

REVIEW OF SERVICES FOR THOSE WHO ARE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING

Accountable Officer: Derek Nickless (Head of Neighbourhood Services)

Author: Maurica Legg (Lead Commissioner (Adults)) - MK253259

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To present the review of services for those who are deaf or hearing impaired.
- 1.2 To seek support from Committee to progress the wide range of recommendations arising from the review.
- 1.3 To seek approval to commence re-tendering for the equipment and information service.

2. Summary

- 2.1 Services provided to people who are deaf and hard of hearing have not changed since Local Government Review in 1997. A review of the whole of the service in conjunction with service users was therefore appropriate.
- 2.2 While some aspects of the service are common to people who are deaf and to people who are hard of hearing, their needs are different. The assessment of needs in relation to these groups of service users has been considered separately.
- 2.3 The review consulted the deaf community and the Hard of Hearing Group. Other models of service were visited elsewhere in the country. The Social Services Inspectorate reports "Service on the Edge" and "Stepping away from the Edge" were considered as part of the review.
- 2.4 The review presents a range of numerous recommendations for the development and improvement of services in Milton Keynes.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 The Committee is asked to:
 - (a) approve the implementation of the recommendations of the review report (attached as an **Annex** to the report);
 - (b) refer the wider issues of accessibility and communication to the Equalities Panel;

- (c) agree the current assessment, information and equipment services be combined;
- (d) approve the re-tendering of the service; and
- (e) delegate to the Strategic Director of Neighbourhood Services to approve the specification following consultation with users.

4. **Background**

- 4.1 Until 1995 most of the services for the deaf community in Milton Keynes were provided by the Oxford Diocesan council for Social Work. In the late 1980's questions began to be asked about the traditional service provided by support workers who signed. There was a move towards qualified social work staff using trained interpreters. This began a process which was meant to improve the quality of service and the quality of interpreting. The RNID began to provide interpreters and in 1995 were given the contract to undertake assessments for the provision of environmental aids and then to provide the equipment. This contract has remained essentially unchanged since that time.
- 4.2 This review is an identified objective under 3.14 of the Directorates Strategic plan. It is part of the overall objective to review services for people with a sensory impairment in order to provide equality of access. User involvement in the service had been very limited in the past and it was important that service users were part of the review process.
- 4.3 At an early stage in the process it became clear that the needs of the deaf community were distinct from service users who are hard of hearing. For example the deaf community have their own language and identity. There are very real issues around the need for support in accessing the hearing world and how this support can be given without creating dependence. For people who use BSL English is a second language. This point is often not appreciated by the wider community.
- 4.4 For people who are hard of hearing there is a need to maintain their independence and maximise their remaining hearing. for most people they have been part of the working world and need to continue to be if they are not to become isolated. It should be acknowledged that hearing aids are difficult to adjust to and may improve hearing but hearing does not return to its previous quality.
- 4.5 The present service exists in two parts. For the "profoundly deaf" the RNID provide assessment for and provision of equipment (minicoms, flashing door bells etc.). There is block purchase of interpreting time and an information officer.
- 4.6 The interpreting service is currently available for Adult and Children's services and the whole of the Housing service. The current contract remains under-used despite the deaf community's complaints about the lack of interpreting.
- 4.7 The Audiology Department at Milton Keynes General provides audiological assessments and hearing aids. They also undertake assessments for equipment for hard of hearing people and Adult Disability pays directly for the equipment. These assessment are normally undertaken by social work staff or staff funded by social care departments.
- 4.8 These arrangements are experienced as confusing by those needing a service. The division of service between profoundly deaf and hard of hearing is unhelpful. In the last financial year only £2,985 of the hard of hearing equipment budget was spent from a total budget of £4,680.00. This needs to be considered alongside a general complaint from the Hard of Hearing group about the lack of service.

- 4.9 The deaf community in Milton Keynes is between 200 and 250 people. With the best information available, this number is increasing. The RNID provided equipment assessment to 77 households in 1998/1999. The RNID are seeing approximately one family new to Milton Keynes, every month.
- 4.10 The current interpreting service is seen by the deaf community as a quality service. Recent changes in the monitoring arrangements have facilitated comparative costings to be established. The RNID costs are competitive, providing the budget is fully used but are not always able to provide an interpreter when needed. This needs to be considered in future plans.
- 4.11 There are great concerns within the deaf community about the lack of interpreting in relation to health provision. There are plans to include the PCG and the local health trusts in future consultations with the deaf community.
- 4.12 There are between 4000 – 5000 people in Milton Keynes who have received a service through audiology. In the last financial year 441 people acquired a hearing aid for the first time and there were approximately 3000 contacts with audiology service for repairs and maintenance of hearing aids.
- 4.13 Hard of Hearing Group have expressed concern about the lack of service. In a recent survey of people with a hearing impairment, 77 people responded to the questionnaire. Out of the 230 pieces of equipment within those households only 21 pieces had been provided by Adult Social Care.
- 4.14 There has been no increase in the resourcing of either provision to take into account demographic change since 1995. In considering services elsewhere, other local authorities spend were consistently higher than in Milton Keynes.
- 4.15 The current register of deaf and hard of hearing does not reflect in any way the number of people who could receive a service. There are concerns that people do not know what is available and therefore are not accessing the service.
- 4.16 In older communities the church plays a significant role in services, for example in providing a building and supporting a deaf club. None of this has been available in Milton Keynes. The deaf club in Milton Keynes used a council day centre as a base until 1995. The introduction of a monthly rent resulted in the club moving and then closing.

5. **Issues and Choices**

- 5.1 The current division in services between deaf and hard of hearing is unhelpful and confusing. There needs to be a single point of contact for all aspects of assessment and equipment. Equally information and advice can be best provided across a wide range of need. The combining of the service to provide for the whole of Milton Keynes will make access easier and should provide a more efficient use of resources.
- 5.2 The combined budgets of the RNID and equipment for audiology would be £38,098. This would provide the financial basis for re-tendering.

- 5.3 In combining this service into a single contract, the Council will lose the benefits of the one and half days of health staff time, which is given to run the service, however the audiology department would welcome the Council making the changes proposed in this report.
- 5.4 Providing very specialist resources within the financial limitations of a relatively small local authority is difficult. The recommendations of the review attempts to address these problems.
- 5.5 There is no clearly identified path for hard of hearing children to receive a service. Equally people who suddenly become deaf or who have acquired a profound hearing loss do not fit into the current service. There have been delays in provision as a consequence and future developments in the service will need to address these gaps.
- 5.6 Although there are no concerns about the current level of funding, it is not possible to assess the level of need. This can be achieved by making available a well publicised service for a period of time.
- 5.7 For people with a hearing impairment there is very little provision. The development of an outreach service, which would support hearing aid users and would improve greatly the quality of their lives by enabling people to maximise their hearing. Further work is required to cost such a service.
- 5.8 In most circumstances hearing loss is the primary need. Therefore there is no need for a service user to become a “social work client”. It is important to establish a specification for assessment to ensure the service quality and to ensure that any secondary care needs are not overlooked.
- 5.9 There is a need to assess all residential and day care in terms of the needs of those who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- 5.10 Staff training is a key aspect of improvements to service.

6. **Implications**

6.1 Environmental

The Review Report makes a number of recommendations that would improve the environment from the point of view of people with hearing impairment.

6.2 Equalities

The inequality of access, not just to the specific services for people who are deaf and hard of hearing, but to the whole of the Council services, is an area of concern. The recommendations of this review should both improve access and promote social inclusion.

Equal access to services is the principle which underpins every aspect of improving the services of deaf and hard of hearing people. The Council offers a wide range of services but many of these are impossible or at best difficult to access if a person is deaf or hard of hearing. by providing loop systems and interpreting at the point of access and information and signposting in appropriate formats a more equal service can be provided.

6.3 Financial

There are no immediate financial implications at this stage of the process. However an increase in demand would probably require additional sources.

6.4 Legal

The Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 and the National Assistance Act 1948, establish the legal basis for the provision of these services.

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 places a responsibility on every organisation to provide an equal quality of service to all. It requires that reasonable action is taken to enable service users/customers to overcome any obstacles presented by the environment or communication with staff. Failure to do so may be challenged in Court.

6.5 Staff and Accommodation

This review does not propose that additional staff should be employed by the Council. Some changes to reception areas and meeting rooms would be desirable to improve accessibility

7. **Conclusions**

7.1 The review has shown that there are significant weaknesses in the provision of services to deaf and hard of hearing people living in Milton Keynes. Much needs to be done to ensure that the full range of Council services are accessible. The Council is weak in its provision to the deaf and hearing impaired people living in Milton Keynes.

7.2 This improvement is a long-term project and needs to be progressed steadily. Many steps have already been taken to make improvements. Better liaison and co-ordination of services across health, social care, education and any independent provider will be essential.

Background Papers: Review Report, Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing