Commissioning. One member of staff from ask was identified as being eligible for TUPE but they chose not to transfer so the Council had no TUPE liability. A CIS helpline was introduced and

developments were made to the Council website to provide the necessary information. ask worked closely with CIS to implement the changes.

6. SENDIS: WPCC developed SENDIS, including a helpline, an electronic call tracking system, developments to their website and recruiting two part time information workers. WPCC also introduced information events for parent carers.
7. Family Finance: The Revenue and Benefits team introduced a dedicated telephone number and assigned some staff to take any specific calls on family finances.
8. Communication: A communication was widely distributed via email in June advising a wide range of stakeholders of the changes, the roles of the services affected and their contact details. The changes were also shared with Wiltshire Council Customer Care and their staff were briefed.

Financial Impact

9. From April 2014 the annual saving to Wiltshire Council of the changes is £65,000. In the financial year 2012-13 the savings were pro rata for 9 months. i.e. approximately £49,000.

Customers Feedback

10. The Children's Commissioning Team worked together with ask and Early Years to develop customer surveys for FIS and CIS respectively. The FIS survey was completed by 128 customers who had contacted the service since July 2012. The key findings of this survey were:
 - 94% said the service was helpful
 - 97% said it was timely and courteous
 - 86% said ask could help them with their questions
 - The internet was their most common source of information
 - FIS was described as "very helpful", "clear" and "supportive"
11. The CIS survey was completed by 65 customers who had used the service since July 2012. The key findings from the survey were:
 - 95% said the service was helpful, timely and courteous
 - 91% would recommend the service to someone else
 - 94% said CIS was able to answer all their questions
 - 98% said they used the internet as a primary source of information
 - The most commonly identified benefits of finding childcare were being able to: return to work, start a new job and continue in their current job.
 - Based on the customer feedback a link has been added to emails sent to customers helping them find appropriate childcare, the online search facility is being further developed as are the lists sent to parents.
12. WPCC have received positive feedback on the SENDIS service from both parent carers and professionals e.g.

"I like having all the information in one place. The events you hold are really helpful. It is so good to have information about things I need to know about for my disabled child. Being able to search for activities for my child is great" **Parent**

"I have telephoned WPCC on more than one occasion each time I felt that I was talking to someone who was well informed and enjoying their work. I think this would be very reassuring for a parent making their first contact." **Professional**

Parent carers gave the following feedback on the first SENDIS event:

- 100% rated the event as excellent or very good
- 100% rated the quality of the information, advice and help as excellent or very good
- The opportunity to meet with professionals and officers was welcomed
- Parent carers want more SENDIS events in the future and WPCC have built them into the plan for 2013/14

13. The Revenue and Benefits team and Customer Care have reported minimal impact to their services. Customer feedback from the limited number of calls received on the dedicated family finance number have been positive and families have benefitted from being able to have queries on areas such as housing benefits also answered.
14. No complaints have been received on any of the services since the changes were made from 1 July 2013. In addition, the Commissioning Team have been in regular contact with a range of other services, agencies and colleagues and have not received any negative feedback on the services or the changes.

Services Developments

15. ask are reporting a continuing decline in calls to their FIS helpline (even after accounting for the calls now received by CIS, SENDIS and Revenue and Benefits). The latest figures give a call rate of just under 6 calls per day. Possible reasons for the decline in calls include: greater use of websites for information, fewer Social Care calls because of the work of CAF Coordinators and increasing use of Children's Centres. ask have been focusing efforts on raising awareness of ask's services and on developments to their website.
16. CIS and WPCC have made significant changes to their web pages. CIS reported a huge increase in use of their website (over 13,000 hits in January – March 2013 compared to around 1,500 in July – Sept 2012). Both services have introduced new search functionality for customers.
17. WPCC delivered their first SENDIS event on 22 February 2013 in response to feedback from parent carers. Under the old service model there was no equivalent. The event saw thirty seven services / agencies represented with stalls and parents carers were able to book 'surgeries' with various professionals.

Conclusions

18. The implementation of the new model of services worked well and credit should go to ask, Early Years, WPC and Revenue & Benefits for positively managing the changes to their services.
19. The new services continue to meet the needs of families in Wiltshire, as demonstrated by the feedback received. The continued development of websites has been important and website use has continued to increase.
20. The new model of services is a leaner, more efficient use of resources, with less duplication and less cost.
21. Parent carers of children with SEN and/or Disability are benefitting from a dedicated service providing a one stop shop and information events.

Next Steps

22. Commissioning intentions should now be developed for service requirements from April 2014 (the current contract with ask is due to end March 31st 2014). The commissioning intentions will need to consider:
 - The needs of families in Wiltshire
 - The increasing use of the internet rather than help lines
 - Lean and efficient systems
 - Value for money
 - The role of information services within a safeguarding framework and plans to introduce a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) in Wiltshire
 - Where services can be best delivered by Wiltshire Council and where they can best be delivered by external providers (the 'Make or Buy' decision)

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Background Papers and Appendices

Report of the Rapid Scrutiny Exercise – May 2012 ([link](#))