

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY BOARD

7 APRIL 2009

AUDIOLOGY FINAL REPORT – AN UPDATE

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. The Health Scrutiny Panel reported to the Overview & Scrutiny Board 1 July 2008 on Audiology Services. At that time the Panel recorded what was in effect an interim position and we are now in a position to report on the current situation which has seen significant improvements. The Health Scrutiny Panel felt it was important to bring the current position to the attention of OSB.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. That the Overview & Scrutiny Board notes the progress of Audiology Services and the progress reported recently to the Health Scrutiny Panel.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORT

3. As Members of the Overview & Scrutiny Board will recall, during 2008/9, the Health Scrutiny Panel conducted a review into Audiology Services. This was instigated by the Panel, following the publication of the Royal National Institute for the Deaf (RNID) paper, which highlighted that the South of Tees area had a 54 week wait for hearing aids, against a national target of 18 weeks.
4. The Panel took up the topic by speaking to people from the PCT, South Tees Hospitals Trust and the Middlesbrough Deaf Centre. A copy of the Executive Summary of the Final Report is appended to this paper.
5. As part of the Final Report, the Health Scrutiny Panel heard that the local NHS was confident that target waiting times would be met by the end of 2008. The Health Scrutiny Panel accepted this and requested an update in early 2009, to investigate whether it had been achieved. That update was provided to the Panel on 5 February 2009.

The Panel's Recommendations

6. The Panel heard that the average patient journey (referral to fit) for hearing aids in the *Specsaver Hearcare* pilot is six weeks. South Tees Hospitals Audiology service achieved the Governments 18-week target from referral to having a hearing aid(s) fitted. Waiting times at South Tees have further reduced since the report was published from 27 weeks to 12 weeks. There were 4 patients who are outside of the 18-week target at the end of December 2008.
7. The Panel had put forward the view that such a large hospital as JCUH, may not always be the best place to go for Audiology Services and that a greater town centre presence should be delivered for audiology services. The Panel felt that this was especially so if people were wishing to take advantage of the 'drop in' facility. The Panel heard that Tees PCTs advertised in December to Tender an Adult Hearing Service from High Street locations in Middlesbrough, Redcar, Stockton and Hartlepool PCT areas. Bidder response from the Independent Sector was positive and the PCT are conducting bidder evaluation sessions and expect to award contract in early February. South Tees Audiology Service provides services in the Lifestore, in central Middlesbrough, twice a week.
8. Following a visit to the Deaf Centre, by the Chair of the Panel, it was felt that there was a danger of people missing their appointments by being suitably notified that it was time for their appointment. Following a visit to the department by the Chair, it was also felt that the waiting areas were not particularly well laid out or signposted for visiting people. As such, the Panel suggested that hand held alert systems be issued to arriving patients, which would activate when it was their appointment, similar to those that are in use in restaurants. The Panel has heard that South Tees has implemented, in the Audiology department, a coaster style patient paging system, for use by hearing impaired patients.
9. In addition to the information already provided to patients in James Cook University Hospital Audiology information leaflets, the signage in the Audiology reception area has been reviewed and will be strengthened.
10. Following detailed conversations with people at the Deaf Centre, the Panel heard that the South Tees Trust could improve its level and frequency of engagement with people at the Deaf Centre. As a response, the Panel heard that The Trust PALS team already has links with the Deaf Centre in Middlesbrough. They will be increasing the frequency of their meetings. Any new concerns raised by the Deaf Centre regarding Audiology services will be passed on to the Audiology Manager.

Conclusion

11. The Panel was pleased with the outcome of the update and it appears that excellent progress has been made with dealing with waiting times relating to

audiology services. It is felt that this is a good example of the positive impact that Scrutiny can have. By investigating an issue of local concern and speaking to a number of key stakeholders in the matter, it was able to suggest a number of ways forward. Scrutiny has played an important role in ensuring that attention is focussed on an area of concern to local services and facilitated discussions on where problems are faced and improvements can be made. The end result to the process is that local residents are now able to access the services they need much quicker than they could previously.

12. The Health Scrutiny Panel will be an interested observer of Audiology Services as the service develops and the number of service providers increases.

**Councillor Eddie Dryden
Chair, Health Scrutiny Panel**

BACKGROUND PAPERS

13. Appendix 1 – Executive Summary of Health Scrutiny Panel's Final Report into Audiology Services

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