



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

17 NOVEMBER 2009

FINAL REPORT: PLAYSCHEME PROVISION FOR CHILDREN WITH COMPLEX NEEDS

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. To present the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel's findings, conclusions and recommendations following its investigation of playscheme provision for children with complex needs.

AIMS OF THE SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION

2. Following a request from a member of the public that this topic should be examined, the scrutiny panel sought to assess how the Council's summer playschemes make provision for children with complex needs.
3. In examining this topic, however, it was found that such provision is often closely linked to other, more general, play provision or to provision for children with other disabilities. Some aspects of the panel's investigation therefore inevitably involved a wider focus than children with complex needs and playscheme provision and these findings are reflected in this report.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

4. The terms of reference of the scrutiny investigation were as follows:
 - (a) *To examine playscheme provision for children with complex needs, including accessibility for those service users.*
 - (b) *In the context of this review, to examine the opportunities provided by, and the implications of, the "Aiming High" funding which is to be made available to the Council.*

(Cont....)

- (c) To examine funding opportunities available to parents and carers to support play provision for children with complex needs.*
- (d) To examine training provision for Playscheme and Leisure Services Staff in respect of disability awareness.*
- (e) To assess the capacity of services to meet the play-related requirements of children with complex needs.*

HOW INFORMATION AND EVIDENCE WAS OBTAINED

5. The scrutiny panel undertook an in-depth investigation and met formally on six occasions between 28 May and 28 September 2009 to gather evidence. The panel initially heard from the Chair of the Davison Trust, the member of the public who submitted the request that this topic should be examined. Information was also submitted by Council officers, parents and school/playscheme staff. In addition, panel members visited a school playscheme for children with complex needs.
6. A Scrutiny Support Officer from Legal and Democratic Services co-ordinated and arranged the submission of written and oral evidence and arranged witnesses for the review. Meetings administration, including preparation of agenda and minutes, was undertaken by a Governance Officer from Legal and Democratic Services.
7. A detailed record of the topics discussed at Panel meetings, including agenda, minutes and reports, is available from the Council's Committee Management System (COMMIS), which can be accessed via the Council's website at www.middlesbrough.gov.uk.
8. A summary of the methods of investigation is outlined below:
 - (a) Detailed officer presentations, supplemented by oral evidence and relevant documentation.
 - (b) A visit to the Beverley School summer playscheme.
 - (c) Discussions with the Chair of the Davison Trust, Friends of Beverley School, parents and staff at Beverley School.
 - (d) Consideration of relevant documentation in respect of Council policy.
9. This report has been compiled on the basis of evidence gathered using these sources.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE PANEL

10. The membership of the scrutiny panel was as follows:

Councillors Ismail (Chair), Williams (Vice-Chair); and Councillors Biswas, Dunne, Majid, McTigue, Mrs H Pearson OBE, Sanderson and Taylor; plus the following Co-optees: C Hodds, Father G Holland and M White.

THE PANEL'S FINDINGS

11. The scrutiny panel's findings are set out below in respect of:

- The background to this investigation.
- The agreed terms of reference.

Background to this investigation

12. The scrutiny panel initially considered a request from Mr A McDonald, Chair of the Davison Trust, that this topic should be examined. Having agreed to do so, the panel then spoke directly to Mr McDonald to obtain further information on the background to his request.

13. The Davison Trust administers a fund that has been established for some considerable time for the benefit of Middlesbrough children with special needs. The panel heard that an increasingly common source of applications for assistance from the trust fund is for children's playschemes during school holidays. Whilst the Trust considers each funding application on its merits - and has provided funding, its principal purpose is to provide funding in circumstances where there is no other mainstream funding available where appropriate to that particular need.

14. The Davison Trust indicates that the issue of provision of playscheme places for children with complex needs and who cannot be integrated within a mainstream but inclusive facility, is becoming an increasingly regular item of discussion. The Trust acknowledges that there are excellent examples of Council provision to support children with complex needs and disabilities. However, it did highlight its concern that playscheme provision ought properly to come within Middlesbrough Council's Play Strategy and that children with special and complex needs should receive fair and appropriate consideration within such a strategy.

15. It was also indicated that representatives of the Davison Trust have previously raised the issue of specialised play provision for children with complex needs with Council officers. The outcome of an exchange of e-mails at that time indicated that the focus appears to be the accommodation of children with special needs within mainstream provision. The Trust's view is that for many children with particularly complex needs, such an inclusive approach is not appropriate.

16. The panel heard that the Council does have a current Play Strategy - '*Child's Play: A Play Policy and Strategy for the Children and Young People of Middlesbrough 2006-2011.*' The policy identifies that children love to play and every child needs opportunities to do so. While play is often an activity for its own sake, it is also recognised as how children connect with the world around them and how they learn to value themselves and others. It is therefore important that play provision is welcoming and accessible to every child. The policy includes the following statement:

“We believe that every child needs opportunities to play. It is therefore critical that play provision is welcoming and accessible to every child. This includes children and young people regardless of their age, gender, impairment, race or religion, who will not be discriminated against in line with Middlesbrough Council’s Equalities Policy and Diversity Action Plan. Middlesbrough Council intends that play provision operates with an inclusive approach, proactively working to meet the needs of all its children and young people within inclusive provision. We recognise the value and contribution of other groups (voluntary, private sector etc) who organise separately other play provision to enable children to gain the confidence to join “integrated” play provision.

It is Council policy that services providing play opportunities will work towards ensuring accessibility to a wider range of children and young people than is currently the case.”

17. In agreeing terms of reference for its investigation, the scrutiny panel sought to investigate whether accessibility is being achieved in the specific context of Council summer playschemes and children with complex needs.

Findings in respect of the agreed terms of reference

18. The scrutiny panel’s findings in respect of each of the terms of reference investigated are set out below.

TERM OF REFERENCE: “To examine playscheme provision for children with complex needs, including accessibility for those service users.”

19. Middlesbrough Council’s summer playschemes provide an important opportunity to extend play opportunities. This is through a wide variety of activities, including sport, games, drama, art and crafts. The scrutiny panel sought to ascertain the extent and scale of playscheme provision for children with complex needs specifically but also for those with disabilities in general. This was so that comparisons could then be made between any differing levels of provision between the different user groups.
20. Information was considered in respect of:
 - a) Overall playscheme provision, including the budget for summer 2009.
 - b) General support provided by the Team for Children With Disabilities.
 - c) Accessibility to mainstream provision for children with complex needs and disabilities.
 - d) Dedicated playscheme provision for children with complex needs and disabilities.
 - e) Beverley School playscheme.
 - f) Priory Woods School playscheme.

Overall playscheme provision

21. The scrutiny panel heard that the overall budget for playscheme provision for summer 2009 was £84,000. This sum, which was principally spent on staffing costs, covered the cost of running mainstream schemes - which children with disabilities are encouraged to attend - as well as two specialist playschemes for children with disabilities. The panel’s key findings in respect of overall playscheme provision were as follows:

- a) 25 playschemes were held in summer 2009. These took place at various town-wide venues such as schools and leisure centres.
- b) Four schemes are run by the Council's Leisure Services at leisure facilities.
- c) Each scheme generally runs for four days per week over four weeks.
- d) Principal aims of the playschemes are to encourage as many children as possible to be active during the school holidays and achieve this at a low cost per session.
- e) Around 150 playscheme staff are employed each summer. Officers appointing the staff do look for applicants who have relevant skills or an interest in working with children with disabilities and special needs.
- f) For mainstream provision, the ratio of staff to children aged under 8 is generally 1:8 and for children aged over eight is 1:16. All schemes operate with at least four to five staff.
- g) A wide variety of activities is available - such as art and crafts, sport, games, drama and excursions.
- h) Each venue has five play leaders and one co-ordinator and, depending on demand, generally accommodates between 20 and 50 children.
- i) Over 13,000 places are available each year.
- j) Morning sessions cater for the 5-14 age range and run between 10.15 am and 12.00 noon.
- k) Afternoon sessions cater for the 8-14 age range and run between 1.00pm and 3.00pm.
- l) Each session costs 60p.

General support provided by the Team for Children With Disabilities

22. The scrutiny panel was advised that Middlesbrough Council's Team for Children With Disabilities is committed to providing support to enable this group of children and young people to access all relevant service provision - including playschemes. In the case of playschemes, a Multi-Agency Planning Group is involved in examining issues such as accessibility of provision, support staff required and type of activities to be offered. The group explores which schemes can meet the different needs of participating children and ensures that an appropriate level of support is provided.

Accessibility to mainstream provision for children with complex needs/disabilities

23. Within the overall staffing of playschemes a group of workers are trained to provide 1:1 support for children with disabilities who attend mainstream schemes. Approximately £4000 was spent in summer 2009 on the salaries of staff working in this way.

24. The panel heard that places in mainstream playschemes are not specifically allotted or allocated for children with disabilities. In theory, all playschemes are available to all children and the schemes are promoted on that basis. It is, of course, recognised that such attendance is subject to an appropriate level of support being provided for children with complex needs disabilities. Under existing arrangements, parents request support for their child to attend a mainstream playscheme via a referral form which is submitted to Leisure Services. A 1:1 support worker is then placed with the child at the venue of their choice. Parents' main concerns have been found to be whether their child can cope with a mainstream playscheme environment.

25. The Gleneagles team endeavours to support parents and children and develop their trust in accessing mainstream schemes.
26. The playschemes are promoted in the "Disability Matters" publication - which is sent to every family with a child with a disability in Middlesbrough. Five hundred copies are circulated every two months. The May/June 2009 edition was made available to the scrutiny panel. This contained an advertisement for the summer playschemes that included the following:
 - *Do you have a disabled child who would like to attend our summer playschemes with both disabled and non-disabled children?*
 - *Does your child require any support to participate in play?*
 - *If you have answered 'yes' to either or both of the above, then why not contact us to discuss a playscheme place or complete a referral form.*
27. Eight children with varying degrees of disability had applied to attend mainstream playschemes with a 1:1 support worker in 2009. All eight had been placed in a scheme appropriate to their needs.
28. Approximately 120 children had been involved in the four playschemes run by the Council's Sports and Leisure service during summer 2009 (ie at the Council's sports/leisure centres). This year no young people with disabilities had attended these four playschemes, although they had done so in the past. The service was unable to confirm why this was the case - it was unknown whether there was simply no demand or whether such children had made alternative arrangements.

Dedicated playscheme provision for children with complex needs and disabilities

29. There are Council-run summer playschemes for children with disabilities at two venues. These are:
 - Gleneagles/Kader playschemes (which run alongside each other at Kader Community Centre) and offer integrated/inclusive provision wherever possible).
 - Pennyman School playscheme.
30. Pennyman playscheme is fully funded from the annual playscheme budget. In 2009, three members of staff who are employed at Pennyman during term-time were employed to help as specialist playworkers at a cost of approximately £1500. Children attending the Pennyman playscheme tend to have more physical needs rather than complex needs, although the scheme is fully inclusive where possible and caters for both mainstream provision and children with disabilities.
31. Eight young people with disabilities attended the Pennyman playscheme on a daily basis over the four-week course of the scheme. After the first two weeks, the scheme moves to Netherfields Community Centre, with no specialised support from Pennyman staff.

32. Two of the four workers at the Kader/Gleneagles playschemes were funded from the main playscheme budget in summer 2009. This equated to a contribution of approximately £1000. Remaining costs were shared between Kader and Gleneagles schools. The Kader scheme ran for four weeks during the summer holidays. The Gleneagles playscheme, which was attended by children with learning and physical disabilities and autism, operated for six weeks. Seventeen young people attended that scheme. Of these, three received two or more sessions a week and the rest received one session a week.
33. In addition to funding staffing costs as outlined above, the Council spent £500 on specialised play equipment such as sensory equipment for children with autism and also provided Beverley, Priory Woods and Kader with art and craft materials.

Priory Woods Playscheme

34. In addition to the above schemes, a summer playscheme also runs at Priory Woods School. Priory Woods is an all age community special school which provides inclusive education for pupils with severe learning difficulties and those with profound and multiple needs. Discussions with the school confirmed that this scheme:
- Is funded directly by the school.
 - Runs for four weeks each summer.
 - Caters for both under and over 16s.
 - Costs £2 per day for under 16s and £5 per day for over 16s.

Beverley School summer playscheme

35. The scrutiny panel was aware from discussions with the representative of the Davison Trust that an independent playscheme operates at Beverley School. The school is a specialist technology school for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders. As part of its investigations, arrangements were made for the scrutiny panel to visit the school to speak to staff and parents and to see its summer playscheme in operation.
36. Members were particularly interested to ascertain how the scheme operates, how it is funded and what charges are made for children's participation. The panel's visit took place on 4 August 2009, when Members met Becky Hutchinson, Playscheme Leader; Julie Robinson, Parent/Chair of School Governors; and Dorothy Fraser, Parent and Chair/Fundraiser of Friends of Beverley School. The panel's findings are set out below.
37. Members heard that the school's playscheme is funded entirely from donations and by the fundraising efforts of Friends of Beverley School, which is a registered charity. The scheme is not run by the school, but by the charity, which employs Beverley School to run the playscheme on its behalf. As such, the operation of the playscheme is entirely reliant on raising the necessary funds each year.
38. The main points highlighted by the school staff member and parents during the discussion with them were as follows:
- a) The playscheme runs for two weeks, five days a week, each summer and provides places for a maximum of 40 children/young people each day.

- b) The scheme's budget for summer 2009 was around £15,000.¹ The bulk of this sum is spent on staffing, with 20 to 23 people usually employed each year.
- c) No financial contribution is made by the Council. There is however, no charge made for using school facilities and school buses for excursions.
- d) The school has free use of a community-group-run swimming pool (payment is made for a lifeguard).
- e) This year's daily charge of £10 per child (doubled from £5 in 2008) had proved prohibitive and resulted in 11 spare places (for which there had been demand/need in previous years) on the playscheme. One family has three children who attended the playscheme at a total cost of £300 for the two weeks.
- f) The 2009 daily charge of £10 still represented a significant subsidy against the actual cost of £38 per child per day.
- g) Direct payments can, in theory, be used to pay for playscheme attendance. However, doing so could mean foregoing other services (eg short break/respice care).
- h) The playscheme is vital for a lot of families as a means of providing a break from parents' caring responsibilities as well as benefiting the children. The parents that panel Members spoke to expressed the view that without the playscheme, some families would simply break down - some children have such challenging behaviour that the family is dependent on the support provided by attending the playscheme.
- i) Beverley School's playscheme is specifically for children with autistic spectrum disorders. There is other playscheme provision for children with disabilities at Priory Woods, Pennyman, Gleneagles and also at Kirkleatham in Redcar and Cleveland Borough.
- j) Children with autism are generally unable to be integrated into mainstream playscheme provision due to the nature of their disability, which may require highly specialised one to one care. Such children and young people find changes such as school holiday arrangements hard to cope with. As such it has been found that having a playscheme in a familiar autism-specific environment with familiar, trained staff has been a key to success.²
- k) Efforts have been made to secure Aiming High funding via discussions with relevant Council officers. However, after a rigorous and daunting application process³ it had been found that such funding could only be used for new schemes. The Beverley School playscheme could not be funded as it is already in existence. School fundraisers indicated that it would be good to offer more places - but these could not be offered without sustainable funding being obtained.

39. As well as seeing the playscheme facilities available at the school - such as soft play, the scrutiny panel also heard details of other activities and events that are organised as part of the scheme. These include swimming, cinema and bowling excursions.

¹ At its meeting on 13 August 2009, the panel was advised by the Headteacher of Beverley School that actual costs for 2009 were likely to be just under £12,000 as reduced take-up of places had meant that fewer staff had been required.

² As highlighted at para. 27, eight children with varying degrees of disability attended mainstream playschemes with a 1:1 support worker in 2009. The panel was advised that this number had included children from Beverley School.

³ Officers confirmed that the grant application process operates within an agreed procedure to ensure the protection of potentially vulnerable young people.

40. Examination of this term of reference highlighted the inclusive nature of general playscheme provision; assistance which is provided to assist children with disabilities and complex needs in accessing this provision; and the alternative schemes which are available for these children.

TERM OF REFERENCE: “To examine the opportunities provided by, and the implications of, the “Aiming High” funding which is to be made available to the Council”AND “To examine funding opportunities available to parents and carers to support play provision for children with complex needs.”

41. The above terms of reference were examined separately during the course of the panel’s investigations. However, as both of these contain areas of overlap, they are addressed together in the following sections of the report.
42. ‘Aiming High for Disabled Children’ was launched in May 2007 as a national transformation programme for disabled children’s services. The Government has identified disabled children as a priority and has provided new funding and measures to make the system work better. The panel had been made aware that Aiming High provides additional funding opportunities to established groups and organisations. In the current financial year, £30,000 has been provided to Middlesbrough Council by Central Government to facilitate short breaks for children with disabilities and their families through Aiming High. ‘Short breaks’ is the term which is now generally used instead of ‘respite.’
43. Members heard that the Council provides assistance to groups and organisations to apply for such funding. The authority’s Voluntary Sector Liaison and Grants Manager works in partnership with the Social Work Team for Children with Disabilities to assist organisations to access funding.
44. In order to apply for a grant from the Aiming High Fund an organisation needs to provide evidence that it is well established. Voluntary, community and private sector organisations can all apply for funding subject to confirming bank account details and supplying governance documents which outline aims, objectives, management arrangements and terms of reference.
45. Organisations can apply for a maximum grant of £3,000 in 2009/10. This must be spent within the financial year and must be used for new or additional provision - funding cannot be obtained for existing events and activities. The maximum amount per grant had been set by the Children with Disabilities Team in consultation with service users and carers. Funding can be used for a variety of options to provide children and families with short breaks including day trips, residential stays and playschemes. Applications are approved on a bi-monthly basis and payment is issued by the Children and Disabilities Team.
46. Individuals and families are not permitted to apply for grants from the Aiming High Fund. Also, funding could not be provided for activities which were not classed as ‘organised activities’. There are also stringent requirements and procedures in place in relation to safeguarding and child protection.

47. At the time that Aiming High funding was discussed by the scrutiny panel (in July 2009), one application relating to “play provision” for people with disabilities had been approved. This was for Middlesbrough Sportability Club which had received grant funding towards the cost of 16 disabled young people attending a residential holiday in Keswick. The participants had taken part in a range of outdoor activities.
48. Four other applications relating to disability-related groups/activities were being processed as at July 2009. These were in respect of:
- Council playschemes⁴
 - A project to provide several day activities for children with autism.
 - A private day care centre, which had applied for funding to open on weekends as well as weekdays to provide a service for disabled children.
 - A children’s charity, which had applied for funding to do one-to-one work with children in their homes.
49. Current indications are that Aiming High Funding will be available for two years only - ie during the 2009/10 and 2010/11 financial years. Middlesbrough’s funding allocation will increase from £30,000 in 2009/10 to £90,000 in 2010/11. Although new applications will still be considered in 2010/11, organisations which have run successful projects in 2009/10 will also be able to apply for funding to complement/continue existing projects. Grants in 2010/11 will be up to £10,000.
50. The availability of this funding has been publicised in various ways, including via e-mail, flyers and the Council website. In addition to Aiming High, organisations and individuals can also apply to the Council’s Youth Opportunities Fund (which provides grants for young people aged 13-19) or to the Community Chest. Details were provided to the scrutiny panel of assistance which Council officers are able to provide in this regard - such as by helping organisations to find out what grants are available to them.
51. This assistance can be through searching for appropriate funding sources on national databases, such as Grant Finder and Funder Finder, which are not generally available to the public. Officers are also able to assist with the application process. This has proved to be very valuable - as the most worthy or needy causes for funding may not be the most adept at completing the necessary forms and paperwork.
52. During the course of the panel’s investigation, reference was also made to grants available from the Council’s **Working Neighbourhoods Fund** (WNF). As WNF funding is used to support annual grants to the voluntary and community sector, Members queried whether this could be a possible further source of funding towards playscheme provision. This was investigated further, when it was ascertained that, unfortunately, WNF funding could not be used in this way. This was because playschemes would not satisfy the qualifying criteria, which principally relate to worklessness, deprived local neighbourhoods and the provision of training/assistance into employment.

⁴ At the time when this report was being finalised (October 2009) the updated position was checked in relation to the application for funding for Council playschemes. It was found that the sum of £3,000 had been ultimately provided from Extended Schools funding and not from ‘Aiming High.’

53. In terms of other potential funding sources, the scrutiny panel queried whether the local Primary Care Trust (PCT) - which is now known as 'NHS Middlesbrough' - might be approached as a possible additional funding source for playschemes for children with complex needs and disabilities. While it is acknowledge that the PCT has not been involved in this scrutiny exercise the panel considered that such an approach might be worthwhile.
54. Examination of this term of reference highlighted that while 'Aiming High' may provide additional opportunities to fund play provision for children with complex needs, the funding can only be used by bona-fide organisations for new schemes. In addition, the temporary nature of the funding arrangements mean that other funding sources would need to be found in future.

TERM OF REFERENCE: “To examine training provision for Playscheme and Leisure Services Staff in respect of disability awareness.”

55. The scrutiny panel's examination of this term of reference covered two aspects:
- Training provided by the Council's Team for Children with Disabilities
 - Training provided by Leisure Services
56. Middlesbrough's Team for Children with Disabilities is involved in delivering awareness training for anyone working with children with disabilities. The training can be provided to any Council staff on request and covers how children come to be disabled, different forms of disability, the differing levels of support that children might need, together with the range of support services which are available.
57. The training, which is delivered by people who are experienced in working with children with disabilities, has been provided to a wide range of staff groups - such as youth workers, Sure Start staff, parent support advisors and early years workers.
58. The Team for Children with Disabilities has also been involved in providing input for Playscheme Workers in recent years. This has varied from year to year but has been provided whenever requested. Training is not standardised but is tailored to the level required for the group of staff concerned. For summer 2009, training input was provided concerning the needs of children with disabilities who would be using mainstream playschemes. Gleneagles School is used as a training resource and has been visited by some playscheme workers and group leaders, who have spoken to staff about caring for children with disabilities.
59. The scrutiny panel heard that sports and leisure staff who work on the summer playschemes are not recruited specifically to work with children with disabilities but are from a general annual intake of playscheme staff. Most sports and leisure staff do have some disability awareness training, especially where they engage with the public as part of their job. As has been indicated elsewhere in this report, there is also a group of workers which is trained to provide 1:1 support to enable children with disabilities to attend a mainstream scheme.

60. In addition to the training provision by the Team for Children with Disabilities, the Council's corporate training programme provides a wide range of courses that also cover disability awareness issues. These include general equal opportunities training and more specific provision, such as visual impairment awareness, deaf awareness and child protection training. The senior recreation officer in charge of each playscheme generally attends most of this training - although there is not a formal checklist in place that requires sports and leisure staff working on playschemes to have completed specific training courses.
61. The scrutiny panel was also advised that following attendance at 2009 playschemes, parents of children with disabilities were to be sent a questionnaire. This would be used to assess parents' views and improve services where necessary - including addressing any staff training requirements should these be highlighted.
62. Examination of this term of reference highlighted that measures are in place to address staff training issues in respect of disability awareness and support, both in terms of playschemes and wider Council staff.

TERM OF REFERENCE: *"To assess the capacity of services to meet the play-related requirements of children with complex needs."*

63. During the course of the scrutiny panel's work the panel suggested that this term of reference could not generally be covered by gathering information and evidence. Instead, the findings in respect of this important area would be a judgement for the panel to make once it had concluded its investigation. As such, the panel's findings will be reflected in the conclusions which are included in the finalised version of this report.
64. On a related note, the panel did hear, however, that following on from publication of the Council's Play Strategy (which includes equality of access to play provision as one of its tenets), a Disability Discrimination Act Audit has been completed in respect of all play areas and play provision in Middlesbrough. When any play site is newly built or refurbished the Children with Disabilities Group and young people are consulted regarding equipment to ensure that they can access and enjoy the provision.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

65. In the course of the scrutiny panel's investigations, information came to light which, while not directly covered by the terms of reference, is relevant to the work of the panel on this topic. This related to:
 - General Leisure Services provision
 - The work of The Cleveland Unit.

General Leisure Services provision

66. The Council's Leisure Services were represented at the scrutiny panel meetings during this investigation. Although general leisure provision for children with complex needs/disabilities was not part of the panel's terms of reference, issues were discussed which the panel wishes to record.

67. While Leisure Services makes every effort to offer inclusive services accessible to all, to date there has been no specific provision for children with complex needs. Existing services have been aimed at including children/people with disabilities - such as through supporting the Sportability Club, coaching for wheelchair sports and some swimming provision through 1:1 support. While recognising that there can be difficulties in providing mainstream sporting opportunities for children with complex needs, the scrutiny panel suggested that this might be an area that Leisure Services could explore further.

The work of The Cleveland Unit.

68. A parent who spoke to the panel in the context of overall local authority support, provided information to the regarding the role of the Cleveland Unit, which is based at the James Cook University Hospital. Despite its location, the Cleveland Unit is not a hospital facility but is a Child Development Centre and Assessment Nursery for children up to the age of five.
69. The centre provides early identification and intervention for children with complex and special educational needs. It provides multi-disciplinary assessments, an assessment nursery, joint education and therapy groups for parents/carers, statutory referral for assessment of special educational needs, and professional development training for practitioners. The unit also provides “early bird” training for parents/carers of children with diagnosis of autism, home portage visiting, inclusion support for children into mainstream education and a home lending library of specialist toys/equipment for parents.
70. Through involvement with members of the Davison Trust and parents from Beverley School, Liz Pickard the head teacher of the Cleveland Unit became aware of the scrutiny panel’s investigation. As a result, the head contacted the Council by e-mail to comment on the fact that there are no places available in playschemes for the under fives. The view was expressed that this can mean that, for parents who have children with disabilities who are aged under five, nursery/school holidays can be quite long and stressful, with no breaks for the families. It was further indicated that playschemes in other local authority areas do accommodate under fives and suggested that the Council’s Children’s Centres could possibly run small playschemes⁵. Arrangements were made for a panel Member (Councillor Dunne) to visit the Cleveland Unit to speak to the head teacher and to view the unit’s operation and facilities.

Other service provision

71. It should be noted that the scrutiny panel also found that summer playscheme provision for children with complex needs and disabilities is only one element of how the local authority is involved in supporting such young people and their families. For example, earlier reference has been made to the work of the Cleveland Unit. By way of further illustration of support, officers are presently working alongside Gleneagles Resource Centre with a view to starting a girls group at Thorntree Community Centre for children with disabilities. Gleneagles is also actively involved in providing a support service to over 80 of the most disabled children and young people in Middlesbrough, in being able to provide emergency support to families in crisis and in supporting children in their own homes and in community facilities.

⁵ The scrutiny panel was later informed that if consideration is to be given to parents’ requirements during school holidays, there will be a need to recognise that the defined differences between playschemes and child care provision affect the requirements for registration with OFSTED, particularly for children under 8 years old.

72. The 'Disability Matters' Council Newsletter also publicises support and events which is available to parents/carers of children and young people with disabilities - such as soft play sessions, conferences and discussions, short breaks and funding opportunities.

CONCLUSIONS

73. Based on the evidence gathered in the scrutiny investigation the Panel concluded that:
1. In accordance with the Council's Play Policy, it is important that play provision is welcoming and accessible to every child. This principle applies equally across all play provision and services, including summer playschemes. Provision should therefore reflect all needs - including children with disabilities and children with complex needs.
 2. Although every effort is made to encourage children with disabilities to access and engage in mainstream playscheme provision, this may not always be possible due to the particular circumstances of each child, their parents' wishes or the level of support which may be needed. Also, some parents may simply consider that mainstream provision is not appropriate for their child's needs. Some children with complex needs/disabilities have, however, attended mainstream play schemes with assistance from their own carers or with specialised 1:1 support.
 3. Playscheme charges are not equitable in that the cost of attending the two non-Council playschemes for children with complex needs/disabilities (at Beverley School and Priory Woods School) is considerably higher than that at Council-run playschemes.
 4. The opportunity for qualifying organisations to provide additional playscheme provision for children with complex needs/disabilities through the Government's 'Aiming High' funding (despite the funding's temporary nature) is to be welcomed. However, at the time that this was examined by the scrutiny panel (July/August 2009) it was unclear what impact this funding might have in this area.
 5. Summer playscheme provision is only one element of support that the Council provides to families with children with complex needs and disabilities. It is important that families are aware of this alternative support and can access all other appropriate services/facilities.
 6. Training on disability awareness is made available to playscheme staff and is also provided in a wider-Council context for other relevant staff.
 7. There appears to be a match between the number of playscheme places for children with complex needs and disabilities and demand/requirements. The scrutiny panel found no evidence of unmet demand and concludes that current service provision (at both mainstream and specialist level) is adequate. However, the points raised by the Cleveland Unit in respect of the lack of specialist provision for under fives is noted as a possible issue.

RECOMMENDATIONS

74. Following the submitted evidence, and based on the conclusions above, the scrutiny panel's recommendations for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Board and the Executive are as follows:

1. That, given the mixed range of service provision and funding arrangements in respect of playschemes for children with complex needs and disabilities, a review is undertaken with a view to rationalising such provision. This should include how the two non-Council playschemes for children with complex needs/disabilities at Beverley School and Priory Woods School can be better supported by the authority - for example by assessing the existing budget split, or determining whether the authority can make provision to offer activities such as free sports (for example swimming with appropriate support) within and outside the current playschemes' operation. It should also investigate the possibility of providing some form of playscheme facilities for children with complex needs/disabilities who are under five.
2. That, within the constraints of the Aiming High funding regime, every effort is made to maximise the use of the funding to support playschemes for children with complex needs and disabilities - for example by encouraging relevant organisations to apply, assisting them with the application process and determining whether the requirement to offer new provision could be satisfied by offering playschemes in non-summer school holidays (subject to organisations wishing to do so).
3. That efforts are continued to encourage children with complex needs and disabilities to access mainstream playscheme provision - such as by further publicising opportunities that are available, publicising success stories in appropriate media such as Disability Matters and Middlesbrough News and by highlighting that 1:1 support is available for these groups of service users.
4. That Council Officers initiate discussions with NHS Middlesbrough (ie the former local Primary Care Trust) to ascertain whether that organisation can assist in any aspects of supporting playscheme provision for children with complex needs and disabilities.

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75. The scrutiny panel is grateful to everyone who has presented evidence and information during the course of this investigation and who assisted in its work. The panel would like to place on record its thanks for the willingness and co-operation of the following:

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- J Baxter - Respite Care Co-ordinator, Social Care
- J Callaghan - Sure Start Children's Services Locality Manager - Children, Families and Learning
- N Carden - Headteacher - Beverley School
- J Catron - Deputy Director: Achievement - Children, Families and Learning
- A Conway - Children, Families and Learning
- J Dalby - Team Manager, Social Care
- S Danks - Play Strategy and Development Manager, Children, Families and Learning
- C Duncan - Venues Manager, Leisure Services
- T Fewster Manager - Children Disabilities Services, Social Care
- D Fraser - Parent/ Chair and Fundraiser, Friends of Beverley School
- R Hutchinson, Playscheme Leader, Beverley School
- W Kelly - Voluntary Sector Liaison and Grants Manager, Children, Families and Learning
- A McDonald - Chair of the Davison Trust

(Cont....)

- L Morris - Development Activities Manager, Leisure Services
- N Pocklington - Deputy Director: Safeguarding, Children, Families and Learning
- J Robinson - Parent/Chair of Governors, Beverley School
- G Smith - Staff Member, Priory Woods School

BACKGROUND PAPERS

76. The following background papers were consulted or referred to in preparing this report:

- Minutes of Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel meetings held on 28 May, 29 June, 20 July, 13 August and 7 and 28 September 2009.
- Reports submitted to the above meetings.
- Notes of visit to Beverley School - 4 August 2009.
- 'Child's Play: A Play Policy and Strategy for the Children and Young People of Middlesbrough 2006-2011'

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