Appendix 1

Adult & Cultural Services Scrutiny Board

Final Report

Scrutiny Task & Finish Group on Transforming Our Community Equipment Services and Fair Access to Care Eligibility Criteria for Equipment

December 2010

Task Group Members

Cllr Joe Cowell (Chair)
Cllr Bill Wearing
Cllr Cam Ross
1. Executive Summary

This report is the third and final report of the scrutiny review on the Transformation of Cumbria County Council's Community Equipment Services and Introduction of Fair Access to Care Eligibility Criteria.

The purpose of this report is to update members following the publication of an interim report in October 2009 and ‘pre-scrutiny’ report in May 2010 which looked at the preparations for the introduction of changes to the Community Equipment Service and the introduction of Fair Access to Care eligibility criteria for equipment. This report was submitted to Cabinet in March 2010.

The Scrutiny Task Group has met on four occasions since it reconvened in May 2010 and interviewed a range of witnesses including officers involved in implementing the scheme, representatives from Age UK, Unison and Cumbria Disability Network.

The Task Group will submit a final report to Adult Scrutiny Board in January 2011 and Cabinet in March 2011.

2. Recommendations

2.1 That the Directorate ask for an update from the Director of Age UK on the Hardship Fund and in particular the reason for the low number of payments from the scheme.

2.2 That the Directorate ask the Director of Age UK to investigate the use of ‘equipment kits’ for Trusted Assessors and consider using monies from the Hardship Fund for the purchase of kits.

2.3 That the Directorate consult with Cumbria Disability Network with regard publicising the Cumbria Occupational Therapy Self Assessment Tool to disabled users.

2.4 That a proposed pilot scheme of accredited mobile retailers is actively encouraged by the Adult & Local Services Directorate.

2.5 That an article on the progress of the Community Equipment Services ‘one year on’ with input from scrutiny, is published in the next edition of Your Cumbria.

2.6 That Scrutiny continues to monitor progress of the scheme through Voluntary Social Enterprises such as Age UK, The Cumbria Centre for Independent Living (CIL) and Disability Network and updates the Adult Scrutiny Board in July 2011.

3. Background

A review of future Transforming Our Community Equipment Services and Fair
Access to Care Eligibility Criteria for Equipment was taken forward as a topic by the Adult & Cultural Services Scrutiny Board in August 2009 at the request of Cabinet.

The purpose of the review was to gain an understanding of the proposed plans to change Cumbria County Council’s community equipment services and the introduction of Fair Access to Care eligibility criteria for occupational therapy assessments.

The Scrutiny Task and Finish group met for a single session and interviewed a range of witnesses including officers involved in design and implementation of the scheme, representatives from service users’ organisations and the Acting Corporate Director of Adult and Cultural Services.

Members felt that they needed more time to examine the topic but were sensitive to the fact that a delay in implementing the scheme would result in considerable added cost for the authority.

The Task Group produced an interim report in October 2009, which set out scrutiny’s initial findings on the issue. This was considered by Cabinet on the 13 October 2009.

Members asked that they be allowed to explore a number of issues raised by the review in more depth and held a further meeting on 14 December 2009 to look at these concerns. This resulted in the production of a final report in May 2010.

This report was a ‘pre-scrutiny’ review looking at the preparations for the introduction of changes to the Community Equipment Service and the introduction of Fair Access to Care eligibility criteria for equipment. Members understood the need for the introduction of Fair Access to Care eligibility criteria and supported it in principle.

Members felt strongly that there were issues that they would like to address once the new system was in place. These issues would be revisited after the scheme had been operational for six months and a final report produced in December 2010.

The Task Group reconvened in July 2010 to discuss their response to the following issues that had arisen from the changes to community equipment services:

1. A report submitted to the ‘Staff Employer Cabinet Sub Committee’ from UNISON regarding the changes affecting the two integrated Community Equipment Stores (ICES) had been referred to the Task Group. The Task Group responded to report by interviewing a representative of Unison on 5 October 2010.

2. Cumbria LINk (Local Involvement Network) reported that clients in rural areas were finding it difficult to access the pharmacies under the accredited retailer scheme. In response to this, members decided that a survey should be designed and circulated (with the help of LINk) to the following groups:
o GP surgeries and district nurses
o Carers Associations
o Organisations aimed at older people such as Age Concern
o Occupational Therapists

The survey addressed the following issues:

o Are there enough equipment retailers to service the needs of people requiring low-level equipment?
o Are there any issues with the geographical spread of the equipment retailers?
o What has the experience with Trusted Assessors been like?
o Are Trusted Assessors available when needed and easily accessible?
o How is the Handyman service working? Are they easily accessible and affordable?

The Task Group met in October and December 2010 with Trusted Assessors from South Lakeland Age UK, a representative Unison and Cumbria Disability Network and officers from Adult & Local Services for feedback on how the changes were working to inform their final report. Written feedback was received from Trusted Assessors in other areas.

4. Methodology

This review was undertaken by Members of the Scrutiny Task Group on Transforming Our Community Equipment Services and Fair Access to Care Eligibility Criteria for Equipment.

Between the August 2009 and December 2010, Members of the Task Group held witness interviews to gather information.

The first (interim) report was informed by a witness session in August 2009 and the second (pre scrutiny) report by a witness session in December 2009 before the changes were implemented.

At the final stage of the scrutiny process from July to December 2010, the Task Group engaged with the following witnesses:

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<th>Witness Interviews</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>5 October 2010</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>County Manager Physical Disabilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Branch Convenor, Cumbria County Unison</td>
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<td><strong>7 December 2010</strong></td>
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<td>Operations Manager, Age UK, South Lakeland</td>
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<td>Community Officer/Trusted Assessor, Age UK, South Lakeland</td>
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Members also received written evidence from Trusted Assessors in other parts of the County as follows:

Trusted Assessors at Age Concern, Carlisle & Eden
Active Living Manager, Age UK West Cumbria
Age Concern Carlisle and Eden

5. Findings

The findings of the Interim (October 2009) and Pre-Scrutiny (May 2010) reports can be found at Appendix 1 and 2 of this report.

The Task Group reconvened in July 2010 and members decided to interview a Unison representative in response to the concerns outlined in the Unison report received by the Staff Employer Cabinet Sub Committee. Members recognised that some of the issues in the Unison report had already been identified by the Task Group as issues they had had reservations about.

In response to this report and the information received by LINk, Members agreed to circulate a survey to Users, Carer and Health Professionals, to ascertain their views on the changes.

The survey was circulated at the end of August and replies received by the end of September. The response rate to the survey was low (33 replies out of 1000 questionnaires circulated). Members were concerned with the low response to the survey and recognised the importance of feedback from service users/carers to identify problems at the frontline.

Discussions were held with the Age UK South Lakeland and feedback was obtained from Trusted Assessors based at Age Concern Carlisle & Eden, Age UK West Cumbria and Cumbria Disability Network to find out how the changes were working.

Concerns highlighted by Members following witness sessions were

- The low number of applications to the Hardship Fund
- The delivery of training to Trusted Assessors
- Suggested use of a demonstration kit in assessments
- Use of the online assessment tool
- How the retail model was working in practice

A Hardship Fund of £10,000 is available for people with low to moderate needs who need help with funding equipment and is administered by Age UK. It is available to people who qualify for statutory benefits and are having difficulty purchasing equipment. So far, only three payments have been made from the fund totalling £239.99. Members have asked for an update from
the Director of Age UK on possible reasons for the low number of payments from the scheme.

Members were concerned about **training for Trusted Assessors**. Training is delivered by a Manchester based company at a cost of £10185.10 to date. It was suggested that training could be undertaken in house by Occupational Therapists.

This suggestion was discussed with the Development Manager, Adult & Local Services. The training course is an accredited course of four modules recognised as a recommended level for delivering the Trusted Assessor service. In house training is not an option as there is no suitable occupational therapist or trainer able to deliver the level of training required.

One of the original concerns from Scrutiny was that the training should be of a recognised standard to hold credibility so that users would receive an acceptable service.

During the witness session with Trusted Assessors, it was suggested that a **demonstration kit of equipment** would help with assessments. However, Occupational Therapists do not have a recognised ‘assessment kit’ as such and there is not identified list of equipment.

Age UK have put together a selection of equipment to demonstrate or leave with users in their own homes who then purchase their own. This would deal with immediate problems and give people time to buy products that are suitable. The cost is £150 per kit and it has been suggested that this could be funded from the Hardship fund. This suggestion is supported by the Members in their recommendations.

The **Cumbria Occupational Therapy Self Assessment Tool** enables users to assess their own needs for equipment and adaptations and find a solution without engaging with the Directorate. It makes recommendations on what users need and provide details of what can be bought and where, including local retailers. It is accessed via the County Council website. It was also meant to help Assessors who could use it to assist service users.

Following feedback from the Disability Network, Members were concerned that the tool had been publicised sufficiently to disabled users. The tool could assist disabled users in particular, where the main means of communication might be internet/e-mail. It was suggested that the tool was publicised at the first point of contact i.e. GP’s surgery.

On behalf of NHS Cumbria and Cumbria County Council, the County Council runs an accreditation scheme for equipment suppliers. The ‘**Retail Model**’ (TCES) for equipment was implemented in Carlisle from 10th May and across the rest of the county from 14th June 2010.

The retail model is a network of accredited retailers, who supply equipment for low-level needs up to a value of £100. A range of private and third sector organisations has established 29 accredited retailers across the county.
Members were concerned that the users in certain areas would be unfairly disadvantaged if they needed equipment delivered and would have further to travel to purchase equipment.

After discussion, Members were reassured that coverage had improved but there are still a few areas, such as Appleby and Wigton where there is no retailer. The Directorate is working with retailers to encourage establishment of retail outlets in these areas.

The Directorate has held shared practice workshops in Carlisle, Whitehaven and Kendal in September/October 2010 attended by retailers, advice centres and practitioners. One positive outcome from the workshops was that it had been easier than expected for prescriptions to be managed by the user/family/support and that customers were happy with the service.

Members were interested to hear that an accredited mobile retailer was considering locating to Cumbria. Currently, this company has two mobile retailers in Central Lancashire to cover an area where there are no normal retailers. The company also offer a mobile service to the West London area, where the concept has been proven to work.

Members feel that this scheme should be encouraged in Cumbria given the lack of accredited retailers in parts of Cumbria and have recommended that the Directorate investigate the possibility of a pilot scheme.

6. Conclusion

In the pre scrutiny report, May 2010, Members supported the introduction of Access to Care eligibility criteria for equipment in principle but agreed to revisit the topic six months after implementation. Members felt that issues arising from these important changes to everyday living should be given the thorough examination it merited.

This third and final report has looked at the outcome of the implementation of the changes.

Members recognised that the introduction of Fair Access to Care was potentially a controversial issue. Prevention services are providing support and advice for people with low to moderate needs. Members felt that the success of the scheme depended on the quality and availability of Trusted Assessors. Training is now in place with an accredited nationally recognised course for Assessors. Twenty four Trusted Assessors have now been trained in voluntary sector organisations such as Age UK and the Centre for Independent Living (CIL).

The Hardship Fund has been widely publicised but only used on three occasions and Members have asked that the reasons for this be investigated.

The TCES model has now been successfully implemented in Cumbria. Most of the issues at the start of the project, with regard to retailers, have been resolved although there is still work to do to ensure the correct equipment is supplied with full coverage of retailers across the County.
Members were also impressed with other measures the Directorate has in place such as Shared Practice Workshops for feedback on the Retail Model.

With a new scheme understandably there would be initial problems in the first year of operation and members have been reassured that work is ongoing to continue to improve the Community Equipment Service model.

23.12.10

Councillor Joe Cowell
Chair, Scrutiny Task Group-Transforming Our Community Equipment Services and Fair Access to Care Eligibility Criteria for Equipment

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Interim Report of the Task Group (October 2009)
Appendix 2 - Pre Scrutiny Report of the Task Group (May 2010)

IMPLICATIONS

Staffing: None
Financial: None
Legal: None

Background Papers

Interim Report of the Scrutiny Task Group (October 2009)

RESPONSIBLE CABINET MEMBER

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Appendix 2 - Interim Scrutiny Report (October 2009)

Transforming Our Community Equipment Services and Fair Access to Care Eligibility Criteria for Equipment

1. Executive Summary

The purpose of this scrutiny review is to gain an understanding of the proposed plans to change Cumbria County Council’s community equipment services and the introduction of Fair Access to Care eligibility criteria for occupational therapy assessments.

The Scrutiny task and finish group met for a single session in which they met a range of witnesses including officers involved in designing and implementing the proposed schemes, representatives from service users’ organisations and the Acting Corporate Director of Adult and Cultural Services.

Members considered the following aspects of the proposals:

- Fair Access to Care and the County’s Anti-Poverty Strategy;
- The use of Trusted Assessors to assist in the Self Assessment process;
- The planned consultation on Fair Access to Care;
- The likely effect of the implementation of Fair Access to Care on those with low income;
- The danger of abuse of vulnerable adults;
- How the Retail Model will function including its relation to Fair Access to Care.

Due to time pressures this task and finish group could only meet for a single session as the directorate requested that the results of the review should be made available for the first week in September. However the task and finish group feel that there are some areas of work that need further scrutiny and have requested further time to undertake additional research. They submit this report as an interim report and would like to carry out further scrutiny before submitting a final report to Cabinet for December 2009.

2. Interim Recommendations:

Fair Access to Care

2.1 To use Cumbria County Council Consultation Strategy and Toolkit to ensure the public consultation exercise is conducted in an open, transparent and equitable manner.

2.2 To map current service users against areas of deprivation and poor health. When Fair Access to Care is implemented, the service users’ level of need should be incorporated into this mapping exercise.
2.3 To produce a long term / 5 year plan for the training of Trusted Assessors to support the long term effectiveness of this scheme.

**Transforming Community Equipment Services**

2.4 To respond to the concerns relating to the Retail Model—(see page 12, paragraph 7.16).

2.5 That the directorate undertakes a mapping exercise which shows the distances that service users will have to travel to their nearest Trusted Assessor and accredited retailer. This should include intelligence on the availability of public transport in each area, thereby ensuring no service user is left disadvantaged by the new service arrangements.

2.6 The Acting Corporate Director of Adults and Cultural Services to report to Scrutiny on the details of the proposed Hardship Fund including how much will be in it, who will be eligible for it and how long it will be in place.

**Further Research:**

We recommend that scrutiny is given time to investigate further into the following issues with a view to producing a Final Report by December 2009 which will accompany the consultation report to Cabinet.

2.7 The effect of the introduction of eligibility criteria on those with low incomes taking into consideration Cumbria County Council’s Anti-Poverty Strategy.

2.8 The role of the Hardship Fund.

2.9 What can be learned from other local authorities who have already implemented Fair Access to Care especially in the area of managing negative media coverage.

**3. Introduction**

3.1 This interim report is a result of a scrutiny review on the proposed transformation of Cumbria County Council’s community equipment services and the proposed introduction of Fair Access to Care eligibility criteria.

3.2 This piece of work is being considered by Scrutiny at the request of Cabinet. Cabinet have requested that Scrutiny look at this proposal before they consider it since it is seen as a sensitive issue which has the potential to result in negative press coverage and public dissatisfaction with the authority.

3.3 Whilst welcoming the opportunity to consider this important topic, Scrutiny Members feel that the time made available by the ACS directorate has not been sufficient to give the task the thorough
examination it merited. However they are sensitive to the fact that a
delay in implementing the scheme would result in considerable added
cost for the authority. In view of this dilemma, Scrutiny have produced
an interim report at this stage which sets out scrutiny’s initial findings
on the issue which will go to Cabinet on the 13th October 2009.

3.4 The task group have requested that they be allowed to investigate
further issues during the time period allotted for the consultation and to
feed into a final report in January 2010. This final report will go to
Cabinet at the same time as the results of the Consultation and would
thereby provide Cabinet with an additional body of evidence to
consider.

4. **Background**

4.1 This review focuses on two separate but interlinked developments.
The first addresses the way that the authority provides community
equipment to older adults and adults with physical disabilities. The
second addresses the way in which the authority provides
Occupational Therapy assessments for this equipment.

4.2 The authority is under pressure to change its current arrangements due
to demographic changes which have seen an increase in the numbers
of older people and subsequent demand on the existing service.
Current demand has resulted in significant waiting times for OT
assessment particularly for those with lower level needs. Demand is
forecast to grow by 30% by 2020.

4.3 Transforming our Community Equipment Services will entail the
authority downsizing their community equipment service to provide only
large specialist items. It has been proposed that in the future low cost
items of less than £100 will be provided instead on prescription via a
newly developed network of accredited retailers.

4.4 Fair Access to Care will entail moving away from OT assessments for
all towards a system where the efforts of OTs will be concentrated on
those with high level/complex needs. Those with lower levels of need
will be offered a self assessment tool, support and signposting to
places where they can obtain the support they need.

4.5 Scrutiny members, ACS and Health Agencies recognise the increasing
financial burden which the authority is faced with particularly in the light
of a growing aging population. However, before implementing the new
arrangements for the Community Equipment Service and changes to
eligibility criteria, Scrutiny members want to be reassured that future
service users will not be significantly disadvantaged by the proposals.

4.6 Task and Finish members also need to be reassured that the
preparations for a full public consultation exercise are sufficiently open
and inclusive and is not regarded simply as a ‘done deal’ and thereby
attracting bad press and further public dissatisfaction with the authority.
4.7 In the recent Cumbria Place Survey 2008, the level of confidence the general public have in being able to influence the County Council's decision-making process has fallen to 36%. This is well below the national average and the need to improve public perceptions of the local authority is regarded as a key objective for the County Council.

4.8 It is therefore crucial that any major consultation exercise (particularly relating to a reconfiguration of service), is seen to be open, transparent and equitable.

5. Methodology:

Witness Interviews – 20th August 2009:

Nick Waterfield - County Manager Physical Disability – Cumbria County Council

Catherine Morley - Project /Service Development Manager (TCES) – Cumbria County Council

Mark Tennant - Development Manager – Cumbria Disability Network

Sally Bloomer - Business & Retail Development Manager at Age Concern South Lakeland and involved in the Retail Workstream

Gordon Barwick - Service Manager PDSI West (Retailer Workstream Representative)

Documentation:

Transforming Our Community Equipment Service and Fair Access to Care Eligibility Criteria for Equipment – Draft paper to Cumbria County Council, Cabinet Briefing 7th July 2009,


Transforming Community Equipment – Retail Model Project Initiation Document – Cumbria County Council and NHS Cumbria

Cumbria County Council Consultation Strategy 2006

Cumbria County Council Public Consultation Scrutiny Review 2009

Cumbria County Council Anti-Poverty Strategy 2009

Cumbria Place Survey 2008

Findings and Conclusions
6.0 Fair Access to Care

6.1 Under the Fair Access to Care scheme, all service users would be assessed for their level of need. Those with high, complex or substantial needs would still be assessed by an Occupational Therapist and would receive their equipment free of charge.

6.2 Those with low to moderate needs would no longer automatically get an assessment by an OT. They would be able to assess their own need using an on-line self assessment tool preferably with the help of a Trusted Assessor and signposted to purchase any equipment needed through an accredited retailer.

6.3 Trusted Assessors are trained individuals, often from the voluntary sector, who can help people through the self assessment process. Trusted Assessors can direct them to sources of support including retailers that stock the equipment they need to support their independent living.

6.4 The Adult and Cultural Services Directorate feel that the current assessment system is unsustainable. Long waiting lists for assessment indicate that the system is over stretched at present and staff feel that they are not able to spend sufficient time with clients with complex needs.

6.5 This demand is forecast to increase by at least 30% by 2020 due to demographic growth in the older people’s population and changed patterns of service that aim to support people in their own homes. The introduction of FACs will affect approximately 30-40% of cases currently seen.

6.6 There are no predicted job losses as a result of the FACs being implemented as the existing staffing level will be needed to keep waiting lists down (the target is 28 days maximum) and for OT staff to have time to thoroughly assess those with complex needs.

6.7 The alternative to introducing FACs is that there will have to be an increase in staffing levels to meet the present and future needs. This is not possible within the resources currently available.

6.8 The directorate see the introduction of FACs as a way of ‘normalising’ the equipment needed to support independent living in older people. They would like to move away from a model where this equipment is seen as specialist and towards a situation where it is seen as readily available on the high street. The need to purchase this equipment should be seen as a natural part of aging and not as a specialist intervention.

6.9 Fair Access to Care and the Anti-Poverty Strategy

6.10 Scrutiny members were concerned about the effect that the introduction of FACs might have on people with low incomes. Members wanted to know whether there was any correlation between areas with high
numbers of people in need of OT equipment and areas with areas of high deprivation.

6.11 Members were concerned that the introduction of this scheme did not go against the intentions of the County’s Anti-Poverty Strategy.

**Adult and Cultural Services Anti-Poverty Strategy**

“The County Council has both an obligation and an opportunity to protect the interests of those in greatest need and to champion the cause of those who are most at risk”.

Amongst other things the Anti Poverty Strategy aims to:

- Prevent families and individuals getting into poverty in the first place
- Minimise the harm caused by poverty for people living on low incomes

6.12 There was concern that the additional expense of having to purchase and pay for delivery and fitting of OT equipment, even when the cost of the equipment is relatively low, might potentially be too much to pay for those on low income.

6.13 The scrutiny report ‘Debt in Cumbria’ identifies that many older people are already being pushed into debt as a result of higher costs of living. Older people and those on low incomes often suffer from financial exclusion and can be forced to borrow from commercial loan organisations with high rates of interest.

6.14 The directorate feels that, since many of the people who are identified as having low – moderate level needs are ‘new’ to the system, they haven’t needed help before, they will not have experienced the current system and therefore will not be expecting to get an automatic assessment and free equipment.

6.15 One of the advantages of using Trusted Assessors based within organisations that support older adults or those with disabilities is that people are offered other services including benefits checks to ensure they are taking up all the benefits they are entitled to, advice on debt and healthy living.

6.16 There are also plans to set up a ‘Hardship Fund’ which may be managed by Cumbria’s Credit Unions and aimed at those without the means to pay for the equipment they need. No details are available yet about this fund and the directorate only intends it to be a temporary measure.

6.17 There is also a plan to encourage third sector (voluntary) organisations to sell or otherwise make available items of second hand equipment through their premises or shops. Surplus stock held by CCC after the scheme is implemented could be donated to those in financial hardship though this is obviously a finite resource.
6.18 **Access to Transport**

6.19 Members are concerned that older adults and those with disabilities in rural areas will be disadvantaged by this new scheme as it will increase the amount of travelling they have to undertake. Under this new scheme, if they are not entitled to an assessment through social services, they will have to undertake one journey to see a Trusted Assessor and another to source the equipment they need.

6.20 Eden has been identified as the second most deprived district in the country in terms of ‘geographical barriers’. According to the County’s Anti-Poverty Strategy this means that local people without access to private transport will find it very difficult to get to important things they need.

6.21 There is a concern that lack of access to transport might put people off seeking help altogether. He also thought that if people relied on the self assessment alone, without the advice of the Trusted Assessors (for example if they decided to undertake the self-assessment at home) they may not be able to accurately assess their own needs or correctly identify the support they need.

6.22 **Trusted Assessors**

6.23 It is very important that the assessors receive the right level of training and be able to recognise situations where the service user’s requires an assessment by an occupational therapist. At present, those currently trained as Trusted Assessors (who, for example, deal with Direct Payments) tend to err on the side of caution with assessments. However it is important to maintain the quality of service as the scheme is rolled out and assessors potentially get less cautious. It is important to ensure that those with higher or complex needs do not ‘fall through the gaps’.

6.24 Third sector organisations provide good Trusted Assessors, it may not be advisable to look at members of commercial organisations (such as commercial partners in the Retail Model) becoming Trusted Assessors as there may be a danger that their primary motivation will be commercial gain.

6.25 Using Trusted Assessors for those with low to moderate needs provides a lighter touch than a full OT Assessment. There are also many service users who do not feel comfortable with having contact with social services. Trusted Assessors from the voluntary sector often appear less ‘official’ and threatening.

6.26 **Consultation**

6.27 The ACS directorate are going to undertake a three month consultation on transforming community equipment services and Fair Access to Care eligibility criteria for equipment between September and December 2009.
Previous experience has shown that when changes such as this are implemented by the County Council that involve the implementation of charges where the service was once free can result in negative media coverage and public outcry.

Scrutiny undertook a public consultation review in January 2009 which includes lessons from the County’s public consultation exercises of recent times. This should be of interest to anyone embarking on a consultation exercise within the authority.

Abuse of Vulnerable Adults

Members raised concerns during this review that there was a danger, with less direct contact with experts from social services, that instances of abuse of vulnerable adults will not be picked up.

The directorate feel that Age Concern and other agencies acting as Trusted Assessors have enough experience to police this issue themselves.

Conclusions:

Scrutiny members understood the need for the introduction of Fair Access to Care eligibility criteria and supported it in principle, however they feel that more time is needed to explore both the introduction of Fair Access to Care thoroughly and request that they be allowed to explore a number of issue raised by the current scrutiny review in more depth.

Scrutiny recognised that the introduction of FACs was likely to be a controversial issue. Members questioned whether the three month consultation period proposed was long enough.

Members feel strongly that the Cumbria County Council’s Consultation Strategy and Toolkit should be used as a basis for the consultation since it was important that there is a consistency of approach and standard across the authority. The directorate should also pay attention to the findings of the Public Consultation scrutiny review from January 2009.

Scrutiny members wanted to see more information about the spread of service users affected by this change who live in areas of high deprivation. Members felt that there may be a correlation between areas of high deprivation, poor health (and correspondingly high level of people with low level disability) and low income. They were concerned that certain areas of the county could be disadvantaged by the introduction of FACs.

Members would like to be reassured that service users will not be put off seeking help because they do not have access to transport to take them to the locations where they can see Trusted Assessors or to accredited equipment retailers. Members noted that this scheme does require the service user to go through more processes than the previous scheme where service users would be assessed in their own home and the equipment delivered to them.
Members felt that the success of this scheme depended on the quality and availability of Trusted Assessors. They would like to know more about the authority’s plans to ensure enough sufficiently trained Trusted Assessors are in place to support this scheme now and in the future.

7.0 Transforming Our Community Equipment Services

7.1 Cumbria County Council currently supplies community equipment to anyone who needs it within the county without an assessment. These pieces of equipment help people to continue to live independently and in comfort in their own homes which would otherwise be difficult or impossible due to disability or the onset of old age.

7.2 This equipment can range from simple items to address low level needs such as waterproof mattress covers and grab rails through to equipment to address more complex needs such as hoists.

7.3 County Council is following national policy by promoting the normalisation of low level equipment in order to meet future demand. The aim is to encourage individuals to address the impact of low level disability without direct state intervention.

7.4 There are currently two community equipment stores in Ulverston and Maryport. The annual cost of running these stores is in the region of £900,000 which includes staffing and the costs of distribution but which doesn’t include the cost of the equipment itself.

7.5 There will be some job losses for CCC staff as the in-house equipment supplies are scaled down.

7.6 Under the proposed new system, larger items will continue to be distributed from these stores while smaller items (i.e. those up to a value of £100) will be given out on prescription.

7.7 Service users will be signposted to accredited retailers where they will be able to obtain the equipment with the prescription. Under this system, the accredited retailer will also be able to deliver and fit equipment if required by the prescription. The cost of the fitting will be included in the prescription the cost of which will be fixed by national guidelines. All accredited retailers will be responsible for employing fitters and will also be liable for their conduct.

7.8 Individuals obtaining equipment without prescription from accredited retailers will have to make their own arrangements for fitting equipment. Age Concern runs a Handyman Scheme for older adults where volunteers can be brought in to do simple jobs round the house.

7.9 The Retail Model

7.10 ACS is currently setting up a network of accredited retailers who will form the Retail Model.
7.11 Approximately 30 retailers and third sector organisations have shown a firm interest in becoming part of this scheme to date. Some of the retailers have more than one outlet in the county. Not all the organisations currently stock this type of equipment but are all keen to expand their range of activities and see potential in this market.

7.12 A series of training and information events have been run since September 2008 which cover different aspects of the scheme and will include accreditation requirements. Items prescribed to service users will be priced at a fixed cost set by the National Catalogue of products. Retailers will receive in the region of £1.50 in fees for every item handled.

7.13 ACS is designing an accreditation process based on a national model introduced by CEDES for retailers taking part in the scheme. In addition to the criteria set out in the national model, ACS will also set further criteria ensuring reasonable opening hours and accessibility to stores for those with disabilities. There will also be a complaints procedure and a monitoring procedure in place.

7.14 All larger items of equipment (i.e. with a value greater than £100) will be supplied, delivered and fitted by CCC as before.

7.15 The Retail Model and Fair Access to Care

7.16 There is some concern that the implementation of Fair Access to Care would mean that those with low level needs will not be entitled to get their equipment on prescription. This would lead to fewer prescriptions being issued and less custom for the accredited retailers. The witness was concerned that this might cause the Retail Model to fail as it could cause accredited retailers to pull out of the scheme.

7.17 There is a concern that the Retail Model needs to function effectively in order for FACs to work well. Customers who are advised through the self assessment tool and the Trusted Assessors to buy a piece of equipment need to be able to obtain it easily and locally.

7.18 The retail work stream has undergone a risk assessment workshop. Over 30 risks were identified. Not all issues have been addressed yet but members of the Retail Workstream are working towards this.

Conclusions:

While Scrutiny has no great concerns about the plans to transform the community equipment services, they recognise that securing ‘buy in’ from partners in the private and third sector to the Retail Model is essential to its success.

Scrutiny recognises that for Fair Access to Care to be implemented effectively it will be essential that the Retail Model is also working properly enabling service users to access the equipment they need.
Scrutiny would like to hear the directorate’s response to this concern and to find out if there are any steps that can be taken to mitigate the risk.

Scrutiny feels that more needs to be understood about the distances that people will have to travel as a result of this new scheme and if there is an equality of access across the county.
Adult and Cultural Services Scrutiny Advisory Board

Transforming Our Community Equipment Services and Fair Access to Care Eligibility Criteria for Equipment

A scrutiny review of the proposed changes to community equipment services and the introduction of Fair Access to Care eligibility criteria for equipment

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The Task Group would like to thank all the people who contributed to this review.

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Scrutiny Report:

Transforming Our Community Equipment Services and Fair Access to Care Eligibility Criteria for Equipment

1. Executive Summary

The purpose of this scrutiny review is to gain an understanding of the proposed plans to change Cumbria County Council’s community equipment services and the introduction of Fair Access to Care eligibility criteria for occupational therapy assessments.

The Scrutiny task and finish group met on two occasions in which they interviewed a range of witnesses including officers involved in designing and implementing the proposed schemes, representatives from service users' organisations and the Acting Corporate Director of Adult and Cultural Services.

Members considered the following aspects of the proposals:

- Fair Access to Care including its relation to County’s Anti-Poverty Strategy and the Prevention Agenda;
- The use of Trusted Assessors to assist in the Self Assessment process;
- The planned consultation on Fair Access to Care;
- The likely effect of the implementation of Fair Access to Care on those with low income;
- Access to transport;
- The proposed consultation;
- The geographical spread of accredited retailers;
- The danger of abuse of vulnerable adults;
- How the Retail Model will function including its relation to Fair Access to Care.

This task and finish group has been requested to submit a final report to Cabinet in March 2010.
2. **Recommendations:**

2.1 That the Adult and Cultural Services directorate continue to monitor the correlation between areas of deprivation and areas where there is greatest need for equipment. Members recommend that the directorate takes the necessary steps to ensure that poverty does not result in people being unable to obtain the equipment they need.

2.2 That the directorate produce a long term plan for the training of Trusted Assessors to support the long term effectiveness of this scheme.

2.3 That the directorate report to Scrutiny with details of the proposed Hardship Fund including how much will be in it, who will be eligible for it and how long it will be in place.

2.4 That the directorate take steps to ensure that service users are not discouraged in seeking help because they do not have access to transport to take them to the locations where they can see Trusted Assessors or to accredited equipment retailers.

**Note:**

Following the interim report of October 2009, the Adult and Cultural Services Directorate have already started to address some of these recommendations.

Members feel strongly that there are issues that they would like to explore once the new systems are up and running. They intend to revisit the issue in around six months’ time. The areas of further research are outlined in ‘Conclusions’ on pages 14-15 of this review.
3. Introduction

3.1 This report is the result of a scrutiny review on the proposed transformation of Cumbria County Council’s community equipment services and the proposed introduction of Fair Access to Care eligibility criteria.

3.2 This piece of work is being considered by Scrutiny at the request of Cabinet. Cabinet have requested that Scrutiny look at this proposal before they consider it since it is seen as a sensitive issue which has the potential to result in negative press coverage and public dissatisfaction with the authority.

3.3 Whilst welcoming the opportunity to consider this important topic, Scrutiny Members felt that the time made available by the Adult and Cultural Services Directorate was not sufficient to give the task the thorough examination it merited. However they were sensitive to the fact that a delay in implementing the scheme would result in considerable added cost for the authority. In view of this dilemma, Scrutiny produced an interim report which set out scrutiny’s initial findings on the issue which went to Cabinet on the 13th October 2009. Scrutiny held a further meeting on 14th December 2009 which resulted in the production of this final report.

4. Background

4.1 This review focuses on two separate but interlinked developments. The first addresses the way that the authority provides community equipment to older adults and adults with physical disabilities including visual impairment. The second addresses the way in which the authority provides Occupational Therapy assessments for this equipment.

4.2 The authority is under pressure to change its current arrangements due to demographic changes which have seen an increase in the numbers of older people and subsequent demand on the existing service. Current demand has resulted in significant waiting times for OT assessment particularly for those with lower level needs. Demand is forecast to grow by 30% by 2020.

4.3 Transforming our Community Equipment Services will entail the authority rationalising their community equipment service to provide only large specialist items and simple items where both are needed by an individual. It has been proposed that in the future low cost simple aids to daily living of less than £100 will be provided instead on prescription via a newly developed network of accredited retailers.

4.4 Fair Access to Care will entail moving away from OT assessments for all towards a system where the efforts of OTs will be concentrated on those with high level/complex needs. Those with lower levels of need will be offered a self assessment tool, support and signposting to places where they can obtain information and advice or the support
they need through a Trusted Assessor in a voluntary sector organisation.

4.5 Scrutiny members, the Adult and Cultural Services Directorate and Health Agencies recognise the increasing financial burden, which the authority is faced with particularly in the light of a growing aging population. However, before implementing the new arrangements for the Community Equipment Service and changes to eligibility criteria, Scrutiny members want to be reassured that future service users will not be significantly disadvantaged by the proposals.

4.6 Task and Finish members also need to be reassured that the preparations for a full public consultation exercise are sufficiently open and inclusive and is not regarded simply as a ‘done deal’ and thereby attracting bad press and further public dissatisfaction with the authority.

4.7 In the recent Cumbria Place Survey 2008, the level of confidence the general public have in being able to influence the County Council’s decision-making process has fallen to 36%. This is well below the national average and the need to improve public perceptions of the local authority is regarded as a key objective for the County Council.

4.8 It is therefore crucial that any major consultation exercise (particularly relating to a reconfiguration of service), is seen to be open, transparent and equitable.
5. Methodology:

Witness Interviews – 20th August 2009:

Nick Waterfield - County Manager Physical Disability – Cumbria County Council

Catherine Morley - Project /Service Development Manager (TCES) – Cumbria County Council

Mark Tennant - Development Manager – Cumbria Disability Network

Sally Bloomer - Business & Retail Development Manager at Age Concern South Lakeland and involved in the Retail Workstream

Gordon Barwick - Service Manager PDSI West (Retailer Workstream Representative)

Witness Interviews – 20th November 2009:

Catherine Morley - Project /Service Development Manager (TCES) – Cumbria County Council


Mary Bradley - Chief Executive, Age Concern

Nick Waterfield - County Manager Physical Disability – Cumbria County Council.

Documentation:


Transforming Community Equipment – Retail Model Project Initiation Document – Cumbria County Council and NHS Cumbria.

Cumbria County Council Consultation Strategy 2006.

Cumbria County Council Public Consultation Scrutiny Review 2009.

Cumbria County Council Anti-Poverty Strategy 2009.

Cumbria Place Survey 2008.
6. **Findings and Conclusions**

**Fair Access to Care:**

6.1 The Adult and Cultural Services directorate feel that the current assessment system is unsustainable. Long waiting lists for assessment indicate that the system is over stretched at present and some staff feel that they are not able to spend sufficient time with clients with complex needs.

6.2 This demand is forecast to increase by at least 30% by 2020 due to demographic growth in the older people’s population and changed patterns of service that aim to support people in their own homes. The introduction of Fair Access to Care for Equipment will affect approximately 30-40% of cases currently seen. Under the Fair Access to Care scheme, all service users would be assessed for their level of need. Those with high, complex or substantial needs would still be assessed by an Occupational Therapist and would receive their equipment free of charge.

6.3 Those with low to moderate needs would no longer automatically get an assessment by an OT. They would be able to assess their own need using an on-line self assessment tool preferably with the help of a Trusted Assessor and signposted to purchase any equipment needed through an accredited retailer.

6.4 Trusted Assessors are trained individuals, often from the voluntary sector, who can help people through the self assessment process. Trusted Assessors can direct them to sources of support including retailers that stock the equipment they need to support their independent living.

6.5 Members established that part of this new scheme would involved service users with low level needs being encouraged to use self-assessment tools such as on-line assessment which would help them identify any help or equipment they may need. The self-diagnosis tools have a facility, which will advise people who turn out to have high or substantial needs to seek a professional OT assessment.

6.6 Members had some concerns that there was a danger that some people may misdiagnose their own needs and that people with high or critical needs may not assess themselves correctly or underestimate their own needs.

6.7 Virtual assessments can be carried out using a plan of the client’s house on a computer and if the Trusted Assessor thinks that a home visit is required, this can be arranged.

6.8 It is unlikely that there will be reductions in staffing in OT services as a result of the Fair Access to Care for Equipment being implemented as the existing staffing level will be needed to keep waiting lists down (the target is 28 days maximum) and for OT staff to have time to thoroughly assess those with complex needs. The alternative to introducing Fair
Access to Care for Equipment is that there will have to be an increase in staffing levels to meet the present and future needs. This is not possible within the resources currently available.

6.9 The directorate see the introduction of Fair Access to Care for Equipment as a way of ‘normalising’ the equipment needed to support independent living in older people. They would like to move away from a model where this equipment is seen as specialist and towards a situation where it is seen as readily available on the high street. The need to purchase this equipment should be seen as a natural part of aging and not as a specialist intervention.

6.10 To date, Age Concern have completed training six assessors, are currently training four and have twelve awaiting training. They feel that this number give a sufficient spread across the county to be able to carry out the scheme. Cumbria’s disability organisations also plan to train some Trusted Assessors for this scheme. Members feel that it is imperative to recruit and retain sufficient numbers of trusted assessors to carry out assessments across the county in order for this scheme to be a success.

6.11 All Accredited Retailers will have trained staff on site who can give advice about equipment.

**Fair Access to Care and the Prevention Agenda:**

6.12 A characteristic of the current generation of older people is their reluctance to ask for help. There is an important role for social workers in the implementation of this new scheme in persuading people to come forward. Social workers are well placed to introduce support gradually, as it is needed. The Prevention Agenda will address the needs of people not currently ‘on the radar’ of social services and who do not currently seek or receive support.

6.13 The Prevention Agenda will address the needs of people not currently ‘on the radar’ and who do not currently seek or receive support. Library services for example could reach ‘hard to reach’ groups. Library services could provide information, access to the online self-assessment tool and signpost people to sources of help.

**Fair Access to Care and the Anti-Poverty Strategy:**

6.14 Scrutiny members were concerned about the effect that the introduction of Fair Access to Care for Equipment might have on people with low incomes.

6.15 Members felt that there may be a correlation between areas of high deprivation, poor health (and correspondingly high level of people with low level disability) and low income. They were concerned that certain areas of the county could be disadvantaged by the introduction of Fair Access to Care eligibility criteria for equipment.
6.16 Following their inquiry, members were supplied with maps, which detailed the level of need for low-level equipment by ward. There seemed to be some correlation between the areas of greatest need for low level equipment and areas of greatest deprivation in the county.

6.17 Members were concerned that the introduction of this scheme did not go against the intentions of the County’s Anti-Poverty Strategy.

**Adult and Cultural Services Anti-Poverty Strategy**

“The County Council has both an obligation and an opportunity to protect the interests of those in greatest need and to champion the cause of those who are most at risk”.

Amongst other things the Anti Poverty Strategy aims to:

- Prevent families and individuals getting into poverty in the first place
- Minimise the harm caused by poverty for people living on low incomes

6.18 There was concern that the additional expense of having to purchase and pay for delivery and fitting of OT equipment, even when the cost of the equipment is relatively low, might potentially be too much to pay for those on low incomes.

6.19 The scrutiny report ‘Debt in Cumbria’ identifies that many older people are already being pushed into debt as a result of higher costs of living. Older people and those on low incomes often suffer from financial exclusion and can be forced to borrow from commercial loan organisations with high rates of interest.

6.20 The directorate feels that, since many of the people who are identified as having low – moderate level needs are ‘new’ to the system, they haven’t needed help before, they will not have experienced the current system and therefore will not be expecting to get an automatic assessment and free equipment.

6.21 One of the advantages of using Trusted Assessors based within organisations that support older adults or those with disabilities is that people are offered other services including benefits checks to ensure they are taking up all the benefits they are entitled to, advice on debt and healthy living.

6.22 There are plans to set up a ‘Small Grants Fund’ which may be managed by the voluntary sector or Cumbria’s Credit Unions and aimed at those without the means to pay for the equipment they need. This is only intended as a temporary measure while the new scheme is being implemented. In the long term, the changes to Community Equipment criteria and the introduction of Fair Access to Care for equipment are intended to be a way of 'normalising' the purchase of equipment needed
to support independent living in old age in the much the same way as people now expect to have to pay for eye care from their own resources.

6.23 Age Concern has an existing system in which they hold a small amount of money (around £2000 per district) which is used to supply people with equipment especially those who are ‘outside the system’ and do not approach the local authority for help.

6.24 There is also a plan to encourage third sector (voluntary) organisations to sell or otherwise make available items of second-hand equipment through their premises or shops. Surplus stock held by CCC after the scheme is implemented could be donated to those experiencing financial hardship.

6.25 Age Concern has been exploring the possibility of collecting and cleaning equipment for redistribution to those experiencing financial hardship. At the moment it appears that it is not financially viable to refurbish items that have a value of less than £60 due to the high costs of cleaning them. They have explored the possibility of applying for grants for carbon offsetting if they recycle equipment but it there is no guarantee that these will be obtained.

6.26 Age Concern has also explored the possibility of recycling equipment for scrap value as they have a licence for this. In addition to any financial gain, this scheme would also serve to take some unsafe equipment out of circulation.

**Access to Transport:**

6.27 Members are concerned that older adults and those with disabilities in rural areas will be disadvantaged by this new scheme as it will increase the amount of travelling they have to undertake. Under this new scheme, if they are not entitled to an assessment through social services, they will have to undertake one journey to see a Trusted Assessor and another to source the equipment they need.

6.28 Eden has been identified as the second most deprived district in the country in terms of ‘geographical barriers’. According to the County’s Anti-Poverty Strategy this means that local people without access to private transport will find it very difficult to get to important things they need.

6.29 There is a concern that lack of access to transport might put people off seeking help altogether. It is also thought that if people relied on the self-assessment alone, without the advice of the Trusted Assessors (for example if they decided to undertake the self-assessment at home) they may not be able to accurately assess their own needs or correctly identify the support they need.

6.30 The directorate has undertaken a mapping exercise which shows the spread of accredited retailers who have already signed up for this scheme. The directorate are continuing to expand the list of accredited retailers in the county. A greater the spread of retailers means less chance of people being geographically disadvantaged.
Trusted Assessors:

6.31 It is very important that the assessors receive the right level of training and be able to recognise situations where the service user requires an assessment by an occupational therapist. At present, those currently trained as Trusted Assessors (who, for example, deal with Direct Payments) tend to err on the side of caution with assessments. However it is important to maintain the quality of service as the scheme is rolled out and assessors potentially get less cautious. It is important to ensure that those with higher or complex needs do not ‘fall through the gaps’.

6.32 Equipment retailers will not have trained Trusted Assessors but they will have staff who will able to advise customers on the equipment that they sell.

6.33 Using Trusted Assessors for those with low to moderate needs provides a lighter touch than a full OT Assessment. There are also many service users who do not feel comfortable with having contact with social services. Trusted Assessors from the voluntary sector often appear less ‘official’ and threatening.

Consultation:

6.34 The Adult and Cultural Services Directorate have been undertaking a three month consultation on Transforming Community Equipment Services and Fair Access to Care Eligibility Criteria for Equipment. The consultation took place at the same time as this review and it is intended that the two reports are submitted to the Cabinet meeting in March 2010.

6.35 Previous experience has shown that when changes such as this are implemented by Cumbria County Council, that involve the implementation of charges where the service was once free, it can result in negative media coverage and public outcry.

6.36 In their interim report (October 2009) this Scrutiny Task and Finish group recommended that the directorate use Cumbria County Council Consultation Strategy and Toolkit to ensure the public consultation exercise is conducted in an open, transparent and equitable manner.

Abuse of Vulnerable Adults:

6.37 Members raised concerns during this review that there was a danger, with less direct contact with experts from social services, that instances of abuse of vulnerable adults may not be picked up.

6.38 The Adult and Cultural Service directorate feel that Age Concern and other agencies acting as Trusted Assessors have enough experience to police this issue themselves.
Transforming Community Equipment Services

6.39 Cumbria County Council currently supplies community equipment to anyone who needs it within the county following an assessment by the OT Service. These pieces of equipment help people to continue to live independently and in comfort in their own homes which would otherwise be difficult or impossible due to disability or the onset of old age.

6.40 This equipment can range from simple items to address low level needs such as waterproof mattress covers and grab rails through to equipment to address more complex needs such as hoists.

6.41 County Council is following national policy by promoting the normalisation of low level equipment in order to meet future demand. The aim is to encourage individuals to address the impact of low level disability without direct state intervention.

6.42 There are currently two community equipment stores in Ulverston and Maryport. The annual cost of running these stores is in the region of £900,000 which includes staffing and the costs of distribution but which doesn’t include the cost of the equipment itself.

6.43 Under the proposed new system, larger items will continue to be distributed from these stores while smaller items (i.e. those up to a value of £100) will be given out on prescription.

6.44 Service users will be signposted to accredited retailers where they will be able to obtain the equipment with the prescription. Under this system, the accredited retailer will also be able to deliver and fit equipment if required by the prescription. The cost of the fitting will be included in the prescription the cost of which will be fixed by national guidelines. All accredited retailers will be responsible for employing fitters and will also be liable for their conduct.

6.45 Individuals obtaining equipment without prescription from accredited retailers will have to make their own arrangements for fitting equipment. Handyman services are going to be put in place across the county. Cumbria County Council is currently putting out a tender for this contract. Experience nationally is that for full cost recovery, £25 per hour would be needed to fund the scheme. However, indications are that individuals would prefer to pay £12 to £15 per hour so this is likely to be charge to the individual. Very quick and simple jobs, such as changing a light bulb, may have a charge of around £5. Members felt that it was very important to have a fixed pricing structure across all areas of the county.

The Retail Model:

6.46 Cumbria County Council has designed a retail model which separates the supply chains for simple and complex equipment. Currently the authority holds all equipment within its own stores and distributes it. In the future the local authority and NHS partners will still supply items of complex equipment, but equipment for low level needs, up to a value of
£100, will be available via a network of Accredited Retailers. If Fair Access to Care eligibility criteria for equipment is introduced, equipment for people assessed as having low or moderate needs will no longer be available free of charge. Instead, people will be expected to purchase it themselves.

6.47 The Adult and Cultural Services Directorate is currently setting up a network of accredited retailers who will form the Retail Model. Approximately 30 retailers and third sector organisations have shown a firm interest in becoming part of this scheme to date. Some of the retailers have more than one outlet in the county. Not all the organisations currently stock this type of equipment but are all are keen to expand their range of activities and see potential in this market.

6.48 The distribution of retailers currently covers the whole county although there are areas where the spread of retailers is sparser than others. There is a nationally fixed tariff for delivery of equipment that increases the further out a client lives from the retailer. Members had concerns that people in areas where there were fewer accredited retailers may be unfairly disadvantaged as they will have to pay a higher price if they need equipment delivered and further to travel to purchase equipment.

6.49 The Adult and Cultural Services Directorate feel that the spread of retailers will develop quickly as the scheme is implemented. There will be a 12 month cross-over period as the scheme is implemented and the existing premises stores reduce their supplies of low level equipment. It is felt that further opportunities can be explored during this time such as approaching pharmaceutical outlets in supermarkets to see if they would be interested in becoming part of the scheme.

6.50 A series of training and information events have been run since September 2008 which cover different aspects of the scheme and will include accreditation requirements. Items prescribed to service users will be priced at a fixed cost set by the National Catalogue of products. Retailers will receive in the region of £1.50 in fees for every item handled.

6.51 National Accreditation criteria apply to retailers and will be administered locally by Cumbria County Council Contracts team. In addition to the criteria set out in the national model, Cumbria are considering setting further requirements ensuring reasonable opening hours and accessibility to stores for those with disabilities. The Cumbria County Council complaints procedure is available and will be promoted as the method for making a complaint. The activity around prescriptions will be monitored.

6.52 All larger items of equipment (i.e. with a value greater than £100) will be supplied, delivered and fitted by Cumbria County Council as before.
The Retail Model and Fair Access to Care:

6.53 During interviews members heard that the implementation of Fair Access to Care would mean that those with low level needs will not be entitled to get their equipment on prescription. Concern was expressed that this would lead to fewer prescriptions being issued and less custom for the accredited retailers. The witness was concerned that this might cause the Retail Model to fail as it could cause accredited retailers to pull out of the scheme.

6.54 There is concern that the Retail Model needs to function effectively in order for Fair Access to Care to work well. Customers who are advised through the self assessment tool and the Trusted Assessors to buy a piece of equipment need to be able to obtain it easily and locally.

Conclusions:

The timing of this work has meant that this has been a ‘pre-scrutiny’ review looking at the preparations for the introduction of changes to the Community Equipment Service and the introduction of Fair Access to Care eligibility criteria for equipment. Scrutiny members understand the need for the introduction of Fair Access to Care eligibility criteria and support it in principle.

Members feel that there are certain aspects of these new arrangements that they would like to revisit once the scheme has been up and running for six months or so. Specifically they would like to interview Occupational Therapists, Social Care Workers and Trusted Assessors to see how successful the implementation of the scheme has been and if there are any areas of concern.

It was recognised that the introduction of Fair Access to Care has the potential to be a controversial issue. During the review, members questioned whether the three month consultation period proposed was long enough.

Members recognised the need to ‘normalise’ the purchase of items of equipment for low level need. They recognised that most of the purchasers of this simple equipment would be ‘new’ to the system and therefore would not necessarily expect to receive the equipment for free.

There were some concerns about the correlation between areas of greatest demand for this equipment and areas of greatest deprivation in the county. Members would like to monitor this situation to make sure that the implementation of this scheme will not result in people being unable to access the equipment that they need because of financial hardship.

Members would like to be reassured that service users will not be put off seeking help because they do not have access to transport to take them to the locations where they can see Trusted Assessors or to accredited equipment retailers. Members noted that this
scheme will require the service user to go through more processes than the previous scheme where service users would be assessed in their own home and the equipment delivered to them.

Members felt that the success of this scheme depended on the quality and availability of Trusted Assessors. They would like to know more about the authority’s plans to ensure enough sufficiently trained Trusted Assessors are in place to support this scheme now and in the future.

Members would like to make officers aware they understand that this is a new scheme and that it is to be expected that there may be ‘hiccup’s in the first year. They request to be kept informed of developments and any problems that arise.

While Scrutiny has no great concerns about the plans to transform the community equipment services, they recognise that securing ‘buy in’ from partners in the private and third sector to the Retail Model is essential to its success.

Scrutiny recognises that for Fair Access to Care to be implemented effectively it will be essential that the Retail Model is also working properly enabling service users to access the equipment they need.