Developing specialist provision for children with vision impairment in Peterborough mainstream schools

Purpose of paper

1. This paper describes the current arrangements and demand for children with the most severe vision impairment in the city. It then describes a proposed rationalisation of those arrangements to make the provision consistent across the primary and secondary phase, as well as responding to recent changes in the patterns of demand.

2. This paper is consistent with recent developments in Peterborough for all specialist provision for pupils with the most significant and complex needs, i.e. the range of hubs in mainstream schools and of special schools. Those developments are set out in the June 2015 paper (updated in September and November 2015) which reviewed the continuum of specialist provision in Peterborough, and the April 2016 progress report.

Current position

3. There are currently 50 pupils in mainstream schools (year 0-13) on the VI support service’s caseload (29 in primary phase, 21 in secondary phase of which 18 are advisory cases i.e. the pupil is known to the service. 8 Peterborough children in mainstream schools have a statement or education health and care plan (EHCP) with vision impairment as the main presenting need; two of these young people are moving into school 6th form or FE college in September 2017. This number is in line with what you would expect for a small city council.

4. These children with VI are included in their local mainstream provision, supported by various staff within and outside of the school. Most of the pupils are fully supported on a daily basis through school-based intervention programmes and top up funding to the school through their statement or EHCP, as part of the historical moving away from centrally-deployed teaching assistants; only two pupils are currently supported daily by central TA staff (one of whom will be starting FE college in September 2017).

5. The local authority has a peripatetic team of teaching assistants (TAs) centrally employed within The Peterborough Sensory Support Service (PSSS).
Deployment of these TAs (7 FTE staff) is made by the acting Manager of Peterborough Sensory and Physical Support Service (PSAPS) to assist schools with adapting resources or delivering short-term interventions for pupils.

6. Children in schools throughout Peterborough who have a statement or EHCP that identifies VI as the main presenting need are currently funded in two separate ways, through:

- the normal SEN funding to schools (from notional SEND budget and top up funding) for those with statements or EHCPs; this is the arrangement for the majority of children with VI
- the historical provision of centrally-employed teaching assistants; this is the arrangements for the minority of children with VI

Where support is provided by direct funding to schools, guidance by the PSSS team is provided on the skill sets required for staff supporting individual learners.

7. The use of centrally-employed teaching assistants to support pupils on an ongoing basis reflects a historical position, and is no longer required to the same extent. The vision for the future is that interventions are made by school-based staff with guidance, specialist input and support from the PCC team, as required. It is important for the central team to have the necessary skills and expertise for all profiles of visual impairment currently found, which can then be flexibly deployed for individual pupils.

8. With the development and implementation of the various hub specialist provisions for Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Hearing Impairment (HI), Social Emotional Mental Health (SEMH), Speech Language Communication Needs (SLCN) and Physical Disability (PD), there is a model to establish a school- led VI hub in-line with the other hubs. The VI hub, in conjunction with specialist PCC teachers of VI, would promote the good practice of itself and other VI-friendly schools.

9. This approach and any restructuring arising from it is to make better provision for pupils, and to ensure fairness and consistency in funding (e.g. no double funding through top ups and central staff input); it is not driven by a need for budget savings.
Proposed arrangements

10. The new pattern of provision aims to formalise the way in which provision for VI has been naturally developing for children with VI placed in mainstream schools. This would mean that school-based teaching assistants would not be deployed and managed by the LA, but the VI hub and all other schools would employ and manage their own support staff. This would ensure that schools are better able to meet the needs of children on their rolls in a more integrated and inclusive way throughout the school week. This would apply to both mainstream schools and specialist settings.

11. A centrally-employed VI specialist teaching and support service will be maintained to work with pupils in mainstream and special schools to:

- provide direct teaching intervention, coaching and modelling where required
- ensure the ongoing development of support and provision for children with VI in Peterborough
- provide a full range of training to whole-school staff, plus those working directly with VI pupils, parents and other training as required
- attend meetings and provide advice on individual cases within a multi-agency context as required
- model good practice with individual children and/or within classrooms.

12. The proposed specialist setting would be established as a ‘VI Hub’. The hub would provide a commissioned service, defined and monitored by a service level agreement, which would establish it as a centre of expertise to have a wider professional impact within the city, as well as for pupils on roll of the hub school. The VI hub would have two principal roles:

specialist placements

- for an agreed number of children and young people (CYP) with an EHCP
- VI expertise and experience among staff
- access to a VI-friendly peer group
- a broad and balanced curriculum for children with VI
- focus on children with VI being taught within the main body of the school for the majority of the day, as their individual needs allow

a centre of expertise for children with VI

- location for staff from other schools to observe best practice, e.g. if they are providing for a child with VI for the first time
• training activities, open days, twilight surgeries and workshops, in partnership with the Peterborough Sensory Support Service, for the Peterborough community of parents, schools and CYP
• host for events coordinated by the Peterborough Sensory Support Service
• shadowing opportunities for teachers and TAs from schools across the city

13. The new VI hub provision would also bring consistency across all types of impairments which were previously reliant on a centrally-deployed support team. The VI hub would have:

• support staff employed and managed by the host school, which is in the best position to deploy staff effectively and efficiently on a daily basis for the maximum benefit of the children
• teacher of the VI input from the Peterborough Sensory Support Service, flexibly deployed to respond to demand in terms of child numbers and needs
• clear entry and exit guidance for admission for reference in the statutory SEN process
• an agreed number of places as set out in a service level agreement.

14. The hub would be established in a secondary school for pupils aged 11-16. This could be introduced to a new school or added to a school with an existing hub. As with other primary and secondary mainstream hub provisions for different types of SEND, there will be no early years or post-16 specialist provision for VI. Post-16 young people, if they continued at the school following the review of their statement/EHCP, would be allocated any additional funding required through their EHCP, just as children and young people in non-hub schools, as well as still benefiting from the expertise available from the hub.

15. The provision in the hub school would involve:

• access to suitable learning spaces that are visual impairment friendly and suitable acoustically, which could also accommodate specialist equipment
• support and direct teaching from teachers of the vision impairment from the PSSS
• teaching assistants with experience/additional qualifications in working with VI learners
• specialist equipment and resources
• access to support from other specialist agencies, including qualified habilitationist specialists.

16. The admission to the specialist provision will only be for pupils with an EHCP and is likely to be based on:

• a severe or profound bi-lateral vision impairment as primary impairment need
• significant adaption needs to ensure access to learning

Details of the admissions guidance would be discussed and developed in partnership between the LA and hub school, before being added to the existing admissions guidance document for use at provision panel

Overview of proposed commissioning arrangements

17. This VI hub service, in partnership with the Peterborough Sensory Support Service, would provide an agreed number of specialist places and act as centre of expertise in the city. The intention is for one VI hub to be established and operate from September 2017, subject to appropriate consultation.

18. The purpose and operation of VI hub service would be defined through a service level agreement between the local authority and the host school. The SLA will address staffing, funding and other operational aspects covered in the sections below. It will clarify what the hub is expected to provide and define how it will work in partnership with the Peterborough Sensory Support Service. The progress of children in the hub and the use of the devolved funding will be monitored in a termly meeting between the local authority lead officer and the school, and reviewed annually through the SLA.

19. There will be common admissions and exit guidance which will be used as part of the statutory process to determine a child’s suitability for placement, and/or continued placement, in the hub. The agreed number of places would be in addition to the school’s published admissions number (PAN) for in-year admissions.

20. The school would be funded as a commissioned service through place number and top up funding. The number of places would allow sufficient capacity to carry out the centre of expertise role, and the number of top up funding allocations would match the place number to ensure stability of funding.
21. Schools with pupils with significant vision impairment will determine their own staffing arrangements. This should be sufficiently flexible to respond to the profile of individual children’s needs, as schools will have to ensure that they can make the provision specified in an individual child’s EHCP. The school’s own staffing would be supported by Teacher of the VI input from the Peterborough Sensory Support Service (subject to pupils’ individual needs).

22. The ongoing revenue funding for the new arrangements will be cost neutral in terms of current expenditure for children with significant vision impairment in the city. The detail of the funding arrangements will be discussed and agreed with the schools affected by these changes, e.g. those losing 2 days a week staffing from the VI team, as part of the implementation process.

23. Any necessary, one-off setup costs for the hub will be agreed by the local authority and funded outside of the annual revenue funding.

Next steps

24. It is anticipated that the local authority will initiate and carry through the HR and other consultation processes required to reach a decision about implementing the new arrangements, with effect from the beginning of the 2017-18 academic year. This will include provision, PSSS support and top up funding arrangements for children with a statement/EHCP in their local school as well as for the newly established hub.