

AGENDA ITEM

28TH APRIL 2008

REVIEW OF AUDIOLOGY SERVICES

Summary

The first review of the Health Select Committee in 2008 is to be a review of audiology services. This briefing paper is to inform the Committee the current position of this review

Recommendation

That Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council's Health Select Committee provides initial consideration to the scope and timescale of the review.

Detail

1. The Scrutiny Liaison Committee met on 25th March 2008 to discuss the topics for the Council's select committees during 2008/9. The Chair of the Health Select Committee submitted a suggested review of audiology services in the borough which was accepted by the Scrutiny Liaison Committee. A copy of the pro forma is attached at Appendix 1.
2. In March 2007 the Department for Health published *Improving Access to Audiology Services in England* which set out the aspiration for local health systems to transform the experience of the audiology service for all their patients (see Appendix 2).
3. The report recognised that it required a radical reduction in waiting times hence the most complex audiology cases (those properly referred to ENT) will be covered by the target of treatment within 18 weeks of referral by December 2008. Since March 2008 routine adult hearing loss cases should be assessed within 6 weeks, in line with the diagnostic waiting time milestone on which local commissioning plans are based. It is also considered good practice for the subsequent hearing aid fitting to be carried out soon after or at the same time as assessment.
4. In May 2007 The House of Commons Health Select Committee published its report of audiology services in England which included a number of recommendations it believed were necessary to improve the services that could help up to 14 per cent of the population that suffer from some form of hearing impairment (see appendix 3).
5. In December 2007 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. In the North Tees PCT area the RNID found that new patient waiting times were 14 weeks and 236 people were on the new patient waiting list.

6. In the Middlesbrough PCT area clients had waiting times of 54 weeks and 615 people on the new patient waiting list which brought it to the attention of Middlesbrough Council's Health Scrutiny Panel. The Panel will conclude its review of audiology services in May 2008 and has been asking the following questions:

- Are there different cohorts of audiology patients e.g. some requiring ENT or direct referrals to audiology? Does this affect waiting times?
- How many patients are currently waiting longer than 18 weeks for audiology services?
- Are there historical reasons where there are long waiting times? If so, what are they?
- What is being done to address the matter?
- What else could be done to improve matters?
- The North East region was heavily represented in the RNID's worst ten waiting times. Is there any SHA leadership on this matter?

Conclusion

A tripartite meeting is still to be held regarding this review topic. At the next meeting the Select Committee will be asked to agree the scope and project plan for a review of audiology services in the borough. The Committee should take cognisance of Middlesbrough Council's Health Scrutiny Panel review to avoid a duplication of work. A copy of their report will be made available to committee members when it is available.

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Background Papers :

Work Programme Pro Forma (see Appendix 1)

Ward(s) and Ward Councillors:

Not ward specific.