

Evaluation of Brighton and Hove's Equipment and Adaptations service:

The views of Service Users and Prescribers

Executive Summary



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Evaluation of Brighton and Hove's Equipment and Adaptations service - Paragraph summaries

From the 343 **Service Users** who responded to the survey, most were generally satisfied with the support they received regarding their equipment and minor adaptations. Most Service Users did not have any problems when waiting for their equipment; most were contacted by the Community Equipment Service (CES) when arranging equipment delivery; delivery and fitting occurred mostly on the agreed day and time expected and was to a good standard; and the equipment had ultimately helped most people stay at home rather than having to be in a care environment. However, compared to the 2017 findings, a lower proportion of Service Users were 'extremely' or 'very' satisfied with the equipment they received from the service. This may reflect the one in five Service Users who had problems when waiting for their equipment, however this could relate to waits outside of the providers' control, including the waiting time for a clinician assessment and the prescription of the equipment; the 17% who were not told how to report a fault or return the equipment; the 16% who were 'very unhappy' with the quality of the installation of a ceiling hoist, ramp or handrail; or the 16% who were 'very unhappy' with the politeness of the Customer Service Team. A further finding was that the majority of Service Users would not use an online form, website or App to manage their orders. Also, although most people still needed their equipment, a sizeable 15% had equipment they no longer needed.

The 92 **Prescribers** who responded were highly satisfied with the CES in a number of different areas. These were: the general communication including telephone and email responses; the ordering and process of orders; access to online information regarding catalogue items and non-standard equipment; and access to technical information and advice from warehouse staff. Also, Prescribers showed high levels of agreement towards the support from the CES online system and reports, and the level of equipment choice including spare parts. However, there were also some concerns: nearly one in ten Prescribers said they were dissatisfied with the access to technical information and advice from warehouse staff, and access to online information regarding catalogue items and non-standard equipment. Nearly one in five Prescribers said that installation did not happen on the planned date. In terms of recycling, 13% of Prescribers said they did not review items of equipment that were no longer required when completing an assessment, and nearly two-thirds said they do not have access to a 'Hand It Back' postcard. The use of online technology is limited, with only 37% using the IRIS system remotely.

Evaluation of Brighton and Hove's Equipment and Adaptations service

This review of the Equipment and Adaptations Service was commissioned by Brighton and Hove City Council to inform the recommissioning process, due in 2023. To support this process, this report presents the experiences and opinions from Service Users and Prescribers of the service.

Executive summary - Service User survey findings and recommendations

Sample characteristics

A total of 343 responses from Service Users were received. This provided a response rate of 22.9% from those who were sent the postal questionnaire. Based on a sample size calculation, this sample size was shown to be statistically significant and broadly representative of the likely views from the remaining people who did not return questionnaires¹.

The average age of a respondents was 71.1 years, ranging between ages 7 and 100. The majority were female (68%). 87% described themselves as White-English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British.

The most common areas of Brighton & Hove, where respondents lived (where at least 10 people lived) were Hove (20.2%)²; Portslade (8.4%); Kemptown (6.5%); Central Brighton (4.6%); Woodingdean (4.3%); Patcham (4.0%); and Whitehawk (3.4%). This was a free-text box.

As expected, a large proportion (93%) were living with a disability that limited their day-to-day activities, with 70% (of the total) reporting this was limiting them 'a lot' and 23% 'a little'.

Ordering and receiving the equipment

Waiting for equipment

The length of time waiting for the equipment did not cause any problems for most people. However, one in five people did report problems: 15% reported 'minor problems' and 5% said they experienced 'serious problems' in waiting for their equipment³. For some people there may have been a significant wait for an assessment for equipment by a therapist and it is hard to distinguish here whether this has had an impact on satisfaction rates. These figures are similar (three percentage point difference) to those in 2010 and 2017.

¹ Based on a 95% Confidence Interval and 5% Margin of Error. As an example, if 45% chose a particular answer, then one can be confident that 40-50% of the wider sample would respond in the same manner. This applies to a sample size exceeding 306 responses from a possible 1500.

² Service users added their neighbourhood in a comment box. Although several chose 'Hove' it is known that there are several neighbourhoods within this area that were not shared.

³ Throughout this report, percentage totals may not add up to 100% due to rounding up or down of decimal points.

Delivery and installation

In terms of delivery, the majority (78%) were contacted by the Community Equipment Service to arrange the delivery/collection by a driver. This was over 15 times more than those who were not contacted beforehand (5% said 'no')⁴.

High proportions of people said the driver 'arrived on the day and time expected' (93%) and 'fitted or adjusted the equipment' (90%). Slightly less people (76%) said the 'driver demonstrated the equipment with written instructions on how to use it'; and even less (69%) said the driver 'explained how to report a fault or return the equipment'. The area of most concern was that 17% said they were not told by the driver how to 'report a fault or return the equipment'.

Although most Service Users showed favourable responses to the service, they were somewhat contradictory in their rating of happiness towards the politeness of the Customer Service Team and the driver, and the quality of the installation. For example:

- 80% were either 'very' or 'fairly' happy, with the 'politeness of the driver (who delivered or collected the equipment)', however 14% were 'very unhappy'.
- 79% were either 'very' or 'fairly' happy with the 'politeness of the Customer Services Team' whereas 16% were 'very unhappy'.
- 75% were either 'very' or 'fairly' happy with the 'quality of the installation of a ceiling hoist, ramp or handrail (if you had any of these)' and 16% were 'very unhappy'.

Additional items

58% had purchased additional small items of equipment or technology to improve their daily living activities, such as grabbers, jar openers, or a chair raiser.

Recycling equipment

Very few people (15%) had equipment they 'no longer needed', relative to 80% reporting 'no' and 6% 'don't know'⁵.

For those ordering and returning equipment, there is an option to process this online. Although 67% had 'access to the smart phone, tablet or computer', fewer people (35%) were happy to use this technology to 'assist with their equipment deliveries and collections'. If the proportion excludes those without a smartphone, then 55% of smartphone users would use this technology to 'assist with their equipment deliveries and collections'.

Impact of having equipment

With the option to choose several responses, the most common impacts on people's lives were:

- 'looking after your personal care needs (such as grab rails, shower or bath seats)' (72%);
- 'getting around within your home (such as small portable ramp, grab rails)' (52%); and
- 'helping you have more control over your daily life (this could be any piece of equipment)' (46%).

⁴ The remaining responses were 'Don't know'.

⁵ For this and other findings, results do not always add to 100% due to rounding up or down decimal points.

The same three impacts were also the most popular in 2017. However, for all three, a greater proportion of Service Users in 2021 reported these impacts - for example, in 2017, 62% reported 'looking after your personal care needs' compared to 72% in 2021.

A slight majority of Service Users said that they were given the equipment to 'support them living as independently as they can' (54%). A slightly lesser proportion said to 'help with their day-to-day living' (52%), and 35% said they 'came out of hospital and were provided equipment to allow them to return home'. The lowest proportion were given the equipment on the basis of 'needing an assessment' (20%).

70% said that the 'equipment/adaptation had helped them stay at home rather than having to be in a hospital or other care environment'.

Equalities and disadvantage

Only 4% of Service Users said that their sensory need (hearing or sight loss), or English not being their first language, caused difficulties as regards the delivery or collection of their equipment.

There were minimal comments to a question that asked whether the service had been responsive to 'your age, caring role, disability, ethnicity, gender identity, married status, pregnancy, religion, gender or sexuality'. Although many comments were positive, for example, either "No" or "No they have been wonderful they have done all they could and more", there were some recommendations mainly around responding to people's disabilities. This suggests that some Service Users, all be it small proportion, face additional difficulties with the equipment and adaptations service due to their disability.

Satisfaction with the service

A total of 68% were 'extremely' or 'very' satisfied with their equipment that they received from the service. However, 8% described themselves as 'extremely dissatisfied'. Closer inspection of the open-ended comments suggested that a proportion of these may have mis-read the response option, where they expressed satisfaction in their related comments.

In comparison, satisfaction levels in 2021 were lower to those reported in 2017 (even if the above misreading of the question is taken into account). In 2021, 68% were with 'extremely' or 'very' satisfied with the equipment (compared to 83% in 2017).

Recommendations from the Service User survey

As regards the future of the service, the attention naturally focusses on areas of improvement within a broadly satisfied customer base. Responding to the following may well be able to contribute to bringing the overall service satisfaction back to the 2017 levels. Looking at the 2017 recommendations and the findings from this 2021 survey, the following improvements are required:

1. (From the 2017 report), provide a more consistent aftercare service ensuring all users receive a follow-up check to monitor use of equipment. This was not a requirement of the provider in 2017 nor within the current contract but would be beneficial.

2. (From the 2017 report), provide frequent and clear communication to users and carers about how to return equipment when no longer needed - 15% of the 2021 sample had equipment they 'no longer needed'.
3. Encourage greater use of a smartphone, tablet or computer to 'assist with their equipment deliveries and collections' - only 35% were happy to use this technology for this purpose.
4. Explain to the Service Users how to report a fault or return the equipment - 17% were not told how to do this.
5. Reduce waiting times for equipment. This will reduce the proportion of Service Users having any problems as a result of this. 20% of people reported some problems due to this waiting and this figure has not changed significantly from earlier 2010 and 2017 findings. The provider delivers equipment according to the timescales set by the Prescriber, so this recommendation relates to the wider 'service' of assessment and prescription of equipment.
6. Improve the perceived 'quality of the installation of a ceiling hoist, ramp or handrail' as well as the 'politeness of the Customer Service Team'. Although most were satisfied, 16% were 'very unhappy' with both.
7. Address comments about unsuitability of equipment in some instances.
8. Be mindful that some people face disadvantage in the application and delivery of their equipment according to their disability. Although a minor proportion, the Community Equipment Service need to be aware of these issues.

Executive summary - Prescriber survey findings and recommendations

An online questionnaire was sent to all 355 active equipment Prescribers across Brighton and Hove. A total of 92 Prescribers responded to the survey providing a response rate of 25.9%.

Sample characteristics

Most Prescribers responding to this survey worked for Sussex Community NHS Foundation Trust (51%), followed by Brighton and Hove City Council (BHCC) Adult Social Care (23%). Most worked as an Occupational Therapist / Occupational Therapy Assistant (58%). The majority prescribed equipment for those with long term health conditions (63%). Another 48% prescribed equipment for short term rehabilitation care. Some respondents prescribed for both of these hence the total is more than 100%.

Ordering equipment

Sourcing equipment

When ordering equipment, the most frequently used source ('every month' as opposed to 'every 3 months', 'every 6 months' or 'every year') was the equipment catalogue (69%). This is compared to the use of non-standard specials (46%) and minor adaptations (40%).

Ordering process and support

Prescribers were generally satisfied with the 'general communication including telephone and email responses' (89% were either satisfied or very satisfied), and the 'ordering and process of orders' (89% 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied'). This was relative to the experience of 'any delays in receiving equipment' where 65% were 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied'. For the latter, 28% were 'neither satisfied nor unsatisfied' (and 7% were 'unsatisfied' or 'very unsatisfied').

Prescribers were generally satisfied with the 'access to online information regarding catalogue items and non-standard equipment' (77% were either 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied') and 'access to technical information and advice from warehouse staff' (68% were either satisfied or very satisfied). This was relative to the 'support from the CES [Community Equipment Service] regarding the discharge process from an in-patient setting' where 47% were either 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' and 49% were 'neither satisfied nor unsatisfied' (a further 4% were 'unsatisfied' or 'very unsatisfied').

Nearly one in ten of Prescribers said they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the 'access to technical information and advice from warehouse staff' (9.4%) and 'access to online information regarding catalogue items and non-standard equipment' (9.3%).

83% agreed or strongly agreed that the 'CES online system and reports (IRIS) supports their role as a Prescriber and/or manager of a team of Prescribers'. 75% 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that the 'CES catalogue provides a suitable level of choice of equipment including spare parts' (7% 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed').

37% were using the IRIS system remotely. However, only 6% (of all Prescribers) were using the NRS⁶ App (expected as the App was currently in development). A further 1% did not have access to a smartphone/computer.

Delivery and installation

In terms of installation, 64% said 'the work was carried out to a good standard' (with 31% 'not sure' and 6% saying 'no') and 45% said it 'happened on the planned date' (with 38% 'not sure'). 18% said the installation did not happen on the planned date.

A total of 71% felt that the 'community equipment currently supports a 2-hour urgent community response need'. The few comments added were that Prescribers had rarely used an urgent option, either it was not needed for their job role or they were not aware of this service (the current CES provides a 'same day' service for emergency provision, with a 2pm cut off for urgent orders).

Additional items

The majority (83%) of Prescribers had 'suggested people purchase small-non catalogue items of equipment or technology independently of the CES to improve their daily living activities'. A range of small items were purchased including helping hands, long handed shoehorns, urinal bottles, jar openers, sock aids, and drinking aids.

64% of Prescribers found it easy to 'prescribe equipment from a buffer store including the associated documentation'. Comments showed that many do not use this 'buffer store' facility.

Meeting specific needs

Prescribing equipment to 'those with sensory needs' or 'those for whom English is not their first language' largely did not apply: with 67% replying 'not sure' to sensory needs and 67% 'not sure' to English not a first language. A further 7% of Prescribers said the delivery or collection of equipment for those with sensory needs 'caused difficulties', as did an equal proportion (7%) of those for whom English was not their first language. Equal proportions (26%) said that the delivery or collection of equipment for 'those with sensory needs' or those with 'English not a first language' did 'not cause difficulties'.

Recycling equipment

84% of Prescribers said they 'reviewed which items of equipment were no longer required and could be recycled' when completing an assessment. 22% of all Prescribers said they reviewed whether the equipment was no longer required 'after 3 months'. 13% of Prescribers said they did not review items of equipment that were no longer required when completing an assessment.

90% of Prescribers gave out 'details to Service Users on how to return equipment when it is no longer required'. However, 63% said they do not have access to a 'Hand It Back' postcard to support the recycling of equipment.

⁶ NRS Healthcare is a provider of products and services designed to support independent living.

Additional comments were dominated towards the NRS system and how this could be improved, in particular regarding the updating of records automatically. Comments also showed an overall positive sentiment about the CES.

Links to Service User findings

In reviewing the Service User and Prescriber findings, there were four parallel themes that arose across the two surveys as follows:

Firstly, 65% of Prescribers were satisfied with 'any delays in receiving equipment', with 28% neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, and 7% dissatisfied. Prescribers also reported that nearly one in five (18%) installations did not happen on the planned date. These findings tie in with the 20% of Service User who reported problems in waiting for their equipment (15% reporting 'minor problems' and 5% 'serious problems').

Secondly, there appears to be a need to increase the use of online technology, both for the Prescribers and Service Users. 37% of Prescribers were using the IRIS (software) system remotely. Similar level of technological use was reported by the Service Users, whereby only 35% were happy to go online to 'assist with their equipment deliveries and collections'.

Thirdly, 83% of Prescribers had 'suggested people purchase small-non catalogue items of equipment or technology independently of the CES. This had been translated to purchases experienced by 58% of Service Users.

Fourthly, 13% of Prescribers said they did not review items of equipment that were no longer required when completing an assessment. This is two percentage point difference to the 15% of Service Users who had equipment they 'no longer needed'. This provides an indication of the equipment in circulation that could be recycled.

Recommendations from the Prescriber survey

Unlike the Service User questionnaire, there are no recommendations from prior surveys of Prescriber opinion. In view of the headline findings from this survey, the recommendations to improve the prescribing service are as follows:

1. Reduce the proportion of the nearly one in ten of Prescribers who were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the:
 - 'access to technical information and advice from warehouse staff' (9.4%); and
 - 'access to online information regarding catalogue items and non-standard equipment' (9.3%).
2. Increase the proportion (37%) of Prescribers who use the IRIS system remotely.
3. Improve the proportion of installations that happen on the planned date. Nearly one in five (18%) installations did not happen on the planned date.
4. Consider how the CES provider responds to the NHS 2 hour urgent response timescales?

5. Improve the recycling of the equipment - 13% of Prescribers said they did not review items of equipment that were no longer required when completing an assessment, and 63% did not have access to a 'Hand It Back' postcard.