

Shared Services Joint Committee 27 March 2024

Report Title	Visual Impairment (VI) – Update /Progress Report
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Executive Member	Cllr Gill Mercer, Executive Member for Adults, Health and Wellbeing, NNC Cllr Matt Golby, Portfolio Holder for Adult Care, Wellbeing and Health Integration, WNC

Key Decision	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for call-in by Scrutiny?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there public sector equality duty implications?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information (whether in appendices or not)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Applicable paragraph number/s for exemption from publication under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972	

List of Appendices

[Appendix A - Glossary of Terms](#)

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To report on progress and timescales within the Visual Impairment (VI) service as requested by SSJC on the 18/01/2023 ([Public Pack](#)) [Agenda Document for Shared Services Joint Committee, 18/01/2023 14:00 \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#) and 29/03/2023 [Public reports pack 29th-Mar-2023 Shared Services Joint Committee](#) As per the Inter Authority Agreement (IAA) Annual Report for 2022/23 presented to SSJC on the 14/06/2023 the VI service currently has a revised disaggregation date of long term deferral.
- 1.2 To reduce the potential disruption to the Statutory Service and diminish risk to the North Northamptonshire Council (NNC), West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) and their residents, this report seeks the approval to provide a further update report on progress and timescales within the VI service in March 2025.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 VI is a Statutory Service, due to the high risk to the safety of customers of the service, for which the Local Authorities (LAs) are legally responsible.
- 2.2 The Service is hosted by WNC, serving both Children and Adults across Northamptonshire (NNC and WNC).
- 2.3 The timeframe for disaggregation was set out within the IAA Blueprint approved by NCC and WNC.
- 2.4 The Service has an IAA in place which lays out the service to be provided, statutory requirements and KPIs which must be reported against. There are also detailed arrangements laid down regarding the UK GDPR Article 28 regulations regarding the holding and processing of information.
- 2.5 To ensure NNC and WNC can continue to deliver the Service safely as part of their statutory duties, without additional risk to customers, this report sets out the recommendation to reprofile the disaggregation of this function, and the request to report in March 2025, detailing progress and a recommended timescale for disaggregation.
- 2.6 There is a national shortage of suitably qualified personnel for the VI Service. The Service will be at a high risk of failure if it is disaggregated prior to suitable staffing arrangements being in place. The risk to residents is significant (including potentially fatal) if the Service is not adequately resourced prior to disaggregation.
- 2.7 The Service is a Statutory provision delivered pursuant to the Care Act (2014) and its Code of Practice.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Shared Services Joint Committee:
 - 3.1.1 Approve to a further report in March 2025 outlining progress and timescales for the VI service being disaggregated.

4. Reasons for the Recommendation

- 4.1.1 This will provide the service with enough time to ensure staff can be adequately trained and qualified to provide safe and effective service delivery.

Alternative Options Considered

- 4.1.2 **None** – SSJC have approved a long-term delay to disaggregation and requested a further report in March 2024 only.

5. Report Background

- 5.1 From 1 April 2021, NNC and WNC entered an IAA for the delivery of hosted Services as agreed as part of the Future Northants Disaggregation Blueprint. Both provisions are delivered through hosted arrangements in line with the

Local Government Reform (LGR) blueprint previously agreed through the LGR transformation programme.

- 5.2 The timeline for disaggregation of the Service is currently set as a revised long-term deferral, (IAA schedule 3A8), as part of wider plans for the Adult Social Services disaggregation.
- 5.3 The Service is Statutory and LAs are legally responsible for the delivery of the Service. In Northamptonshire the VI Service operates across the whole County (WNC and NNC) responding to requests for support from customers.
- 5.4 The Service provided under the Care Act 2014, prevention section, providing a countywide Specialist Rehabilitation Service for Adults and Children who have a visual impairment and those who may need help with mobility training and/or daily living skills training. This includes the administration of specialist equipment which is supplied to customers undergoing rehabilitation programmes to provide support in their homes and in the community; the Service objective is to promote customers' independence whilst improving their of quality life, providing safety and managing risk to the service user.
- 5.5 The team currently hosted by WNC, provides a Service to NNC through a hosted arrangement in line with the LGR blueprint previously agreed through the LGR transformation programme.
- 5.6 The statutory element of the service is the Visual Impairment register of residents with visual impairments in accordance with Statutory requirements to plan the provision of Services to meet demand for care and support, and monitors changes to the number of adults in the area with the need for care and the types of needs they have. The register has now been split so North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire both maintain their own registers in accordance with statutory requirements.
- 5.7 The Councils have a three-yearly Statutory obligation to report on the register of blind and partially sighted people (SSDA902). Both councils now hold their own registers on their IT systems.
- 5.8 The Service is responsible for documentation, liaison with NHS consultants, and updating registers and records, in line with the Care Act (2014) accordingly.
- 5.9 The Service delivers a 9:00 – 17:00 service across Monday to Friday.
- 5.10 It is considered impossible, at this time, to split the service further. The service has experienced challenges which included difficulties recruiting appropriate officers with the required qualifications as there are current shortages in the labour market for qualified personnel. The existing members of staff were cultivated through university programmes by the current team. Recruitment to these specialist roles is challenging, but we can 'grow our own' through the apprenticeship scheme. Alternative ways of working are also being considered in order to address these issues.
- 5.11 The Service comprises of 2 permanent Full Time Equivalent staff: one Qualified Senior Rehabilitation Officer (Visual Impairment) and one Qualified Rehabilitation Officer (Visual Impairment). Since the previous report to this

committee 2 apprentice roles have been recruited to, one starting in May 2023 and the other starting in June 2023, they both enrolled in September 2023 for the 2-year course and qualification for the Qualified Rehabilitation Officer (Visual Impairment Rehabilitation Certificate (Foundation Degree) which takes two years to complete.

- 5.12 The qualification for the Qualified Senior Rehabilitation Officer (Rehabilitation Officer Certificate or equivalent e.g., Diploma in Higher Education in Rehabilitation Studies, Mobility Officer / Technical officer's Certificates) takes a further two years to complete.
- 5.13 It is not viable to run the service on one qualified member of staff per unitary. The different grade levels of the two members of staff mean that the balance of the two unitary councils' ability to deliver the same service would be compromised. Therefore, the recruitment and training of the new apprentice roles will give the service enough capacity to enable disaggregation to take place.

6. Links and Dependencies

- 6.1 The Service works closely with the Northamptonshire Association for the Blind (NAB).
- 6.2 The Service is involved in a pilot scheme with the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) offering places on a "Living Well with Sight Loss" free phone course at the point of registration. The aim of the pilot is to link people with the RNIB services, information and advice, and other people with a VI. It doesn't take away any of the work the team provide face to face in people's homes.
- 6.3 The Service is part of the wider Community Therapy team.

7. Issues and Choices

7.1 The following options are to be considered:

- 7.1.1 Approval of a request to provide a further report in March 2025, which gives details of progress and a recommended timescale for disaggregation.

8. Implications (including financial implications)

8.1 Resources and Financial

- 8.1.1 We can update that in addition to the IAA WNC now also recharge NNC for half of the apprenticeship costs.

8.2 Legal and Governance

- 8.2.1 The Shared Service Joint Committee is responsible for "ensuring there are robust plans for any disaggregation of Services and that there is a smooth transition to new Service delivery arrangements". They are also responsible for ensuring that Statutory arrangements are in place for each Council.
- 8.2.2 The Service is currently operating in accordance with the IAA that exists between NNC and WNC. If the recommendation proposed within the report is

agreed, then the Councils will approve any further amendments under the IAA to ensure that adequate collaborative, contract and financial management and governance is in place between the authorities.

8.2.3 As outlined within the report, VI is a Statutory Service and the LAs are legally responsible for the Service. It is imperative to ensure that the Service is disaggregated when it is safe and legal to do so. If there is not a delay to disaggregation, then there is a risk that legal requirements would not be met, and vulnerable Service users will be put in danger.

8.3 Relevant Policies and Plans

8.3.1 Reprofilling disaggregation of the VI Service complies with the requirements of the approved Blueprint, whereby it outlines the hosted Services in each authority that require disaggregating.

8.4 Risk

8.4.1 If the Service is disaggregated prior to the team having sufficiently trained and qualified staff at NNC and WNC to safeguard the Service the following risks and issues will arise:

8.4.2

Risk Assessment	Mitigating Action
Disaggregation would leave the Service at WNC and NNC vulnerable due insufficient numbers of qualified staff, to provide resilience especially if there is sickness or resignations.	Delaying disaggregation provides more time to ensure that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are sufficiently trained and qualified staff at NNC and WNC to safeguard the Service. • There is adequate time to explore alternative ways of training and working and • Executive Directors can be confident that the Service can be split in a safe and legal manner.
Residents may be left vulnerable to harm including potential death, if they do not get required the support in a timely manner e.g. road safety, if the Service cannot adequately meet the demands placed on it, and each LA may be exposed to reputational risk.	Delaying disaggregation provides more time to ensure that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are sufficiently trained and qualified staff at NNC and WNC to safeguard the Service. • There is adequate time to explore alternative ways of training and working and • Executive Directors can be confident that the Service can be split in a safe and legal manner.
Key Performance Indicators may not be met if the service is disaggregated and would leave vulnerable residents without	Delay in disaggregation would allow resources to be put in place to ensure that each Council will be able to meet

Risk Assessment	Mitigating Action
a service to ensure their safety, for an unacceptable length of time.	their statutory responsibilities and agreed service standards (as stated in the VI Service Plan – schedule 3A8)
<p>Resilience to ensure the Service can be delivered by each authority independently, safely and legally:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualified Rehabilitation Officer – There is only one person in the Service that has the relevant qualifications and experience to deliver this role. • Qualified Senior Rehabilitation Officer – There is only one person in the Service that has the relevant qualifications and experience to deliver this role. • Geographical location – Existing staff that work within the Service are both geographically located within West Northamptonshire. This would likely lead to both members of the team staying with WNC, leaving NNC with no staff for their Service. 	<p>Delaying disaggregation provides more time to ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are sufficiently trained and qualified staff at NNC and WNC to safeguard the Service, and • Executive Directors can be confident that the Service can be split in a safe and legal manner.

8.5 Consultation

8.5.1 This report does not meet the parameters required for public consultation.

8.6 Consideration by Executive Advisory Panel

8.6.1 No considerations arising from this report.

8.7 Consideration by Scrutiny

8.7.1 No considerations arising from this report.

8.8 Equality Implications

8.8.1 The Service supports people with protected characteristics, namely those who are visually impaired. This section of the community could be exposed to high risk in terms of safety, independence, access to education, work and community life if the Service is not disaggregated in a prudent and lawful manner. The proposed delay to disaggregation will reduce the disruption and danger to Service users.

8.9 Climate Impact

8.9.1 No negative impacts arising from this report.

8.10 Community Impact

8.10.1 The Community will be protected by ensuring high-quality Services are in place.

8.11 Crime and Disorder Impact

8.11.1 No negative impacts arising from this report.

9. Background Paper

9.1 None
