

Childrens and Families Committee

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| Date of Meeting: | 8 November 2021 |
| Report Title: | All Age Sensory Impairment Strategy |
| Report of: | Nichola Thompson, Director of Commissioning |
| Report Reference No: | CF/13/21-22 |
| Ward(s) Affected: | All |

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1.** Over the last 12 months, the Council has worked in partnership with Cheshire Clinical Commissioning Group to develop an All-Age Sensory Impairment Strategy. Sensory impairment is an umbrella term that encompasses anyone living with a hearing and/or visual impairment including those with a dual sensory loss (also referred to as deafblind). Note – the needs of children and young people with multi-sensory impairment (MSI) are addressed separately through the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Strategy and Local Offer.
- 1.2.** The development of the Sensory Impairment Strategy involved a strategic review of the pathways of support for children, young people and adults with a hearing or visual impairment. This involved collaborative working and engagement with health, education and social care professionals and other local stakeholders. Extensive engagement has also taken place with children, young people and adults, and their families and carers, to identify local needs that helped shape and inform the priority areas.
- 1.3.** Formal public consultation on the draft strategy took place between 20th July and 19th September. The feedback received has been reflected in this version of the strategy presented here for approval (Appendix 1).
- 1.4.** The strategy places a strong emphasis on prevention and early intervention. It supports Cheshire East Council's Corporate Plan (2021 – 2025) and aligns with the priority, "A Council which empowers and cares about people".

- 1.5. An action plan sits alongside the strategy which will be implemented as part of the adoption of the strategy. The strategy will also inform future commissioning intentions.
- 1.6. The provision of sensory impairment services allows the Council to meet its duties under the Care Act 2014 and the Children and Families Act 2014.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. That the Adults and Health Committee and Children and Families Committee approve the All Age Sensory Impairment Strategy.

3. Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1. The All Age Sensory Impairment Strategy 2021 – 2024 (Appendix 1) sets out a strong and shared commitment to improve the lives of children, young people and adults living with a visual and/ or hearing impairment, and their families and carers. This approach aligns with the priority within the Corporate Plan of “A Council which empowers and cares about people”. It also places a strong emphasis on prevention and early intervention to enable people to receive the help they need in a timely way thereby increasing their independence, health and wellbeing. The strategy will enable us to work in partnership to support children and young people in the most effective way.
- 3.2. The Children and Families Act 2014 sets out the implications of sensory impairment on the child’s learning and development. ‘The Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice’ require Education, Health and Care Plans for children and young people to fully take account of the implications of sensory impairment for teaching and learning on the child’s development.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1. Not having approval for the strategy will limit the ability to integrate and make best use of the resources available to support people of all ages with a sensory impairment. This will lead to worse outcomes for children and young people.

5. Background

- 5.1. The Council has worked in partnership with Cheshire Clinical Commissioning Group to develop a Cheshire East All Age Sensory Impairment Strategy for children, young people and adults, living with a hearing and/or visual impairment. This followed extensive engagement and consultation with children, young people and adults with sensory impairments and local stakeholders to understand local issues and areas for improvement.
- 5.2. The shared vision presented in the strategy “is for children, young people and adults in Cheshire East living with a sensory impairment to achieve their individual aspirations and ambitions and contribute positively to their

community”. Six key priority areas have been identified for development over the next 3 years (2021 – 2024):

- The provision of accessible information and advice
 - Integrated service provision and improved co-ordination of care
 - Support for children and young people when preparing for adulthood (transition)
 - Keeping your independence (including use of equipment and assistive technologies)
 - Emotional and peer support
 - Awareness and understanding of sensory impairments.
- 5.3.** There are significant numbers of people with sensory impairments living in Cheshire East with numbers forecast to grow substantially over the coming decades due to the ageing population. As we get older, we are increasingly likely to experience hearing loss or sight loss or both, known as dual sensory loss.
- 5.4.** Current estimates show that in 2020, there were 15,200 adults living with a visual impairment in Cheshire East. This included 2,070 with severe sight loss (blindness) and 13,170 with partial sight¹. 88,244 adults were estimated to be living with a hearing loss in Cheshire East. This included 8,613 with severe hearing loss and 79,631 with some hearing loss³. Nearly 3,000 people have a dual sensory loss (combined hearing and sight loss) in Cheshire East. Of these, an estimated that 1,150 are living with severe dual sensory loss².
- 5.5.** The numbers of children and young people living with a sensory impairment, are substantially lower than the adult population, but still significant. Latest estimates indicate around 200 blind and partially sighted children and young people², 262 with a permanent hearing loss and less than 20 with a dual sensory loss⁴.
- 5.6.** Sensory loss can create significant challenges for individuals. Communication is one of the biggest barriers and causes of social isolation for D/deaf people ('D' in deaf indicates people who are deaf from birth or early childhood and often use British Sign Language). This is a vital component of health and social care and is a key factor in creating and delivering high quality services. Good communication makes D/deaf people feel valued and supported.
- 5.7.** Having a visual impairment can limit a person's ability to perform everyday tasks, to interact with others and to get about unaided.
- 5.8.** Dual sensory loss presents a new level of challenge, having a significant impact on a person's daily function and quality of life. Getting the proper help for a person with dual sensory loss begins with awareness. There is a need to ensure services are provided by appropriately trained staff, who know how to correctly and comprehensively understand the impact the condition is having on their wellbeing.

- 5.9.** Consequently, sensory impairment can have an enormous personal, social and economic impact throughout a person's life but with the right support systems in place; children, young people and adults can excel in all areas including daily living, education, employment and leisure and take an active part in their community. A strengths-based approach to supporting people with strategies to promote independence in a holistic way can greatly improve their quality of life.

6. Consultation and Engagement

- 6.1.** The new Sensory Impairment Strategy was drafted after extensive engagement and consultation with a wide variety of stakeholders. This included:
- A survey of stakeholders including East Cheshire NHS Trust, Mid-Cheshire Hospital NHS Trust, the voluntary sector, and Cheshire East Council (13 responses).
 - Two Sensory Workshops held with health, social care, education and voluntary sector professionals (average of 35 attendees at each).
 - A survey of children and young people with visual impairments (8 responses).
 - A survey of children and young people with hearing impairments (19 responses).
 - A survey of adults with visual impairments (43 responses).
 - A survey of adults with hearing impairments (49 responses).
 - A face-to-face interview with a deafblind current service user (1 response).
 - Telephone interviews with adults with visual impairments (2 responses).
 - Attendance in person at a walking group for visually impaired adults.
 - Attendance via Teams at a visual impairment forum, Children's Hearing Services Working Group and Parent Carer Group.
- 6.2.** A period of formal consultation on the strategy took place between 20th July and 19th September and was widely promoted on the Council's website, through partner organisations and on social media. Measures were taken to support people to take part in the consultation. This included providing materials in large print and using local sensory impairments organisations to engage with users over the strategy. A short video explaining the strategy, was also available on the Council website and YouTube.
- 6.3.** The strategy consultation attracted a fair response given it is a relatively niche area of work. In summary, this included 27 responses to the survey questionnaire, 117 video views and 7 direct contacts via email/phone.

- 6.4.** Overall, the findings were positive with a large proportion of respondents agreeing that the overall strategy is relevant (83%), good (67%) and comprehensive (61%). Large proportions of respondents felt that the vision was relevant (89%), appropriate (85%) and comprehensive (77%). The six priorities were also rated as “good,” with 78% rating the priority “integrated service provision and improved co-ordination of care” to 65% rating the priority “emotional and peer support” as good.
- 6.5.** Among the comments received, some wanted to understand how the strategy will be implemented and resourced. Some raised the importance of making the strategy more accessible to those with sensory impairments, for example, British Sign Language users. A few comments were made about the need to include references to safeguarding and domestic abuse.
- 6.6.** The final draft strategy presented here has been updated in response to the feedback received and includes additional sections on safeguarding and domestic abuse. Further detail is also presented about how the priorities will be achieved. A multi-agency Sensory Impairment Strategy working group has been established with a view to implementing the action plan and monitoring progress on the six key priority areas over the next three years (see Appendix 1). This will seek to maximise the impact of resources through joined up working.

7. Implications

7.1. Legal

- 7.1.1.** Under Section 9 of the Care Act 2014, the local authority has a statutory duty to carry out an assessment of an adult’s needs for care and support. Under Regulation 6 of the Care and Support (Assessment) Regulations an assessment which relates to an individual who is deafblind must be carried out by a person who has specific training and expertise relating to individuals who are deafblind.
- 7.1.2.** Under Section 77(1) of the Care Act 2014 the local authority has a statutory duty to maintain a register of sight-impaired and severely sight-impaired adults who are ordinarily resident in its area.
- 7.1.3.** Under the Children and Families Act 2014 the local authority has a statutory duty to make provision for children with special educational needs. The accompanying Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice (January 2015) requires account to be taken of the implications of sensory impairment for teaching and learning on the child’s development (paragraph 6.34).
- 7.1.4.** Under Section 20 of the Equality Act 2010 the local authority has a statutory duty to make reasonable adjustments to its services to ensure that they are accessible to everyone, including those with a sensory impairment.

- 7.1.5.** All organisations which provide NHS care or adult social care are legally required to follow the Accessible Information Standard (2016). The Standard aims to make sure that people who have a disability, impairment or sensory loss are provided with information that they can easily read or understand and are provided with support so they can communicate effectively with health and social care services.

7.2. Finance

- 7.2.1.** The budget will remain the same for sensory impairment but using Health and Local Authority resources more effectively through partnership work (thus removing duplication) will bring greater value for money.

7.3. Policy

- 7.3.1.** The All-Age Sensory Impairment Strategy provides a strategic approach to addressing the support and services for people with sensory impairments in Cheshire East.

7.4. Equality

- 7.4.1.** An Equality Impact Assessment is available as Appendix 2.

7.5. Human Resources

- 7.5.1.** There are no direct implications arising from the strategy itself.

7.6. Risk Management

- 7.6.1.** The successful implementation of the strategy will be achieved through statutory and voluntary sector organisations working together effectively to deliver the actions identified. Any significant risk will be controlled for and escalated for action where appropriate.

7.7. Rural Communities

- 7.7.1.** The strategy will inform the way services to support people with sensory impairments are commissioned in the future. Access to community-based support is particularly useful for individuals in rural communities who may find it harder to access support networks and public transport and can often experience difficulties getting out and about due their sensory impairment. This will ensure they receive equitable and timely services.

7.8. Children and Young People/Cared for Children

- 7.8.1.** This is an all-age strategy that includes children and young people, and their families and carers.
- 7.8.2.** A key priority of the strategy is support for children and young people when preparing for adulthood.

7.9. Public Health

- 7.9.1.** The strategy makes a commitment to improving the outcomes of people with sensory impairments by increasing their independence, wellbeing, safety and quality of life. It will also raise awareness of the importance of routine health assessments and treatments.

7.10. Climate Change

- 7.10.1.** The strategy sets out a collaborative approach to working which will improve efficiencies. It will also inform the way services to support people with sensory impairments are commissioned in the future. This will include social value questions including one specific to the environment.

| Access to Information | |
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| Contact Officer: | Nichola Thompson, Director of Commissioning Nichola.Thompson@cheshireeast.gov.uk |
| Appendices: | 1. Sensory Impairment Strategy Final Draft 2. Equality Impact Assessment 3. Consultation Report |
| Background Papers: | 1. Cheshire East Council Corporate Plan 2. Care Act 2014 3. Children and Families Act 2014 |

References

¹ RNIB Data Tool, <https://www.rnib.org.uk/professionals/knowledge-and-research-hub/key-information-and-statistics/sight-loss-data-tool>

² Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB)

³ Projecting Adult Needs and Service Information, <https://www.pansi.org.uk>

⁴ CEC return (2021) for Consortium for Research into Deaf Education (CRID)