

News release

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For immediate release

Leicester to test government proposals for disabled children

The Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland PCT Cluster has been chosen to help test proposed changes to services for disabled children with special educational needs (SEN).

A local partnership, made up of the PCT Cluster, NHS Northamptonshire and councils in those areas, is among 20 national pathfinders chosen by the government to test out the main proposals in the special educational needs and disabilities Green Paper.

The project will involve the trialling of a single assessment process for children and young people with SEN, bringing together their education, social care and health needs and support in a single plan spanning birth to 25 years of age.

Leicester and Northamptonshire have both received government funding of £225,000 over two years for the project which will test core elements of change, including:

- a single education, health and care plan from birth to 25 years old, focusing on whether outcomes for disabled children, young people and their parents have been improved through this process
- personal budgets for parents of disabled children and young people and those with SEN so they can choose which services best suit the needs of their children
- the full engagement of children, young people and their families
- strong partnership between all local services and agencies working together to help disabled children and those with SEN
- improved commissioning, particularly through links to health reforms
- the role of voluntary and community sector organisations and parents in a new system, and;
- cost of reform.

Sam Little, children's commissioning manager, speaking on behalf of the cluster, said: "This is a fantastic opportunity. The trial will directly involve a number of children, young people and their families in the pathfinder processes and investigate whether the use of a personal budget approach will give them more influence over the services the child or young person receives.

"The project will work with a control group of around 100 children and young people across Leicester and Northamptonshire. Participants will be chosen following consultation with parents or carers to ensure their commitment to taking part in the 12 month trial."

Assistant City Mayor Councillor Vi Dempster, who is responsible for children, young people and education at Leicester City Council, said: "This is a small pilot with just 100 children across two local authorities and parents will be fully involved. However, being part of the pilot means we can actually have a say in shaping new arrangements for special needs to make sure they actually improve things for children and families."

The systems put into place as part of the pathfinder project will be developed and tested and the findings will be analysed. The existing statutory framework will remain in place during the timeframe of the project and all pathfinders will continue to work within this.”

The children and young people in question will receive services from the full range of agencies so that engagement can be tested across all sectors:

- Social Care
- Behaviour Support
- Educational Psychology
- Residential and/ or community based short breaks.
- Health visiting
- Connexions
- School Nursing
- Speech Therapy
- Occupational Therapy
- Physiotherapy
- Children’s acute and community nursing
- Children’s continuing care services.
- General Practitioners
- Acute and community paediatricians
- Adult Services
- Housing
- Job Centre Plus

Announcing the pathfinders last month, Children’s Minister Sarah Teather, said: “We’re proposing the biggest reforms in 30 years to help disabled children and those with special educational needs so we need to make sure we get them right. It’s good to see that the overall response from parents, teachers and professionals is supportive of our vision for change.

“There are some interesting responses that will help us shape future policy decisions. For example, we can see that people think there should be a greater emphasis on meeting particular needs that emerge in school, just as much as identifying development problems in the early years.

“I’m looking forward to seeing how the pathfinders progress over the next few months to test out how we can make our proposed changes a reality.”

ENDS

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Notes to editor:

In October 2010 NHS Leicester City and NHS Leicestershire County and Rutland joined forces to form a ‘cluster’, in line with the requirements of the Department of Health. Although we share one Cluster Board and our staff work across the city and county boundaries, we have not legally merged, and retain our separate statutory duties. Together we serve a population of more than a million people. Cluster formation is an interim stage in the reform of the NHS, involving on-going transfer of most local commissioning functions to GP-led clinical commissioning groups, in line with the Health and Social Care Bill, now before Parliament and the House of Lords.