



CABINET MEMBER DECISION

Date of decision 22 August 2016

FORMAL PROPOSAL TO CEASE DELIVERY OF A DEDICATED PORTAGE SERVICE IN WORCESTERSHIRE

Relevant Cabinet Member

Marc Bayliss ±Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families

Relevant Officer

Director of Children, Families and Communities

Recommendation

1. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families is recommended to :
 - (a) note the contents of the report and the Equality Impact Assessment; and
 - (b) approve the proposals to cease delivery of the dedicated Portage Service in Worcestershire on 1 October 2018 with the transitional arrangements from 1 October 2016 as set out in the report; and
 - (c) authorise the Director of Children, Families and Communities to take all necessary steps to put the above into effect .

Background

2. 'Portage' is a home-visiting educational service for pre-school children with additional support needs and their families. Named after the town of Portage in Wisconsin, USA, the service was developed as a way of supporting parents to help their child make appropriate pre-school progress. The first Portage Service in the UK was established in 1976 due to an increasing awareness of a gap in service provision and the need to support families from the birth of a child with additional needs. There are over 120 registered Portage services in England and Wales delivered by Local Authorities and charities.
3. Worcestershire County Council currently delivers a countywide Portage service which is available to children aged 0-5 years and is accessed through an open referral system i.e. self-referral and through professionals. The service has used clear entry criteria which are as follows;

9. An external evaluation of Portage took place in 2013 which sought feedback from parents and carers and benchmarked Worcestershire's Portage service against statistical neighbours. The report considered Portage in light of the restructure within Worcestershire and identified next steps for the service including recommendations for the future service model. It also evaluated the impact of the service on its stakeholders and included a Social Return on Investment report. (see background paper). Whilst the evaluation evidenced the strong support from parents/carers for the service it concluded that there was no evidence that a dedicated Portage service impacted on outcomes for children. This led to a recommendation for the service to modify its evaluation methodology to better evidence the impact of the service so as to not solely rely on the qualitative feedback from service users.

10. Portage is in itself a discretionary service and whilst it supports wider statutory duties such as under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989, the professional conclusion is that needs could be met in a more effective and cost-efficient manner. Disabled children are considered as 'children in need' under the Children Act 1989, as are children whose health or development are likely to be significantly impaired or further impaired without the provision of services under Part III of that Act and thus children for whom we owe duties under that Part. Under Section 27 of the Children and Families Act 2014 we must keep under review the educational, training and social provision made in Worcestershire for children who have Special Educational Needs (SEN) or disability, or such provision made outside the county for children with SEN for whom the Council is responsible, or children with a disability within the county. As part of that duty, the Council must consider whether such provision is sufficient to meet the children's needs. The professional conclusion is that, having regard to the consultation undertaken, a dedicated Portage system is not necessary, nor the most appropriate method of meeting our duties, and sufficient provision is otherwise available if it were to cease. It is considered that the proposal is in line with our duty under s11 of the Children Act 2004 to ensure our functions are discharged having regard to need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. We could of course continue the Portage Service if we wished but there are alternative, effective ways to meet our statutory responsibilities. An average caseload for a fulltime Home Worker is 15 which is very small and a consequence of the high-intensity and frequency of the intervention the service currently provides.

transition Portage service with an alternate funding stream for 2015/16 and a revised service specification which outlined a more evidence-based family support model with a targeted approach to delivery. It also proposed that a review be carried out to identify the feasibility of including the functions of Portage in scope of other services, i.e. the Health Visiting service or Specialist Play with a view to decommissioning the service by 30 March 2016 (see paragraph (2)-6.6Or

- x Staff Spin-Off - the Portage service has explored applying for charity funding (e.g. Children in Need, Big Lottery funding etc.) with the intention of setting up a staff spin-off; however this wasn't viable as funding could not be guaranteed.

16. After exploring the viability of these options and the impact for the dedicated service stopping the Council proposed to stop providing a dedicated Portage service in Worcestershire from 1 October 2016 in order to meet the financial savings and on the basis that its duties could be met in a more efficient and cost-effective way . A public consultation ran from 04 April 2016 to 03 May 2016 which gave current service users and professionals the opportunity to comment on the proposal to stop providing a dedicated Portage service. The link to the online survey or hardcopy survey was made available to all parents/carers of current service users. In addition, other relevant stakeholders, including other parents of children with additional needs and

services will prioritise the needs of vulnerable groups such as those children with developmental delay that have previously been eligible for a Portage service. Families will also be able to access an improved information, advice and guidance offer via the Local Authorities websites and if and when the family has complex needs they can contact the Family Front Door for further advice and access to services.

Legal, Financial and HR Implications

28. Since April 2014, Portage has not been allocated a base budget and has been funded through Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) reserves. Allowing a £200K base budget saving to be made. The current funding for the service is £200k per annum. Funding has already been approved by ()-263(re -17u3re -17u3re -17u3re 4 ET BT 1 0 0 1 520.3 6t)-

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Director of XXX) the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this report: