

OPTION: ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

BUDGET SAVING: £300,000 increased income

DESCRIPTION OF OPTION

Assistive Technology in Wirral is jointly funded by Wirral Council and NHS Wirral. The joint management of the service is provided via Wirral Council. The service has seen a growth in the numbers of people being supported by the service of over 225% since 2009/2010. In 2011/12 there were over 4,500 people accessing the service at a cost of £1.5m.

Assistive technology includes installations in a person's home such as bed occupancy sensors, property exit sensor, pull chords, flood detectors and falls detectors. Assistive Technology in Wirral is increasingly recognised as an integral part of supporting individuals and carers.

This equipment is currently installed free of charge, and the people who receive the service have the added benefit of 24/7 monitoring, again for no charge. The value of the equipment ranges significantly, depending on the volume and type of support required but can cost as little as a few pounds to over £5,000.

The option in this area is to provide the same service, to the same standard, but introduce a weekly charge of £3 per household, per week, regardless of the level of equipment installed within the house.

The charge would be based on an individual's ability to pay.

RATIONALE FOR SAVINGS

The Council has already agreed to develop 'nominal' charging for Assistive Technology. In the current financial climate and in the absence of directly tangible cashable efficiencies, a growing service must be considered to be unsustainable. Charging will be linked to Fair Access to Care criteria, must in itself not become a barrier to using Assistive Technology and be mindful of the funding principles of the NHS i.e. free at the point of care.

The option is to implement a proposed charge based on the cost of providing an ongoing monitoring service. The proposed charge of £3 per week is in line with charges made by other Local Authorities. It is estimated that 50% (2,500) of current users would be liable for this charge.

The current system is not to charge, this is seen as untenable going forward. A nominal fee has been put forward that covers the cost to the council, to charge more may be illegal.

IMPACT

It is acknowledged that in implementing a charging regime there is likely to be an impact on the number of financial assessments made, the collection of income and potential bad debts.

MITIGATION

People who need the service may opt out due to the cost of the fee; this will be mitigated by ensuring that the charge is based on an individual's ability to pay.

