

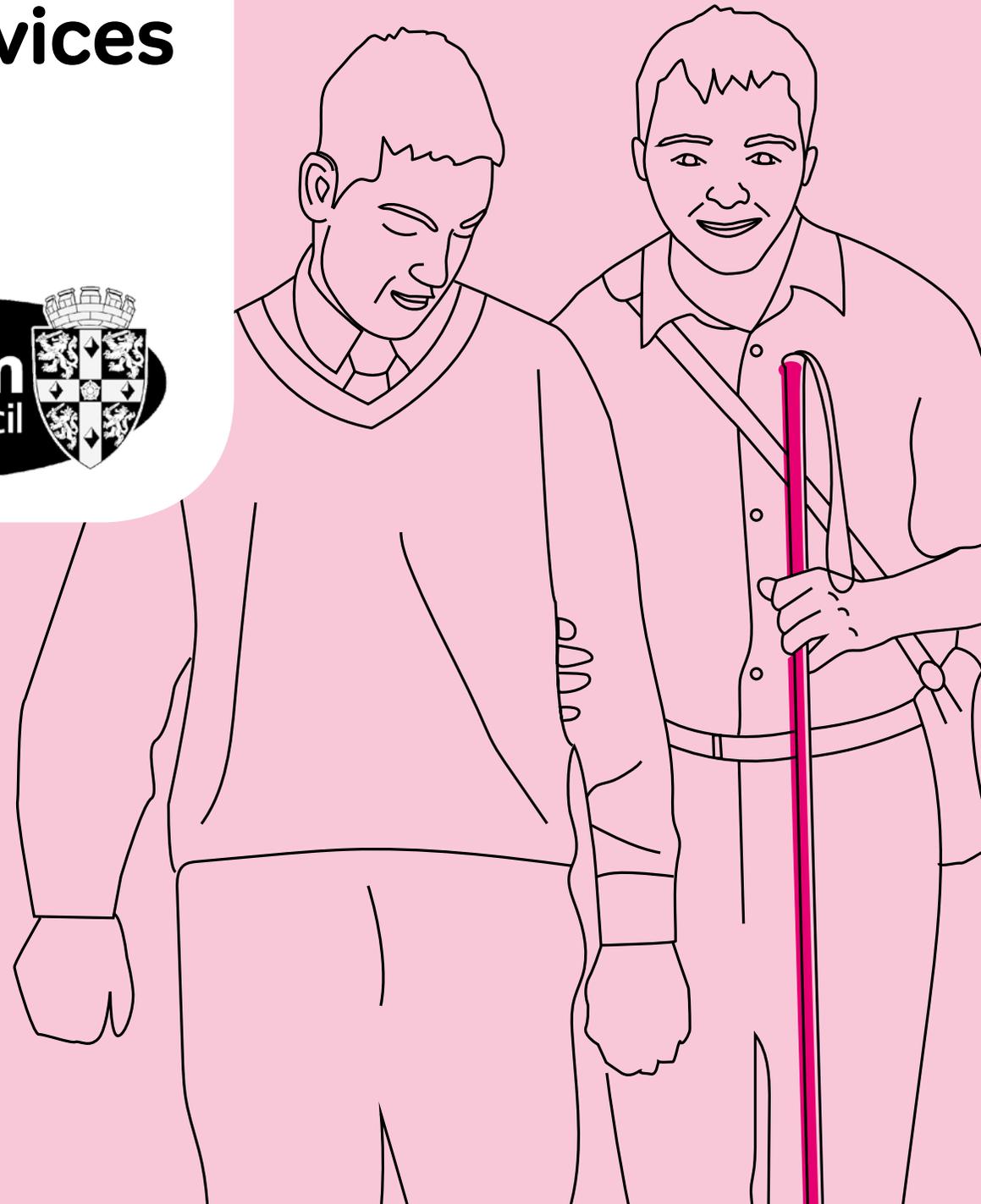
Durham Sensory Services

Spotlight on vision rehabilitation

RNIB

Supporting people
with sight loss

Durham
County Council



Durham Sensory Services

Maureen Cummins, commissioning services manager, tells us about Durham's vision rehabilitation service. She highlights how they work towards the goals of **See, Plan, Provide**, seeing people for specialist face-to-face assessments and having plans in place within 28 days; and how they meet all of the **Good Practice Principles**.



How would you describe your service?

We are an in-house service for Durham County Council and have operated as a specialist team for about 12 years. Our services are for people with sight loss as well as hearing loss or dual sensory loss. We are a county-wide service covering the whole of Durham, which has a population of 515,000 people and although there is a mix of urban and rural areas, it is largely rural.

A full assessment of need is completed by the rehabilitation worker, which may result in the provision of equipment to meet the assessed need. A broad range of vision rehabilitation services are outlined during the assessment, which include mobility training, daily living skills, and assistive technology training.

Who makes up your team?

The team consists of two assistant team managers and a team manager. One of the assistant team managers is responsible for sight loss and the rehabilitation workers, of which there are six. The other assistant manager manages the hearing loss side of the service and five specialist social workers who support people with hearing loss.

The team also has a specialist social worker for people who have dual sensory loss.

How many clients do you work with?

In Durham, there are approximately 3,466 registered blind and partially sighted people. This figure is lower than we submitted in 2013/14 as we had a data cleanse of the register last year in line with the Care Act. We carry out around 690 assessments each year, for both sight and hearing loss. The majority of referrals are from Certificates of Vision Impairment (CVIs). We also receive referrals from professionals or direct from clients. We hold the register for blind and partially sighted people.

What's working really well about your service?

We currently run five Living with Sight Loss courses every year for service users and their carers. We have 16 speakers over the five-week course, which runs for half day a week. We currently have a service level agreement with RNIB to facilitate each course, and our team works closely with our local sight loss charities to deliver aspects of the course.

We target service users and their carers who are newly diagnosed with sight loss and offer six to eight places on each course, plus their carers. The course is an opportunity for people to learn about what's available as well as meet other people in a similar situation. Social groups have been set up by people who have been on a course and want to stay in touch after it has finished.

As I have a team of six rehabilitation workers, we are able to provide vision rehabilitation free of charge without any time limit and until all needs are addressed (**Principle 5**). As all referrals are sent directly to our service electronically from Social Care Direct (our contact centre), we are able to respond to each referral within two working days as the case can be immediately allocated to one of the team (**Principle 1**). We offer registration and we can book in a specialist assessment usually within a fortnight. Because our focus is on getting to the person as early as possible, we can help to promote that person's independence and, therefore, prevent needs from escalating further. Our approach means we aim to keep people out of services which would be more costly to the local authority in the long run.

Our qualified rehabilitation workers carry out a face to face specialist assessment at the person's home within 28 days (**Principle 2**) covering a range of issues such as low vision, communication, mobility, daily living skills and employment, education and training. During the assessment, the rehabilitation worker will share information about the services available and get an understanding of their needs (**Principles 3 and 8**). This will form the care plan which is jointly agreed with the service user (**Principle 4**) and the training will start once the assessment is completed.

Continuous professional development is a huge part of improving our work in the sensory team. For example, the rehabilitation officers all have different special interests including low vision, mobility and technology. At every team meeting, one of the officers will share the "app of the month" which helps the team keep up to date with the latest trends in technology, which can be beneficial to their service users. We also hold internal training sessions, with a different focus each time, such as orientation and mobility or peer reviewing cases, to encourage knowledge sharing. (**Principle 10**)

The service has also played a prominent role in addressing the housing needs of local blind and partially sighted people. Working with a local developer and housing association, the team helped develop a housing scheme, which provides specifically designed accommodation to meet the needs of people with sight loss in Durham.

Over the next 12 months, what are the main challenges you are facing and how will you look to address these?

We are aware of the growing demand for our services particularly as a high proportion of our population are older, and we will strive to maintain the quality and timescale of our assessments. It is a challenge to keep on top of the latest technologies, and we are always looking at new and innovative ways of supporting people, such as developing and sharing knowledge of the latest equipment to promote and maintain independence as much as possible.

Three steps of See, Plan and Provide

- **See:** everyone with a visual impairment must receive a specialist face to face assessment.
- **Plan:** everyone must have a plan in place, identifying the outcome of the assessment. The first two steps must take place within 28 days of first contact with the local authority.
- **Provide:** any agreed vision rehabilitation support must start within 12 weeks of the person's initial contact with the local authority.

10 Principles of Good Practice in Vision Rehabilitation

All blind and partially sighted people...

- 1** receive initial telephone contact within two working days of receipt of a Certificate of Vision Impairment (CVI), referral or self referral
- 2** are seen and receive a specialist assessment from someone with appropriate skills, knowledge, training and qualifications, within 28 days of initial contact

- 3** are offered a range of services at the specialist assessment. Services include those that address their eye health, emotional, physical, financial and social needs and those of their carer if appropriate
- 4** are provided with a vision rehabilitation plan within 28 days based on goals agreed in the assessment
- 5** are provided vision rehabilitation services free of charge, to meet agreed assessed needs
- 6** offered a full community care needs assessment when vision rehabilitation does not fully meet their needs
- 7** are provided with equipment, aids or minor adaptations free of charge, when it has been assessed that these help, reduce, prevent or delay the need for more costly care
- 8** receive information about services or support in a timely manner and in their preferred format
- 9** have the ability to access vision rehabilitation services in the future if required
- 10** are provided vision rehabilitation by someone who is trained to understand their sight loss related needs

To download a copy of the 10 principles
rnib.org.uk/rehab-principles



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