

EDUCATION FOR LIFE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 6TH MARCH 2014

SUBJECT: PROPOSED REVIEW OF THE GWENT VISUAL IMPAIRMENT SERVICE, THE EDUCATIONAL ADVISORY SERVICE FOR HEARING IMPAIRED AND THE COMMUNICATION INTERVENTION TEAM (COMIT)

REPORT BY: ACTING DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To inform Members of the intention to review the regional services currently operating as Gwent Visual Impairment Service, the Educational Advisory Service for Hearing Impaired and the Communication Intervention Team (ComIT) currently located in Brecon House, Cwmbran.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The aim of the review would be to further advise on the strengths and areas for development of the current services and to develop a business case to bring together all three services under one management structure and form a single coherent service operating across the region.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 The Hill Review (June 2013) recommended that Local Authorities continue to provide specialist services for learners with low incidence ALN.
- 3.2 There remains a statutory requirement that in order to teach pupils with a sensory impairment, teachers must have a mandatory qualification. Section 7.84 of the Code of Practice for Wales (2002) states that: *if a child has sensory difficulties, the LA must obtain educational advice from a teacher qualified to teach children who are visually or hearing impaired as well as from the school or setting.*

4. THE REPORT

- 4.1 The Educational Advisory Service for Hearing Impaired and the Gwent Visually Impaired Service are both legacy services of the former Gwent County Council. Both services provide a peripatetic support service to individual learners with an identified hearing loss and or visual impairment, their schools and families. The Communication Intervention Team (ComIT) was initially formed in 2002 using grant funding from Welsh Government to improve working relationships across health and education in the delivery of support to learners with speech, language and communication difficulties.
- 4.2 In developing further collaborative work it is proposed that Directors of the five authorities of Caerphilly, Blaenau-Gwent, Torfaen, Newport and Monmouth, agree to securing specialist independent advice to develop a business plan for the integration of specialist sensory and communication services. The business plan will need to consider the vision for the service, the function, structure and cost.

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 When the review is completed a full impact assessment will be undertaken on the range of options.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Provision for securing an independent specialist in this field to undertake a review has already been made from within the existing services budgets. The services of the consultant has been secured by Torfaen at a cost of approximately £9,000.

7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no personnel implications related to this report.

8. CONSULTATIONS

- 8.1 Heads of Services and Directors have been consulted on this proposal.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 It is recommended that the Scrutiny Committee note the contents of this report. When the review is completed a further report which identifies a range of options will be brought to the committee.

10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 The formation of a single service with specialist expertise will provide learners, parents and schools with appropriate timely advice and support within an integrated service.

11. STATUTORY POWER

- 11.1 Not applicable for this report

Author: Jacqueline Elias, Service Manager, Additional Learning Needs
Consultees: Directorate Senior Management Team
Councillor Rhianon Passmore, Cabinet Member
Heads of ALN / Inclusion Services and Directors of Education for Caerphilly,
Blaenau-Gwent, Torfaen, Newport and Monmouth