

Council Budget Consultation 2015-17:
 Response Deadline 30 December 2014

Focus Group Meetings:

- Friday 5 December 2014, Council Chamber, Gateshead Civic Centre.
- Friday 12 December 2014, Gateshead Access Panel, Team Valley.
- Wednesday 17 December 2014, Gateshead Access Panel, Team Valley.
- Monday 22 December 2014, Gateshead Access Panel, Team Valley.

GAP Review of Social Care, Health and Wellbeing, and Disability Issues.

Those attending: 05 Dec

- Christine Pickersgill – GAP Manager: Chairing Meeting
- Steve Hudson – GAP Consultancy: Notetaker
- Ian Atkinson – GAP Worker
- Sandra Atkinson – GAP Volunteer
- M A Dunsford – GAP Service User
- Jacqui Morrow – Service User
- John Morrow – Service User
- John McKenzie – Service User
- Ros McKenzie – Service User

Apologies:

- Kevin White – Service User
- Yvonne White – Service User
- Bill Spratt – Service User
- Louise Clough – Service User
- Joanne Watson – Service User

Those attending: 12 Dec

- Christine Pickersgill – GAP Manager: Chairing Meeting
- Steve Hudson – GAP Consultant: Notetaker
- Ian Atkinson – GAP Staff
- Sandra Atkinson – GAP Volunteer
- Colin Daughtry – GAP Volunteer
- Dianne Daughtry – GAP Volunteer
- Steven Clough – GAP Volunteer
- Louise Clough – GAP Volunteer

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Pauline Hawkins – GAP Volunteer
 Marcus Smith – GAP Trustee
 Kim McNestry-Waite – GAP Trustee

Those attending: 17 Dec

Christine Pickersgill – GAP Manager
 Steve Hudson – GAP Consultancy
 Ian Atkinson – GAP Staff

Those attending: 22 Dec

Christine Pickersgill – GAP Manager: Chairing Meeting
 Steve Hudson – GAP Consultant: Notetaker
 Ian Atkinson – GAP Staff
 Sandra Atkinson – GAP Trustee
 Colin Daughtry – GAP Volunteer
 Louise Clough – GAP Trustee
 Alan Clarkson – GAP Trustee
 Kim McNestry -Waite – GAP Trustee
 M A Dunsford – GAP Service User

Apologies:

Marcus Smith – GAP Trustee

The following report content and documented responses reflect concerns relative to the Council’s budget proposals for 2015-16 in regard to Social Care, Health and Wellbeing, and Disability Issues from the reviews and discussions in the meetings listed above.

Please refer to separate DESUIF Report for responses including those of GAP members on the Council’s budget proposals for 2015-16 in regard to provision of services relative to the environment and provision of buildings or facilities for which the Council has responsibility.

It has not been possible to reflect, consider, or respond on any of the Council’s proposals for 2106-17, due to lack of any detail on those proposals.

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Universal Services: Communities, Culture and Leisure: Draft Proposals 2015/16

1 Review Neighbourhood Management and Volunteers and Voluntary Sector support

Issues raised:

- Loss of support to volunteers and / or loss of resources to build capacity could result in loss of some community centres and libraries, with resulting impact on the neighbourhood environment and access to facilities and services, which the Council have responsibility to provide;
- Impact of closure may be increased travelling and costs to access services, or exclusion from access to services.

Conclusions:

Higher potential impact on disabled people, elderly people, and persons on low income.

May impact more on vulnerable groups and provision of local services to such groups. **GAP does not support this proposal.**

2 Reduction in the overall Leisure provision:

Issues raised:

- We query the stated 73% Satisfaction - How many disabled people were involved in the “satisfaction survey”?
- “73% Satisfaction” means nothing if consultation group does not adequately reflect local population.
- Potential adverse impact on preventative health care and wellbeing need to be considered;
- Higher potential impact on disabled people and elderly people if access to sport and leisure facilities is less available or lost, increasing health inequality;
- Reduction in available times for leisure facilities and activities, or loss of facilities through closure, will likely have a higher impact on those persons who are already prone to health inequality, and those who already have difficulty accessing such services, including disabled and elderly persons.

Conclusion:

Higher potential impact on disabled people, elderly people, and persons on low income. **GAP does not support this proposal.**

3 Reduce services provided by Sport Physical Activity and Health team

Issues raised:

- In the summer of 2013 Gateshead Access Panel User Group Members did gain some benefit from the Health Trainers based in Gateshead Council.

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However, this service was a ‘time limited’ service, restricted to 6-week programmes. GAP reported at that time that disabled people required a longer programme to meet individual needs, and this was accommodated to allow group work. However, GAP now understand that the system has changed, so to access the Health Trainer Service individuals now need a referral from their GP. One of GAP’s members asked their GP for a referral just this month, but the GP was unaware of the service. This Service, if supported well is a good service to **start** addressing **Health Inequalities** faced by disabled people.

- Highest negative impact will potentially affect disabled people and elderly people.
- Likely to increase health inequality for disabled people and elderly people.

Conclusion:

Higher potential impact on disabled people and elderly people.

GAP is against this proposal.

4 Reduce funding to community centres in 2015/16 and cease all financial support to community centres after 2016/17

Issues raised:

- Removal of funding support too early, before centres are financially viable and self-supporting, increases risk of closures with resulting loss of services and facilities;
- Possible loss of Community Centres and access to services will likely have greatest impact on vulnerable people and people on low income;
- Day Centre provision for physically disabled people was largely removed on the basis that they would instead use their local Community Centres for social activities, learning, and access to services...thus reducing isolation for vulnerable disabled people, but these alternatives may also now be jeopardised by these proposals;
- Impact of closure may be increased travelling and costs to access services, or exclusion from access to services.

Conclusion: Higher potential impact on disabled people, elderly people, and persons on low income. **GAP does not support this proposal.**

5 Reduce the Capacity Building Fund and stop providing the Local Community Fund by 2015/16

Issues raised:

- Reducing these funds will likely jeopardise preventative services by the community and voluntary sector;
- High potential impact on disabled people, elderly people, and other vulnerable people, as well as persons on low income;

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Conclusion: Higher potential impact on disabled people, elderly people, and persons on low income. **GAP does not support this proposal.**

6 Review the Public Health Capacity Building Fund

Issues raised:

- Reducing these funds will likely jeopardise preventative services by the community and voluntary sector;
- High potential impact on disabled people, elderly people, and other vulnerable people, as well as persons on low income;
- If any cut is made to this Fund, a 50% cut would be preferable alternative to the proposed 100 %.

Conclusion: Higher potential impact on disabled people, elderly people, and persons on low income. **GAP does not support this proposal.**

7 Review support for Older People’s Assembly

Issues raised:

- Negative impact on older people and disabled people.
- Impact of other proposed cuts may also result in other Community Support Funding not being available;
- Potentially less opportunity for social inclusion and activities to support the health and wellbeing of older people and disabled people who currently access services via this group.

Conclusions:

Higher potential impact on disabled people, elderly people, and persons on low income.

High risk of closure of group or reduction to minimal activity with potential dependence on fewer volunteers, resulting from current and potential loss of other funding sources in addition to this proposal.

GAP does not support this proposal.

8 Reduce support to arts and museum organisations

Issues raised:

- Difficult to quantify impact on disabled people, but not believed to be high impact or a priority, providing these organisations can achieve sustainability of facilities and most services of benefit to the community and society;
- Members appreciate the facilities and services provided at these venues, and the opportunities they offer.

Conclusion: We believe the proposal will have minimal potential impact on disabled people generally. **GAP Supports this proposal.**

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9 Reduce funding to the arts and events programme and teams

Issues raised:

- Difficult to quantify impact on disabled people generally;
- Members appreciate the opportunities provided by these events, although access to many events can still be very problematic for disabled people.

Conclusions:

We believe the proposal will have minimal potential impact on disabled people generally.

GAP to review Gateshead’s “Culture Strategy” before further comment on this proposal.

10 Consider delivery models for St Mary’s Heritage Centre

Issues raised:

- Members appreciate the facilities and services provided at this venue, and the opportunities offered.

Conclusion:

The proposed self-sustaining model appears to have a Neutral impact on disabled people. **Providing this facility and as far as practicable and appropriate the services it currently offers are sustainable, GAP supports this proposal.**

Universal Services: Public Health:

Insufficient information provided in consultation document regarding proposed strategy and no Comprehensive Impact Assessment available. Therefore, informed comment is not possible on these issues at this time. **GAP therefore does not support the proposed savings under this budget heading**, and are concerned that the implications of any cuts to services are most likely to adversely affect disabled and older people and those most vulnerable with regard to health and well-being.

Targeted Services: Children’s and Young People’s Services

1 Implement Children’s Social Care Financial Strategy

Issues raised:

- Strategy appears to indicate continued support, with reduction in “costs of residential car placements by recruiting more foster carers, and supporting them to care for young people with more complex needs”;
- CIA indicated a “Positive” impact on Age and Disability, and claims no adverse impact on Equality;
- Does Council have recorded “Outcomes” to confirm current impact on children including those with impairments?

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Conclusion: We believe the “Outcome of this proposal could be Neutral”, providing this does not adversely impact on young people requiring support, including those with complex needs and those who are harder to place with a foster parent.

GAP Supports this proposal on the proviso that: it is effectively monitored to ensure young people, including those with complex needs, or those who are harder to place with a foster parent, are not adversely affected.

2 Reduce Council funding towards Local Safeguarding Children’s Board (LSCB)

Issues raised:

- Strategy appears to indicate continued support, with minimal risk and an expected neutral outcome.

Conclusion: GAP Supports this proposal.

3 Education Services

Issues raised:

- Strategy appears to indicate a lower level of staff resources will need to be more focused to continue support, with a lower level of dedicated support to post 16 pupils, but with mitigation that is expected to lead to a mostly neutral outcome.
- However, GAP are concerned regarding the proposal “to reduce the level of resources for the Education Welfare Services”;
- GAP are less concerned regarding the proposal to “end Secondary and Post-16 school improvement support”;
- GAP is aware of families with disabled pupils or disabled parents, or both, that benefit from the support of the Education Welfare Services;
- Concerned less serious cases of children experiencing difficulty in attending school will not be supported, i.e. loss of preventative actions to minimise potentially escalating and more serious outcomes;
- Concern over families with lower level need for support may be left unsupported, i.e. losing a preventative service of the EWS;
- Preventative measures may be lost, escalating family problems and resulting in greater need, which may also result in creation of longer term consequences for required support and funding;
- Families with disabled members or vulnerable children would be at higher risk of moving from low dependency needs to higher dependency needs if the EWS were not available;

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- Feedback from GAP Members indicates the Education Welfare Services are highly valued, particularly for disabled parents needing support to address issues regarding their children’s education.

Conclusion:

GAP does not support: the proposal to reduce the level of resources for the Education Welfare Services.

GAP does support: the proposal to end Secondary and Post-16 school improvement support.

4 Home to School and College Transport for Children with Additional Needs

Issues raised:

GAP members have concerns over this proposal, including:

- Around 540 families are currently supported with transport (Ref: CIA);
- Some members are frightened at the prospect of a young or vulnerable child may be required to travel independently, or using public transport;
- Concerns over increased potential for disabled children to experience harassment, abuse, and bullying, if required to use public transport;
- The impact on children whose needs may not be accommodated by the alternative transport options or independent travel training offers;
- Children with special needs often need to travel further than other children who use public transport;
- Unless transport is contracted for the specific child’s needs, there is no guarantee the child will be able to access the transport they need;
- No guarantee of an accessible transport / taxi to accommodate the child’s needs will be available when required, if required to use an individual travel budget;
- Transport is currently provided because of inequalities for disabled pupils, whereas non-disabled pupils can obtain free or subsidised transport;
- Concerned of the impact on families with disabled members or on low income, if charges are introduced for transport to school;
- Some disabled pupils also regularly or daily require additional support equipment and aids transporting with them between home and school, which they would not be able to do if travelling independently of using public transport;
- Impact of climate and weather changes is often more serious for pupils with impairments, increasing risks to their health, safety or both, and any delay in accessing transport between school and home has a much higher potential to have a detrimental effect;

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- Safeguarding against abuse or bullying for children travelling to school requires consideration, especially for children with additional needs;
- Proposed changes should be made with existing budgets in place (with a contingency) to ensure changes can be effected without detriment to the children affected.

Conclusion: GAP is against this proposed saving. We propose any changes to the proposed travel arrangements and travel options should be made with current budgets protected, to ensure such changes work effectively and without detriment to the child in each case, before any budget reduction. We agree that personal transport budgets can work, but the application of these requires an individual approach to each child who has this need; so as to ensure the child's needs are safely met and such pupils are as far as possible safeguarded whenever they are expected to access alternative transport options. Consideration is also required of families with disabled parents who may not be able to regularly/always get their children to school, or who have considerable difficulty in achieving this.

5 Transforming Children's Services Programme

Issues raised:

- Difficult to comment on potential suitability of proposal;
- Impact on vulnerable children needs to be monitored;
- Outcomes for all children need to be monitored.

Conclusion: As we do not have outcomes to be able to assess potential impact of this proposal, **GAP is Neutral to this proposal** providing that monitoring is effectively planned and effected, so as to identify efficacy of proposals and outcomes for the children affected/supported.

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Targeted Services: Adult Services:

1 Consolidate Housing Family Support Service into existing Housing Support Service

Issues raised:

- 26 individuals/families supported (ref CIA);
- Individual consultations to be held with each (learning disabled) person receiving support and their carer;
- Consideration of support via “domiciliary care” service;
- The high level of vulnerability of the persons in receipt of these services, from any change in the services they receive or in the way in which they are provided / received, raises extreme concerns, as reflected in the Council’s CIA.
- Proposed changes should be made with existing budgets in place (with a contingency) to ensure changes can be effected without detriment to the adults affected.

Conclusion: GAP is against this proposed saving. We propose any changes to the proposed service arrangements should be made with the current budgets protected, to ensure such changes work effectively and without detriment to the adult in each case, before any budget reduction. We recognise the alternative approaches to providing these services may work effectively, but as recognised in the CIA, the application of these requires an individual approach to each adult and their carer; so as to ensure the adult’s needs are safely met and that they are as far as possible safeguarded whenever they are expected to access the proposed alternative service options, as well as within their role and involvement in the community.

GAP is also concerned that, for this proposal in particular, the proposed changes appear to be already commenced prior to this consultation, and therefore it also appears that we are being asked for opinions after the decision being made and the proposal implemented.

2 Discontinue Older People’s Support Service and Home Support Service

Issues raised:

- 60 staff mostly female (part-time workers) affected;
- 177 customers affected;
- Proposed referral to “Adult Social Care” is not suitable, as we believe many of those people who are currently receiving this current service are doing so because they have been refused Adult Social Care support;
- It is not clear what alternative services will be available / provided;

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- For some people, this current service will likely be their only prevention from “social isolation”;
- Well-being of the individuals will likely be severely affected;
- The cost of any alternative services / service provider does not appear to be a consideration within the background to the proposal, the proposed mitigation, of the CIA for this proposal;
- It is extremely important to recognise that, the voluntary sector cannot obtain funding to provide a service that has been discontinued by a local authority.

Conclusion:

GAP does not support this proposal.

3 Adult Social Care managing increasing and complex demand

Issues raised:

- GAP members are concerned that the recognised increased need may reflect the anticipated closure of the Independent Living Fund and the additional funding that would be required to support those disabled people who are currently in receipt of ILF support;
- The increased budget appears to have been previously justified;
- No justification is now offered for making the budget reduction;
- How will vulnerable people be supported?
- Will outsourcing / commissioning lead to poorer quality of care, as care providers are required to provide the equivalent levels of care on a lower budget?

Conclusion:

GAP is against this proposal.

4 Review of Adult Social Care Provider Services (Phase 1)

Issues raised:

- No indication of any direct impact on services;
- There may be an indirect impact on service users, but this will only be identified through monitoring and feedback or complaints from service users.

Conclusion:

GAP supports the intention to make savings through efficiencies, providing the outcomes and impact on service users are also effectively monitored, reported and used to inform future actions.

5 Generate additional income from Care Call

Issues raised:

- Is the suggested £50,000 income generated after deduction of costs required to generate this additional income?

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Conclusion:
GAP Supports this proposal.

6 Targeting our social work to help those in need

Issues raised:

- The CIA for this proposal appears to be inadequate and assumes any impact will be positive in regard to people with the protected characteristic of “Age” or “Disability”. The CIA appears inadequate because the assessment: -
- Fails to offer any detail or evidence to support the proposal or how it is to be achieved;
- Fails to indicate how the impact is evaluated;
- Fails to indicate what mitigation is proposed;
- Fails to indicate how services and quality of service delivery will be protected.

Conclusion:

GAP is unable to make meaningful comment on the suitability of this proposal due to the lack of information, accompanied by a CIA that appears to provide an assessment of the proposal without any detail of how the assessment is achieved. Without such evidence, we consider that an assessment cannot be made or the impact on disabled and vulnerable individuals recognised.

GAP is therefore concerned if this proposal is effected without an appropriate assessment of impact.

7 Review arrangements for Independent Supported Living for disabled people

- Will equipment be tamper resistant to any interference by other residents or carers?
- Equipment may also need to be resistant to abuse;
- GAP believes that advocacy support is required for these individuals in addition to their being accompanied during interviews/assessments by their usual carer(s);
- Monitoring equipment will require regular inspection and maintenance – has the cost of this been included in the budget considerations?

Conclusion:

GAP considers this proposal could have positive outcomes for the individuals supported, where this supports their independence. **GAP therefore supports this proposal providing:**

- a) The impact and outcomes for the supported individuals are effectively monitored; and
- b) A system is put in place to appropriately respond to safeguard the individual and/or redress: -

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- (i) any adverse impact or loss, removal, ineffectiveness, or inadequacy of the technology support either due to maintenance, abuse, incompatibility, or other issues;
- (ii) or due to any direct or indirect detriment to the individual resulting from this change in their support.

8 Review of commissioned services

- o **Advocacy and Information & Advice services** (current cost of commissioned advocacy services is £397,227)
- o **Carers services** (current cost of commissioned carers services is £579,553)
- o **Healthwatch** (current cost of Healthwatch is £113,750)
- o **Alarms for Older People** (current cost of Older Persons alarms is £58,074.)
- o **Day Services** (current cost of day services is £422,900.)
- o **Extra Care** (current cost of this service is £59,015)
- o **Sheltered Accommodation** (current cost of these services is £62,473)
- o **Support and Advice services** (current cost of these services is £288,906)
- o **Learning Disability Floating Support Services** (current cost of these services is £26,631).
- o **Complex Needs Floating Support (Creative Support)** (current cost of this service is £177,143)
- o **Learning Disability Independent supported Living Services** (current cost of this service is £318,638)
- o **Mental health accommodation** (current cost of these services is £186,708)
- o **Short term accommodation** (current cost of these services is £1,037,845)
- o **Specialist Floating Support** (current cost of these services is £171,159).

Issues raised:

- These are Preventative Services that other Budget Saving Proposals indicate vulnerable people will be directed towards for support as “mitigation” for the impact of those other proposals!
- With the proposed reduction in funding of these commissioned services, there will inevitably be a reduction in the services available from VCS, and therefore a reduction on the support available to mitigate the impact from savings made in other services currently provided by the Council;
- The mitigation suggested by the Council for this proposal are not new and are in fact a continuation of what is currently being done by those service providers, i.e. the status quo, which suggests there is limited if any potential for such mitigation or to be effective;

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- GAP does not disagree with options to support efficiencies through commissioning: however, we are concerned for those VCS organisations that will not be sustainable as a result of unsuccessful tendering, which will result in further loss of preventative services and impact on groups supporting people with specific needs.
- The funding and sustainability issues for VCS organisations have been equally serious as for Council budgets, or more so, since even before the current extended financial downturn and related budget cuts. Many smaller and local VCS organisations recognise they are at risk without being involved in the delivery of commissioned services, either individually, in partnership, or as partner to a consortium.
- GAP is concerned that such smaller organisations, even when operating in partnership, will have greater difficulty in finding efficiencies and savings to provide commissioned services at a lower cost, compared to some larger organisations that may often be less than “local” and result in increased economic deprivation locally and reduced availability of local VCS organisation support.
- As GAP’s service users have often said, “What would I do if GAP was not here?”
- Impact of suggested efficiencies may have a negative or detrimental effect on vulnerable people, and there may be a high risk of this occurring;
- Potential negative impact on “early intervention”, “prevention” and “non-statutory support” for vulnerable people and increased risk of this resulting in higher dependency needs, increased social isolation, and/or increased social care cost.

Conclusion:

GAP is against this proposal, due to the potential and likely detrimental impact on the resources and availability of VCS organisations to continue to provide non-commissioned support on which many vulnerable people depend; as discussed above.

Internal changes which could generate efficiencies and savings: Draft Proposals 2015/16:

Organisation Structure

GAP Response: GAP is amazed that such efficiencies and savings can be made with no apparent detrimental or negative impact on service users.

Reviewing the Council’s funding, financing and strategic investment.

GAP Response: GAP Supports this proposal.

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Reviewing of working practices and supplies

GAP Response: It is unclear from the report as to how the suggested saving of £2,387,000 can be achieved, as the few examples provided appear to offer a far lower level of cumulative savings.

Reduction in cleaning of Council buildings

Issues raised:

- GAP is concerned for the potential impact on cleaning and hygiene of toilet and changing facilities, which can have a serious impact on the health and wellbeing of disabled and vulnerable individuals.

Conclusion:

GAP supports this proposal providing that the cleaning and hygiene regimes of toilets, showering/bathing, and changing facilities are appropriately maintained for the protection of staff, volunteers and service users.

Charge for collection of green waste

This proposal is already being implemented as identified in the Council’s report.

Issues raised:

- GAP has previously expressed concerns around the potential impact of this change in service delivery, including: -
- Increased potential for fly tipping;
- Higher impact on low income households, which may also including vulnerable individuals;
- Higher impact on disabled people who are likely to be less able to access alternative services, i.e. unable to take waste to an authorised / approved location;
- Increased potential for this waste to be left in people’s gardens, creating an environmental risk or anti-social impact;
- Skips should be provided locally.

Conclusion:

Higher potential for a negative impact on disabled and vulnerable people and those on low income. **GAP is against this action without appropriate mitigation, such as including the following: -**

- i. Providing large community skips for Green Waste;
- ii. Not charging people on benefits for collection of Green Waste, e.g. those persons on Housing Support Benefit.

Review the way we access specialist advice – public health

Issues raised:

- GAP is unable to comment on this proposal due to lack of direct or reported knowledge or experience of service users, or evidence of outcomes.

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Conclusion:

GAP is Neutral on this proposal due to lack of awareness of any outcomes for service users who may access this service.

Delivering the Meals and Shopping service

Issues raised:

- GAP is concerned if the proposal results in either a lower level of service provision or reduced quality of meals provided to service users;
- GAP members are concerned that changes in service delivery could result in either direct or indirect abuse of the individual receiving the service, or other negative impact on service users;
- GAP is concerned regarding the potential of changes in service suppliers resulting in their being inadequate capacity to satisfy the needs of all service users, if there is no system in place to satisfying any such shortage in the suppliers capacity to deliver the service, i.e. provide the service by an alternative means until such time as the capacity issue can be rectified;
- The number of service users is not indicated, so it is difficult to consider the potential impact on the service of the suggested savings of £232,000.

Conclusion:

GAP supports this service providing that:

- iii. The service is not replaced with a lower level of service without appropriate and effective mitigation of the impact on the service user;
- iv. The quality of the service is not reduced or results in a negative impact on an individual receiving the service, such as an impact on their health and wellbeing, their social involvement or inclusion;
- v. Safeguarding issues are adequately addressed;
- vi. The effectiveness and adequacy of the service is monitored for the impact on service users;
- vii. Alternative system(s) are put in place to address any shortfall in supplier(s) ability to meet service user needs.

Steve Hudson

Design, Access and Disability Equality Consultant, GAP Consultancy

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