

**ANGUS COUNCIL**

**EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

**10 OCTOBER 2000**

**WITHDRAWAL OF FUNDING BY TAYSIDE UNIVERSITY HOSPITALS NHS TRUST  
FOR OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY EQUIPMENT USED BY SPECIAL NEEDS PUPILS IN SCHOOLS**

**REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION**

**ABSTRACT**

**This report advises members of a decision made by Tayside University Hospitals NHS Trust to discontinue funding for the purchase of occupational therapy Hoists and Slings to be used in schools by pupils with physical disabilities.**

**1. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the Education Committee

- a) notes the terms of this report;
- b) instructs the Director of Education to write to the Chairman of Tayside University Hospitals NHS Trust to request an urgent meeting to discuss this matter;
- c) instructs the Director of Education to liaise with colleagues in Dundee and Perth & Kinross with a view to identifying common difficulties which the Health Trust's unilateral decision has caused;
- d) instructs the Director of Education to write to Mr Peter Peacock, Deputy Minister for Children and Education, who is currently chairing a national enquiry into the provision for pupils with special educational needs with a request for ministerial guidance on the issue of funding for the purchase of specialist equipment and for a commitment from central government to fund appropriately the needs of children with physical disabilities.

**2. INTRODUCTION**

- 2.1 This item has been raised for consideration as the result of the unilateral decision taken by Tayside University Hospitals NHS Trust to change a well-established practice for the support of physically disabled children in schools. A letter dated 11 August 2000 confirms the Trust's position (Appendix). The Trust did not seek views on this matter but has decided without consultation to move responsibility for what is a health-related issue to another public body.

**3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The Council is committed to a policy of social inclusion and children with a wide range of physical disabilities and mobility problems are educated in their local schools wherever possible. This positive approach to inclusion, and the quality of provision in Angus schools for children with special needs is a feature which is endorsed and passed in all published reports on schools by Her Majesty's Inspectorate.
- 3.2 Some children, however, have physical support needs which require more specialised provision than that which can be found in their local schools and this extra support is mainly provided in resourced schools by training and care staff who have access to hoisting equipment.

- 3.3 Since the Council was formed such hoisting equipment has been provided by the Health Service and is currently funded by Tayside University Hospitals NHS Trust. Hoisting equipment is expensive and an installation for one child can typically cost in the area of £4,000 – £5,000. Trust staff are currently engaged on an exercise to prepare projected needs and costs but this information is not yet available. It should be noted, however, that twenty three pupils in Angus need this type of support and manual handling and lifting by council staff is proscribed by occupational therapists for health and safety reasons.
- 3.4 In August of this year the department was advised that the Trust was not in a financial position to continue funding the provision of hoists and slings for use solely in schools although it would continue to provide these items for home use (see Appendix). These items of equipment are large and heavy and cannot be easily transported.
- 3.5 From an admittedly parochial perspective it appears that the Trust is simply washing its hands of any liability in this matter and passing on the costs to be borne by another public sector service without any form of dialogue or consultation. This is not only unacceptable but, arguably, irresponsible. Whilst the need for the Trust to make economies in the light of its significant budget difficulties is recognised, the economies which are being proposed will be potentially damaging to some of the most vulnerable children we have in our schools.
- 3.6 This unilateral decision leaves the Council in a no-win situation. Failure to provide resources for children in school will attract severe criticism but the amount of funding required for this exercise - which will require to be drawn from departmental priorities already described in the service plan - will have a deleterious effect on many other projects. Regrettably, this will be a recurring problem as new referrals are made every session. Also, children outgrow hoists and slings and there is the inevitable wear and tear associated with this type of equipment.
- 3.7 Despite recent discussions with senior managers in the Health Service it is clear that the decision to cease funding for equipment purchase is firm. This, however, sits at marked variance with the guidance provided for parents in the Scottish Office publication "A Parents' Guide to Special Educational Needs: Raising the Standard, Citizen's Charter".

***Do I have to Pay for Special Equipment?***

***No. Personal equipment such as wheelchairs, walking aids, spectacles and hearing aids are supplied by the health board free of charge for children who need them. Special equipment supplied to support an educational programme, such as a communication aid, may be paid for by the education authority. If there is any difficulty, discuss this with your authority or health board. Your named person may also be able to help you to get anything your child needs for school or social life.***

#### **4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The financial implications cannot be detailed until such time as Tayside University Hospitals NHS Trust finalises its projections. However, it is clear that substantial sums of money, estimated to be in the order of £50,000, will be required on an annual basis.

#### **5. CONSULTATION**

In accordance with the Standing Orders of the Council, this report has been the subject of consultation with the Chief Executive, Director of Finance, the Director of Housing and the Director of Law & Administration.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

- 1) The Council may well face considerable difficulties as a result of this unilateral change in policy by Tayside University Hospitals NHS Trust. Although the immediate implications are for the education department there is also a strong possibility that other service departments will experience problems.
- 2) This issue requires to be addressed at a local level to achieve an interim solution to the problem.
- 3) Guidance, and additional ring-fenced funding, will be required from central government otherwise the Council may well be placed in a situation where current services may have to be reduced in order to meet this new and unplanned expenditure.

**Jim Anderson**  
**Director of Education**

**NOTE:** No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above Report.