Children & Young People's Scrutiny Panel



Improving Public Services in Cumbria



Strategy for Children with Disabilities

A scrutiny review of the development of a strategy for children with disabilities in Cumbria

February 2009

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Summary of the Group's Findings and Recommendations

The Task Group was established by the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel at their meeting of 11 July 2007 to examine the development of a Strategy for Children with Disabilities and the eligibility criteria being formulated for those services that the Council and its partners provides for children with disabilities.

During the review, the Group spoke to senior officers at both the Council and NHS Cumbria, and examined best practice and guidance.

From their research the Group noted several key points:

- o It is essential that families are actively involved in all stages of the process of developing and implementing a strategy for children with disabilities, and are not just consulted during the initial phase.
- Joint working between Cumbria NHS and the Council appears to be very successful in this area, with good working relationships at appropriate levels, and as such may serve as a model for good practice when developing partnership working in other areas of the Council.
- There is a need to develop and improve how services for children with disabilities are publicised within communities to ensure that people are aware of their options and the services that are actually available to them. If this is not done well, no matter how good the services are, if people are not aware of their options services will be underused and those in need will not benefit.

The Chair of the Task and Finish Group would like to thank everyone who supported and gave evidence to this Group.

The Task and Finish Group recommend that Scrutiny Management Board are asked to put the following recommendations to Cabinet for consideration:

Recommendation 1

That Cumbria County Council and NHS Cumbria ensure that parental involvement is a feature of all stages of the process of transforming short breaks in Cumbria.

Recommendation 2

That Cumbria County Council and NHS Cumbria develop a strong focus on publicity, both when developing and implementing transforming short breaks in Cumbria, and that this should be done in a number of different ways using a variety of mediums.

Recommendation 3

That information regarding the quality of the services provided by Cumbria County Council and NHS Cumbria is gathered and collated, and is then used to help inform service improvements and changes as part of an ongoing review process.

Recommendation 4

That an update on the progress of this work be brought back to Scrutiny in 6 months, to enable the Panel to decide whether it is appropriate to conduct a further review into the progress that has been made.

1 Background and Context

- 1.1 The "Every Child Matters" Green Paper was published in 2003, alongside and responding to the inquiry by Lord Laming into the death of Victoria Climbié. "Every Child Matters" recognised that child protection cannot be separated from policies to improve children's lives as a whole and emphasised the need to focus both on the universal services which every child uses, and on more targeted services for those children with additional needs and/or who are at risk. Children and young people must be properly protected within a framework of universal services which are there to support every child to develop their full potential.
- 1.2 The Government expected that disabled children would benefit from the support and work arising out of "Every Child Matters," but wanted to take this even further. In the May 2007 report "Aiming High for Disabled Children: Better Support for Families," the Department for Education and Skills stated; "The Government wants all children to have the best start in life and the ongoing support that they and their families need to fulfil their potential. Disabled children are less likely to achieve as much in a range of areas as their non-disabled peers. Improving their outcomes, allowing them to benefit from equality of opportunity, and increasing their involvement and inclusion in society will help them to achieve more as individuals. It will also reduce social inequality, and allow communities to benefit from the contribution that disabled children and their families can make, harnessing their talent and fostering tolerance and understanding of diversity."
- 1.3 This work highlighted the Government's drive to ensure that support for disabled children is a national priority. Three priority areas for improving outcomes for disabled children were identified as:
 - access and empowerment (services that are more accessible, and where young people and their families have been more involved in the planning and delivery in their areas);
 - responsive services and timely support (there will be a focus on services for disabled children both locally and nationally); and
 - improving quality and capacity (new funding is being allocated to services that families want and need, in particular short breaks services, but also equipment and therapists)
- 1.4 Cumbria County Council's Children and Young People's Plan was produced by consulting with children, young people and their families, analyzing the improvements made following the Joint Area Review (JAR) in 2006, and a comprehensive needs analysis based on the Every Child Matters outcomes.
- 1.5 A report from the Corporate Director of Children's Services in October 2008 highlighted that in Cumbria there are 2480 children under 18 in receipt of Disability Living Allowance, with around 1000 in receipt of the high rate (indicating a higher level of need). Social care currently provides services for around 480 children with the PCT providing services for a further group of children.

- 1.6 Overview and Scrutiny first agreed to review this area of work in July 2007 following a piece of task group work undertaken to examine short breaks for children with disabilities.
- 1.7 The remit of the Short Breaks Task Group was initially extended to include looking at the proposals being developed for eligibility criteria to services for children with disabilities. However following a discussion with the Service Manager for Children with Disabilities it was explained that these criteria were being developed as part of a wider strategy that would also define a spectrum of care for children with disabilities. It was therefore felt that the Task Group should examine the strategy that was being developed, of which the criteria form a part.

2 Links to Council and Community Priorities

- 2.1 The Council Plan sets out Cumbria County Council's ambitions and priorities, which have been shaped by many factors, such as what the public say needs improving, the changing social and economic context, and our shared priorities with partners. Within this Plan one of the Council's stated six priority themes is "happier improving the life chances and well-being of children and young people."
- 2.2 In addition, the Council's Children and Young People's Plan has a stated vision that "In Cumbria, the best for every child, young person, and their family. Enabling children and young people to be healthy; to stay safe to enjoy and achieve; to make a positive contribution; and to achieve economic wellbeing."
- 2.3 The aim of this area of work is to help minimise barriers, so ensuring equitable access for all children with disabilities, and specifically those with severe and profound disabilities. The Council aims to ensure that Disability Discrimination Act requirements are fulfilled by all providers, and support for disabled children to lead a life like any other child is provided, as well as helping to ensure that carers of severely disabled children have breaks that meet their needs.

3 Role and Membership of the Task and Finish Group

- 3.1 At their meeting of 11 July 2007 The Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel agreed to extend the remit of the Short Breaks for Children with Disabilities Task Group to focus on the developing overarching strategy for children with disabilities.
- 3.2 Membership of the Task Group was initially confirmed as being:
 - Councillor A Burns
 - o Mr. C Brooksbank
 - Ms R Davies
 - Ms L Garbarino
 - Councillor S Leyton
 - Councillor S Fisher
- 3.3 Due to the length of this review and a number of external factors, membership of the group was refreshed in October 2008, and was confirmed as being:
 - o Mr. A Buckley
 - o Mr. C Brooksbank
 - Ms R Davies
 - Ms L Garbarino
 - Councillor S Leyton
- 3.4 Mr. C Brooksbank served as the Chairman of this group, in his capacity as a coopted member to the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel.
- 3.5 The terms of reference for this Task Group were subsequently agreed as being:
 - To scrutinise the proposed strategy for Children with Disabilities and in particular, to examine how parents, schools and other stakeholders are engaged with the process.
 - To examine the assessment criteria for access to the service:
 - To monitor implementation of the changes to the Short Breaks service as agreed with scrutiny by the NHS and Children's Services.
- 3.6 Due to a number of reasons including capacity and availability, the review was unable to be completed by February 2008 as had originally been planned. Over the course of this review the Task Group have held a total of five meetings where they examined a range of written evidence and best practice, and conducted a number of witness interviews to help formulate their recommendations. This final report from the Group has been drawn up as a result of their investigations and evidence gathered.

4 Evidence Gathered

- 4.1 The Task Group have reviewed a range of internal and external documentary evidence as part of this review, including the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) paper "Aiming High for Disabled Children, Transforming services for disabled children and their families." They were supportive of the vision expressed in this document and that resources were being committed to this important area of work, however did raise a concern that it is important to ensure that the necessary service improvements match and deliver these expectations.
- 4.2 The DCSF has set out a Full Service Offer that Local Authorities and Primary Care Trusts are expected to have in place by April 2011 and a copy of this is attached at Appendix 1 for information.
- 4.3 As part of their research members of the Group attended a series of transforming short breaks 'vision' events across the county, where they met with parents, carers and representatives from a range of other organisations, who were being consulted on the vision for short breaks for children with disabilities in Cumbria. This provided the Group the opportunity to discuss with a variety of individuals what they felt about the process, their concerns and how they would like this key area of work to develop.
- 4.4 There was a great deal of good feedback from these events, although concern was raised that this must not just become a consultation exercise as a way to 'tick a box,' rather it needs to be the beginning of an interactive process to develop the services for this key group within our communities.
- 4.5 During further discussions with the Senior Commissioning Manager NHS Cumbria, levels of engagement with families and key stakeholders were explored, as was the progress of actual the strategy and service transformation. Members were advised that the information from all of the consultations that have been carried out will be pulled together to help create the vision, which will then be put on the website for people to comment on, and forums will be set up in the localities for testing this vision. From the first of April when we begin to transform the service, groups and individuals in the localities will have been identified to champion this work, and within the project it will be clearly visible to see how stakeholders' issues and priorities have been incorporated into the developing services.
- 4.6 Over the Course of this review the Group have met with senior officers from both the Council and NHS Cumbria to discuss the range of work that is being undertaken to help deliver the key aspects of the strategy within Cumbria. At the Overview and Scrutiny Panel meeting of 14 October 2008, members of the Panel were advised that "a key requirement of the readiness criteria is the provision of detailed data on current provision of short breaks, including those provided by community groups, children's centres and extended services, and current spending, Similarly an audit of current services available to disabled children and their families is being undertaken."

- 4.7 The Commissioning Manager Inclusive Services for Children and Young People with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities then proceeded to outline the key features of the plan as being:
 - The aligning of Health and Local Authority budgets to create maximum input.
 - Equality of appropriate opportunity across the whole County.
 - The systematic engagement of parents at both a strategic and local level in both determining the profile of provision and also the development and monitoring of services.
 - Supporting a range of third sector and community providers to contribute to the range of provision made.
 - Developing and publishing transparently, the range of provision and levels of entitlement.
 - The monitoring and quality assurance of provision, including feedback from parents, carers and young people.
- 4.8 After discussing the range of information they have received over the course of the review and the good work that is currently being undertaken, the Group felt that there was nothing further they could add at this stage, and as such felt that it was appropriate and timely to bring the review to a close. The Task Group are grateful to everyone who presented evidence to help them in their review, and their key findings and recommendations are detailed below.

5 Findings and Recommendations

- 5.1 The Task Group are pleased to note that there is a great deal of good work being carried out with regards to transforming short breaks for children with disabilities in Cumbria, and that through working in partnership with NHS Cumbria, and engaging the third sector, resources are being used effectively to help drive and deliver this project.
- 5.2 Initial levels of engagement with parents, groups and communities has been encouraging and the Task Group feel that it is crucial this is maintained at all stages of the work, to ensure that services are truly designed for and responsive to the needs of those using them, and that they are of a high quality. A key part of this will be the type of information collected by NHS Cumbria and the Council, as rather than just collecting facts and figures such as numbers of service users, data relating to quality, perceptions and problems should be recorded and dealt with, so enabling services to be able adapt and address people's needs.
- 5.3 One area they have highlighted as needing a continual focus on however is publicity, as from the evidence they have gathered the group are aware that not all potential service users are aware of both the services and options available to them. In order to ensure that everyone who needs services is both aware of them and able to access the best support for themselves and their families, it is crucial that they are aware of those services on offer and their range of options. In order to achieve this, a variety of methods of publicity need to be adopted and undertaken on a regular basis.

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Report ends.