

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 5 November 2015

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, People and Economy

PORTFOLIO: Health and Wellbeing

SUBJECT: Cessation of Talking Books Service

WARD(S) Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To seek Executive Board approval to withdraw subscriptions to the Talking Books service offered by the Royal National Institute for the Blind.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That Executive Board approve the phased withdrawal of subscriptions to the Talking Books Service.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 At its 20th November 2014 meeting Executive Board agreed (Minute EXB90) to recommend to Council, budget savings for 2015/16 which included £50,000 from the restructure of vision rehabilitation services. Work is ongoing to deliver this saving which included £20,000 relating to the talking books service.

3.2 Historically assessments of need relating to visual impairment have included referrals to the Royal National Institute for the Blind Talking Book Service to reduce loneliness and isolation. Talking Books is not a statutory service though around 150 people hold a subscription for which the Council meets the annual cost of £50 per person, £7,500 in total.

3.3 Developments in technology have increased options for everyone to access a wide range of free and purchased audio books and magazines and alternatives such as screen reading software. In addition Halton Library Service offers a range of e-books and audio books and can arrange delivery through volunteers to a person's home.

3.4 These lower cost alternatives are now promoted during a person's assessment of need and rehabilitation. No referrals from Adult Social Care to the RNIB Talking Books service have been made over the last two years and this has contributed to savings achieved to date of £12,500.

3.5 The range of alternatives has prompted a review of the continuation of Council funded subscriptions to the Talking Books service. Executive Board are requested to support a phased withdrawal of this service by not renewing individual subscriptions as they end over the year achieving further savings of £7,500. Those affected will be advised of their options and this will be managed by:

- Writing to all users informing them of the change and advising them of the range of options (which will include personal subscription to Talking Books). A stamped addressed envelope will be included for them to return a slip indicating which choice they are setting up.
- Record receipt of replies returned
- Setup review activities on Carefirst for each person, particularly those who have not replied
- The Council Vision Rehabilitation Officers to contact people by phone at review date (set 4 weeks before the end of their subscription period) to establish what alternatives if any they have put in place and ensuring that they are aware of the changes.
- Any support required with completing alternative subscription forms will be referred to Vision Support as part of their Council funded outreach services
- If this decision presents extreme difficulties for a person then an individual response will be considered

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 None identified

5.0 **OTHER/FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 The Directorate's budget for the Talking Books Service was offered up in 2015/16 as part of the Council's budget savings. Withdrawal of the service is the final phase to contribute £20,000 to the required saving in vision rehabilitation services of £50,000.

6.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

6.1 **Children & Young People in Halton**
None identified

6.2 **Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton**

None identified

6.3 **A Healthy Halton**

None identified

6.4 **A Safer Halton**

None identified

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 As this proposal relates to a withdrawal of a service there is a risk that if approved there may be a legal challenge to the decision. The actions outlined above which include informing people of their options and following up on their choices will mitigate against this risk.

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 These will be considered on an individual basis during the review activity outlined above (3.5) to ensure those with visual impairment are not being disadvantaged.

9.0 **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

None under the meaning of the Act.