

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;
 - Child has a significant developmental delay in at least 2 areas, or a recognised disability or diagnosis
 - Child must live within the county boundaries or predominantly access Worcestershire support services
 - Parents are willing to commit to a regular teaching programme, either weekly or fortnightly at the coordinators discretion

- The child is not attending a special needs placement (does not include Nursery Plus placements)
 - The child is of a pre-school age
 - The child has at least one full term before s/he is due to start school.
4. A team of trained Home Workers support children who have a developmental delay in at least two areas and their families to improve the child's readiness for school. Intervention is delivered via weekly/fortnightly visits to support the development of play, communication, relationships, and learning for young children. These visits begin when the additional needs are first apparent – this can be soon after birth or at any time in the pre-school period and can last for several years, up to the point the child starts mainstream school or a specialist placement.
5. The main functions of Portage are:
- To support the holistic development of children with disabilities and/or significant special needs aged 0-5, to improve opportunities for achievement and learning
 - To work with a range of multi-agency professionals to ensure a consistent approach to the individual child's support package
 - To empower parents to support their children's holistic development.
6. Home Workers were asked to describe their wider role, including engagement with other services. These were:
- Acting as Lead professional in the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and Team Around the Child meetings
 - Helping the parents to fill out Disability Living Allowance forms
 - Accompanying parents to paediatricians and hospital appointments
 - Transitional support for families as their child moves into early years settings and schools
 - Setting developmental targets
 - Ensuring families understand and can help their child meet targets set by other professionals (Occupational Therapists, physiotherapists, Speech and Language Therapists, etc.)
 - Visiting nurseries, schools, child development centres with parents and for meetings
 - Liaising with professionals on parents' behalf – advocating where needed
 - Engagement with social worker (child protection, core group meetings and joint visits)
 - Help parents come to terms with the fact that their child has additional needs.
7. Parents share with the Home Worker their understanding of their child's individual gifts, abilities and support needs. Profiles or developmental checklists are often used to help this process of identifying strengths and goals for future learning. The aim of each home visit is to decide on an activity which the family can practice and enjoy together. Activities are based on play, grounded in everyday situations in order to provide fun and success for the child.
8. The service currently supports 103 children and their families, 47 of which are due to be discharged from the service in September 2016 and move into mainstream school or specialist placements, leaving a cohort of 56 families.

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. 8 children currently receiving support from Portage are classified as Children in Need (CiN) of a local authority service and have a dedicated social worker(14% of the total cohort). The Council would, of course, continue to meet its obligations under the respective Acts. For example, CiN will continue to receive a local authority service that best meets their needs such intervention from a social worker and other duties would be met through a broad range of prevention services.

Changes to Date

11. The outcome of Corporate Strategy Planning 2013 was that the base budget for Portage was proposed to be removed. The high-level savings target for the Early Help programme was endorsed by Cabinet in February 2014 and ratified by Council with further work needing to be done on assessing the implications of the budget reduction.

12. Initial proposals were therefore presented to Next Steps Programme Board in June 2014 as part of an outline business case on how to implement the removal of the base budget for Portage. In the light of the previous review and survey, the recommended option was to de-commission the current Portage service and re-commission a revised

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 14)

13. To help inform the review of other delivery options a stakeholder survey with existing parents/carers was issued in March 2015. This survey focused on identifying which functions of Portage service users found most valuable. Over half of respondents said they used the Portage service for advice, ideas, support and information. Emotional support, signposting support to other services, and discussing pre-school provision were services that also ranked highly in terms of importance and were used by a majority of respondents.

14. In March 2015, the service budget was reduced by an initial £47k which was achieved by removing 2FTE Portage Coordinator posts. An agreement was put in place for the Health & Care Trust to provide line management for the team for 12 months with no impact on service delivery.

15. As part of the business case for decommissioning the service the following options were considered:

- Include Portage in the specification for the Health Visiting service - from October 2015 Public Health, now included within the Council, became responsible for commissioning the health visiting service. This service, along with others, will be delivered by a new 0-19 Prevention Service (currently being commissioned) from October 2016. It was proposed that some of the functions of Portage could be included in the specification for this service. However, capacity within the Health Visiting service would not allow for Health Visitors to take on all the additional functions currently provided by Portage
- Include Portage in the specification for the Starting Well service - the 0-19 Starting Well service will offer support families, online advice and information, facilitate parent support groups in communities, build and develop volunteering and peer support, provide drop in facilities for children, young people and families to receive advice and face to face support, provide regular health & development reviews for all children and young people and give extra help such as home visiting or specific interventions for children, young people and families who have greater need. The new provider of this service will also be required to support school readiness for vulnerable children. It will not however offer a dedicated home visiting service for children with disabilities as part of its specification.
- Enhance Specialist Play provision – the Specialist Play service provides support to aid development of children and families with additional needs. This service is currently only delivered in the North of the county. This option proposed that instead of continuing a dedicated Portage service, Specialist Play provision could be expanded across the whole county. However the funding needed to implement this is not available.

- 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 professionals were asked to contribute to a separate survey.

17. 44 parents/carers responded to the consultation which equates to a 45% response rate from current service users. 14 professionals responded to the consultation. Feedback was entirely against the proposal unless an adequate alternative service would be available for families after Portage stopped.

18. The consultation also highlighted that all of the respondents were accessing other services alongside Portage, with 59% of respondents accessing 4 or more services. The majority of service users were accessing a Speech & Language Therapy (SaLT) service (89%) and a community paediatrician (85%). Over half were accessing a Health Visitor, Occupational Therapist or Physiotherapist (70%, 55%, and 49% respectively). This means that none of the families are currently relying on Portage as the sole service to provide support.

19. The majority of professionals who responded expressed disappointment at the proposal to stop providing a dedicated Portage service. A minority felt that the current reductions in other services would heighten the impact for families if Portage were to stop e.g. family breakdown. The minority also highlighted a potential risk that families could experience greater isolation and inequality if Portage were removed. 2 respondents understood the financial pressures on local authorities and the need to review services and 1 felt that there isn't "sufficient evidence of the impact" of Portage.

20. The feedback from the consultation can be summarised as follows;

- 100% of parents/carers currently receiving support from Portage were against the proposal to stop providing a dedicated Portage service. 51% of parents/carers do not consider the savings or alternatives to be equal to, or capable of, providing the same levels of practical and emotional support to parents currently provided by Portage to meet their child's developmental needs which 73% of parents/carers consider the most important thing.
- Parents/carers felt that Portage is a vital and critical service which is personalised to each child and parent's needs and where staff are very passionate and positive about the service they provide. Parents/carers feel that the Portage Service has been the only regular, structured and progressive intervention they have received in a one-to-one environment. They also report that Portage staff have developed strong, caring and respectful learning relationships with children and parents/carers. They also feel that the activities and play modelled by staff during

home visits provide parents/carers with practical strategies to integrate into daily play activities with their children. The regularity of sessions is seen as far more effective (20%) than one-off sessions and gives children the chance to make better progress as repetition and growing confidence are key to learning.

- Parents/carers were therefore highly anxious and fearful (36%) at the impact these proposals will have on their children's development. One parent has described her feelings of utter hopelessness at this situation. Out of the parents/carers who responded a few (22%), are overwhelmingly shocked and aggrieved. 20% are outwardly angry.

Proposed Plans

21. After considering the consultation feedback a revised proposal recommends that the Portage service be continued until 30 September 2018, rather than stopping the service on 30 September 2016 which was the original proposal. This responds to the feedback from families accessing the service that they oppose the proposals to stop the service, and would reduce the disruption to them. This will enable those families who currently receive the portage service to continue to receive support until the majority of their children would naturally be discharged from the service in any event upon reaching compulsory school age. Out of the current cohort of 56 children, 10 would be due to continue to receive a service post October 2018 and 3 from October 2019. However, during the next two years the Home Workers will work with these families to ensure they are well prepared for the service to be withdrawn so that the impact is better mitigated and any needs for alternative support identified. There have been no new entrants to the Portage scheme since January 2016, and it is proposed that this continues. However Home Workers, if they have capacity, may provide short packages of intervention for families as part of a wider targeted family support offer. The potential for this needs to further developed following approval of the recommendations.

22. If the recommendations are approved, the team will be working with much smaller caseloads over the next two years as the proposal would be that the service wouldn't routinely take new referrals. There will therefore be a requirement for fewer staff to deliver the service and it is proposed that a revised team structure be implemented from October 2016 which will reduce the current team from 6FTE Home Workers to 3FTE Home Workers given the reduced caseload for the service from October 2016. This will also enable partial savings to be made from October 2016. The caseload will further reduce in October 2017 when more of the children reach statutory school age and are discharged from the service as the table below illustrates.

Academic Year	Remaining Cohort
2016/17	56
2017/18	29
2018/19	10
2019/20	3

Equality and Diversity Implications

THE COUNCIL MUST, DURING PLANNING, DECISION-MAKING AND IMPLEMENTATION, EXERCISE A PROPORTIONATE LEVEL OF DUE REGARD TO THE NEED TO:

- ELIMINATE UNLAWFUL DISCRIMINATION, HARASSMENT AND VICTIMISATION AND OTHER CONDUCT PROHIBITED BY THE EQUALITY ACT 2010
- ADVANCE EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY BETWEEN PEOPLE WHO SHARE A PROTECTED CHARACTERISTIC AND THOSE WHO DO NOT
- FOSTER GOOD RELATIONS BETWEEN PEOPLE WHO SHARE A PROTECTED CHARACTERISTIC AND THOSE WHO DO NOT

23. In identifying and making recommendations regarding the future of the Portage service the Council has given due regard to the 3 aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty. An Equality Impact Assessment (including extensive consultation in respect of proposals) has been completed and its findings have contributed to the development of the Report recommendations (see supporting information for full EIA is attached). The Assessment identified the possibility of some adverse impact on children aged 0-5 with developmental delays if the service were to be withdrawn from those families who currently access the service. These families have become accustomed to and value particular aspects of the Service; although other specialist services are available to the children and families who have additional needs the Council considers that the current Portage Recipients may find it difficult to adjust to alternative service delivery models in the short term.

24. The proposal to extend the service for an additional two years mitigates this potential adverse impact for the majority of those families already receiving support from the service. The Home Workers will work with the 10 families who would have received a service post October, 2018, to ensure that they are able to access alternative services which can meet the needs previously addressed through the Portage service e.g. specialist education placement.

25. For families who might previously have been referred to Portage any negative impact would be mitigated by the re-prioritisation of public health nursing services and children's centres to provide greater focus on children and families in most need. The Portage team will also help improve the Information, Advice & Guidance offer and provide advice on other potential services/groups families can access in the future. It is also important to note that there has been an expansion in pre-school nursery provision over the last 5 years and this is set to continue with the introduction of the 30hour offer.

Recommendations

26. Given the service's discretionary nature and the lack of quantifiable evidence supporting its impact on children with additional needs the recommendation is to continue with the proposal to cease delivery of a Dedicated Portage service in Worcestershire.

27. However, taking into consideration the consultation feedback from both staff and service users, a revised proposal recommends that the service be continued until 30 September 2018 to mitigate the negative impact families currently accessing the service might otherwise experience. However, it will continue to be the case that there will be no new entrants to the Portage service – their needs will continue to be met by alternative means. Upon reaching statutory school age the children either enter a mainstream or special school depending on which placement can best meet their level of need. If the recommendations are approved, then from 1 October 2018 the Dedicated Portage service will stop in its entirety. For 'new' service users the wider reform of services for children with disabilities, including a review of what is available through prevention

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 Schools Forum to fund Portage for 2016/17 and approval has been given from Schools Forum to fund a reduced staff structure from DSG reserves for 2017/18 to provide a service in the transition should the recommendations be approved. It is not recommended that DSG be used to fund Portage indefinitely as the service does not represent best value for money. The cost to fund the reduced staff structure in the transition will be £67k per annum. The remainder of the team would be placed at risk of redundancy in July 2018, prior to the decommissioning of the service in October 2018.

Supporting Information



Peridot Evaluation
Report.docx

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Portage Consultation
Summary Report (put

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4.2 EHS04 Portage
Outline Business Case



Microsoft Word 97 -
2003 Document

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Contact Points

County Council Contact Points

County Council: 01905 763763

Worcestershire Hub: 01905 765765

Email: worcestershirehub@worcestershire.gov.uk

Specific Contact Points for this report

Hannah Needham, Strategic Commissioner – Early Help & Partnerships

Tel: 01905 844913

Email: HNeedham@worcestershire.gov.uk

Background Papers

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: