

Workstream 2b – Local Offer

Evaluation of the impact of NatSIP local offer guidance

May 2015

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Preface



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1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to

- assess the level of awareness of parents of the availability of the local offer and understanding of its purpose
- review the information available to parent carers and young people with sensory impairment (SI) in the local offer
- measure the early impact of the NatSIP local offer guidance
- inform the future work for NatSIP around supporting development of local offers.

2. Context

2.1 Summary of SEND legislation in relation to the local offer

The local offer forms a key component of the Children and Families Act 2014.

Local authorities are required to set out in one place all education, health and care services they expect to be available locally to children and young people with special educational needs or disability (SEND). This is called the local offer. The details of what the local offer should include and who should be consulted are defined in regulations.

This is supported by the general duties on agencies to cooperate and integrate services. This means that all schools, colleges, local authorities (including in relation to social services) and health agencies are required to cooperate. Local authorities are required to promote their integration.

The SEND [Special Educational Needs and Disability] code of practice makes clear that local authorities must review their local offer in consultation with children and young people with SEND and the parents of children with SEND. It also makes clear that local authorities must publish comments from children, parents and young people about the local offer and publish the action they intend to take in response to those comments. This will help to ensure local offers are responsive to local needs.

(Written Answer by Edward Timpson, Wed 7 January 2015)

2.2 NatSIP response to the legislation

NatSIP produced two documents to support the sector in developing local offers that recognise the needs of children, young people and families with sensory impairment.

- a) Including sensory services in the local offer (June 2014)¹
- b) Creating confidence in local services: NatSIP guidance to support the development of the local offer for children and young people with sensory impairment (May 2014)²

The first set of guidance is aimed at officers who are developing the local offer. The purpose is to ensure that local authority/Clinical Commissioning Group officers understand the importance of maintaining specialist services for children and young people (CYP) with SI. It sets out the key information on services for CYP with SI and their parent carers.

The second set of guidance should inform an ongoing review of the services available for children and young people with sensory impairment in the local offer. This review should be carried out annually in line with SEND guidance. NatSIP's expectation is that the local offer is developed within a framework of core principles and adopts the regulatory framework and broader guidance of the local offer.

3. Method

A mixed methodology was adopted to review the extent to which families and young people are aware of, or involved in, the development of local offers as well as measuring the initial impact of the local offer guidance devised by NatSIP.

3.1 Process

The process was as follows:

1. Focus groups were held using a semi-structured questionnaire with parents at 6 family events to discuss awareness of and involvement in the development of local offers, plus 5 parent and 2 young people individual consultations
2. A desk-based analysis of 21 local offers using the NatSIP local offer guidance as a framework to evaluate the inclusion of relevant Sensory Impairment services in local offers
3. an online impact survey of all NatSIP web portal visitors who downloaded the NatSIP advice documents (59 participants)
4. A review of published reports of 152 local offers undertaken by leading sensory impairment charities, and the SQW thematic report
5. Collation of case studies volunteered by NatSIP affiliates
6. Preparation of a report of findings summarising the sources of information, commentary, key learning and recommendations for the future.

¹ https://www.natsip.org.uk/index.php/doc-library-login/doc_details/778-02-including-sensory-services-in-the-local-offer

² https://www.natsip.org.uk/index.php/doc-library-login/doc_details/752-01-local-offer-creating-confidence-in-services

3.2 Sources of information

Information from the following sources was used:

1. Six events involving 81 Parents at Sense forum events (November 2014)
2. Evidence from 21 local authority offers (collected by Sense, January 2015)
3. Four participant responses to the NatSIP online impact survey
4. Evaluation reports published by RNIB, BCUK and NDCS
5. SQW thematic report: local offer
6. Three case studies volunteered by NatSIP affiliates

4. Key findings

4.1 Focus Groups

Focus groups were held using a semi-structured questionnaire with parents at 6 family events to discuss awareness and involvement in the development of local offers

81 parents and 2 young people were engaged in 6 focus groups, plus 5 parent/2 young person individual consultations.

The overall response was that the vast majority of parents did not know about the local offer. Consequently, it was hard to complete the full semi-structured questionnaire since there was nothing to reference the questions to. Those who knew either found out about it in their professional capacity or from Sense presentations. Interestingly, eight very active parents who are on top of new developments did not know about the local offer.

Parents said that they felt positive about the fact that they could comment on the local offer and that LAs should publish their responses. But some parents fed back that they have found their local offer unhelpful/incomplete, and some are confused about the link between the local offer and support offered through an EHC Plan.

The NatSIP document *Local Offer: Creating Confidence in Services* (the tool)³ was sent to five individual parents. Seven parents who looked at their local offers independently and offered feedback told us that they were not impressed; they could not find information about specialist support for their children.

Two young people were asked about the local offer. They reported that they found out information from their social worker or parents. They thought the idea of having a list of possible opportunities and information about the support available to them was a good idea in general.

Parents have been in touch to say that, even though they take part in their local parent carers forums, they struggle to get MSI included and that the duty to consult or respond to comments is not enough for them to be able to influence service provision. Parents find local offers not very useful as there is a lot of information, but no clarity whether or not a service will be accessible for their children, especially if children have high support needs, and they find it difficult and time consuming to find information.

Some of the young people have also said that there is little information about the opportunities available to them. One young person confirmed that this is the main problem for her.

³ https://www.natsip.org.uk/index.php/doc-library-login/doc_details/752-01-local-offer-creating-confidence-in-services

The following is a quotation from a parent who took part in the SENSE local offer survey about the information that she would like to see in the local offer:

To have MSI at least on the list (hearing and sight loss are mentioned independently but not MSI). The local offer on the website is really dry in presentation. You have to plough through loads of pages before you find anything at all useful. I am pretty IT literate and I dread to think what it is like if you are not. It also does not differentiate between, for instance, those services which work with complex/high needs and those that do not. There are lots of services apparently but they are very generic (things like our local sports centre that has a ramp!). I need a directory of services which, for instance, have high levels of staffing so that I would not have to stay with my son or provide a carer myself. The provision of social activities for this is really poor - my son is 11 and now should be spending more time with his peers, building friendships and being more independent from me. I have been to consultations with [name of LA]. I have done brain storming and MSI has been written down but it has not been taken forward. I will continue to go to consultations in the hope that eventually someone will listen to me but as of yet I am very disillusioned with the whole consultation so far.

4.2 Desk-based analysis

A desk based analysis of 21 local offers using the NatSIP local offer guidance as a framework to evaluate the inclusion of relevant Sensory Impairment services in local offers.

The analysis demonstrated the following services available to CYP with sensory impairments:

Education Services:

Teaching and support from specialist teachers, specialist school, Speech and Language Therapy, environmental audits, BSL services, supporting post-16 providers, sound field/personal FM systems, appropriate adaptations to exams, communicator support worker/interpreter

Social Care Services:

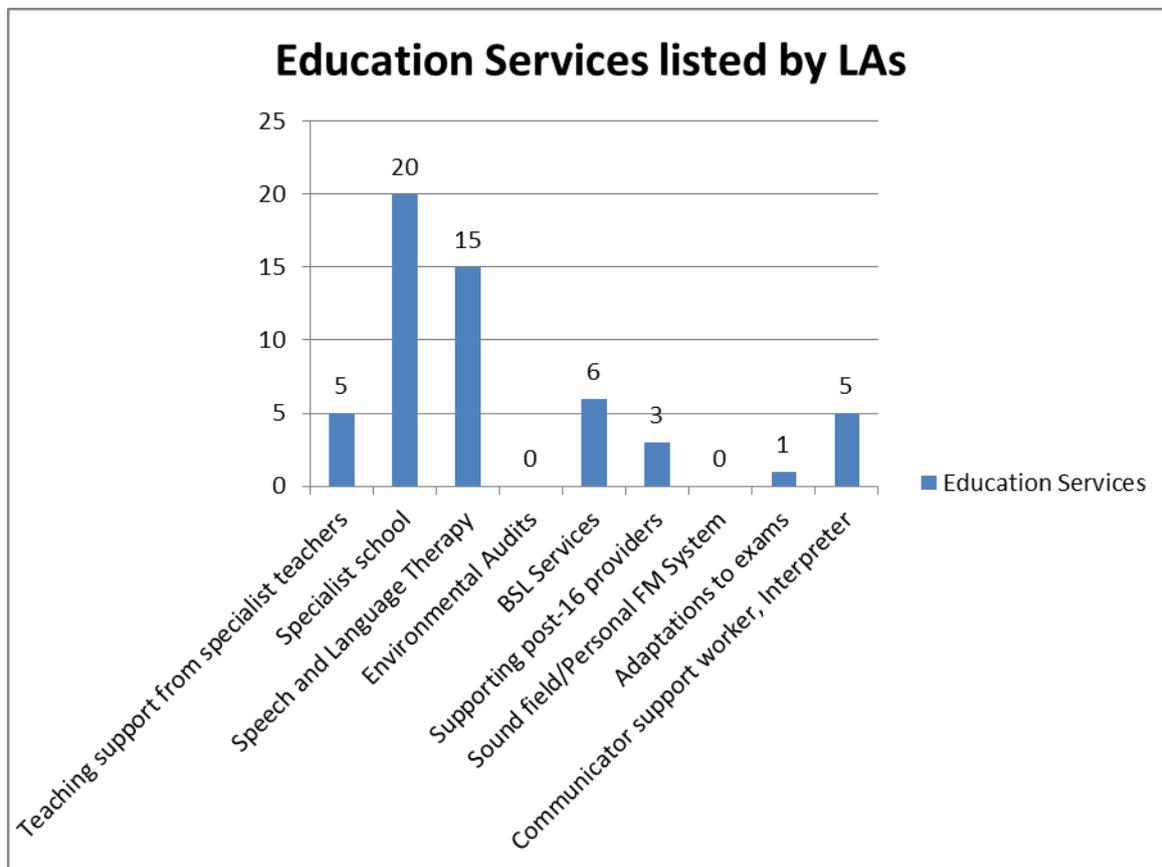
Specialist children's social worker, specialist deafblind guidance, short breaks/holiday schemes, Child in Need Assessment, access to sensory impairment support groups, disability sports activity

Health Services:

Cochlear implant, habilitation from Paediatric Mobility Officer, Optician/Audiologist, NHSP, diagnostic hearing screening, certification and registration of VI, low vision assessment clinic, hearing aid technicians

Transition Services:

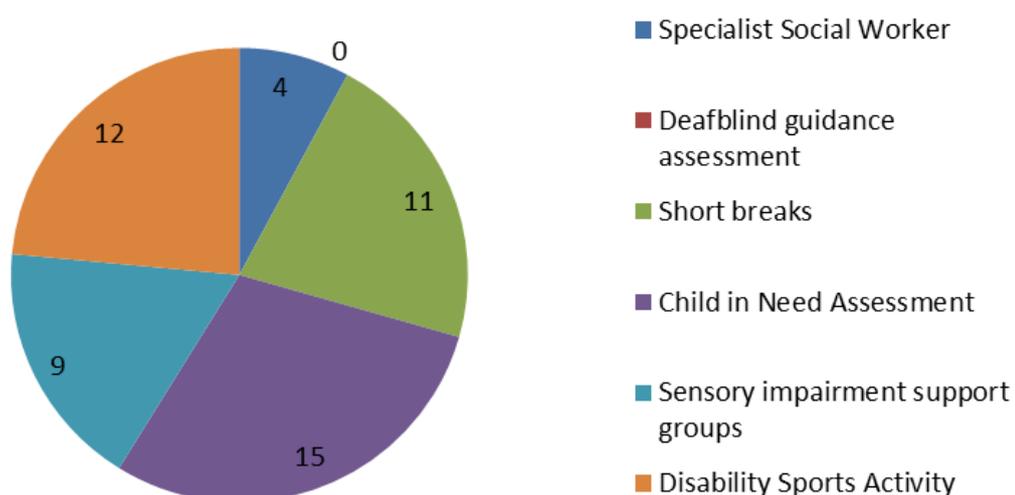
Specialist vision and hearing equipment, specialist transition planning, specialist careers advice, specialist employment support, Connexions



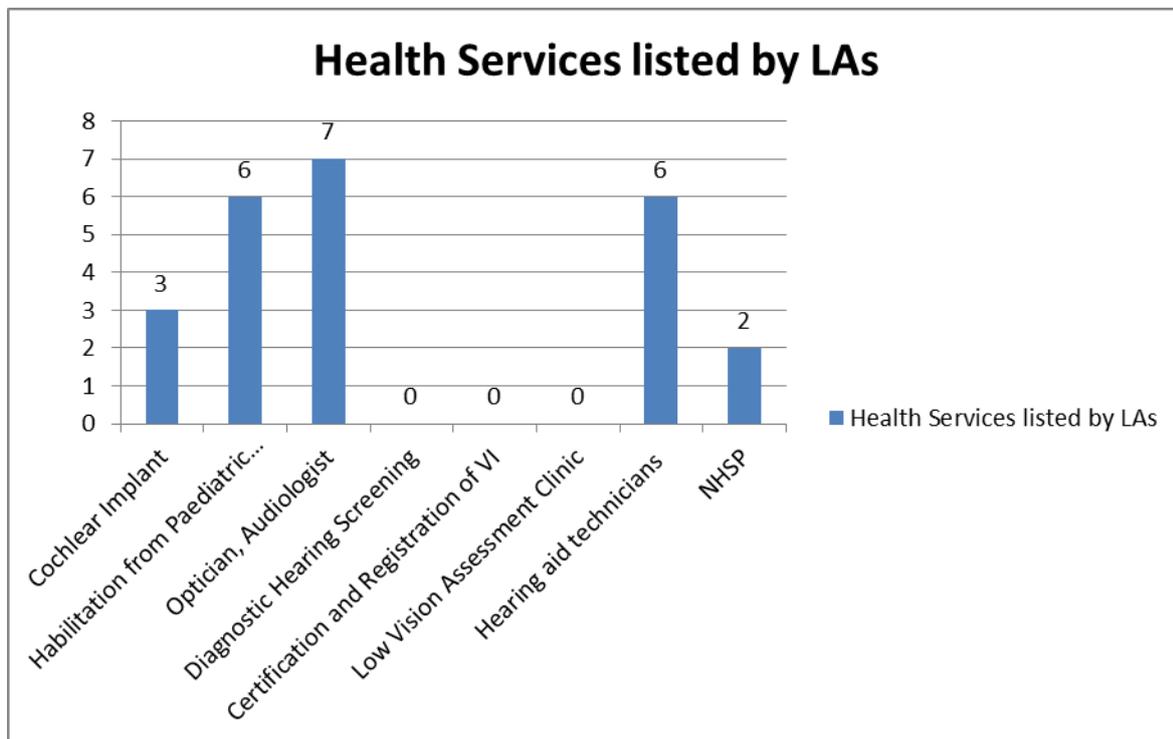
All local offers we looked at had information about special schools for children with sensory impairments and the majority had a link to the list of independent special schools.

- Fifteen Local Authorities mentioned speech and language therapy
- Only five local authorities mentioned specialist teacher for MSI and support for children with MSI
- Furthermore, only one authority mentioned ‘appropriate adaptations to exams in line with the Equality Act’
- None of the local authorities mentioned either “Environmental Audits” or “Sound Field System”
- Three local authorities mentioned support to post-16 providers to ensure specialist equipment is in place
- Six mentioned BSL services.

Social Care Services Listed by LAs



- We did not find a local offer which mentioned specialist assessment for deafblind children and young people
- Fifteen LAs mentioned Child in Need Assessment.
- Eleven LAs mentioned short breaks and holiday schemes; most included short breaks for children with sensory impairment
- Only four local authorities mentioned specialist children's social worker
- Nine mentioned access to sensory impairment specific family support groups
- Twelve local authorities included disability sports activity; there was no information about specific activities for children with sensory impairments.



- Health services were particularly difficult to find as only 5 services out of 8 could be found and the number of results was significantly low
- Local offers usually have links either to the NHS Choices website or to a list of services commissioned by local CCGs
- None of the Local Authorities included Diagnostic Hearing Screening, registration as sight impaired or severely sight impaired, or low vision clinics
- Only 2 mentioned Neonatal Hearing Screening Programme
- Only 3 provided information about cochlear implant in their local offer
- 7 Local Authorities included optician or audiology services.

4.3 Online Survey

An online impact survey of all NatSIP web portal visitors who downloaded the NatSIP advice documents was conducted.

Of the 59 portal visitors who were set invitations to participate in the survey, received the survey, only four completed responses were received. There was some initial technical difficulty with the survey which may have discouraged some respondents, but this was quickly rectified. The low response would indicate that further work is needed to disseminate the two sets of guidance and encourage their use.

Of the four who did respond, three completed the survey to report that they had used the *Creating confidence in local services* guidance for

- service reporting within the LA or discussion with their manager (1)
- service reporting to stakeholders, children and young people, parents and schools (2)
- service discussion and reflection (1)
- service INSET (2)
- service evaluation and review (2)
- mapping the tool against other published Quality Standards (1)
- performance management with service staff (1)
- informing service development plans (1).
- Three completed the survey to report that they had used the *Creating confidence in local services* guidance for
- service reporting within the LA or discussion with their manager (1)
- service reporting to stakeholders, such children and young people, parents and schools (3)
- service and/or LA publications (1)
- service reporting regionally (1)
- service discussion and reflection (2)
- service INSET (1)
- service evaluation and review (2)
- mapping the tool against the Quality Standards for Support and Outreach services (1)
- mapping the tool against other published Quality Standards (1)
- performance management with service staff (1)
- informing service development plans (2).

The respondent who was not able to complete the survey commented:

I downloaded the local offer guidance to support what I am doing in both my consultative role and in my role as a trustee for a [local VCS]. I found it useful and informative and know that the VCS I am a trustee for found that it explained things very clearly for their staff and that that they have used it when supporting families.

Independent consultant

Comments on other ways of using the guidance included:

...to compare local offers and see whether local offers actually include services for children with sensory impairments.

I read the guidance as I am a lecturer in SEND and I deliver the National Award for SENCOs. We have been looking at the local offer in our lectures, seminars and tutorials. I have recently come from working in a Local Authority where I led the sensory impairment team. This would have been very helpful if I had still been in post there. I always value the NatSIP publications.

4.4 Review of published local offers

Review of published reports of 152 local offers undertaken by leading sensory impairment charities, and the SQW thematic report

4.4.1 RNIB

In January 2015 RNIB conducted an audit of the information provided by local authorities in England on the support available to children and young people with vision impairment. The main aim was to find out how easy/difficult it would be for parents to find information about the support available including support for babies and young children in the early years.

The RNIB researcher divided the England regions into five groups (with between 20 and 42 LAs in each group) and allocated these to five volunteers. The task of the volunteers was to imagine they were a parent of a baby or child newly diagnosed with vision impairment, and to carry out a search of their allocated LA websites to see what information they could find about support for children with vision impairment and their families. The volunteers were given a series of questions and some key words to help provide a route through their search of the LA website. All of the volunteers were experienced in searching the internet but none had a background in vision impairment education or SEND.

All the people who did the search approached it in very different ways which shows that individuals vary considerably in the ways that they undertake internet searches.

Preliminary analysis of the core questions showed:

LA home page

Q1. Is there any information on the LA home page that provides the first link to information for parents about support for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities?

YES: 53/152 LAs

NO: 99/152 LAs

Q2. If YES: by following this link is it possible to find any information about support for children and young people with visual or vision impairment?

YES: 23/53 LAs

NO: 30/53 LAs

Q3. If YES: is this information part of the web pages about the local offer?

YES: 13/23 LAs

NO: 10/23 LAs

Q4. If YES or NO: does the page give information about the specialist education service for children with VI?

YES: 17/23 LAs

NO: 6/23 LAs

Q5. If YES: does this include details of how to get in touch with the service?

YES: 15/17 LAs

NO: 2/17 LAs

The volunteers then looked at the 132 LAs where they had either given a 'NO' response to Q1. (i.e. they hadn't found a clear link from the home page that would lead them to information about support for CYP with SEND) or where that route hadn't led to information about the VI service. In the case of these 132 LAs therefore, our volunteers had started a new search following the instructions given in Q6.

Q6. Searches where it is necessary to search for information on support for CYP with vision impairment ('NO' to Q1 or Q2]: using search terms such as 'children with visual impairment', 'children with vision impairment', 'special educational needs', 'children with disabilities', 'Local Offer' is it possible to find any information about support for children and young people with visual/vision impairment?

YES: 73/132 LAs

NO: 59/132 LAs

Q7. If YES: is this information part of the web pages about the local offer?

YES: 37/73

NO: 36/73

Q8. If YES or NO: does the page give information about the specialist education service for children with VI?

YES: 47/73

NO: 26/73

A key finding was the huge variation between LAs in terms of

- ease of search
- quality of information provided on support for children and young people with vision impairment both in general, and also specifically in relation to the VI service
- whether or not VI service information was included in the local offer information
- the content of the local offers and how they were presented.

There was little consistency between LAs, meaning that parents in adjacent local authorities using the same search terms could get very different results.

These findings suggest that the way that many LA websites (including the local offer pages) are set up at present means that parents with vision impaired babies and young children may have difficulty in finding the information they need about the specialist support that is available.

Finally, the finding that some LA websites had very good information on the VI service but this stood outside the local offer pages and could not be accessed via the local offer website raises questions about whether children and young people with vision impairment and their parents were fully consulted in the development of the local offer in these LAs.

4.4.2 NDCS

NDCS's team of Regional Directors carried out an initial audit of local offers over winter 2014/15. This was intended to provide an initial and internal snapshot of the information being provided about provision for deaf children. Some of the findings were:

There was evidence that parents of deaf children appeared to have been consulted and involved in drawing up the local offer in only around 36% of cases.

There was evidence that young people had been involved and consulted in around 19% of cases.

There was no mention of specialist education services for deaf children in 25% of local offers.

In 38% of local offers, we could find no mention of specialist education provision (such as resource provisions and schools) for deaf children.

Only 22% of local offers had information about specialist provision outside of their local authority.

90% of local offers did not include a reference to any accessibility strategies.

32% of local offers did not include information about what services **were suitable for** personal budgets.

NDCS will be carrying out another audit in due course to identify if improvements have been made. NDCS will also be drawing services' attention to its advice on what information should be included in a local offer on provision for deaf children, available online at www.ndcs.org.uk/senprofessionals/

Separately, NDCS has worked with the I-Sign project to identify examples of how local offers have included information about provision for children and young people who communicate in British Sign Language.

Local offers should provide useful information on services including health, education and social care, helping families and deaf young people to find out what local BSL provision is available.

At the time of writing (December 2014), few local offers included information about BSL provision, perhaps because information on all services is still being developed. This document highlights examples of BSL Provision found within four local offers.

Using local offers to find British Sign Language (BSL) Provision. NDCS Jan2015

4.4.3 Blind Children UK

Currently many children and young people with a vision impairment, who would potentially benefit from habilitation, are not accessing it. Providing information about this service on the local authority's website through the Local Offer is therefore a valuable way of signposting parents to this service. This report looks at whether local authorities have included information about the habilitation service that they provide in their Local Offer, and, where they have included that information, how in-depth it is.

As of 31st October 2014 we were able to view 150, out of 152, Local Offers on local authority websites. Encouragingly, just over half (78) of published Local Offers included a reference to specialist mobility training for children and young people with a vision impairment (often this was referred to as habilitation, or as mobility and independent living skills training).

The inclusion of habilitation in 78 Local Offers is very positive. However, of the Local Offers that include information about habilitation, there was a wide variation in the quality of that information based on the six questions recommended by Blind Children UK. There are pockets of good examples but many Local Offers do not provide enough information to give families a clear picture about what habilitation services in their local area are, who is eligible, and how to access them.

Helen Honstvet (2015) *What's on Offer? The quality of information about habilitation within Local Offers*
Blind Children UK

4.4.4 SQW

SQW was commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) to lead a consortium of organisations to undertake the evaluation of the special educational needs (SEN) and Disability pathfinder programme. ... During the course of the research a number of key issues were identified as requiring more in depth thematic review. This report focuses on one of these issues – the development of the local offer.”

Key Challenges reported:

The local offer needs to be accessible to all families with a child or young person with SEN and Disabilities, not just to those with a computer and access to the internet.

Linked to this all families do not just need to be technically able to access the local offer, they need to be aware of its existence and understand the benefits of accessing it.

Ensuring the Local Offer remains up to date is crucial in order for them to be useful (and used) by parents, children and young people and professionals

Helen Spivack, Rachel Hallem, Graham Thom (2014) *Special educational needs and disability pathfinder programme evaluation thematic report: the local offer research report* DfE

4.4.5 Collation of case studies volunteered by NatSIP affiliates

An example of good practice:

Following consultation with parents, the framework of the local offer gave the authority the opportunity to deliver an existing strategy to focus on young people with sensory impairments, particularly MSI.

The outcome of the local offer is that families now report the benefit of short break opportunities and young people with MSI are accessing life experiences that peers take for granted. Parents have let us know that they find the joined up services and reports to be a positive support. Parents are providing support to each other, whereas previously many had spoken of the isolation of being a parent of an MSI child. Families have experienced a wide range of activities and some are now accessing these without specialist support.

The information from the parent consultation has also informed the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment for Sensory. This document provides data and information on children and adults with MSI, HI and VI and outlines the ongoing Sensory Strategy.

A few of the developments remain to be addressed. The next step to effect these developments is through the multiagency Joint Commissioning Framework for Sensory which is being facilitated by the commissioning officers for children’s health services.

The Kent Local offer for MSI is provided in an easy to read version which gives a summary of the major services and how to access them. Supporting this is a detailed chart of all the services available for sensory from Health, Social Care, Education and Voluntary Organisations. Together with this the NatSIP publication – Creating Confidence in Local Services has ensured that the focus of the local offer is linked to outcomes for children and young people.

The development of the Kent MSI local offer was organic and moved forward over a period of time. The key starting point was to find out the parent and child’s experience and the improvements they identified. The developments have been supported by a commitment from professionals from a wide range of organisations to work together to improve practice and delivery. It is important that the local offer is not static; it should be reviewed to enable services to continue to support the best outcomes for children, young people and their families.”

Suzanne Wilkins, County Professional Lead for Sensory Impairment, Kent County Council
Wilkins S, (2014) *Local Offer* RNIB Insight Magazine 2014 Issue 53

4.5 Analysis of key themes and learning

From a parent or young person's perspective, the information presented above leads us to ask a number of questions:

a) Is there information

Parents are not aware of the local offer and do not understand the terminology of the local offer.

b) Where would it be? How would I find it?

Local offer information is not easily located by parents on LA websites and does not contain the information they need.

c) What are the duties in relation to the local offer and how do I exercise my rights to challenge or develop them?

Parents do not know about how to get involved in the development of their local offer or that comments about the local offer should result in actions that improve services in relation to their local area.

d) What should I expect the quality of that information to be?

Local offers are still a resource in development. They are variable in the quality of general information and, importantly for this report, the specialist provision available to CYP with SI is a low priority. This is likely to be due to lack of awareness of the support services available for CYP with SI.

5. Recommendations

5.1 NatSIP should develop guidance for parents and young people on what the local offer is and how they can get involved in it.

We propose that NatSIP would take this work forward in the workplan for 2015-2016.

4.2 Sensory Impairment Services should ensure that the range of provision is visible in their local offer.

NatSIP should continue to promote the *Creating confidence in local services* guidance, and encourage local sensory services to use this to champion the education, health and care needs of children and young people with sensory impairment.

4.3 Each local authority commissioner responsible for the development of the local offer should be proactive in engaging parents and young people in local development with emphasis on including low incidence groups such as sensory impairment.

NatSIP should continue to promote the *Including Sensory Services in the Local Offer* guidance, and target commissioning leads, through local Sensory Impairment Services, to raise awareness of services available to CYP with SI and their families.

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