

1 September 2003

**Aids and Adaptations: Review
Report**

Report of Head of Overview and Scrutiny

Purpose of Report

1. To up-date the Sub-Committee about the latest review of the Aids and Adaptation Service in the County.

Background

2. A Scrutiny Group, in December 2000, made recommendations about improvements in the Aids and Adaptations Service in relation to the following areas:-
 - Overall co-ordination – One Stop Shop
 - Joint Working, improved tracking of equipment, clarification of eligibility criteria and standards
 - Pooled budgets and One Stop packages for Occupational Therapy Services
 - Regular reviews of waiting times and dissemination of good practice
 - Building up effective networks for users
3. A number of review meetings have taken place with representatives of the Service Users and Carers who assisted Members with the original investigation.
4. The latest meeting took place on 1st July and was attended by eight representatives of the Service Users and Carers, nineteen Council Members and one District Council Officer.
5. John Thornberry, Head of Adult Commissioning in the Social Services Department, gave a progress report. He explained that, in terms of performance indicators, the delivery of items costing less than £1,000 delivered within three weeks had moved from 72.6% in 1999/2000 when the investigation first started to a current figure of 92%. The target for the current year is 95%. It was clear that this was a significant improvement which made a difference to service users.
6. The improvements in the Home Equipment Loan Service were explained by Paul Allison, Manager of the Service. There had been considerable improvements in the 'recycle rates' of equipment when it

was no longer required by service users. In some areas, such as decontamination, the service was recognised as a centre of excellence.

7. A backlog of bath lifts had recently been tackled and referrals for Occupational Therapy assessments had generally improved. The recruitment of two new Occupational Therapy staff for Easington should address issues in that area.
8. The development of the Joint Eligibility Criteria was currently subject to consultation. John Thornberry pointed out that one person in five in the County would be in receipt of an aids and adaptations service. Currently, there were 800 referrals a week. This underlined both the pressures on the service and its importance to people in the County.
9. Jane Hartley from Newton Aycliffe Pioneering Care Partnership explained the vision from the Community Equipment Board about the Aids and Adaptations Service. The aim was to have some simple information leaflets for service users to assist them in accessing facilities. This would be in addition to local home independence shops providing smaller equipment and information about purchasing equipment at affordable rates. Specialist demonstration and assessment resource centres were planned in North and South Durham which it was hoped could be operational across the County by mid-2004. Preliminary planning and recruitment of key staff would commence shortly with common standards and procedures in place next year.

Views from Service Users and Carers

10. The improvements in the service were recognised but a number of individual examples of difficulties and delays were explained by service users which demonstrated the importance of continually seeking to improve this vital service. A particular theme was the need for communication to service users if there were to be delays in provision of services. It was noted that some services were provided by District and Borough Councils, some by the County Council and some by the Health Authorities. The services were becoming more joined up but there was still a need to increase co-ordination.
11. County Council Members pointed out their role in assisting service users when difficulties arose. It was also noted that when there were staffing difficulties, there was an immediate impact upon the quality of service.
12. Michael White from the Service Users and Carers Forum pointed out that he was fully involved with the developments of the service through the Community Equipment Board. He suggested that perhaps a fast track team should be introduced for the more difficult cases.
13. Service users again emphasised the importance of a 'One Stop Shop' so that one contact with the authorities should unlock the comprehensive services needed rather than being directed to different

service providers. John Thornberry pointed out the dilemma of balancing increased demand with realistic resources.

14. One of the service users explained how many initiatives appeared to be beneficial in theory but needed to be applied in practice. For example, the opportunity of using equipment on a trial basis would be a useful innovation. This would provide an opportunity of ensuring that the equipment was, in fact, suitable for the client.
15. Concern was expressed about the needs of the visually impaired particularly in the light of the new criteria to be introduced by the County Council and a request was made for their interests to be taken fully into account. It was suggested that very little community equipment would be available free of charge for visually impaired people. Other issues raised were the need for accessible information for visually impaired people including audio cassette versions as well as large print and Braille, the inappropriateness of occupational therapy support and the duplication of facilities by the County Durham Society for the Blind and Partially sighted at their resource centre in Durham City and the facilities being developed at the Pioneering Care Centre.
16. The possibility of service users feeding back their views about specialist equipment was raised and this appeared to have support.

Summary of Views from the Service Users and Carers

17. John Thornberry indicated that he would take away from the meeting five good ideas to consider in terms of improvement of the service:-
 - A fast track team to deal with difficult or complex cases
 - The need to improve communications with service users particularly where there might be delays
 - The possibility of using equipment on a trial basis to ensure that it was suitable
 - The need to address backlogs
 - The possibility of introducing a 'feedback' from service users about specialist equipment.

Recommendation

18. The meeting with Service Users and Carers was again quite a challenging experience for the officers managing this service. **Members wished to revisit this service again in approximately six months' time.** This would provide the opportunity to assess progress against the vision explained by the officers. The debate with service users had also provided five potential ways in which the service could be improved which, in itself, demonstrated the benefit of this open debate.

Background Papers

Reports from the officers to the Scrutiny Group.

Contact: Ian Mackenzie Tel: 0191 383 3506

ATTENDANCE LIST – 1ST JULY 2003**Present**

COUNCILLOR NICHOLLS in the Chair

Members

Councillors Armstrong, Blenkinsopp, Douthwaite, Ebbatson, Firby, E. Foster, Graham, Mrs. Hunter, Hunter, Langham, Marshall, Priestley, Rodgers, Scott, Stradling, Thompson, Trippett and Watson.

Presenters:

Paul Allison, Jane Hartley, John Thornberry, Mike Smith (Team Manager)

Service Users and Carers

Graham Livesey, Paul Kaye, Michael White, K. McGillillian, B. Edwards, Linda Curtis, D. Crosby, P. Morphet.

Durham City Council

Barbara Gow.