SCHOOLS FORUM

**6**

Tuesday 12th May 2014

Review of Community Play Services and proposal to commission a new integrated Family Support Service

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| **Lead Officer** | **Alice McColl and Debbie Forward** **Preventative Commissioning Team** |
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| **Forum asked to decide / steer / be informed** | To seek the views of Schools Forum on the proposal for a new integrated service Family Support Service.To seek permission from Schools Forum to engage in a three year commission for a new early help family support service (2016-2019) To invite representation form Schools Forum on the commissioning panel for this work.  |
| **Time Needed** | 20 minutes  |

**Introduction**

Children’s Services currently commissions two Community Play services and a Specialist Family Support service. The two Community Play Services are delivered by Bath Area Play Project (BAPP) and Wansdyke Play Association (WPA). The specialist family support service is provided by Southside Community Project. These contracts have been in place for over three years and all three are due to come to an end in February 2016. Schools Forum supports the commissioning of the two Community Play services with an annual allocation of £199k. This allocation has been in the Schools Forum budget since 1999. The funding available from the council to jointly fund this new service will be in the region of £220k. All three services have been affected by the reductions in the council’s Children Centre and Early Years budget and given the changes which have taken place since these contracts were last commissioned over 3 years ago, it was agreed at Cabinet in September 2014 that these services would be reviewed as part of the commissioning process.

It is therefore proposed to replace the two Community Play services and the Specialist Family support service with one new integrated Family Support Service to work jointly with the Connecting Families team and Children’s Centre services from February 2016.

This proposal would mean the service would be jointly funded and commissioned on behalf of Schools Forum and the Council. This provides an opportunity to develop stronger links between community based family support services and schools and facilitate access to a broader range of child, parent and family support services which would be of benefit to vulnerable pupils.

This report informs School Forum of the review and the consultation which has taken place, outlines the proposal for a new integrated Family Support service which would require continuing support and funding through Schools Forum, and explains the implications if no further funding commitment can be made.

**Recommendations**

1. This paper is looking for permission from this Schools Forum to engage in this commission for a 3 year period and commit to funding for this period
2. Members consider how Schools Forum or schools may wish to engage with the commissioning process

**The report**

In March 2014 a report was submitted to Schools Forum about the Community Play Services. The paper was well received and the Schools Forum agreed that funding for this service would be continued for 2015/16. It was also suggested that closer links were made between the Community Play services and Behaviour and Attendance panels. Alice McColl, the Strategic Commissioning Officer, visited the panels during 2014 to promote the Community Play services and develop closer links.

All panels agreed that the support delivered through the Community Play Service contracts was needed. Referrals from secondary schools to community play service were already increasing and the number of referrals from schools has increased as a result of their role becoming better understood by panels and schools

Further consultation is taking place with School Heads, leads on pastoral care and Behaviour and Attendance Panel representatives. This has helped shape the new model.

A summary of the key views are as follows:

* Community Play Services lend additional capacity to schools to develop effective engagement with children and their families out of school, at home and in their community.
* The service supports a holistic approach of working with children and young people with behaviour, emotional or social difficulties - developing focus and understanding of issues they may be facing beyond school e.g. family issues, housing, social isolation, domestic abuse.
* Increased awareness by school staff of the effectiveness of informal play and activity to engage children and young people who are hard to engage/reach.
* Increased awareness by school staff of attachment issues and how past trauma can impact on ability to learn

**An Early Help Family Support Service**

The Family Support service will bring together the support and therapeutic interventions available for children, parents and families currently provided. It will support families with dependent children aged 5-18 who have additional or more complex needs which cannot be met through schools or other universal services, and where the needs do not reach the threshold for specialist services and/or social care.

The new services will form part of a graduated approach to the provision of early help. For many children it will be likely that wider family circumstances are contributing to the presenting needs and behaviour of a child at school, which goes beyond the extra support that can be provided by the school or through the additional support accessed through Behaviour and Attendance panels. This is illustrated in Appendices 1 and 2.

A draft service specification is available from the paper author.

The new service will receive referrals from a range of sources including schools and behaviour and attendance panels. The service will develop a support plan based on an assessment of the child’s needs. This will be undertaken with the child and their parents with input from other professionals as appropriate, and will have agreed actions and outcomes. The service will provide outreach support to families providing support to families in their own homes or in community venues. Therapeutic and support interventions will be delivered as part of the support plan either on a 1-1 basis (for children or their parents) or in family groups. The service will also deliver bespoke groups and sessions for vulnerable groups of children or parents. These will continue to include nurture groups, or family play inclusion groups which can be run in community venues or in schools.

The service will continue to include play as a method of intervention and a way of engaging and working with children individually, and with families to address a range of problems.

There is evidence that well established nurture groups are effective at addressing emerging social, emotional and behaviour difficulties. Evidence also shows that if parents can be supported to better manage their child’s behaviour, alongside the work carried out at the school, there is much greater likelihood of success in reducing the child’s problems and supporting their academic development. Where particular problems have been identified, working with the family is preferable as therapeutic approaches are most effective when they support the child/young person in the context of their family and work with other family members whilst working closely with the school. The strongest evidence supports early help approaches which focus on a therapeutic support with the whole family. (Mental health and behaviour in schools - Departmental advice for school staff- June 2014).

**Behaviour and Attendance panels.**

Referral into the new service can be made by schools and Behaviour and Attendance panels where the child meets the eligibility criteria. A key development will be the strategic link made between the new Family Support Service and schools. And increase interaction with the Behaviour and Attendance Panels. At present options are being considered to develop these links and include a suggestion of allocated places to each panel and/or representation form the service provider at panel meetings to update where referrals have come through panels and better acquaint panels with the what the service can offer.

**The Commissioning Process**

The three existing contracts end in February 2016. A new contract for a Family Support Service would be subject to competitive tender as would the letting of any new contract(s) when the existing contracts end. This is a legal requirement in order for the council and Schools Forum to comply with the Public Procurement regulations. The procurement process needs to commence in July this year in order to be in a position to allow a new contract to start in February next year and allow the continuation of the services. The procurement process will take 7 months.

If School’s Forum is not in a position to confirm funding going forward, it will not be possible to proceed with the commissioning of the service at set out in this paper. The specialist support service would need to be commissioned separately and there would be uncertainty regarding the future of the Community Play provision.