

<b>COMMITTEE</b>	Care Scrutiny Committee
<b>DATE OF MEETING</b>	31 January 2019
<b>ITEM</b>	Supporting Gwynedd's Disabled People Scrutiny Investigation - Update
<b>HEAD OF SERVICE</b>	Aled Davies
<b>CABINET MEMBER</b>	Councillor Gareth Roberts
<b>AUTHOR / CHAIR OF WORKING GROUP</b>	Councillor Dewi Wyn Roberts
<b>PURPOSE</b>	To update members of the Care Scrutiny Committee on the progress of the investigation

## **1. Background to the Scrutiny Investigation**

- 1.1 Following a proposal by the Cllr. Peter Read to a meeting of the Council on 15 June 2017, the Council decided:

“That the Council refers the question of the suitability of the arrangements for providing wheelchairs for Gwynedd residents for consideration for the scrutiny programme.”

- 1.2 In accordance with the Council's scrutiny procedures, the matter was referred to the Care Scrutiny Committee which in turn decided that the best way to answer was to conduct a Scrutiny Investigation. A Working Group was set up to lead the Investigation which includes some members of the Scrutiny Committee and two further Councillors.

## **2. Aim of the Scrutiny Investigation**

- 2.1 The proposal above arose from evidence from Gwynedd residents that there was some discontent with some aspects of the current wheelchair provision. The aim of the Scrutiny Investigation therefore is to answer the following questions:

- Is there evidence that individuals who receive these services are central in the process of assessing their needs and subsequent provision of suitable equipment, and are they helped to live their lives in the manner that they wish?
- If there is discontent or complaints about the current service are they being satisfactorily addressed?
- If there is a need, how can the service be improved for the future?

2.2 We will attempt to answer these questions by:

- Collecting evidence from wheelchair users about their satisfaction, or not, with the process of being assessed for the correct equipment, and their experience of any support services after receiving their wheelchair.
- Collecting evidence from professional workers who provide the services in this field.
- Collecting evidence and collaborating with Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (the Health Board) so that future provision is the best it can be.

### **3. Background to the Current Provision**

3.1 In Wales, the provision of prosthetics and wheelchairs for those that need them is supplied by the Posture and Mobility Service (PAMS). The Service is often still referred to by its old name and acronym, namely Artificial Limb and Appliance Service (ALAS).

3.2 PAMS is a national all-Wales service which is commissioned via the Welsh Health Specialised Services Committee (WHSSC), and the service is provided by a collaboration between three Health Boards. PAMS has three centres – Wrexham, Cardiff and Swansea – and the provision for Gwynedd residents is usually organised via the Wrexham Centre which in turn works closely with sub-contractors.

3.3 PAMS is responsible for assessing the needs of the individual and to offer the most suitable equipment, and then to provide, collect, repair and maintain the equipment so long as it is needed.

3.4 PAMS aims in their own words is to

‘Offer a consistent and equitable service to people in Wales who have a permanent or long-term impairment. PAMS is committed to providing an excellent rehabilitation service to people with an impairment. Our objective is to maximise ability and minimise disability.’

3.5 The first step in the process of obtaining a suitable wheelchair from PAMS is for the individual to be assessed for the most suitable equipment by a registered professional healthcare worker with the relevant skills and information. Several professions are able to conduct these assessments, such as GP’s, physiotherapists, Health Board occupational therapists, or Gwynedd Council occupational therapists.

3.6 There are two levels of assessments, dependent on the nature of the individual’s disability –

Level 1 Assessment – for a manual wheelchair. This more basic assessment can be conducted by any of the above professionals, with the professional workers completing the assessment and referring the case on to PAMS.

Level 2 Assessment – more complex or contentious cases with a need for more specialised equipment. These assessments are only conducted by occupational therapists and technicians employed by PAMS.

- 3.7 As mentioned above, once the assessments has been completed and referred to PAMS, the supply and upkeep of the equipment is then the responsibility of PAMS.

#### **4. Evidence from service users**

- 4.1 The Working Group decided that it would concentrate on service users which are residents of Gwynedd only, judging that this is where the Council would be able to influence any service provision in the future.
- 4.2 Three cases of complaints against PAMS have been sent to the North Wales Community Health Council, and one of these was passed to the Health Board.
- 4.3 Evidence collated by the Working Group from service users includes the following:

##### Person 1

Following a car accident this person is paraplegic. Following discharge from hospital Person 1 waited 8 months for an assessment for a specialised wheelchair, and waited a further 3 months to receive the wheelchair. There were other matters of concern to Person 1, apart from the supply of the wheelchair, relating to overall care.

##### Person 2

Person 2 needs a specialised wheelchair because of paraplegia. Person 2 waited for over a year for adjustments to the wheelchair, and during this waiting time Person 2 developed severe health problems.

##### Person 3

Person 3 had been in hospital for 3 months receiving treatment for a pressure sore caused by unsuitable equipment. There were other matters of concern, apart from wheelchair provision, arising from the overall care for the individual.

##### Further comments

There is evidence from an individual who has received services from two separate PAMS centres in Wales, with a difference, in the individual's opinion, of the quality of service between them.

## **5. Collecting information from health and professionals**

- 5.1 As noted earlier, occupational therapists from the Council's Adults, Health and Well-being Department are qualified to assess individuals for Level 1 (basic manual wheelchairs). These assessments are then forwarded to PAMS for a decision. From this point onwards the evidence gathered so far suggests that contact between Council workers and PAMS is ad-hoc, with examples of long waits for a decision, or of not receiving information about a decision on an assessment. In the 12 months between September 2017 and August 2018 PAMS received 343 referrals for assessment from Gwynedd Council occupational therapists.
- 5.2 Occupational therapists working in the Council's Children and Supporting Families Department don't conduct similar assessments for children and young people in Gwynedd. This work is carried out solely by PAMS staff. The only contact occupational therapists working with children and young people have with PAMS is to assist with any work needed to make necessary adaptations to the individual's home. The therapists, who work through the Derwen service, are not aware of any problems or complaints made by children and young people under their care about the provision or service provided by PAMS.
- 5.3 The Council also co-operates informally with PAMS staff in the context of provision of disability sport and other leisure activities for wheelchair users. In this context the co-operation has led to positive experiences for the residents of Gwynedd.
- 5.4 The Working Group continues to be in discussions with officers from the Health Board and PAMS in order to get the whole picture of their work processes, including how they respond to dissatisfaction or complaints about service.

## **6. Next Steps**

- 6.1 From the information gathered from service users so far, there are some common themes:
  - Not enough variations of wheelchairs that are suitable for an individual's needs
  - Waiting times for an assessment causing problems for individuals (waiting time is 34 weeks)
  - Waiting times for equipment/wheelchairs causing problems for individuals
  - Waiting times for repair or adaptations to equipment causing problems for individuals

- 6.2 Discussions are continuing with officers from the Health Board and PAMS in order to collect information and to discuss the co-operation with other organisations, such as Gwynedd Council. Until we have the full picture it would be premature for us to offer further comment or recommendations at this point in time.
- 6.3 Since a service user is of the opinion that the quality of service varies between different PAMS centres across Wales, then we are of the opinion that this needs to be investigated further. Is there further evidence? Why would this be? Does it affect the quality of service to individuals?
- 6.4 Considering the evidence we have about the experiences of service users, we believe that there is an opportunity to look at the overall care for these individuals. This care, which is beyond the sole provision of equipment, is provided by staff of organisations such as the Health Board and Gwynedd Council, and further discussions will need to be held before we are able to suggest recommendations for the future.