

Health, Wellbeing and Local Government Committee

HWLG(3)-04-10-p4: 4 March 2010

Ministerial Evidence session

1 Purpose

This paper provides background information to update the Health, Wellbeing and Local Government Committee (the Committee) on Wheelchair Services and the All Wales Posture and Mobility Review.

2 Background

In Wales, a posture and mobility service that includes long-term wheelchair provision is commissioned by Health Commission Wales from the Artificial Limb and Appliance Service. The Welsh Health Circular (2003) 63, Planning and Commissioning Guidance, identified that Health Commission Wales would commission an agreed range of specialist, tertiary and national services on an All Wales basis from 1 April 2003. Wheelchairs are currently issued through 5 centres across Wales: Cardiff and Wrexham Artificial Limb and Appliance Service Centres and the Rehab Engineering Units in Swansea, Cardiff and Llanfairfechan. The Rehab Engineering Units, through a Service Level Agreement with the 2 Artificial Limb and Appliance Service centres, are responsible for the provision of specialised seating.

In 2008/09, Health Commission Wales provided the Artificial Limb and Appliance Service in Wales with £18.6m funding. This does not include the funding for all of the Rehabilitation Engineering Units. Currently there are 70,955 wheelchair users known to the services. This equates to approximately one wheelchair user for every 43 people in the population.

The vast majority of referrals (72% - 80%) are assessed as non-complex and are managed through a process that delivers a wheelchair to a client within 21 days.

3 Action Taken

The paper provides the Committee with an update on the All Wales Posture and Mobility Review.

In May 2008, I announced my commitment to conduct a review of wheelchair provision across Wales. The intention was for the review to encompass long term and short term loans, adult and paediatric wheelchair services.

All Wales Posture and Mobility Review

The review has been divided into two phases. The aim of phase one was to:-

Examine opportunities to reduce waiting times for both assessment and provision of equipment for both paediatric and adult wheelchair service users;

Review the current process within the Wheelchair Services in respect of waiting list management to ensure they are managed within current good practice guidelines (Guide to Good Practice 2007 and Referral to Treatment guidelines);

Make recommendations on a way forward that will lead to sustainable improvement for wheelchair users;

Consider whether a wider review of Artificial Limb and Appliance Service was required.

Following on from the completion of phase one, phase two would look to:

Develop a costed plan for achieving incremental improvements in waiting times. This work would identify the early efficiencies to be delivered to improve performance and an investment plan that would deliver an agreed maximum waiting time over an agreed period of time.

Review the remainder of the Artificial Limb and Appliance Service as wheelchair users often access other services.

4 Progress

Key Findings from Phase One of the All Wales Posture and Mobility Review

Phase One of the review was taken forward by a Steering Group and Expert Advisory Group which included representation from service users and carers, employees from Cardiff and the Vale and Betsi Cadwaladr Local Health Boards, Health Commission Wales, British Red Cross and the Welsh Assembly Government.

The Steering Group produced a Ministerial report on the conclusion of phase one which included a summary of its key findings, and made a number of recommendations.

A summary of the key findings of phase one of the All Wales Posture and Mobility Review is as follows:

There are significant risks and implications for users and carers whilst they wait to be assessed and have equipment provided. In addition there are associated costs in both Health and Social Care whilst trying to support clients without the right equipment.

The lack of formally agreed service standards or key performance indicators for the provision of wheelchair services has meant that the performance management focus on the service is not as clear as for other specialities where waiting times are a key service driver.

In the absence of a formal mandatory requirement to monitor waiting time for the assessment and delivery of wheelchairs, Health Commission Wales has developed provisional maximum waiting times for the services in North Wales and South Wales.

There are currently variable (and sometimes significant) bottlenecks in the supply chain process resulting in delays between the taking of a wheelchair prescription and its delivery to the client.

The Artificial Limb and Appliance Service and Rehab Engineering Unit budgets are subject to year on year internal cost reduction targets. Much of the equipment for the posture and mobility service is purchased from the global market. Because of the impact of the currency exchange rate, the relative increase in the cost of equipment is placing additional financial pressures on the service.

Across the four home nations, Wales provides its service users with the largest range of equipment. This is a deliberate strategy to enable clinical needs to be met to best effect avoiding unnecessary compromises in provision. Whilst this is also a positive factor in offering choice to service users, it can have a negative impact on waiting times. The broader the range of equipment, the more complex the prescribing and commissioning process and, therefore, the longer the lead-in times for delivery and commissioning. It also means that the scope for reconditioning and re-using equipment is more restricted.

The Artificial Limb and Appliance Service provides a wheelchair service that principally meets "health needs" i.e. essential posture and mobility needs. Service users often need to have their wider requirements taken into account during the assessment process, whether in relation to employment, education or social need.

A quality repair and maintenance service is an intrinsic and critical part of the wheelchair service and is vital for all clients. The service in South Wales will be brought in house this year.

Short-term wheelchair loans are not funded through the Artificial Limb and Appliance Service. Currently, most clients, carers and practitioners rely on voluntary agencies for this service. The provision of short term loans needs to be further reviewed.

Recommendations from Phase One of the All Wales Posture and Mobility Review

The Phase One report made the following recommendations:

Robust Key Performance Indicators measuring the whole pathway should be developed in partnership with service users to drive the performance improvement agenda.

To support work already undertaken to improve the posture and mobility waiting list management processes, there is a requirement for further review in line with the Referral to Treatment (RTT) guidance.

The service model needs to be reviewed taking into account agreed suggested key principles.

The principle of Unified Assessment needs to be fully extended to the posture and mobility service. Community Therapist assessment protocols will need to be developed which enable key elements of the work place, home and school assessment to be completed prior to referral to ALAS. Strong communication links need to be developed between ALAS staff and the community therapists with community therapists attending all first assessments.

The planning of standard and specialist Artificial Limb and Appliance Service should continue to be managed through the Welsh Health Specialist Services Committee (WHSSC), the successor body to Health Commission Wales.

A policy lead will be identified within the Welsh Assembly Government for Technical services to include Artificial Limb and Appliance Services, community equipment, communication and environmental equipment, Telecare and Telehealth.

A programme of education will be developed to enable users, carers and practitioners to understand the value of real partnership in agreeing how the needs of users of the services provided through Artificial Limb and Appliance Service, Rehab Engineering Units and rehabilitation services will be met.

A specific review of the commissioning and provision of wheelchairs for short-term loan purposes should be undertaken.

Next Steps for Phase Two of the All Wales Posture and Mobility Review

Work is currently underway to develop Phase Two of the All Wales Posture and Mobility Review. The review will take forward the recommendations arising from Phase One and will take the form of two strands running in parallel. The first strand of the review will focus on:

Reviewing current waiting list management processes. The aim of which would be to ensure that any future investment in the wheelchair service is planned to yield a greater reduction in waiting times.

Review of wheelchair waiting list management processes in line with the Referral to Treatment guidance.

Review of the posture and mobility service model.

Development of robust Key Performance Indicators to drive the performance improvement agenda.

The second strand running in parallel would cover the following two wider recommendations:

Review of the most appropriate model of the proposed single lead organisation which would have responsibility for managing and delivering the services currently provided by the Artificial Limb and Appliance Service Centres and the Rehab Engineering Units. To include the development of a programme of education to enable users, carers and practitioners to understand the value of real partnership in agreeing how the needs of users of the services will be met.

Review of the commissioning and provision of wheelchairs for short term loan purposes.

Phase Two is being driven forward by a Project Board supported by a wider reference group. The first meeting of the Project Board will take place in March 2010 with a three month completion deadline.

4 Summary and Recommendations

The Committee is invited to note the progress made on the All Wales Posture and Mobility Review.