

## 8.8 BMG/SEN: Funding for Communication Aids and AAC



### Progress Report 12/2/19

This progress report is to provide BMG with an update regarding the enquiries being made regarding the provision of communication aids and AAC. Unfortunately, the work has not yet been completed as there will need to be a meeting with CCG Children's Commissioner to consider the threshold for health funded provision of communication aids.

#### **Focus of this work:**

To review the pathway and funding arrangements (including the allocation of top up funding) for:

- The provision of communication aids
- The provision of Augmentative and Alternative Communication Aids (AAC)

#### **Background**

There are many elements that contribute and enable a child/young person to access their educational environment supporting their learning and development. Communication and AAC aids form part of this and are vital for those that require it. Effective management and access to these aids can positively effect a child's physical, cognitive, psychological and social development.

AAC is the term used to describe various methods of communication that can 'add-on' to speech and language development when an impairment (physical and/or cognitive in nature) has been identified. The aids can help address the impact on everyday function and interaction within a person's environment and should be used to support effective communication alongside clearly identified Speech and Language (SLT) development goals. Some individuals are unable to access daily methods of communication in a meaningful way and require specialist levels of AAC aids to support and enable effective communication the majority or all of the time.

There are different types of AAC aids including low level systems, as well as more complex techniques and systems involving computer technology and complex software (see appendix A).

#### **Current Process and Expectation on Educational Settings**

Assessment to identify communication impairment will initially be carried out by the local SLT service. This will identify the level of need and form a clinical basis to any recommendation of communication aids or onward referral for a more specialist assessment.

### **a. Low Tech Communication Aids**

Recommendation of low-tech or light tech devices should be supported through locally commissioned SLT services. This level of need is likely to account for 90% of those with an identified communication impairment.

There is currently no pathway for trial or funding of these lower tech communication aids. Where possible, local SLT services utilise charity support to access some items but also rely on privately purchased personal devices and app/software purchases.

The expectation on schools would be to purchase these lower level communication aids through school funding allocation, or banded top up funding (where there is an EHCP) due to the individual nature of the aids and software required.

### **b. High Tech Communication Aids**

Identification of complex communication impairment requiring further assessment through nationally commissioned specialist AAC services will initially be supported through local SLT services. Referral for specialist assessment would be made to Bristol Communication Aid Services (BCAS)

Recommendation, funding, provision and upkeep of high-tech devices including specialist communication software designed to meet complex need is supported through this national service.

## **Analysis of Need and Spend**

There has previously been a tripartite funding pathway in Plymouth. However, from enquiries it is evident that this is no longer in operation. The spend over the past 2 years has been as follows:

### **National SLT Funded Items**

- 5 High Tech AAC aid systems assessed, funded & provided via the NHS England commissioned regional pathway.  
This includes but is not exclusively 'Eye Gaze' activated systems.

### **High Needs Block (via SMAP)**

- 1 request (in past 24 months) for individual seating/accessories for mounting and use of the AAC aid that had been provided through BCAS following OT assessment.

Information from LivewellSW SLT Service for past 2 years:

### **Charity Funded Items**

Applications supported via assessment from local SLT service.

- Charity purchases - mainly via CALL SW  
10 x iPad @ £319 each - **£3190**  
10 x Cases @ £90 each - **£900**

10 x 2 year apple care (cost not confirmed as CALL South West have a 'blanket' cover policy)

6 x Software (Proloquotogo) @ £250 each - **£1500**

1 x Software (Grid for IPAD) £350 - **£350**

2 x Software (PECS IV) @ £80 each - **£160**

1 x Software (Grid 2) £480 - **£480**

**Total - £6580**

### **Schools Funded Items**

Applications supported via assessment from local SLT service.

- Specialist school purchases (3 schools consulted to date)
  - 3 x Ipad plus software (PEP funded) @ £319 each - **£957**
  - 3 x Cases @ £90 each - **£270**
  - 3 x Software @ £250 each - **£750**
  - 20 x Ipad (school funded) @ £319 each - **£6380**
  - 20 x Cases @ £90 each – **£1800**
  - 20 x Software @ £250 each - **£5000**

**Total - £15,157**

These IPADS are dedicated communication devices – not used for educational games or access to learning etc. - the schools have additional equipment for this purpose.

Within one school there is a single dedicated IPAD with 'Proloquotogo' specialist communication software which is being used for trial which is coordinated by a local SLT. This is being shared between 6 students who are in different classes and therefore offers little access to the therapeutic modelling that is essential for developing the skills to enable successful and meaningful communication of either the students or the supporting staff.

### **Questions**

Sustainability for current system:

- Clarify the NHS England and NEW Devon CCG expectation around the funding arrangements for communication aids in the future. Is the Bristol Communication Aid Service able to provide sustainable funding for the next period?

Profiling need and demand:

- Are we able to predict the requirement for low-tech communication aids that are required classroom through local data? (link to the Balance System data work being undertaken).

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