

Birmingham City Council

Schools Forum

Date: 26.10.2023



Subject: SEND Locality Therapists and the Balanced System
Report of: Raman Kaur
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Decision to be made by: The LA in consultation with Schools Forum

1 Purpose

- 1.1 Following the Innovate to Save project, a number of locality-based Speech and language Therapists (SALT) and Occupational Therapists (OT) have been commissioned through the High Needs block to the value of £1.4m. The proposal is to increase the funding to £2.7m, shared equally across both SALT (through the Balanced System model) and the SEND Locality OT team.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 For School Forum to approve the increase to the budget as part of joint commissioning arrangements for the implementation of the Balanced System model.
- 2.2 For School Forum to note in order to recruit and retain experienced staff commissioning arrangements will be put in place until March 2025. This commission will be reviewed every 12 months and will be monitored to ensure KPIs are achieved and impact is made.

3 Background

- 3.1 The joint CQC-OFSTED Local Area SEND inspection of Birmingham in 2018 identified several shortcomings in supporting children and young people with SEND. As part of the City's response, Education and Health worked together on a bid to develop the SEND Locality Therapist team, funded through the Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND) Local Offer Innovate to Save Fund.
- 3.2 As part of the original Innovate to Save project, a bid was approved to fund Occupational Therapists (OT) and Speech and Language Therapists (SALT) working across the six localities in Birmingham working with schools and families in early identification of need and universal support.

- 3.3 This was initially for school age pupils. However, the programme was extended to Early Years settings across the ten districts, taking the total budget for the programme to £1.4m.
- 3.4 Schools and settings have been able to access SEND Locality based SALT and OTs in education settings and receive timely advice, training, and support.
- 3.5 The offer has been two-fold in that it has focused upon building the knowledge, understanding and capacity of schools, alongside offering early advice and guidance to parents and carers.
- 3.6 The work with schools and settings has focused on workforce development through: SENCo drop-ins, follow-up sessions with school staff to implement strategies/coaching support, attendance at multi-agency planning mtgs where appropriate, writing and delivering training to groups of schools via consortia. In addition, the Locality Therapists have worked closely with school SENCo Consortia Leads, EYS SENCo District Leads, and the LA SEND advisory teams in developing a more bespoke offer at a local level. This has included environmental support such as communication-friendly classrooms and sensory audits as well as support to school/setting Language Champions. School staff have reported an increase in their knowledge and understanding around sensory issues and SLCN that has supported them in their whole class approach as well as in their provision for particular pupils (see Appendix One for a impact reports showing activity covered and feedback from schools and settings).
- 3.7 Support to parents/carers has been through initial consultations offering general advice and strategies (including sessions where the school SENCo also attends), parent/carer workshops both face to face and online, which in turn has led to a library of recorded online training sessions that parents/carers and families can access through the local Offer. Parents and carers have also reported an increase in both their own confidence and in their confidence of settings being able to support their child's needs following shared consultation sessions (see Appendix One for a range of impact reports showing activity covered and feedback from parents and carers). Families also commented positively on being able to access advice in a timely manner either before referral to specialist services or whilst on the waiting list.
- 3.8 In 2020, a transformation of SALT services to children began with the implementation of a national evidence-based framework known as The Balanced System (developed by Maria Gascoigne, Better Communications CIC). With a focus on workforce development, family support, environment, identification and intervention, the Balanced System model supports children and young people across the age groups at the universal, targeted and specialist levels.
- 3.9 This is an approach that allocates levels of resource based on an analysis of population needs; this analysis presented that there are an estimated 115,000 children and young people in Birmingham with a predicted Speech, Language and Communication need.

- 3.10 The Balanced System model incorporates the role of the Locality SALT as part of the universal support to families and to schools and settings.
- 3.11 Current impact of the SEND Locality therapists has considered the amount of activity and qualitative feedback from schools/settings and from families. Through implementing a more Balanced System approach, more defined impact measures and Key Performance indicators have been developed for NHS SALT and OT to report back on (see Appendix two).

4 Any Finance Implications

- 4.1 The proposed joint commissioning arrangements are as follows:

Education:	£2.7m
NHS:	£4.4m
Total of:	£7.1m

- 4.2 Work with Better Communications (Balanced System Consultants) is ongoing to allocate resource across the city based on need; it is recognised that the funding above will not yet meet the needs of every pupil with SLCN in schools and settings across the city, therefore it is expected that schools will need to continue to source/fund additional SALT as per existing arrangements.

5 Any Legal Implications

- 5.1 A Service Level Agreement is in place between the LA and NHS.

6 Any Equalities Implications

- 6.1 The Balance System does not create new inequalities but is susceptible to known inequalities relating to access, identification and assessment.

7 Appendices

- 7.1 Appendix One A: Impact report Summer 22
- 7.2 Appendix One B: Impact report 22 – 23
- 7.3 Appendix Two: SEND Locality Therapists Outcomes and KPIs