

**REPORT TO:** Executive Board

**DATE:** 14 March 2024

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Executive Director, Adults

**PORTFOLIO:** Adult Social Care

**SUBJECT:** Halton Integrated Sensory Support Service

**WARD(S):** Borough-wide

## 1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To reflect on the performance of the integrated Sensory Support Service and consider the future of the service through a direct award.

## 2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That Executive Board

- 1) note the contents of the report; and
- 2) approve a Waiver in compliance with Procurement Standing Order 1.14.4 iv of part 3 of Procurement Standing Orders, for a direct award to support the continuation of the provision of Integrated Sensory Support Service in Halton delivered through contract with Visions Support for the period from 1<sup>st</sup> July 2024 to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2029.

## 3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

### 3.1 Background

3.1.1 Following a procurement exercise the Halton Sensory Support Service was setup 2018 as an integrated approach to meeting the needs of visual and hearing-impaired residents across the borough. The service is run by Vision Support in partnership with the Deafness Resource Centre following their successful collaborative tender for the provision. Prior to this time the two services delivered provision under separate contracts.

3.1.2 The service is further supported by vision rehabilitation officers in-house to the Council. While these posts were intended to be part of the integrated service they primarily work out of Council offices but work in close contact with other elements of the service. The two posts support individuals with identified needs through the care management process within Adult Social Care. The majority of the work undertaken by the two officers lends itself to outreach activity and as such they co-ordinate with both care management and the Sensory Support Service accordingly.

- 3.1.3 The initial contract ran to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2021 and a further two 12-month extensions were invoked. An Executive Board agreement for a further 12 months of service from 30<sup>th</sup> June 2023 to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024 was made in lieu of a service review which had not been possible over the course of the pandemic and its immediate aftermath.
- 3.1.4 The Adult Social Care contract is a major financial contributor to the service, currently offering an income of £114,023 per annum. They further seek funding from other sources and have secured some funding from Children and Families services and through a lottery grant.
- 3.1.5 This current service charges have not been uplifted in-line with inflation since contracting in 2018. It is therefore recommended that an inflationary uplift is built into a new contract. The current Adult Social Care contract runs to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024.

## 3.2 **Service performance**

- 3.2.1 The service has consistently and successfully reached out to the visually and hearing-impaired communities of Halton, promoting service out of the base at 126 Widnes Road but also being engaged in outreach and networking opportunities both through the Council, in conjunction with health service and in partnership with wider third sector forums. The service managed a substantial programme of continuous contact and remote support during the pandemic to maintain connections with service users and offer support.
- 3.2.2 Performance figures to date for 23/24 (covering quarter one and quarter two) are given at Appendix One. To pick out a few headlines, these indicate overall service user satisfaction with the service and that all staff are appropriately trained to meet the remit of their role. The service has provided 179 people with information specific to their condition over the 6-month period, closed 173 cases, provided 206 people with equipment, conducted 283 reviews to people with low vision and referred them for further assessment.
- 3.2.3 Appendix Two gives cases studies for the period from both a hearing impairment and vision impairment perspective.

## 3.3 **Future delivery of the service**

- 3.3.1 It is felt that the service is operating well and serves a valuable support mechanism to the target audience being reached. The service offers positive impact on the prevention agenda and supports delay of great need for services.
- 3.3.2 The service has developed good relationships across the borough in order to make appropriate and timely referrals.
- 3.3.3 It is believed that little or no other market options exist within the borough –

Vision Support and the Deafness Resource Centre collaborated for the current service, having delivered it previously on separate contract. No other service tendered for the contract in 2018 and there is no further intelligence to indicate additional market entrants.

- 3.3.4 In view of these details, it is recommended that a direct award should be granted. It is recommended that a further five-year contract is offered, as this will offer the service the financial stability to sustain and develop the service.
- 3.3.5 Were a direct award to be offered the service specification for re-contracted would need some small revisions based on how the provision has been delivered in practice. This would need to reflect the fact that the Vision Impairment Rehabilitation Workers are still based within Council offices. It would also require some revisions to the data processes and performance measures, based on what can be captured.
- 3.3.6 A waiver in compliance with Procurement Standing Order 1.14.4 iv of part 3 of Procurement Standing Orders is sought to award Halton Integrated Sensory Service a five-year contract from 1<sup>st</sup> July 2024 to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2029.

#### **4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 The service forms part of the Adult Social Care offer of provision and meets statutory requirements in relation to support for visual and hearing impairments. Halton Integrated Sensory Support Service offers specialist expertise, as well as knowledge of, and established partnerships across, the borough.

#### **5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 Waiver in compliance with Standing Order 1.14.4 of part 3: Non-Emergency Procedures (exceeding a value threshold of £100,000) on the basis that no other known provision is understood to exist.
- 5.2 Awarding a contract to the existing provider would sustain the current structure and operations of the services which providers support, including preventative intervention, to vulnerable adults.
- 5.3 The waiver would be effective for the period 1<sup>st</sup> July 2024 to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2029.
- 5.4 The total financial cost to the adult social care budget for the 5-year contract would be £620,300 (accounting for a 9% uplift, which has been indicated as the operating costs by the service).

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

- 6.1 **Children & Young People in Halton**  
N/A
- 6.2 **Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton**

N/A

**6.3 A Healthy Halton**

This service makes an important contribution to the health and social care system in Halton.

**6.4 A Safer Halton**

N/A

**6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal**

N/A

**7.0 RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 This contract falls below the current EU Light Touch Regime threshold of £663,540 and subsequently the risk of challenge will be negligible.

7.2 The Service will continue to be monitored to ensure that the Council and Halton residents receive value for money.

**8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 The service is focussed on residents of the borough with sight and hearing impairments. As such they fall within the protected characteristic, under the Equality Act 2010, of disability.

**9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 There are no environmental or climate implications as a result of this report.

**KEY DECISIONS ON THE FORWARD PLAN**

**10.0 REASON(S) FOR THE DECISION**

10.1 This is an existing service which is operating well. It is believed that no other market competition exists within the borough.

**11.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED**

11.1 The service could go out for full tender. However, when the service was last tendered it was tendered as an Integrated Sensory Service. The organisations which already delivered the elements of the service, for sight and hearing impairment needs, came together to submit a bid. No other submissions were made.

11.2 Ceasing delivery of the service would impact negatively on a vulnerable cohort of the borough's population and likely result in more costly, crisis intervention being made. The service impacts heavily on preventing and delay need for more intensive service.

12.0 **IMPLEMENTATION DATE**

12.1 To assure continuity of service a further contract needs to be in place by 1<sup>st</sup> July 2024, as the current contract expires on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024.

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

13.1 None identified.

**Appendix One – Performance Figures – April to September 2023**

Outcome objective		Measure	Quarter 1 – 23/24	Quarter 2 – 23/24
People with sensory impairments are offered a full range of services that address their eye/ear health, emotional, physical, and financial needs and those of their carer as appropriate	People will have access to a range of different services	number of people receiving info about specific condition (hearing or sight loss condition)	74	105
		Number of people referred to/provided with financial social care support	86	91
		Number of people referred to/provided with advice and practical support to manage medication	23	25
		Number of people where low vision needs are reviewed and referred for a low vision assessment, aids or training if needed	138	145
		Number of people provided with communication support including reading writing, telling the time and using telephone and mobile phone	268	282
		Number of people provided with IT support/ training	51	56
		Number of carers referred for a carers assessment	4	3
		Number of people given information, advice and guidance on emotional support or counselling services	67	74
		Number of people referred to health professionals such as GP, OT, Physio, District nurse, diabetic nurse etc	38	42
		Number of people provided with advice and support around social activities	148	159
		Number of people referred to Disability Employment advisor, a 3rd sector employment support provider or given advice on specialist equipment for employment	4	6
		Number of people referred to advice information and support around education and training.	6	8
		Number of people provided with equipment	80	126

Outcome objective		Measure	Quarter 1 – 23/24	Quarter 2 – 23/24
All people with sensory impairment are provided with a rehabilitation plan within 28 days based on goals agreed at assessment	100%	Number of people signposted to support or suppliers to purchase additional pieces of equipment	51	54
All people with sensory impairments are provided rehabilitation services free of charge to meet agreed assessed needs	100%	Percentage of people who are happy with the service/support they have received	100%	100%
		Percentage of people who report that they received information about services and or support in a timely manner	100%	100%
All people with sensory impairment are provided with equipment, aids or minor adaptations free of charge when it has been assessed that these help reduce, prevent or delay the need for more costly care	100% receive equipment	Percentage of people who received information in their preferred accessible format.	100%	100%
	free of charge	Number of cases closed in the quarter	70	103
All people with sensory impairment receive information about services or support in a timely manner and in their preferred accessible format.		Number of people who have re-accessed the service in the period	33	42
		100% of all staff working on the project have appropriate training for their role	100%	100%
		100% of staff have completed all of their mandatory training and received refreshers as required	100%	100%

## Hearing Impairment

### Case Study One

Mr C has started attending the Hard of Hearing Group and was delighted that he was able to talk to other people about his feelings regarding his hearing loss.

He admitted that he has reduced his time spent socialising as he can't keep up with the conversation with his friends when there is too much background noise. As a result, he has suffered from depression and could feel himself getting very anxious about this.

Whilst at the group we set up an Artone neck loop and microphone for him to try. He was immediately drawn more into the conversation and couldn't believe how clear it was.

His actual words were; 'Wow, this is unbelievable, I haven't heard like this for a very long time. I am actually looking forward to going out with the lads to try this out!'

Following on from his visit to the group, Mr C called in to the office to update us on how he has been getting on with the Artone equipment.

He said 'It's been amazing, I went out and stayed at the club the whole evening instead of having to go home early, which I had been doing because I was getting so frustrated at not being involved in the conversation. I could still hear the background noise but the equipment enabled me to hear the voices of my friends over this. It has truly been life changing for me and have got my social life back and am feeling much brighter in myself'.



## **Case Study Two**

Mr H was referred to us by Surestart to later life. He has been having difficulty with his two hearing aids, but as he is bed bound and sadly on end of life care and cannot go out to get them sorted out.

He is living in his bedroom and his only form of entertainment now is the television. He has to have it on very loud to hear it and it is causing stress amongst the rest of the family living in the house.

We managed to set up a Sonnumax TV aid which he used with over the ear headphones and he can now hear the TV through these even when there is no volume on the TV. He was relieved and delighted as he was feeling a nuisance to his family and was becoming extremely depressed about it. He can also now watch TV if he is awake in the early hours of the morning which he very often is.

His wife can also come up and watch some TV with him now as it isn't too loud for her and she can watch it at a comfortable volume, which means he can have some company and doesn't feel as isolated.

Both Mr H and his wife were very grateful that we were able to help their situation and told us that 'They can't thank us enough for bothering to come out and help them. You've no idea how grateful we are and it's so good to know that someone cares'.

## **Vision Impairment**

### **Case Study One**

We were contacted by one of our Service Users (SU) daughters, as she was struggling to manage her father's many hospital appointments due to her living outside the borough and having increased health problems of her own.

Through this contact we became aware that the SU was missing crucial medical appointments as his daughter was struggling to arrange the correct hospital transport for him and the SU 'didn't want to make a fuss' and 'be a burden to his daughter', so he hadn't let us know that the situation had developed.

Once our Rehabilitation Assistant (RA) became aware of the situation they managed to establish that they were contacting the wrong patient ambulance service. Through further investigation, the RA realised that the SU had a Warrington postcode but is classed as part of Halton from an electoral ward point of view. The boundaries set by the North West Patient Transport Service meant that the North Staffordshire contact centre cover this postcode, rather than Cheshire/Merseyside, which had led to the confusion.

We were eventually able to book the correct transport for the SU and have been able to organise an escort as well, as the SU has significant hearing loss in addition to his vision impairment.

In addition, during our discussions with the SU's daughter she mentioned that her dad was also having problems with some white goods in his home, namely his freezer and was unable to afford a replacement. After talking through the various options for resolving this, our RA established that the SU had previously served in the armed forces and suggested we contact Blind Veterans for financial support. Having got agreement to do this the RA made an application to Blind Veterans and they were able to provide a new freezer for the SU and are also now offering him ongoing support, by way of visits and telephone calls.

## **Case Study Two**

We have regularly been supporting one of our more isolated Service Users (SU) who lives on a mobile home park and who struggles financially.

We became aware that he was struggling to pay his electricity bill, as his energy was supplied via the site and therefore didn't receive any of the recent monthly Government Energy Payments.

Our Rehabilitation Assistant (RA) therefore spoke to Eon who supply the site and they confirmed that legislation didn't allow for people who 'weren't supplied in the normal way' or were considered to live "off grid" to receive any grants.

However, the SU lives alone, has no family or friend support network and is totally blind, so the RA decided to contact the National Association of Park Home Residents (NAPHR) on his behalf to see if they could assist. Unfortunately, they confirmed that this was the case and no financial support was available despite many other residents contacting them about this issue. They in turn were raising the issue with Department for Business and Industry/Treasury.

They asked that we also contact the SU's MP to add his details to those raising this as an issue, which the RA subsequently did. Having taken the action requested, our SU later received a letter from NAPHR, confirming that the Treasury had agreed to award a one-off payment to people in his situation.

The payment had to be applied for, via GOV.UK, as there wasn't an automatic award and any award would then be made via the Local Authority, rather than the energy companies. We supported the SU to make an application online and we are pleased to report that the SU has now received a £400 energy payment.