

Cheshire East Sensory Impairment Strategy 2021-24

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Contents

Foreword	3
Executive Summary	4
Introduction.....	5
Our Aim and Vision	6
Our Principles.....	6
Background	7
What people told us.....	12
Our Priority Areas.....	15
Appendix 1: Terminology	20
Appendix 2: Development of the Strategy	21
Appendix 3: National Legislation.....	23

Foreword

This strategy has been developed in partnership between Cheshire East Council and Cheshire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCCG). It has involved engagement with our local partners and stakeholders; and children, young people and adults living with a sensory impairment, their families and carers, to understand local needs. Throughout this strategy, where we refer to “people” we include everyone with a sensory impairment across all ages.

The circumstances and experiences of people living with a sensory impairment are unique to each individual. The challenges they experience can range from being able to get out and about safely, accessing education, employment and leisure, and being able to participate in their community. The emotional impacts of living with a sight or hearing loss can be distressing, frustrating and isolating.

With the right support systems in place, children, young people and adults can excel in all areas of life, including education, work and sport. The aim of this strategy is to work to improve the outcomes for people with a visual, hearing impairment or dual sensory loss. It will enable us to develop new ways of working, maximise the impact of what we do and think creatively about how we can work together in Cheshire East. We want people to be as independent as possible and live their best lives.

We would like to thank all who have contributed to its development at a particularly challenging time during the Covid-19 pandemic. The strategy provides an opportunity to make a significant difference to the lives of people living with a sensory impairment.

Executive Summary

The Cheshire East All Age Sensory Impairment Strategy makes a shared commitment to improving the lives of children, young people and adults with a visual and/or hearing impairment, and their families and carers. The strategy acts as a roadmap for improvement to be achieved through the collective efforts of local organisations and the community.

Sensory loss can have an enormous personal, social and economic impact throughout a person's life. It will become an even bigger challenge over the next decade due to the ageing population.

Hearing and visual impairment can impact on children's learning and social interactions, restrict their aspirations and life chances. It can also increase the risk of mental health problems and reduce chances of employment for everyone. In older people, hearing loss can become a major challenge leading to a greater risk of social isolation, poor mental wellbeing and dementia. Visual impairment can limit people's ability to perform everyday tasks and affect their quality of life and ability to interact and move about unaided.

The strategy places a strong emphasis on prevention and early intervention and supports the provision of flexible, responsive and equitable services.

To steer and inform the strategy, consultation and engagement has taken place with a wide range of professionals from across social care, education, health and the voluntary sector. We have also engaged and collected the experiences, thoughts and suggestions of adults and parents of children and young people with sensory impairments to understand what needs to be improved. This is in line with the co-production approach and TOGETHER principles developed with children and young people. Combining this with recent national and local evidence and best practice guidance, we have identified key themes and priorities which are explored throughout this strategy.

Introduction

The Cheshire East All-Age Sensory Impairment Strategy is for children, young people and adults, living with a sensory impairment and their families and carers. Sensory impairment or “sensory loss” refers to everyone who has a visual and/or hearing impairment (also known as d/Deaf and deafblind). The additional needs of children and young people with multi-sensory impairment (MSI) are addressed through the SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) Strategy and Local Offer for SEND. Further details of the terms relating to sensory impairment are given in Appendix 1.

There are currently a range of services supporting people with sensory impairments locally across health, education, social care and the voluntary sector. We acknowledge the critical role of these services and the importance of working together to provide a holistic approach.

The document gives an overview of where we are now; what really matters to people; and what we can do to remove or overcome barriers that exist locally and improve outcomes for people.

There is a need for better integration, co-ordination and increased awareness of roles and functions across services, to make it easier for patients and service users to get the help they need in a timely way.

The strategy supports the work of other key local documents including:

- Cheshire East Council’s Corporate Plan (2021 – 2025)
- Cheshire East’s Joint Health and Well Being Strategy (2018- 2021)
- NHS Cheshire CCG Strategic Objectives (2020 – 2023)
- Cheshire East SEND Preparing for Adulthood Strategy (2021– 2023), SEND Strategy (2021 – 2024) and Local Offer for SEND

The strategy needs to be smart and deliver the improvements that will make the most difference while recognising the challenges in public funding and needs of an ageing population.

Our Aim and Vision

The overall aim of this strategy is to guide us towards achieving our vision over the next three years.

Our Vision

Our shared vision is for children, young people and adults in Cheshire East living with a sensory impairment to be able to live their best lives and be inspired to achieve their hopes and ambitions and contribute positively to their community. We will work in partnership to improve awareness and access to information, services and support that are inclusive and appropriate to their individual and unique needs.

This collective approach should enable a person with a sensory impairment to be as safe and as independent as possible and in control of their health and daily life.

Our Principles

The values and principles that will underpin the work to achieve this include:

- A joint commitment to work together to improve outcomes for people with sensory impairments
- Listening to what people tell us
- Taking account of the vision and priorities set out in the SEND and Preparing for Adulthood Strategies and TOGETHER principles working with children and young people
- Having an emphasis on prevention and early help
- Making sure services are co-ordinated so people are offered the right information and specialist support when they need it.
- Creating a community where treatments and preventative measures are known about, available and routinely accessed.
- Making best use of finite resources

Background

People with visual impairments

Almost 2 million people in the UK are living with sight loss and 360,000 are registered as visually impaired. Sight loss can affect us at any age but it is common for our vision to get worse as we get older. An estimated 79% of people aged over 64 are living with some degree of sight loss¹.

Locally, 15,200 people were estimated to be living with sight loss in Cheshire East in 2020 (4% of the population) compared to 3.2% nationally. This included 2,070 with severe sight loss (blindness) and 13,170 with partial sight².

In 2020, the RNIB³ estimated that there were 191 blind and partially sighted children and young people under 18 living in Cheshire East.

Certificate and registration

People registered as partially sighted or blind are issued with a Certificate of Visual Impairment (CVI) which is a legal document provided by an Ophthalmic Consultant at the time of registration. In May 2021, there were almost 2,000 people registered as blind or partially sighted in Cheshire East.

Not everyone with a sight loss is registered as sight impaired but our aim is to ensure that all services are available to anyone with a visual impairment, whether or not they are registered.

People with Hearing Impairments

In the UK, there are 12 million adults with a hearing loss, equivalent to one in five adults. Of these, an estimated 900,000 have a severe or profound hearing loss⁴. Hearing loss increases sharply with age, affecting about 71% of people aged over 70.

Locally, 88,244 adults were estimated to be living with a hearing loss in Cheshire East in 2020. This includes 8,613 with severe hearing loss and 79,631 with some hearing loss⁵.

The latest figures show there were 262 children and young people under 20 in 2021 with permanent hearing loss living in Cheshire East⁶.

People with Dual Sensory Loss

It is estimated that there are nearly 400,000 deafblind people in the UK⁷. Dual sensory loss, or deafblindness is a combination of both sight and hearing loss. This may have been from birth or due to deterioration later in life. It affects people of all ages but is more common in older people as sight and hearing naturally worsen as we get older. Dual sensory loss affects a person's ability to communicate, access information and get around.

The RNIB states that an estimated 2,920 people are living with some degree of dual sensory loss in Cheshire East. Of these people, it is estimated that 1,150 are living with severe dual sensory loss. Among children and young people, there are estimated to be less than 20.

The National Context

This strategy has been informed by the statutory and best practice guidance for people with visual and hearing impairments and dual sensory loss. The specific statutory duty for deafblind people is given below with other relevant legislation outlined in Appendix 3. There are national initiatives underpinning the need for improvements in services for people with sensory impairments. The key documents are listed below.

The UK Vision Strategy (2013-18) set out a strategic framework for improving the UK's eye health and outcomes for people with sight impairment. It sought to achieve three outcomes which are still relevant today:

1. Everyone in the UK looks after their eyes and their sight
2. Everyone with an eye condition receives timely treatment and, if permanent sight loss occurs, early and appropriate support
3. A society in which people with sight loss can fully participate.

'Seeing it my way' underpinned the UK Vision Strategy and set out ten outcomes that visually impaired people say are important to them:

The "Seeing it my way" outcomes are:

- That I understand my eye condition and the registration process
- That I have someone to talk to
- That I can look after myself, my health, my home and my family
- That I receive statutory benefits and information and support that I need
- That I can make the best use of the sight I have
- That I can access information making the most of the advantages that technology brings
- That I can get out and about
- That I have the tools, skills and confidence to communicate
- That I have equal access to education and life-long learning
- That I can work and volunteer

The importance of these outcomes was reflected locally, and we have used them in this strategy to link to our key priorities and actions later in the document.

Action Plan on Hearing Loss (2015) sets out the case for action to tackle the rising prevalence and personal, social and economic costs of uncorrected hearing loss. It proposes addressing this growing challenge by promoting prevention of hearing loss, improving the integration of services, providing innovative models of care and ensuring that people of all ages with hearing loss are supported and empowered to lead the lives they want for themselves and their families.

The Action Plan sets out five key objectives:

- Prevention
- Early diagnosis
- Integrated, patient centred management
- Ensuring those diagnosed do not need unscheduled care or become isolated
- Ability to partake in everyday activities.

The **Children and Families Act 2014** and its supporting document, “The Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice” describe how, where an Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan is required for a child or young person with SEN relating to sensory impairment needs, the EHC Plan is required to fully take account of the implications of the sensory impairment for teaching and learning on the child/young person’s development. The **National Deaf Children’s Society (NDCS)** provides support and guidance on the provision of children’s services.

Deafblind people: Guidance for Local Authorities

Local authorities are required to act on guidance under Section 7 of the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970 (for children) and section 78 of the Care Act 2014 (for adults).

They have to:

- make contact and keep a record of all deafblind children and adults

- ensure assessments of need for care and support are carried out by people with specific training and expertise
- provide appropriate services for deafblind people
- provide specially trained one-to-one support workers when necessary
- provide accessible information for deafblind people
- ensure that a Director-level member of the local authority senior team has overall responsibility for deafblind services.

National Drivers:

- The Care Act 2014
- The Children and Families Act 2014
- Equality Act 2010
- Accessible Information Standard 2016
- Public Health Outcomes Framework: Preventable sight loss indicators
- The UK Vision Strategy 2013 – 2018
- Call to Action for Visual Impairment
- Seeing it my Way 2013 – 2018
- ADASS position statement on vision rehabilitation
- RNIB Guiding principles for vision rehabilitation support
- Action Plan on Hearing Loss 2015

What people told us

The development of the strategy has been informed through engagement and co-production with children, young people and adults with sensory impairments, their families and carers, local organisations and health professionals, to understand local needs and issues. Details of all user engagement is outlined in Appendix 2. The following common themes and issues emerged including areas for improvement for children, young people and adults.

Prevention and early intervention

Prevention and early intervention are the golden threads running throughout all of the themes in this strategy. Having a preventative approach can be achieved through raising awareness; promoting independence and self-care; and early diagnosis and intervention to provide effective support.

Information and advice

Local people told us how important it is to have more information about what services and options are available to them. This was identified as an area for improvement. Information should be offered or easily available at the appropriate times. It also needs to meet the communication needs of people who are d/Deaf and visually impaired.

Support at the point of diagnosis is vital but if people are coming to terms with this, they may want to access information and support when they feel ready. Offers of information and referrals should be made at appropriate points. It is important that people are made aware of the support available locally wherever they first seek help. Ongoing publicity about the support and activities available locally will support this.

Service pathways

Collaborative working, established during the development of this strategy, will involve improved co-ordination between services. This will help to achieve greater equity and consistency so people can get the

relevant support and services to meet their individual needs. The pathways for referral, assessment and service provision are currently being reviewed and are included in the action plan later in the document.

Preparing for Adulthood and Transition from Children's to Adult Services

The links between health, education and social care services in supporting children and young people are well developed in Cheshire East. Local engagement with parents and carers of children and young people with sensory impairments identified the need for improved information when preparing for adulthood, particularly in relation to the transition from children's services to adult services to make sure young people are supported and can fulfil their potential. Children and young people with sensory impairments are all known to the Sensory Inclusion Service at Cheshire East Council and the links with other services were identified as being very positive.

The Cheshire East SEND Partnership has recently launched a new Preparing for Adulthood Strategy which outlines its vision to ensure young people with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) are prepared for adulthood to achieve their individual aspirations. The strategy has been written through the Working TOGETHER principles with young people, parents and carers and professionals representing a wide range of partner organisations. The SEND Partnership has also undertaken work to co-produce a refreshed SEND Strategy. The Cheshire East Local Offer for SEND (available online at www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/localoffer) provides information about the support and provision that families can expect from a wide of agencies for children and young people with SEND.

Staying independent

The importance of having good access and training to use equipment and assistive technology was a common theme across all age groups. Barriers included cost, not knowing what is available or how to use it and unequal access. Local people with a visual impairment told us that

having access to support, as early as possible, to learn new ways of doing daily tasks and training to remain mobile and get out and about is important for rebuilding confidence and staying connected. The service provided by the council's Rehabilitation Officers for Visual Impairment (ROVIs) was well regarded in this respect. More information and support for those who want to undertake training and gain skills to provide greater employment opportunities was identified, particularly among working age adults.

Emotional support

Access to emotional support, peer support and group social activities was highlighted across all age groups but most noticeably among children and young people. More support is also needed for younger adults (18 – 39) and those experiencing sudden sight loss. Within the right environment, those with sensory impairments may be able to share their coping strategies and provide mutual support. The role of families and carers was widely recognised, including the importance of having access to advice and support themselves.

Raising awareness

There are many people with a sensory impairment who are not known to services. Living with a sensory impairment is complicated and each person has a different story; some people are born blind or deaf; some are not aware they have lost part of their sight and/or hearing and some people have a visual or hearing impairment secondary to other conditions such as stroke, dementia or a learning disability.

Local feedback told us there is a lack of awareness and understanding of the impact and challenges of living with a sight and/or hearing impairment among professionals and the wider community. By improving awareness and making services more accessible, everyone should be able to get the right support when they need it. For children and young people, this will be provided through the Cheshire East Local Offer for SEND, by ensuring clear, comprehensive, accessible and up-to-date information about the available provision and how to access it.

Our Priority Areas

Using the national and local evidence, six key priorities have been identified to help us achieve our vision over the next 3 years.

There is a commitment to work collectively to deliver and implement the changes required. We will make sure that everyone living with a sensory impairment, their families and carers are integral to the delivery of this strategy and can provide feedback on progress. The priorities identified below apply across all age groups.

Priorities for 2021-2024

1. The provision of accessible information and advice

Our ambition:

We will fulfil our responsibilities to provide accessible information and advice about services available in Cheshire East.

The following actions will be delivered:

- Local organisations will work together to improve awareness and access to information and advice at an early stage to ensure people feel more informed.
- We will ensure people have access to information and advice in a timely way, both at diagnosis and at other points when they need it.
- We will ensure information is provided in a range of media and in accessible formats including the Council's Live Well pages.
- We will promote information more widely to health, education and social care staff on the availability of sensory services and through the Local Offer for SEND for children and young people.

Outcome:

Children, young people and adults, their family and carers, and professionals report increased awareness of the services and support available.

2. Integrated service provision and improved co-ordination of care

Our ambition:

We will work together to ensure access to co-ordinated services that provide the right support at the right time.

The following actions will be delivered:

- Work with local partners to improve communication and awareness of roles and functions and improve co-ordination between services.
- We will aim to ensure people have access to the most effective support in an equitable and timely way, both at the time of their diagnosis and throughout their journey.
- Create simple pathways to show how health, social care and education services, and the voluntary sector work together in a co-ordinated way to support people with hearing impairments, visual impairments and dual sensory loss.
- Review and understand where any gaps in services exist to inform future commissioning intentions.

Outcome:

We will develop simple service pathways and clear, consistent processes so people can get the support they need in an appropriate and timely way. We will improve communication, co-ordination and information sharing between core services such as health, social care and education.

3. Support for Children and Young People and Preparing for Adulthood (Transition)

Our ambition:

We will ensure children and young people receive the best support when moving to the next stages of their lives and preparing for adulthood, including transition between children's and adult services.

The following actions will be delivered:

- Develop clear transition pathways from children's to adults social care to ensure seamless support.
- We aim to ensure that all young people leaving school, along with their families and carers, are supported and given the information they need to make informed choices about the range of options available. This includes adult social care services, education, training and support from other relevant organisations.
- We aim to ensure that young people are supported to access further education, training and employment opportunities as appropriate.

Outcome:

We will develop simple service pathways and transition arrangements to ensure children and young people are supported at all stages.

We aim to ensure children and young people, and their families and carers, have access to the right support within any educational or training setting. This will enable them to achieve their full potential and lead to greater employment opportunities.

4. Keeping your independence (including use of equipment and assistive technologies)

Our ambition:

We will increase awareness and use of available equipment and assistive technology to improve independence. We aim to inspire people to achieve their personal goals and will offer support and training by appropriately qualified people.

The following actions will be delivered:

- To review the provision of equipment with local partners to improve the co-ordination and accessibility of equipment and assistive technology.

- To review and develop opportunities for training, advice and support on how to use equipment, new technology and apps.
- Promote greater awareness of rehabilitation support alongside other interventions for children, young people and adults with visual impairments/dual sensory loss.
- Provide information and support on training and employment options.
- Work with local organisations to raise awareness of the importance of consulting local people with sensory impairments about changes in their local community, e.g. road/pavement alterations, community building design, public transport routes etc.

Outcome:

Children, young people and adults with a sensory impairment have access to the right equipment and can benefit from the latest technology, online services and applications to increase their independence and connections to social, educational and employment opportunities.

5. Emotional and peer support

Our ambition:

We will ensure that people who need counselling, emotional and peer support can access this when they feel the time is right for them.

The following actions will be delivered:

- Identify opportunities for the development of emotional support services and peer support groups, particularly for young people, working-age adults and people experiencing sudden sight/hearing loss.
- Provide more support for families and carers of people with a sensory impairment.
- Review access to emotional support services including counselling and psychological therapies working with mental health services.

Outcome

Making sure there are appropriate, accessible emotional support services available and people are supported in a timely way.

6. Awareness and understanding of sensory impairment

Our ambition:

We will educate our workforces on the impact of sensory impairments and their obligations in making services accessible. We will promote greater awareness in the wider community and improve public health information.

The following actions will be delivered:

- Promote greater access to sensory awareness training to staff in adult social care, education, children's services and other front-facing services including "first point of contact teams" and libraries.
- Raise awareness of the importance of routine sight and hearing tests and associated health screening programmes.
- Look at the availability of an e-learning programme and other resources to raise awareness.
- Ensure children, young people and adults with a sensory impairment are involved in guiding the development of services and sharing their experiences

Outcome:

To ensure children, young people and adults with a sensory impairment have the best access to services and support and are treated with dignity, understanding and respect.

Appendix 1: Terminology

Sensory impairment or “sensory loss” are umbrella terms used to describe loss of sight and hearing senses. As such, it encompasses the following conditions:

Visual impairment includes people who are born blind or who acquire a visual impairment. **Partially sighted** is where the level of sight loss is moderate and **severe sight impairment (blindness)** is where the level is so severe that activities that rely on eyesight become impossible.

Hearing impairment, or hearing loss, occurs when a person loses part or all of their ability to hear. It refers to anyone with a hearing loss who is Deaf, deaf, deafened or hard of hearing.

The term d/Deaf is used to include people who are Deaf from birth or early childhood and may use British Sign Language (BSL). The ‘D’ in Deaf indicates that they have their own sign language, culture and identity. Those who are “deaf” include people who are hard of hearing or deafened, losing hearing later in life.

Deafblindness is a combination of sight and hearing loss that affects a person's ability to communicate, access information and get around. It's often also referred to as "dual sensory loss" or "dual sensory impairment". This includes ‘progressive’ sight and hearing loss where sight and hearing may deteriorate over a period of time.

Multi-Sensory Impaired (MSI) is a term used to describe the loss of sight and hearing. Children with MSI may also have cognitive, medical or physical disabilities, and challenges which affect other senses.

Service users are people with sensory impairments who access council services and support.

Appendix 2: Development of the Strategy

Sensory Project Group

A sensory project group comprising health, social care and education operational managers, commissioners and practitioners set the overall strategic direction and steered the development of the strategy.

Stakeholder Professional Group Engagement

Engagement took place with local specialist providers including East Cheshire Eye Society, Iris Vision, Deafness Support Network, Cheshire East Deaf Children's Society, and other voluntary and community representatives. In addition, staff from Cheshire East Council (including the Rehabilitation Officers for Visual Impairment, Sensory Inclusion Service, Children's Disability Team, Youth Support Service and Participation Team), Cheshire Clinical Commissioning Group, East Cheshire and Mid Cheshire NHS Trusts Ophthalmology and Audiology Departments advised on the formation of the strategy. They were consulted by holding:

- Two sensory workshops
- One-to-one meetings.
- Online stakeholder survey

Service user engagement

The aims of consulting with service users were to:

- Gather their personal views and experiences
- Ask them about the barriers they face and how we can change and improve things
- Explore how they receive information and advice

Qualitative approaches used included semi-structured interviews, online surveys and attendance at a local forum meeting. In total, 100 adults and 27 children and young people with a visual impairment and/or hearing impairment (including some with dual sensory loss) responded via the above methods.

The engagement work was conducted over the Autumn and Winter of 2020/21 during the Covid-19 pandemic and as a result most took place virtually which was challenging for people with visual and hearing impairments. We wish to express our thanks to our partners for assisting with the engagement work.

Public consultation on the draft strategy will take place via an online survey on the Council's website to the wider public. We will also consult with local organisations and stakeholders.

Appendix 3: National Legislation

The Care Act (2014) (section 9) places some specific duties on Local Authorities to improve services for deafblind people and requires the sight impairment registration process.

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/23/contents/enacted>

The Children and Families Act 2014 includes the implications of sensory impairment on the child's learning and development.

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/contents/enacted>

The Equality Act 2010 requires all organisations that provide a service to the public to make reasonable adjustments to ensure they are accessible to everyone.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/equality-act-2010-guidance>

Accessible Information Standard (2016) requires people who have a sensory loss to be provided with information that they can easily read or understand including support so they can communicate effectively with health and social care services.

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/2016/08/accessible-information-standard/>

References

¹ RNIB Data Tool, <https://www.rnib.org.uk/professionals/knowledge-and-research-hub/key-information-and-statistics/sight-loss-data-tool>

² Projecting Adult Needs and Service Information, <https://www.pansi.org.uk>

³ Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB)

⁴ RNID prevalence estimates using ONS population data (2018).

⁵ Projecting Adult Needs and Service Information, Project Older People Population Info, <https://www.poppi.org.uk/> and <https://www.pansi.org.uk>

⁶ CEC return (2021) for Consortium for Research into Deaf Education (CRIDE)

⁷ Deafblind UK, <https://deafblind.org.uk/>