

REPORT TO: Healthy Halton Policy & Performance Board

DATE: 16 September 2008

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, Health & Community

SUBJECT: Halton Integrated Community Equipment Service – Internal Audit Report – Progress Report

WARDS: Boroughwide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To inform the Healthy Halton PPB of progress in relation to the recommendations and response to the audit report.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- (1) the Board note the content of the report; and**
- (2) the board consider what further reporting or scrutiny it would wish to undertake.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 An internal audit of the Halton Integrated Community Equipment Service was conducted between October and June 2007 and a report on the findings and recommendations was considered by the Business Efficiency Board 4th June 2008 which recommended that *“consideration be given to a topic group being established in relation to Halton Integrated Community Equipment Service”* by the Health Halton PPB. This report provides a progress report on the recommendations.

3.2 As with the original report, this report needs to be placed in the context of the Central Government initiative, Transforming Community Equipment Services, developments within Halton and St Helens PCT and the need to re-locate the service from Picow Farm to Dewar Court.

3.3 Transforming Community Equipment Services

3.3.1 This model, introduced by central government in Summer of 2007, focuses on the develop of a retail model for the provision of community equipment. Service users would be assessed in the normal way and issued with prescriptions for their equipment that they would then collect from a local retailer. There would be the opportunity for service users to “top up” the prescription to obtain a model of equipment of

their choice and they would be advised, within the retail outlet, by registered assessors.

3.3.2 The model is currently being trialled in three North West Local Authorities, Cheshire, Oldham and Manchester. Halton has been actively involved in the development of the pilots in the three neighbouring authorities, has benefited from the information available as part of this programme and is currently exploring the option of a retail outlet at the Independent Living Centre.

3.4 **Halton & St Helens PCT**

Changes to the configuration of the PCT led to disruption in the continuity of principal staff involved in the Halton Integrated Community Equipment Service, although recent appointments have resolved this issue. A future benefit of these changes will be the option to explore provision of a community equipment service across a wider geographical area.

3.5 **Picow Farm Store**

In October 2007 it was necessary to cease to use the equipment store at Picow Farm due to an infestation of vermin. Temporarily the store was provided in a number of locations and permanent alternative premises have been identified. Although unplanned this gave an opportunity to address the known shortcomings of the existing store. Sound partnership working between Halton Borough Council and the PCT during this period ensured continuity of service with the minimum of disruption.

3.6 Two units at Dewar court have been identified for the store. One unit is currently in use and a further unit will be available following resolution of issues regarding the lease and a substantial programme of refurbishment. It is anticipated that all of the service will relocate in the Autumn. This development has not been without financial implications and every effort has been made to keep these to a minimum while striving to provide an improved service in the future.

RECOMMENTATIONS AND RESPONSES

3.7 **Recommendation 1: Control over value for money needs to be strengthened.**

Response

Contributions to the pooled budget were agreed at the beginning of the partnership and were based on activity at that time. Since that date changes to service provision, in keeping with the Integrated Community Equipment Service philosophy, have blurred the boundaries between health and social care service users.

- In 2006/07 through an initiative to reduce the pressure on the Independent Living Team and to provide a service aligned to the Single Assessment Process 197 health service professionals were trained to assess for and provide equipment that would normally have been provided by social care staff. Training is ongoing.
- Equipment provided to facilitate safer handling of service users when supported by home care services is generally prescribed by health professionals to facilitate hospital discharge or to avoid admission and can dramatically reduce the required package of home care.
- The development of the Rapid Access and Rehabilitation (RARs) service, a joint service between health and social care with funding shared on a 50/50 basis, further skewed the picture as all equipment provided by RARs is recorded as health provision.

3.7.2 A recent significant increase in activity at the equipment store has prompted further analysis and the development of a business case to recommend an increase in resources and this will include a review of the relative contributions to the service by the Council and the PCT.

3.8 **Recommendation 2: A fundamental review should be undertaken examining how the service is delivered to provide assurance that service users' needs are being met in a cost effective way.**

Response :

Recent information provided by the Department of Health has identified Halton as the best performing equipment service in the country for obtaining best value in its procurement of equipment.

Plans to review the service have been delayed pending the outcome of the national pilots of the Transforming Community Equipment Service initiative. Reports from the pilots and Central Government are expected in the autumn.

3.9 **Recommendation 3: The partnership's governance arrangements need to be strengthened.**

Response :

An initial meeting of the Halton Integrated Community Equipment Service partnership board was held in April with representatives from the Council and the PCT. Terms of reference were agreed and work to develop a business plan, including a performance management framework, is underway.

- 3.9 **Recommendation 4: Control over financial management needs to be strengthened.**

Response :

The partnership board will agree the budget on an annual basis. A financial lead for the PCT has been appointed to provide robust financial information on a regular basis.

- 3.10 **Recommendation 5: Control over equipment returns needs to be strengthened.**

Response :

This recommendation will be implemented once the store has relocated and a bar coding system has been introduced, to monitor equipment distribution and collection.

- 3.11 **Recommendation 6: A comprehensive stores manual should be produced that clearly explains the procedures governing the store's operation and management.**

Response :

On removal to the new premises all guidance will be updated in relation to the new environment and collated in one document.

- 3.12 **Recommendations 7 & 8: Management should action to improve the integrity of the information held on the MSOFT system. Control over the stores records need to be strengthened.**

Response :

Improvements have already been put in place in relation to the stores system and also to the sub stores. The sub stores provide a valuable service to users enabling the provision of equipment for trial during home visits and avoiding inappropriate prescribing.

MSoft, the IT system used by Halton Integrated community Equipment Service, has recently been upgraded and once further training has been provided to staff it is anticipated that this will provide more robust management information for the service.

- 3.13 **Recommendation 9: Control over obsolete stock needs to be strengthened.**

Response:

Actions completed.

- 3.14 **Recommendation 10: Control over the security of the stores needs to be strengthened.**

Response:

The arrangements for security are part of the project plan for the relocated service and an alarm system has already been installed on the new premises.

- 3.15 **Recommendation 11: Computer access controls need to be strengthened.**

Response:

Computer access has been reviewed and is appropriate to the duties of each users.

- 3.16 **Recommendation 12: Efforts should be made to improve the quality and range of management information produced.**

Response:

The MSoft upgrade and further staff training, that is being negotiated with the provider, should allow the provision of more robust management information in future.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Policies and procedures for the Halton Integrated community Equipment Service will need to be reviewed when the service has relocated to the new premises.

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial/Resource Implications

Many of the improvements recommended by the audit will be undertaken as a result of the re-location of the service. There are financial implications of the re-location that are being minimised and will result in an improved service.

- 5.2 Growth in the older population in Halton, high levels of disability and long-term illness, enabling people to continue to live at home and rising service user expectations all place increasing demands on Halton Integrated Community Equipment Service and significant pressure on the limited budget that needs to be continually reviewed.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton

The equipment service serves all service user groups including children and young people who benefit from the developments and efficiencies of this service.

6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

The option of providing a retail outlet at the Independent Living Centre includes consideration of equipment opportunities for disabled people in Halton.

6.3 Healthy Halton

Equipment provided through the service enables people to remain independent and active in the community contributing to physical and emotional wellbeing.

6.4 A Safer Halton

Equipment provided through the service contributes to improved safety within the home by improving mobility and reducing the potential for falls and injury to users.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

None.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 This audit report was produced just prior to a period when the equipment service was subject to a significant unplanned change. These developments have, however, provided the opportunity to improve service provision and the recommendations of the audit report have been welcomed and have provided a framework for this improvement. These improvements are, however, not without additional costs and there is a need to balance investment against the potential for radical change in provision both on a regional and a national basis.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 The Halton Integrated Community Equipment Service provides a service for users of all ages and across all service user groups.

9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

9.1 There are no background documents under the meaning of this Act.