

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

10 December 2024

Subject: **Recommissioning of Speech and Language Therapy Service**

Cabinet Member: **Cllr Jane Davies - Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, SEND, and Inclusion**

Key Decision: **Key**

Executive Summary

Wiltshire Council currently commissions Speech and Language Therapy services in partnership with the Integrated Care Board, with local authority funding the education element of therapeutic support.

The speech and language service provides education settings with support in meeting the needs and children and young people with communication needs and works directly with children in school and early years settings to provide therapy.

The current contract ends on 31st March 2025, following a seven-year period, and Wiltshire Council proposes to commission a service directly to support children and young people in education.

It is essential that the new service is fully aligned with the health offer for speech and language services but is distinct in having its own specification to ensure clear service delivery.

This paper is requesting additional investment in this service through the recruitment of a qualified speech and language lead to support settings and work alongside the provider to deliver an early help model as well as meeting our statutory requirements that ensures an effective support for schools and early years settings, and ensures our children and young people's needs are met at the earliest opportunity

Proposals

That Cabinet

- 1) Agrees to commission Speech and Language Therapy services for schools and early years settings with a clear co-produced specification that meets the needs of families and children and education settings.
- 2) Agrees to increased investment in speech and language services from the SEND Transformation Programme budget, to provide a total of £2,280,000 over the lifetime of the contract period of two years, plus one.
- 3) Delegates authority to approve and award a new contract and future extensions and all associated documents to the Director of Commissioning and Director of Education and Skills in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, SEND and Inclusion.

Reason for Proposals

The purpose of this paper is to provide an update to Cabinet on the status of the Council's contracted Speech and Language Service which is delivered by an external service supplier and expires on 31 March 2025.

Following the end of the current service Wiltshire Council intend to commission a service separately from the BSW ICB to ensure a greater level of oversight and clarity in delivering a service that meets the needs of education settings, parents and children. However, the service specification will be designed to ensure full alignment with the health delivered speech and language service to provide a service that reduces duplication and allows for a holistic approach.

A recommissioned service following a procurement process and award of contract will be in place for 1 April 2025.

Lucy Townsend
Chief Executive

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

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Purpose of Report

1. This report requests cabinet approval for the proposal to commission Speech and Language Therapy services for schools and early years settings. These are to be commissioned via a procurement process.
2. It requests additional investment in order to meet increased demand for services, and the increased need from schools for training and support.
3. To delegate authority to approve and award a new contract and future extensions and all associated documents to the Director of Commissioning and Director of Education and Skills in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, SEND and Inclusion.

Relevance to the Council's Business Plan

4. The proposal is relevant to the following priorities and objectives laid down the Council's Business Plan:
 - The people of Wiltshire are empowered to live full, healthy, and enriched lives:
 - We get the best start in life;
 - We stay active;
 - We are safe;
 - We live well together;
 - We ensure decisions are evidence-based;
 - We have the right skills to prosper;
 - We have vibrant, well-connected communities
5. To support the working themes in the council's business plan 2022 to 2032, commissioning priorities are to:
 - **Priority 1** - ensure services are in the right place at the right time.
 - **Priority 2** - ensure right people receive services in the right place i.e. increasing services delivered in the community and in people's homes.
 - **Priority 3** - ensure right service, right price

Background

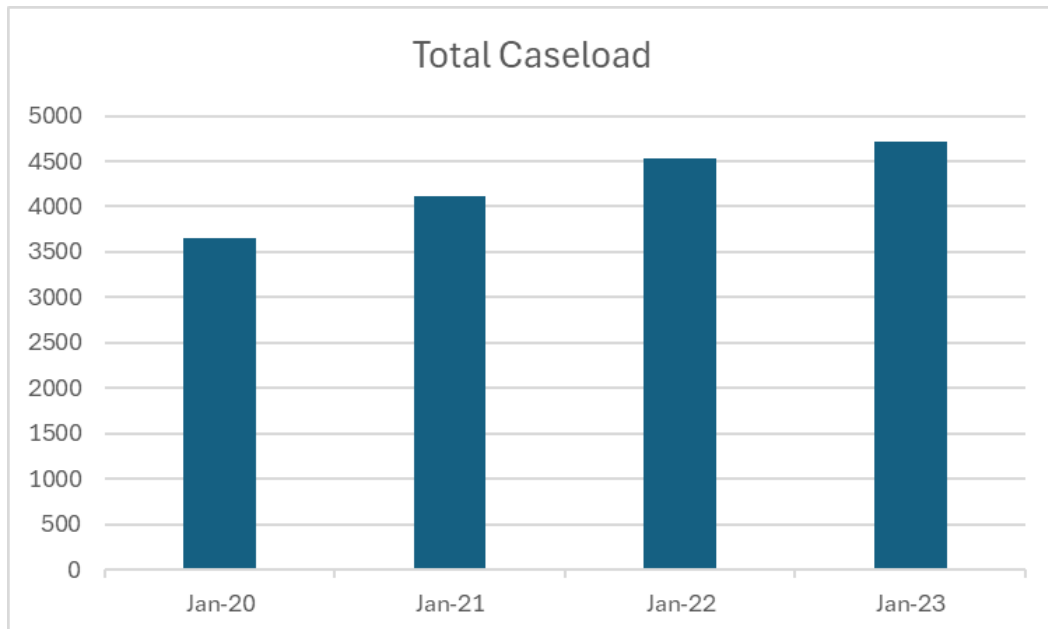
6. Wiltshire Council currently commissions a Speech and Language Therapy service as part of the community services contract with the BSW Integrated Care Board.
7. The service commenced in 2018 at an annual cost of £518,000, with agreed uplifts for annual inflation.
8. Current expenditure for 2024-25 for the service is £560,000
9. The service currently aims to deliver:

- Timely, accessible and evidence based SLT assessment, advice, and intervention to children and young people with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN), with a high level of engagement with parents/carers and teachers.
- To recognise, and respond appropriately to, different causes of speech and language difficulties and delay, whether relating to a physical or sensory impairment or social factors, and use the most appropriate, evidence-based interventions to address them.
- To provide early intervention for children and young people with communication and feeding difficulties.
- To develop a child's communication and feeding skills to their full potential and to support the creation of appropriate environments and skills in others to enable this.
- To recognise the importance of the role of primary care givers and educational settings and ensure they are appropriately trained and supported to continue interventions outside of clinical sessions using verbal, written and audio/visual tools appropriately. This training and support should recognise the nature of the physical and social factors behind language difficulty or delay and targeted to address these specific factors.
- To contribute to a child or young person's positive self-esteem, confidence and emotional maturity by addressing issues of social communication and interaction.
- To work in partnership with parents/carers, early years' practitioners, education professionals and others who are part of a child or young person's everyday life in order to create a supportive environment for the development of communication skills and to facilitate access to the curriculum.
- To contribute to the local authority's wider approach to meeting speech, language and communication needs.
- To ensure that SLT needs can be met within the county, reducing the need for tertiary services out of county.

10. Speech Language and Communication Need (SLCN) is an umbrella term and tends to include CYP with social communication difficulties/pre-Autism assessment and these CYP would not necessarily have speech and language difficulties requiring Speech and Language Therapy.

11. Not all CYP with SLCN would meet the thresholds for Speech and Language Therapy. The Preschool and Primary School Age Communication Trackers provide a needs-led approach to identifying, monitoring and referring CYP to Speech and Language Therapy at the appropriate time. The trackers are supported by on demand training available through our training offer and website.

12. Caseloads have continued to grow year on year and reflect the increasingly complex referrals and CYP are needing to stay on caseloads for longer despite a slightly lower total referral number for year ending March 2023. There is an increase in caseload size of 1058 between 2020 and 2023.



13. Not all CYP with SLCN would meet the thresholds for Speech and Language Therapy, the Preschool and Primary School Age Communication Trackers provide a needs-led approach to identifying, monitoring and referring CYP to Speech and Language Therapy at the appropriate time. The trackers are supported by on demand training available through our training offer and website.
14. In managing caseloads and recognising the increasing need Wiltshire Council has approached the service recommissioning with a view to enhance the offer with additional investment as part of the SEND Transformation Programme.
15. Currently there is not role within the Authority to manage and support the education element of the services, and working specifically with settings on ensuring a system wide approach to supporting children and young people.
16. Due to both the increased investment in service provision and the approach undertaken in recommissioning community health services using an outcomes based approach, officers recommend an approach with ensures that there is a clear specification to meet the education elements of the speech and language service.
17. The specification does, however, need to fully align with the outcomes based approach put in place by BSW ICB.

Main Considerations for the Council

18. The current contribution to the Community Health Contract for Speech and Language Therapy by the local authority is £560,00 per annum.
19. While inflationary impacts have been recognised in uplifts in funding during the lifetime of the contract, demand has not been reflected.
20. Through rigorous stakeholder engagement activity, it has been highlighted that there is a need to address both the requirements of the service and the associated costs.
21. It is recognised that the core deliverables of the service should be:
 - To provide training programmes which enable all settings to be communication friendly environments.
 - To provide timely, accessible and evidence based SLT assessment, advice, and intervention to children and young people with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN), with a high level of engagement with parents/carers and teachers.

- To recognise, and respond appropriately to, different causes of speech and language difficulties and delay, whether relating to a physical or sensory impairment or social factors, and use the most appropriate, evidence based interventions to address them.
- To provide early intervention for children and young people with communication and feeding difficulties.
- To develop a child's communication and feeding skills to their full potential and to support the creation of appropriate environments and skills in others to enable this.
- To recognise the importance of the role of primary care givers and educational settings and ensure they are appropriately trained and supported to continue interventions outside of clinical sessions using verbal, written and audio/visual tools appropriately. This training and support should recognise the nature of the physical and social factors behind language difficulty or delay and targeted to address these specific factors.
- To contribute to a child or young person's positive self-esteem, confidence and emotional maturity by addressing issues of social communication and interaction.
- To work in partnership with parents/carers, early years' practitioners, education professionals and others who are part of a child or young person's everyday life in order to create a supportive environment for the development of communication skills and to facilitate access to the curriculum.

22. The Speech and Language Therapy Services is expected to provide a continuum of support to ensure that children and young people are able to communicate as effectively as possible. Support will be provided, whenever possible, in early years and school settings, using the principle of a 'team around the child' including the child's family. A service will be provided to children and young people with the following needs (both transient and persistent):

- Language Delay
- Speech and Language Impairment
- Autism and Autistic Spectrum Disorder
- Phonology Disorder
- Stammer
- Complex Needs with significant speech and language needs SLCN / AAC

23. It is essential that the re-focusing of the specification of the Speech and Language Therapy Service is aligned with both the new SEND, AP and Alternative Provision Strategy (2024-2029) and the SEND Transformation agenda.

24. As such, and given the increase in demand for services, there has been agreement to invest an additional £200,000 from the High Needs Block into the delivery of the service.

25. This will provide a funding total of £760,000 per annum

26. The purpose of the additional investment will be to ensure that the service is able to meet demand, work more closely with settings, and recruit to a role to co-ordinate the education element of the service and work at a system level to drive improvement, support statutory requirements and hold partners to account.

Safeguarding Implications

27. Contracts give clear direction on how and when to raise a safeguarding alert to avoid any confusion about who will do this and/or assumptions that someone else will raise the alert.

28. Contracts also ensure that any issues relating to adults, young adults and children's safeguarding are identified and appropriate referral made to Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).

Public Health Implications

29. Speech, language and communication skills impact many aspects of a child's life including their social, emotional and cognitive development and without the right support, can lead to poor outcomes into adulthood. The contract would directly benefit the wellbeing of children and young people in Wiltshire and these positive outcomes would be compromised if the service was not in place.

Procurement Implications

30. A compliant procurement process will be followed in line with relevant UK procurement legislation.

31. The procurement process will be designed and run, in conjunction with the Commercial and Procurement team.

32. Consideration to social value implications will be informed through our socially responsible procurement policy and will be taken into consideration when developing the specification for the service.

33. To meet procurement deadlines to ensure the new service is in place for 1st April 2025

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

34. In ensuring an aligned approach with the community services contract jointly commissioned with the ICB, the new contract will utilise the Equality Impact Assessment approach undertaken as part of the process to inform and support in the meeting of the needs of our diverse communities.

35. As part of the specification and contract development provision for ensuring the capture of key data is embedded, with clear reporting and subsequent requirements for producing robust action plans to ensure equality of service across all community groups.

Environmental and Climate Change Considerations

36. The primary impact of the contract is staff travel between educational establishments. Whilst this is in line with the current contract, as part of the development of the specification and contract for the service there will be emphasis placed upon the provider to deliver a service that reduces the environmental impact of the provision,

Workforce Implications

37. The current provider has advised that there it is unlikely that staff will be eligible for TUPE. The provider of the new service will be required to recruit and train additional suitable staff to deliver the contract as required.

38. The commissioning process and management of the contract will use existing resource in the children's commissioning team.

39. It is intended that a speech and language lead will be recruited by the local authority to support with the delivery of the service and will be funded by monies made available through the SEND Transformation Programme.

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision and related work is not taken

40. The primary risk is not meeting our statutory duties in relation to Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA), Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) and Tribunals

41. Without early intervention there is likely to be an increased risk of EHC Needs Assessment requests and longer-term interventions to meet the needs of children with speech and language needs

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision is taken and actions that will be taken to manage these risks

42. To ensure a clear specification for the service, Wiltshire Council have determined that a separate contract is necessary to meet need. However, there is a risk in the development of the service if it is not fully aligned with the commissioned health service:

- Duplication
- Parents, carers children and young people having to tell their story more than once
- Information sharing

43. To mitigate these key risks we will ensure a fully aligned approach to working with the ICB Community Health commissioned service with agreed protocols for working together to meet the needs of children and young people

Financial Implications

44. The education element of speech and language therapy is funded from the high needs block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). The Safety Valve agreement between the council and the DfE includes an assumption that the council will continue to commission speech and language at the cost detailed in this report, with further investment of £0.200m from April 2025 to support the recruitment of a speech and language lead within the SEND service and to support other activities to focus on managing demand.

Legal Implications

45. Legal Services has been instructed to advise on this matter and prepare the new contract. Legal advice will continue to be sought until the conclusion of the project.

46. The proposals will be implemented using a Council template contract which has been tailored to protect the interests of the Council as well as remain commercial so not to put off the market.

47. The procurement will be undertaken in accordance with Constitutional and Legal requirements under the Public Contracts Regulations 2015.

Overview and Scrutiny Engagement

48. A briefing on the proposals for the commissioning of the service with the chair and deputy chair of Children's Select Committee.

Options Considered

49. A number of options were considered as part of the process for the recommissioning of Speech and Language Therapy. This did include 'do nothing' which was immediately discounted as this could lead to the Authority not meeting its statutory duties, and a reduction in support for education settings, families and children which could likely impact on the number of requests for EHCPs.

50. Commission the service as part of the ICB Community Health Contract. This approach was discounted due to the tendering process under which the commissioning of the services was undertaken. Due to the removal of the need for a specification, it was felt that there were risks in not being able to deliver the service to meet the needs of children and young people and create challenges in holding the service to account
51. To deliver the service in house. This option was reviewed and due to the complexity of the arrangements and the expertise required to deliver the service fully in-house it was rejected. However, through the discussion of this option it was agreed that the service would benefit from a lead partitioner within the Authority to deliver support to education settings and work with the provider to ensure delivery of the services as outlined in the specification
52. To commission a service separately from the ICB with a clear specification of requirements, but fully aligned with the health element of the service to ensure a clear delivery of service for education settings

Conclusions

53. It is essential to our business plan that children and young people are provided, through their education settings, with a clearly defined specification for service to deliver speech and language therapy.
54. This approach aligns with our early help model and the aspirations of the SEND Transformation Programme
55. Families and Children expect a service that meets their needs and does not lead to needing to tell their story more than once, and it is therefore critical that while we have a clear specification for the delivery of the service, that it is aligned with the outcomes framework and approach undertaken by the health commissioned service.
56. The service will greatly benefit from the knowledge and experience of an internally employed lead for speech and language therapy providing support for education settings and ensuring delivery of the commissioned service.

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Appendices

None

Background Papers

None