

Health Scrutiny Committee

Meeting to be held on Tuesday, 5 November 2019

Electoral Division affected: (All Divisions);
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Impact of recruitment of additional Occupational Therapists (Appendix A - Equipment Categorisations, Activity and Spend)

Contact for further information:

Sue Lott, Head of Service, Social Care Service (Health), (01772) 538230
sue.lott@lancashire.gov.uk

Executive Summary

At the Health Scrutiny Committee Steering Group on 17 April 2019, the chair received a report relating to Learning from Complaints in Adult Social Care, and heard about the improvements in Occupational Therapy waiting times. The committee requested a more detailed report on how this has been achieved.

This report details the development of the Occupational Therapy service within Adult Social Care at Lancashire County Council, and demonstrates the improvements seen in timeliness of assessments and the increase in Disabled Facilities Grants recommendations over recent years. The report also demonstrates the positive benefits of Occupational Therapy in adult social care, and innovation possibilities for the future.

Recommendation

Health Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the report and the improvements seen in the performance of the Lancashire County Council Occupational Therapy Service.

Background and Advice

Occupational Therapists take a whole-person approach to both mental and physical health and wellbeing of people, enabling individuals to live as independently as possible. This includes working with people to use new or better techniques for the task they need to undertake and/or by adapting their home environment through the provision of equipment or adaptations.

In 2014, there were 20 full time equivalent Occupational Therapist posts across County within Adult Social Care, following the transfer of the moving and handling and equipment and adaptations services back into the Council. The existing waiting lists for assessments had also been transferred into the county council from the NHS, and work was undertaken to start to reduce these with varying degrees of success; the challenges in part, due to staff capacity.

Within the Passport to Independence transformation programme in Adult Social Care, the redesign of the Reablement service put Occupational Therapy at the heart of its leadership in 2016. At the same time, the new Improved Better Care Fund monies offered the opportunity to enhance the overall Occupational Therapy establishment to better match demand. The number of Occupational Therapists was increased from 20 to 40 full time equivalent posts within Adult Social Care. 10 Occupational Therapists posts were sited in Reablement, and 30 in the Community Occupational Therapy service.

Although this report touches on the Reablement service, in the main it concentrates on the remit of the work within the community Occupational Therapy service.

In addition to the Occupational Therapists in post across Adult Social Care, the decision was made some years ago to expand the number of staff who could assess for and commission community equipment. Using a Trusted Assessment and competency based framework, all Social Care Support Officers have been trained to assess for more straightforward less complex equipment items (ie mostly items contained in the 'Retail Model' (see Appendix A for explanation) such as grab rails and raised toilet seats), and give people a 'prescription' which they can use at any number of local retailers, usually specific mobility retailers, but also a number of pharmacies across the County.

Community Occupational Therapy Service

Through Passport to Independence, dedicated Occupational Therapy leadership was created in the form of a County Occupational Therapy Manager; this was important for the profile of the service, and in ensuring that the professional registration and continuing professional development requirements of the service are met alongside a lead for Occupational Therapy practice and performance.

The improvements in the practice and processes the teams operate to, are evident in the performance now seen from the service. High quality outcomes remain a key priority, and this is borne out in the 2018/19 feedback data relating to the service of 25 complaints and 195 compliments, a ratio of almost 1:8.

Following the approval of the use of the Improved Better Care Fund to create more Occupational Therapy posts, recruitment initially proved a challenge. It took some considerable time to see tangible improvements in recruiting to vacant posts. A lot of work has been undertaken to showcase Lancashire as a good place for Occupational Therapists to work, and to make the adverts more attractive to increase the interest in posts. Some of the actions undertaken include:

- A Lancashire County Council OT talking about her experience of working in Lancashire and why prospective applicants should apply
- Increased and more effective use of social media to advertise OT posts
- Attendance at recruitment fairs
- Closer links with local Universities to reach undergraduates to showcase Lancashire as an employer

- Working towards supporting a small number of adult social care staff on the Occupational Therapy Degree through the use of the Apprenticeship Levy

The recruitment campaign has proved successful, with all posts now recruited to and a 'business as usual' staff turnover rate.

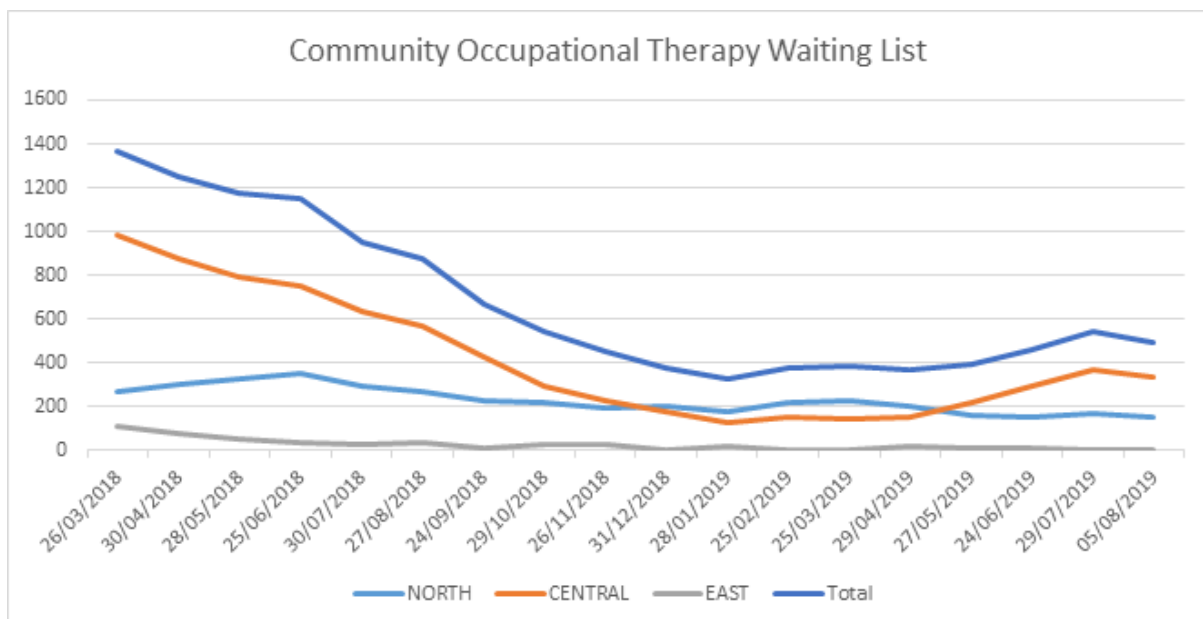
The service is also now starting to take Occupational Therapy students for the first time, further enhancing the opportunities for prospective applicants of the future to see Lancashire County Council as a place they want to work.

The overall number of Occupational Therapists within Adult Social Care has recently increased again through the addition of some permanent and temporary posts to create the Single Handed Care Team (see further information about this service under the New Initiatives and Possibilities section below), and also through a redesign of the Reablement Service, taking the current number of OTs to 49.

Timeliness of Occupational Therapy Assessment

Although initiatives had occurred to improve the Occupational Therapy waiting times in the past, the lack of leadership and practitioner capacity within social care for the Occupational Therapists prior to 2017/18, meant that short term improvements were rarely sustained.

The following graph shows the significant improvement in timeliness of assessment from March 2018 onwards, with the number of people awaiting assessment across County standing at 1363 at March 2018 and, through the focussed work undertaken, reducing to 497 as at 5th August 2019. This work is continuing with the aim of the service reaching their 'business as usual' target to see everyone within 28 days of being referred.



Where a referral is categorised as a high priority, the Occupational Therapy service is now able to see people on average within 7 days.

In order to achieve the performance seen so far around the reduction in waiting times and in the number of people awaiting assessment, a robust action plan was produced in 2018 which set out a new screening process to be followed, data cleansing of the waiting lists, recruitment to new posts and initially some additional overtime hours for defined numbers of assessments.

The implementation of the action plan saw a rapid reduction in people waiting for an assessment, plus a significant change in the timeliness of assessments.

Approximately 300 people each month are referred for an Occupational Therapy assessment, with 80% of people now being seen within 28 days (Quarter 1, 2019/20) as compared to only 65% of people being seen within 28 days in the same period in 2018/19. The service continues to work hard to achieve all people being seen with this timescale as a business as usual Key Performance Indicator.

Community Equipment Activity and Spend

The provision of equipment to support people to live as independently as possible, is one possible outcome of both an Occupational Therapy assessment, and of a Social Care Support Officer assessment. Occupational Therapists and Physiotherapists working for the NHS also provide community equipment following their assessments.

Community Equipment provision is broadly split into three categories in Lancashire:

- Simple items of equipment that are available for general purchase, and not provided by Health or Social Care as an outcome of an assessment, such as shoe horns, or long handled grabbers.
- 'Retail Model' equipment that is provided via a prescription (and is also available for general purchase) following an assessment by Occupational Therapists, Social Care Support Officers or Physiotherapists
- Complex equipment that is provided on a 'loan' basis to people following assessment by an Occupational Therapist or Physiotherapist. The equipment is provided via an organisation called [MedEquip](#) who have the contract across health and social care for Lancashire

Minor adaptations are small scale (with a cost of less than £1000) adaptations to peoples' home environment that enable them to move around and outside their home as independently as they can. These small scale adaptations fall within the remit of the Local Authority to provide, with adaptations including things such as additional bannister rails, or small ramps to replace steps.

Detailed information on community equipment and minor adaptations activity and spend is contained in **Appendix A**.

Disabled Facilities Grant

The Disabled Facilities Grant is a means tested grant to install adaptations such as ramps, wet rooms or other changes to the person's home environment to enable disabled adults to live as independently as possible. (Disabled Facilities Grant is also available to children, but this report concentrates on adults aged 18 and above).

The Disabled Facilities Grant is allocated each year to Lancashire County Council as the upper tier authority. It is then passported directly through to the District Councils in line with their nationally defined individual allocations. The Grant allocation has increased considerably in the last 3 years, meaning that more people are now able to benefit each year from adaptations to their home, enabling them to live more independently and safely.

The process for accessing a Disabled Facilities Grant is via an Occupational Therapist assessment, who will make a recommendation to the District Council for a Disabled Facilities Grant adaptation to take place. The District Council will undertake the financial means test, and if eligible, schedule the works in with the individual.

Some years ago, due to the limited staffing capacity within the Occupational Therapy service, lower numbers of recommendations were being made for Disabled Facilities Grant adaptations, and some District Councils reported that they were struggling to spend their allocation across the year. Due to the longer wait times for an assessment from an Occupational Therapist, people were therefore waiting much longer than would be wanted for an adaptation to take place. This also led to increased numbers of complaints.

As the Occupational Therapy service has worked through the waiting list and is now in a much better performing position, it can be seen in the table below that the numbers of Disabled Facilities Grant recommendations sent to the Districts each year has improved significantly, moving from just 812 in 2014/15 to 2814 in 2018/19.

The volume of 1376 Disabled Facilities Grant adaptations recommended so far in 2019/20 already surpasses the full year total of 2014/15 and is only slightly short of the full year volume for 2015/16.

It is likely that we will see a flattening out of referral numbers from this year onwards, as the high number in 2018/19 reflects the work undertaken on the waiting list, so includes higher numbers of people from the backlog of assessments. As the improvement work around timely assessments continues, such significant waiting lists will no longer be in place.

Referral Numbers for Disabled Facilities Grants

	Central (Preston, Chorley, South Ribble, West Lancs)	East (Burnley, Pendle, Rossendale, Hyndburn & Ribble Valley)	North (Lancaster, Morecambe, Fylde, Wyre)	Area Not Recorded	Total DFG referrals
2014/2015	262	334	196	20	812
2015/2016	518	590	510	37	1655
2016/2017	720	570	531	53	1874
2017/2018	758	678	742	51	2229
2018/2019	1299	768	687	60	2814
2019/2020 (to 15/10/19)	470	423	481	2	1376

The higher numbers of referrals from the LCC OTs have contributed to significant increases in the actual numbers of DFGs completed by the Lancashire district councils, as shown in the table below:

Disabled Facilities Grants completed

Lancashire 12 Districts	Number of DFGs Completed
2016/17	1711
2017/18	2117
2018/19	2608

Some of the District Councils have accumulated carry forwards in their Disabled Facilities Grant monies, which offers opportunities for flexibilities in application of the Grant. In addition, social care capital schemes have been identified in two of the districts, which are being considered for support.

New Initiatives and Possibilities

There are many new initiatives in place both within adult social care and in collaboration with the District Councils to broaden access to Disabled Facilities Grant within the regulations, reduce hand-offs between services, avoid delays and increase peoples' independence and choice. These include:

- Within the Lancashire County Council Moving with Dignity project the Single Handed Care Team have now commenced, undertaking assessments with people who are identified for more than one carer per visit, with a view to reducing the number of carers through innovative use of the latest equipment and most up to date moving and handling techniques. This was one of the Service Challenge proposals from Adults. Enabling people to become more independent this also releases care capacity back into the market alongside being a more cost effective way of delivering care and support.
- To support the more timely recommendation of Disabled Facilities Grant to the District Councils, new 'direct referral' procedures are being trialled around some standard adaptations such as wet rooms, whereby an Occupational Therapy assessment is not needed if a Social Care Support Officer has undertaken a recent assessment and all the relevant information is included. These are sent directly through to the Districts, who contact an Occupational Therapist if there are any issues.
- District Councils and Lancashire County Council's Occupational Therapy services have agreed a joint Disabled Facilities Grant prioritisation criteria with the emphasis on reducing acute hospital admissions and facilitating timely discharge

- District Councils have agreed to the expansion of provision of Disabled Facilities Grant items, resulting in a consistent set of equipment and items that are provided across the County. For example ceiling track hoists and wash dry toilets are now provided via Disabled Facilities Grants across all districts, representing a cost saving to Social Care and could help to facilitate initiatives such as Single Handed Care
- In keeping with current good practice guidance, wider use of Disabled Facilities Grant discretionary grants has been discussed and promoted through the county Disabled Facilities Grant group. Eight districts now have discretionary grants, these are required to address local need and typically remove means testing for low value grants plus the raising of the upper limit above £30,000 for high value grants, in circumstances where it is necessary. This helps people get the support they need more quickly and reduces cost pressures on other parts of the system. In addition, fewer people drop out of the system for financial reasons.
- An event is being planned in the near future bringing together Lancashire County Council, District Councils and other partners, to look at best practice and innovation in the use of the Disabled Facilities Grants elsewhere and explore the possibilities and benefits for the people of Lancashire.

Conclusion

It can be seen that there has been significant improvement in the performance of the Occupational Therapy service in terms of more timely assessments, improved wait times, and in people getting more timely access to both community equipment and Disabled Facilities Grant adaptations that make a difference to their independence and quality of life. This is a result of a combination of factors:

- significant investment to increase the number of qualified Occupational Therapists employed by the council
- increased leadership capacity within the Occupational Therapy service
- improvements in productivity and business processes
- increased Disabled Facilities Grant allocations from central government
- improvements in partnership working with district councils, private sector equipment providers and the NHS

The work underway to grip and achieve the performance improvement so far will continue, ensuring that people are seen in a timely way, and high quality outcomes are realised for people that support their optimum independence, choice and control.

Occupational Therapists have a key role in adult social care, in maximising peoples' independence and reducing their need for other formal support, and further opportunities to focus their skills in the right place during peoples' contact with social care will continue to be explored.

In addition, there is also potential for wider innovation and collaborative work with District Councils and other partners to explore the possibilities around the use of Disabled Facilities Grants to further benefit the people of Lancashire.

Consultations

N/A

Implications:

N/A

Risk management

There are no key risks to outline for noting

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel
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None		
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Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate

N/A