

**Final Report of the Special Schools and Post-16 SEN Task Group
– part 2**

Purpose

1. To present the conclusions and recommendations of the Special Schools and Post-16 SEN Task Group for endorsement. The Task Group brought an initial final report with recommendations to Committee in July 2012, but further work was requested.

Background

2. The Task Group was established by Children's Services Select Committee in September 2010 with the following terms of reference:
 - a) To establish the strengths and weaknesses of current special school and post-16 SEN provision in Wiltshire, taking into account the views of service users, parents and other stakeholder groups;
 - b) To consider examples of best practice in special school and post-16 provision in Wiltshire and other authority areas;
 - c) To make recommendations with respect to how special schools and post-16 SEN provision can be developed to ensure improved outcomes for Wiltshire residents with SEN.
3. Early on in the Task Group's work, members concluded that its terms of reference were very broad and could potentially encompass a huge area of work. It was agreed that it would be most productive to focus on particular areas of concern or interest.
4. The Committee received the Task Group's initial final report in July 2012 and the executive response was received in September 2012 – attached at Appendix 1. The Committee asked the Task Group to reconvene to undertake further work, consider the executive responses in detail, and to receive the

various pieces of further information that had been offered. The Committee asked the Task Group to consider the following new topics:

- consideration of the identification of Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties (BSED) in primary school-aged children.
 - an investigation to identify out of county resources being used by Wiltshire.
 - an examination of mainstream schools to identify the level of SEN provision they make.
5. The Task Group has not had the capacity to investigate these issues in addition to the work reported below. However, members believe that services for children and young people with SEN/LDD warrant continued consideration by the Committee and recommends that they are considered a priority within the new Council's overview and scrutiny work programme (**Recommendation 1**).

Methodology

6. During this second leg of work, the Task Group met formally on three occasions between January and May 2013 and comprised the following membership:

Cllr Graham Payne (Chairman)

Rev Alice Kemp

Cllr Carole Soden (no longer a member of the Council)

Cllr Tony Trotman

7. Members of the Task Group also attended a meeting of the Special Schools Heads' Forum, a sub-group of the Wiltshire Association of Secondary School Headteachers, and visited Wiltshire College's Trowbridge campus to experience the provision for post-16 learners with SEN and LDD (Learning Difficulties and Disabilities). This visit was requested by the Committee in September 2012.

Updates on the Task Group's original recommendations

8. The Task Group can report that there has been progress with a number of its original recommendations:

Recommendation 4: "That in planning the buildings and grounds for the new care home on the former Paddocks site, a feasibility study is undertaken with respect to the following proposals..."

- i. additional land is allocated to Larkrise School to increase its current outside space;
- ii. following consultation with the school, provision of a new access route to Larkrise school running from the Hilperton Road (A361) is incorporated... [full recommendation text included in Appendix 1].”

Update: The requested feasibility study has now been completed and it identified significant issues about internal and external space at the current Larkrise site. Short-term (immediate) options are being explored with the architects, including the conversion of one part of the building into a classroom to allow it to accommodate hoists. This is to ensure appropriate progression for pupils currently on roll of the school is possible. Longer term (more than 3 or 4 years), consideration will be given to a range of options including split sites or relocation of the school; this is likely to require significant capital investment.

Recommendation 5: “That the Cabinet of Wiltshire Council gives consideration to allocating capital funding to the purchase of a suitable property to accommodate St Nicholas School’s post-16 provision, which would both allow its continuance and development and free-up space within the main school buildings.”

Update: Funding had been set aside to help St Nicholas School purchase a bungalow to accommodate its post-16 provision. Authority for the transaction from Cabinet Capital Asset Committee was obtained on 19 March 2013 and the purchase is now underway.

Work is also underway to purchase a current Wiltshire College owned building adjacent to the Chippenham campus to co-locate St Nicholas’ post-16 provision. This allows St Nicholas students to use the College’s autistic centre and some funding has been identified to purchase the property (further funding being pursued within the Council) alongside an application to the Education Funding Agency under the Demographic Growth Capital Fund to refurbish the building to meet St Nicholas’ pupils’ needs.

Further work

Short breaks for children and young people with Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD)

9. In its previous report to Committee, the Task Group noted that caring for a child with Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD) can be demanding and short-term respite care can provide vital breaks for some parents and help them to continue to care for their child or young person at home. There were (and still

are) two residential facilities in Wiltshire providing short breaks services for children and young people with SLD:

Hillcote is a ten-bedded unit in Salisbury providing residential short breaks services for children and young people aged 4 to 18 with a learning disability and complex needs. The service is provided by Great Western Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and commissioned by NHS Wiltshire.

Canon's House is an eight-bedded registered residential home in Devizes which offers short term breaks for children aged 5 to 18 with a disability and complex needs. The service is provided by the Council from a Victorian House in Devizes.

10. During its initial investigation the Task Group received anecdotal evidence that Canon's House was often operating at full capacity with a long waiting list, while Hillcote was underused. In reality, neither of these residential units operate waiting lists. The Task Group has subsequently investigated the actual usage of these two facilities with officers and considered the results of a review of Wiltshire's short break provision conducted jointly by the Council and NHS Wiltshire. The results of this review will also be considered by Wiltshire's Clinical Commissioning Group in June.
11. In addition to the Canon's House and Hillcote residential facilities, the Council provides a Family Link service which provides family-based short breaks scheme for disabled children. These are 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.
12. The following table summarises the proportion of overall cost (of the £1.47m) and proportion of activity (overnights) for Canon's House, Hillcote and the Family Link service. 61% of all overnight breaks are currently provided by Canons House and there is limited capacity for this to be increased. 41% of overnight breaks are provided by Hillcote. Only 16% of all overnight short breaks are currently provided through the Family Link service, whereas other local authorities provide a higher proportion through this type of model, which is the least expensive of the services to run. It should be noted that any absolute comparisons between the three services are difficult because each resource offers a different service, for example Hillcote and Family Link offer day care in addition to overnight short breaks.

	Canons	Hillcote	Family Link
Spend	51%	41%	8%
Activity	66%	18%	16%
Overnights	2663	756	663
Children receiving overnight breaks	65	21	19

13. The current model operated in Wiltshire, consisting mainly of residential unit overnight provision, primarily gives carers a break, but places less focus on increasing independence. The Task Group recognises that this is not in-keeping with the strategic direction of Wiltshire's SEN Pathfinder project, which highlights empowerment and independence for the families and inclusion for children and young people. However, the Task Group also feels that the family-based short breaks provided by the Family Link scheme are not suitable for all children. Those with more challenging needs often require specialised rooms and equipment that residential units are more suited to providing. Responses to the survey of parent carers also clearly indicate they wanted residential unit provision to continue and cited the opportunity for children mixing with peers as a key benefit. The Task Group therefore recommends that an appropriate level of residential overnight short break provision to meet the needs of families should continue in Wiltshire (**Recommendation 1**).
14. If there were to be any reconfiguration of short break provision in Wiltshire, the Task Group recommends that any savings identified are retained for services for children and young people with SEN/LDD and their families (**Recommendation 2**). It also recommends that, if a reconfiguration of the service was proposed, the Committee receives data demonstrating how the new service could meet the demand for short breaks across Wiltshire and not equate to a reduction in the current provision (**Recommendation 3**).
15. The Task Group notes that a large proportion of the available nights at short breaks residential provision is used by a small number of users. Canons House accommodated two children and young people for over 200 nights and Hillcote accommodated one child for over 100 nights. The Task Group therefore questions whether this is the most appropriate use of short break provision, as it could effectively amount to very expensive residential provision, and asks for the Cabinet Member's response regarding this issue (**Recommendation 4**).

	Canons	Hillcote	Family Link
Under 75 nights	61	17	17
Over 75 nights	4	4	2

16. The results of the review of short break provision show that families who do not live close to Canons House or Hillcote are less likely to use overnight short breaks. While this may in part be due to the lower cost of travel for these families, it is important that all parents are made aware of the availability of these services no matter where they live in the county. It is also noted that information about services available to these families is not currently compiled in one location online and recommended that this is an aspiration for the future. It is hoped that the implementation of Wiltshire's Support and Aspiration Pathfinder should increase awareness of the whole local offer of services for families with a child or young person with SEN/LDD. The Task Group recommends that the Committee focuses on this area in future scrutiny of the Wiltshire's Support and Aspiration Pathfinder **(Recommendation 5)**.

Beyond school for students with SEN/LDD

17. In its July 2012 report, the Task Group reported concerns voiced by Wiltshire special schools that mainstream colleges do not always have the expertise required to meet the specific needs of learners with SEN. Members also emphasised that Wiltshire students without SEN enjoy a wide range of post-16 providers to choose from and did not feel it is acceptable for students with SEN to be limited to only one option.
18. Following its report, the Task Group was invited by Wiltshire College to visit its Trowbridge campus and experience the College's provision for post-16 students with SEN/LDD. The Task Group met with the College's Vice-Principal and the Trowbridge Campus Director and then attended classes with two learning groups: Students with Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD), who follow the College's XLR8 learning programme, and students with Profound Learning Difficulties. Finally, members enjoyed a lunch prepared by the students. The Task Group would like to thank Wiltshire College's staff and students for their valuable time and generous hospitality during its visit to Trowbridge Campus.
19. The Task Group were pleased to hear that the Council has provided additional learning support funding for Wiltshire College's XLR8 programme and that this programme receives near-100% attendance. As a result of this funding increase, students now receive 25 hours of learning time per week spread across 5 days, up from 15/16 hours per week, which made it difficult for parents to work.
20. At present students with Profound Learning Difficulties still receive 15/16 hours per week at the College, but the Task Group is informed that this will

also increase in the near future when the Council takes control of the funding in September 2013.

21. One conclusion from members' conversations during the visit was that well-planned and well-run transitions between school and college and/or further training or employment are vital in ensuring successful outcomes for young people with SEN/LDD. The transition from school to mainstream college for students with SEN can be particularly difficult and the threat of them dropping out of education altogether is significant and can have long-term implications. The Task Group were pleased to hear College staff comment that working towards a single process for students transitioning from school to the College was the aspiration.
22. The Task Group also considered an interim report produced by Rowdeford School on a piece of 'learner voice' research currently being undertaken by the school with the help of the Council. The research project involves surveying young people with SEN, both pre- and post-16, about their experiences of transitioning from school to college, training or employment. It is attempting to find out:
 - a) How are local providers preparing young people with SEN for transitions to further education, work and adult life?
 - b) What choices are available to students aged 16+ in Wiltshire?
 - c) What is the quality of the educational experience for students aged 16 and over?
 - d) Are young adults from Wiltshire's Special Schools achieving their 'full potential' as adults and if not how could we better help them to?
 - e) What should stakeholders be doing differently?
23. The project is not complete so firm conclusions cannot be drawn, but participants identify visits to schools or colleges, work experience, meeting someone at school or college and experiencing the actual provision firsthand, as being helpful in preparing them to make the transition more comfortable and successful. When asked what could help make leaving school easier, suggestions have included meeting other students; knowing what the college teachers would be like, knowing what it would be like to be a college student; knowing more about the lessons and knowing how to get around.
24. Students and parents evidently value a structured process and early planning and preparation for students' transitions from school to college or other training. Although this appears to be improving, members feel that does is not happening consistently at present. The Task Group therefore encourage the special schools, Wiltshire College and the Council to all work together to embed a single planned and structured process for the transitions of young

people with SEN/LDD from school to further education and training **(Recommendation 6)**.

25. The Task Group further encourages Wiltshire's special schools and Wiltshire College to work together and share the expertise built up in the special schools, particularly in regards to provision for children and young people with Severe or Profound Learning Difficulties **(Recommendation 7)**.

Healthcare in special schools

26. In its September 2012 report, the Task Group made a number of recommendations regarding the provision of healthcare for students in special schools. During this second leg of work, the Task Group have received evidence that due to changes to national rules, the Council now needs to 'spot purchase' places for individual children and young people with complex healthcare needs (rather than at the moment providing schools with funding for a certain number of planned places). This could mean that when a child with disabilities/complex health needs leaves a school, specially trained staff such as Teaching Assistants may need to move on, meaning the loss of that person's understanding of complex health needs and skills that could be useful for future students. These changes could therefore potentially create a lack of stability in a school's workforce that has implications for the amount of time that health will need to spend on ensuring that staff are trained to meet complex health needs. Officers have reported that has been raised by the Council with local MPs during a recent period of national consultation. The Task Group wish to bring this concern to the Committee's attention.

Proposals

27. That the Committee endorses the following recommendations and refers them to the relevant executive bodies for response:

The Task Group recommends that:

- 1. The Committee gives services for children and young people with SEN/LDD continued attention and considers them a priority within the new Council's overview and scrutiny work programme;**
- 2. If there were to be any reconfiguration of short break provision in Wiltshire, any savings identified should be retained for services for children and young people with SEN/LDD and their families;**
- 3. If a reconfiguration of Wiltshire's short break provision was proposed, the Committee receives data showing the proposed capacity of the new**

model, demonstrating that it could meet the demand for short breaks across Wiltshire and not equate to a reduction in the current provision;

- 4. The Cabinet Member for Children's Services provides a response to the figures included under paragraph 16 showing that a large proportion of the overnight short break days available in Wiltshire are used by a small number of service users;**
- 5. The Council aims to locate information about all services for families with children with SEN/LDD in one location online and that the Committee focuses on this area in any future consideration of Wiltshire's Support and Aspiration Pathfinder;**
- 6. Wiltshire's special schools, Wiltshire College and the Council work together to embed a single planned and structured process for the transitioning of young people with SEN/LDD from school to further education or training;**
- 7. Wiltshire's special schools and Wiltshire College work together and share the expertise built up in the special schools, particularly in regards to provision for children and young people with Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD);**

Special Schools and Post-16 SEN Task Group

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Executive response to the Final Report of the Special School and Post-16 SEN Task Group – September 2012

Background documents

Final Report of the Special Schools and Post-16 SEN Task Group – July 2012