

CABINET- 16 FEBRUARY 2011

SERVICE, MAINTENANCE AND REPAIR FOR STAIR LIFTS

Report by John Jackson, Director for Social & Community Services

Introduction

1. County Council Occupational Therapists assess and recommend to the District Council Housing Departments when it is “necessary and appropriate” to install a stair lift. The stair lift can either be a stand alone adaptation or as part of a larger project. Provision of a stair lift is funded mostly via a District Council Disabled Facilities Grant which is means tested. On installation the lift becomes the property of the individual.
2. When a grant has been awarded the County Council has been providing an ongoing maintenance service at no charge. The contract the County Council has in place includes the provision of an emergency call out service when equipment breaks down. This policy was originally instigated because the lifts were recycled and installed in the houses of new service users. This has not occurred for the last ten years, as the District Councils Housing Teams decided that recycling was no longer cost effective.
3. There is no legislation placing a statutory duty on the County Council to provide this ongoing maintenance service for stair lifts. Other social services departments are reviewing, reducing or removing provision of service and maintenance.
4. A review of this service and its cost was undertaken in October 2009. It was agreed that existing service users should be consulted on the discontinuation of this service.
5. Currently there are adults 793 people supported with servicing and maintenance. This is a 31% increase since 2003 when the figure was 604. The estimated costs this year will be over £300,000
6. This report summarises the outcomes from the recently completed consultation exercise with service users, the costs of the service and a recommendation to discontinue the service.

Proposal to Cabinet

7. The proposal is to cease providing service and maintenance for stair lifts except for the most vulnerable. The service will be closed to new applicants from an agreed date and alternative options to support individuals will be developed.

The proposed change is in line with the modernisation of our services, the ethos of self directed support, personalisation and choice, so that by the management of

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their own budget service users can be in control. Estimated annual savings are over £300,000 per annum depending on the option taken.

Why are we recommending these changes?

8. If this service contract is continued it is likely that numbers, costs, commitments, expectations and obligations will increase in line with the demographic profile of the service users. Over 50% of the equipment being supported is over 5 years old and will incur increasing maintenance costs. When a stair lift is beyond economic repair it becomes the responsibility of the District Councils to replace.

The consultation process

9. A postal survey was sent out during September 2010 to all users added after 2003, as these contracts have a 3 month termination clause. There are 150 other users pre-dating 2003, where OCC cannot terminate the contract.
10. In total, 715 service users were contacted to gain their views about this service and what the impact would be for them if this service was discontinued. A high level of response was achieved with 524 (73%) of service users returning their questionnaires.

The outcome of the Consultation

11. Below is a summary of the main concerns raised by 68% (360) of respondents, regarding the arranging of a private contract if the County Council's contract were to be discontinued. Telephone calls were also made to 10% of the 191 non responders and their verbal responses were in line with other respondents. The full consultation results are available as a background document.

Concern	Mitigation
Financial - Not knowing what the cost would be. This was a particular anxiety for individuals on a limited income.	<i>Information has already been drafted to inform people of the options that are available and possible costs which can be budgeted for in the same way as servicing their central heating or other domestic costs. Individuals service users would in future need to plan their annual budgets. If the individual is assessed under the Fair Access to Care eligibility criteria and eligible for a personal budget and if costs overall can be reduced by the inclusion of a lift, then maintenance costs could be included in an individual's personal budget.</i>
Knowledge - Knowing that the contractor would be reliable	<i>A list of contractors who can provide reliable service contracts has been draw up and this information can</i>

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Concern	Mitigation
and who to use.	<i>be shared with people to use as a basis for making a choice. Our current contractor has already agreed to offer any individual transferring to a contract with them a preferential price but we would need to ensure this information was offered without prejudice to other potential suitable contractors.</i>
Independence -Their ability to remain in their own home. A common theme of feeling that they would not be able to manage at home if the lift broke down and there was no servicing provided. Some felt that they might have to move out of their home to somewhere else.	<i>We have agreed to service all lifts before discontinuing the contract if that decision is made. If the repair to the lift is of significant cost then an application can be made for a Disabled Facilities Grant/repairs grant to repair the lift. If the lift is found to be beyond economic repair a new Disabled Facilities Grant can be made for a replacement lift. The district councils have been informed and are aware of this consultation and await the outcome. If the decision is made to discontinue the contract they are considering arranging extended warranties to cover a five year period but the response by the district councils could vary.</i>
Support The worry of organizing a replacement service for themselves, even if they could afford it.	<i>We have information and advice sheets already prepared. This can be shared with individuals and their carers. Home Improvement Agencies, Age UK and other agencies will be kept fully informed so they can offer independent support and advice as necessary.</i>

Equality and Inclusion

12. The profile of the respondents matched that of our current service users. The Service and Community Impact Assessment is available as a background document.

Financial and staffing implications

13. Annually we are seeing increasing numbers of service users on the contract. As the numbers of lifts installed via a Disabled Facilities Grant continue to increase year on year the pressure on the servicing and maintenance contract increases. The unit cost for each lift added to the contract is approximately £295 per annum (this includes insurance, servicing twice a year, call out costs and repairs).

The annual cost of sustaining this contract rises annually as both the numbers on the contract and the unit cost of repairs increases. The ongoing staffing costs to support contract activity are approximately £30,000.

Options considered

14. The following options have been considered for this service:

1. **No new users.** From a specific date close the service to new applicants so no new requests are accepted on to the contract. Clients will be referred to Disabled Facilities Grants officers to have ongoing support included in the grant. This will cap the contract but deliver no savings until 2011/12.
2. **Service provision to users below threshold only.** Use the Fairer Charging financial assessments for all people remaining on the existing contract with the post 2003 termination clause. This would exclude full cost payers until their capital thresholds are reached to make them eligible for Social Care funding. (As for any other service, if an individual is not eligible under our criteria for financial support we will give them information, advice and guidance).
3. **Ending of service provision except for the most vulnerable.** End the current service provision arrangements and implement mitigation actions. The exceptions here would be people assessed as the most vulnerable or for whom safeguarding concerns are identified. The council in their duty of care would provide the necessary servicing and support for the lift if necessary.

This is the recommended option.

RECOMMENDATIONS

15. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to:**

(a) **Consider the information provided by the Consultation and the options for the service**

(b) **Agree Option 3 to end the service.**

John Jackson
Director for Social & Community Services.

Background papers: Full consultation results: Service and Community Impact Assessment.

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