

## **SCHOOLS CONSULTATION**

### **QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS SHEET**

#### **Consultation on future provision of dedicated speech and language/primary units**

##### **What is the service that you are reviewing?**

Dedicated speech and language therapy units based in three primary schools.

Lincolnshire Community Health Service (LCHS) currently supports over 3150 children with a speech and/or language impairment from birth to leaving school age. Where children do not make progress through additional targeted speech and language therapy (SLT) provision, i.e. the 'enhanced' service, they may be referred for more intensive support and warrant specialist provision to progress their listening, language and literacy skills within a mainstream school setting.

For children at primary school age, Lincolnshire County Council (LCC) commissions three schools to provide educational and therapeutic support to children with complex speech and language difficulties. At present there are approximately 21 children in the three units receiving intensive SLT and educational support services.

The purpose of the service is to target SLT provision early and begin to close the gap between the speech and language of the child against their peers. This early years work aims to withdraw the support at the point where they are able to be fully integrated back into a mainstream local school, however this also brings additional problems in them being able to be allocated a suitable place at an alternative school when they need to return.

It is this model of SLT support which is provided to these pupils that is being reviewed to ensure it remains appropriate and continues to meet their individual needs.

##### **Who provides the dedicated speech and language service?**

The specialist Speech and Language Therapy service is delivered in three schools across the county.

The three primary schools providing this specialist SLT service are Fosse Way Primary (Lincoln), Monkshouse Primary (Spalding) and Mablethorpe Primary (Mablethorpe). The schools are funded by the Local Authority (LA) to provide the specialist teaching and support staff in association with costs in operating the units.

The speech and language therapy service delivered in these schools is provided through Lincolnshire Community Health Service (LCHS).

### **Why is this dedicated SLT service being reviewed?**

It is important to continually review our services to ensure they meet the needs of children. Whilst some authorities provide educational and therapeutic services to children through dedicated units some prefer to support children within their local community based schools and target the support provision in line with a child's individual needs.

The review of this SLT provision has taken into account the desire to retain as many children as possible within a local based mainstream primary setting so promoting inclusion for children within their local community.

Over the last few years the LA and LCHS have worked closely together to improve services to children with complex speech and/or language difficulties within their local community schools to the point that the number of children requiring intensive support within specialist units is now decreasing. We are of the view that it is better for a child to remain in their local school setting and for targeted services to be provided to assist the school in supporting a child's individual needs.

### **What happens for secondary pupils who have speech and language difficulties?**

The LA does not provide similar units for children who are of secondary age. Those children with continuing needs for speech and language therapies are supported through an outreach model into secondary school settings through a service called ECLIPS. This model has proven to work extremely well in keeping children within their local community based school, working with the school to implement strategies to support their needs.

### **What are the benefits of the current SLT unit service in these Primary Schools?**

The main benefit of the current provision is that children are placed within and receive intensive speech and language support within a dedicated unit, staffed by professionals and supported by LCHS Speech and Language Therapists.

Other advantages include:

- Each unit has a dedicated primary needs led teacher focussing on Speech and Language, with additional funding provided for teaching support staff
- At least half of a pupil's time is spent receiving intensive support within the unit. For the rest of the time they benefit from being within mainstream classes with their peer group and being supported by support assistants
- The current outreach provision for SLT into mainstream schools is limited to 20 sessions which may not always achieve the required outcomes and progression for children with more complex needs. This model provides an additional service to supplement this through short term targeted and intensive intervention
- There is a perceived lack of knowledge by both parents/carers and professionals about what levels of support are available under the current local offer in respect of speech and language support provision through LCHS. These units exist to ensure there is a further pathway to a higher level of support.

### **What are the concerns about the dedicated SLT unit service?**

Following a comprehensive review of the service it has been identified there are a number of concerns that exist in providing support through such a model. These include:

- Significant transportation issues due to the distance for some children to travel as there are only three units across the county, impacting on both travel time for pupils and transport costs
- Some parents do not feel comfortable with their child moving to another school which is some distance away from their local primary provision, in particular where their child has to travel long distances.
- Some of the children have more complex needs in addition to speech and language and this may lead to a requirement for assessment for an EHCP and a potential subsequent move into a special school, so delaying the necessary support provision required to meet their needs
- At present a child with an identified need for intensive SLT would be referred to a specialist unit and when accepted they are removed from the roll of their current local primary school and placed on the roll of the school with the unit. Many parents and carers have fed back that they are reluctant for this to happen as they wish for their child to remain on roll at their current school due to locality, siblings attending the school and in building and maintaining local friendships with peers
- Once the child has progressed sufficiently to be able to return to mainstream, the specialist therapist works with parents and carers to find a suitable school placement. Again this may not result in a return to their original school, or an alternative local primary school, which is the usual parental preference
- Some schools report it has proved difficult to recruit replacement specialist teachers externally so the role has had to be offered to an existing teacher from within the school
- The children spend the remaining half of their time attending mainstream classes, supported by support assistants, which raises the question as to why they cannot be supported wholly within a normal mainstream classroom setting and provided with the appropriate level of therapy support
- Some parents and carers have fed back that they are not clear what the local offer for SLT is within mainstream primary settings so they cannot challenge why this support is not provided to keep children in their local school

### **How much does the service currently cost?**

Whilst consideration is being given to providing this service in the most cost effective way this is not the sole driver for this proposed change. Both the LA and LCHS are committed to ensuring we provide the best support to meet the needs of children within their local community.

At present the LA funds the units to the sum of approximately £360,022 p.a. In addition the LA incurs costs for transport in the region of £125,755 p.a. The costs for speech and language therapy services are about £68,674 p.a. resulting in a total cost of this service of £554,451 p.a.

### **What would the benefits be if we moved to a model where support is provided within local based mainstream schools settings?**

With effective partnership working; LCHS, the four Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) and the LA will work together to enhance the current SLT outreach service into mainstream primary schools which supports children with more complex needs to flourish within a mainstream school setting. This will be reinforced by strengthening the resources within LCHS for specialist speech and language support to meet demands across the county.

It is essential that we build on the requirement for improved partnership working within school localities to ensure children's needs are met. Our recommendation would be to strengthen the current SLT outreach support model provided by LCHS into mainstream primary schools to provide children with intensive support, where required.

Our proposed alternative model results in pupils with more complex speech and/or language needs remaining within their local community primary school and continuing to be educated in this setting, receiving short term intensive therapeutic services to support them in fulfilling their potential. This addresses a number of parental concerns as stated including the removal of their child from the local primary school roll, ability to place their child back on roll at the same school and to remove the significant travelling requirements placed upon young children.

This model provides support for children with complex speech and/or language needs within their own local community school so promoting inclusion and for those pupils with more severe speech and/or language problems with additional complex educational support needs to follow the appropriate pathway for an EHC plan.

### **How would the transition of a child back into a local primary school be dealt with?**

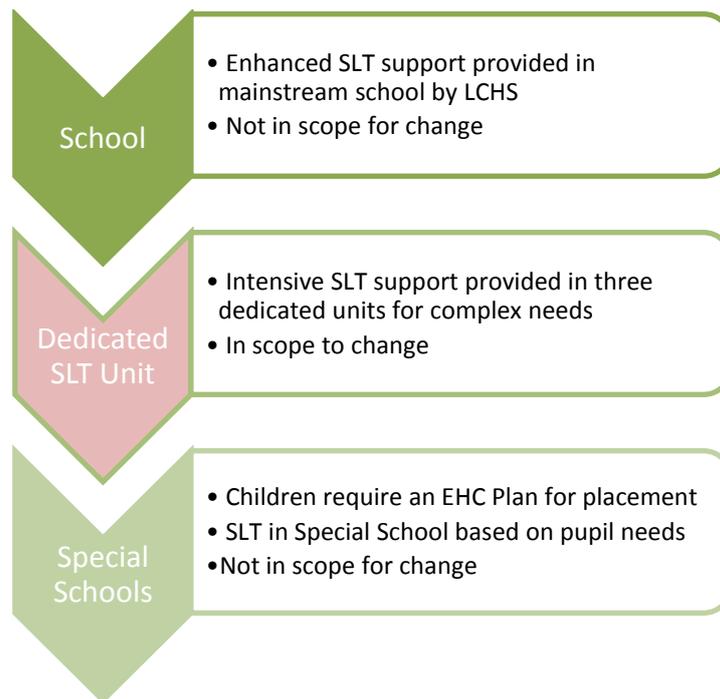
New referrals would be supported using the new model so there would be no further placements made into the units. Where necessary; focused SLT and school admission support would be provided to reintegrate current pupil placements back into their preferred local community primary school.

At the same time the Specialist Teaching service will be strengthened to provide outreach teaching support services into local primary schools to enable them to appropriately support the children.

### **What is the difference between the current model and the proposed new model?**

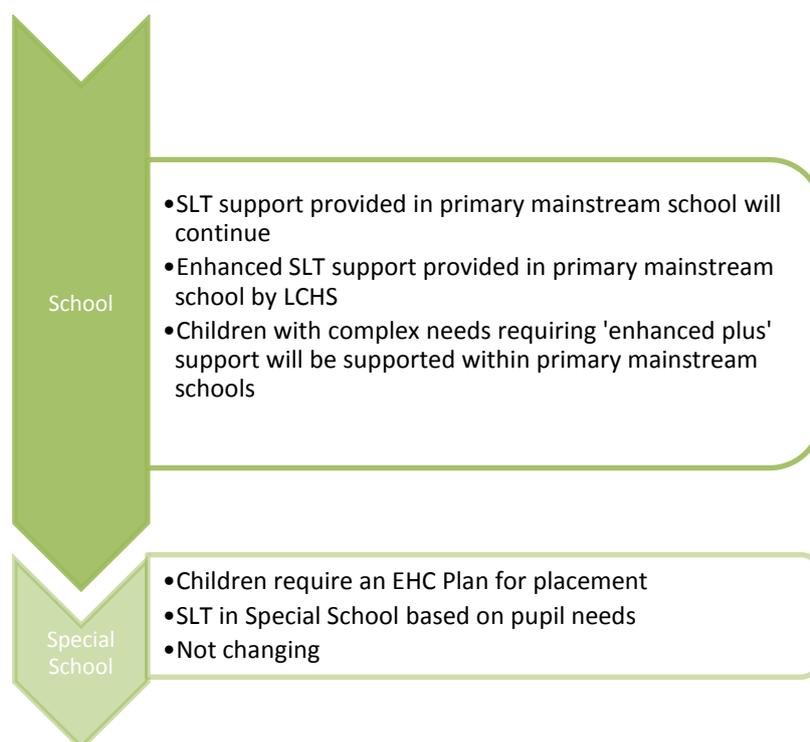
At present LCHS offer support to children with identified speech and/or language difficulties in mainstream schools ('Enhanced' support). If this support is not sufficient to meet the needs of a child with more complex needs then a placement into one of the three dedicated units would be considered. As the diagram below shows:

## Current Model



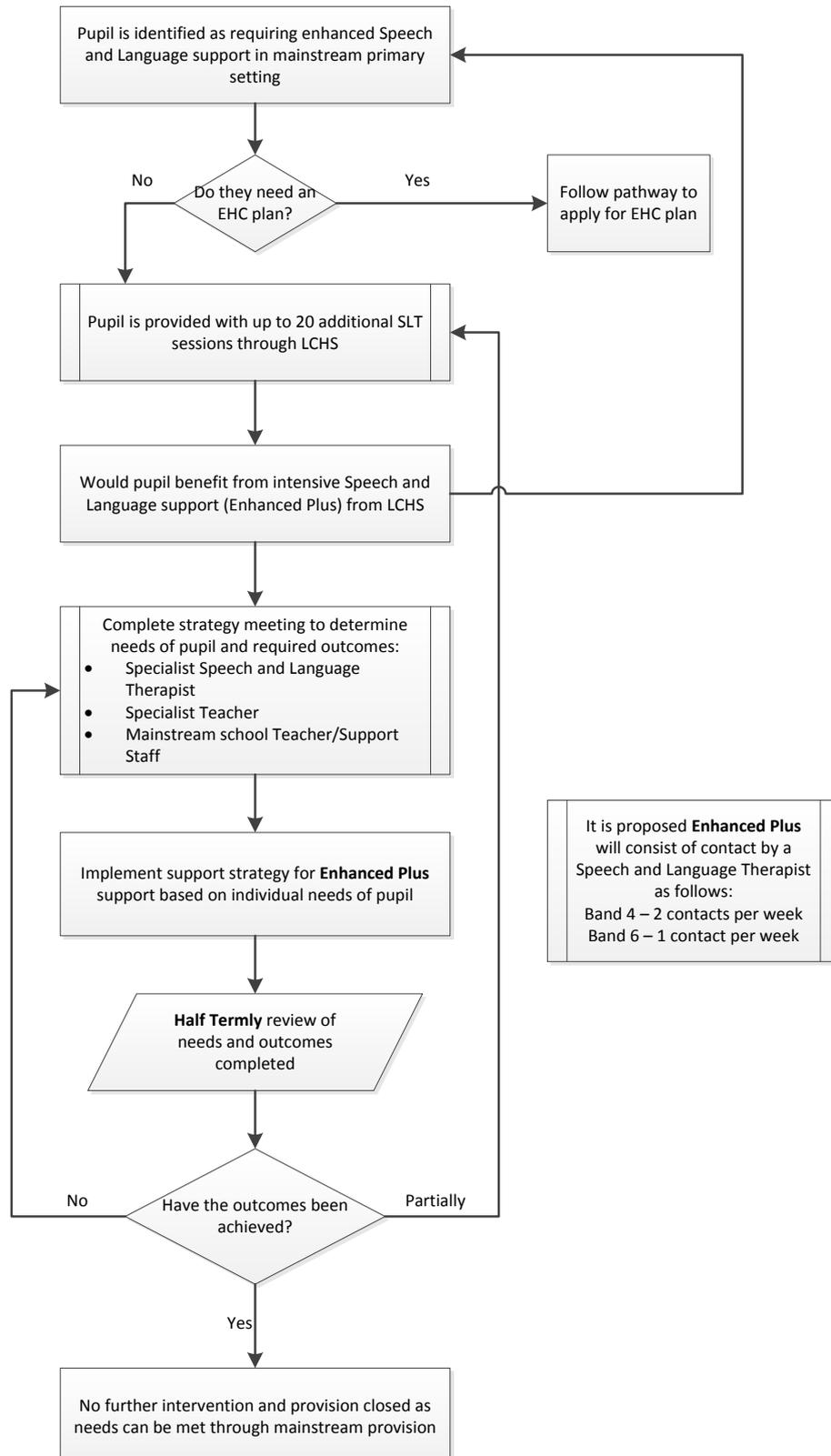
The proposed new model of support would look to offer more specialist support (i.e. Enhanced Plus) into mainstream primary schools to support the child so enabling them to remain educated in their local community. This would mean additional support would be offered to children who do not wish to leave their current school. The model below shows the potential change:

## Proposed Model



## What will the process be for obtaining enhanced plus speech and language support?

The following provides an initial draft process flow for the provision of the enhanced plus speech and language service from LCHS into mainstream primary schools and supported by the Specialist Teaching service. This is still in the process of development and finalisation and feedback as part of the consultation process is welcomed.



**What if a parent/carer decides they want their child to stay in the unit they are currently in?**

As part of our engagement with parents and carers we are engaging with them to gather and understand their views on the proposed model to support their child. If they were to decide they would prefer for their child to remain on the roll of the school who currently provides the unit, they can choose to do so.

However, depending on the outcome of the review and the alternative model agreed we cannot guarantee the future viability of the units as they currently operate should the number of children in the units reduce significantly. If this happens the child will still stay in the school but will benefit from the 'Enhanced Plus' model for speech and language service as detailed above.

**If a parent/carer wants their child to move back to a local primary school what will happen and when?**

Depending on the feedback received during consultation and from our engagement sessions with parents and carers, and the subsequent model agreed by the LA for the future provision of the service, LCHS Speech and Language and the LA will work with parents and carers to determine their preferred primary school placement. We will then together work to secure a placement and to develop an appropriate transition plan to commence the provision of the 'Enhanced Plus' speech and language support programme when the child moves school.

**As a school what does this mean to the funding I am provided with to run this service?**

All three provider schools of the units are provided with funding in line with the number of pupils they have on roll. As this is a funded service by the LA it is reviewable and numbers and funding can be reduced in line with the numbers of children on roll. These units are funded above the schools normal base budget for pupils on roll and therefore the closure of the units will be cost neutral. We have been clear that during the period of the review schools will not be financially disadvantaged and we will work together to ensure that the funding provided to the school reflects any required implementation plan including transition arrangements.

**As a Specialist Teacher working in the unit what does this mean to me?**

The LA passports the funding for this service to the school and it is the school who employs the Specialist Teacher. The contract of employment is therefore with the school or the LA if a community school. If the new model is approved, there will be further consultation with all affected staff.

**I am a Learning Support Assistant, what are the implications on my job?**

As with the Specialist Teachers, Support Assistant are employed by the school. If the new model is approved, there will be further consultation with all affected staff.

**If I provide feedback to this consultation will my comments be considered?**

The purpose of consultation and engagement is to share, collect and reflect on any comments made on the suggested proposal. We accept this can be a very difficult time for individuals who are impacted by any potential changes and will ensure they are supported in any process of change.

All comments will be collated and reflected in the final recommendation made on the future service provision.

Please ensure your feedback is submitted to us by the closing date of 5.00 pm on Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2016.

**Who will make the final decision on the future model?**

The outcome of the consultation with affected schools and staff and feedback received from engagement with parents/carers will be provided in a final report which will contain the recommended model for approval. This recommendation will be submitted to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee in May with a final decision being made by the Executive Councillor for Children's Services in early June 2016.