

**REPLY BY THE MINISTER OF
THE HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT
TO A QUESTION ASKED PURSUANT TO RULE 6 OF THE
RULES OF PROCEDURE BY DEPUTY A. H. ADAM**

Question 1

During 2012 HSSD decided to defer the services in relation to Family and Friends Care Arrangements, which had been one of the successful SSP bids of 2011. This service was aimed to support family and friends so that they are able to care for children and young people who are “looked after children”, and reduce the numbers of children needing to go into mainstream foster care, residential care or be adopted. Deferring the start may have slowed down the benefits, however these benefits would be delivered from 1 January 2013 when it was intended that this service would start.

Have these benefits been introduced?

Answer 1

In late 2010, the Health and Social Services Department agreed to introduce a **Family and Friends Care** allowance. The aim was to provide financial support to people who were caring for the child of a relative or friend, who was the subject of a care order.

It was accepted that a placement with a family member or friend tended to be preferable to putting a child in the care of the Department, and reflected the requirements of the Children Law. Formerly, if such a placement was at risk of breaking down due to the family’s financial situation, the only option available to HSSD was to assess the family as foster carers, if possible, and pay them a fostering allowance.

Not all families providing care could meet the criteria to be classed as foster carers, and thus access the associated financial support. However, it was felt that the skills and attributes needed to look after a wide range of foster children were different to those required to look after a child who was already well-known to the carer. As such, it was agreed that a simpler assessment process could be introduced for “family and friends care”. This would be matched with a lower rate of allowance.

This new “family and friends care” allowance would be available to a wider group of people who were looking after the children of relatives or friends. It was hoped that this would prevent placements breaking down for lack of financial support; or families needing to go through the assessment process to be classed as foster carers, purely in order to access that level of financial support.

Residence Orders were introduced following the new Children Law. These are court decisions about where and with whom a child should live. Again, the intention of a Residence Order is to ensure that a child is placed in the best possible situation, and does not have to

come into the care of the Department. In early 2011, HSSD agreed to introduce a means-tested allowance for Residence Orders.

Both allowances (Family and Friends Care and Residence Orders) were introduced in 2011, following the decisions of the HSSD Board. In the absence of States Strategic Plan funding in 2012 and 2013 (discussed in Question 2, below), the costs have so far been met from the fostering budget, which overspent in 2013 as a consequence.

Question 2

Why has there been no business case for access to monies agreed as a new service bid through the SSP process?

I would accept a delay in relation to constructing the Business Case and presenting it to T & R but would have expected this service to be considered a significant need and that it would by now have received the support previously agreed.

Answer 2

In November 2011, HSSD considered how to meet a £2.35m efficiency target which had been applied to the Department's 2012 budget as part of the Financial Transformation Programme. It was agreed to place an amendment to the Budget which would reduce this target to £1m, which the Department believed was achievable. However, HSSD also considered options for saving the additional £1.35m, should the amendment be unsuccessful. This included deferring the submission of business cases which would release the funding for the States Strategic Plan (SSP) bids which had been approved by the States the previous month – allowances for Family and Friends Care & Residence Orders, and the introduction of a short break (respite) service for adults with learning disabilities.

The amendment was unsuccessful, so the Department went ahead with its plans to save the full £2.35m. In June 2012, HSSD learned that the Treasury & Resources Department had decided that the deferred SSP bids would not count towards HSSD's efficiency target. However, it appears that the business cases were not submitted by HSSD then or later in 2012, to release funding immediately or for a 1 January 2013 start.

In late 2013, HSSD and T&R officers discussed the process for releasing the funding and agreed that the business cases would be updated and submitted for T&R's approval, in line with the original SSP process. It has taken some time to update and validate the cases but, at the time of drafting this response, HSSD is writing to the T&R Minister with business cases that will seek funding from the beginning of 2014.

It should be noted that HSSD has funded Family and Friends Care & Residence Order allowances since 2011, without SSP funding, and this has placed additional pressures on existing budgets; and that the Department has operated a limited short break service for adults with learning disabilities (discussed further below) since January 2013.

Question 3

Learning Disability Respite Care was a successful SSP bid in 2011, but was not started during 2012.

The existing service provided respite care for both children and adults in one site, which contravened the Children Law, however HSSD managed this by offering reduced respite so that children and adults did not mix.

On 9 September 2012 I was on the Sunday phone-in and questioned at length about Respite Care. On the following evening there was a meeting outlining developments for provision of respite care for those with learning disabilities.

This new service would provide for adults separately from children, and provide more appropriate care. Although deferring the start of the service until January 2013 would mean respite continued to be at reduced levels, there was the intention of increased service in 2013.

Have the provisions for respite care for adults with learning disabilities been increased?

Answer 3

Historically, HSSD provided short break (respite) care for both children and adults with learning disabilities at The Croft. Following the introduction of the Children Law, the Department needed to separate children’s services and adults’ services. Plans were made to develop separate short break facilities for adults, and HSSD made a successful SSP bid for the service in 2011.

As outlined in the answer to Question 2, above, submission of the business case was deferred. During 2012, HSSD continued to provide some respite care at The Croft for adults and children. In 2013, The Croft was restricted to children only, and HSSD has been working with adults with learning disabilities, and their families and carers, to provide alternative short break services. In the absence of SSP funding, it was only possible to provide a limited service, including some bed-based provision and some supported social activities, funded from the existing budget for the Adult Disability Service.

The Department’s revised business case should now enable HSSD to establish a full short break (respite) care service for adults with learning disabilities in 2014. This is expected to include access to short break services for adults on the learning disability register, who do not currently use it, through a more flexible and diverse service.

Over the past year, HSSD has worked closely with the adults who use short break care, and their families and carers, to develop the service; and will continue to do so in future. The Department is grateful to all those involved for their patience and engagement.

Question 4

Have the monies which were allocated under a successful SSP bid by the previous HSSD Board, been utilised for this service?

Answer 4

As explained in the answer to Question 2, above, HSSD has not yet received SSP funding for this service, following a decision of the former Board to defer the submission of the business case. The current service has been funded from the Department's existing budget.



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Date of Reply: 3rd March 2014

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