



Service Provision for Blind and
Partially Sighted People in Barnsley
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Author: Lorna Lewis

Surveyors: Lorna Lewis

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Introduction

About Healthwatch Barnsley

There is a local Healthwatch in every area of England. We are the independent champion for people using local health and social care services. We listen to what people like about services and what could be improved and share their views with those with the power to make change happen. We also share them with Healthwatch England, the national body, to help improve the quality of services across the country. People can also speak to us to find information about health and social care services locally. Our sole purpose is to help make care better for people.

In summary - local Healthwatch is here to:

- help people find out about local health and social care services
- listen to what people think of services
- help improve the quality of services by letting those running services and the government know what people want from health and social care.

Healthwatch Barnsley is commissioned by Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council and hosted by Voluntary Action Barnsley (VAB). Healthwatch Barnsley (HWB) is a community led, community driven organisation with a Strategic Advisory Board, who are responsible for determining the direction of the organisation.

We are assisted by volunteers (Healthwatch Champions) whose role is to gather information and prioritise areas of work, ensuring engagement with all sections of the local population.

In some areas, Healthwatch organisations provide advocacy for people making a complaint about NHS services. In

Barnsley, this service is provided by DIAL. DIAL in Barnsley is not limited to dealing just with health service complaints they can also address problems with social care services. Through our collaboration with DIAL, we have been able to successfully remedy a number of complaints from our clients regarding their experiences of local services.



Key Findings

Healthwatch Barnsley arranged a meeting with visually impaired people to talk about the services available to them in the Barnsley area, in response to questions and concerns raised by several individuals, who had been newly diagnosed, and had expressed concern regarding lack of services in general for Blind and Partially Sighted people living in Barnsley,

This report highlights the issues for some of the Blind and Partially Sighted people living in Barnsley.

Initially this piece of work had intended to focus on the provision of social activities available in Barnsley. However, following discussions with service users and a number of organizations it became clear that there were other issues that it was important to capture. Subsequently the report reflects what we learnt, and is intended to prompt further discussion.

The services for Blind and Partially Sighted People in Barnsley are limited, and those that are available appear to be underfunded and stretched beyond their capacity.

People in Barnsley are accessing IT training and social groups by going to the Sheffield Royal Society for the Blind or Sight and Sound in Rotherham. The concern however, is for those people who are isolated from the community as a result of a lack of local provision

- (a) Because there is a waiting list for a Social Services Assessment and
- (b) A Visual Impairment Assessment
- (c) The people that we talked to tell us that when a visual impairment assessment takes place the waiting list for general support is so long that they, and to their

knowledge other people are suffering with mental health issues (see quotes)

Following on from a joint visit to Sheffield Royal Society for the Blind including: Healthwatch Barnsley, Barnsley Blind and Partially Sighted Association, a BMBC Commissioner and service users, the CEO of Sheffield Royal Society for the Blind stated that if BMBC could offer them a level access building in the town centre they would look at what services they could get started working with partners.

To date no town centre level access facility has been identified.



Understanding the Issue

Please see Public Health Statistics for prevalence of Blind & Partially Sighted in Barnsley.

Ref which

strategy <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/search/sight%20loss>

Indicator	Period	England	Yorkshire and the Humber region	Barnsley	Doncaster	Leeds	Sheffield	West Yorkshire	North East Yorkshire	North Yorkshire	Humberside	East of England	London	South East	South West	York	
People aged 16-64 registered blind or partially sighted per 100,000	2013/14	214.1	237.0	324.2	311.0	253.3	253.2	144.3	227.9	165.4	289.3	241.0	185.2	161.3	229.5	225.0	219.4
People aged 65-74 registered blind or partially sighted	2013/14	569	596	933	656	506	381	471	544	436	704	54	464	436	783	611	763
People aged 75+ registered blind or partially sighted	2013/14	4258	4448	6205	4534	3546	4270	4385	3649	3015	5115	3249	2708	2683	4843	4462	7177
4.12a - Preventable sight loss - age related macular degeneration (AMD)	2016/17	1112	1237	2013	1123	103.2	34.1	381	191.7	194.7	112.9	121.4	70.2	201	141.9	114.9	128.3
4.12b - Preventable sight loss - glaucoma	2016/17	13.1	12.7	20.2	8.3	18.8	8.3	13.7	13.7	21.8	11.8	-	5.2	17.4	14.2	15.2	-
4.12c - Preventable sight loss - diabetic eye disease	2016/17	3.3	3.2	6.2	4.1	2.7	3.2	3.8	4.3	3.8	-	-	3.2	3.6	2.6	2.1	-
4.12d - Preventable sight loss - sight loss certifications	2016/17	42.1	40.0	50.0	44.1	33.4	25.3	28.6	32.3	34.0	41.8	32.8	12.2	22.6	33.0	49.4	37.5

The National Vision Strategy for 2013 -2018 outcomes were:

Everyone in the UK looks after their eyes and their sight

In the next five years, we will work to:

- raise awareness and understanding of eye health, particularly focusing on people most at risk of eye disease
- encourage every individual to develop personal responsibility for their eye health and sight
- raise awareness of eye health and the impact of sight loss among health and social care practitioners and ensure the early detection of sight loss and prevention where possible.

Everyone with an eye condition receives timely treatment and, if permanent sight loss occurs, early and appropriate services and support are available and accessible to all

In the next five years, we will work to:

- improve the co-ordination, integration, reach and effectiveness of eye health and eye care services

- ensure that, when permanent sight loss occurs, emotional support, habilitation and/or rehabilitation will be provided in a timely fashion, enabling people to retain or regain their independence.

A society in which people with sight loss can fully participate

In the next five years, we will work to:

- improve attitudes, awareness and actions within education, employment and other services
- ensure that children and young people with sight impairment can take their place in society
- achieve improved compliance with equality legislation.

The Ophthalmic clinics appear to be oversubscribed. Three people told us that they were waiting for certification, which if you are registered blind you would be entitled to a blue badge and a £50 reduction on your television license and other help that they can't get without a certificate. Our Engagement Officer has spoken to eight people who have waited for up to six months for a general appointment.

What we did

In response to questions and concerns raised by several individuals, regarding lack of services for Blind and Partially Sighted people living in Barnsley, Healthwatch arranged a meeting with visually impaired people to talk about the services available to them in the area. An invitation went out to all of our networks and via the hospital, social services and Steve Hambleton of Sight and Sound Rotherham and Royal Society for the Blind Sheffield.

Although the initial response was high, only a few people attended the meeting.

Prior to the meeting our Engagement Officer contacted service providers for information to feed into the meeting.

HWB have spoken to some of the current and potential service providers / groups in the area. These include:

- Barnsley Blind and Partially Sighted Association
- Talking Newspaper
- The Vision Foundation
- ECLLO (eye clinic liaison officer)
- Sensory team- SWYFT
- Macular group
- BMBC Commissioning
- Sight and Sound - Rotherham
- Royal Society for the Blind - Sheffield
- Blind veterans

As the Town Centre Environment Group had not met during the period we were carrying out our engagement, we spoke to a number of the group's members.

What we found out

The Barnsley Blind and Partially Sighted Association (BB&PSA)

Our Engagement Officer met with the Manager of BB&PSA in February 18.

The group is based at Back Regent Street, Barnsley. The organisation has existed for over 20 years. They are a voluntary organisation and a registered charity. Their income for 2017/18 was approximately £24.8K

According to the group, they provide the following services:

- Advice - housing, family problems, social activity and sports activity
- information
- counselling
- advice on grant giving and application
- welfare rights
- appeals and tribunals
- white stick training
- training on small aids and adaptations

- home visits
- awareness raising in schools

Historically the organisation received a grant to provide equipment but this is no longer available.

They fundraise to continue to provide these services. The organisation is struggling to pay the rent and utilities and to keep the organisation going. Supporters carry out a wide range of fundraising activity.

They used to rent from a property owner who supported the organisation and only charged them a peppercorn rent. The property owner has changed and now they are paying a full commercial rent that they are struggling to pay.

They receive numerous referrals from:

- social services
- rehab workers
- the hospital
- GP's and other organisations.

Referrals from social services have increased in the last 18 months. They have requested funding from BMBC without success.

The Sensory Team SWYPFT

The Sensory Impairment Team is a service delivered by SWYPFT but jointly commissioned by Barnsley Council and Barnsley Clinical Commissioning Group. The team consists of three people; however, we were advised that the team had been under staffed for approx. 8 months. The remaining Rehabilitation Officer visits people in their homes to provide whatever support Visually Impaired People (VIP's) need. At the time of discussion, the officer had a backlog of 90 people waiting for support, which continues to increase every day. The officer provides training and support to individuals.

She visits to make an initial assessment and then implements the plan that is agreed with the individual. The service provides orientation and mobility training, communication skills training (including IT and braille), information, emotional support and specialist equipment; aids and adaptations.

The service also facilitates the Town Centre Development Environment Group. Ten people who have visual impairments are involved with this work.

The service also supports the RNIB with the Living with sight loss course, and have just set up a service user led visual impairment support group - this is in the early stages.

The Rehabilitation Officer is not medically trained, but does have a Rehabilitation Officer qualification. Her role is a functional one. The officer provides information on a range of services including BB&PSA they do not directly refer, to provide patient choice. BB&PSA see patients from the sensory impairment service, mainly for help with benefit forms.

RNIB ECLO (Eye Clinic Liaison Officer)

The Barnsley ECLO service is delivered by the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) and jointly funded alongside Barnsley Hospital NHS Foundation Trust.

There is one worker in post who is based at the hospital, working with the Eye Clinic staff to support people who have been certified blind and provide support to people with ongoing sight problems. We were advised that this role is predominantly a signposting and information sharing role, but also one which assists people to fill in forms. Where people have no support a referral will be made to BB&PSA, and across the Eye Health Pathway.

Talking Newspaper Barnsley

The organization is voluntary, supplying their own recordings of local newspapers on weekly CD/audio tapes via postal service, in addition to other information and entertainment on original magazine tapes - for people unable to read newsprint, due to visual problems. Contact is via telephone or written referral

The Vision Foundation

The Vision Foundation, a Community Interest Company, provides social and physical opportunities for Blind and Partially sighted people living in Yorkshire. They have sponsored and supported people who live in Barnsley to achieve their ambitions. They receive no funding from statutory authorities and fundraise to achieve their aims.

Their aim is to do more work in Barnsley subject to acquiring funding.

What People Told Us

The group talked about the difficulty they had all experienced trying to access BMBC departments. They said that they could not get through to a specific department and that the voice commentary told them to send an email. The group said that they felt that this made the system inaccessible to most of them and to other members of the public who do not have access to technology.

Similar comments were made about Live Well Barnsley and care navigation system. It was felt that more audio support routes to services would be helpful.

The group felt that compared to nearby authorities the facilities for visually impaired people were very minimal.

No one in the group had a Personal Assistant (PA) despite them all being registered blind. A PA would be funded by a personal budget.

The point made by one member of the group was that many people were waiting for assessment and so were not able to have access to a PA or other types of care, should they require it.

It seemed a matter of chance as to whether people found anything out about services. There appeared to be inequalities with regards to access to available information and to the accessibility of systems for visually impaired people

One person had support to find funding for aids and adaptations from sensory services. Others in attendance were unaware that this support may be available to them.

The majority of people at the meeting were unaware of the environmental projects or the Thomas Pocklington Eyes Right Screening Toolkit.

People present didn't know about the Health Equality Conference held at the town hall in January 18.

The group felt that Barnsley should consult with more visually impaired people with a view to developing better social, physical and emotional support services (currently part of the ECLO role)

The group felt that the communication and information strategies should be reviewed as they are clearly not working for some people.

Of the people that we talked to only two people had heard of the ECLO. Nobody had received services from it. It was felt that this information should be given to people when they visit the hospital. One person said that he had not been given this information when he visited the hospital last year. We were told that the ECLO had been in place for three years.

Quotes from blind and partially sighted people living in Barnsley:

Client One “I was registered blind 11 years ago. At that time, I was given a 20-minute chat with social services. (They gave him a piece of plastic to help him sign his name.) I waited 4 years for a white stick that I got from Barnsley Blind and Partially sighted. (Someone called Darren set him up with a computer starter course.) I saw the Job centre special needs officer who offered me nothing. I just wanted to work. I spent 2 years at home doing nothing. If it wasn't for my wife's encouragement, I would not be here. I was depressed and suicidal. From first diagnosis there has been no follow up from any services. “

Client Two “My wife was given information by Healthwatch about Mappin Street in Sheffield. She took me there for a look around. And the rest is history. I am now an Archery Champion. I have an active social life. This is as a direct result of the support I received from a Sheffield organisation (Sheffield Royal Society for The Blind). “

Client Three “I have cataracts and went to see a consultant last year the Doctor said there was nothing else they could do for me. No discussion or anything. When I received this news I was devastated. I wasn't given any information and was left on my own. I sat in the waiting room in tears. I have had no follow up from anywhere since. That was a year ago.”

Client Four “I have received no support from Social services or the NHS. Whilst in Sheffield Hallamshire with a different medical complaint I was given information about a blind cricket club at The Royal Society for the Blind in Sheffield, which I joined. I took a coaching qualification. I now cricket with blind children and adults.”

Client Five “When I was first diagnosed I was devastated. My driving licence was taken away and that was my independence gone. I received no support services. I am the main carer for my husband who has dementia. BIADS are the only people who have offered me support and this has only been fairly recently.”

Client Six “I am registered blind and struggle to get out and about where I live as the roads are not safe and this affects my confidence. If I go out I have to get a taxi or have someone with me. I live alone so this is difficult. I have received a stick, braille bumps and a signature strip from the sensory team when I was diagnosed and have received no support services since regarding my sight loss.”

Client Seven “The sensory team had been very prompt in responding to me when I got my diagnosis but the only service they could offer was Barnsley Blind and Partially sighted” (which was not suited to his need)

Client Eight “I am registered blind and was having hallucinations. My GP referred me to the hospital for treatment. He thought it was a problem with my medication. I have been waiting for 6 months for an appointment. During this time, I had an hallucination, I thought that my cooker was on fire. I leaned over to try and bat the flame out, (the cooker wasn't on fire) and burnt my arm on the cooker. My neighbour came to sort me out. She rang Healthwatch who rang the hospital to find out what was happening with my appointment. They fitted me in the following week. It was my medication that was the problem. I was very frightened for a long time. I thought I was going mad.”

Recommendations

Following on from our research we would like to suggest consideration be given to the following recommendations, and we have included the responses received from Barnsley Public Health.

Recommendation One

Commissioners to consult with people who have visual impairments to find out what the needs and issues are and what can be achieved at a local level to help them, this consultation could be used as a preamble to the Barnsley Action Plan refresh.

Response from BMBC to the Recommendation:

This is a regular action (consultation) for the Barnsley Vision Strategy Group. Unfortunately, we had to postpone our last year's event to concentrate on outcome 1 "Healthy Eyes across the life course" working to improve eye health and reduce sight loss. The plan is to hold another event/s to update people on the work that is being developed across the eye health pathway. It would be useful to have some involvement from the individual's/service users that you met with in relation to this paper so that we can ensure their views are captured and they can be engaged throughout the process, ensuring a co-produced document.

Recommendation Two

A meeting with the Blind and Partially Sighted Society Sheffield, The Blind and Partially Sighted Association Barnsley, VAB and BMBC to be convened to look at locating free town centre accommodation to locate further services for Blind and Partially Sighted people.

Response from BMBC to the Recommendation:

Barnsley Council welcome further discussions around the identification of a free town centre level access facility for the use of blind and partially sighted people in Barnsley but would wish to consult wider to ensure that any building identified meets local needs and expectations. Barnsley Council has reviewed a number of facilities in the town centre, as a result of initial discussions and has provided feedback to Sheffield Royal Society for the Blind. To date no suitable free town centre accommodation has been identified, and further opportunities around planning sessional sessions needed to be explored.

Recommendation Three

Due consideration to be given to the Accessible Information Standard;

The [Accessible Information Standard](#) sets out requirements for all providers of NHS care and / or publicly-funded adult social care to identify, record, flag, share and meet the information and communication needs of people with a disability, impairment or sensory loss. Since 1 August 2016, all providers have a legal duty to be meeting the Standard in full.

Response from BMBC to the Recommendation:

As an organization we strive to ensure we, and our commissioned services, meet the information and communication needs of people with a disability, impairment or sensory loss. Accessible Information. This was identified at a previous consultation meeting, and as a result a group was formed and they devised an information pack. Work around meeting the Accessible Information Standard is continuous.

Our services actively promote accessible information, and carry out awareness training to ensure other areas are aware of visually impaired people's needs. As new digital methods of communication are developed we will seek to consult our service users on feasibility of use.

Recommendation Four

Due consideration to be given to The [Equality Act 2010](#)

The Equality Act's Public Sector Equality Duty came into force on 5 April 2011. This duty: -

requires all public bodies to play their part in making society fairer by tackling discrimination and providing equality of opportunity for all;

requires public bodies to consider needs of all individuals when shaping policy, delivering services, and in employment;

supports good decision-making by encouraging understanding of how people are affected by policies and services;

supports making services efficient and effective;

covers a wide range of 'protected characteristics' - age, disability, gender re-assignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion/belief, sex and sexual orientation.

Response from BMBC to the Recommendation:

Barnsley Council has a firmly established Equality Forum for People with Disabilities, which the Vision Strategy Group would seek to engage with during the development of the Vision Strategy Action Plan. Service users and carers would also be consulted through the various organisational engagement channels used by members of the multi-agency Vision Strategy Group, or through

a multi-agency organised consultation event.

Recommendation Five

Further work may result from the findings contained within this report.

Response from BMBC to the Recommendation:

We welcome the opportunity to consult further.

Acknowledgements

Local Barnsley people

Barnsley Blind and Partially Sighted
Association

Barnsley Public Health

SWYFT rehabilitation team

BMBC commissioning

Barnsley ECLO

The Vision foundation

Sheffield Royal Society for the Blind

APPENDIX ONE

Comments from Public Health on Key Findings - page 5

Sheffield and Rotherham services do not offer Barnsley residents visual impairment assessment or rehabilitation. Equipment, Adaptation and Sensory Impairment Service (Sensory Impairment Service) in Barnsley provides visual impairment assessment and rehabilitation to Barnsley residents. Once a visual impairment assessment has taken place there is no wait for the patient. They are offered immediate support from the Sensory Impairment Service.

Eye Clinic Liaison Officer (ECLO) based at Barnsley Hospital and Sheffield Hospital, which is an additional service to the Sensory Impairment Service, offer information, signposting and emotional support on an individual basis and for the family affected, as well as acting as a facilitator and advocator, liaising with local services, including those that provide social activities to patients while they are waiting for an assessment.

Sheffield and Rotherham services offer IT training and social groups. Other services follow the process, from hospital if registrable the patient will be seen by ECLO and then onto the Visual Impairment Team with CVI certification. Sheffield and Rotherham services do not offer Barnsley residents visual impairment assessment or rehabilitation. Equipment Adaptation and Sensory Impairment Service (Sensory Impairment Service) in Barnsley provides visual assessment and rehabilitation to Barnsley residents. Once a visual assessment has taken place there is no wait for the patient. They are offered immediate support from the Sensory Impairment Service.

Barnsley Council are happy to have further discussions around the identification of a free town centre level

access facility for the use of blind and partially sighted people in Barnsley but would wish to consult wider to ensure that any building sought meets the needs of local blind and partially sighted people. Barnsley Council Commissioner has looked at a number of facilities in the town centre, as a result of initial discussions and has provided feedback on the progress to Sheffield Royal Society for the Blind.

Comments from Public Health on Understanding the Issue - page 6 & 7

The Barnsley Vision Strategy Action Plan is currently under review by the Barnsley Vision Strategy Group, focusing on the six key priorities identified in the England Vision Strategy 2018-2021, which were identified as building blocks for change in an update of the Strategy in 2018.

The priorities are:

- Prevention: To improve eye health and prevent sight loss across England within diverse groups and the wider population.
- Commissioning: To promote effective commissioning strategies across health and social care supporting an integrated and person-centered pathway.
- Services: Adults, children, young people and their families have access to the right services, advice and support when eye health and sight loss problems arise.
- Independence: Adults, children and young people can learn, relearn or retain key life skills on a continuing basis as driven by their needs with access to appropriate professional support, aids and adaptations including technology.
- Self-determination: To develop and enable face to face and online peer support opportunities and self-help and self-advocacy resources to empower adults, children, young people and their families to achieve their aspirations.

•Inclusion: To promote inclusive environments and equality of opportunity to enable blind and partially sighted people to fully participate, contribute and live independently.

The national strategy has been updated 2018, and our local action plan is being developed based on the national priorities.

Barnsley Public Health is working to improve eye health and prevent sight loss (national priority one) by launching the pilot of the Thomas Pocklington Eyes Right Screening Tool, which encourages people to get their eyes checked regularly by an optician. The screening tool is being piloted in small sites before evaluation. This action is one of many actions in Outcome One “Healthy Eyes across the life course” of the Draft Barnsley Vision Strategy Action Plan. Other public health strategies to support eye health are focused around promoting lifestyle interventions, which we know keep eyes healthy; Barnsley Sport and Physical Activity Action Plan, Barnsley Food Plan, Barnsley Tobacco Control Alliance Action Plan.

A Certificate of Visual Impairment (CVI) does not automatically mean you get financial support e.g. Attendance Allowance and Personal Independent Payment. ECOL facilitate access to support services, working closely with work and pensions, completing forms with patients, and signposting to local support services. A patient can access the Adult Sensory Impairment Services and others locally without a CVI. If you are registered blind you would be entitled to a blue badge and a £50 reduction in your television licence.

We appreciate that it can be extremely difficult sometimes to engage service users in consultation and that Healthwatch have reached out through their networks for attendance at a consultation meeting. As Barnsley Vision

Strategy Group we are always keen to consult and engage service users in our planning and service delivery and would be happy to support a wider consultation with service users from across children, adult and family services for the visually impaired. We understand the importance of having a representative sample, how insightful this can be and useful in terms of planning services to meet local need.

Comments from Public Health on What we found out - pages 7,8

We would be interested in better understanding the referrals and need.

The Sensory Team SWYPT - Staff capacity has increased and the waiting list decreased.

Sensory Impairment Service understand that BB&PSA provide canes to service users who self-purchase. Under the Care Act 2014 the training should only be carried out by a qualified Rehabilitation Officer who is a specialist in this training.

BB&PSA - to our knowledge this grant was administered over ten years ago.

The Barnsley ECLo service is delivered by the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) and jointly funded alongside Barnsley Hospital NHS Foundation Trust. The service is based within the Ophthalmology Department at Barnsley Hospital and enables patients to discuss, in depth, their concerns about the impact their eye condition may have on their lives and those close to them and via holistic assessment of need connects patients to vital statutory and community support/services. The ECLo service provides a key role in bridging the gap between health and social care enabling vital early intervention and identification of urgent needs. This includes providing information, advice and guidance, signposting and referring to partner organizations.

The ECLo can:

- Provide emotional support
- Refer and signpost to partner organizations including statutory services
- Provide vital information on eye conditions and treatments
- Liaise with medical professionals as required
- Explain the process of becoming registered with sight loss and the benefits of a Certificate of Vision Impairment
- Advise on peer support and personal independence courses
- Advise on welfare benefits such as Personal Independence Payment, Attendance Allowance
- Give specialist advice and referrals on employment, assistive technology, travel concessions and housing
- Refer to the Mobility Assessment Clinic (Falls)
- Refer to Low Vision Clinic to be assessed for low vision aids
- Raise awareness of visual impairment with other departments and wards within the hospital such as Stroke Unit/Falls Team
- Additionally, the ECLo provides essential visual awareness raising sessions within the Trust and with external organizations

The service is also available to anyone with a sight loss including patients' carer's, family members and professionals culminating in supporting 1734 people with a visual impairment in the past 3 years.

Comments from Public Health on What People Told Us - pages 8,9

We would be interested to know which departments within BMBC this refers to, so that we can discuss with our customers.

We would like to discuss this further with service users to establish what would be appropriate.

As a Vision Strategy Group working to the six principles identified in the England Strategy we support people to maintain their independence, and therefore a PA is a personal choice. Not all registered blind would require or want a PA. People need to be assessed to determine whether they require assistance with personal care, shopping etc.

Information is provided throughout the patient journey and we would welcome a discussion around how we can improve information and make it more accessible for the visually impaired.

Support with funding for equipment from Sensory Impairment services are discussed with service users during an assessment if a need is identified

