



CABINET – 5TH OCTOBER 2016

SUBJECT: PROPOSAL FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF A COMBINED SENSORY AND COMMUNICATION SERVICE (SENCOM) MADE UP OF THE VISUAL IMPAIRMENT (VI) SERVICE, HEARING IMPAIRMENT (HI) SERVICE AND THE COMMUNICATION INTERVENTION TEAM.

REPORT BY: CHIEF EDUCATION OFFICER

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The report sets out the proposal for the development of a combined Sensory and Communication Service (SenCom) made up of the Visual Impairment Service, the Hearing Impairment Service and the Communication Intervention Team, under a single employer and governance structure operated by Torfaen CBC. This will involve the transfer of some staff from Caerphilly CBC to Torfaen CBC necessitating appropriate consultation following permission from Cabinet to proceed. The purpose of the report is to seek agreement from Cabinet to proceed with a consultation to transfer Gwent Visual Impairment Service, currently hosted by Caerphilly CBC, to Torfaen CBC. Torfaen CBC currently manage the Hearing Impairment Service and the Communication Intervention Teams on behalf of the south east Wales region.
- 1.2 If permission is granted to proceed, a consultation with Sensory and Communication Service staff and partners will commence on 6th October 2016 with the proposal that all employees of Caerphilly CBC who work in the Sensory and Communication Service (SenCom) transfer their employment to Torfaen CBC as of 1st April 2017.

2. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 2.1 Caerphilly CBC Corporate Plan 2015-16 – Improve outcomes for all learners, particularly those vulnerable to underachievement.
- 2.2 Torfaen CBC Corporate Plan 2016-2021- Raising educational attainment.

3. THE REPORT

- 3.1 The Sensory and Communication Support Service consist of three specialist support teams:
 - Communication Intervention Team (ComIT)
 - Gwent Visual Impairment Service (GVIS)
 - Hearing Impairment Service (HIS).
- 3.2 ComIT was established in 2008, while the HIS and GVIS were established by Gwent County Council prior to local government reorganisation in 1986. All three services are co-funded by the five local authorities in the South East Wales Consortium area and provide a regional, highly specialist 0-19 training and intervention service to families, early years settings and schools. In the academic year 2015/16 the service supported around 1700 children and young people.

- 3.3 The current Head of Service took up his post in September 2015 with a remit to develop greater strategic and operational integrated processes between the teams. This has been a long held desire of the consortium and the five local authority Directors of Education have expressed a wish to see the teams amalgamate under the auspices of a single local authority. This proposal has already been discussed with the Executive Members for Education from both LAs.
- 3.4 The Chief Education Officer and the Head of Service believe the proposals will be a positive development as they will:
- Significantly support the development of a seamless, coordinated service that provides far more focused support to schools, families and settings through joined up advice and intervention.
 - Provide a one-stop setting for families where they know they can receive high quality support and guidance. This is particularly appropriate for families whose children may have a range of complex needs.
 - Enhance the sharing of expertise and a wide range of resources across the three services to aid the service in attaining its strategic objective of becoming a national leader in innovative practice.
 - Support further efficiencies by combining IT and administrative support services in order to provide greater value without additional costs to all partner local authorities.
- 3.5 Although the three teams have operated as independent service providers for many years and their contributions are well regarded by schools and families, now is the ideal opportunity to re-organise the workforce arrangements so that the service can implement its strategic aims and be able to respond effectively and flexibly to the anticipated requirements of the forthcoming Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Bill. If Cabinet agrees for the proposal to commence, a formal consultation will begin with staff and stakeholders on 6th October 2016. Officers will then report back to members on the outcome of the consultation together with a full Outline Business Case, for consideration by Cabinet early in the new year.

4. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Council's full Equalities Impact Assessment process will be applied to the formal Consultation Document and subsequent report to Cabinet.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 It is proposed that all staff currently employed by Caerphilly CBC stay on their current terms and conditions upon and after transfer. This model has been successfully used in the development of the Education Achievement Service and will be replicated in relation to this proposal. All costs associated with the services involved are already fully funded via a service level agreement with the five local authorities.
- 5.2 As staff are currently co-located on the same building in Torfaen there will be no relocation or removal costs.
- 5.3 During the consultation period finance officers from Caerphilly and Torfaen will work together to provide a detailed analysis of any potential transitional costs, which will include management costs, costs associated with maintaining the building and infrastructure improvement costs such as IT. This analysis will be included in the consultation report to Cabinet.

6. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Employees employed in the VI Service immediately before the transfer and whose employment would have continued with the Council beyond the date of transfer, automatically become employees of Torfaen Borough Council on the transfer date. 20 employees (14.4FTE) would have an entitlement to transfer.
- 6.2 TUPE imposes obligations upon the Council and Torfaen Council to provide certain information and to consult in respect of affected employees. A TUPE protocol will be developed as a focus for consultation and so that all parties have a clear framework within which any transfer will be facilitated.
- 6.3 An integral part of the transfer process will be structured and open communication between the Council, Employees, Trade Union representatives and Torfaen Council. HR Officers from both Councils will work closely with the respective managers, staff and the unions in this regard.
- 6.4 All collective agreements and trade union recognition agreements binding on the Council will transfer to Torfaen Council with the employee. The employee's period of continuous employment will not be broken by the transfer.
- 6.5 All employees transferring will have exactly the same terms and conditions that they enjoy with the Council immediately prior to transfer with the exception of any specific TUPE measures necessary to secure the transfer process. For example payroll dates differ from Council to Council. Changes necessary to pay employees on the same date (i.e. the end of the month) would be discussed and managed with employees affected

7. CONSULTATIONS

- 7.1 If agreement is given, a full six week consultation process will be undertaken with all members of SenCom and all partners. Feedback from the consultation exercises will be included with a final report to Cabinet.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 Cabinet are asked to note the content of the Report.
- 8.2 That Cabinet agree to the proposal to commence consultation on the proposed transfer of all SenCom Caerphilly CBC based staff to Torfaen CBC in connection with the proposal to create a combined Sensory and Communication Service.
- 8.3 That Cabinet agree that officers report back to members the outcome of the consultation together with a full Outline Business Case in relation to the proposals to create the combined service for consideration by Cabinet early in the new year.

9. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 Current hosting arrangements do not easily allow the development of a strong framework to support SenCom's evolving operational structure. One aligned support system and oversight structure will further develop its quality led delivery of services. It will also further enable the best outcomes for vulnerable learners and build capacity across all schools and settings within the consortium.

10. STATUTORY POWER

- 10.1 This is a Cabinet function.

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