

**Decision Maker:** Adult and Community Portfolio Holder

**Date:** For pre-decision scrutiny by Adult and Community Policy Development and Scrutiny Committee on 26<sup>th</sup> July 2011

**Decision Type:** Non-Urgent                      Non-Executive                      Non-Key

**Title:** **THE PROVISION OF EQUIPMENT AND TALKING BOOKS FOR VISUALLY IMPAIRED PEOPLE**

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**Chief Officer:** Terry Rich, Director of Adult and Community Services

**Ward:** Boroughwide

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1. Reason for report

- 1.1 Following Portfolio Holder agreement (ACS 11004) to a consultation on changes to the provision of equipment and talking books, this report sets out the outcome of the consultation exercise and recommendations for the future provision of the service.
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**2. RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1 The Adult and Community Services Portfolio Holder approves the proposed changes to the provision of equipment and talking books for visually impaired people. Namely;
- Items of equipment as listed in para 3.3 below are provided free of charge to eligible service users who meet critical/substantial needs under Fair Access to Care services criteria
  - Additional items of equipment not listed can be provided free of charge in exceptional cases, should these be deemed vital in maintaining the service user's safety and/or independence
  - The withdrawal of Council subsidy from the RNIB Talking Books service, with new and existing users directed to alternate providers including free local library services and free national providers

### Corporate Policy

1. Policy Status: Existing policy.
  2. BBB Priority: Supporting Independence.
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### Financial

1. Cost of proposal: Estimated cost £9,770
  2. Ongoing costs: Recurring cost. 9,770
  3. Budget head/performance centre: Care Services Budget, Assessment and Care Management
  4. Total current budget for this head: ££9,770
  5. Source of funding: ACS Portfolio
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### Staff

1. Number of staff (current and additional): n/a
  2. If from existing staff resources, number of staff hours: n/a
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### Legal

1. Legal Requirement: Statutory requirement.
  2. Call-in: Call-in is applicable
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### Customer Impact

1. Estimated number of users/beneficiaries (current and projected): Approximately 120 Talking Books users and 500 service users who received equipment issued by KAB within the past 24 months
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### Ward Councillor Views

1. Have Ward Councillors been asked for comments? N/A.
2. Summary of Ward Councillors comments:

### 3. COMMENTARY

- 3.1 The Council currently funds a wide range of equipment for people with a visual impairment who meet the eligibility criteria i.e. assessed as having a critical or substantial need. Some of the equipment provided is vital in helping people remain safe and independent at home, whereas some could be considered “non-essential” for which it would be reasonable to expect people to pay for themselves. Talking books have been provided to people registered blind/partially sighted in Bromley, the service is provided by Royal National Institute of Blind people (RNIB) with an annual subscription charge of £82 per user, funded by the Council.
- 3.2 Kent Association for Blind (KAB) are funded by the Council to provide specialist statutory assessments for people with visual impairments and issue items of equipment to those assessed as requiring these. They are also responsible for administering the talking books service.
- 3.3 The budget for the provision of equipment and talking books has been overspent for the past 2 years and measures to control costs are necessary to ensure future spend is contained within the available budgets. Report ACS 11004 set out the Council’s intention to consult with service users on proposed changes to the provision of equipment and talking books for visually impaired people.
- 3.4 Almost 600 consultation documents were issued to people provided with equipment by KAB and talking books subscribers, with a total of 155 responses received. An equalities impact assessment of the proposed changes was also completed.

#### Summary of Consultation Responses:

##### Equipment

- 3.5 Of the respondents 90% agreed that the following designated items of equipment should be provided free of charge to those who meet the eligibility criteria:

Daily Living	Mobility Aids
Liquid level indicator	Symbol cane
Boil alert	Long cane
Oven shelf guard	Wooden walking stick
Cooking basket	Guide cane
Dycem	Aluminium walking stick
Vegetable holder	Replacement cane tip

- 3.6 Other items of equipment which have previously been provided free of charge can in future be purchased by service users using their own funds. Only in exceptional circumstances will KAB be able to provide non listed items free of charge, and only where these have been assessed as vital in ensuring the safety and independence of the service user.

##### Talking Books

- 3.7 The consultation sought views on the proposal to withdraw Council subsidy from the RNIB Talking Books service as free or cheaper alternatives had been identified. Annual subscription cost to the RNIB service is £82 per user and as of August 2010, 128 people were receiving a wholly subsidised service.
- 3.8 35% of respondents agreed with the proposal, 42% disagreed and the remaining 23% were unsure or did not comment. The reasons for disagreeing with the proposal was due to the perceived superior quality of the service, the wider range and selection of books available and the increased functionality of the of the RNIB service.

- 3.9 As part of the consultation process council officers also attended a demonstration of talking books audio playing equipment with a small group of visually impaired service users. It was clear from the demonstrations the RNIB daisy player has additional functionalities, however the alternatives demonstrated (Calibre and British Wireless for Blind Fund) were accessible to those with a visual impairment.
- 3.10 Given the availability of alternatives and the need to manage increasing demand by ensuring that available funds are targeted at the most vulnerable, it is proposed that the Council will cease subsidising the RNIB talking books service, with new and existing users signposted and supported to access the alternatives available. Service users wishing to continue receiving the RNIB talking books service may do so at their own expense.

### **Equalities Impact Assessment**

- 3.11 The EIA identified instances where visually impaired people may potentially be adversely impacted from the change in policy. These are clearly set out in the EIA and a series of actions have been agreed to mitigate these. Below is a summary of the main issues and actions taken to mitigate these:
- There may be occasions where individuals will require a piece of equipment not listed to remain safe and independent in their own homes. In these exceptional circumstances, discretion will be given to issue items outside of the list free of charge provided they have been assessed as vital in maintaining safety/independence
  - Physical access to library buildings - to mitigate the potential issue whereby some visually impaired residents may be unable to access library buildings, a home library service will be available to deliver books to their homes on a monthly basis
  - The consultation identified a lack of responses from the BME residents, it is therefore proposed to raise awareness through BME representative groups, by providing information and presentations on services available to visually impaired people
  - To address accessibility issues with the online library books service, KAB staff receive training in supporting people to access the service

## **4. POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 The recommendations from this report supports the Council's objectives in the Building a Better Bromley 2020 Vision, in particular Supporting Independence; whereby people with a visual impairment, are supported to remain safe and independent in their homes for longer.

## **5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The budget currently includes the combined costs of talking books and equipment for visually impaired people. Over the past two years, spend has outgrown the available budget. Below is a table of costs:

<b>Year</b>	<b>Budget</b>	<b>Actual Spend</b>	<b>Equipment/talking books split (%)</b>
09/10	£9,550	£16,381	36% equipment 64% talking books
10/11	£9,770	£15,716	47% equipment 53% talking books

- 5.2 By limiting the type of equipment which can be provided free of charge to the list set out in para 3.5 above and by ceasing to subsidise the talking books service, future spend will be contained within available budgets.

## 6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The Community Care (delayed discharges) Act 2003 states any qualifying service of a description prescribed in the regulations is to be free of charge to the person to whom it is provided. The qualifying services are defined in Regulation 3 of The Community Care (Delayed Discharges etc.) Act (Qualifying Services) (England) Regulations 2003 as intermediate care and community equipment (aids and minor adaptations) services. Some of the items of equipment currently provided free of charge to people with visual impairments by the Council could be considered non-specialist ordinary household items which do not fall within the definition of Community Equipment and for which it may be reasonable for people to purchase for themselves.
- 6.2 Under s.7 Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, a local authority is under a duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof. The existing provision by library services is efficient and comprehensive, reasonable adjustments have been made to ensure the Bromley Library service is accessible to those with a visual impairment, this includes waiving all fees to those with a registered visual impairment, the provision of a home library service for housebound service users and the ability to reserve books from within the extensive library audio books stock, furthermore if there is particular demand for an audio book not available from the library stock, consideration will be given to purchasing this.
- 6.3 The Equality Act 2010 s149 (1) places a duty on a public authority in the exercise of its functions, must have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination and advance equality of opportunity between persons who share relevant protected characteristics and persons who do not share it By implementing the steps outlined above the Council is making reasonable adjustments to ensure disabled residents are not placed at a substantial disadvantage compared to non-disabled residents.

<b>Non-Applicable Sections:</b>	Personnel Implications
Background Documents: (Access via Contact Officer)	Equalities Impact Assessment