

Visual Impairment Support Survey Report

Outline of the Report:

In March of 2021, the Adult Social Care and Health Commissioning Team (ASCH) at Derbyshire County Council (DCC) undertook an engagement exercise with members of the Sight Impaired Community.

The contract for the Visual Impairment Rehabilitation and Advice Service is due to end in March 2022. We wanted to gather information about how members of the Sight Impaired community felt about the current Visual Impairment Support Offer, and to understand what was useful and / or important to this community to inform the re-procurement of the service. The engagement exercise ensures that we are listening to and co-producing the service with the support of the people who use it.

Methodology:

The period of engagement took place from Monday 8th February to Friday 26th March. The engagement used a mixed method approach of quantitative and qualitative questions to gather respondents' views. The engagement opportunity was promoted via partners including: Macular Degeneration Society in Derbyshire; DCC Adult Care Sensory Team, DCC Children's Sensory Service; and Sight Support Derbyshire (the current provider of the service).

To encourage participation, three options for completing the survey were given: by email, by large print hard copy (return post-paid) and by telephone contact.

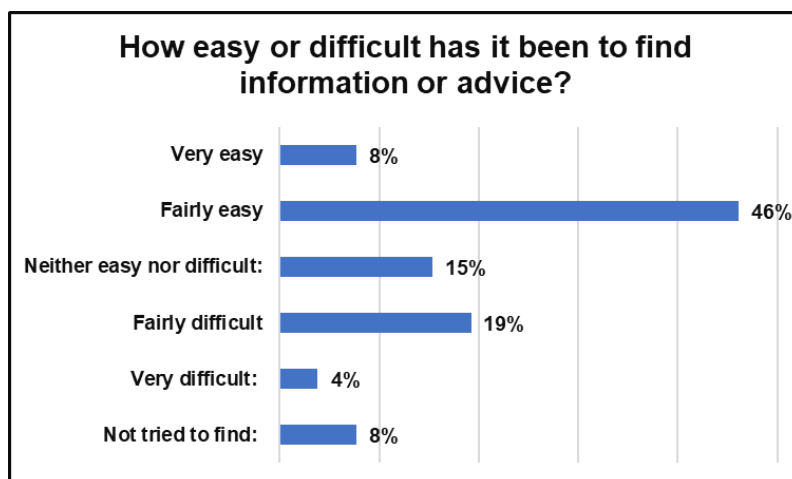
A series of 12 questions was asked about respondents' experience of accessing appropriate information and advice, the quality of support available and what equipment respondents use to aid their visual impairment. Free text comments throughout this report pick out the key themes of respondents' answers.

26 responses were received: 8 by phone; 8 through email and 10 by a printed copy.

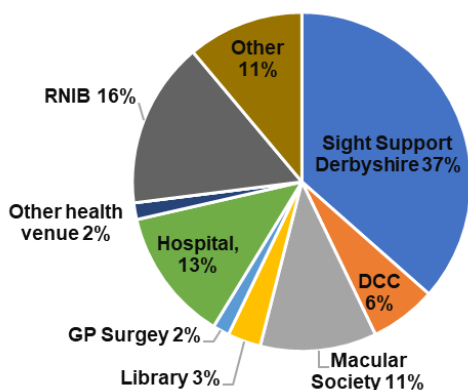
The information has been captured in the report below.

Questions 1-3: Information and Advice

The first group of questions asked respondents about information and advice: **how easy or difficult it was to find, how accessible the information was, and where respondents had found information:**



If you looked for information or advice, where did you find it?



Information or advice in the 'other' category was found from the internet / google searches, Usher Vibe, DBUK, Sense, Chesterfield Careline, an optometrist or from family members.

88% of the survey respondents found the information was in an accessible format or useful, with 12% not finding information accessible or useful.

The top three themes with regards to information and advice were: the usefulness of the information provided; the use of large print for accessibility; and that it was easy to ring or contact the current service provider for information. These were some of the responses about whether information was accessible or useful:

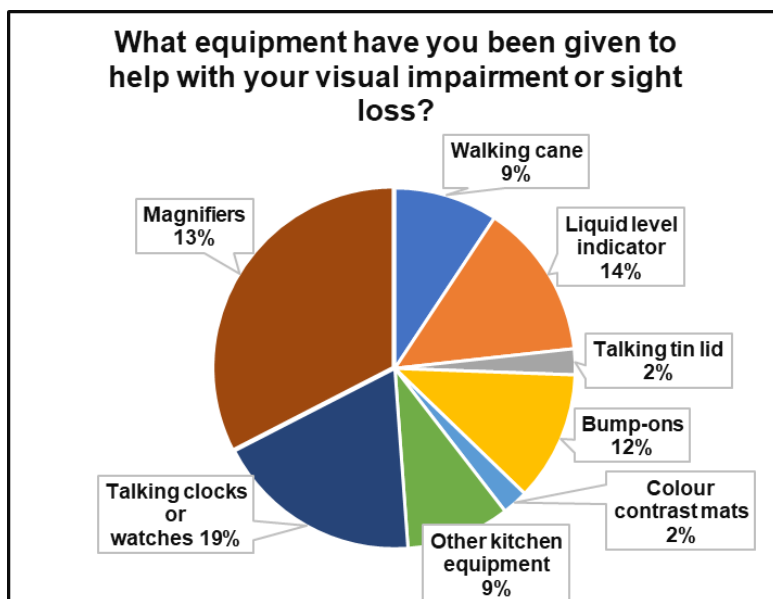
'It was easy to ring and make enquiries; they were good for information about getting online.'

'Information is usually fairly accessible, but I use a smartphone app to read things to me whether digital or on paper. The RNIB have a COVID page but it's not that easy to navigate.'

'I can ring the Sight Support office. I can talk to the organisers of the Macular Society. I can ask questions at the hospital. The problem is I don't know what is available to ask all these people about.'

Questions 4-9: Support and Equipment

The next group of questions asked respondents to reflect on support and equipment:



Please note that magnifiers are not part of the current Visual Impairment Support offer: where respondents stated that had been given magnifiers, these have come from other support providers such as the Macular Society or RNIB etc.

As well as the equipment provided, support was also offered: 12% of respondents received a certificate of their Visual Impairment; 4% of respondents received mobility training and 15% were given links to groups or activities for people with Visual Impairment or Sight Loss.

Advice, support, referrals and equipment provision came from a variety of groups and providers: Sight Support Derbyshire, Deafinitely Women, optometrists, GPs, RNIB, Derby Blind Society, Access to Work and Guide Dogs.

How has the support or equipment helped improve or maintain your independence?

Two key themes emerged: that specialised equipment such as kitchen aids or magnifiers had enabled the respondent to maintain independence, and that links to groups or activities had enabled the respondent to meet other people and benefit from emotional or psychological support. Comments included:

'Enables me to be confidently Mobile outdoors and be able to read more easily. Support networks especially Ushers Vibe and Deafinitely Women hugely important.'

'Meet other people at Macular meetings. Visual aids (magnifiers, etc.) help me deal with money, some post, shopping.'

'Visual aids have been invaluable in allowing me to lead a fully independent life.'

'Feel better in self; equipment helps me get out.'

What pieces of equipment have you found most useful for keeping your independence?

The most popular response was magnifiers at 28%, followed by 10% of respondents citing bump-ons or screen readers / talking books as very useful equipment.

Did you purchase additional equipment and if so, what did you buy?

73% of respondents stated that they had purchased additional equipment themselves. There was a wide variety of equipment purchased, the most prevalent being magnifiers (11%) or a form of phone software (11%) which respondents stated they had bought. Also popular were smartphones (9%) and book readers / players, Alexa, lights, large or talking clocks / watches, kitchen aids and tablets, all at 7%.

One respondent noted that the current provider doesn't have a 'shop' and that reviews of equipment and their experiences from other Visually Impaired people would be useful.

The final question in the Support and Equipment section of the survey was whether respondents had **any other equipment preferences or needs which weren't currently being provided for**. 32% of respondents stated that they had no other needs; another 32% of respondents stated that it would be beneficial to understand what technology the Support Offer did provide, what general equipment or support could be provided through the Support Offer and what new equipment or technology was available. Comments included:

'I'm not sure of what equipment is available or what might help me.'

'No, I'm very techie and keep up to date and know where to go for things.'

'Visual recognition technology such as Orcam MyEye, and Training for using visual aid technology, and advice regarding this would be useful.'

'Although iPad and iPhone are not specialist Equipment they are vital for me to be able to communicate with everyone and run my life.'

Questions 10-12: Having Your Say about the current support offer

The final section of the survey asked participants to comment on what they found most and least useful about the support offer and to think about how the support offer could be developed to better meet the participant's needs. It also offered respondents the opportunity to make any other comments they felt were important to them.

What are the most useful aspects of the current Visual Impairment Support Offer and why?

The top three themes which emerged from this question were receiving advice or information (23%); social opportunities provided by groups or activities (16%) and the ease of being able to contact the service provider (14%).

Respondents' comments included:

'Being able to contact someone easily; monthly newsletter is good; been great for maintaining contact fortnightly.'

'Psychological support – two people been and both aware of the issues faced; both been empathetic and supportive. Visits and advice very useful.'

'The tech days are very useful as it allowed me to find out about equipment and software to help me manage tasks I'd struggled with for years. I enjoyed the social group that was running in Matlock for visually impaired people and meeting other visually impaired people and making new friends was a great support. I would rate Sight Support highly.'

'Everything about them. SSD service is great. The mobile resource van is great and will help you sort problems out and find solutions. SSD also encouraged me to get involved as a volunteer befriender for macular society – really enjoy this. The service helps me make links in visible impaired community which helps support people through their journeys. The service shares info on useful items such as telling me about the water dispenser kettle. Tech days are useful, both to find out about equipment and meet other people.'

What are the least useful aspects of the current Visual Impairment Support Offer and why?

Again, respondents provided a variety of comments. The top three themes were that respondents were generally happy with the service or had no comments (21%); that more social groups or activities were wanted, spread over a greater geographical area (16%) and equally with 11%, that more contact was needed, the service or offer needed to be more publicised and that information and advice on new technology needed to be more current and available.

Respondents' comments included:

'Events need to be more evenly spread around the county.'

'Can't answer this until someone explains what VI support offer is.'

'There are no social facilities for visually impaired people that actively work.'

'Not knowing what aids are available so not knowing what to ask about.'

The final question in the survey requested respondents to comment on **how they thought the current support offer could be developed to better meet their needs.**

26% of comments noted that more contact was wanted and echoing that, 15% of comments stated that more local events would be useful. The third and fourth most prevalent comments requested more technical support or advice on equipment and how to use it or set it up (13%) and 10% of comments noted that the Support Offer and service needed to be more widely advertised.

Respondents' comments included:

'More meetings held locally; meeting people for pleasure. Too long between asking for help and receiving it – i.e instructions on how to use new equipment; using walking aids – the help was good; meetings in Matlock – little outside Derby City; events tend to happen in Derby and no funding for transport to get there.'

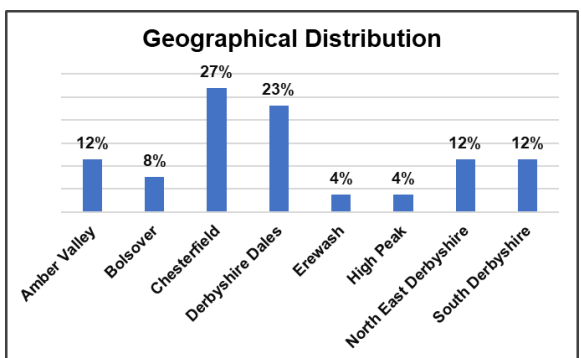
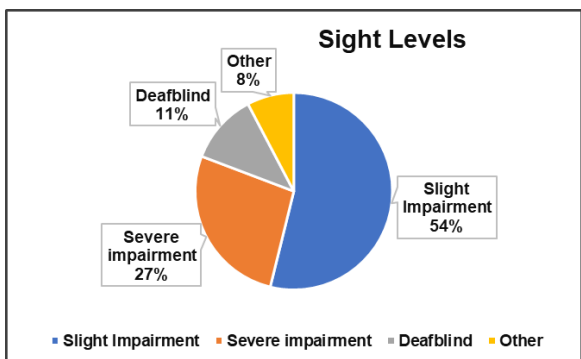
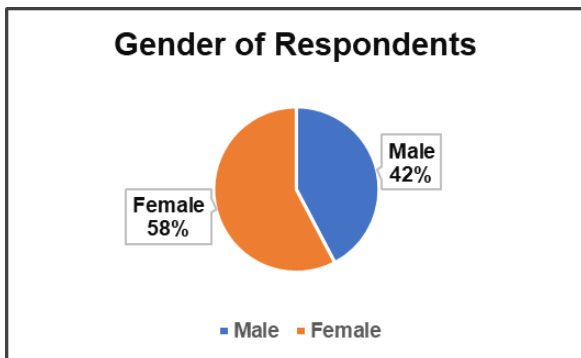
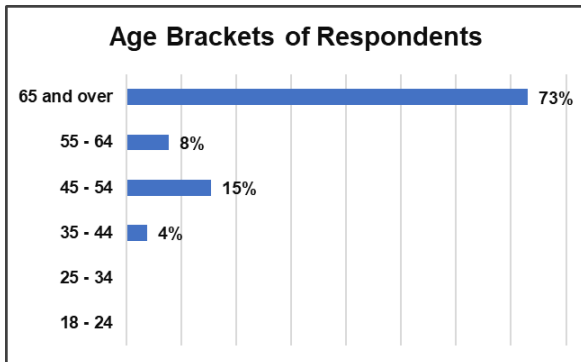
'Offering lessons in accessing IT and the web etc.'

'More advertising – people need to be made more aware of it. Only aware of it from the Eye Clinic. Would be useful to have info found in GP surgery, local libraries and even supermarkets.'

'I think the social groups should be restarted as they provided good support to people. I also think a more regular newsletter throughout the pandemic would have been useful, particularly with news relevant to the pandemic. For example, I struggled to get information on how to get a test – a lot of the TV adverts had the phone number on the screen but it wasn't read out. It would have been good for SSD to provide sight impaired people with the main info in an accessible format. This could continue after covid with news in general. More newsletters from the service would be good. It would also have been nice to get a phone call from SSD at least once in the past 12 months to check how I am throughout the pandemic – I would value someone checking in with me to see how I'm managing the pandemic even though I live with my husband.'

Demographics:

Demographic information about gender, age, geographical area, sight levels, living situation and ethnicity of the respondents was captured:



Additionally, to the graphs above, 62% of respondents lived with others and 38% lived on their own. The ethnicity of respondents mirrored the ethnic make-up of Derbyshire, with 92% of respondents stating they were White British, 4% of respondents stating they were Asian and 4% of respondents stating they were White Other.

We are very grateful to all partners who supported us with this engagement exercise. We will be using the findings to help inform the new service which will be re-procured in the summer of 2021.