

Scrutiny Sub-Committee to Promote Strong, Healthy and Safe Communities

5 June 2006



Aids and Adaptations Service

Report of Head of Overview and Scrutiny

Purpose of Report

1. To explain that a further review meeting with Service Users and Carers has taken place to consider progress in relation to the Aids and Adaptations Service.

Background

2. The Scrutiny members identified the Aids and Adaptations Service as a key element of improving independence for County Durham residents. When this Service was investigated over three years ago, there was a recognised need to improve the Service in a number of areas to make it more responsive to Service User and Carer needs.
3. On a regular basis, Scrutiny members have met with Service Users and Carers to review progress. At the last meeting there was a request that the review include Sensory Impairment. The latest meeting took place on the 12th May 2006.
4. **SENSORY IMPAIRMENT**

The representatives for the County Durham Society for the Blind indicated that they would like the County Council to provide more assistance in seeking funding for key equipment which is particularly important to people with impaired sight but is not available from the County Council.

In addition, there is still a need to join up these services provided to those with sight impairment. The County Durham Society pointed out that the National Health Service uses a different assessment than the County Council in relation to individuals. There has been a common theme for some years to seek to clarify and simplify the process. Reference was also made to the super nova initiative introduced in the County Durham libraries. Whilst this was beneficial for people with sight impairment, there was a need to address the training needs of staff in the library to make sure that this facility was fully used.

5. OTHER TYPES OF AIDS AND ADAPTATIONS

5.1 INEQUALITY OF SERVICE

The main concern was that there was inequality of service across the County. There was no waiting list in Derwentside and yet in Easington and Sedgfield areas, there was a considerable waiting list for an assessment. The Scrutiny members were particularly concerned that this needed to be addressed urgently. It was appreciated that there were resource issues but it was also unclear why services in one area of the County were significantly different than in other parts of the County. This was particularly relevant bearing in mind the government guidance that there should be 'fair access to care'.

5.2 INTEREST FREE LOANS

The suggestion of interest-free loans for individuals who did not qualify for services from the County Council was raised and would be considered.

5.3 FIRE ALARMS

The issue of fire alarms and smoke alarms for those with hearing impairment was raised. There was an effective scheme in place under the heading of 'First Alert' in conjunction with the Fire Service and District Councils. However, not all District Councils were involved in this scheme and the Scrutiny members, again from an equity point of view, would like to be assured that all residents in County Durham who have significant hearing impairment have the opportunity to be included in this important scheme to protect their welfare. There was also an issue about how information was provided to members of the public about this scheme.

5.4 TELEPHONE REPORTING OF INCIDENTS

There was also concern expressed about the difficulties of reporting issues about clients over the telephone to the adult service. The officers explained that this is an issue which has been raised recently and improvements have been introduced. The response of the County Council to telephone enquiries is a key factor in the way in which the Council's services are perceived. The service needs to be of a high standard and supportive of those people who are using services.

5.5 SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT

Ken Ibbotson, the Chair of the Service Users and Carers Forum, indicated that, at the end of the meeting, the service level agreement between the Forum and the County Council was coming to an end and that, therefore, this would be the last meeting of its type between the Scrutiny members and the Forum. The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee indicated that he would explore the reasons for this decision.

Recommendation

6. You are asked to note this report.

Contact: Ian Mackenzie Tel: 0191 383 3506

Attendance List- Meeting held on 12 May 2006.

Scrutiny Members Present

Councillors Armstrong, Barker, Douthwaite, Gray, Nicholls (Chair), Southwell, Wade and Williams.