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Foreword

Speech, language and communication are crucial to every child's ability to succeed in life. SLCN can be primary, such as specific language impairments or a stammer, or secondary and related to another need like autistic spectrum disorders, hearing impairments or physical disabilities. By delivering universal and specialist services that best support children with SLCN, children with a diverse range of needs will better develop socially, succeed in education and get more out of life. As John Bercow MP pointed out in his review, early intervention for SLCN is essential to maximise a child's chance of success and avoid subsequent behavioural and other problems.

We want to support partnerships of commissioners, clinician and professionals who want to work together to improve services for this group of service users and their families. We are therefore pleased to be able to ask Children's Trusts, including Primary Care Trust (PCT) and local authority (LA) members, for expressions of interest in becoming pathfinders. We want the pathfinders to represent different types of areas across all regions in England with a mix of service provision already in place. We want to use them to show how every area can improve commissioning of services for children with SLCN.

This provides an opportunity for up to twenty areas to be at the forefront of efforts to improve services for children with SLCN. It gives your commissioning teams the opportunity to work together and develop new ways to help these children, developing skills that will serve them role across the Children's Services and commissioning agendas.

Enclosed is a full application pack which sets out details of the pathfinders and how to express an interest. We hope that you will use this chance to become a pathfinder as an opportunity to overcome the barriers to integration and achieve a demonstrable improvement for service users. A test of our success will be that the results achieved by these innovators inspire others to follow rapidly, learning from and implementing new approaches to provide the world class services that children and young people with SLCN, and their families, have every right to expect.

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Introduction

Background

In 2007, the Government commissioned John Bercow MP to conduct a review of services for children and young people with speech, language and communication needs (SLCNs). The Bercow Report¹, which included 40 recommendations covering a broad range of areas, was published in July 2008. A key theme of the report is that early identification and intervention is essential to maximise each child's chance of overcoming their communication need and succeeding. The review called on the Government to raise the profile of children with communication difficulties amongst local authorities and primary care trusts, who are responsible for commissioning services for children with SLCNs.

In addition, the report made a number of recommendations for better commissioning of services for children and young people with SLCN, including, the development of a joint framework for commissioners. Furthermore, the report recommended that this framework should be developed through a programme of pathfinders, to identify best practice and evidence to show how joint commissioning works well in a range of local areas.

The Government welcomed the publication of the Bercow Review and published *Better Communication*, the SLCN action plan, in December 2008. The Action Plan provides the Government's full response to the Bercow Report and is available at www.dcsf.gov.uk/slcnaaction. It sets out plans for a series of initiatives to improve services for children and young people with SLCN which culminate in the National Year of Speech, Language and Communication in 2011.

*Healthy lives, brighter futures*², the strategy for children and young people's health, confirms many of the commitments made in *Better Communication*, the SLCN Action Plan. In particular, plans for up to 20 local area pathfinders to develop a supplemental framework for services for children with SLCN, and work to develop commissioning models for children's equipment (to be piloted in 2009-10) which will include alternative and augmentative communication aids.

We are now inviting applications from innovative commissioning organisations who wish to become pathfinders to help inform the development of the joint commissioning framework. The pathfinders will test and evaluate ways in which services for children and young people with speech, language and communication needs can be effectively commissioned. Pathfinders may take the form of a children's trust but they will not be limited to a particular structural model.

This prospectus invites applications from prospective pathfinders, and sets out the scope of the programme and the process for selection.

The vision

The ability to communicate is an essential life skill for all children and young people in the twenty-first century. It is at the core of all social interaction. With effective communication skills, children can engage and thrive. Without them, children will struggle to learn, achieve,

¹ www.dcsf.gov.uk/slcnaaction

² http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_094400

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make friends and interact with the world around them. Speech, language and communication are central to each child's potential to be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and ultimately achieve economic well-being.

Our vision for children and young people with speech, language and communication needs, is that of timely access to an evidence-based range of interventions from a seamless continuum of services designed around the child and family so that children are able to realise their full potential in terms of educational attainment and their place in society as adults.

The Action Plan sets out initiatives across Government which support its aim to ensure the wellbeing of each child with SLCN and allow them to reach their full potential. This requires action to raise awareness of the importance of communication to children's development across the children's workforce, deliver universal services that promote language development and help commissioners plan and deliver targeted and specialist services for children with SLCN based on evidence of what works.

This pathfinders programme will demonstrate how commissioners can improve the provision and delivery of services for children with SLCN and develop tools and a joint commissioning framework to help them do that.

The intention is that the pathfinders will help to develop local integration, both in terms of commissioning and provision. The pathfinders will support local innovation, whilst also improving understanding of the impact that strong commissioning can have on improved outcomes and reduced inequalities, and the actions necessary to achieve world class commissioning for children and young people with SLCN, and their families. Links with CSP and ongoing evaluation during the lifetime of the programme will help create an information base to support sharing of innovation and learning, and develop an understanding of what works.

The pathfinders will benefit from being developed in conjunction with the Commissioning Support Programme which will help commissioning organisations plan, design and implement services more effectively by providing tailored support as and when Trust partners need it.

Deliverables and Outcomes

Objectives of the pathfinder programme

The specific objectives of the pathfinder programme are to

- Establish up to 20 pathfinders spanning health, education, social care and beyond
- Create an effective learning and support network for the pathfinders in order to accelerate their development, and improve their competence as commissioners
- Increase user participation in shaping services
- Establish a rigorous evaluation of the pathfinders, which adds to the current evidence base
- Disseminate and share widely the emerging learning from the pathfinders so as to encourage wider improvement in commissioning of SLCN services
- Develop a supplemental (to the children's health services joint commissioning framework) joint commissioning framework for children with SLCN. This framework will include models of good practice covering the development of the children's workforce to improve the delivery of services for children and young people with SLCN and local level commissioning of augmentative and alternative communication.
- Develop and share tested tools that support commissioners to improve SLCN services

Outcomes of the programme

The purpose of this programme is to **improve outcomes and experience for children and young people with speech, language and communication needs, and their families**, through:

- improved access for **all** children and young people with SLCN, and their families to a continuum of high quality, equitable and effective services that respond to their needs
- improved user satisfaction and reported outcomes
- improved partnerships in commissioning and care provision
- efficient use of resources and more effective and economic delivery systems

To support this, DH and DCSF will make available over £1.2m to the pathfinders for investment in SLCN commissioning. In addition, the Commissioning Support Programme will provide direct support to pathfinders to achieve the aims set out in their pathfinder proposals. This will take the form of expert input to all stages of the pathfinder, plus dedicated consultancy support for each pathfinder for them to use as they choose, drawing down from a menu of support in discussion with CSP. Options include planning, diagnostics, coaching, leadership development and stakeholder engagement. Pathfinders will also be invited to participate in national sharing and learning events, including a final showcase event to which other SLCN commissioners, SHAs, regional and national stakeholders will be invited to learn from the Pathfinders. The Commissioning Support Programme will link the pathfinders with the wider learning and development on commissioning, and will facilitate networking, discussion and learning between pathfinders via on-line communities of interest and Special Interest Groups.

There are also a series of specific deliverables **nationally** that will be overseen by the Commissioning Support Programme, drawing on the experience and expertise of the Pathfinders. Pathfinders will be invited to participate in their development. These are all commitments made by DH and DCSF in the response to the Bercow Review of Speech, Language and Communication Needs and include:

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- the development of a joint framework for commissioners for Children's Trusts (including LA and PCT partners) and schools, on the commissioning of a continuum of universal, targeted and specialist services for children and young people with SLCN across the age range 0-19. This framework would sit as a subset of the Child Health Strategy commissioning framework
- the creation of a checklist to help commissioners design, plan and implement their local commissioning for SLCN
- the design of an audit tool to help commissioners, in the context of the joint strategic needs assessment, to assess the range of needs to be met by universal, targeted and specialist services in their area.
- advice on developing skills and workforce capacity requirements
- advice on responsibilities for funding in complex cases
- activities to promote the importance of performance monitoring and the publication of information on quality
- building of a database of best practice in commissioning effective interventions for children and young people with different types of SLCN

Details of the Pathfinders

Framework for pathfinders:

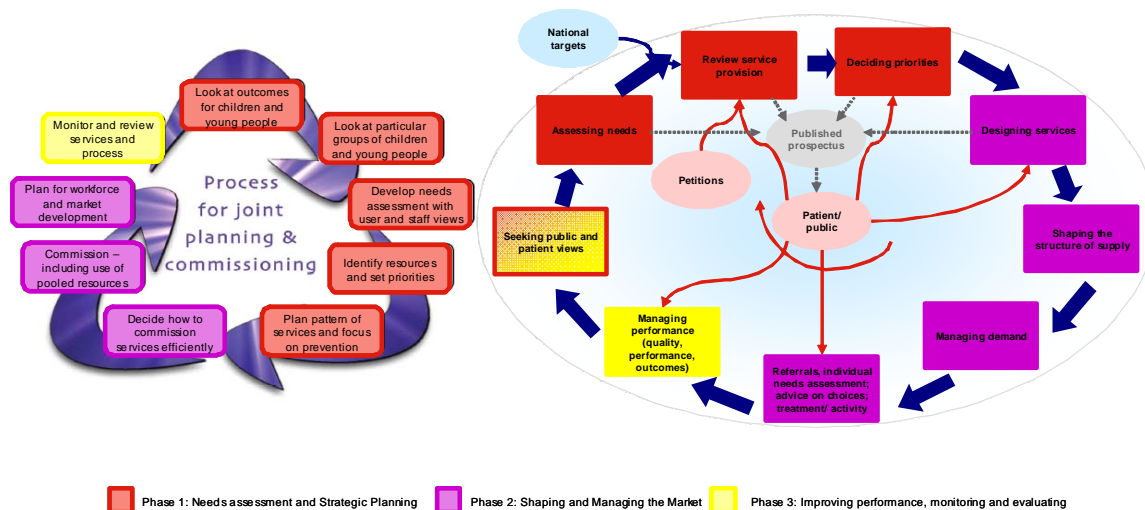
In order to deliver these outcomes we have developed a framework within which we would like pathfinders to sit. This is designed to support the generation of innovations and ideas within this complex area without being too prescriptive and restricting learning.

Three phases of commissioning aligned to the World Class Commissioning competencies are set out in *Securing Better Health for Children and Young People through World Class Commissioning: A guide to support delivery of Healthy Lives, Better Futures: The strategy for Children and Young People’s Health*³ and provide a framework for pathfinders. These are:

- Phase 1 – Needs assessment and strategic planning
- Phase 2 – Shaping and managing the market
- Phase 3 – Improving performance, monitoring and evaluating

Pathfinders should focus their project on one or more of these phases (see diagram overleaf and annex A), making clear how the proposal addresses the relevant competencies within the context of SLCN. Where the project itself does not fit this approach we would expect prospective pathfinders to demonstrate how they would deliver the outcomes set out in section 2. Annex A sets out the three phases in detail with some guidance on what pathfinders might focus on in each area. Further detail is available in *Securing Better Health for Children and Young People through World Class Commissioning*.

The phases of commissioning



Partnership and joint working

Partnership and joint working is not only crucial to SLCN but has been highlighted as one of the key blockages to improvement. Within the context of these three phases, we are

³ http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_094400

particularly interested in pathfinders that tackle some of the biggest challenges around partnerships including:

- Partnerships between local authorities and PCTs
- Partnerships between strategic commissioners ('macro' commissioning) and those working directly with families ('micro' commissioning)
- Partnerships that cross transitions (e.g. primary to secondary school, moving from one local area to another)
- Partnerships between commissioners, providers and practitioners particularly where this cuts across the 'medical' and 'social' models of provision
- 'Partnerships' between commissioners and children and their families, particularly children whose needs demand innovative approaches to engagement and 'listening'

Scope

The successful pathfinders will need to demonstrate a willingness to develop world class joint commissioning arrangements and processes which address the needs of children and young people with SLCNs and their families. Successful pathfinders will need to demonstrate a focus on innovation and joint working, leading to improvements in outcomes, reductions in inequalities, and improvements in quality and levels of satisfaction.

Using the framework outlined above, proposals should set out how the prospective pathfinders plan to meet the world class commissioning competencies, and tackle the key challenges that these present. Across the above three phases, the approaches that pathfinders will take are likely to vary and include different partnership arrangements, varied levels of engagement with providers and a mix of approaches to engaging with children with SLCN and their families. They are likely to explore different types of financial agreements and arrangements and a range of measures of success. We welcome this variety – we are keen to learn from a range of approaches.

Criteria for selection

Applications will be assessed against a number of criteria. The key areas that prospective pathfinders will need to demonstrate in their initial application are:

- a clearly articulated approach to the scope of the proposed pathfinder including identifying the problem (and how it relates to the objectives and outcomes outlined above), the hypothesised solution and the expected outcomes
- evidence that the proposal addresses a local need (based on robust joint assessment)
- track record of effective partnership working with clear roles and responsibilities
- strong clinical and professional engagement
- clear tools and approaches to monitoring, evaluating and learning, including good data systems and proposals for how outcomes will be measured
- robust project management and good governance
- a clear plan for sustainability once pathfinder funding and support ends

In particular, we will expect successful pathfinders to possess or demonstrate a willingness to develop and test:

- use of evidence based interventions and good practice
- commitment to skills development
- cost-effective use of resources
- working towards the world class commissioning competencies (for health providers)

National requirements

In addition to local piloting activity, we will expect all pathfinders to confirm their commitment to participate in the national components of this programme including:

- national evaluation, which will include collection of data against local and national measures
- collaboration and commitment to data collection and sharing of data to support measurement and evaluation
- Participation in national events to be developed by the Commissioning Support Programme

Selection process

Number and scale of pathfinders

The number of pathfinders will be dependent on the quality of proposals received, but will be no more than 20. There will be no upper or lower limit on the number of users/ population covered by the service commissioned. In order to encourage innovation we are prepared to consider waiving or amending the application of some aspects of the principles and rules for cooperation and competition but only if the scheme is truly innovative and demonstrates real potential to improve outcomes. Any relaxation of these rules or principles will need to be requested and agreed in advance with the Department of Health and the Cooperation and Competition Panel.

Within the constraints of applications received, we will ensure a breadth of pathfinders around:

- Geography – a mix of urban, suburban and rural pathfinders across the country. We will also look at balancing those areas with co-terminus boundaries with those who have different boundaries as evidence suggests this can impact on partnerships and pathways.
- Range of provision – a balance between universal, targeted and specialist provision
- Specific groups –
 - Meeting the needs of secondary aged children
 - considering a regional approach to commissioning some types of Alternative/Augmentative Communication (AAC) resources and for other low incidence, high cost conditions
 - meeting the SLCN of young people in the Youth Justice System
 - children with Specific Language Impairment (SLI).

In order to obtain a sufficient range of pathfinders to address these areas, and in particular the specific groups outlined above, there may be additional moderation to ensure appropriate spread.

Selection Process

There will be a competitive process in order to select the successful pathfinders. Each applicant will be assessed against the criteria described above. Proposals should set out a clearly articulated approach to the scope above, and to the specifics of the pathfinder including identifying the problem (and how it relates to the objectives and outcomes outlined above), the hypothesised solution and the expected outcomes.

Pathfinder selection will involve a two stage process. Stage one will comprise 2 bidder workshops on **14th April 2009 in London and 28th April 2009 in Birmingham**. Please email worldclasscommissioning@dh.gsi.gov.uk to book your place, stating which one you wish to attend, and confirming that your Director of Children's Services and PCT Director of Commissioning are willing to consider putting in an application. The workshops will go through the criteria and provide some facilitated time to shape applications.

Written applications should be submitted by the end of **Monday 18th May 2009** to worldclasscommissioning@dh.gsi.gov.uk. Stage two will involve a review of the applications, at national and regional level, with an announcement by **mid-July 2009**. There will also be a

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joint RCSLT/ DH/ DCSF conference on 2nd June 2009 where proposed pathfinders can develop their thinking further in preparation for implementation.

Where prospective pathfinders have well-developed proposals and a clear and robust approach for data collection and measurement, they will be encouraged to start at an earlier stage.

The application form is included as an attachment to this prospectus. The application form should be completed with particular attention to the word limits attached to each question. Application forms which are incomplete or in which word limits are exceeded may be discounted.

Funding available

DH and DCSF will make available over £1.2m for pathfinders for the two-year duration of the project. The amount of funding available for each pathfinder will depend on the number of pathfinders established. Funding cannot be used to support the costs of direct care, and a clear plan will be needed for use of the funding prior to its release. Suggestions for use of this funding include

- providing project management and administrative support,
- freeing up professionals' time to participate in the project,
- engaging with service users,
- development of commissioning tools,
- data collection, analysis and
- communication about the project.

Roles and responsibilities

Pathfinders will determine the precise model they wish to adopt and the specific commissioning approach and interventions they wish to measure. Pathfinders will be responsible for the implementation for their schemes as set out in their application, including:

- All aspects of pathfinder governance
- Effective project management and risk management, including cooperation with the Commissioning Support Programme as the national support provider
- Clinical, professional and corporate leadership
- Customer and other stakeholder engagement, liaison and communication
- Sound financial management
- Collection and reporting of required data
- Attendance at and contribution to workshops, and the three national events
- Cooperation with the Commissioning Support Programme, including freeing up staff time to participate in interviews and other evaluative methods over the course of the two years
- Making available financial information required in order to evaluate costs and financial benefits
- Performing Equality Impact Assessments on proposals in line with current legislation

The **Commissioning Support Programme** will provide direct support to each of the pathfinders. They will support pathfinders individually as well as bringing pathfinders together to support and accelerate their learning. They will manage data aggregation and reporting at the whole programme level, based on minimum data set submissions by the pathfinders. They will prepare material for transmission to interested stakeholders. They will work with pathfinders to develop the joint commissioning framework as well as the other national outputs listed in section 2.

The Department of Health will work with the Department of Children, Schools and Families to manage the work of the Commissioning Support Programme on this SLCN commissioning pathfinders project. CSP will be accountable for the progress of the project to the Disabled Children Programme Board (jointly chaired by Directors in DH and DCSF). The Disabled Children Programme Board is in turn responsible to the Child Health and Wellbeing Board (which is responsible for the delivery of PSA12).

A subgroup of the Communication Council will be formed to provide a stakeholder advisory group to the project. As well as representatives of the Council, the subgroup will include representatives of the pathfinders and other stakeholders with an interest in commissioning.

Annex A – Phases of commissioning and application to pathfinders

Phase 1: Needs assessment and strategic planning

World Class Commissioning Competencies	
✓ Locally lead the NHS	Stimulate the market
✓ Work with community partners	Promote improvement and innovation
✓ Engage with the public and patients	Secure procurement skills
✓ Collaborate with clinicians	✓ Manage the local health system
✓ Manage knowledge and assess needs	Make sound financial investments
✓ Prioritise investment	

What is this phase:

This phase is about understanding the current **outcomes** and needs of local children and families – as well as **potential needs** in the future. This includes both clinical needs and wider needs around access, support and information. The most robust needs assessments are built from a combination of quantitative and qualitative data.

This phase is then about translating a robust assessment into strategic planning – what are Children’s Trust partners going to do in response to the assessment. This might include commissioning different services, decommissioning long-standing services, working in partnership with other Children’s Trusts locally, regionally or nationally, investing in training and skills development etc. The key is a strategic plan firmly located in the needs assessment.

What we might see from pathfinders:

We are aware that formal processes of needs assessment – particularly those that inform the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and the Children and Young People’s plan mean that significant strategic planning may have already taken place in this area.

Pathfinders do not need to revisit this full process but may instead look at the detailed needs assessment and planning for children and families with SLCNs both as a group and for individual children and their families. For example, pathfinders may explore new ways of delving into the needs of individual children and families, or particular types of SLCNs, or indeed groups of children and families with additional needs such as those with English as a second language.

Pathfinders may consider new partnerships or approaches to collecting information and making assessments at both the individual and more global level.

In terms of strategic planning pathfinders may consider new ways of engaging with parents and children in this process or indeed how providers and other service partners are part of the planning and not just the delivery process.

Pathfinders who are focusing on this area should be innovative and ambitious in understanding needs and translating these into robust and coherent strategies.

Phase 2: Shaping and managing the market

World Class Commissioning Competencies	
✓ Locally lead the NHS	✓ Stimulate the market
✓ Work with community partners	✓ Promote improvement and innovation
✓ Engage with the public and patients	✓ Secure procurement skills
✓ Collaborate with clinicians	✓ Manage the local health system
Manage knowledge and assess needs	✓ Make sound financial investments
✓ Prioritise investment	

What is this phase:

This phase is about translating strategic plans into reality – working in partnership to encourage and enable current and potential providers to respond flexibly and creatively. Children’s trusts should already be encouraging a strong and diverse provider market with possibility of entry from new participants and growth from underdeveloped sources of supply including social enterprises. In many cases this is about contracting and procuring, but in other cases it may be about investment in training, provision of services to support innovation and development and decommissioning provision that no longer contributes to priorities or is no longer based on best evidence.

What we might see from pathfinders:

Pathfinders who choose to focus in this area may explore new approaches to managing the market – working in new forms of partnerships locally, sub-regionally or regionally. Where the needs assessment suggests particular service gaps, pathfinders may develop new ways of working with existing or potential providers to re-structure or refocus services. Pathfinders may choose to focus on developing a particular sector (e.g. the third sector or social enterprises).

This is often a very challenging phase for Children’s Trust partners as the skills and tools needed for market-making and market managing are specialised and complex. Pathfinders may choose to focus on developing and then deploying their own skills in these areas. .

Pathfinders who are focusing on this area should be innovative and ambitious in building a rich and vibrant provider base that responds effectively to the SLCNs of children and families.

Phase 3: Improving performance, monitoring and evaluating

World Class Commissioning Competencies	
✓ Locally lead the NHS	Stimulate the market
✓ Work with community partners	Promote improvement and innovation
✓ Engage with the public and patients	Secure procurement skills
✓ Collaborate with clinicians	✓ Manage the local health system
✓ Manage knowledge and assess needs	Make sound financial investments
✓ Prioritise investment	

What is this phase:

This phase is about ascertaining if investment has been effective and making decisions based on outcomes. It is about regular monitoring of, performance, intervening early when outcomes may suffer and making changes to the next strategic plan based on these experiences. Performance should be assessed against specific national and local standards as well against contractual agreements and outcomes.

Performance assessment is not only about looking at outcomes (or outputs as proxy where necessary) but also about assessing whether there are the right skills and tools to deliver effectively and whether or not resources and funds are being used as effectively and efficiently as possible.

What might we see from pathfinders:

In this area pathfinders might explore new approaches to performance monitoring and improvement, particularly around partnership with providers or other commissioners. Pathfinders may also look to be particularly innovative in engaging children with SLCN and their families in the performance monitoring, review and improvement process. Pathfinders may also look to test new approaches to responding to performance management information including skills development, peer support and peer improvement etc.

Pathfinders who are focusing on this area should be innovative and ambitious around assessing performance and responding to the findings.

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