

AGENDA ITEM

8TH SEPTEMBER 2008

REVIEW OF AUDIOLOGY SERVICES

Summary

Having been involved in a number of consultations regarding health provision in the borough the Health Select Committee is now in a position to review audiology services as agreed at Scrutiny Liaison Forum in March 2008. This briefing paper is to provide background for Members.

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 concluded in its review of audiology services in June 2008 (its final report is attached at appendix 4) that:
- The PCT and South Tees Trust prepare a report for the Health Scrutiny Panel at the end of 2008, highlighting how many, if any, people are waiting outside 18 weeks for a hearing aid following GP referral.
 - The South Tees Trust and PCT deliver a more substantial town centre presence for audiology services, to reduce the amount of people having to travel to James Cook University Hospital, for what can be very minor matters.
 - The South Tees Trust invests in handheld alert devices for use in the reception at Audiology Services in James Cook University Hospital, aimed at ensuring people know when their appointment is due.
 - The South Tees Trust improves the visibility and accessibility of information in the Audiology section around how to make complaints and raise concerns.
 - The South Tees Trust engages on a regular basis with Middlesbrough Deaf Centre, aimed at improving communication, solving problems early and building a better relationship. The PCT, as Commissioner, should be kept aware of the outcome of these debates.

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)
Department for Health: *Improving Access to Audiology Services in England* (see Appendix 2)
House of Commons Health Select Committee's report of audiology services in England (see Appendix 3)
Middlesbrough Council's Health Scrutiny Panel's report of audiology services (see Appendix 4)

Ward(s) and Ward Councillors:

Not ward specific.