

HEALTH SCRUTINY PANEL

3 APRIL 2008

AUDIOLOGY SERVICES IN MIDDLESBROUGH

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. To introduce representation from Middlesbrough Primary Care Trust (PCT) and South Tees Hospitals NHS Trust, to discuss audiology services provided for the people of Middlesbrough.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. That the evidence presented be duly noted and considered with a view to implementing it into the Panel's Final Report.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORT

3. Over the Christmas and New Year period of 2007-8, the Panel may have seen news coverage of the topic of audiology services and the associated waiting times. The Royal National Institute for the Deaf (RNID) conducted a research project whereby it asked 152 PCTs to supply information. It asked the current average time it takes a new adult patient to receive a hearing aid from the time of referral by a GP, amongst other questions.¹
4. According to the RNID, the research conducted found that 39% of new patients in England wait more than a year to have hearing aids fitted. The Department of Health has a target of 18 weeks for the procedure to be completed.
5. On a local basis and according to the RNID research, South Tees Hospitals NHS Trust (which runs James Cook University Hospital) has average waiting times of over a year (54 weeks), along with 9 other NHS Trusts.

¹ A copy of the RNID press release is attached as an Appendix

6. At a meeting of the Health Scrutiny Panel on 4 January 2008, it was decided that the Chair, on behalf of the Panel and with the assistance of officers, investigate the topic and present a report to the Panel detailing findings.
7. As part of this evidence gathering process, the Chair and supporting officers attended the Middlesbrough Deaf Centre on 6 February 2008 to discuss local audiology services with Deaf people and their experiences of those services. A sign interpreter assisted the Chair in having those discussions. Notes of that meeting were taken and are outlined as an Appendix to this report.
8. As the next step of this review, today's meeting has been arranged. Representatives from Middlesbrough PCT and the Audiology Department from the South Tees Hospitals NHS Trust will be in attendance to discuss current services with the Panel and how they may be developed in the near future. The PCT and South Tees representatives have been asked to consider a number of preliminary questions, which can be used to initiate debate at today's meeting. Those questions are:
 - 8.1 What are current waiting times for audiology services for people in Middlesbrough?
 - 8.2 Are there different cohorts of audiology patients e.g. some requiring ENT or direct referrals to audiology? Does this affect waiting times?
 - 8.3 How many patients are currently waiting longer than 18 weeks for audiology services?
 - 8.4 Are there historical reasons where there are long waiting times? If so, what are they?
 - 8.5 What is being done to address the matter?
 - 8.6 What else could be done to improve matters?
 - 8.7 The North East region was heavily represented in the RNID's worst ten waiting times. Is there any SHA leadership on this matter?
9. It is also anticipated that there will be a couple of people in attendance at today's meeting, to represent the Deaf Centre. They will be able to take part in the debate at today's meeting and contribute to the discussions where appropriate. A sign interpreter has been booked for this purpose.
10. Following today's meeting, it is anticipated that a Final Report will be put together, which will be considered by the Health Scrutiny Panel in due course. Following that, it will be put to the local NHS to formulate formal responses.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

11. Please see notes from the Chair's visit to the Deaf Centre, marked Appendix 1.

12. Please see a copy of the RNID's press release marked Appendix 2.
13. Please see a paper prepared by the local NHS responding to some initial questions, marked Appendix 3.

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