

## Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

Directorate: People
Service : Adult social care
Name of Officer/s completing assessment: Mike Fry.
Date of Assessment: 21.10.2013
Name of service/function or policy being assessed: Talking Books

1. What are you assessing? Is it a policy, function service?	<p>The Talking Books service provides audio DAISY player plus unlimited audio books to blind and partially sighted people.</p> <p>The service is provided by the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) as part of a national provision: there is no local office in Herefordshire for Talking Books, though RNIB does have a presence in the county through its partnership working with Vision Links.</p>
2. Are you making changes to what is already happening? (starting something new, stopping something, changing something?) What is the purpose of the new change?	<p>Adult Social Care proposes to withdraw direct funding of this service. Currently the Herefordshire Council pays approximately £13,000 a year to fund services for just over 170 individuals. Currently people do not have to meet any criteria other than that they have some level of visual impairment to access the service.</p> <p>The change is intended to bring funding of Talking Books in line with other services commissioned by Adult Social Care, Herefordshire Council. It will also bring access to the service in line with the strategic intent of both central and local governmental policy, where individual service users who have eligible needs identified are provided with funding to choose how to purchase services to meet their needs, and have the freedom to access services from a provider of their choice rather than having a provider imposed on them as a consequence of local authority funding agreements.</p> <p>Where individual service users are FACs eligible, their personal budget may include an amount to allow the individuals to purchase the service directly if appropriate.</p>
3.1 Why are you making this change? (what	The current contract is coming to an end. The

are the drivers – budget, resources, duplication, legislation)

Herefordshire Council is experiencing severe financial constraints, and consequently has to review spending to ensure that funding is targeted to meeting the assessed needs of those members of the population who meet critical and/or substantial FACs criteria.

The change is being proposed to bring the funding of the Talking Books service in line with other provision for disabled people within the county. If the Herefordshire Council continues to fund this service directly for non-FACs eligible individuals it would be guilty of treating this group of service users differently to other user groups who do not have non-FACs eligible services funded by the authority. The proposed change complements other similar alterations to service funding of other provision to bring all Adult Social Care funding in line with common criteria.

Some people with a visual impairment may be able, and wish to take advantage of recent technological / market developments that have seen the introduction of alternative providers of audio books with a wide choice and/or at less cost than RNIB's Talking Books service. The proposed changes will allow for individual solutions to be developed to meet individual reading needs, giving service users previously unavailable options. A number of Talking Books users already subscribe to a totally free audio book service for people with a visual impairment called Calibre, which offers a similar provision, though it currently has a smaller, though rapidly growing, list of available titles. Other audio books are available through commercial providers such as Audible.com, iTunes, and Amazon.co.uk.

### 3.2 Wider contextual issues

**Herefordshire Library Services** issued 1,648 adult audio books titles in 2012. This is an average of 9.0 titles issued per 1,000 population compared to an average of similar authorities of 25.1 titles issued per 1,000 population. There are too many possible confounding variables to be able to ascribe cause or meaning to this data, however, it is clear that this is not an overly used resource locally.

The library service provision in Herefordshire is under review as part of the council's programme of budget reductions. Some libraries are to be turned into community libraries, while others are to operate for reduced hours. Budget pressure may see further reduction in library provision announced early in 2014. This will impact on the ability of people with a visual impairment to access audio books from local libraries. However, this group will not be uniquely disadvantaged as the whole population of the county will have access to reading material reduced with reductions in library opening hours.

There are those who argue that the council should fund Talking Books to provide people with visual impairments a parallel access to the written word as fully sighted people have via library services. If the availability of library services is to be reduced to the population as a whole there is an equal argument that a proportionate reduction in access to alternative formats of written materials for people with a visual impairment would be equitable.

**Vision Links** is a local charity supporting people with sight loss in Herefordshire through an office in Hereford. Until this year Vision Link received direct funding from Adult Social Care, but his funding was withdrawn as of xxxxx. Vision Links continues to operate from its Hereford office having had to remodel its financial and operational models as a consequence of this change to funding streams.

People who meet FACs criteria who are assessed as requiring services that Vision Links provide will have this taken into account when personal budgets are calculated, and will be in a position to individually purchase services they need from Vision Links as appropriate.

The people who would be disadvantaged by the dual reduction in funding to Talking Books and Vision Links are those with relatively low level needs who would not meet FACs criteria, and those with sufficient private financial resources to be ineligible for Adult Social Care support. In line with national legislation and guidance the

	<p>Herefordshire Council has determined that it will target its provision to meet only those for whom it has as responsibility under FACs criteria rather than provide universal access to services. This decision has been made irrespective of protected group status of individuals. This will reduce service levels to some individuals with a visual impairment, however, the Herefordshire Council is legitimately empowered to make this decision in the period of financial constraints currently being experienced.</p> <p><b>Talking Newspapers/Magazines</b> are a locally located service providing audio versions of local and national news content and magazines. This service is not effected by the proposed change to Talking Books funding, and so will continue to offer access to news/current affairs content to people with a visual impairment in Herefordshire.</p> <p><b>The Adult Social Care Sensory Impairment Service</b> is being remodelled as part of the wider review of council and social care provision in the context of budget pressures and a changing legislative and operational best practice landscape.</p> <p>This is an opportunity to develop a more effective provision in the rapidly changing context support needs for people with a visual impairment. A more focused provision that takes advantage of advancements in practice and technology to assist people with a visual impairment could mitigate some of the difficulties that individuals may face with the withdrawal of previously funded provision.</p> <p>A service specification for the remodelled sensory impairment service is currently under development.</p>
<p>4. What evidence / sources of information have you used to make your decision? (surveys, employee groups, user groups, statistical data)</p>	<p>Statistical data: Talking Books currently have 173 individuals registered with them in Herefordshire. Of these 28 have not used the service for over one year. Access to Talking Books is not restricted to FACs eligible individuals. Currently only 30 of those registered are in receipt of a FACs eligible service from the Herefordshire Council.</p>

	<p>Financial data: The Herefordshire Council's Adults' Wellbeing Directorate does not have the resources to fund this service directly for people who do not meet Critical and/or Substantial FACs criteria.</p> <p>Consultation responses: Only a minority of individuals responding to the service user consultation stated that they would not be prepared to pay for Talking Books (n=14). This group consisted of roughly equal numbers of those who said they would not pay on principle and those who said they could not afford to pay: those meeting FACs criteria who did not have the financial ability to pay following a financial assessment would not have to meet the cost of the service. This further reduces the number of individuals who might wish to withdraw from receiving the service should the proposed change take place.</p>
<p>5. Have you identified who will be affected by your proposal? (users, partners, customers) – are there any gaps in the information you have collected</p> <p>5a How many people will be affected? How many users are there of the service currently?</p>	<p>Out of the estimated 7,000 people living with varying degrees of sight loss in Herefordshire, there are 173 Talking Book Service Council paid beneficiaries.</p> <p>Those meeting FACs critical and/or substantial criteria will, where appropriate, be able to purchase the service directly through an additional element in their personal budget/ direct payment. Any additional funding is also consequent to a financial assessment under the Fairer Charging guidance.</p> <p>Adult Social Care will evaluate all those currently on the Talking Books register to identify those individuals who may meet FACs eligibility criteria and will offer to assess/review those people. It will also offer to review those who have already been identified as meeting the criteria to recalculate any direct payment/personal budget as appropriate.</p> <p>All those currently on the Talking Books register will be contacted to inform them of any funding changes to the service, and alternative provision that they may wish to access.</p>

	<p>The Talking Books service is a national provision delivered by a third sector agency. It is not expected that there will be any risk to paid or voluntary employment for individuals in Herefordshire due to the centralised structure of RNIB Talking Books which is based outside of the county.</p> <p>Talking Books has an existing subscription scheme allowing individuals to purchase their service, so RNIB will not need to develop a changed business structure to adapt to the proposed change.</p> <p>People who are not FACs eligible will still be able to access Talking Books, but will need to purchase the service from their own resources.</p>
<p>6. Have you identified that one group of people may be more affected than another (for example, disabled people)</p>	<p>Blind and partially sighted readers who do not have a viable alternative working medium for accessing printed literature.</p>
<p>7. Have you consulted with the people that will be affected? (what did they tell you? How did you consult with them?)</p>	<p>On-going discussions with Talking Books staff have been taking place over the last nine months regarding this proposed change to funding.</p> <p>A telephone consultation, which attempted to contact all the Talking Books service users in Herefordshire, was undertaken in the week commencing 23/09/2013. 84 people responded to the consultation. The vast majority of respondents used Talking books solely or primarily for leisure purposes. 57% of respondents could either access print material or accessed audio materials from sources other than Talking Books. Only 14 individuals said they would not pay for a Talking Books service.</p>
<p>8. Have you identified any potential positive impacts?</p>	<p>Improved service user experience and increased service delivery efficiency.</p> <p>Talking Books will have the opportunity to reshape their service to take advantage of the development of service users directly developing demand funded through Personal Budgets, stimulating and reshaping the market place in line with Government policy. Undertaking this action has the potential to mitigate the negative impacts below.</p>

	<p>The proposed changes will allow people to seek individual solutions to meet their reading needs rather than rely on a single provision.</p>
<p>9. Have you identified any negative impacts?</p>	<p>Those individuals with a visual impairment who do not meet critical or substantial FACs criteria will no longer be able to access a free at point of delivery Talking Books service.</p> <p>There may be an increased demand for people wanting to have a social work assessment as a consequence of the proposal. Liaison with social work staff who may be involved in these assessments will be critical to ensure timely delivery of any additional service demands.</p>