



**ADULTS AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**7 JUNE 2021**

**VISUAL AND SENSORY IMPAIRMENT SERVICE**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF ADULTS AND COMMUNITIES**

**Purpose of report**

1. The purpose of this report is to set out the conclusions of a recent review of the Council's Visual and Sensory Impairment Service, and to seek the Committee's views on the forthcoming procurement for the service ahead of the new contract start date on 1 October 2021.

**Policy Framework and Previous Decisions**

2. The Care Act 2014 statutory guidance outlines outcomes for individuals, groups and local populations and makes specific references to people with a sensory impairment.
3. Maintenance of a Sight Register is a statutory requirement for Leicestershire County Council. Under Section 77 of the Care Act 2014, local authorities are legally required to establish and maintain a register of sight-impaired and severely sight-impaired adults who are ordinarily resident in their area.
4. The Visual and Sensory Impairment Service is underpinned by the Council's Strategic Plan and the Adults and Communities Department Strategy 2020-24, the latter of which was approved by the Cabinet at its meeting on 18 September 2020. The Strategy sets out the aim to ensure that services delivered meet the eligible needs of the citizens of Leicestershire to maximise their opportunities and wellbeing. The Strategy promotes independence, supporting individuals to remain in their own homes and reducing the need for residential care.
5. The Cabinet considered an update report on a strategic review of the Adults and Communities' preventative services on 1 April 2014, including commissioning options for the Council's secondary prevention offer, leading to the subsequent procurement of the current service.

**Background**

6. Section 2 of the Care Act 2014 'Preventing, Reducing or Delaying Needs' states that rehabilitation services for people with a visual impairment should not be restricted to six weeks and should remain free of charge. The guidance defines rehabilitation as including daily living skills and mobility training for people with visual impairment. As well as offering this reablement support, the current Visual and Sensory Impairment Service also meets the requirements as set out in the Association of Directors of

Adult Social Services (ADASS) Position Statement on Vision Rehabilitation in the context of personalisation. In summary the statement aims to ensure that blind and partially sighted people remain independent by putting them in control of decisions that affect their lives.

7. Local authorities must ensure information and advice services have due regard to the needs of people with sensory impairments. This includes ensuring websites conform to accessible information standards and people have information in a language that they understand.
8. The Council's current Visual and Sensory Impairment Service is provided by local charity Vista. It has been operating since October 2015 and comprises the following elements:
  - Visual Impairment Rehabilitation Service;
  - Sight Register;
  - Equipment;
  - Deafblind Community Care Assessment Support Service.

#### Visual Impairment Rehabilitation Service

9. The Visual Impairment Rehabilitation Service is a short-term support service, providing specialist assessment and rehabilitation to individuals with a visual impairment and/or dual sensory loss who are suitable for and would benefit from a period of rehabilitation. Rehabilitation is provided irrespective of an individual's eligibility for social care services or inclusion on the Sight Register. It is for individuals and their families or carers who are newly diagnosed with visual impairment and/or dual sensory loss, those who have lived their whole life with reduced sight loss or those who are deafblind. This also includes those who experience a change in their vision or their personal circumstances.
10. In order to prevent individuals experiencing a crisis and/or requiring ongoing social care and support services, the provider promotes the benefits of registering visual impairment to potential service users, accessing rehabilitation services and practical support solutions to living and working with visual impairment.
11. The service supports early intervention, prevention and the ongoing support needs of users; it helps avoid isolation and enables individuals to live a healthy life and promotes independence and wellbeing.

#### Sight Register

12. The Sight Register, the maintenance of which is a statutory requirement, currently shows there are 3,158 people registered within Leicestershire of which 2,945 are adults.

#### Equipment

13. When a rehabilitation assessment is undertaken by the Visual Impairment Rehabilitation Service, a general assessment to establish whether any equipment is required is also carried out. The main equipment accessed is walking sticks, talking watches, lighting, talking clocks, liquid level indicators, canes and mobility canes.

14. Last year 390 pieces of equipment were issued to service users in accordance with their assessed need, helping to support them in maintaining their independence and therefore reducing and delaying the need for social care services.

#### Deafblind Community Care Assessment Support Service (DCCAS)

15. The DCCAS identifies and supports appropriate deafblind individuals to access social care service assessments that lead to individuals receiving a personal budget. The service fulfils the County Council's duties under the Care and Support for Deafblind Children and Adults Policy Guidance and the Care Act (2014), including referrals for assessments and facilitating access to qualified interpreters.
16. The annual budget for the service is £166,000, which includes £6,000 for the purchase of equipment.

#### Service Review

17. The current contract with Vista expires on 30 September 2021. In establishing the service required beyond the contract period, the Council carried out a comprehensive review, considering the performance of the current arrangements, the views of those using the service, benchmarking against other authorities, future requirements including likely demand, and the value of the service.

#### Service reviews before 2021

18. Light touch service reviews were carried out in 2016/17 and again in 2019 with Public Health partners, which determined that the service was fit for purpose to continue until the end of the maximum contract duration of 30 September 2020.
19. In June 2020, as a response to the unprecedented circumstances relating to Covid-19 pandemic, the contract was extended to 30 September 2021.

#### Service review 2021

20. Between January and March 2021, the Council carried out a review of the Visual and Sensory Impairment Service, which included consultation with people who use the service, Vista staff, partner organisations, and the Council's adult social care operational and public health teams. Analysis of quality and monitoring data took place in parallel.
21. Approximately 25 people who identified either as a user or carer of the service were involved in the consultation about their service. Lines of enquiry included but were not limited to:
- How they heard about the service and why they accessed it;
  - Experience of the service they had received and how the provider had evaluated their experience;
  - Options provided in delivery of the service to the person;
  - Equipment received, if any, and whether it was helpful;
  - Support provided and whether it was what the person wanted;
  - Checks on progress or improvements;
  - Raising concerns with the provider and response times;

- Advocacy and future advice;
  - Impact on independence and any isolation previously experienced;
  - Outcomes and unmet outcomes from the service;
22. Key themes from the users and carers in receipt of support from the service demonstrated that advantages included gaining appropriate information and advice about technology, equipment, finances, and benefits. Users indicated that they have become more independent and less isolated since receiving the service. They were informed about groups and clubs available to reduce isolation and there was evidence that people were supported to continue going to work with the interventions through this service.
23. The feedback from the engagement was overwhelmingly positive and suggested that the service provides emotional and practical support which enhanced the user's confidence and independence and gave them choice and control over their lives.
24. Feedback from adult social care operational staff was that most people with sight impairments were referred directly to the service from the Eye Clinic Liaison Officers (ECLOs) at University Hospitals of Leicester. In general individuals require support for their sensory needs rather than requiring social care support. The feedback that was available was positive about the service.
25. The Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) has produced a document '10 Principles of Good Practice in Vision Rehabilitation' which can be considered best practice for people with sight impairments (document accessible via Background Papers). From the service review it can be concluded that the current service meets the principles listed in the document.

#### Numbers served and outcomes

26. Key data relating to those on the Sight Register, and those who have received interventions from the service, is given in the table below. Not everyone on the Sight Register needs nor has accessed the service.

	<b>2019/2020</b>	<b>2020/2021</b>
Number of people over 18 on the Sight Register	3,474	2,945
Number of People with Partial and Severe Hearing Loss on the Register	1,086	739
Number of people over the age of 18 who have had interventions (from signposting, to provision of equipment or training) within a 12-month period	1,314	2,692
Number of people accessing equipment in a 12-month period. (Adults service only)	447	390

27. As noted above, there are 3,158 people listed on the Sight Register, of which 2,945 are adults. As of the end of April 2021 there were 2,013 clients who had accessed services from Vista (from signposting, to provision of equipment or training) and 353 of these were new referrals within the last quarter.
28. People who are blind or visually impaired are able to obtain a Certification of Visual Impairment (CVI). The rate of new certifications for sight loss in each financial year is

included as an indicator in the Public Health Outcomes Framework (PHOF). Vista records these figures on behalf of the Council within the Sight Register.

29. The numbers of people accessing the service increased in the last financial year during the Covid-19 pandemic. This is despite the number of people attending appointments at Hospital Ophthalmology Departments, where most referrals to the service originate, having declined in that period.
30. From the start of the pandemic in spring 2020, Vista carried out welfare calls to 1,200 people living alone to update them on information and guidance for Covid-19, and to establish whether further support was required. Following this initial work to prioritise those living alone, and to assist with information, equipment and support, the remainder of the those on the Sight Register were also contacted, which generated further referrals.

### Review Conclusions

31. The review findings suggests that the service is achieving its objectives, and meeting the Department's model for social care which continues to focus on delivering the right support to the right person, at the right time, in the right place, and by the right partner. It aims to put the person at the centre, and to ensure that the support they receive can deliver the right outcomes and manage any risks appropriately.
32. During the contract period, the Visual and Sensory Impairment Service has supported the Council's strategic aims described in the Adults and Communities Department's Strategy for 2020–2024 'Delivering Wellbeing and Opportunity in Leicestershire'. Residents of Leicestershire have been enabled to achieve the outcomes that matter to them by receiving support delivered in the most cost-effective way and which enables them to live as independently as possible. This approach has been achieved by focusing on individual and community strengths along with a focus on individuals achieving their goals.
33. There are currently 12 people supported by adult social care whose primary long-term support need is listed as 'Sensory Impairment – Support for Visual Impairment'. This suggests that a majority of people with sight impairments are having their needs met within the community without social care support due to the interventions from this service.
34. The 2021 review suggests that the service meets the Council's 'prevent model' to support, promote, and maintain people's independence in the community. The specification for the service from 1 October 2021 will therefore be based on this successful model which has been in place since 2015.
35. It is difficult to carry out a detailed cost analysis for individuals who access this service based on the level and type of interaction. However, it is evident from the review that the service is being provided in an outcome focused way, which flexed to respond to the challenges presented by Covid-19. For the future, the intention is to be able to monitor the rehabilitation or reablement service in terms of outcome journey for an individual.

Future demand

36. The RNIB report that the numbers of people aged 18 and over living with a visual impairment are expected to increase across Leicestershire by 2030. There are expected to be 31,300 people in Leicestershire living with sight loss, which is an increase of 25% from 2021. Future services must take into account the increased demand for services for people with visual and sensory impairment needs.

Visual impairment in Leicestershire

37. The numbers of people in Leicestershire aged 18 and over predicted to have a moderate or severe visual impairment projected between 2025 and 2030 is shown in the table below.

	<b>2025</b>	<b>2030</b>
People aged 18-64 predicted to have a serious visual impairment	286	294
People aged 65-74 predicted to have a moderate or severe visual impairment	4,514	4,435
People aged 75 and over predicted to have a moderate or severe visual impairment	8,668	9,151

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38. According to RNIB, the risk of sight loss increases with age, which is why the population aged 75 and older offers a good indication of the demand for sight loss services. RNIB report that one in five people aged 75 and over are living with sight loss.

Hearing loss in Leicestershire

39. The number of people aged 18 and over predicted to have some, or severe hearing loss projected between 2025 and 2030 is shown in the table below.

	<b>2025</b>	<b>2030</b>
Total population aged 18 and over predicted to have some hearing loss	145,722	159,220
Population aged 65 + and over predicted to have severe hearing loss	12,852	15,409
Total population aged 18 and over predicted to have severe hearing loss	15,642	18,231

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40. Using the data available, it suggests the demand for these specialised services will increase overall. The service from 1 October 2021 must be able to meet future service requirements and demand.

### **Future procurement**

41. Based on the service review and understanding of the requirement from the service going forward, the proposal is to retain the key elements of the current service specification.
42. Therefore, the specification for the service from 1 October 2021 will be strongly based on the successful model which has been in place since 2015.
43. Similar to the last procurement of the current Visual and Sensory Impairment Service in 2015 and based on research into market appetite from this review, the suggestion is that there continues to be limited market interest in providing this specialist service. This presents a risk either that there may be no bidder at all, or in the event of very limited interest, that the Council will need to seek assurances of the value for money of any bid.

### **Resource Implications**

44. The budget for the service will be £160,000 per year with an additional amount of £6,000 for the provision of specialist equipment. This is the same annual budget as that allocated for the last contract. Bidders will need to demonstrate how they can achieve the best outcomes for people against the service specification within this financial envelope, whilst bearing in mind a context of increasing demand.
45. The Director of Corporate Resources and the Director of Law and Governance have been consulted on the contents of this report.

### **Timetable for Decisions**

46. Work has begun in preparation for the reprocurement of the service with the new contract to start on 1 October 2021.

### **Recommendation**

47. The Committee is asked to comment on the proposal that the forthcoming service specification be based on the model currently in place and make any further considerations ahead of the procurement.

### **Background papers**

- [Leicestershire County Council Strategic Plan 2018-22](#)
- [Delivering Wellbeing and opportunity in Leicestershire – Adults and Communities Department Ambitions and Strategy for 2020-24](#)  
Report to the Cabinet: 1 April 2014 – Strategic Review of Preventative Services in Leicestershire –  
<http://politics.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&MId=3989&Ver=4>
- RNIB – Supporting people with Sight Loss: 10 Principles of Good Practice in Vision Rehabilitation -  
<https://www.rnib.org.uk/sites/default/files/10%20principles%20of%20Good%20Practice%20in%20Vision%20Rehabilitation.pdf>
- ADASS Position Statement on Vision Rehabilitation (<https://www.adass.org.uk/adass-position-statement-on-vision-rehabilitation-may-2016>)

**Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure**

48. None.

**Equality and Human Rights Implications**

49. Equalities and Human Rights requirements have been incorporated into the existing contract and will also be applied to the new service.
50. An Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment (EHRIA) screening has been carried out to assess the equality and human rights implications for any proposed changed elements of the service arising from the procurement. No negative EHRIA impacts are anticipated from the new proposed contract.

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