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SPEECH AND LANGUAGE THERAPY

Author: Simon Newland
Tel: 01992 555738

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To inform Forum of the proposed review process towards the expiring Speech and Language Therapy (SALT) contract, and to invite comments on this.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Forum is asked to support the proposed review process in relation to any future SALT contract, and in the meantime to support the extension of the current contract (if this is possible) to allow adequate time for that review to take place.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Council is required formally to consult Schools Forum when the local authority is proposing a contract for supplies and services which is to be funded from the Schools Budget and is in excess of the EU procurement thresholds. The consultation must cover the terms of the contract at least one month prior to the issue of invitations to tender. This report relates to the current county-wide contract for the delivery of Speech and Language Therapy in Hertfordshire schools which expires on 31 March 2016.
- 3.2 The Council currently allocates £1.7m of Designated Schools Grant (High Needs) each year, to the delivery of a countywide Speech and Language Therapy service. The service is delivered by Hertfordshire Community NHS Trust (HCT). HCT has three different contracts to deliver Speech and Language Therapy in Hertfordshire. There is one LA contract and East & North Hertfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group and Herts Valleys Clinical Commissioning Group also separately commission HCT to deliver Speech and Language Therapy to children and young people through their obligations to deliver community services. This provision is part of a wider multi-million pound contract for HCT to deliver a suite of community services.

- 3.3 The service as currently constituted delivers sessional support to Special Schools, Speech and Language units/bases in mainstream schools, and direct to mainstream. About 150 sessions per week are delivered to Special Schools and 100 each to units/bases and to mainstream. The emphasis of the service is on primary aged pupils. The model delivered by HCT has an increased focus on training school staff to identify speech and language issues, and advice and support as well as to deliver interventions.
- 3.4 An important feature driving the way the service current works is that it is centrally funded – i.e. that schools/bases do not have to pay directly for activity delivered on their sites. This has both advantages, but also may have flaws in terms of the extent to which it may promote optimal use of resources. Of course, the cost of the service is met within the overall DSG pot so money spent on it is at the expense of money spent, probably by schools, in other ways.

Issues and options arising:

- 3.5 Prior to reaching any conclusion on what to do by way of re-providing the current service there is a requirement for a degree of research and evaluation of what is the best overall approach to meeting the needs of the children to which the service is directed. There are several aspects to this:
- Consideration of what the appropriate roles of Special Schools, Units/bases and Mainstream schools are, viz-a-viz the externally-provided SALT service. In the case of units and bases very considerable funding is directed in support of their activities, and it is important to be clear on exactly how these might best complement and be complemented by external SALT provision.
 - Evidence gathering from schools on perceived quality
 - Evidence gathering on value for money
 - Further documentation of the current service delivery model
- 3.6 Once this is complete, then it will be possible to scope the services we wish to commission in future and – importantly – consider with CCG colleagues the interrelationship between these and those which they would wish also to commission.
- 3.7 One outcome of the process for us will be a clear view on what we expect schools/units bases to undertake directly, what they might purchase (and thus what funding might be devolved to them or included within their own SLAs/service contracts), and what we wish to see centrally-procured and offered via schools/units for no direct charge.
- 3.8 Only at that stage will it be possible to come to consider the best approach to contracting and procurement of any central SALT contract.
- 3.9 Given the scale of work required, it is not practical to reach a conclusion and undertake any retendering exercise for an April start. We will therefore need to investigate the extent to which the current contract can be extended.

Proposed approach

- 3.10 It can be seen that the first part of this exercise – roles of schools, bases, etc., - is in effect an aspect of the programme of review work to be undertaken under the umbrella of the SEND strategy which was discussed by the High Needs Funding Group earlier this month. The note/outcome of that wider meeting is covered elsewhere on this agenda.
- 3.11 Accordingly, it would seem appropriate that the governance of the first part of the necessary review process takes place using a Project Board/Group structure tied into the DSPL executive group and High Needs Funding Group. Work on SALT would be a work stream under that umbrella.
- 3.12 Whilst the review and contracting process is not primarily directed to cost saving, there is a need to be clear that any reframed service must be financially sustainable, and its costs must represent acceptable value for money in the context of the future limitations in the HLN budget.
- 3.13 It must be emphasised that interrelationships with CCGs and their processes throughout will require careful consideration.

4. Financial implications

- 4.1 This is for information not a decision report, but financial issues are considered in section 3, above.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

- 5.1 Forum is asked to support the recommendations set out in Section 2, above.