1 THE ISSUE

1.1 Overview and Scrutiny Panel requested an update on the restructure of Inclusion Support Service, particularly in relation to the deletion of the Portage Service and the alternative provision of services.

2 RECOMMENDATION

2.1 The Overview & Scrutiny Panel is requested to note the report.

3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 This report follows the restructure of Inclusion Support Service, following agreement by the Council to make a saving of £210,000. There are no specific financial implications beyond achieving these savings.

4 THE REPORT

4.1 Background

Inclusion Support Service consists mainly of statutory services to children, young people and their families, with special educational or additional needs. The main services are:

- The **Statutory Special Educational Needs Service**, which issues, monitors and reviews Statements of SEN;
- The **Educational Psychology Service**, which provides statutory advice to the Local Authority on SEN and other complex needs that children, young people and their families, might experience;
• The **Portage Service**, a non-statutory, home visiting service to pre-school children with SEN and families;

• The **Children Missing Education Service**, which provides a statutory service to children, young people and schools, to ensure their attendance in education, as well as the statutory safeguarding duty in relation to entertainment and the employment of minors;

• The **Learning Support Service**, which is a partly traded service with schools and supports children and young people with learning needs such as dyslexia;

• The Inclusion Support Service also commissions a range of services, such as the Sensory Support Service, the Autism Spectrum Outreach Service and the service for Traveller Education, which supports the Local Authority in meeting its statutory duties;

• The service also has administrative support.

4.2 Following agreement by the Council, in relation to the 2010/11 budget setting process and prioritisation within Children’s Service, Inclusion Support Service was required to find savings of £210,000, from a budget of £1,552,954 (13.5%).

4.3 Consultation was undertaken with staff and Unions before the implementation of a range of measures achieved the savings. The savings exercise applied to the Inclusion Support Service budget as a whole and not to individual services however, the 2010-11 financial year effect on particular individual services is:

• A reduction in the Educational Psychology Service of **£33,972**, equating to the loss of a Trainee Educational Psychologist post, which will finish in July 2010;

• The deletion of the Portage Service, consisting of 1.3 FTE staff, resulting in a saving of **£50,354**;

• A net reduction in the Learning Support Service of **£18,017**, equating to the loss of the Deputy Manager post, achieved through the retirement of another member of the team. This reduction takes into account the reduced earning potential of the service;

• A reduction in the Head of Service budget of **£33,812**, achieved by transferring the member of staff responsible for Inclusion Quality, equalities and training to the Statutory SEN Team;

• A reduction in the Children Missing Education Service of **£47,315**, achieved by not replacing the service Manager and a voluntary reduction in hours by an Officer;

• A reduction of **£11,009** from the Administration Service achieved by not replacing a member of staff that left the Authority;

• An increase in the Statutory SEN Team of **£8,198**. This is due to an increase in statutory responsibilities, such as the transfer of responsibilities from the Learning Skills Council for learners with SEN or Learning Difficulties and Disabilities.

4.4 This equates to a reduction in staffing costs of **£186,281**.

   In addition, there has been a reduction in the non-staffing budgets, such as travel and supplies and services, of **£23,719**, to achieve the total saving.
4.5 The Portage Service

The Portage Service provides a service to pre-school children with Special Educational Needs and their families. This service is a home visiting service, usually weekly or fortnightly, on a term time only basis. Home visits are generally an hour long and involve some structured activities, along with child-led play and time set aside for sharing and addressing family priorities. For each case, there is an additional two hours required for travel, preparation, report writing etc. The maximum caseload for a full time equivalent Portage Home Visitor is typically 12 cases. This equates to a maximum 16 cases for the service based on 1.3 FTE staff.

4.6 The service consists of 1.3 FTE staff, with additional management and administration provided via the Psychology Service and Administration Service i.e. this is in addition to the Portage Service budget. The average number of cases per year (calculated over the last 3 years) is twenty-three. This equates to a cost per case of approximately £2,190.

The age profile of the children referred, ranges from 2 months and 3 weeks to 4 years old.

4.7 The criteria for accessing Portage are:

- The child & family live within Bath and North East Somerset.
- The child has complex needs identified from birth which are likely to impact on learning, and/or significant developmental delay in at least two areas.
- The child is accessing the Early Years Foundation Stage for no more than five sessions per week (or 12½ hours).
- One parent/carer will be available during agreed home visiting times.
- This parent/carer is committed to working in partnership with the Portage Home Visitor.

4.8 The Portage Service is no longer involved when:

- The child’s developmental delay is no longer significant in terms of impact on the child’s learning.
- The child starts school.
- The child and/or family no longer require home visiting, as agreed at a Portage Review meeting.
- The parent or carer consistently fails to keep appointments without good reason.

4.9 The decision to delete the Portage Service in Bath and North East Somerset is in the context of making the required savings within the whole of Inclusion Support.

The Portage Service is a non-statutory service. Applying further savings to statutory services, on top of those outlined above, would mean that it would not be possible to carry out those statutory duties properly and this would be an unacceptable risk to the Local Authority. Further savings from other non-statutory aspects of the service, such as administrative support would directly affect the ability to carry out statutory functions of the Local Authority and further savings in the Learning Support Service, a
partly traded service, would be detrimental to its earning capacity.

4.10 In addition, there are changing patterns of provision locally. Over the last ten years or so, provision for all pre-school children (0-4 years) has increased considerably. Staff in Early Years settings are now better able to meet the additional needs of children. Pre-school settings are well supported by the Early Years Foundation Stage Team who specifically support settings in meeting a child’s Special Educational Needs, through the Area Special Educational Needs Advisory Teachers. As a result, the Portage Service has experienced difficulty in arranging home visits, because children are receiving support elsewhere (mainstream settings, Bath Opportunity Pre-school, PAT Centre, Speech & Language Groups, local Children’s Centre support groups, which would not always have been the case some years ago. Similarly, the service has experienced patchy or reduced numbers of referrals over the last few years and this has resulted in staff not being fully productive throughout the year.

4.11 Given that the service consists of 1.3 FTE staff, it is a small service on the edge of viability, with some functions now replaced by other providers. Given the patterns of referral etc, extending the service is not a viable proposition. Reducing the service to less than 1 FTE, rather than deleting it altogether, would be problematic and leave the service vulnerable, due to sickness etc.

The Alternative to Directly Providing a Portage Service

4.12 As stated above, there are significantly more children with SEN now having their needs met within pre-school settings. The number of Statements of SEN, related to pre-school children, has increased significantly over the past four years and therefore; more support is available to children. It is acknowledged that Early Years Settings do need more help in supporting these vulnerable young children however, the Portage Home Visiting Service is not the answer in the current climate.

4.13 For those children who do not access pre-school provision, the Local Authority, via the Early Years Foundation Stage Team, is working with a local voluntary provider and the eleven Children’s Centres across the Authority, to offer a service to parents. This is a way of delivering a more efficient service than is currently provided. For instance, one aspect of a Portage home visit is a focus on the family i.e. time spent during the session to share and address family priorities such as, sharing daily experiences and routines, highlighting positive experiences, sharing skills, knowledge and experience, as well as empowering parents/carers. This is now a role that Family Support Outreach Workers play and can be further developed with the Specialist Pre-school Provider in the area. It is also possible that when this type of work is carried out in a group, with other parents, it can prove supportive and add an element to the work that is currently missing. Given several families could be included at the same time, with no associated travel costs; this approach is much more cost effective.
Summary

4.14 The Portage Service provides a service to pre-school children with Special Educational Needs and their families. It is a service that was conceived some 30+ years ago and, although some parents value it, the decision to delete the service took into account the current high level of quality provision in Early Years settings. Portage is a non-statutory service, and to retain it would mean that the required savings would come from statutory services. This was not seen as a viable option.

4.15 There is a recognition that some families may still benefit from a home visiting approach and this is being considered as an element of current and future commissioned services in the early years.

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5  RISK MANAGEMENT

5.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council’s decision making risk management guidance.

6  EQUALITIES

6.1 Equalities Impact Assessment has taken place.

7  CONSULTATION

7.1 Full consultation on the restructuring and future direction of the service took place with all staff in Inclusion Support Service, Managers within Children’s Service and with Unions.

7.2 Consultation was carried out via meetings with staff and Unions as well as informal and formal proposals.

8  ISSUES TO CONSIDER IN REACHING THE DECISION

8.1 Overview & Scrutiny Panel are asked to note the report.

9  ADVICE SOUGHT

9.1 The Council’s Monitoring Officer (Council Solicitor) and Section 151 Officer (Strategic Director - Support Services) have had the opportunity to input to this report and have cleared it for publication.
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<td>Background papers</td>
<td>Children’s Service Plan 2010-11 approved by CYPP Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 25th January 2010.</td>
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