Background

The Cabinet Secretary agreed 10 refocused priorities for the national Together for Health: Eye Healthcare Delivery Plan to be delivered by 2020. Action 5 is the development and implementation of a service to ensure those attending a special school, or a special school unit in a mainstream school, are offered an annual vision test in the school setting. The proposal was agreed by the Cabinet Secretary, pending further advice on how the health boards will deliver the service nationally.

A proposal to deliver an annual vision test for this cohort of children was issued for a three-month consultation in 2016. It sought wide stakeholder engagement on a proposed model of delivery to be undertaken by specially trained optometrists working in partnership with dispensing opticians, orthoptists and the school nurse. The plan was for this to be hosted nationally by one health board, as part of the Wales Eye Care Service Joint Committee arrangements, whereby, Hywel Dda University Health Board (HDUHB) host the Low Vision Service Wales and Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB) host the Eye Health Examination Wales Service.

A prominent message arising from the consultation was that some local authorities do not have special schools; instead, children whom the local authorities deem to require specialist provision often attend a special school unit in a mainstream school. As there are children with special educational needs who do not attend a special school it would be inequitable to treat them differently to children attending a special school.

The WHC issued in 2015 directs health boards to develop an orthoptist-led service for the school nurse to deliver a screen of children’s eyes for sight problems. All health boards now provide the service in mainstream schools only. The current WHC is not deemed equitable as it does not include those children attending a special school or a special school unit in a mainstream school.

To address this issue (to provide equitable services for children with the same special education needs, regardless of their educational setting) it would be more appropriate to include an annex with set criteria in the WHC Children’s Vision Wales Pathway for 4-5 year olds (Appendix 1). The annex would act as a lever to refer children that meet the set criteria to the proposed service model, to receive a vision test regardless of their school settings.

The governance arrangements and process for delivering the proposed service model within all school settings would be similar to that of the community dental service and so there would be opportunities to replicate what is already being done.

Previous work

Since 2013, a pilot project has delivered sight tests to children in 5 schools across Wales (one of which is Crownbridge Special School in Cwmbran), with over 425 children having received sight tests. The pilot project has proved the concept that sight tests can be delivered within the school environment. Positive feedback has been received from the pupils, parents and schools regarding the delivery and impact of the pilot project.
**Service development**

Welsh Government have made £100k available to support a SPECS service development. The service delivery development phase will run over 12 months, from the 1\(^{st}\) April 2018-31\(^{st}\) March 2019. This project will be commissioned through Hywel Dda University Health Board (HDUHB) who will establish a service delivery model through partnership between Cardiff University and HDUHB.

The aim of the project is to develop all service infrastructure and delivery model which would be required for phased role out of the All Wales SPECS service from 1\(^{st}\) April 2019.

The project will be led by HDUHB, and aligned to the LVSW service within the Primary Community and Long Term Care Directorate. The Clinical Leadership will be provided by the existing clinical lead for the LVSW who holds an Honorary contract with Hywel Dda University Health Board and also has responsibility for the Pilot project within Cardiff University. A project manager who will sit within the Health Board will be appointed. A Welsh Government project lead has also been appointed. The three posts will work closely together throughout the development of the All Wales SPECS service.

During the development phase, the pilot project will continue.

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