

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**CHILDREN'S SERVICES CABINET PANEL
WEDNESDAY, 7 FEBRUARY 2018 AT 10.00AM**

PROPOSED CHILDREN'S EQUIPMENT OFFER AND PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Report of the Director of Children's Services

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Executive Member:- Teresa Heritage, Children's Services

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 This report is to invite the Panel to endorse a proposed equipment offer which will be accessible to all children and young people in Hertfordshire, and which will be formalised into a single policy.
- 1.2 The report asks Panel to note the Director of Children's Services intention to begin a public consultation on the proposed equipment offer.

2. Summary

- 2.1 Community and school equipment provision is important to many families across all of Hertfordshire as it allows individuals to maintain independence as well as prevent hospital admission. In light of this any change to the way in which equipment provision is administered is likely to cause concern.
- 2.2 At present, there is not a clear equipment offer for Hertfordshire families. The proposed policy attached to this Report will inform families as to what they are entitled, and of the process by which they access equipment.
- 2.3 Further, because there is not a clear policy framework to guide decision making about equipment provision, there is no assurance that resource being invested in equipment provision is being targeted at those who need support the most.
- 2.4 Panel is asked to endorse the proposed policies which will form the offer, and note that Officers will be taking the proposed offer to public consultation.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 That the Panel:
 - Notes, comments upon and supports the proposed Children's equipment offer.

- Notes that the Director of Children’s Services intends to commence a public consultation on the proposed offer.
- Notes that the outcome of the Consultation will be brought back to Cabinet Panel and then onto Cabinet for a final decision.

4. Background

- 4.1 At present Hertfordshire County Council does not have a clearly articulated offer which states how children and young people access equipment support. As a result Families are not clear what support is available to them.
- 4.2 The above needs to be addressed to ensure that equipment support is part of the system-wide vision to improve outcomes and increase the financial sustainability of services. This vision is set out in Hertfordshire’s Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) [Strategy](#) and the [Hertfordshire and West Essex Sustainability and Transformation Plan](#). The proposed equipment offer will align to the [Hertfordshire Six Bees](#) outcomes framework co-produced with families, and they describe what Children’s Services wants to achieve for families. In particular, the proposed equipment offer will align the outcomes of be healthy, be safe, and be independent.
- 4.3 Access to equipment support following a clinical assessment can enable Hertfordshire to realise its ambitions by ensuring that children and young people have the opportunity to safely access their home environments and their educational settings.
- 4.4 The demand for equipment reflects complexity of need amongst children and young people. Children’s services see a smaller volume of demand than that placed on Adult Care Services (ACS) funded community equipment provision; however individual items of equipment tend to be more complex and more expensive. For example children’s funded equipment provision accounts for approximately 7% of Hertfordshire Equipment Service deliveries each year. However 80% of ACS funded equipment are categorised a ‘standard stock’ and have a lower unit cost; where as 80% of Children’s funded equipment are non-standard stock, and must be purchased to meet individual need. The offer going forward must future proof service provision, so that Children’s’ Services is able to continue to meet the demand for complex and expensive items of equipment.
- 4.5 At present demand for equipment is met through the resources invested in the equipment provider: Hertfordshire Equipment Service (HES). Investment is shared across Hertfordshire County Council, East and North Hertfordshire CCG (ENHCCG) and Herts Valleys CCG (HVCCG).
- 4.6 The overall resource required from the partner agencies in order to meet the current need for equipment is unpredictable at present; this is because of the demand profile described above which is the need for a relatively low number of expensive items of equipment. The table below outlines total spend on children’s equipment for the past three years, and demonstrates how much spend can fluctuate.

	Total Spend on Children's Equipment
2015/16	£662,337
2016/17	£456,466
2017/18	£551,282 (forecast whole year expenditure)

4.7 The unpredictability of spend means that financial planning has previously been reactive. An overspend on the equipment budget in 2015/16 meant that it was agreed to increase the contributions to the HES children's budgets for 2016/17; Health (ENHCCG and HVCCG), Education (the Dedicated Schools Grant contribution) and social care would each contribute £201,500 (£604,500 in total).

4.8 The impact of a clear equipment offer will be to give increased assurance that resource is being effectively used to target need amongst children and young people; and to ensure the financial sustainability of the service. Officers can then consider whether the level of resource invested is appropriate to meet need.

5. Objectives for the Children's Equipment offer

5.1 The future Children's equipment offer must achieve the following objectives:

- To ensure that equipment is used effectively and efficiently to achieve outcomes for children and young people, across the whole county.
- To enable children and young people to realise their personal health and wellbeing outcomes.
- To ensure that there is control over the future costs of equipment, so that the service offer is financially sustainable and represents value for money
- To meet statutory duties within Children and Families Act 2014 and Care Act 2014
- To ensure a clear pathway for transitioning to ACS funded equipment provision.

5.2 To achieve these objectives the future Children's equipment offer must be outcomes focused, and access to the service will be dependent on a clinical assessment undertaken by a qualified Occupational Therapist.

6. The proposed equipment offer

6.1 It is proposed that the future offer will be composed of the following framework:

- Children's Services will fund provision for young people up to their 18th birthday. At 18, a service user will transfer to ACS funded provision.
- That a child or young person will be issued with only one set of equipment per location or setting. However where there are mitigating

circumstances requiring multiple sets of equipment, the Head of HES will be able to apply their discretion

- There will be two classification of equipment: standard and non-standard specialist stock.
 - Standard Stock items means items of equipment which HES buy in bulk, and a ready supply is available in the HES warehouse. These items usually have a unit cost of less than £500
 - Non-standard specialist stock is an item of equipment which must be bought in to meet an individual child's particular needs. These items typically have a value of more than £500.
- There will be a clear and consistent approach to decision making about equipment allocation, this is described below.
- Special schools will generally be expected to fund equipment support out of their centrally allocated budget (and not through the resource invested in HES).
- Mainstream schools will access equipment support through HES, as per the usual assessment and authorisation process. The future of equipment support for schools is detailed further below.

6.2 These proposals will be included in a consultation document and consultation feedback may lead to amendments.

6.3 It is proposed that decision making about equipment allocation will take place within the following protocol:

- Requests for 'non-standard specialist stock equipment' will be critically assessed for clinical necessity by a panel of authorisers (competent, qualified therapists).
- The panel of authorisers will replace a group which already exist to review orders for Children's equipment. The group meets monthly, and is comprised of the Head of HES, and three qualified professional authorisers.
- Standard stock items will not require authorisation at panel, but must be approved via the usual management oversight process; which is determined by the Head of HES
- A more detailed guide to the standard stock list and authorisation framework is provided in Appendix A.

7. The equipment offer to schools

7.1 At present, there are no clear policy as to what equipment will be provided as standard from HES to mainstream or specialist schools. The future equipment offer will address this issue; proposals will be included in the public consultation.

7.2 Consultation with Integrated Services for Learning (ISL) have resulted in the following principles being proposed as a future equipment offer to schools:

- **Special schools** are normally expected to fund the equipment needs of the children in the school. Should a school be required to take a child with exceptional specialist equipment needs, this will be considered on a case by case basis.
- **Mainstream schools** will receive equipment from HES, following the usual stocklist protocol. Requests for equipment from mainstream schools will be considered through the usual authorisation process, and should follow a needs-led assessment.
- Excluded from the standard equipment offer are 'reasonable adjustments' to schools buildings or premises, and equipment covered by the 'Policy on the Loan of Specialist Equipment for Pupils with a Physical and/or Sensory Impairment'.

7.3 The funding model which underlies this offer to schools will be developed further by ISL, for implementation with the revised policy

8. Consultation on the proposed offer:

8.1 The introduction of an equipment offer will have implications for families across the county. In light of this, officers feel that a public consultation is necessary before a decision on the future offer is taken.

8.2 It is proposed that the consultation will last from February 2018 to May 2018. A report on the outcome of the consultation and the proposed offer will be brought to Panel in June 2018 and Cabinet thereafter. This report will outline a final equipment offer, which Panel will be asked to recommend to Cabinet.

8.3 The new equipment offer should be fully operational in time for the beginning of the 2018/2019 academic year.

9. Financial Implications

9.1 It is possible that there will be financial implications resulting for a new Equipment Offer. Although at this present stage it is not possible to quantify any potential financial impact. Some measures within the revised offer may reduce spend, such as controlling the number of sets of equipment which any one child or young person can be issued with; whilst the increased complexity of need in the community may lead to more bespoke equipment being prescribed, which increases cost.

9.2 The intention of introducing a clear Equipment Offer is to offer greater assurance that spend on equipment is being used in the most effective way to address need in the county. Officers will continue to monitor spend, and assess the financial impact of the Equipment Offer. If upon implementation, this revised policy results in significant financial change, the relevant process for reporting and securing this (amongst the funding partners) will be initiated and followed.

10. Governance

- 10.1 The governance of HES formally sits in Adult Care Services.
- 10.2 Notwithstanding the above The Director of ACS has indicated that he will be guided by the decision making process within Children's Services, for matters which pertain to the elements of HES which are funded by Children's Services.

11. Equality implications

- 11.1 When considering proposals placed before Members it is important that they are fully aware of, and have themselves rigorously considered the equality implications of the decision that they are making.
- 11.2 Rigorous consideration will ensure that proper appreciation of any potential impact of that decision on the County Council's statutory obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty. As a minimum this requires decision makers to read and carefully consider the content of any Equalities Impact Assessment (EQiA) produced by officers.
- 11.3 The Equality Act 2010 requires the County Council when exercising its functions to have due regard to the need to (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act; (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it and (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. The protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- 11.4 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been undertaken and this is annexed at Appendix B.