

Scrutiny Board (Health and Wellbeing and Adult Social Care)

1. At its meeting on 25 January 2012, the Scrutiny Board (Health and Wellbeing and Adult Social Care) considered the draft working group statement in relation to the provision of services for the blind and visually impaired across Leeds.
2. At the Scrutiny Board meeting, members raised some concerns regarding the regular respite afforded to carers, that resulted from previous social group meetings at Shire View. It was recognised that this matter had been one of the concerns raised by the deputation to the Scrutiny Board, at its meeting in October 2011 (as detailed in Annex A). However, due to the emerging complexities presented, this had not been a specific consideration of the working group. The Scrutiny Board agreed to draw this matter to the attention of Executive Board.
3. In addition, Members of the Scrutiny Board not directly involved in the working group discussions raised the possibility of a 'review and refresh' clause within future contractual arrangements when commissioning services. It was felt that the use of such clauses would allow the Council to consider any potential changes to the needs of service users, and specify any appropriate service changes, at regular and pre-determined intervals during the duration of a contractual agreement. While it was recognised this had not been a consideration of the working group, the Scrutiny Board agreed to draw this matter to the attention of Executive Board.

Cllr. Lisa Mulherin
Chair, Scrutiny Board (Health and Wellbeing and adult Social Care)

25 January 2012

Scrutiny Board (Health and Wellbeing and Adult Social Care)

Provision of services for the blind and visually impaired across Leeds

Working Group statement for consideration by the Executive Board

Purpose

1. The purpose of this statement is to provide the Executive Board with additional comments from the working group established by the Scrutiny Board (Health and Wellbeing and Adult Social Care), following receipt of a request for scrutiny regarding current arrangements for meeting the needs of Blind and Visually Impaired people in Leeds.

Background

2. In October 2011, the Scrutiny Board (Health and Wellbeing and Adult Social Care) was presented with a request for scrutiny regarding current arrangements for meeting the needs of Blind and Visually Impaired people in Leeds.
3. At that meeting, the Scrutiny Board noted that a deputation on the issues raised was due to be presented to Full Council (at its meeting on 16 November 2011) and that deputations to Council were usually referred to Executive Board for consideration. As such, the Scrutiny Board established a working group to consider the issues raised, agreeing that this should arrange to meet prior to the Executive Board so that any findings and/or recommendations could be submitted to the Executive Board to assist the consideration of the issues raised at Full Council. The relevant extract from the minutes of the Scrutiny Board meeting, 28 October 2011, is attached at Annex A for information.
4. Since considering the issues raised at the Scrutiny Board in October 2011, the working group sought to explore these in more detail through a number of different elements of work. This included a site visit and discussions with a range of stakeholders as follows:
 - Service users, including, but not exclusively, Dual Sensory Loss (DSL) service users;
 - Leeds Vision Consortium (LVC) staff members;
 - LVC managerial staff;
 - Officers from Adult Social Services
5. The site visit to Fairfax House took place on 9 December 2011 and provided an opportunity to look at the facilities available, meet with staff members and speak to a number of service users and volunteers. Notes¹ from the site visit are attached at Annex B for information.
6. A meeting of the working group was held on 16 January 2012. The working group considered a range of written material produced by LVC and Adult Social Services. This allowed the working group to consider additional information that provided useful context to the current position and the request for scrutiny. Notes from that meeting are attached at Annex C.

¹ As amended at the working group meeting on 16 January 2012, to reflect additional comments made by those attending the site visit

Summary of findings

7. In October 2011, members of the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) presented concerns to the Scrutiny Board in relation to services to the blind and visually impaired that focused on:
 - The loss of social provision available under previous arrangements at Shire View.
 - The suitability of current facilities at Fairfax House – particularly in terms of the bathroom/ toilet facilities available, primarily to Dual Sensory Loss (DSL) service users.

Support to social group

8. From the information presented and discussions held, it is clear that there has been significant confusion in some quarters regarding the provision of support to a number of active social groups, under the previous and current contractual arrangements. However, it is clear that specific support to social groups did not form part of the previous contractual arrangements with CoHearentVision, and this continues to be the case under the current agreement with Leeds Vision Consortium (LVC).
9. Nonetheless, it should be recognised that outside of the formal contractual arrangements, Action for the Blind (a charitable organisation that forms part of LVC) is supporting and continues to offer support to existing social groups. The working group has been advised that the 10 social groups previously making use of the facilities at Shire View have been offered the use of facilities at Fairfax House and, to date, 4 groups have taken up this opportunity. The working group welcomes the efforts of both LVC and Action for the Blind in continuing to support the work of social groups, outside the formal contractual arrangements.
10. However, it is noteworthy that the working group was advised that the Craft Group had been advised [by the National Federation of the Blind] not to take up the offer of using the LVC facilities until after 10 February 2012 (i.e. the date of the Executive Board meeting).

Suitability of current facilities

11. The services offered at Fairfax House are being accessed by a range of different service users from across the City and not just Dual Sensory Loss (DSL) service users. While it is important to recognise and respond to the issues raised by DSL service users, it is also important to recognise the range of other services provided by LVC under the contractual arrangements with the Council.
12. Having viewed the current facilities at Fairfax House and discussed the facilities with service users, the working group highlighted a range of concerns and identified a number of areas for improvement and potential solutions. The areas of concerns were discussed with LVC staff, which resulted in a number of positive actions – including the proposed relocation on the toilet/ bathroom door that will provide a much higher level of privacy. The working group welcomes LVC's willingness to both listen to the concerns raised and take action to address such concerns.
13. Members of the Working Group who had visited Fairfax House also expressed concern about the noise levels in the DSL meeting room on the ground floor, which had no soft furnishings to soften the noise. On the day of the site visit it had been difficult to communicate even for those without a sensory impairment, because of the

noise level. LVC advised that curtains were to be fitted to some of the windows to help to soften the noise and that the tables and chairs had been chosen to make this meeting room a more flexible space. The working group was keen to see further efforts made to soften the feel and reduce the sound echoing in this meeting space.

14. LVC also advised that there had been many more service users in the meeting room than normal on the day of the site visit as it was just before Christmas and people were meeting to exchange gifts. LVC advised that other meeting rooms were available to DSL service users too, but that due to the constraints of the building and the lease agreement these other meeting rooms were on the 5th floor.
15. It should be noted that some service users also commented that the facilities at Fairfax House offered additional opportunities (not previously available), such as accessing shopping and other facilities in the City Centre. It is important that these additional opportunities are recognised.
16. Service users who use public transport to access the service also told the Working Group how much easier it was to access Fairfax House with only one bus connection required to get into the city centre.
17. Furthermore, while the ground floor accommodation at Fairfax House is the main meeting space for DSL service users, it is clear that LVC is committed to operating a flexible approach to the use of other available space within the building on the 5th floor, aimed at improving and increasing service users' independence around the building.
18. Concerns were expressed about evacuation from the 5th floor in case of an emergency, however it was noted that a fire evacuation plan is in place and a practice evacuation has recently taken place. A recent fire audit at Fairfax House, undertaken by the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB), found the facilities and arrangements in place to be satisfactory.

Other comments/ observations

19. While the working group has focused on the primary concerns identified as part of the request for scrutiny in October 2011, a range of written material produced by LVC and Adult Social Services has been considered. This additional information is reflected in the notes of the working group meeting, detailed at Annex C. However, it is important to recognise the following details.
20. Issues around Shire View and service provision appear to have become increasingly intertwined. However, from the information presented it is clear that the use of Shire View as a base to deliver services under the previous contractual arrangements was a decision of the previous service provider, CoHearentVision. It is also clear that the decision to terminate the lease agreement for Shire View, and therefore vacate the premises, was also taken by the previous service provider, CoHearentVision. Furthermore, CoHearentVision's decision to terminate the lease for Shire View was taken only weeks before the new service began to operate and after LVC had signed a 5-year lease agreement for Fairfax House. Nonetheless it is felt that an early resolution around the future of Shire View would be in the interest of all concerned.
21. The service review concluded by Adult Social Services in January 2009 identified some significant inadequacies in the service, with the level of uptake not reflecting

the significant investment in this service. Under the current arrangements, LVC are offering an enhanced range of services and support for clients than had been available under the previous arrangements with CoHearentVision. This is supported by the comparative information reported around the level of referrals under the previous and current provider.

22. LVC is currently establishing a befriending element to the volunteer service. This is aimed at addressing a need identified and highlighted through the Independent Living Service, and suggests LVC has arrangements in place to help improve and develop services to meet the needs of service users. However, it is felt that further development is needed around establishing and maintaining effective 'peer support' arrangements for service users.

Recommendations

23. It is recommended that:
- (a) The findings of the working group be noted and used to inform the decision of the Executive Board.
 - (b) To improve the experience of all service users accessing facilities at Fairfax House, LVC implements the following programme of improvements to the ground floor meeting room, as discussed with the working group:
 - Relocation of the toilet / bathroom facility entrance;
 - Improvements to the drink-making facilities;
 - Introduction of more soft furnishings.
 - (c) LVC present a progress report on improving the physical environment at Fairfax House to the appropriate Scrutiny Board by June 2012.
 - (d) At the breakpoint in the current lease agreement for Fairfax House, consideration be given as to whether better premises can be found for LVC to meet the needs of all blind and visually impaired service users.
 - (e) In recognition that it would be in the interest of all concerned, the future of Shire View be resolved as soon as practicable.
 - (f) Adult Social Services and LVC maintain their efforts to address the continuing needs of a range of social groups for blind and visually impaired people across Leeds.
 - (g) In recognition that further development is needed around establishing and maintaining effective 'peer support' and 'peer learning' opportunities for service users, Adult Social Services establish this as an aspect of service delivery under future contractual agreements.
 - (h) By June 2012, Adult Social Services presents a comprehensive performance report to the appropriate Scrutiny Board relating to the provision of services for the blind and visually impaired – detailing performance across the range of service areas that form part of the formal agreement between LVC and the Council.

January 2012

**Extract from the minutes of the Scrutiny Board
(Health and Wellbeing and Adult Social Care) held on 28 October 2011**

Request for Scrutiny: arrangements for meeting the needs of Blind and Visually Impaired people in Leeds

Minutes

The Board considered a report of the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development setting out a request for scrutiny relating to the current arrangements for meeting the needs of Blind and Visually Impaired people in Leeds. A copy of the request made by Mr Victor Jackson, was appended to the report.

Members noted that a Deputation to Full Council on this matter was scheduled to be presented at its meeting on 16th November.

The Board heard from Mary Naylor MBE who had been nominated to speak on this matter.

Members were informed that following the changes to the provision of services for blind, visually impaired and dual sensory loss people in Leeds, there were major concerns by service users about the loss of venues for the range of groups which had been formed which as well as providing the opportunity for socialising also provided help, motivation and continued support for people living with these conditions.

Concerns were also highlighted in respect of:

- the provision at Fairfax House; that as a drop-in centre this was adequate but not as a day centre due to its location; its design – i.e. an office building - and its lack of basic facilities suitable for service users;
- the monitoring of complaints within Adult Social Care in view of the concerns about the provision which had been raised, although it had been stated by Senior Officers within the Department that no complaints had been received in respect of this provision;
- the impact of the changes on carers, in that the previously guaranteed respite provided by the regular group meetings at Shire View, had ceased;
- the need to ensure provision for the future;
- that Shire View which had been a centre planned for and by people with visual impairments, remained empty;
- that the current unstable situation was causing fear and concern and that without the support networks provided by service users and volunteers, those people newly diagnosed with visual impairment would not have the same opportunities when dealing with their new situation which could lead to isolation and loss of confidence;

As deputations to Council were usually referred to Executive Board for consideration, the Scrutiny Board considered that a working group be established as a logical way forward, comprising members of the Scrutiny Board which would meet before the Executive Board meeting as this would enable the working group's recommendations to be put directly to the Executive Board.

RESOLVED –

- (i) To note the report and to thank Mary Naylor for her presentation
- (ii) To note that a deputation on the issues raised would be presented to Council at its meeting on 16th November 2011
- (iii) That a working group of the Scrutiny Board (Health and Well-being and Adult Social Care) be established to consider the issues raised and that a meeting be arranged prior to the Executive Board meeting to enable the working group's findings to be submitted to the Executive Board.

SCRUTINY BOARD (HEALTH AND WELLBEING AND ADULT SOCIAL CARE)
SERVICES FOR THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED WORKING GROUP
– NOTES OF THE SITE VISIT (9 DECEMBER 2011)²

Following the Scrutiny Board meeting in October 2011 – where it was agreed to establish a working group to consider the issues highlighted by a group of visually impaired service users, on 9 December 2011 representatives from the working group visited Fairfax House – a city centre (LS1) building used by Leeds Vision Consortium (LVC), both as an administrative centre and service delivery location.

Attendance at the meeting was as follows:

Cllr. Lisa Mulherin (Chair)	Helena Hughes (Regional Operations Manager)
Cllr. Shirley Varley	Lesley Sharp (Service Manager)
Joy Fisher (co-opted member)	Iris Berkeley (LCC – Adult Social Services)
Steven Courtney (LCC – Scrutiny Support)	

At the start of the meeting, Cllr. Mulherin outlined that the Council had received two separate requests from service users regarding current service provision, as follows:

- **Request for Scrutiny: 28 October 2011** – focusing on the loss of social provision available under previous arrangements at Shire View. Concern had also been raised regarding the current facilities – particularly in terms of the bathroom/ toilet facilities available, primarily to Dual Sensory Loss (DSL) service users.
- **Deputation to Council: 16 November 2011** – focusing on re-establishing facilities at Shire View.

It was outlined that the purpose of the visit was to provide members of the working group with an opportunity to look at the facilities on offer and speak to a number of service users.

Members of the working group were presented with (and discussed) a range of information, which included details of the range of services provided by LVC and a summary of performance (June – December 2011). In particular, the following points regarding the Dual Sensory Loss service were discussed:

- 47 service users accessing the service – over 3 days/ week (Monday, Wednesday and Friday);
- DSL service users tended to be older people;
- Initial priority to ensure a stable transition for service users;
- Also establishing a programme of assessments (undertaken by SENSE) to identify individual needs;
- Current service was not purely centre-based, and aimed to enhance the service user experience.

During the visit, members of the working group also met with other staff, volunteers and service users – mostly those accessing DSL service.

² As amended at the working group meeting on 16 January 2012, to reflect additional comments made by those attending the site visit.

Findings

Following discussions with service users and viewing the current facilities, the following issues were raised:

- Current services were being accessed by service users from across the City;
- The current bathroom/ toilet facilities which opened into the meeting room appeared inappropriate and, in the view of the working group, did not offer an acceptable level of privacy;
- There was a lack of soft furnishings, leading to the meeting space feeling quite clinical;
- There was some concern regarding the acoustics of the meeting space, which appeared to be very noisy – perhaps as a result of the level of glass and lack of soft furnishings. This was a particular concern given the particular needs of DSL service users, with some users stating it was difficult to hear (at times) which could put a strain on relationships/ friendships with other service users;
- While drinks were available, there was some concern around the drink-making facilities;
- Some service users commented that the facilities were quite cold;
- There appeared to be limited opportunity to improve some aspects of the facility;
- Some service users had commented that the facilities at Fairfax House offered additional opportunities (not previously available), such as accessing shopping and other facilities in the City Centre.

Additional information

A range of additional details has been established both prior to and since the site visit, including:

- LVC was awarded the contract to deliver services in January 2011. This followed a formal tendering process;
- A mobilisation period followed – until June 2011 – at which point service delivery commenced;
- LVC undertook an extensive property search to identify appropriate premises for the delivery of some services. A number of properties were viewed and considered;
- Fairfax House was identified as a potential property and discussed with the Council (through staff in Adult Social Services) regarding its suitability, before agreeing the lease;
- LVC entered into a 5-year lease agreement for Fairfax House, which includes a minimum term of 3-years. The premises were refurbished prior to services ‘going live’;
- LVC confirmed that support to/for social groups did not form part of the formal contract. It was confirmed by Adult Social Services that this had been the case under the previous agreement with CoHearent Vision.
- Nonetheless, LVC was continuing to work with previously established social groups to try to accommodate their needs/ requirements. There had been some successes. The Women’s Social Group was now using the facilities at Fairfax House and it was anticipated that the Craft Group would be doing likewise in early 2012.

NB It was reported at the working group meeting that the Craft Group had been advised [by the National Federation of the Blind] not to take up the offer of using the LVC facilities until after 10 February 2012 (i.e. the date of the Executive Board meeting).

**SCRUTINY BOARD (HEALTH AND WELLBEING AND ADULT SOCIAL CARE)
SERVICES FOR THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED WORKING GROUP
– NOTES OF THE MEETING HELD 16 JANUARY 2012**

Present:

- Councillor Lisa Mulherin (Chair)
- Councillor Bill Hyde
- Councillor John Illingworth
- Councillor Shirley Varley
- Joy Fisher (co-opted member)
- Sally Morgan (co-opted member)

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed everyone in attendance, in particular the service users present.

Attendance, apologies and introductions

In addition to members of the working group, the following individuals were present:

Action for the Blind (part of Leeds Vision Consortium)

- Elizabeth Percy, Head of Region (Yorkshire and North East)
- Helena Hughes, Regional Operations Manager
- Ian Beverley, Assistive Technology Coordinator
- Stephen Hezelgrave, Independent Living Coordinator

Service Users

- Terry Bottomley and Carl Sykes

Leeds City Council

- Tim O'Shea, Head of Adult Social Care Commissioning
- Iris Berkeley, Adult Commissioning Officer
- Steven Courtney, Principal Scrutiny Adviser

Brief introductions were made and the following apologies were noted:

- Councillor Judith Chapman
- Councillor Suzi Armitage
- Councillor Rebecca Charlwood
- Betty Smithson (co-opted member)
- Paul Truswell (co-opted member)

NB Apologies were subsequently received from Councillor Clive Fox

To help the working group consider the issues presented to the Scrutiny Board at its meeting in October 2011, the following documentation was provided to inform the discussion.

- Background and outcome of the site visit;
- Leeds Vision Consortium (LVC) – summary of current service provision and performance;
- Request for Scrutiny: Adult Social Care response;
- Deputation to Council: pre-publication draft Executive Board report.

Background and outcome of the site visit

The Chair gave a brief reminder of the purpose of the working group, making reference to the request for scrutiny and deputation to Council and summarising the differences in emphasis as follow:

- The request for scrutiny focused on the perceived short-coming of the current facilities on offer at Fairfax House.
- The deputation to Council focused around a desire to return to Shire View.

Reference was made to the notes from the site visit (Annex B) which was amended to reflect the additional comments made by other members of the working group who had attended the visit.

Leeds Vision Consortium (LVC) – summary of current service

It was reported that the Dual Sensory Loss Day Service (DSL) and Communicator Guide Service ran on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, with approximately 10-18 attendees at each session. It was highlighted that service priorities for the first 6 months had been to provide a stable transition for service users, while beginning to engage them in a programme of assessment to help identify their needs and wishes with a view to ensuring that the service is better able to meet both. It was reported that service users were responding well to the gradual changes that are being implemented and are positive about the more active opportunities now offered.

In response to some of the comments and findings from the site visit, representatives from Leeds Vision Consortium (LVC) provided the following comments/ response:

- Arrangements were in place to relocate the toilet/ bathroom door. Construction of a partition wall had been considered, however feedback from service users suggested this was not desirable.
- By relocating the toilet/ bathroom door, this would allow for a 'drinks station' to be created that would improve the current facilities.
- Acoustics of the ground floor meeting space at Fairfax House was recognised. It was reported that high level curtaining was to be installed to help improve the facilities.
- Issues associated with the availability of soft furnishings was acknowledged. While it should be recognised that specialist furniture was needed to meet the needs of service users (i.e. furniture of specific height etc.), this would be taken forward and discussed with service users.
- While it was important to respond to the issues raised by Dual Sensory Loss service users, it was also important to recognise the range of other services provided by LVC under the contractual arrangements with the Council.

An outline of the other services provided was presented, as follows:

- **Eye Clinic Liaison** – to ensure that those who attend eye clinics, including low vision clinics, have instant access to targeted relevant advice and support and practical information that helps clients put their diagnosis in context. Onward referrals are made to other service areas.
- **Independent Living Service** – offers support with day-to-day living, welfare rights, housing issues and managing personal budgets. Offering tailored support in all aspects of life after sight loss, enabling clients to make informed choices and to be in control of the way they live their life and maintain independence.

- **Assistive Technology** – providing training, support and practical advice on all areas of technology enabling individuals to become more independent, access information, support skills development and contribute on equal terms. It was highlighted that technology can assist visually impaired people of all ages. Making the most of technology can have a very positive impact, helping people who are blind and partially sighted to increase their independence.
- **Employment Service** – specialist support and advice to help blind and partially sighted people find employment, start their own business or stay in their jobs if they are losing their sight.
- **Transitions Service** – similar to the Independent Living Service, but providing targeted support for young people (16-25 years) during the transition between compulsory education to further and higher education or into employment or training. This aspect of service supports young people to build their confidence and independent living skills.
- **Volunteer Service and Development** – providing a structured programme of training and support for volunteers who are either visually impaired themselves or who are sighted but are interested in supporting our clients. Currently establishing a befriending element to the volunteer service to address a need highlighted through the Independent Living Service. It was reported that there are 24 active volunteers with a further 8 volunteers currently going through the recruitment process.
- **Health and Wellbeing Service (Wilberforce Trust)** – the first Health and Wellbeing Programme started in early December and is targeted at clients who are either newly diagnosed or who have not previously accessed services. Upon completion, participants who consider themselves in need of more intensive ongoing support will be referred to the appropriate service.

It was reported that Fairfax House served as the overall operational base and current base for the DSL service, the Independent Living Service, Employment Service and Assistive Technology suite (as confirmed at the site visit). It was reported that St James Hospital was the base for the eye clinic service and that three satellite social groups were located in Kippax, Otley and Morley.

The working group was advised that the Health and Wellbeing Service would be operating its health and well being programme in three different localities across Leeds and it was LVC's intention to continue to develop the outreach service in differing neighbourhoods in line with the expressed needs of service users. In particular, it was reported that the Health and Wellbeing Development Worker has continued to attend community based events in order to reach groups and individuals who may not already be aware of the services available to them – particularly focusing on encouraging up take of services by visually impaired members of BME communities.

It was confirmed that, while the ground floor accommodation was the main meeting space for DSL service users, LVC operated a flexible approach to the use of other space (on the 5th Floor) within Fairfax House. It was reported that a number of service users made use of the other facilities and the this approach was increasing service users independence around the building.

Members questioned the level of service user involvement and participation in developing services and discussed the need for befriending services and peer support groups to help prevent possible isolation as part of a more community based service. In response, it was reported that befriending services had been highlighted through the Independent Living Service and that LVC was currently establishing this as an element of the volunteer service – reflected in the temporary increase in working hours for the Volunteer Coordinator.

Feedback from staff members and service users

LVC staff members reported experience of other service providers (both in and outside of Leeds), including the previous provider CoHearentVision. It was felt that Leeds was offering a unique service that was addressing service user participation and potential isolation. The working group was advised that, from a staff perspective, LVC were offering an enhanced range of services and support for clients than had been the case under the previous arrangements with CoHearentVision.

Service users present described positive experiences of the service. One service user had previously accessed services at Shire View, but was now accessing more support and a greater range of services at Fairfax House. The city centre location had also improved accessibility.

The other service user had suddenly become blind in June 2011 and had not previously accessed services at Shire View. However, since June 2011, the services and support provided by LVC had been excellent.

It was reported that a younger service user had planned to attend the meeting (originally planned for 21 December 2011) but, with the support of the Transition Service, had recently secured a place at college and was unable to attend.

Request for Scrutiny: Adult Social Care response and Deputation to Council: pre-publication draft Executive Board report

The working group considered a report of the Director of Adult Social Services seeking to address a number of issues raised during consideration of the request for scrutiny in October 2011, concerning the outcome of the recent tender process of Sight Impaired services.

Among a range of issues raised in October 2011, the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) stated that 'there are no resources for groups to enable visually impaired to practice their skills and support each other and there is no provision now where their health and well being can be maintained and where they can continue to be motivated.'

In addition the report sought to address a number of other matters, including:

- Adult Social Care Support Service
- Contractual arrangements with CoHearentVision
- Social Groups which formerly met at Shire View
- Service Provision
- Facilities at Fairfax House

The issues contained in the report were presented and fully discussed. The main issues identified can be summarised as follows:

- Previously, a contract had been in place between Adult Social Services and CoHearentVision, for the delivery of blind and partially sighted services. Under that contract, CoHearentVision were contracted to “support and assess the needs of blind and partially sighted and deafblind people through the provision of advice, information and support to enable each individual to live independently as possible”. The service was contracted to provide, “Day services for deafblind individuals; provide a Social Communicator Guide Service and generic information services for Blind and Visually Impaired people”.
- A service specification with clear outcomes was agreed and implemented with CohearentVision during the last two years of the contract.
- CoHearentVision chose to provide the service from Shire View premises in Headingley until the contract ended in June 2011.
- The premises at Shire View had been the subject of a 20-year leasehold agreement between the Council and CoHearentVision (entered into by Council officers during the 1990’s). The terms of this agreement only allowed CoHearentVision the right to terminate the leasehold arrangement.
- It was reported that in May 2011, CoHearentVision informed Adult Social Services of its intention to terminate the lease agreement and return the building to the Council – which it did so on 30 June 2011. It was also reported that until May 2011 the intentions of CohearentVision, in relation to the retention of the premises or indeed to the groups that had used the building during that organisations tenure, had been unclear.
- In January 2009, Adult Social Services concluded a review of services provided by CoHearentVision. Alongside an extensive consultation process with current and potential service users, the review process highlighted:
 - Significant inadequacies in the service and a level of uptake (from the 5200 adults in Leeds registered with a visual impairment) that did not reflect the significant investment in this service;
 - The existing service lacked an overall management direction. This included an absence of staff training, supervision, or appraisal; and,
 - A general lack of policies and procedures within the organisation.
- A financial dispute between the Council and CoHearentVision arose during 2008/09 after CoHearentVision failed to post it’s annual accounts on time and following enquiry by specialist LCC accounting staff. This matter was not in relation to the services the organisation provided from Shire View but was in relation to significant financial surpluses the organisation had accrued over a number of years and which were recouped by the Council in 2009/10 financial year. This was reported as an ‘unintended outcome’ of the review undertaken by Adult Social Services and it was also reported that there were some outstanding legal issues.
- There was limited service performance information available from the previous contact. This was described as a result of the previous provider not always providing sufficient/ full information, which had resulted in ‘a few surprises’ and demonstrated by the lack of client files made available to LVC after being awarded the contract.

- The lack of historical performance information made direct comparison of the previous and current contracts difficult. However, it was made clear that there are more services provided by LVC, available to a larger number of people at the main base (Fairfax House) and at other venues across the city. Statistics collected as part of the contract monitoring showed that in the period June 2011 – September 2011, LVC received 172 new referrals compared with 56 by the previous provider within the same time period during 2010.
- The need to ensure effective use of the general facilities available at Shire View (as a Council asset), although it was recognised that this was perhaps outside of the remit of the working group and beyond the specific scope of the inquiry.
- The requirement of the current contact with LVC had not changed significantly since September 2010 (when CoHearentVision had held the contract) and support to social groups had not previously formed part of that contract. However, outside of the formal contractual arrangements, Action for the Blind (a charitable organisation that is part of LVC) continues to try and support existing social groups. The 10 social groups previously making use of the facilities at Shire View had all been contacted and offered the use of facilities at Fairfax House. To date, 4 groups had taken up this opportunity.
- It was reported that since the start of the contract (June 2011), a total of 15 complaints had been received – 3 from DSL service users (covering facilities available at Fairfax House such as hot food, spending area (for dogs) and the toilet/bathroom facilities. A further 12 complaints had been received from other blind and partially sighted individuals, not currently accessing the services. These complaints had been around support to social groups. It was reported that opportunities to experience the services and facilities available at Fairfax House had been offered, but not taken up. It was reported there were no outstanding complaints and no further complaints had been received since September 2011.
- Following queries around fire safety of the facilities, it was reported that an evacuation plan was in place and a practice evacuation had recently taken place. It was also reported that the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) had recently undertaken a fire audit at Fairfax House and were satisfied with the facilities and arrangements in place.

Summary and conclusions

The Chair drew the meeting and discussion to its conclusion with the following points being offered by members of the working group:

- The facilities available on the 5th floor (Fairfax House) were considered to be good and the flexible approach to use the available space (including the ground floor) was recognised. It was also acknowledged that this would increase the independence of service users around the building.
- The efforts and actions to date to address the issues raised by DSL service users and members of the working group were welcomed and seen as positive steps to improve the facilities and experience of service users.
- Acknowledgement that other improvements identified by the working group (including soft furnishings) would be explored by LVC.
- The development of a befriending service within the Volunteer Service was seen as a positive improvement. However, it was recognised that further development was

needed around establishing and maintaining effective 'peer support' for service users.

- It was agreed that an early resolution around the future of Shire View would be in the interest of all concerned.

It was agreed that the:

- Principal Scrutiny Adviser would summarise the discussion and outcome of the meeting and prepare a draft statement for submission to the Executive Board at its meeting on 10 February 2012.
- Draft statement would be circulated to members of the working group for approval, in advance of it being submitted for inclusion as part of the departmental report to the Executive Board.

The Chair thanked all those present for attending the meeting and contributing to the discussion and closed the meeting.